

Killers in the Kitchen

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It may have flopped on Broadway, but Michele Lowe's comedy *The Smell of the Kill* has turned out to be surprisingly popular in numerous resident theatre engagements. Here's why: The lead characters, a trio of upper-middle-class matrons, each uniquely, unhappily married, are cleaning up in the kitchen after their monthly dinner party. Through the proverbial series of events that are too complicated to explain, their three husbands end up trapped in the walk-in freezer. The ladies really do mean to spring their husbands at first, but, on reflection, after some remarkably dishy conversation, they begin to wonder if they shouldn't let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak.

It's a premise that appeals to more than one Redbook subscriber, and one imagines the play leaves any number of married couples reviewing their options. At any rate, the recent production at the Cincinnati Play House in the Park set box office records. The play certainly benefited from Klara Zieglarova's set design, depicting one of those sleek, shiny, industrial kitchens so popular among suburban strivers (It looks as if one could service a large restaurant with it). For LD Thomas Hase, the design was an experiment in architectural lighting for the theatre, as the set featured nearly as many lighting units as did the overhead rig.

Hase says that Zieglarova's design original had minimal actual lighting units designed into it; rather, she was opened the door wide to the concept of a great many practicals and he went to work, adding track lighting to each of the ceiling beams that branch out over the set; these units provided downlight for the set. In addition, he added another system of 250W birdies to provide uplight on the ceiling's structure. Then there were approximately 60 "very narrow capsule lights shooting up from underneath the deck in red." In addition, rope light placed underneath the kitchen's cabinets added an extra highlight. Overall, he says, "There are more than 150 practicals on the set."

Also to be found on the set was Light Pad, a German product that Hase describes as "a flexible plastic material that comes in a variety of colors. You hook it up to a high-frequency transformer [which comes with the product] and it works like glow tape, although it's about five times brighter and can be manufactured in any size or shape. Also, there's a connection that you plug into a secondary transformer, to a 100W dimmer line, and it dims, completely, flawlessly. There's a frequency modulation knob on the transformer, which allows you to adjust the color." The LD knew of the product, having worked in Germany with master LD Hans Toelstede. Hase contacted Herm Pfahl, of the company Light-Pad, who supplied the materials at cost and donated the

use of the transformer. The Light Pad was stretched across the top of the kitchen walls and under counters, creating a steely blue line that adds to the metallic, state-of-the-art look of the setting. Of course, Hase had to light the play as well, and, with a rig of approximately 180 conventional units--mostly ETC Source Fours and some Wybron Coloram scrollers--from the theatre's stock, his design went from a light blue wash to a warmer palette as the three characters let down their hair and open up about their problems.

At the play's climax, when the wives try to explain to the police what happened, the walls of the set opened up, fully revealing a red sky cyc that had been partially visible all night long. That's when Hase made use of the capsule lights in the deck, drawing a direct route upstage from each actress to the cyc, indicating that, even though they may now be widowed, they are indeed free. One other unusual touch: The shaft of moonlight on the kitchen counter was created using the Inno-Four, another European (Austrian) unit, which uses an HMI bulb. Control for the lighting was provided by an ETC Obsession II console.

Hase worked with the theatre's electricians, Steve Saalfield and Larry Corman, a staff that is, he says, "one of the best in the country." They custom-fabricated the track lighting for the set: "They put it up, pulled it together, and electrified the kitchen in just one day," the LD adds. There were some glitches along the way, however: The design had planned a system of sidelight to carve the actresses out of the setting, then learned, after load-in, that the beams of the set were raised to accommodate the theatre's sight lines. "My sidelight plot was designed to get light onstage, around and through the beams of the set." However, he says, thanks to the Play House staff, "We moved a few things and cleaned it up in only four hours or so."

The Smell of the Kill just closed, but Hase remains in Cincinnati, working a triple-bill evening for the Cincinnati Opera: Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, François Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine*, and *Medusa*, a new opera by distinguished American composer William Bolcom. All three will star the noted soprano Catherine Malfitano. It's more than likely that Hase will find more unconventional technology for this unconventional production.

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