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Cast and costume -- Following Hollywood's newsroom stylebook, what movie journalists wear is heavily designed and edited

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A cap sleeve black dress Angela Bassett wears in "Nothing But the Truth" spotlights her toned arms, lending a subtle physical authority to her role as editor of the fictitious Washington newspaper, The Capital Sun-Times. Was that intentional?

"If you have to show something, it's better than your belly button," said Bassett, smiling, as she waited between scenes shot recently in The Commercial Appeal newsroom on Union Avenue.

But no. The Ellen Tracy belted dress was chosen for its sophistication, which may also account for Bassett's four-inch, stack heels, perhaps the tallest that ever traversed the real newsroom's ink-stained carpet.

Print journalists, never known for sartorial chic, may smile at the stylish duds worn by actors who portray them. (Actors get more beauty help too. At one point, Bassett snapped her fingers and someone rushed over and buffed her arms.) But so many considerations influence **costume** selection, it's a wonder actors ever emerge from their dressing rooms at all.

The movie, being shot in Memphis through November, is inspired by the story of New York Times reporter Judith Miller, jailed in the Valerie Plame CIA-leak case, for refusing to testify before a grand jury.

(Plame, 44, was an undercover CIA operative who became a household name after syndicated columnist Robert Novak revealed her identity in a 2003 column concerning her husband Joseph Wilson's CIA-sponsored trip to Niger to investigate claims that Iraq was trying to buy uranium.)

The **cast** includes Kate Beckinsale as the ill-fated reporter; Noah Wyle as a lawyer for the newspaper; Vera Farmiga as the outed agent; and Alan Alda as a

high profile, smooth-talking attorney defending Beckinsale's character. Rounding out the stellar **cast** are Matt Dillon, David Schwimmer and Bassett's real-life husband Courtney B. Vance.

For the film, **costume** director Lynn Falconer, 40, of Brooklyn, created costumes for the main characters guided by the script and by writer-director Rod Lurie's vision of a dark, subdued palette of charcoal, mahogany and burnt umber. Costumes also had to pass muster with the actors.

"I get to weigh in with my idea of the character," said Bassett. "I do have power suits, (for Bonnie Benjamin, the editor she portrays), but I felt she shouldn't be mannish. She's strong enough to express her feminine side."

Sometimes actors get to keep the clothes they wear in the film, said Bassett, which can make choosing what is right for the character painful. "Angela loves that!" said Bassett,

breaking into a wide smile as she recalled a proposed outfit she had felt it necessary to discard. "But that is going," she told herself. "It's not Bonnie. Bonnie wouldn't wear that."

For selection, Falconer displayed her ideas for costumes on "presentation boards," using her sketches and outfits pasted together from photos torn from magazines. Some clothes she later acquired were provided free of charge or at wholesale prices by the makers. Zegna, the maker of luxurious Italian men's clothing, donated its clothes. (The name Zegna is actually mentioned in the movie dialog by Alda's label-obsessed character.) Other clothes are purchased according to wardrobe budgets, calculated all the way down to socks and underwear.

Falconer has found that high-end and moderate clothing "all mixed together work like a tapestry," giving a movie texture and life. Much of Beckingsale's upbeat, ambitious and somewhat collegiate wardrobe is from Club Monaco (roughly in the same price category as J. Crew, but more hip) with a coat by the contemporary line Laundry and jeans by Citizens of Humanity.

Falconer shopped for clothes through company brochures and in stores and showrooms in different cities for two weeks before the filming and had two fittings with the lead actors. Some items were purchased locally as the need arose during Memphis filming. Among them were two outfits purchased at the shops of Laurelwood for Bassett: a blue Diane Von Furstenberg wrap blouse from Joseph and a conservative brown pantsuit by Fabrizio Gianni from James Davis.

Movie extras, who included actual Commercial Appeal editors and reporters, wore their own clothes during filming. They were instructed to choose fall items in earthy colors, and, depending upon their roles, were asked to wear styles that were "office," "office trendy," or "uber office." In one scene, extra and CA assistant managing editor for features, Peggy McKenzie, is told she won a big journalism prize by Bassett's character. She was overcome with joy (over and over again) dressed in a chalk-stripe vest and untucked white shirt over gray pants - an outfit styled by her 17-year-old daughter.

When styling for scenes, clothes have to suit backgrounds, lighting and the action. A character can't pull a note from her pocket if she doesn't have a pocket. But primarily clothes are "props," said Falconer. They help define characters, create moods and sometimes even forward the action.

Wyle, who plays a young, less affluent, in-house newspaper lawyer, described his character's clothes as "utilitarian. nothing too flashy. ... nothing that attractive. The kind of clothes a guy would pick who doesn't have a girlfriend."

Why no girlfriend? Wyle flashed a mischievous grin. "He's a bit of a hothead," he said of his character. "You'd want him as a lawyer, but not at your dinner table."

Farmiga's frequent coat changes are "part of her murkiness, her secretiveness," said Falconer. "She is a chameleon. . . . and the silhouettes of the coats show a certain spyness." Demonstrating how far this can go, Falconer also dropped in touches of red, as in a shirt or bag, to suggest the spy's "explosive anger."

Clothes nearly make the man for Alda's character, who is fixated on Zegna suits and Domenico Vacca ties. "He's successful, puffed up, a bit of a peacock," said Falconer. But by the end of the film, humbling experiences have changed his tastes. He shows a new appreciation for Banana Republic.

Falconer studied at Parsons School of Design and worked as a knitwear and textile designer. She has been a **costume** designer since 1998 for TV commercials and indie films including the 2005 film "Duane Hopwood" with Schwimmer and Janeane Garofalo.

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