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Oscars flashback: Sandy Powell prevails over Colleen Atwood





Sandy Powell accepts the costume design Oscar for her work on “The Aviator.” (Mark J. Terrill / Associated Press)

By Randee Dawn

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It’s a truism worth repeating: If you’ve done stellar costume design in a contemporary film, you may as well plan to stay home on Oscar night. It’s been 30 years since the academy has awarded a costume design statuette for work on a non-fantastical or non-period film — and that was for the fairly fantastical-if-contemporary “The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert” — with the second most recent example being 1979’s “All That Jazz.”

Films with contemporary costumes didn’t even score a nomination 20 years ago. But the battle between multi-award-winning veterans Sandy Powell (“The Aviator”) and Colleen Atwood (“A Series of Unfortunate Events”) made for a tense competition — as did the appearance of one of the more famous animated costumers, “The Incredibles” Edna Mode, at the Feb. 27, 2005, ceremony.

Flying high

Raspy-voiced Pierce Brosnan presented the award along with the animated Mode, who strolled onto the stage and interacted with the actor, who had recently concluded

his run portraying James Bond. Mode wasn't just a character in Pixar's film; she was at least partly inspired by Edith Head, the costume designer awarded the most trophies (eight) and nomination (35). It was an amusing bit, with Mode totally upstaging Brosnan by calling the costume trophy the "most prestigious award" of the night, and referring to the actors as "models."

Four of the five nominees were already on the stage as the nominations were read (Bob Ringwood was absent, having retired after working on "Troy"), but it was Powell who triumphed in the end. Her speech was fairly short, largely thanking her "colleagues and partners in crime," but also giving a personal shoutout to "Marty" (as in "Aviator" director Scorsese) "for being the inspiration for us all."

This was Powell's second of three Oscars so far; she has one from 1998's "Shakespeare in Love" and another for her work in 2009's "The Young Victoria." The costume designer has been nominated 15 times, four of them for work on Scorsese films. They first collaborated on 2002's "Gangs of New York" and most recently on 2019's "The Irishman."

"Marty's very interested in clothes," Powell told [W Magazine](#) in 2016. "He responds well to men's clothing in particular. Marty is a clotheshorse himself." While shooting "The Wolf of Wall Street," she noted that he'd become "obsessed by ties" and got personally involved in certain outfits. "Quite often, on set, especially on something like 'Wolf of Wall Street,' if Leo [DiCaprio] comes onto set with a new suit, the first thing Marty does is feel the cloth, or feel the label."

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Atwood went home empty-handed that evening but has won four Oscars and received 12 nominations. Her trophies are for “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them” (2017), “Alice in Wonderland” (2011), “Memoirs of a Geisha” (2006) and “Chicago” (2003).

Alexandra Byrne (“Finding Neverland”) has scored six nominations in her career, winning her first Oscar in 2008 for “Elizabeth: The Golden Age.” Sharen Davis was onstage for her work in “Ray” and would go on to nab her second nomination for her work in “Dreamgirls.” “Troy” costume designer Ringwood, the only male nominated in the category 20 years ago, had earlier been nominated for his work in 1987’s “Empire of the Sun.”

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