

Designing a Better, More Spectacular Attraction

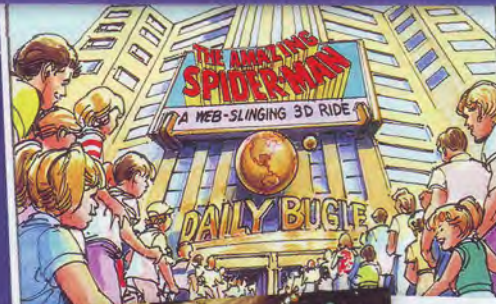
Behind the Scenes with
Some of the Industry's Top Designers

By Deborah Brauser



The concept for the entrance of The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man evolved only slightly from drawing to construction, retaining the setting of the Daily Bugle as the attraction's facade.

While it might take a single artist just a few hours to create art for the look of the interior of the T-Rex Cafe at Downtown Disney, it takes a team of skilled craftsmen to actually put it all together.



As you've stood in line for your favorite ride or show, have you ever thought about all the details that go into ensuring it comes together smoothly? Details such as safety protocols, mechanical working parts and even water effects have all been meticulously researched and installed, as part of the ride's overall design.

There are often hundreds of people involved with creating a new attraction. Many times, theme parks and restaurants take their initial idea and then turn to the experts to bring their vision to life. Other times, they may look to a ride designer to provide original concepts. Whatever the process, all the designers taked to for this story agree—collaboration and teamwork are key to turning out great projects that keep guests happy for years to come.

Gary Goddard Entertainment Design

Based in North Hollywood, Calif., Gary Goddard Entertainment Design has been designing rides for more than 25 years, including some of Universal's most popular attractions. Chairman and Owner Gary Goddard has also produced Broadway shows, created Las Vegas productions, directed motion pictures and created several television series. "In all things, we really look for the emotional connection. We try to design rides and shows that will immerse people in an experience that engages them emotionally," he said.

Goddard uses the words positive and very collaborative when describing his relationship with former heads of Universal's Recreation Division, Jay Stein and Barry Upson. "From the time I started working there, first on the Conan

Sword and Sorcery Spectacular, then to Kongfrontation in L.A., then as part of the team that created the concepts and master plan for Universal Studios Florida, and then again for what became Universal's Islands of Adventure, the idea was to push the envelope. There was a true desire to create attractions that would be more immersive and edgier."

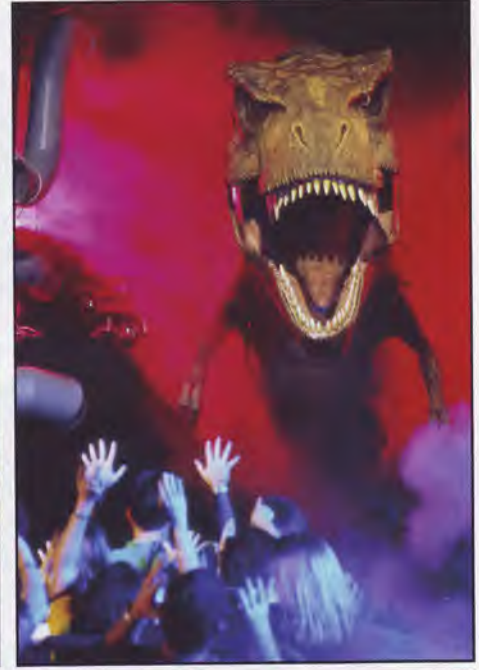
When Universal first approached Goddard about developing a ride based on *Jurassic Park* (Jurassic Park: The Ride at Universal Studios Hollywood in California and Jurassic Park River Adventure at Universal Orlando's Islands of Adventure), they were interested in creating a Jeep ride, which played a major part in the movie's script. It was a suggestion that Goddard wasn't keen on. "I told them that we can never do a Jeep ride as good as what

would be in the movie and we'd never meet the audience's expectations." He instead suggested a boat ride, based on a reference in the *Jurassic Park* book. "This would give the Studios a major water ride – something they desperately needed in Orlando at the time." Steven Spielberg, who was involved with the entire attraction process, "liked the boat ride concept, gave us input at several key stages and brought up a host of other great ideas."

After the concept was approved, and a large walk-through scale model built of the overall ride, Goddard was asked to develop another movie-related idea – one based on *Terminator 2: 3-D* at Universal Studios. According to Goddard, when Stein said he wanted a stunt show in the old Conan theatre, Goddard was a little worried. "I had visions of some guy in a tinfoil suit battling an Arnold look-alike on a live stage and I knew that it would just never work. Plus, I knew (the movie's director) James Cameron would have to approve any concept – and he was way too smart to approve a typically cheesy theme park stunt show." After struggling with how to make it interesting, Goddard hit upon an idea. "An image of the T-1000 in its liquid metal form would come off the screen in 3-D. And then when it re-formed, it would become a real live actor in the T-1000 human mode and leap into the audience. I didn't yet know how we would achieve this, but I thought: if we can get that to happen believably, it would be really cool."

The Spider-Man ride concept (The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man at Universal's Islands of Adventure) was assigned to Goddard before the first Spider-Man movie came out. "I grew up on comic books, so I was elated to have this project." While analyzing what a super hero ride should be, he realized that it first of all had to have "in your face" action. But how could he translate the energy of a comic book into a ride? "I started thinking: what are the possibilities?" said Goddard. "An animatronic ride wouldn't be right – much too static and with limited

Gary Goddard (in blue) worked with director Steven Spielberg (middle) and former CEO & president of Universal Studios Sid Sheinberg during the *Jurassic Park* ride design process. Concept art (below) was used as a guide to create the attraction's overall layout and climax (below, right) which matches the artwork almost identically.



Stories From the Frontline

After 25 years in the theme park business, Gary Goddard has had his share of “make ‘em or break ‘em” presentations for his ride concepts. Here, he recalls a couple that were surprisingly successful.

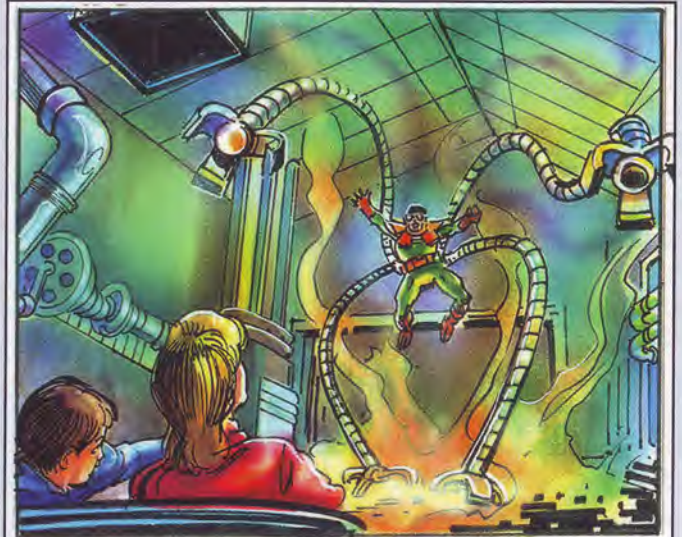


Gary Goddard poses on the Terminator 2: 3-D set with director James Cameron and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Terminator 2: 3-D

Working with Jay Stein (former head of Universal's Recreation Division), we developed a very strong concept, script and presentation. And because nothing could move forward unless James Cameron (Terminator 2 director) approved it, I was told that I'd be pitching it to him. So that day, I wasn't nervous until he entered the room. And then I suddenly realized: I'm going to be pitching this concept for a new attraction – something we called T2 3-D – to the guy who created the entire Terminator universe! And I suddenly felt a bit of pressure. But I pitched hard, with four walls of renderings and storyboard art. And after about 40 minutes, I was through and I'll never forget what happened next.

The room was silent. Everyone was waiting for Jim to say something. After a few moments of long silence, I felt I had to break the ice and started to speak – and Jim held his hand up, so I stopped mid-sentence. He got up and looked at the artwork and said, “These drawings are really good – who did them?” I told him and he looked a bit more. Then he turned around and said to the room, “You know, driving over here I was thinking: what kind of dumb idea are they going to show me? I arrived here fully prepared to tell you that it sucks. But I have to say, this is really good. The entire concept, the use of film and live actors, the transitions from film to live, and the story – you get it. The mythology is right.” And then after a moment, he added, “Not that I can't make it a little better.” Everyone laughed and the project moved ahead. And Cameron was right. He did improve things!



— And thru the hole comes DOCTOR OCTOPUS! He's furious that we've invaded his secret lair, and he lunges straight toward our vehicle. “Ah, hostages!” he sneers. “Just what the Doctor ordered!”

The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man

Spider-Man was an attraction that few people believed in. It was a constant struggle to get that green lit. And we had no Spielberg or Cameron to fight for us. Again, Jay Stein believed in it and he allowed us to move ahead, step by step. At that time, many of his executives didn't think 3-D would work if you were in a moving ride conveyance. We had to actually spend a lot of money to set up a sound stage with three sets of twin 3-D projectors showing existing 3-D footage onto large screens. And then we pushed the executives around in little wheeled chairs. They wanted to see that when we moved them forward, backward and side to side, that the 3-D images would actually still work. And of course it did and we were allowed to carry on. Ultimately the ride was turned over to Scott Trowbridge to produce the project and he did a great job of bringing it to life. But we worked on the concept and design for over two years.

I still ride Spider-Man and go experience T2 3-D every time I'm in Orlando. And I have to say, they still work incredibly well. I love seeing audiences come out laughing and excited and really loving them. It's a great feeling.

motion.” He soon decided that 3-D was the way to go. “It was the only way to violate the ‘ride envelope’ (the safety zone around which no physical objects can penetrate for safety reasons) in a way that would make people react in the way I wanted. And it had big in your face action and big physical effects timed to the 3-D film. It's so cool to have done

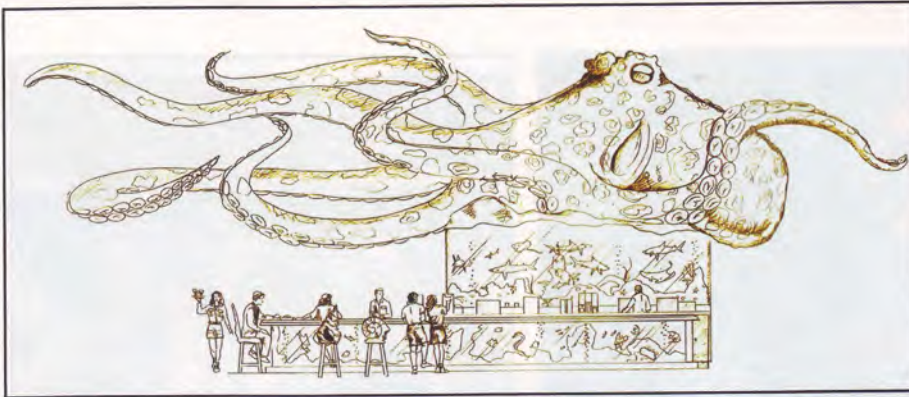
these attractions almost a decade ago, and to know they are still being seen and loved by audiences of all ages.”

Daddona Studios

Based out of Pompano Beach, Fla., Daddona Studios specializes in all aspects of themeing – for parks, restaurants, stores and more. This includes providing

all carpentry, welding, sculpting, mural painting and mechanical lighting needed to bring a theme to life. Their latest project has been providing many of the creatures found at the new T-Rex Café in Downtown Disney.

President Dan Daddona said today's guests are a bit more demanding and have come to expect an interesting



When a project is as big as building a restaurant with a dinosaur theme, even the tiniest details are planned during its initial conceptual stages. The art pictured above was used to plan the construction of the restaurant's bar area (above, middle). Seen in the bottom picture is the finished product.

experience while eating or shopping, as well as in the theme parks. "We basically grew with the themeing industry. And it's really because of Disney's influence. People started seeing that if they had a theme, their store or restaurant would do better. Today, if companies don't keep up with the expectations of the customers, they end up kind of falling

by the wayside."

Daddona first got involved with Steve Schussler of Schussler Creative, to help bring the first T-Rex Café concept to Kansas City. Landry's Restaurants soon stepped in to partner with Schussler, and then Disney gave them all a green light to bring the idea to Downtown Disney. "We worked with all the architects and

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If an attraction calls for pyrotechnics, there's a good chance that Andy Nicholls (above, at a pyro setup) was involved. He helped Indiana Jones feel the heat in the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Show (left).

builders through these jobs, and it was just great. And for the most part, the restaurant here is bigger – with little enhancements here and there. For example, instead of doing four tentacles for the octopus like we did in Kansas City, we did eight here in Orlando. Overall, it's just been a lot of fun."

In addition to T-Rex, Daddona has also worked with Disney on a project at Epcot, made several sets for the Hollywood Studios Star Wars Weekends, and created several sculptural pieces for Animal Kingdom. "We always look at everything Disney does, because they always have the newest technologies and use them beyond anyone's capabilities," said Daddona. "Working with them is amazing. It's like getting to go to a Disney College!"

— Orlando Special Effects —

Speaking of the new T-Rex Café, Orlando Special Effects provided all of its outdoor flames and indoor fire effects. "We made sure the indoor effects will burn for 12 hours a day," said company President Andy Nicholls. "We were actually awarded with Disney's first indoor flame burn permit for the project."

Since 1990, this Florida-based company has provided special effects to the entertainment industry, as well as simulations and training for the military. Though they specialize in fire and pyrotechnic effects, they've been called upon to design and set up numerous

mechanical effects as well. "We did two shows for SeaWorld: a water ski show where they had a torpedo go astray and supposedly hit a set, causing a fireball to erupt.

"And then we did an indoor show about Atlantis, with the set falling down and water going everywhere, along with flame effects," said Nicholls. "We also provided some air can effects for the Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Show at Hollywood Studios several years ago, and all the flame effects and some of the scary gags at the old Skull Kingdom (formerly on International Drive)."

When asked why fire effects remain so popular, Nicholls replied, "Fire upstages everything we do and just grabs your attention. There are a lot of simulators out there, but I don't think anything can replace seeing the real thing and feeling real heat." They've been hired to produce fireballs, explosions, smoke effects and even a backyard volcano.

"There are a lot of safety concerns involved with even a simple fire feature," cautions Nicholls. "That's why when someone hires me for the effect, they're also getting someone who'll follow the standards and answer to the fire marshals and authorities to make sure it all goes off without a hitch."

— Jack Rouse Associates —

Dan Schultz, executive vice president with Jack Rouse Associates out of Cincinnati, Ohio, said his company specializes in creating environments.

Whether they're for theme parks, museums, sports venues or corporate visitor centers, "We basically create an immersive environment that gives people the chance to have fun while they're learning."

Just some of the projects they've worked on in the Central Florida area include Fievel's Playground, Curious



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George Goes to Town and A Day in the Park with Barney play areas at Universal Studios (as well as some of the streetscapes there), the exhibits and attractions at Daytona USA, and exhibits on Early Space Exploration at Kennedy Space Center.

"It's always a collaboration with Universal Studios or with any of our amazing clients," said Schultz. Most have some ideas about what they want to do, but with our background and our experience, we can join with them and come up with creative ideas that we fine tune together. At the end of the day, you're both looking to do what's best from the guest's point of view."

Future Trends

So what are some of the trends for rides in the future? To make them bigger, faster, and louder? To make them more immersive? Or is it searching for the next "completely different" feature?

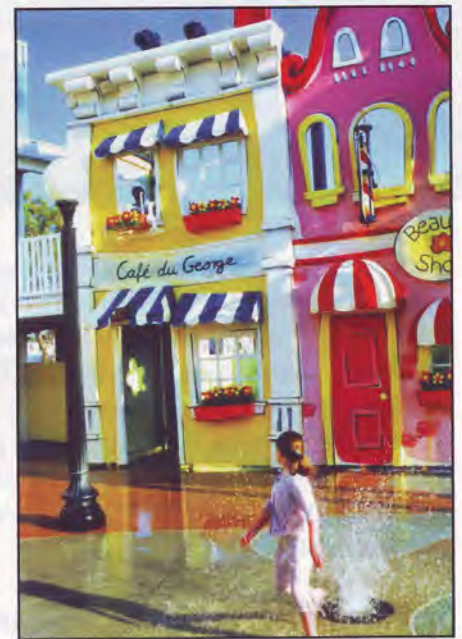
Mike West, director and executive producer of the Creative Studio at Universal, and executive producer for The Simpsons Ride at Universal Studios, said the challenge for parks will be "pulling people away from their interactivity at home. Though they can have fun with thousands of people online, it's still an isolated experience. I think what we provide is the opportunity to laugh and share that excitement and that fun with family and friends and even strangers. That's a whole different kind of experience.

"The immersive experience brings people out," he added. "We can offer a 3-D experience in an 85-foot dome that shows The Simpsons projected 50 feet in front of you. You can't do that at home. Plus, there will always be a demand for a thrilling coaster or a classic dark ride. But I think we'll see more of a demand to mix them, like with The Mummy at Universal. It's a little bit of a dark ride and then a little bit of a theatrical experience. Then all of a sudden, holy smokes – it's a coaster."

In the future, West would like to figure out a way for guests who don't



Universal Studios' Curious George Goes to Town play area required extensive artistic planning to ensure its cartoon feeling came across in real-life.



want the coaster effects, to still be able to enjoy them. "We need to look at a way to give guests or families with young children the option to be able to walk through these rides and experience the interesting theatrical parts, without having to worry about the thrill ride parts. Shrek does that a little bit with the seats that don't move down in the front. It would be nice to see that in some of our 3-Dimensional set attractions as well. Oh, and I think a goal to shoot for would be a 3-D theater without glasses. From a guest's standpoint, I think it would be so magical to sit there and have things jump off the screen without having to put on the special glasses."

Goddard agrees that the trend will

continue towards including more 3-D/4-D effects, "as we've only just scratched the surface on this." But ultimately, he doesn't think future rides should be just about the technology. "I think a great attraction, whether you're talking about Spider-Man or Pirates of the Caribbean, or the Haunted Mansion – they all started with an idea for a journey, a story, an adventure. And as they looked at how best to realize that story, the technologies were then developed to make it all happen. So yes to being more immersive, yes to more and bigger effects, and yes to finding something completely different. But first, figure out what the journey's about. Finding the perfect melding of all these points leads to great rides."