

# 'Hustlers' Costume Designer and DP Joined Forces to Create Gritty Glamorous Look

By [Valentina I. Valentini](#)



Mitchell Travers wonders if anything can really prepare a costume designer for working on a movie in which G-strings, double-sided tape and 8-inch platform heels comprise a complete outfit. But from the moment he began to read the script to "[Hustlers](#)," he was in.

"From the third page, I said I didn't care what [any of the obstacles would be]. I was doing this movie," he says. Inspired by a true story about a small group of New York strippers who got through the economic crash of 2008 by playing by their own Robin Hood-style rules, "[Hustlers](#)" is adapted from a New York Magazine article by Jessica Pressler, and written and directed by Lorene Scafaria. Starring [Constance Wu](#), [Jennifer Lopez](#), [Cardi B](#), Keke Palmer, Julia Stiles, Lili Reinhart and [Lizzo](#), the STX release hits theaters Sept. 13.

It was clear from scenes like one in which a stripper needs a safety pin to hold together a pink iridescent bodysuit, that the costumes were to be as much a centerpiece of the movie as the women wearing them. Travers says the outfits needed to behave like characters — that the audience must feel the looks change

as much as the women do, and that there is a distinction between off-duty and on-duty looks for strippers and pole dancers.

“There aren’t a ton of film references for a movie like this,” says Travers. “There haven’t been many movies of strip-club culture from our point of view, which is that this is an art form, it’s athletic and these are women with incredible training in both dancing and seduction.”

Using a combination of sources to create costumes that ranged from floor-length vintage fur coats and Juicy Couture suit sets to pasties, Travers says finding many of the stage outfits for the cast was far from easy. “There isn’t a stripper store where all of this stuff comes from,” says Travers, whose credits include “Eighth Grade” and “Late Night.” “I canvassed the tri-state area: I’ve been in every single sex shop; I’ve made friends with women who manufacture stripping costumes in small workshops with friends and family.”

Cinematographer Todd Banhazl worked closely with Travers, making sure to light the costumes the same way he would light a character. The two spoke early in production about using fabrics and textures that would reflect light and really pop — even under unforgivingly realistic lighting.

“We wanted the characters to shimmer and shine without needing to put fake movie lighting on them,” says Banhazl, who has shot music videos for Lorde, Muse, Janelle Monáe and A\$AP Rocky. “This created a dirty pop aesthetic. We called it ‘gritty glamour.’”

Travers and Banhazl also collaborated to find ways to suggest the actors were doing what strippers are paid to do — get naked — without having to show it. Banhazl had a scene in the Champagne Room, where strippers dance privately for clients, lit entirely in red, while Travers costumed Wu in a tight dress that matched the color of the light to create the effect.

“The red light and red wardrobe merge, and Constance becomes this completely sexualized idea of the female form, while at the same time she’s using this as a weapon to get what she wants,” says Banhazl. “It’s really powerful.”