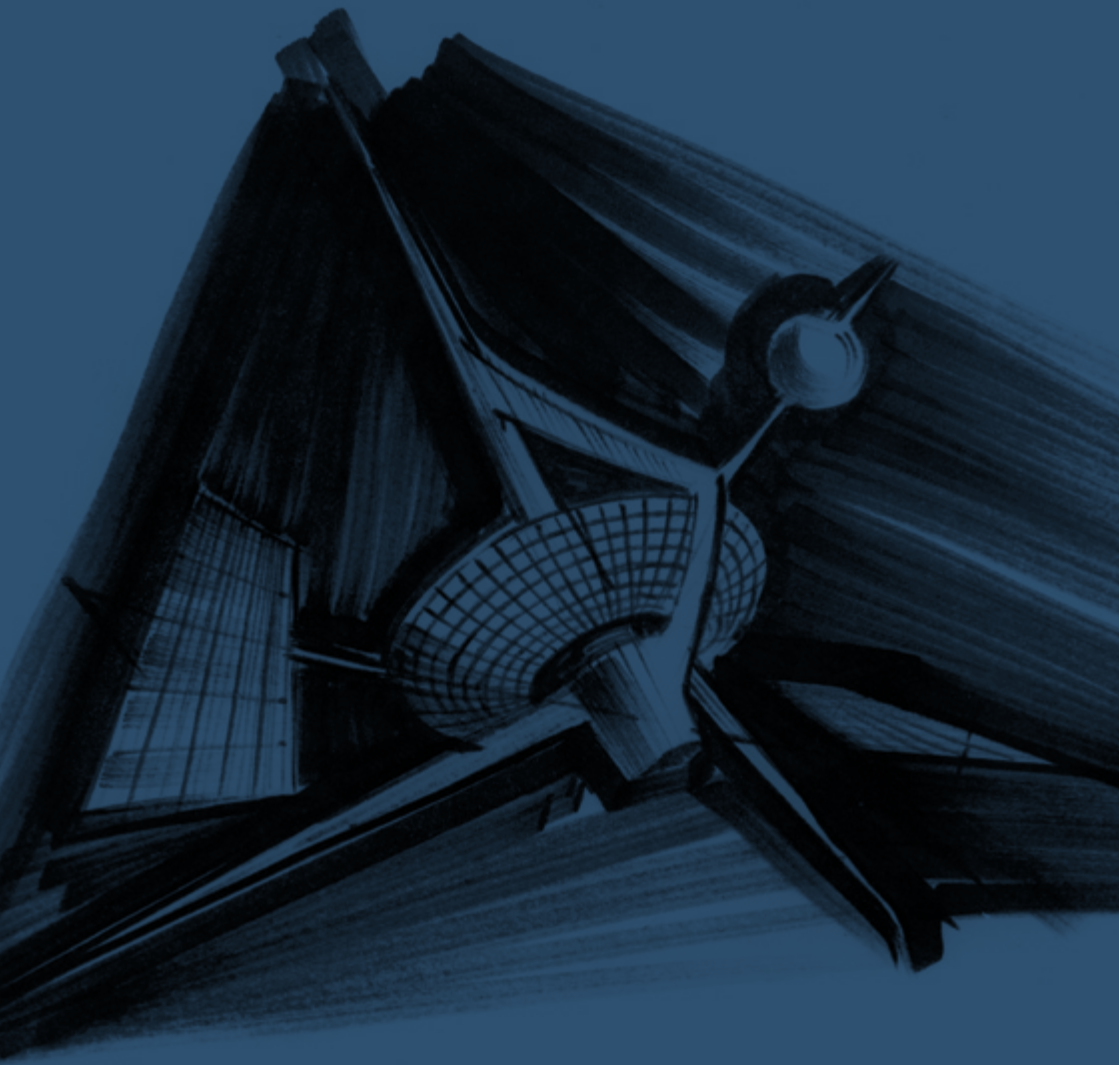


A BAFTA TRIBUTE TO  
SIR KEN ADAM



BRITISH ACADEMY  
OF FILM AND TELEVISION ARTS



LIKE THE BOND CHARACTER Q, KEN ADAM HAS BEEN THE MOST BRILLIANT OF THE BACKROOM BOYS.

Cover: Adam's diamond satellite concept art for *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971).

## OVERVIEW

by Sir Christopher Frayling

IN A CAREER that started in the studio era of the late 1940s and has flourished for well over half a century, production designer Ken Adam – who turns 90 this year – has been responsible for some of the grandest illusions in the history of cinema.

Sir Ken's distinctively expressionist style – rooted in his upbringing in 1920s Berlin – has seen him dubbed “the Frank Lloyd Wright of decor noir,” whilst one critic quite rightly observed that Adam “has had a profound influence not just on his profession but on the whole look of modern film.”

Adam entered the industry as a junior draughtsman in 1947, having studied architecture followed by active service as a fighter pilot in the RAF. Then he became an assistant art director, a fully-fledged art director and in 1959 a production designer – one of the first in Britain to be given that credit.

The most memorable and inspired of his grand illusions include: the antique and modern villain's headquarters, complete with Goya portrait of the Duke of Wellington propped up on an armchair, in *Dr No* (1962); the huge triangular Pentagon War Room with its giant poker table and light ring in *Dr Strangelove* (1964); the cathedral-style bullion rooms, stacked high with gold, in *Goldfinger* (1964); the London warehouse that looks like an Eastern European prison in *The Ipcress File* (1965); the missile launcher hidden beneath a lake and inside a Japanese volcano – at the time, the largest set ever constructed in Europe – in *You Only Live Twice* (1967) and the ship's body of an early Rolls-Royce combined

with the front of a Bugatti, which turns into a hovercraft and a flying machine, in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968).

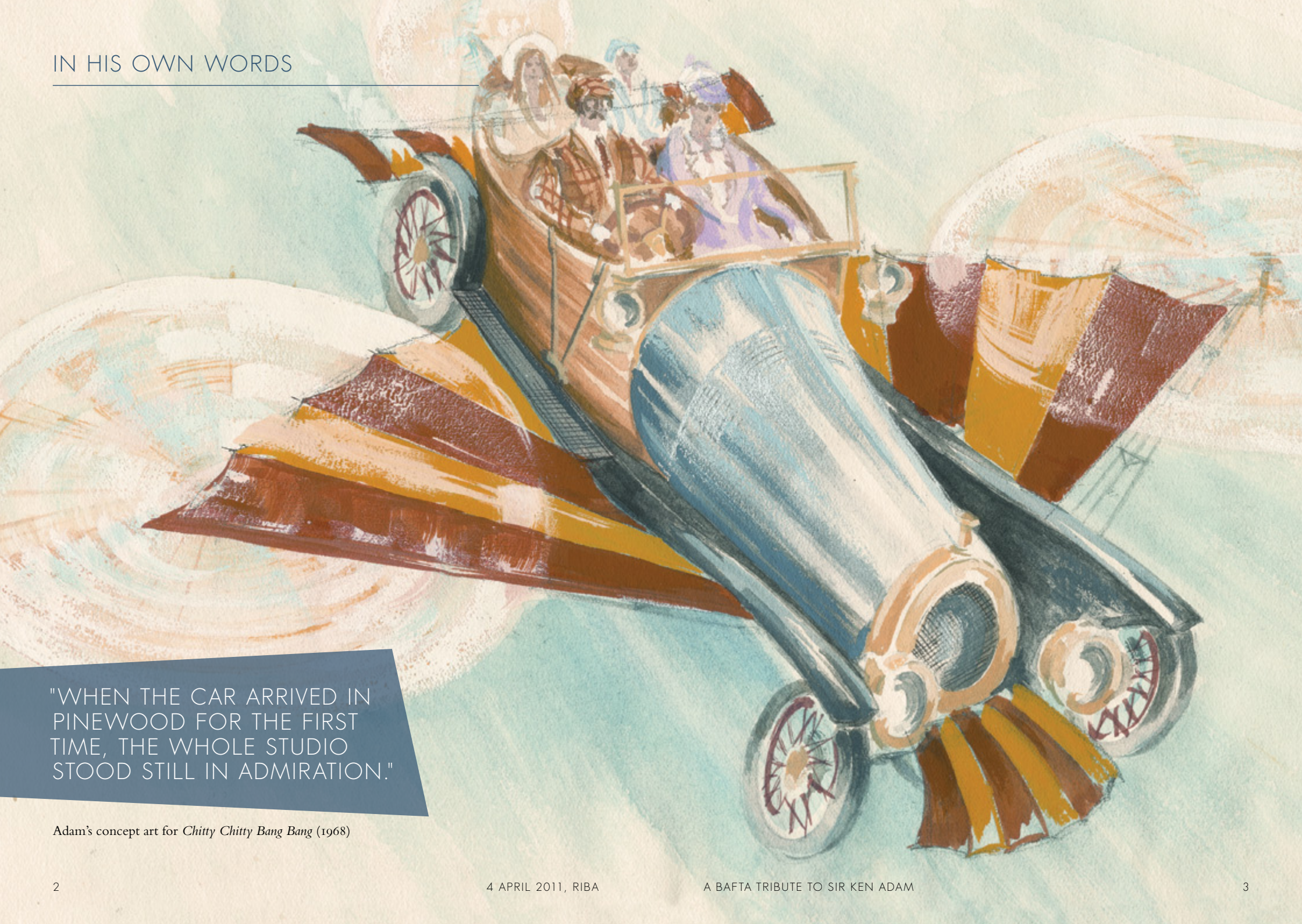
He devised the diamond laboratory with collapsible satellite in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971); an English baronial hall full of tricks, mechanical dolls and elaborate games, which many thought was a real National Trust country house interior, in *Sleuth* (1972); astonishing, candle-lit, eighteenth century rooms – all from real country houses this time – in *Barry Lyndon* (1975); a mammoth supertanker that digests, into a single compartment, three nuclear submarines in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977); a mobile space station, made up of bolted-together metal cylinders, in *Moonraker* (1979); the weird, gingerbread gothic interiors of *Addams Family Values* (1993); and the mixture of heritage locations and stylised design in *The Madness Of King George* (1994).

Hidden within this astonishing list are nine BAFTA nominations, including two wins for *Dr Strangelove* and *The Ipcress File* and five Oscar nominations, including two wins for, interestingly, films not actually characteristic of his design work, *Barry Lyndon* and *The Madness Of King George*.

He received a knighthood in 2003 for services to the film industry, the first production designer ever to be honoured in this way.

Like the Bond character Q, Ken Adam has been the most brilliant of the backroom boys, whose work continues to set the bar for excellence in production design.





"WHEN THE CAR ARRIVED IN  
PINWOOD FOR THE FIRST  
TIME, THE WHOLE STUDIO  
STOOD STILL IN ADMIRATION."

Adam's concept art for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968)



### **Which design are you most proud of, and why?**

That's a difficult question. I think in hindsight, probably my design of The War Room. It gave the right atmosphere to the actors, it was claustrophobic in many ways with the reflection of these enormous maps and so on.

It influenced Stanley because he decided not to shoot it from the establishing angle that I wanted him to shoot it from. He said "Believe me, I want to establish this whole atmosphere, taking time over it, so that the public don't really know exactly where they are."

### **How did you develop your drawing style?**

I did about two years of architecture before the Second World War and when I came back from the war I worked as a draughtsman in various studios before really designing on my own.

My architectural studies, though beneficial in many ways, made me tighten my drawings [which were] too pedantic. Being married to an Italian, she'd criticise that:

"Why do you make these enormous sketches? They're lifeless." That's when I really started letting myself go.

I had this special pen which was invented 30 years ago called the Flowmaster which had black ink – but the black ink was transparent. By sketching and putting pressure on, I could get enormous atmosphere and variation into a one colour sketch. That had an enormous influence on my design and gave me a freedom in expressing myself.

### **What's the most exciting part of the production design process?**

It's something that you feel. It's almost like having an orgasm. When you do a scribble, and I'm serious about this, when everything seems to work. That is really the most exciting part; that initial doodle or scribble, when you know you've done something interesting.

### **How do you feel about the rise of CGI in production design; creating worlds in a virtual space, not physical?**

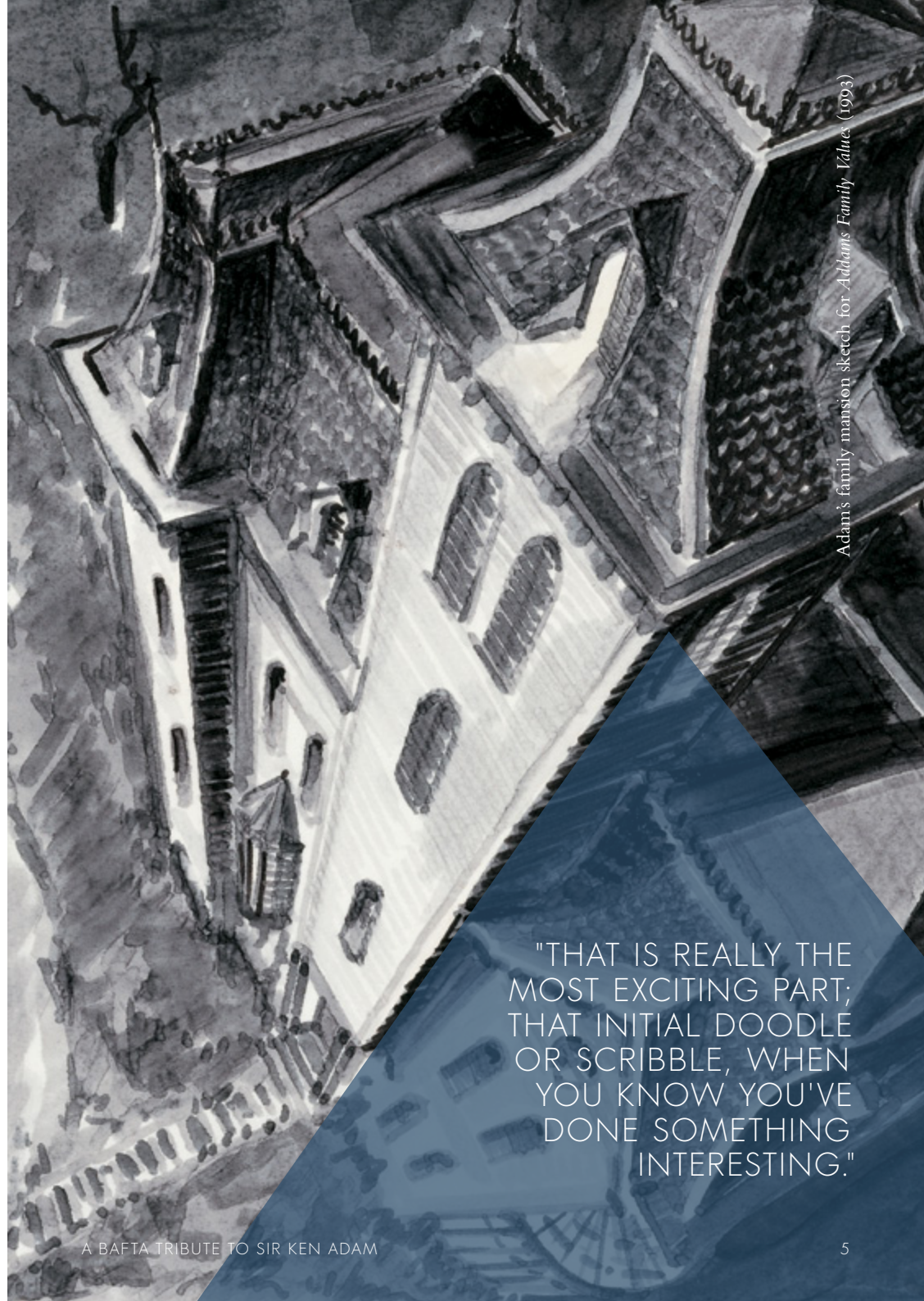
It's a fantastic invention and great progress but I think that every time something new comes up it needs to be treated with caution. I was used to working with a lot of great actors, Olivier, Brando and so on, who became part of the set and they used props on the set for their performances. Well that's all gone of course because the actors have to do their performing in front of a screen. It is a completely different way of making films.

### **What are your top tips for aspiring production designers?**

The basic requirement is talent and a way of convincing the director, producer and cameraman, and yourself, that what you're doing is right for the film.

You have to learn the basics, and then you have to learn how to express yourself. Sometimes that can be difficult, because there are people with a lot of ego problems, so you have to be a diplomat as well.

Think big – that was the first thing I learned when I was working for Mike Todd [producer, *Around The World In Eighty Days*]. It doesn't mean that everything has to be big but there's nothing which prevents you from expressing yourself.



Adam's family mansion sketch for *Adam's Family Values* (1993)

"THAT IS REALLY THE MOST EXCITING PART; THAT INITIAL DOODLE OR SCRIBBLE, WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING INTERESTING."



## INSPIRATION

FOUR PRODUCTION DESIGNERS PICK THEIR FAVOURITE PIECE OF WORK BY KEN ADAM

### JIM CLAY ON 'DR STRANGELOVE'

SOME YEARS AGO I found myself in Stanley Kubrick's kitchen discussing the work of Ken Adam on Kubrick's past films. It was the early pre-production days of *Eyes Wide Shut* and Stanley had asked me to be his production designer; daunting on many levels but not least because I was stepping into the shoes of Ken Adam whose work I had admired for so long. The pressure on me was short lived – one month later I was fired and my admiration for Ken doubled immediately.

Adam's War Room for *Dr Strangelove* has held iconic and inspirational status with filmmakers and cinema devotees alike for the last 48 years. The visual power and awe-inspiring scale of this subterranean bunker so enhances and supports the narrative it has

been drawn upon and copied many times but never matched.

In this strangely elegant space, the creation of a circular and horizontal band of light draws a low and ominous horizon line across the conference table below, thereby illuminating the absurdity of the ensuing debate. The massive maps float above, ever illustrating the unstoppable advance of the bombers and imposing the cathedral-like proportion of the space.

The absolute purity of this concept is design at its highest and most memorable level.

*Clay won BAFTAs for his work on Children Of Men (2006) and Christabel (1988) and was nominated for The Singing Detective (1986).*



## NATHAN CROWLEY ON 'BARRY LYNDON'

SIR KEN ADAM is perhaps best known for his ability to create scale using singular set pieces that are so memorable that they infect the character of the whole film. *Barry Lyndon* does not rely on this singular moment but instead portrays life in the late 1800s, gently immersing you in a time and period that feels remarkably real.

The film builds in scale with ever increasing complication through a series of misfortunes that start humbly in rural Ireland, massing into the decadence of the 1880s. Interiors complement the landscapes with a level of artistic composition and precision.

The film is full of imagery that helps describe the emotion and period of the film,

none more than: “Barry’s daily walk at Sir Charles Lyndon’s house in the gardens” towards the end of the film, where the bleakness of finally reaching his goals with the coldness of the walk contrasts with an empty feeling of loneliness and meaninglessness in his pursuit which led him here, not to mention the cost in betrayal, violence, love and jealousy.

It’s a marvellous piece of design that continues to be part of one of my favourite films and offers great inspiration when embarking on new projects.

Crowley was BAFTA-nominated for his work on *Batman Begins (2005)* and *The Dark Knight (2008)*.

## MARTIN CHILDS ON 'THE IPCRESS FILE'

IF YOU ARE asked to think of floors and ceilings and surprising camera angles ganging up to create a world, you might think of *Citizen Kane* or *The Third Man*, both in black and white. Add the extra element of colour and often the images become too busy to have that kind of impact.

Not so in *The Ipcress File*. The design and camerawork go hand in hand to create the grammar of the film. Geometric composition, the widescreen rectangle fractured into further rectangles, triangles and circles, reaches some kind of zenith via Ken’s eye for dramatically apposite space, architectural detail and the unerringly felicitous prop.

That *The Ipcress File* was largely shot on location, where control can break down and the unpredictable take over, makes it all the more remarkable. The first set that hits you is Dalby’s office: three windows, an oppressive high ceiling, an unadorned shining floor, and minimal, wonderfully witty dressing.

You see that, and you know you’re in the hands of a master of his craft; you long for the rest, for more surprises, and are never disappointed, right up to the film’s full-stop, a toppled red bucket at the right of the final frame.

Childs was BAFTA-nominated for his work on *Mrs Brown (1997)*, *Shakespeare In Love (1998)* and *Quills (2000)*.







## EVE STEWART ON 'GOLDFINGER'

CHRISTMAS, EARLY '70s. *Goldfinger* is the Christmas film. I have persuaded my entire family to dress as characters in the film. Stepfather, inexplicably, fashioned himself a foot long cardboard gold finger; mother squeezed herself into a rather daring jumpsuit; Uncle Andrew came prepared with Bowler hat lined with tin foil.

I was disappointed with the general lack of adult creativity but it would have to do as I barely had time to finish painting my cousin gold. The film started, and I had every character sat with me. In that instant I was truly with James at The Fontainebleau Hotel.

The way that Ken Adam rendered this world was intoxicating. The sexy colours, flamingo pinks and aquamarines created a delicious fruit cocktail of a vision. *Goldfinger* is

fantastically stylish, mixing huge set pieces such as the gold vaults with the minutiae of cunning little gadgets. The vast rooms in *Goldfinger's* plant with their sweeping lines are brilliantly juxtaposed with the models of Fort Knox.

Adam's contrasts between giant/small, dark/light, colour/monochrome, and fear/tongue-in-cheek wit give this film giant lungs that move it along. It reflects its time, but that time is what formed me as designer who wanted to create specific worlds that could transport the viewer so completely, as I was by Ken's.

Thank you for that Christmas, Ken, I shall never forget it.

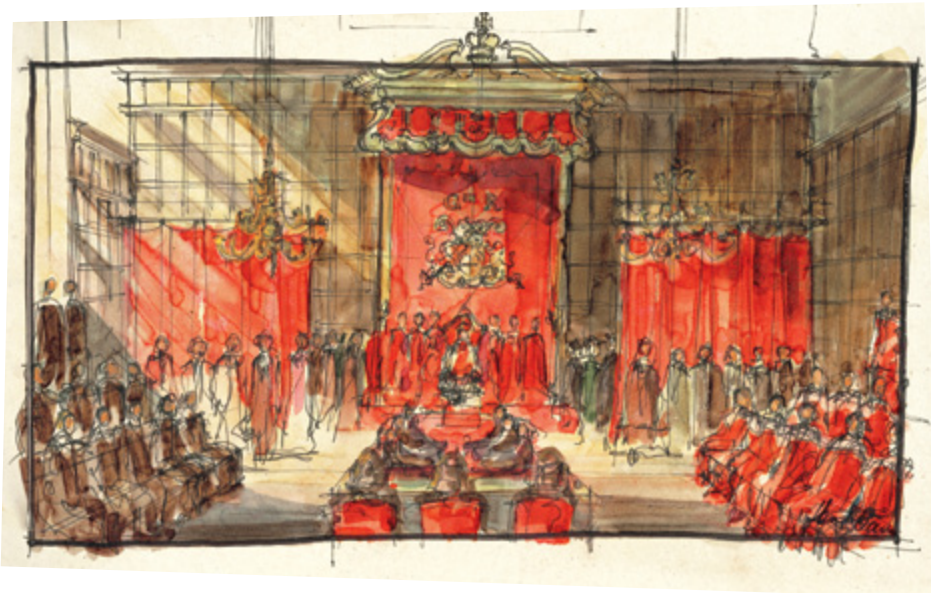
*Stewart was BAFTA-nominated for her work on Vera Drake (2004), Elizabeth I (2005) and The King's Speech (2010).*



The Great Hall set from *Sleuth* (1972)



Concept for the House of Lords from *The Madness Of King George* (1994)



## FILMOGRAPHY (SELECT)

- |      |                                   |      |                                                                             |      |                                        |
|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------|
| 2001 | <i>Taking Sides</i>               | 1976 | <i>The Seven-Per-Cent Solution</i>                                          | 1963 | <i>In The Cool Of The Day</i>          |
| 1999 | <i>The Out-of-Towners</i>         | 1976 | <i>Salon Kitty</i>                                                          | 1962 | <i>Dr. No</i>                          |
| 1997 | <i>In &amp; Out</i>               | 1975 | <i>Barry Lyndon</i>                                                         | 1962 | <i>Sodom And Gomorrah</i>              |
| 1996 | <i>Bogus</i>                      | 1973 | <i>The Last Of Sheila</i>                                                   | 1960 | <i>The Trials Of Oscar Wilde</i>       |
| 1995 | <i>Boys On The Side</i>           | 1972 | <i>Sleuth</i>                                                               | 1960 | <i>Let's Get Married</i>               |
| 1994 | <i>The Madness Of King George</i> | 1971 | <i>Diamonds Are Forever</i>                                                 | 1960 | <i>The Rough And The Smooth</i>        |
| 1993 | <i>Addams Family Values</i>       | 1969 | <i>Goodbye, Mr. Chips</i>                                                   | 1960 | <i>In The Nick</i>                     |
| 1993 | <i>Undercover Blues</i>           | 1968 | <i>Chitty Chitty Bang Bang</i>                                              | 1959 | <i>The Angry Hills</i>                 |
| 1991 | <i>Company Business</i>           | 1967 | <i>You Only Live Twice</i>                                                  | 1959 | <i>Ten Seconds To Hell</i>             |
| 1991 | <i>The Doctor</i>                 | 1966 | <i>Funeral In Berlin</i>                                                    | 1959 | <i>Beyond This Place</i>               |
| 1990 | <i>The Freshman</i>               | 1965 | <i>Thunderball</i>                                                          | 1958 | <i>Gideon's Day</i>                    |
| 1989 | <i>Dead Bang</i>                  | 1965 | <i>The Ipcress File</i>                                                     | 1957 | <i>Night Of The Demon</i>              |
| 1988 | <i>The Deceivers</i>              | 1964 | <i>Goldfinger</i>                                                           | 1957 | <i>The Devil's Pass</i>                |
| 1986 | <i>Crimes Of The Heart</i>        | 1964 | <i>Woman Of Straw</i>                                                       | 1956 | <i>Around The World In Eighty Days</i> |
| 1985 | <i>Agnes Of God</i>               | 1964 | <i>Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb</i> | 1956 | <i>Soho Incident</i>                   |
| 1985 | <i>King David</i>                 |      |                                                                             | 1956 | <i>Child In The House</i>              |
| 1979 | <i>Moonraker</i>                  |      |                                                                             |      |                                        |
| 1977 | <i>The Spy Who Loved Me</i>       |      |                                                                             |      |                                        |

## AWARDS (SELECT)

### BAFTA Wins

*Dr Strangelove*  
*The Ipcress File*

### BAFTA nominations

*The Madness Of King George*  
*The Spy Who Loved Me*  
*Barry Lyndon*  
*Sleuth*  
*You Only Live Twice*  
*Thunderball*  
*Goldfinger*

### Oscar wins

*The Madness Of King George*  
*Barry Lyndon*

### Oscar nominations

*Addams Family Values*  
*The Spy Who Loved Me*  
*Around The World In Eighty Days*



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## WITH SPECIAL THANKS

Sir Ken Adam  
Lady Letizia Adam  
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Sir Christopher Frayling

## THANKS

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National Film & Television School

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Movies: James Bond And Beyond*).

## CONTRIBUTORS

Anouk Aimee	Jess Gonchor
Steven Berkoff	Sir Ronald Harwood
Sir Michael Caine	Sir Nicholas Hytner
Martin Childs	Christiane Kubrick
Jim Clay	Peter Lamont
Nathan Crowley	Nicholas Meyer
Therese Dupree	Sir Roger Moore
Guy Hendrix Dyas	Julia Peyton Jones
Rupert Everett	Alice Rawsthorn
Eumice Gayson	Eve Stewart
Lewis Gilbert	Robert Stromberg

## EVENT PRODUCTION

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Matthew Sweet

**Producer**  
Tricia Tuttle

**Event Coordinator**  
Julia Carruthers

**Stage Designer**  
Yovcho Gorchev

**Head of Learning & Events**  
Tim Hunter

**Webcast Director**  
David Coleman

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**Webcast Editor**  
Amy Hounsell

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