

TWENTIETH CENTURY COSTUMES EXPANDS STATESIDE

Laurence Hollande opens a New York branch of his London costume shop

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In 1979 Laurence Hollande decided to stop trading in second-hand clothes, and to collect the best of his pickings for hiring—this was the beginning of Twentieth Century Props. Ten years later the more aptly named Twentieth Century Costumes has just opened a branch in New York City's SoHo district.

Hollande first worked with period costumes when a friend in the United States asked him to send vintage clothes out to sell in the States. He went on to manage a number of shops before setting up Twentieth Century Props: "At first we were in a basement in Great Sutton Street. We'd literally go to the bank and say, 'Can I borrow £200? I'll give it back at the end of the week.'" Hollande moved the company to its impressive Dallington Street premises in February 1988. He now has a staff of 28 in a five storey building which was redesigned specifically for them by architect Michael Bell. Bell met with the staff of Twentieth Century Costumes over a period of three months to access their needs. Behind the stylish facade and reception area there are a network of stock rooms, a large work-room and tailoring area, and a small laundry room complete with the paraphernalia for breaking down costumes. Bell is also responsible for the design of the New York site.

The company's main asset is its huge collection of costumes which includes some 8,000 pairs of shoes. They also construct costumes, and provide office space for production designers while they are working closely

with the tailoring staff. In order to achieve a genuine period look, their buyers (who operate all over Europe and the United States) look out for bolts of cloth made in the 1930s and 40s. They also have cloth made specially for them; this minimises the need to break down costumes, which is a long and therefore costly process. Every item of stock has an individual code number and is registered on a central computer. It is checked in and out for each production, and can be traced at the touch of a button.

Twentieth Century Costumes has covered such productions as *Out of Africa*, *Absolute Beginners*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Prick Up Your Ears*; they supplied over 1,000 costumes for *The Last Emperor*, dressed all but the Toons in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and worked on the latest Indiana Jones adventure, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Back to the Future II*, and *Batman*. Working on these and other recent projects, Hollande realised there was potential to expand; there is certainly a huge demand for twentieth century costumes, and he felt confident of the quality and choice he can supply.

"We chose New York because there's not really a costume house like us there," says Hollande, "and there wasn't the competition we'd find in Los Angeles." The move to New York is very much a thrust for a greater share of the international market. Hollande comments, "It's difficult to ascertain your market share because no one place can do a big film