

Obituary: Alexander Golitzen

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Oscar-winning 'Spartacus' art director Alexander Golitzen dies

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES – Alexander Golitzen, an art director and production designer who shared Academy Awards for his work on 1943's "Phantom of the Opera," 1960's "Spartacus" and 1962's "To Kill a Mockingbird" during a career that spanned decades, has died. He was 97.

Golitzen died July 26 of congestive heart failure at a health care center in San Diego, said his daughter, Cynthia Garn.

Golitzen worked on more than 300 movies. He earned more than a dozen Oscar nominations for art direction, beginning with the 1940 Alfred Hitchcock movie "Foreign Correspondent" and ending with "Earthquake" in 1974.

Others included 1961's "Flower Drum Song" and 1969's "Sweet Charity."

The Moscow-born Golitzen and his family fled the Russian revolution and ended up in Seattle. Golitzen attended the University of Washington, where he earned an architecture degree, and moved to Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles, he became an assistant to a fellow Russian, MGM art director Alexander Toluboff. He went on to work at United Artists and later was supervising art director at Universal, where he oversaw movies for three decades.

He also designed the set for the Academy Awards show several times.

Along with his daughter, Golitzen is survived by his wife, Frances; son, Peter; five grandchildren and a great-

granddaughter.

Alexander Golitzen

Hollywood art director renowned for his work with Universal Studios for more than 30 years

Ronald Bergan

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[The Guardian](#)



The art director Alexander Golitzen, who has died aged 97, could be considered the co-auteur of most of Universal Studios' major films for more than 30 years. Among the directors with whom he worked was Douglas Sirk, 13 of whose films he designed. These included three of Sirk's rich, ripe Technicolor melodramas: *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Written On The Wind* (1956) and *Imitation Of Life* (1959). Golitzen, and his set decorator, Russell A Gausman, were mainly responsible for the films' lush "look", and this aesthetic can be seen in other movies made for the studio by lesser directors. Todd Haynes's *Far From Heaven* (2002) was as much a homage to Golitzen as to Sirk.

Golitzen was nominated 14 times for an Oscar, and won with *The Phantom Of The Opera* (1943), with John B Goodman; *Spartacus* (1960), with Eric Orbom; and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962), with Henry Bumstead. But his superior work with Sirk remained

unrecognised by the Academy. He also had a penchant for the fantastic – he was art director on five horror/sci fi movies directed by Jack Arnold, including *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) – and westerns rather than contemporary settings. Golitzen was born in Moscow into a prosperous family who fled to the United States during the Russian revolution via Siberia and China. They finally settled in Seattle, where the 16-year-old Alexander attended high school before obtaining a degree in architecture from the University of Washington.

He moved to Los Angeles, where he became an assistant to MGM art director Alexander Toluboff, a fellow Russian émigré with whom he worked on Rouben Mamoulian's *Queen Christina* (1933), starring Greta Garbo. Golitzen's first art director credit (shared with Richard Day) was on William Wellman's *The Call Of The Wild* (1935), based on Jack London's story, released by United Artists. For the same company, he was first nominated for an Oscar for *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), Alfred Hitchcock's second Hollywood film, for which he conceived the interior of a windmill whose blades suspiciously turn the wrong way.

Two years later, Golitzen launched his long Universal career with *Arabian Nights*, the first of a series of Technicolored Hollywood exotica, for which he provided a suitably make-believe Baghdad against which Maria Montez, Jon Hall and Sabu could emote, and he built the Paris Opera imaginatively on the studio backlot for *The Phantom Of The Opera*. Golitzen ventured successfully into film noir territory with Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street* (1945), and lovingly recreated turn-of-the-century Vienna in Max Ophuls's *Letter From An Unknown Woman* (1948).

His first collaboration with Sirk was *All I Desire* (1953), a soap operatic vehicle for Barbara Stanwyck, embellished by the period (1910 small-town America) décor. He then embarked on three films directed by Anthony Mann and starring James

Stewart: a musical biopic, *The Glenn Miller Story* (1953); an action adventure, *Thunder Bay* (1953); and a western, *The Far Country* (1954). In 1958, Golitzen had the privilege and pain of working for Orson Welles on *Touch Of Evil*. Welles was content to accept the Universal staffers as part of the deal, but he insisted on helping to design some of the sets himself. Golitzen brilliantly converted a shabby motel outside Los Angeles into an even shabbier one, but Universal treated the film badly, demanding new scenes and cuts. Consequently, it was the last of the great director-actor's Hollywood movies.

Golitzen continued to oversee the design of films, good, bad and indifferent, at the studio throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Golitzen found a small town in the San Fernando Valley that was about to be destroyed to make room for a freeway, but that had the southern look he wanted. So he moved some of the houses that were to be bulldozed to Universal's backlot.

Among his many later credits were Don Siegel's *The Beguiled*, an American civil war drama with Clint Eastwood, and Eastwood's first directorial effort, *Play Misty For Me* (both 1971). His last film, now credited as production designer, was the disaster movie *Earthquake* (1974).

Golitzen is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

· Alexander Golitzen, art director, born February 28 1908; died July 26 2005