1. Did you have an idea in mind for your cover as you were proposing/writing the book? If so, what did it look like?

Once upon a time, as an aspiring adolescent author, I used to daydream about what my covers would look like. This was the late eighties/early nineties, so my daydream covers usually featured a heavily made up governess in a cloak fleeing a dark house on a cliff, or, sometimes, just the house on the cliff with the name in swirly letters above it. Sometimes I even rendered them in colored pencil. Since I’d only learned to draw people in profile, and that rather awkwardly, all these covers had a certain sameness about them. I did do a darned good castle on a cliff, though, especially after all those hours spent practicing in the margins of my notebook in math class.

By the time I hit my mid-twenties and an actual publication, I came to an important realization: I have zero artistic talent. I can appreciate pretty images, but I can’t create them. For that reason, I’ve always been very happy to leave my covers entirely in my publisher’s hands. Whatever they come up with, it’s bound to be better than what I would. So far, this approach has served me well. Starting with my first book, *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation*, I’ve been blessed by the good cover fairy with truly elegant fine art covers.

My books so far have featured fine art paintings with a parchment band across the cover, so, in my head, this new book looked pretty much like the old ones. In my head, the underlying color tone was a silvery-blue, since this book takes place in the cold and rain of Paris in January—which, as everyone who has been to Paris in January knows, is very cold and wet, indeed.

1. Did your publisher ask for your input on the cover design before the art dept started working? If so, what input did you give?

In the past, I’ve given zero input on covers. Like good elves in a fairy tale, the Dutton art department works their magic and I wake up one morning to discover, ooh! I have a new cover! This system worked well for me. (See *lack of artistic talent*, above.) With *The Orchid Affair*, though, since this was to be a photo shoot, rather than a fine art cover, I was asked to describe my heroine and give some input into what she might be wearing. As I laughingly explained to my editor, we couldn’t have picked a worse book for this. My heroine is a governess. She wears a lot of gray. On top of it, it’s January in Paris, so not only is she wearing gray, she’s covered from head to toe and slightly blue with cold. I certainly wasn’t going to change Laura’s wardrobe within the book (the story is the story, and that’s just the way it is), but we agreed that we might take some poetic license on the cover and snazz her up a bit.

1. What did you think the first time you saw your cover? Truly!

Did someone steal Philippa Gregory’s cover? *The Orchid Affair* is set in the winter of 1804. The first cover I was sent… well, let’s just say there was a casement window, a boned bodice, and several yards of skirt involved. I do understand that covers can’t always adhere to strict historical accuracy (I adore the cover of my third book, *The Deception of the Emerald Ring*, even though it features an 1840’s costume on an 1803 heroine), but to me, this seemed to signal not just a different era, but a different sort of book.

1. Did your editor let you make comments/suggestions on the cover, if you wanted to?

Not only did she listen to my howl of, “But this is the wrong era!” (accompanied by a rather tedious exposition on historical costume), she went out, hired another designer, another model, new costumes, and did a whole new photo shoot.

1. Did the art dept take those comments/suggestions to heart?

When people used to ask me if I have input into my covers, my standard joke was that I had rights of approval, which meant that I had the right to say, “Ooooh! Isn’t this pretty!” *Orchid Affair* is the first time I’ve ever voiced an objection to a cover, and, boy, did it get a reaction. As mentioned above, there was a whole new photo shoot. The dress went from Tudor-via-80’s-prom-dress to an appropriately narrow-skirted, high-waisted garment, while the scene in the background went from generic English manor house to noticeably Parisian.

1. Did the cover change much from the original version you saw?

This cover went through many, many permutations. And I do mean many. There was the original “Mary Sue Boleyn” picture, followed by what I call the “Mirror, Mirror” picture (large floating head in a mirror), the “Why Not to Photoshop” picture (don’t ask), the Busty Blue Woman (which led to such a howl from my readers that we went back to the drawing board), and, finally, the current cover.

1. Do you know if your cover was shot with a model or still life, or if it is a stock photo that the art department found that could capture the feeling of the book?

Many, many photo shoots were sacrificed to create the cover that currently graces Orchid Affair. When the first photo shoot went awry, my publisher went out, hired another model and another designer, sat me and my agent down for a long “okay, what DOES this scene look like?” and did it all over again. It was a huge investment of time, money, and effort on their part, and I’m so grateful to them for being so dedicated to trying to hit just that right look.

1. How do you feel about your cover, in the end? Have you found any hidden meaning in it or anything you didn’t notice at first glance? How does it relate to the story in the book, as you see it?

The thing I like best about the new cover is the faint writing that covers the sky. All the books (except my Christmas book, “The Mischief of the Mistletoe”) feature a framing story involving a modern grad student whose research in the archives plunges us back two hundred years in the past. Just as Eloise’s excursions into those old letters blend into the historical story, so the writing in the sky blends into the historical image on the cover. Neat, no?

1. Please share a photo of your cover, and if you can share an earlier version or inspiration images, please do!