Five exceptional interior design educators reveal what’s going on behind their classroom doors.

By Karina Sanchez

Design educators are not only responsible for inspiring creativity and preparing students for a career, but also are expected to be counselors and disciplinarians at the same time. Many teachers thrive under the pressure, creating names for themselves in their respected colleges and universities, as well as in the interior design industry. Perspective reached out to five outstanding design educators to learn their personal teaching methods and understand the issues that are important to today’s students.
Annick Mitchell, ARIDO, IDC, IDEC, Professor and Chairwoman of the School of Interior Design at Ryerson University, has spent her teaching years searching for one thing: time. These days, there’s never enough of it. When she’s not teaching, Mitchell takes a seat on the opposite side of the classroom, attending graduate school as a student of modern history.

Over the course of her career, Mitchell’s professional life has come full circle. She earned a bachelor’s degree in modern history and a diploma in applied art. From there, she went to work for Ron Thom Architects, designing furniture by day and, as she says, burning the midnight oil learning about interior design at night. After 12 years of practice, she decided to switch gears and move to teaching. “I’ve always responded to challenges. The thing about teaching is that it’s never boring,” she says. “You think that you finally have it all figured out when everything changes.”

For Mitchell, teaching is a constant experiment. Just as the students learn from her, she learns from them. Spectators sitting in on one of her classes would likely leave the session with more questions than answers. “I tell the students that there is no right answer, no one solution; just better solutions,” she says. “Our students don’t see the boundaries between interior design, architecture, new media and graphic design. They see their practice as encompassing all those things.”

If there is one thing Hank Hildebrandt, Interior Design Professor at the University of Cincinnati’s School of Architecture and Interior Design, has seen develop in his students after many years as an educator, it’s a broadening of their knowledge base. While 20 years ago, students questioned the difference between interior design and interior decorating, questions now point toward the difference in interior design and interior architecture.

Hildebrandt — who came to the University of Cincinnati 20 years ago after 10 years of teaching at Mississippi State and several years in Switzerland studying graphic design and typography — has made it his mission to help his students better understand how interior design is defined as part of the current landscape. “That’s one of the issues I’m most concerned about — working to bring a better understanding of what interior design entails and its responsibility within contemporary society,” says Hildebrandt, who earned a master’s degree in architecture from Kent State.

Today, his students keep a watchful eye on current design trends. They are interested in learning about sustainable design. It’s encouraging, he says, to see students understand environmental issues and how design can impact the environment.

But that doesn’t mean Hildebrandt will discard what he calls the “bread and butter” of design: perspective drawing and hand drawing. “Almost everybody feels that hand drawing is a valuable component of communication, so we still teach it,” he says.

For Hildebrandt, a past recipient of the IIDA Educator of the Year Award, there’s a sense of excitement each time a school year begins and a new group of students enters his classroom. “It’s a fascinating process after about five years to see a student recognize their skills and notice how they’ve developed their skill sets,” he says.
You are the visionary. We are the only resource you need.

We know what it takes to impress your client...your vision and our resources. We are OM Workspace – the industry innovator with 40 offices and 350 talented professionals nationwide who can help take your project from concept to completion. We start with your ideas, our team of planners and architects, plus furniture choices from industry trendsetters like Teknion, HON, Paoli, iZzydesign, National and Global You’ll end with your vision – REALIZED.

888.879.9723 or www.OMWorkspace.com
As the Director of the Interior Design Program in the University of Texas’ School of Architecture, Nancy Kwallek, Ph.D., IIDA, IDEC, IMFA, has dedicated her career to improving the interior design industry primarily through advancements in research. The university, whose motto is “What Starts Here Changes the World,” requires professors to conduct research in their specific discipline and encourages them to involve their students.

For more than a decade now, Kwallek has conducted research on color, specifically on how office workers are affected by different colored offices. She’s credited with trailblazing the Interior Design Program at the University of San Diego and with development of the Interior Design Program at Indiana University.

Additionally, Kwallek helped move the Interior Design Program at the University of Texas from the College of Natural Sciences to the School of Architecture—a transition that students struggled with in the beginning, she says. “The mindset in the architecture studio is just so unique and different,” she says. “But I’ve noticed that having the architecture students working side by side with the interior design students really gives them more of an understanding of the construction of a building and a greater ability to think creatively about design.”

Moreover, the university encourages links between campus programs and various disciplines. Kwallek is involved in a grant research project on indoor air quality that focuses on training Ph.D. students in an interdisciplinary way, using science, the social sciences and design as bases. For her part, Kwallek will investigate how the off-gassing of indoor materials versus the use of green materials affects office worker productivity.

It may have taken Mark Karlen, Ph.D., ASID, AIA, years to find his professional calling as an interior design professor at Pratt Institute, but the wait was worthwhile. After years of working in architecture firms and finally starting his own, his practice shifted to interior design in the late ’60s. “I found that I enjoyed interiors as much as architecture, and I’ve been primarily interiors-oriented since then,” says the past recipient of the IIDA Educator of the Year Award.

He realized his true passion was working with spaces, particularly small, intimate ones. “I’d rather design a corner of a room than a whole building,” he says. “I also love the jigsaw puzzle aspect of having a big, open space and re-planning it for people to create the special relationships that are necessary for making a successful interior.”

During his transition from architecture to interiors, he hired a co-op student from Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia. From this experience, he developed a close relationship with the faculty and staff of the college. The school then invited him to teach part-time for a semester, and he continued teaching there as an adjunct professor for four years. It was then that he realized he enjoyed teaching as much as, if not more than, practicing. So he closed his practice and headed to the University of Cincinnati to chair the Interior Design Department.

Karlen’s teaching philosophy includes three basic inclinations that designers favor: aesthetic, human or social and technical. “Most designers have an involvement with all three, but tend to favor one as their primary focus,” he says. Today’s interior design students want to undertake the entire process of design, including architecture, he says. The line between interior design and architecture is becoming less defined, and students are embracing this approach.
The longer carpet lasts, the better it is for the environment.

Choosing carpet made of Antron® carpet fiber is good for the planet and for business. It’s certified as an Environmentally Preferable Product by an independent party for reduced total environmental impact. We also started the first nationwide carpet recycling program. And since our fiber lasts longer, it reduces the total cost of ownership. That’s why you’ll find us in successful organizations everywhere (including the Nature Conservancy). To learn more, visit antron.net.
As more people become rightfully concerned about the environment, a greater commitment will be made to build green. Schools, in particular, are heeding the growing trend.

Colleges such as the University of Denver, University of Florida and University of Colorado all have LEED certifications. And, for the most part, obtaining certification isn’t difficult. But there is a significant amount of documentation that must be processed throughout the length of the project. “Planning and design have to happen early in the process, and budget is a consideration,” says Solterre Design’s Keith Robertson, LEED AP, NSAA (Nova Scotia Association of Architects) and LEED Consultant for the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC).

It’s in the studios where a holistic designer can really flourish. Hubbell encourages students to never stop designing. Students have so much learning to do, he says, and his biggest reward is taking them beyond their own expectations. “I keep pushing them throughout the entire process of a project. And the key is to never stop thinking about design — in every aspect of it, whether it be the largest thing or the tiniest detail,” he says.

Throughout his years of teaching, Hubbell has seen his students’ interests evolve. While his students in the early ‘90s were interested in computer-aided design, now, so much of a student’s life is inundated by computer technology that today’s students are moving beyond this trend. “I think the next evolution is going to be in green design,” he says. “It’s going to be transformative. It’s going to change not only the materials and the products that we specify, but ultimately, even methods of construction.”

**Follow the LEEDer**

How do the world’s educational facilities measure up to sustainable and LEED standards?

As more people become rightfully concerned about the environment, a greater commitment will be made to build green. Schools, in particular, are heeding the growing trend.

Colleges such as the University of Denver, University of Florida and University of Colorado all have LEED certifications. And, for the most part, obtaining certification isn’t difficult. But there is a significant amount of documentation that must be processed throughout the length of the project. “Planning and design have to happen early in the process, and budget is a consideration,” says Solterre Design’s Keith Robertson, LEED AP, NSAA (Nova Scotia Association of Architects) and LEED Consultant for the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC).

NSCC is in the process of constructing its new metro campus in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The facility is working toward obtaining LEED Silver certification. Often, the higher the certification (possibilities include Certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum), the higher the cost will be to obtain it, Robertson says. The facility’s budget was set before the school decided to make a commitment to LEED certification, Robertson says, but so far, the school has remained under budget.

“It’s important for colleges and universities to demonstrate a commitment to sustainability, partly because they are educational institutions in themselves and are educating the next generation of designers, builders and users of buildings,” Robertson says. “Anything that can be done to demonstrate that commitment enhances their image and enhances their profile as an educator.”

Helping to advance this cause is the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), a national coalition of building industry leaders promoting environmentally responsible, profitable buildings and providing learning opportunities for the next generation of green designers. And as part of its 2006 strategic goals, the USGBC has formed its Formal Education committee, which identifies and recommends appropriate content and resources for use by colleges and universities. As part of the initiative, the council offers LEED workshops for new construction and major renovations, LEED for existing building upgrades and LEED for commercial interiors.