



LUANA HANSON



Rochdale-born Production Designer Luana Hanson is the creative mind behind the sets of many popular television dramas and films, most recently Channel 4's *It's A Sin* and Netflix's *Stay Close*.

Luana recently received a prestigious Royal Television Society Award for her incredible work on *It's A Sin* - a multi-award-winning, five part series written and created by Russell T Davies.

Style caught up with Luana to discuss her exciting career, filming in her hometown and why creativity is in her genes...

Style: Did you grow up in Rochdale?

Luana: Yes! I was brought up in Cutgate and lived there until I was about 18. I went to Shawfield Middle School and then Oulder Hill Community School.

I think Rochdale gives you a good backbone. Some really talented, creative people have come out of Rochdale, and Oulder Hill especially.

Tell us a bit about your role as Production Designer...

I'm responsible for everything you see on screen. Not the costumes although I work very closely with the costume designer, but everything else I'm responsible for – whether it's a gun, special effect, a house interior, car, an action prop! Anything visual you see is part of our art department.



I'm usually on set first thing in the morning or the night before a shoot and then I hand the set over to the director. Then I'm straight onto dressing the next set!

How did you first get into production design?

I started off at Liverpool doing Fashion and Textiles. I always wanted to do set design but I wasn't sure how to get into it. One of my teachers from university used to design these huge parties in London for pop stars and record companies and she asked if I wanted to help her design them.

So, I ended up designing about 60-80 themed parties for people like Michael Jackson, Elton John and George Michael. We did the Red Hot and Blue party which was the first party for Elton John's Aids Foundation.



One day, at one of these parties I was literally washing some brushes out at a sink and met a guy who was doing the PG Tips commercials with the monkeys! I got chatting to him, took my portfolio to his studio and he took me on as his assistant. I worked with him for about two years and he taught me so much about what the job was.

I then applied to the Royal College of Art to do a Masters in Design for Film. I did that for two years and then started in art departments as an assistant art director and worked my way up from there.

Do you have an all-time favourite production?

I loved working on *Nil by Mouth* – a long time ago. I was an Art Director then, not a designer, but Gary Oldman who was just fantastic to work with...

Flowers on Channel 4, with Olivia Coleman, was a beautiful job too.

You received a Royal Television Society Award late last year for *It's A Sin* with the judging panel describing your production design as "atmospheric and authentic, feeling and breathing every moment of the characters... it really punched above its weight" – how did that feel?

It was fantastic and so lovely to receive! I always say it isn't just me though – I'm pretty useless on my own. I work with a big group of people so we need to cut the award up and have a piece each! There were 220 sets on *It's A Sin* so it was a tough job for everyone.

Our team are down to the final three for a British Film Designers Guild Award as well which is coming up soon in London, so that's exciting.



Where do you start when you're designing a new television series or film?

I get a script and then break it down into locations and sets. Then work out how many scenes are in each location/set and the budget according to that. If there are a lot of scenes in one location, such as the flat in *It's A Sin*, you can warrant building it. Whereas, if there was only a couple of scenes it's just not worth it, so you'd look for a location.

Then we start to work on sketching and dressing the set. There's so much detail that goes into every scene, even if it's just on screen for seconds!

A few scenes in *Stay Close* were shot in and around Rochdale - did you choose those locations yourself?

Yes! So we turned the interior of Touchstones into an Oncology ward and we used the exterior as a solicitors. And then we used Healey Dell near the viaduct.

For *The Fattest Man in Britain* we used a house exterior up on Roch Valley. And for *It's A Sin* we used a house on Shelfield Lane in Norden. I knew it from when my friend Leah used to live there and we needed to find a house from the 80s, on a hill (then we could then CGI the sea so it looked like the Isle of Wight!).

So obviously, it's all because I grew up in Rochdale and when I'm trying to find locations I'm recalling places that I know of!

Are a lot of your productions filmed up North?

Quite a few! *It's A Sin*, *Stay Close*, *Last Tango in Halifax*, a film called *The Mark of Cain* that was all about Iraq - that was filmed in Tunisia and Manchester. I'm currently working on an exciting drama for Channel 4 in Manchester.

Your creativity must run in the family as your dad, Ian Hanson, was a well known artist in Rochdale...

Yes, sadly my dad passed away at Christmas aged 91. He was a portrait sculptor who used to teach at Rochdale College of Art. He was commissioned by the Queen, Princess Diana, Sophia Loren, Winston Churchill...!



It's A Sin © RED Production Company & All3Media

He was Head of Studio at Madame Tussauds and sculpted so many celebrities and royalty. He definitely underplayed how many well-known people he'd sculpted; some I didn't find out about until recently when I was looking through all his stuff. I even found a video of my dad teaching Michael Jackson how to moonwalk when they were inventing the first animatronic waxwork!



My mum, Christine Pearson (Christine Hanson) is very creative too; she was part of the Rochdale Sculptors, who really broke the mould (excuse the pun) with the way they worked. She was the only female sculptor in that group too!

What would be your dream design job?

I've just read my dream script actually but I can't say what it is unfortunately! But I prefer more emotional pieces about real people, or a big period film.

Do you ever have a day off?!

Not really! I also do Interior Design, so I'm doing a house in Alderley Edge at the moment. I do everything from colour changes, to structural work, complete renovations. So it's a similar thing to film and television but obviously it's for real whereas set design isn't!

What are the best and worst aspects of your job?

Best - Working with great people and creating something that comes to life; you do a drawing of a set and then within a matter of days or weeks you see it three dimensionally, and that's really exciting, watching it come together.

Worst - You wear scruffy clothes all day and the hours are long!! One day on *Stay Close* we were in a grotty café in Blackpool, half derelict, cups full of mould, no toilets, freezing with a gale blowing outside... oh the glamour!

Visit www.luanahansoninteriors.co.uk or follow Luana's Production Design and Interior Design on Instagram @ [luanahansoninteriors](https://www.instagram.com/luanahansoninteriors).

Ruth Parkinson

