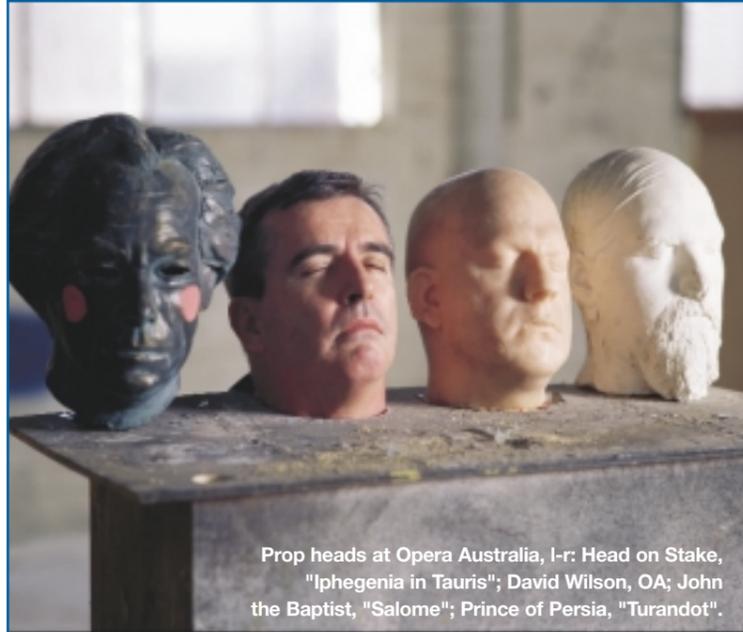


Head of Props, Opera Australia



Prop heads at Opera Australia, l-r: Head on Stake, "Iphegenia in Tauris"; David Wilson, OA; John the Baptist, "Salome"; Prince of Persia, "Turandot".

Opera Australia Props Manager, David Wilson, often wonders if audiences think all the spears or guns or heads or tables used on stage either fall out of the sky or are purchased at some little props shop around the corner. "I don't think people actually realise the amount of time and energy involved behind the scenes in actually obtaining the furnishings and paraphernalia that help create the opera's environment and help carry its story line," he said.

In fact, the majority of props are built from scratch. In a recent production of Alban Berg's *Lulu*, for example, the designer called for a large, black sofa about four metres long. "Try finding something like that at Ikea," laughed Wilson. Building the frame and button-upholstering the sofa took almost four weeks.

And trimmings like balustrades and decorative mouldings? "They're hand-carved in clay, made into moulds, and then cast in fibreglass," Wilson explained. "And the most difficult part of the process is finding good sculptors."

David Wilson is not only the department's manager, he's also one of only two full-time staff members. For extra hands, Wilson relies on a casual pool of ten to 15 sculptors and painters and craftsmen he brings on board. "Many of them are working artists around town, and they're happy to make some extra money by pitching in when needed."

As in the telecommunications industry, where Wilson spent 13 years as an installation technician for Telstra, what happens behind the scenes at Opera Australia bears a direct impact on the ultimate satisfaction the performance delivers to the end-customer.

"Opera is acknowledged as the peak of all the performing arts," said Wilson, "and there's nothing better than seeing something we've made, when it appears on stage, be greeted with a round of applause. For all the people who've worked on it, it's a really good buzz – and I guess that's what customer satisfaction is all about."