A graduate’s success story

Shannon Nicholson didn’t always want to be an Interior Designer. She had a successful career in Home Health for about five years and really enjoyed it. “I loved working with the elderly,” Shannon stated, adding, “I always thought I was born to be a nurse, but after nearly four years I was having difficulty dealing with the death of my clients.” When she wanted to make a career change, she thought about other ways she could help people. “Interior Design was a hobby of mine. I enjoyed helping people use what they had or shop for new items to make their homes, offices, garages, etc., work and look better.” As a freshman she decided to have a career that “I enjoyed so much that it really didn’t feel like work.”

ON BEING A BUSINESS OWNER: “If someone would have told me this was possible in 2000, I’m sure I would have thought he or she was crazy. I am very grateful for the education and foundation I received from the Interior Design Institute and the opportunities that education has afforded me.”

Shannon chose the Interior Design Institute for its convenient evening class schedule and the broad range of classes offered in the program. “When I enrolled I was still undecided as to what area of Interior Design I wanted to pursue,” she recalled, adding, “I needed classes that would guide me to where I would fit best.” Shannon tried to take advantage of every opportunity to learn and out of the classroom to discover what type of designer she wanted to be. “With each class my focus seemed to narrow and did my design work was that I was pursuing my passion.”

New career changed her life

Shannon graduated with her Associate Degree in Interior Design in October 2000. During college she worked part-time in design-related fields which gave her an appreciation of space planning, furniture/buildings/ design and commercial design. “I loved commercial work, it allowed me to use my strengths in space planning, detailed designs and CADD design. I never really entertained the idea of any other field until a friend introduced me to the Kitchen & Bath field.” said Shannon. She continued, “I did a lot of research about the industry which eventually led me to a position with Cabinets By Design. I was ready for the challenge of learning a new field but was pleasantly surprised to find out that my IDI education and commercial experience had well prepared me for this transition. Instead of ‘building’ custom furniture office, I was ‘building’ kitchens, baths and custom cabinetry. I loved the flexibility and working with clients on the cabinetry for their new or re-modeled home, again using what I feel to be my strengths: detailed design and space planning to create beautiful and functional spaces.”

Great advice from a designer

Shannon was with Cabinets By Design for several years when an opportunity arose with a co-owner in another cabinetry dealership. “In 2007, with the help of my business partner, we opened Architectural Kitchens, LLC, a Wood Mode and Brookhaven cabinetry dealership.”

Shannon tells students to take advantage of the resources available to you. “Your instructors have the real world knowledge that, along with your degree, can give you a great foundation for entering the job market. Seek their council and never be afraid to ask questions to help you determine in what area of design your gifts and talents would be best used.”

Risks will pay off

“Don’t be afraid to take risks in your design projects,” Shannon added. “If you really prefer a traditional design, try something contemporary. If you have a favorite application for a particular field, you can’t sell anything without first selling yourself.”

Shannon is a strong proponent of the value of attending The Louisville Technical Institute Design Advisory Board and the opportunities to improve their design while remaining within a specified budget, the Interior Design student team will have the opportunity to implement the selected design.

4. Bellarmine Show House

The full bath in the home’s carriage house was completed by Interior Design students.

Each year, Interior Design students accept the challenge of designing an assigned room at the Bellarmine Show House. Tom George, Interior Design Chair, interviewed interested students to determine who would work on the Bellarmine design team. Kelsey Brandes, an Interior Design bachelor’s degree student and a current employee of Hikes Point Wallpaper and Paint, earned a position on the team as the project manager. Other team members were Jessica Alexander, Stacey Barczak, Kimberly Boucher and Mary Orndorff. As project manager, Kelsey had to develop the design concept for a full bath in the home’s carriage house and present it to the Bellarmine Women’s Council. Once his plans were accepted, Kelsey was responsible for selecting and seeking donations of those products to be used. Hikes Point Paint & Wallpaper donated the paint and wall coverings while Dan Hardwaste with Wallcare donated his time to install. Teen George fabricated the window treatments and Greg Smrns, an LTI instructor, donated the window treatment hardware.

Great learning experience

Bellarmine University’s Women’s Council offers tours of the Show House where many of the funds raised through paid admissions provide scholarships for needy students wanting to pursue higher education. In this excellent example of service and learning, Interior Design students networked with many professionals in the design community and built contacts for their portfolios and resumes by having their work displayed.

5. Creating ‘Green’ Spaces

In partnership with EnergyPros, Interior Design students Connie Rogers and Meredith Stice designed two rooms based on vignettes designed by EnergyPros. This project provided real world experience for the students while they designed spaces to educate the public about what it takes to create environmentally responsible spaces. An added benefit for the students involved was to have their work on the two vignettes displayed at the Home, Garden and Remodeling Show where it was viewed by the thousands of attendees.

6. Festival of Trees & Lights

Interior Design students have more opportunities to improve their design skills while providing service to others by creating wreaths and trees for the Festival of Trees & Lights held at Slugger’s Field in Louisville. Students decorate either a tree or a wreath which is placed on display at the Festival. The public had an opportunity to bid on each item. Money raised by the sale of the creative and seasonal trees and wreaths supports Kosair Children’s Hospital.

Another example of a Service Learning project recently completed by Interior Design students was for the Jeffersonstown Chamber of Commerce. The client has existing space it wants renovated and updated within a small budget. Students formed design teams to meet the client’s needs. Their design concepts were developed after an initial meeting with the client and an opportunity to view and measure the space. Each team presented plans to the client. After the Chamber selects the plan that best meets its needs and vision while remaining within a specified budget, the Interior Design student team will have the opportunity to implement the selected design.

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