



**SOUTHWEST COSTUMERS' GUILD**

Volume VI, Number 6

June 1999

**SouthWest Costumers Guild**

meets generally on the last Sunday of the month, 1:00PM at members homes or someplace fun. The Guild dues for our chapter are \$10 per year, an optional additional \$1 for membership in the International Costumer's Guild, and \$8 to receive the International Costumer's Quarterly. \$8 to receive only our chapter newsletter. Send money to Frances Burns, she will notify the Editor. SWCG Webpage:

<http://members.aol.com/souwesgld/guild.html>  
 International Costumers Guild Webpage: [www.costume.org](http://www.costume.org)  
 For further information write to SWCG, PO Box 39504, Phoenix AZ 85069 or contact:

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**(Deadline for submissions is the 12th of each month)**

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**June Meeting - Wrap Party  
 June 13, 1999 (note date change)**

Guild meeting at Tasha's place. Around the pool we will demonstrate wrapped garments such as the Indian Sari and the Scottish Great Kilt. This is also a Pot Luck, so bring along some foodage.

**ADVICE TO NEWBIES**

edited by Jean Palmer SWCG

This is a compilation of answers to a question posted to the International Costumers Guild list. I have removed all references to the individual writers to protect the guilty. Some are redundant.

**The Question: If you could offer a new member of the ICG [i.e., costuming community] one piece of advice (on costume construction, stage presentation, anything...) what would it be?**

1. Don't think you must be perfect the first time out! Me, I'm only as smart as I am (?) because I've learned from my many mistakes (and observing others). Newcomers say "I could never do anything as good as [whatever, whoever]," but then neither could most of us the first time out. And thank goodness for skill divisions!
2. Do it because you love it and it's fun. Don't let yourself get caught up in the competition or backbiting aspects. Oh, wait, can I offer another one? Even the best costumers started by producing godawful and simple things, so don't ever be embarrassed or dejected if you're just starting out.
3. Don't listen to Pierre when he says his spandex body suit will fit you, no problem. :)
4. ALWAYS LEAVE BEFORE THE AUDIENCE WANTS YOU TO!

# CALENDAR

**NOTE:** Information in this calendar is provided as a service to our guild please contact the individual organizations for verification of information.

**June 25-27, 1999** - DarkCon is the convention hosted by The Dark Ones, central Arizona's hardest-to-describe group of fantasy/SF/gaming/good party fans. The convention features guests of honor George Clayton Johnson and William F. Nolan, the authors of "Logan's Run." The convention will be held at the San Marcos Hotel in Chandler, Arizona and will feature a masquerade directed by SWCG's own Chameleon. The grand prize for the masquerade is a Jaeger Dagger. For more information visit [www.darkones.org/](http://www.darkones.org/).

## Costume College 1999 July 23-25, 1999

Airtel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys, CA Two full days lectures, workshops and demonstrations on costuming techniques and topics, taught by experienced costumers, including class series on the following subjects: Our Focus, Science Fiction and Fantasy Costuming, Regency and Victorian Costuming, General Techniques and more. Attendance limited to 250 Memberships \$40 for ICG members, \$60 for non-ICG members thru 6/1/99 Contact Costumer's Guild West, PO Box 3052, Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670 or Email to [msjess@earthlink.net](mailto:msjess@earthlink.net)

**August 1, 1999** - Leatherworking Demo Guild meeting at Jim & Shoshana's place. Jim will demonstrate some basic leather tooling techniques.

**August 29, 1999** - The Cloaking Guild meeting at Robin's place. We'll build some capes for our semi-annual fundraiser.

**September 10-12, 1999** - CopperCon 19 is one of Arizona's three annual fan-run Science Fiction conventions. This year's con will be held at the Sunspree Resort in Scottsdale. Guests of honor include author David Weber and artist Brett Bass. The con will include a masquerade directed by SWCG President Randall Whitlock. Full details on the masquerade are given at <http://members.aol.com/cumask/> E-mail [cucon@casfs.org](mailto:cucon@casfs.org) for more general convention information or visit the CopperCon 19 web page at [www.casfs.org/cucon](http://www.casfs.org/cucon).

**September 19, 1999** - Fit & Finish Guild meeting at Tonya's place. Frances will demonstrate necklines and other tailoring adjustments.



## Advice

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5. One piece of advice? Per person? Sheesh! Play with people who have good positive energy—the good costumes and costuming opportunities will follow.

6. Don't pay attention to the costume Nazis. [NOTE: costume Nazis are those who tell you the fabric or trim or whatever is not correct.] Not all costumers are like that. Ask questions of everyone but \*not\* just before a masquerade. Some people are getting into persona and may not respond well to questions then.

Read as much as you can.

Attend any local classes that interest you.

If you can get a sewing/costume buddy, it helps.

Join the costume guild. [Or any other costume oriented group such as school or church plays or a dinner theatre. Historical re-creationists: SCA, Pioneer, Civil War, WWII, Civic parades. There are many costuming opportunities out there.]



7. Play around a bit on the local level, (local Cons). I learned a lot by attending our local events (PhilCon and such) before competing the first time. My first win on the local level I attribute to a good experienced partner in the presentation and my significant other who has done the masquerade/con circuit for the last 20 years or so and both taught me a lot about construction.

I also won my first time out at a Costume Con, (CC 17) something that I never expected and with something that was strictly created as a hall costume only. I had to pull everything together in my mind that I learned from 4 years of college theater arts courses then remembered K.I.S.S. an old rule that really works (Keep it Simple Stupid) and keep the audience begging for more. Last but not least, have fun with it. I have a great love of 18th and 19th century mens fashions. As well as a really twisted mind (ask anyone who has seen "Jerry Garcia Through The Looking Glass). Pick a pattern or something your good at, then let your imagination run wild with it (that is unless you are trying for an actual historical). For instance, my next major project plays a

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joke on a herd of cows, Gary Larson Far Side style. History may never forgive me.....

8. I would echo the advice to keep it simple. Don't take it too seriously, for this is a hobby, dammit! Enjoy yourself!

Expect to hear about all of the rivalries, politics and backbiting. Stay out of it!

Do things you like. Don't feel pressured to do things anyone else's way unless you are working with them on a costume.

Do stuff at local and regional Cons.

Don't be afraid to do something ambitious just because you are new.

Above all have fun.

9. My one piece of advice would be to remember bodily needs when planning your Masquerade Costume. Nervous people need to be able to use a toilet and not suffer heat exhaustion before they go on stage. Would also tell them to check what the ceiling height is apt to be before showing a tall monster, not to mention figuring out how it's going to manage steps, if your feet are built outside!

10. Start with basic skills that you already possess, even if they are as simple as being able to cut out paper or sew a straight seam on the sewing machine and with each new costume, try to learn one new technique. Don't be afraid to ask others to teach you their "secrets"—that's how I learned silk painting and airbrushing—I was willing to "trade" lessons with someone. The fact is, some people want their secrets to stay their own and won't talk to you, but some want to share the wealth. Take advantage of costume programming at cons—that's how I began to learn make-up, hair, wigs, big headpieces, fabric painting and presentation.

My only other piece of advice would be to start going to yard sales and thrift stores regularly and let people know that you will be happy to cart away the stuff they've cleaned out of their attic. Because of this I now have 250 lbs. of beads and buttons in my garage to trade or use.

Oh, one last thing—plan to buy a bigger house.

11. First is the Nike rule: A.—Just Do It!

B.—Don't pay too much attention to critics (AKA Costume Nazis). The boldest, most aggressive critics will be those who have never held a needle and don't know what a glue gun is for. Expect the worst of this when you do media re-creations. Some people see a movie and assume you will create a costume exactly as they perceived it on screen. These people don't understand that you don't have access to the custom-made materials used by the film's costumers and that there were something like twenty different Batman suits to look good from different camera angles.

C.—Do it for fun, not awards. I spent all of one day building my only Best-in-Show. Other costumes I've spent weeks building have gotten bubkis. The important part is that I had a lot of fun with all of them. I received laughs and goshwows from the audience.

D.—Learn to do your own research and enjoy it. Since I do

custom sewing from orders over the net, I constantly receive messages from people who want a costume for a particular country or time, but aren't willing to crack a book to find out what was worn then. They expect me to look it all up. Right now, I'm preparing a talk for this weekend on how to do Cavalier on the cheap. I'm going over Baroque art books and having a ball. There is some seriously cool stuff there that nobody seems to re-create. How about the cap in Rembrandt's self-portrait? (He did several, I mean the one included in Microsoft Encarta.) How about the Spanish peasant garb in many of Velasquez's paintings? Just my 0.25 cents worth, after inflation.



12. Whatever you choose to do, in costuming or elsewhere, remember that you're supposed to enjoy it. If you aren't enjoying what you're doing, consider doing something else or approaching what you are doing differently.

Costuming isn't just for stage. Don't feel like you have to be on stage in a masquerade to be costuming. There are plenty of people out there in the costuming community who are very happy doing what they do, who do not ever compete. Really. Do listen to advice. Don't feel you have to take it.

Your mileage may vary. Mine certainly does. (designing costumes since age 6, participating in competitions since 1984, sometimes successfully, even.)

13. Here is my proverbial two cents: **There is no right way to do a costume.** (Unless you are a religious historical costumer.) (Which is why I am not one.)

You can learn tricks and techniques, methods and materials;

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they are the vocabulary that will help you transform your concept into a physical reality. It is your imagination that is the key. Cultivate it.

Ask anyone for suggestions. If you do not have a skill you need to make that costume that is sitting in your head talking to you, enlist assistance. Working with people is the best way to learn, to teach, to get that synergistic magic. Talking with people is the best way to become part of the community.

Share your skills.

Do not be afraid to get on stage or to wear your costume. We all started out at the beginning.

When you get to the point that it isn't the awards or the recognition that motivates you, but the joy of realizing and sharing that concept become costume, you have achieved the ultimate success.

14. In other words, when you get to the point where you love spending hours playing with little tiny seed beads, just because you get to play with little tiny seed beads, then you're there.

15. ...asked what my piece of advice would be, since I brought up the topic. My top 3 choices have already been stated by others...do it because you love it, ignore the politics & learn new skills along the way.

I guess I'll go for #4...fitting counts. It's worth spending time on the "boring" bits of cutting & fitting, rather than racing through them to get to the "fun" embellishment part. One of the reasons I quit teaching beginning costume was burning out on trying to get students to take the time to really fit their garments. I think someone feels much more comfortable in costume that feels like clothing...not too tight, too short, too long, etc., (Patrick Stewart never looked comfy in that uniform he had to keep tugging on...), especially if they'll be in it for a long period of time.

(P.S. "Boring" & "fun" were their descriptions of the various sewing processes...I don't mind cutting & sewing).

16. Make a point to meet and talk with other costumers on a personal basis. You'll gain new friends, a support group, and an invaluable knowledgeable resource base.

17. Don't feel like you have to costume just for the stage. Hall costumes can be just as much fun, and many cons do have hall costume awards as well. Which are more for an imaginative idea than anything else. And there a lot less stressful than having to worry about how well they are constructed and how to present them.

Mostly I echo everyone else when I say costume because you love it. I spend most of my free time at it anymore, between coming up with an idea, designing it, then actually constructing it. I like to build hall costumes and use them as a prototype and then turn them into an actual competition piece by re-working the idea to my standard of perfection. Which is mostly why I have a closet full of many historical (18th and 19th century) costumes for my job as a tour guide, most of them are practice pieces and hall

costumes. Practice Makes Perfect as the old saying goes. But love of the art makes the practice fun.

18. This is kind of a late comment on the newcomer suggestions, including thrift store finds. The thrift stores where we used to live "yuppified" several years ago & decided their merchandise was "potentially valuable collectibles" (I'm quoting a Goodwill employee) & raised the prices accordingly. Being in a college town, I found that the trendy accessory stores that catered to the college crowd had cheaper parts for costumes, since they'd slash the prices for jewelry, scarves, hats, hair ornaments, etc. as soon as they were "out of fashion", which happened about every other month. I'd buy the cheap parts & re-make them into elaborate fantasy jewelry pieces.

(This writer probably has a literal "Ton of Fabric", but nowhere near 250 lbs. of beads...yet.).

19. My advice to beginners in addition to:

Love it!

Do it for fun!

Learn everything you can!

Don't be afraid to screw up!

I would add that 99% of problems can be avoided if you: Make a mock-up first (garments); Make a sample first (trims/embellishments); Make a test run (any new materials/techniques); Don't wait till the last minute to try it on for the first time!; and Wear comfortable shoes.

And remember, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, "Costuming is too important to be taken seriously!"

20. Your Advice???.....

"It's kind of fun to do the impossible." —Walt Disney

