



## Steampunk Transformation

How I went from a historic costumer to a Steampunk and loved it

BY KORY DEAN DOYLE

**I**t has been said there are as many definitions of Steampunk as there are people who call themselves Steampunks. There are those who will tell you what it is and it isn't as if they are the only authority. There are others, however, that will say Steampunk is open to each person's interpretation. I will share my own experiences coming into a movement that I once considered "cute" but wasn't as "accurate" as historical, to becoming enthralled with it, and finding my own definition Steampunk style.



Photo courtesy LunaGrafix.com

### Background

I have been doing historical and science fiction costuming for 33 years. I began at 16 (you do the math) at the original Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Agoura, California. (Trust me, you don't want to see my very first attempt!) I started with Elizabethans, both middle-class and courtly dress. Other periods include Saxon, Viking, English Medieval, Caviler, Restoration (and of course) Victorian and Edwardian; as well as science fiction costumes (Star Trek, Babylon Five, Star Wars, Doctor Who) and comic superheroes. Under costumer guild rules, I can compete as a master level costumer. I have run masquerades at Gallifrey One and at Loscon. I was nominated for Best-Dressed Steampunk Male by the Steampunk Chronicle Reader's Poll in 2013 and won in 2014. I organized and ran a Steampunk fashion show for Clockwork Alchemy that received rave reviews not just for the innovative fashions shown, but the use of models of varying ages, sizes and ethnicities.

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Photo courtesy  
[www.SimoneAtcelli.com](http://www.SimoneAtcelli.com)



Photo courtesy LunaGrafix.com

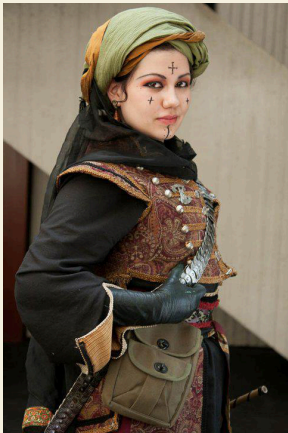
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*Finery* is the newsletter of the Greater Bay Area Costumers Guild, an educational group dedicated to all aspects of costume and textile arts, and is published bi-monthly. The next deadline for submissions is 8/25/14. For details about submitting articles, please see our website at [www.gbacg.org](http://www.gbacg.org), or contact the editor, Gailynne Bouret, at [newsletter@gbacg.org](mailto:newsletter@gbacg.org).

## Steampunk, *continued from page 1*

Now that I've established my costumer's "street cred," let me tell you how I got into Steampunk.

A former student told me that he was attending a Steampunk convention called Nova Albion. His enthusiasm about it peeked my interest enough that I decided to go. At that point, I had been out of the costuming and science fiction con scene for a while focusing on my education. I knew the basics of the genre and chose a late Victorian style outfit I had worn to previous Dickens Fairs. Upon arrival I noticed that I lacked an accessory that seemed ubiquitous to the look: goggles. After procuring a relatively inexpensive pair in the dealers room my look was complete and I set off for the convention. The longer I was there, the more I was struck by the enthusiasm, creativity, and welcoming attitude. Lo and behold! I found myself having more fun at a con than I had had in years. I was hooked.



*Photo credit: tumblr.com*

Steampunk fashion is clothing that is inspired by the Victorian and/or Edwardian ages. It can be historically accurate but dressed with accessories that are of a more fantastical nature. It can also be an amalgam of the various styles from throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras. To complicate the matter, for some Steampunks the genre is not a re-imagined past that never was but is, in fact, a post-apocalyptic world where technology, society, and fashion, have turned their eye to the past to rebuild the future. In this interpretation, there can indeed be very little left of what some purists would call Victorian: all that remains is a corset, bustle, coat or top hat, but it is still very much Steampunk.

Confused? Don't be. A good basic rule is to use Victorian/Edwardian silhouettes and fashions as the base and add or remove elements as one sees fit to create a look that is uniquely your own to fit a chosen role or persona, such as an airship pirate, mad scientist, daring explorer, or stylish lord or lady. This may also include military elements or even full uniforms of the period. Though the term "Victorian" is often used, don't think that limits it to English fashions. Self expression is what is at the core of developing your own Steampunk look be it based on English, French, German, American, Italian, Indian, or Japanese fashions. One may even combine all of them. Multi-culturalism is a force within Steampunk.

Now that we have some of the general visuals mulling about in our head, let's address one of the most important parts of any Steampunk ensemble, accessories.

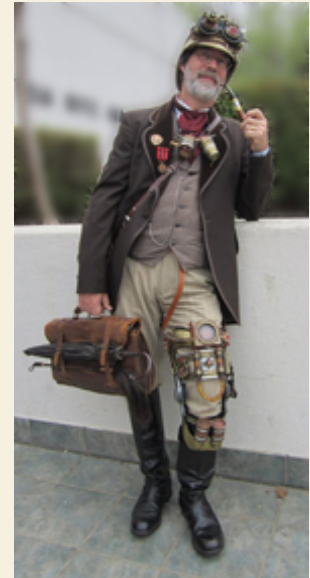
*What is it with all the goggles?*

Good question.

The actual origin of goggles being the defacto Steampunk accessory remains a mystery. One urban legend says that it is



*Photo credit: tumblr.com*



*Photo courtesy the author.*



*Photo courtesy LunaGrafix.com*

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# Books for Summer Reading

BY ANN MORTON

If you want a change from the usual escapist summer read of mysteries, romances, or sci-fi that is costume related, here are some recommendations.

## Charles James: Beyond Fashion

*Harold Koda, Jan Reeder, Ralph Rucci, & Sarah Scaturro*  
Metropolitan Museum of Art (Publisher)

Harold Koda brings a rich review of the fascinating man, the tailor who never trained in fashion, and of course the designs of incredible clothes that defined the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Fabulous details of construction provide a glimpse of the brilliance of his designs. The many clear photographs of garments provide inspiration for the recreator as the sketches, muslins and patterns explain his process.

Charles James was the couturier to the very wealthy and seeing his gowns clarifies why. The kind of perfect architecture that supports his ball gowns was individualized to his clients. Photographs of many famous patrons and admirers support how incredible his work was in defining fashion at its best. This is almost a coffee table book, due to its size and rich construction. The book is a bargain at Amazon. Going to the Met to see the exhibit would be fabulous.

## Lucile Ltd: London, Paris, New York and Chicago 1890s - 1930s

*Valerie Mendez, Amy De La Haye*  
Victoria & Albert Museum (Publisher)

Lucile, Lady Duff Gordon (1863-1935), was a premiere fashion designer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her designs brought lower necklines, more comfortable corsets, and a forward-looking enthusiasm that raised hemlines and freed women in the work place. This book provides details of her business and life. She was a Titanic survivor from the first class lifeboats, making her an interesting mix of business and upper class. Most of the book focuses on her early portfolios of sketches. The books are recreating as they were found, with fabric and trim samples attached. A series of black and white photographs from her salon provide detail of era fashion. The only thing missing is color images of museum pieces from Victoria and Albert to compare the black and white photographs. This is a delightful book that could have more construction details for recreators, but the sketchbooks really give you a feeling for the time period and the nuances of those fashion.

## Upcoming Events

### GBACG Workshop: Regency Jockey- Style Hat

July 19, 2014



Lynn McMasters will take us through the construction of her new pattern for the versatile and lovely Regency Jockey Style Hat. [http://www.gbacg.org/current/regency\\_jockey\\_hat\\_workshop.php](http://www.gbacg.org/current/regency_jockey_hat_workshop.php)

### Costume Salon: 1950s

Aug 10, 2014



Join us for potluck tea snacks, socializing, and sharing resources.

Theme appropriate books, patterns, garments, or projects also welcome. Our Salons are free and no dress-up is required. If you'd like to attend, email [costumesalons@gbacg.org](mailto:costumesalons@gbacg.org) Location: TBD.

### Safari at the SF Zoo

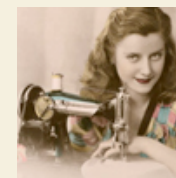
Aug 23, 2014



Come tour the Serengeti with our band of intrepid Steampunk / Victorian / Edwardian explorers. We'll stalk big game and picnic. <http://www.gbacg.org/current/san-francisco-zoo-safari.php>

### GBACG Workshop: Mechanical Wings

Sept. 13, 2014



Make a small pair of moving wings for hats! Questions?

Email [workshops@gbacg.org](mailto:workshops@gbacg.org)

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## Steampunk, continued from page 2



Photo courtesy [www.SimoneAtcelli.com](http://www.SimoneAtcelli.com)



Photo courtesy [LunaGrafix.com](http://LunaGrafix.com)



Photo courtesy the author.

due to the heavy Steampunk attendance of Burning Man, where goggles are needed to shield eyes from the winds and sand. Some say that it is because of the early emphasis of airships in the genre. Michael Moorcock's 1971 novel *Warlord of the Air*, considered by many as an early work of the genre, heavily featured airships. Still others point to the 1988 role playing game "Space: 1889" whose illustrations had most characters wearing goggles. Whatever the reason, goggles give the visual cue that a costume is Steampunk. Goggles can be inexpensive repainted plastic ski or welding goggles, or pricey unique eyewear of leather and brass.

But what if you don't want to wear goggles? Well, another easy way is the use of fantastic gadgetry. Ray guns are not uncommon, neither is the use of plasma disks made to look like a power source for a gadget like a Steampunk inspired armature. I myself simply placed a repainted \$3 LED reading light on my top hat. It's not so much the amount you spend, but the effort and creativity to find the right look for you. See, how easy that was?

*Steampunks are just Goths that discovered brown.*

While it could be argued that brown is the dominant color palate, it is not necessarily the only option. Like goggles, the origin of the dominance of brown is unknown. It's possible that Captain Robert, the lead singer of the influential Steampunk band Abney Park, dresses predominantly in brown on stage, thus setting the fashion. There are those that have quietly rebelled against brown: I know a gentleman who dresses head-to-toe in purple. I, too, have gone for color; it has become one of my style signatures in Steampunk. I love that early Victorian menswear can be just as extravagant color wise as the ladies' attire. The key for any Steampunk ensemble is to take what works for you and leave out what doesn't. If brown is not your thing, don't wear it. If you like the look, embrace it.

*Just Glue Some Gears on it and Call it Steampunk.*

If there was any one symbol that is most used in the entire Steampunk movement, it would be the simple gear. The gear represents the industry and invention of the time. Making and gadgetry is a



Photo courtesy [fotomania.com](http://fotomania.com)



Photo courtesy [LunaGrafix.com](http://LunaGrafix.com)



Photo courtesy [fotomania.com](http://fotomania.com)

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*The author in plaid. Photo courtesy LunaGrafix.com*

major part of Steampunk; thus, visible working gears show that a piece was not just mass manufactured, but made by an individual. As the movement grew, the gear transitioned from a functional piece to an aesthetic statement. Like goggles it became the visual cue that a costume was Steampunk. Many have derided the tendency of people either new to the movement or trying to make a fast buck by jumping on a trend to glue gears on a garment and declare, “Look, I’m Steampunk!” When done well, it can be a masterpiece. I recently saw a wedding dress that had over one hundred hand cut and appliquéd gears worked into the lace of the gown. For someone new to the movement, it’s the “gateway drug” as they discover their own style. Like goggles, you can take it or leave it. It’s up to you.

So for those who disdain Steampunk because “it’s not accurate,” don’t be so hasty in your judgment: there is a time and place for everything. When I attend an event that is touted as a historical recreation, I go in period dress. I make sure I am as accurate as possible while still making it wearable (I have a few physical limitations that need to be accommodated). However when I am going in Steampunk, each piece is usually historically accurate, though from different eras. Since there is such a broad time frame for Steampunk (generally the beginning of Victoria’s reign in 1837 to the death of Edward VII, 1910), I can wear an 1840s coat with 1900 trousers, an 1880s waistcoat and a 1910 tie. I did this exact look for a Steampunk costuming panel at Fanime 2011 and received praise for my elegant “man about town” ensemble by a young woman who was in what could be termed a Steampunk tank girl costume. She had done an amazing job of hand distressing and hand painting her creation that was worthy of equal praise in return. Sure, her look wasn’t “accurate,” but it showed remarkable skill.



*And in gray.*

I am by no means, an authority on what is or is not Steampunk, but as I became more and more involved in it, I find elements of Steampunk more incorporated into my everyday look. I’m obsessed with plaid, something I would have never worn in the mundane world before but now wear in a professional environment and have received compliments when I do. I look for any opportunity to wear a waistcoat, I have quite a collection of hats that I wear regularly. I spend more time on my grooming, and I’m more conscious of how I present myself. It is all part of the ideal being a gentleman, of bringing some of those courtesies and pleasantries that were the best parts of ‘a bygone era that never was’ to make our here-and-now a better place. That is truly one of the best parts of Steampunk and of costuming overall. *F*



## President's Column

BY DEBORAH BORLASE

I hope all of you are having a wonderful summer, be it a vacation with family and friends, or having some time to create a new costume or finish something in the "To do" pile. Those of us going to Costume College are, no doubt, going crazy with finishing our costumes and preparing for classes.

This month's featured article should give you some inspiration for our upcoming "Safari at the San Francisco Zoo." And we hope that the next Costume Salon's theme of 1950s fashion will inform your costume choice for our "On the Road" event in the fall. Speaking of events, we are in the process of arranging our next brainstorming session to plan events for 2015; we welcome your input. If you have an idea and are ready to put together a proposal, please download the form from our website: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/GBACGCostumers/files>. Our event coordinators, Ann Morton and Catherine Scholar, will be happy to work with you in developing your dream event. You may contact either of them at [events@gbacg.org](mailto:events@gbacg.org).

Interested in joining the GBACG or renewing your membership? Want to purchase tickets to events or workshops? You can do all of this on the GBACG website:

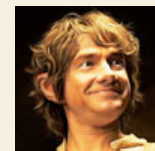
- Join/renew your membership: <http://www.gbacg.org/about-gbacg/join-gbacg.html>
- Purchase event tickets: <http://www.gbacg.org/gbacg-calendar.html> - see individual event webpages to order online (via PayPal), or to print out a form that you can mail in with a check.
- Purchase workshop tickets: <http://www.gbacg.org/gbacg.org/gbacg-calendar.html> . See individual workshop webpages to order online (via PayPal), or to print out a form that you can mail with a check.
- Post or view pictures on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/gbacg/>
- Follow GBACG on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/gbacg>

## Events, *continued from page 3*

### Bilbo's Birthday Bash

Sept. 21, 2014

Come celebrate Bilbo's eleventy-first birthday in Hobbiton, also known as Holbrook-Palmer Park in Atherton. All hobbits, elves, dwarves and humans welcome. \$



### Sister Organization Events

Discount ticket information: <http://www.gbacg.org/about-gbacg/member-benefits.html>

### PEERS: Alameda 1902 Picnic Dance and Ice Cream Social

Aug. 2, 2014: <http://www.peersdance.org/alamedapicnic.html>

### PEERS: The Casablanca Ball

Sept. 6, 2014: <http://www.peersdance.org/casablanca.html>

### ADSC: The Gatsby Summer Afternoon

Sept. 14, 2014: <http://artdecosociety.org/>