

# PERSPECTIVE

THE JOURNAL OF THE ART DIRECTORS GUILD

## editor's note



### Western Features

by David Morong, Editor

The *Los Angeles Times* headline to the 1977 review of the original *Star Wars* was “**Star Wars’** hails the once and future space western.” This issue of PERSPECTIVE shows both the space western and the classic western are alive and well in our industry.

The journal also illustrates the varied scales of production our members experience. Eve McCarney displays her own pioneer spirit with *The Ballad of Lefty Brown*, going off to remote locations with “just a computer and a sketchpad” and through talent and tenacity, she creates a compelling classic western. On *Godless*, Carlos Barbosa has the rare opportunity to build a western town from the ground up, and the complexity and care that went into this effort are apparent from every angle. One of the limitations of our format is that it is difficult to feature some of the larger scale drawings that go into a project like this. The countless pages of drafting done by Set Designers Amahl Lovato, Bill Matthews and Ron Yates for this production are remarkable, and deserve greater exposure than can fit on these pages.

The epic undertaking of *The Last Jedi* dwarfs almost any other production it is compared to, and Production Designer Rick Heinricks brings in the voices of Art Directors Neal Callow, Andrew Bennett, Phil Sims, Chris Lowe and Todd Cherniawsky to give a sense of both the artistic and logistical challenges of designing the latest incarnation of that original space western.



A. Harrison Ford as the space cowboy Han Solo in the original 1977 STAR WARS.  
B. Tommy Flanagan as Tom Harrah outside the saloon in THE BALLAD OF LEFTY BROWN.  
C. Cowboys on horseback gathered in front of the Hotel La Belle in GODLESS.  
D. A stampede through the streets of Canto Bight. Illustration by Kevin Jenkins for THE LAST JEDI.

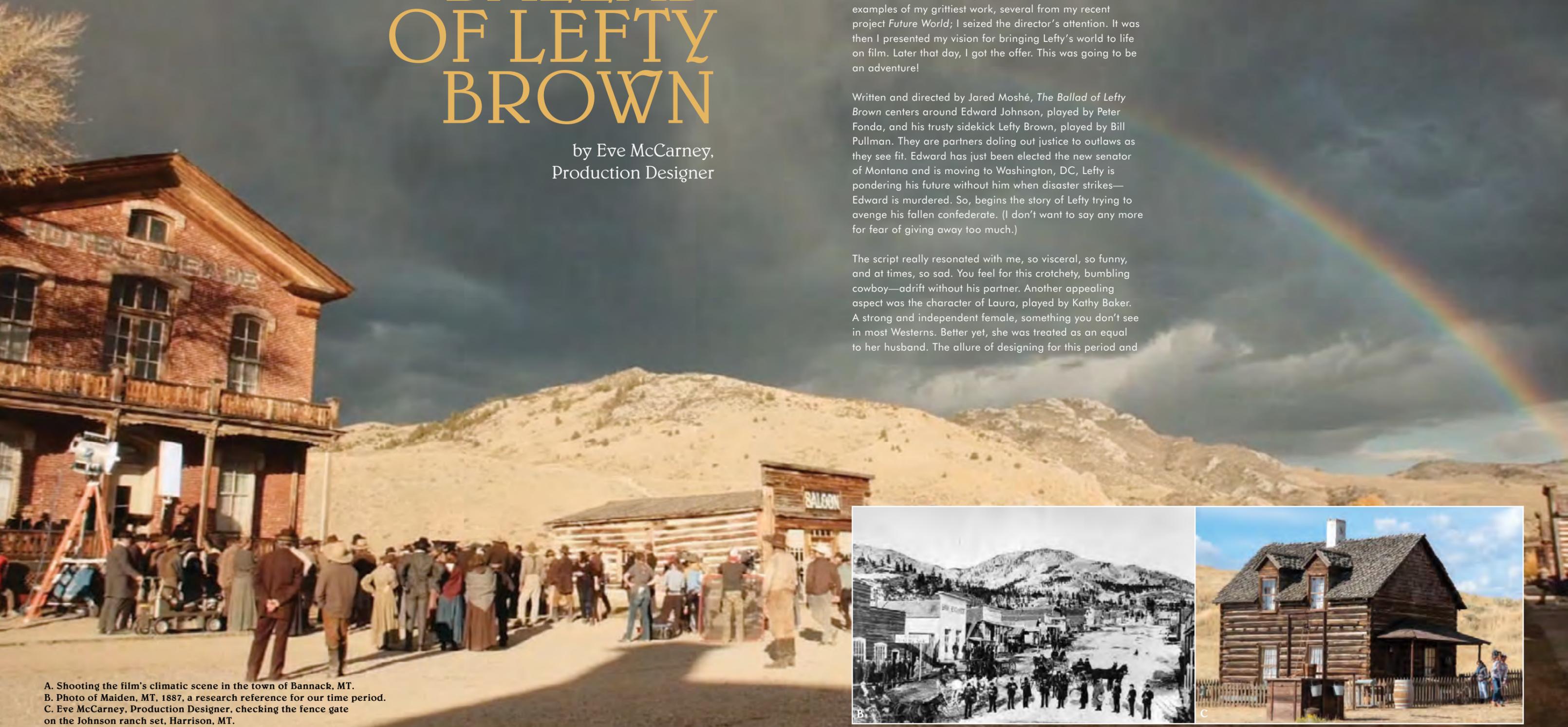
# THE BALLAD OF LEFTY BROWN

by Eve McCarney,  
Production Designer

When I read the script for *The Ballad of Lefty Brown*, I knew I had to design the film. It was the best script I had read in years. A story fraught with loyalty, betrayal, redemption and shootouts; I was hooked! And the best part? It was set in Montana in the year of 1889. My agent had submitted me to the project, but the director wasn't convinced I could design a gritty western. Luckily, a trusted colleague recommended me and I got my shot. Armed with twenty examples of my grittiest work, several from my recent project *Future World*; I seized the director's attention. It was then I presented my vision for bringing Lefty's world to life on film. Later that day, I got the offer. This was going to be an adventure!

Written and directed by Jared Moshé, *The Ballad of Lefty Brown* centers around Edward Johnson, played by Peter Fonda, and his trusty sidekick Lefty Brown, played by Bill Pullman. They are partners doling out justice to outlaws as they see fit. Edward has just been elected the new senator of Montana and is moving to Washington, DC, Lefty is pondering his future without him when disaster strikes—Edward is murdered. So, begins the story of Lefty trying to avenge his fallen confederate. (I don't want to say any more for fear of giving away too much.)

The script really resonated with me, so visceral, so funny, and at times, so sad. You feel for this crotchety, bumbling cowboy—adrift without his partner. Another appealing aspect was the character of Laura, played by Kathy Baker. A strong and independent female, something you don't see in most Westerns. Better yet, she was treated as an equal to her husband. The allure of designing for this period and



A. Shooting the film's climatic scene in the town of Bannack, MT.  
B. Photo of Maiden, MT, 1887, a research reference for our time period.  
C. Eve McCarney, Production Designer, checking the fence gate on the Johnson ranch set, Harrison, MT.





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these characters was overwhelming. It's something I hadn't done before, and it was such an exciting time in Montana's history. 1889 was the year Montana became a state, and the time the railroads were expanding west. A lot of resistance surrounded the railroad expansion into the rural areas, and that provided an undercurrent of unrest, as well as a major plot point to the story.

Right off the bat, I did an exhaustive amount of research: pulling photo reference, articles on the time period, and Montana specifically, as well as

ordering books full of early American and Western furniture styles. Utilizing the Library of Congress, an amazingly rich resource, I added its photos and maps to my mood boards and drawings to show the director what these sets were going to look like. In addition to standard research, I watched lots of the classics to prepare for the film—*Rio Bravo*, *Pale Rider*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, *Tombstone* and so on.

When the director Jared and I started talking about the tone of the film, we decided to keep it in the traditions of the classic Westerns—a muted palette of browns, grays and burnt oranges, with lots of copper and iron accents. The two exceptions to this rule were the red handkerchief that Edward wore, which was a homage to John Wayne, and the dusty rose damask wallpaper I used in the ranch bedroom to show Laura's touch.

I was fortunate enough to do a location scout a month before landing in Montana for official start of preproduction. This was essential, and informed all my designs and plans moving forward. It also allowed me to tailor the remaining preproduction time in Los Angeles to sourcing items that needed to be shipped, versus the things that could be sourced locally. Part of the preliminary scout was spent talking with local vendors and sorting out what could be rented or borrowed, and what was too precious or priceless to use.

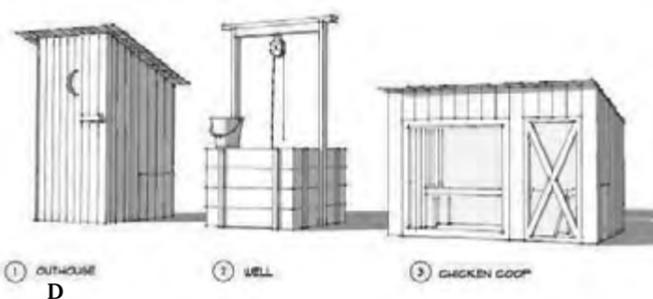
Finding the right ranch for the Johnsons was problematic. There are many period structures in Montana, but most have fallen into ruin, and the ones that haven't, have been updated. There would be a structure or two that couldn't be

shot due to the updated modifications, or all the buildings would have modern metal roofing—too big to remedy on this budget. The ranch selected was in Harrison, MT, which is near the town of Whitehall. It was the perfect layout for the story, but it had its own challenges. All the wood was so weathered, it had turned gray, and the corral fencing and barn had missing pieces or sections that had rotted away. The barn, a scripted interior, had so much horse manure, a chainsaw was required to remove the petrified three feet of it that covered the entire floor. All the buildings were stained to bring up the richness of the wood, corral fencing was fixed, an entrance arch with gates added, and all the structures a functioning ranch would have: outhouse, well, chicken coop, laundry lines and hitching posts, were built. The ranch house itself was also lacking the feel of a period homestead—so a porch and fencing were constructed around the house, and a water trough and hitching post were added, in addition to the dressing of tables, buckets, metal jugs, carts, barrels and lanterns.

The bunkhouse set had originally been scheduled to shoot at Nevada City where the ranch house interior was being shot. It was all set for the film crew when I was notified we wouldn't have time to shoot it on our last day at the location. So, the set was broken down, and the dressing moved north with the production. I had one day to find and dress a suitable interior somewhere on the ranch set in Harrison. The existing bunkhouse interior was way too small for filming, and was filled with machinery and random junk. When I looked at the upstairs of the ranch house, I saw a way to get the two angles we needed—a view out from the bedroom area into the kitchen, and a reverse of that angle. It's a crucial scene, since it's the only time we see Lefty in his habitat and his relationship to the other ranch hands—a vital plot point. And the best part? Everyone on the production ended up liking this set better than the previous choice.



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JOHNSON RANCH OUTBUILDINGS



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A. Johnson ranch house location photo, before restore and construction.  
 B. Johnson ranch barn interior, before manure cleanout.  
 C. Kathy Baker is accusing Bill Pullman inside the Johnson ranch barn.  
 D. Sketch by Eve McCarney of the ranch outhouse, well and chicken coop.  
 E. Finished ranch well and outhouse on the ranch property.  
 F. Dressed ranch house interior, shot on location in Nevada City.  
 G. Bunkhouse interior, dressed in one day at Johnson ranch, Harrison, MT.  
 H. Joe Anderson in a scene set inside the gold mill.  
 I. Approach view of the gold mill location, behind the town of Bannack.



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Originally, the gold mill was scripted as a way station. It's an important set of scenes, and needed a specific geography to make it work. Lefty and Tom have to approach stealthily under cover, have a shootout with Edward's killers, and then give chase; a tall order. There were no way stations near any of the filming areas, so when I was scouting the town of Bannack, I asked our guide Roger if there were any other buildings on the

park property. I was delighted when he said there was an old gold mill behind the town. It was far enough away from the town to feel remote, which was essential, and had a really great look and feel. The one issue was the presence of some enormous non-period metal machinery that had to be avoided. When I showed it to the director Jared and the director of photography David, I knew we found our location.



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The final showdown in the story takes place in the town of Bannack. I fell in love with it while doing my research, and the director had already scouted it on his first trip to Montana the previous winter. The town provided all of the third-act locations, a huge benefit for the production. Plus, there were areas for riding, camping and other smaller scenes required. The town is a true treasure, and is maintained as a tourist attraction, but only using the methods that are correct for the period in which it was built. This was extremely limiting for the film production, especially for a film with finite means. No modification, tear down or repainting was allowed. Luckily, the hotel façade had been kept up well, and the interior lobby and some of the downstairs rooms had been renovated and repaired just a few months before. If not for that, the film would not have been able to shoot there. The front doors were very aged so another set of doors were installed with windows allowing a view into the lobby. This added some depth and also allowed the opportunity to stencil the hotel name on the doors. The exterior wood was gray like the ranch, so linseed oil was used to bring up the finishes.

The Bannack saloon offered yet another dilemma. It had pieces of linen on the back wall that could not be removed, but were also too aged for the time period. Looking back at my research, I came up with the idea



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to cover it with period newspapers—something they would do at the time to prevent drafts. I had also brought in two large shelves for behind the bar, but in order to make the layout work, one small window needed to be covered—something the director of photography David was not happy about. The building itself was very dark and without this light source back there, it was a dead corner. One night, I woke up around 3:00 a.m. and knew I had the solution. The solid back door could be replaced with a door with a window, solving the light issue while keeping the bar back layout I wanted. I also had these beautiful custom period shades handmade, which lent a lovely quality to the filtered light inside. The bar itself was also a stroke of good luck—it was period, gorgeous and twenty feet long, so it wasn't going anywhere.

Needless to say, many challenges are faced while making a period western on such a tight budget, with limited crew and resources. I didn't have an Art Director or art coordinator, just myself, my computer, a sketchpad, and a hardworking local Art Department. Even given the formidable nature of the job, there's something special about doing a film on location—you eat, sleep and breathe the show. It becomes your world for that period of time and the crew your family. This was no exception. We worked 'round the clock to get it right, but you know what? It's one of the best films I've ever done. It was very daunting but also very rewarding. I'm so proud of the work we accomplished and the world we created. **ADG**

**Eve McCarney, Production Designer**  
**Tessla Hastings, Set Decorator**



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**A. Establishing shot of the saloon.**  
**B. Tommy Flanagan in a scene inside the saloon.**  
**C. Location scout photo by Eve McCarney of the Bannack town saloon.**  
**D. Climactic scene of the film being shot, when Bill Pullman takes on the governor.**  
**E. Sketch of the Governor's office rendered in Shaderlight by Eve McCarney.**  
**F. Final showdown between Bill Pullman and Jim Caviezel in the governor's office set.**