

# STUDENT { PERSPECTIVE }

{ MENTORING DAY }

## WHAT ONE STUDENT LEARNED FROM HER DAY SHADOWING AN INTERIOR DESIGNER.

BY CHARLOTTE R. BELL, STUDENT IIDA

Each year, IIDA demonstrates its support for interior design students through its sponsorship of Mentoring Week, an event pairing students with host firms. At the conclusion of Mentoring Week, students submit accounts of their experiences to the IIDA Foundation/Lloy Hack Memorial Essay Contest, which honors the memory of Boston designer Lloy Hack, IIDA. The 2005 Lloy Hack winner is Charlotte R. Bell, Student IIDA, from Arlington, Va.'s Marymount University. Her winning words follow.

"Don't sweat the small stuff." I've heard this saying plenty of times. But in my IIDA Mentoring Week visit on January 25, 2005, with Hartman Design Group of Rockville, Md., a 20-person commercial interior design firm, I learned that there are times when it is important to sweat the small stuff, and that the "small stuff" is not always so small.

Whether it is space planning, creating schedules, selecting materials, perfecting a CAD drawing, updating plans or running a budget, it is the details that make the difference between a good-enough result and a project that elicits a "Wow," and it is the small stuff that differentiates a plain-vanilla job from a deeply satisfying and rewarding career.

During my well-organized and practical day with Hartman Design Group, I spent time with the owner of the firm, senior designers, junior designers and the CAD Manager, getting to know them and the everyday work they do. All of these busy people cheerfully took the time to explain their projects and the design process, answer my questions and actually involve me in their work. My mentor, Senior Designer and Project Manager Katrina Merolle, IIDA, who had arranged my varied schedule, gave me a thorough tour of the office, introduced me to everyone we met and showed me a thick portfolio of the firm's projects.

Then I got down to work. I helped redline drawings, learned how to create a furniture budget, listened in on a negotiation between designers and a manufacturer's representative, helped organize a document set, explored textiles and finishes as a designer gathered materials for a client presentation, learned useful presentation board tips, followed along as another designer prepared a list of revisions to a set of drawings, and received a mini-lesson on 3D computer rendering. I was treated as an equal and involved in the everyday life of the firm — and I came away with a real sense of what it would be like to work at a firm of this size.

But more than this, I left at the end of the day with a broader appreciation for the job of interior designer and for the incredible depth and dedication that this work requires. Not only did these designers have extensive knowledge of the materials and systems that comprise an interior design project, but they showed enormous commitment to quality and accuracy in their work, assiduously ensuring that even the smallest details were done correctly. It was this attention to detail — and these designers' willingness to advance my education by sharing it with me — that impressed me most during this mentoring day. In my other endeavors, my efforts to get at the kernel of a matter are sometimes met with resistance, and this mentoring day taught me to nourish my love of details rather than to downplay it.

Attention to detail carries a message beyond the confines of the design studio or the client's office. In this era of disposable electronics and cheaply made buildings, a design project in which every detail has been carefully tended provides not only good value for the client but also an inspiration for the community at large. This mentoring experience taught me that through design, I can do more than simply collect a paycheck; I can have a positive influence on the world around me.

As I was saying my goodbyes, I commented to Katrina on how impressed I was by the meticulousness of the work I had seen. She replied, "Yes, it is a lot of work, but it is worth it." The greatest lesson that I took from this day was that attention to details is not just small stuff. It is the big picture. 📺

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For more information on next year's Mentoring Week, January 23 to 27, 2006, and the IIDA Foundation Lloy Hack essay competition, visit [www.iida.org](http://www.iida.org) or e-mail [eellermann@iida.org](mailto:eellermann@iida.org).

## WHY IIDA?

The annual IIDA Mentoring Week is just one example of IIDA's role in nurturing interior design students. Others include:

- **Student Sustainable Design Competition:** Meant to recognize environmentally responsible design within the context of an interior design program, this competition awards cash stipends to deserving student projects.
- **Continuing Education Programs:** IIDA offers an up-to-date selection of home study courses, in addition to the CEU included in every issue of *Perspective*. See "CEU," p. 35, for this issue's CEU.
- **Chapter Events:** Among the many chapter-sponsored events occurring throughout the United States is the Great Plains Legislative Day, a juried competition of local university design students, and the Alabama Chapter's Student Design Competition and Scholarship Program. This year IIDA will also be awarding a Chapter Award to Collins College in Tempe, Ariz., for its outstanding design programs.
- **Scholarships:** Includes private loans and a variety of grants. Many of IIDA's Chapters present scholarships to talented design students in their area.