



A Room Fit for a Banquet

James H. Hillestad details the creation of a diorama depicting a British Army regimental dinner circa 1900

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

Five years ago, my wife Carol and I visited Windsor Castle in Berkshire, England. It was a fairytale experience. The word “grand” doesn’t do the royal residence justice. It’s beyond magnificent. The woodwork, tapestries, paintings and heraldic art are mind-boggling.

WATERLOO CHAMBER

I was particularly attracted to the Waterloo Chamber, created by British King George IV. The table seats 80 people!

Our guide told us that setting the table, with its multiple glasses, plates and cutlery at each place setting, was a job for dozens

TOP: The entire banquet hall diorama is 24 inches long, 10 inches deep and 11 inches high.

RIGHT: The Waterloo Chamber at Windsor Castle, shown in a guidebook, inspired the diorama.



ABOVE: Close-up of the fireplace, complete with licorice logs and flames made from icicles.





LEFT: Accessories add the finishing touch to the banquet room.

ABOVE: Wooden doorways, paneling, trim and flooring were used to craft the banquet room.

BELOW: A portrait of young Queen Victoria presides over the gala affair.

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of workers. Some servants actually remove their shoes, don protective felt clogs and walk the table to position the epergnes and other table decor and equipment just so.

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HEARTH & HOME

I used plywood and balsa wood to build the room. A trip to a dollhouse store produced a fireplace, door frames, molding, picture frames and flooring.

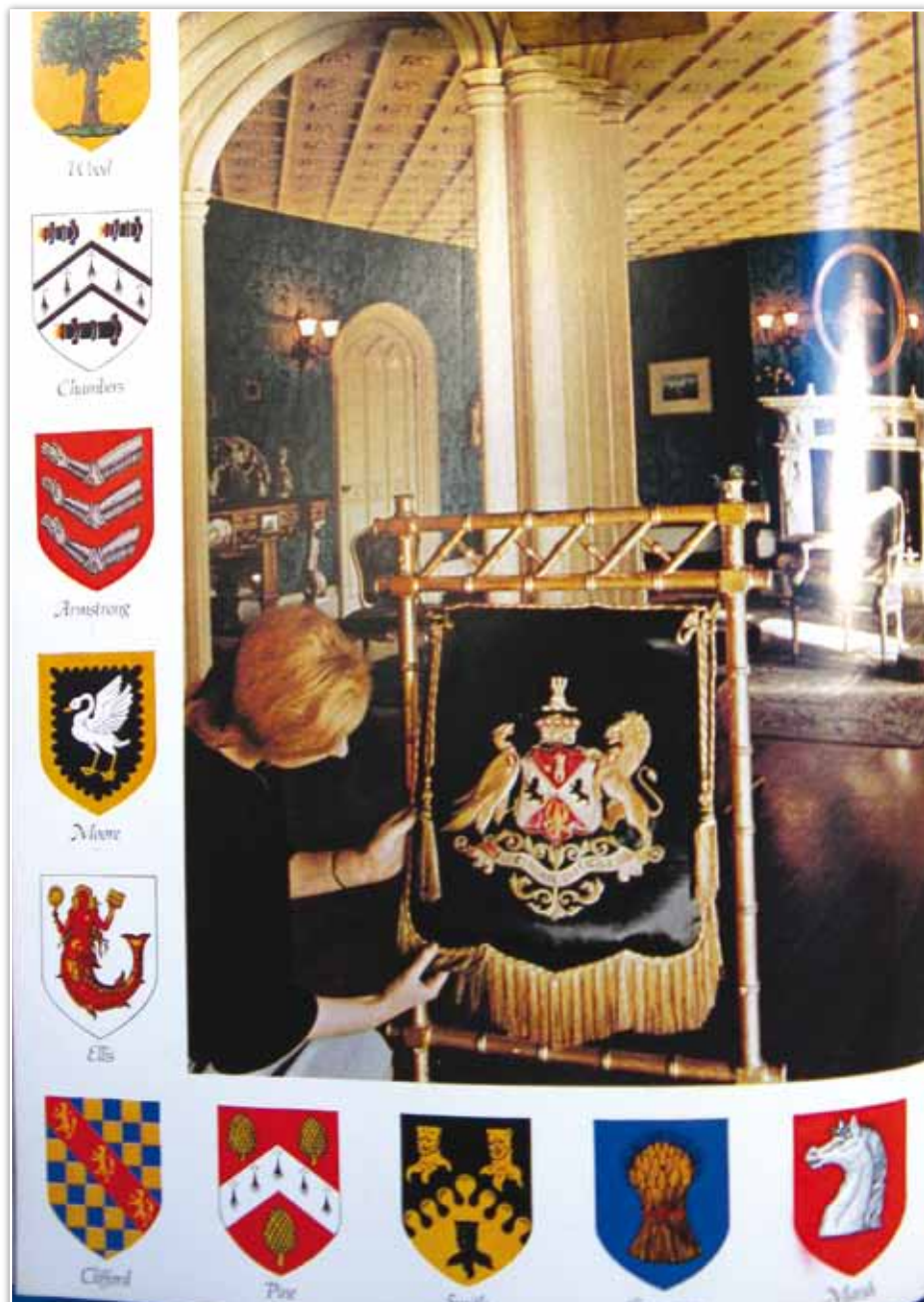
The "paintings" are color copier reductions of artwork that I found in coffee table books. The images were cut to size and mounted in frames.

For the fireplace, I used pieces of licorice root (available at health food stores) to create logs. The flames are Department 56 icicles, which I turned upside down and painted red and yellow. Miniature coals were spread over the hearth.

ABOVE: Color copier reduction of a Scottish print.

ABOVE RIGHT: Heraldic coats of arms found in a traveler guide lend color and significance to the banquet room.

RIGHT: Edinburgh Castle dominates the skyline of Scotland's capital, the setting for the circa 1900 banquet diorama. (Photo by Gordon Andrews)





ABOVE: Regimental trophies adorn the table.

BELOW: Highland officers enjoy a wee dram.





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ADDING DETAILS

Royal coat of arms placed over the doorways came from JG Miniatures.

Tiny statues incorporated in the diorama were purchased at the Windsor Castle souvenir shop.

Floral arrangements gracing the fireplace mantle were made by inserting dried flowers into wooden spindles painted gold.

Overall, the banquet hall measures 24 inches long, 10 inches deep and 11 inches high.

BANQUET PARTY

A young Queen Victoria presides over the gala banquet. The party of 54-mm toy figures populating the banquet room was the work of my good friend Patrick Willis

of Sarum Soldiers in England. He produces an extensive “Officers’ Mess 1900” range of traditional-style figures painted in gloss.

The only exceptions are white-jacketed table servers, which were created by American Bill Speer of Atlanta, Ga.

Assembling the pieces, daydreaming about how the diorama should look and deciding that, yes, I could build the room, took place over a period of years. Actual construction of the diorama took less than one week.

The whole project was a fun diversion from doing my usual battle dioramas. Creating a room fit for a banquet conjured up the pageantry of a bygone era. ■

about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.



ABOVE: A string quartet provides music for the regimental dinner.

LEFT: A Windsor Castle visitor guide provides an image of Queen Victoria to be reduced in size and framed.