

Ready, get set – and action

They look entirely real, but these film sets have been built by Welsh firm 4Wood. West Wales editor Rachael Misstear spoke to the boss...

ROME wasn't built in a day. But Paris, you could say, was created within just a matter of weeks.

That is, authentic-looking Parisian street scenes and sumptuous French interiors have been created by TV and film set builders for a new television drama currently being filmed in Wales.

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the magic of many popular television shows, both in Britain and in the US, is happening behind the scenes – quite literally – right here in Wales, in what is a rapidly growing industry with a wealth of talent.

South Wales-based set building firm, 4Wood, is championing the industry and currently working on projects such as the BBC's *Sherlock*, as well as a newly commissioned drama series, *The Collection*, set in the world of French haute couture after World War II.

It also managed to emulate the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield in sets for the recent BBC iPlayer comedy drama *The Rack Pack*, telling the story of Alex "Hurricane" Higgins and snooker's exploding 1980s popularity.

These are the latest in a catalogue of the firm's impressive credits which span more than a decade, and which also include the BBC series *Torchwood*, as well as major US TV productions such as *The Bastard Executioner*.

It means their work is seen by audiences of literally millions worldwide. Its sets created for international hit US series *Da Vinci's Demons*, have been seen in more than 125 countries in a show aired in 45 languages.

Working largely out of Swansea's Bay Studios but also out of Pinewood in Cardiff, and Dragon Studios in Bridgend, 4Wood and its craftsmen are building an enviable reputation which is helping to secure more work in Wales.

"We have been working on TV and Film Sets for the past 11 years," said company director and founder Scott Fisher.

"We've created sets on productions ranging from *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood* and *Sarah Jane Adventures* in Cardiff, through to Series one, two and three of *Da Vinci's Demons* in Swansea Bay Studios. We've also worked on *The Bastard Executioner* at Dragon Studios, Bridgend, the BBC drama, *Rack Pack* and most recently *The*



➤ One of the amazing sets in Wales made by 4Wood

Collection at Swansea Bay Studios."

In the last decade, Wales has become increasingly obvious as a choice for stunning outdoor locations, not least because of its rolling hills and long stretches of beautiful coastline. Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*, *Snow White and the Huntsman* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* have all been shot on beach locations in Wales. But now it's also becoming a favoured setting for many TV and film productions, where behind timber structures and masked walls, Wales is also doubling for numerous worldwide locations.

Lynsey Fisher, director at 4Wood, said they have been working within the television and film construction industry for eleven years, and in that time huge strides have been made to secure Wales' reputation as a prime location.

But she said many in the TV and film industry outside Wales remain oblivious to the incredible talent and facilities which are now flourishing at studios in both Swansea and Cardiff.

"I think people outside of Wales are largely in the dark about how much production is actually happening here," she said.

"There is sometimes a perception that we do not have either the facilities or the talent, but we have proved beyond doubt that is clearly not the case."

She said Wales has, in last 12 years, seen an incredible boost to its television production and in the last five years that has grown dramatically.

"So much more is happening now beyond the likes of Pinewood and Shepperton in London and that is something that is slowly becoming more apparent to those in the industry who recognise

that Wales is an attractive proposition for film production.

"Not only do we have some of the UK's most incredible landscapes, we also have the talents and capacity to create film sets to complement all kinds of TV and film production. Once upon a time there was a perception that anything creative outside of London would be substandard but that is very much changing now."

Scott, a carpenter who made his foray into TV working as a set builder on *Doctor Who*, later becoming a construction manager on various TV series, said that Welsh studios are flourishing thanks to incredible craftsmen.

"We are fortunate to work with the most talented core team of carpenters, scenic artists, welders, fabricators and stagehands. Their attitude on set is first class, and they continue to blow me away with their sheer talent."

Both Lynsey and Scott believe that the sets for *The Bastard Executioner*, the sword-and-sackcloth drama about the struggles of warrior knights in 12th century Wales, were among the most challenging – and the most impressive – they have worked on.

Creating not only a castle (The Castle Ventris), but an entire medieval village, the 4Wood team transformed a vast space at Dragon Studios for the series which aired on the American cable and satellite channel FX.

"The majority of the writers producers and directors were Americans," said Lynsey.

"They went off on recces across Wales looking for appropriate places to inspire their sets. They were blown away by what they found. When they



visited St Donat's Castle and Atlantic College, near Llantwit Major, they decided that the castle was basically what they wanted. So essentially we built a virtual replica at Dragon Studios. Visiting the set and looking at the castle and the village you would swear blind it was the real thing."

Scott said the crew worked in dreadful Welsh weather to help bring the studio scenery alive.

"The castle and village were built over a period of weeks in the worst weather imaginable, although that didn't dampen spirits," he said.

"The end result was truly amazing."

He said the enormous scale and beauty of the sets for Da Vinci's Demons were also incredible.

"They were a real challenge from start to finish."

But he said the large-scale production is paving the way for future projects in South Wales.

"We are excited about the future of the TV & Film Industry in Wales, and plan to continue to build the most incredible sets for many years to come. It is amazing how the industry has grown so much over recent years, hopefully altering opinions that great TV is not only made in LA or London, but in Wales too."

Production designer Edward Thomas, who has worked on Doctor Who, Da Vinci's Demons, Sherlock and Torchwood, and has

worked with the 4Wood team for several years, said the Welsh team of carpenters, scenic artists and metal workers are a production designer's "dream come true."

"Their combined experience in the film and television industry and the sheer volume of creative talent is exactly what is required to attract high end productions to Wales," he said.

It comes as Amazon has commissioned its first ever UK original drama series - which has begun filming in Wales.

Still very much under wraps, The Collection, whose sets were created in collaboration with 4Wood, is a family saga, based on the story of two brothers who work for a prominent Paris high-fashion house. It and exposes the grit and glamour behind the illustrious French fashion scene.

The project has received investment from the Pinewood Wales Investment Budget.

The series has been written and co-produced by Oliver Goldstick, creator of TV's Ugly Betty and Pretty Little Liars.

"We can't say much too much about this one at the moment," added Scott.

But needless to say Paris, 'The City of Light', will be ready for both cameras and action in a Welsh studio.



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