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INTERIOR DESIGN

Too cool for school



Bodil Ellins teaches Raphaela Holenstein at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, where the Island's first four-year-degree interior design program opens this fall. PHOTO COURTESY OF MALASPINA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Degree program will bring serious style to the Island

JOANNE HATHERLY
Times Colonist

Vancouver Island's first four-year-degree interior design program will open at Malaspina University College this fall. For the past 14 years, the school has offered a two-year diploma program that will now be phased out.

At first blush it might seem the Island's robust residential and commercial construction activity has fuelled the beefed-up program, but Bodil Ellins, professor at Malaspina's interior design school, says a change in regulations and higher industry standards are behind the change.

The supply of registered interior designers on the Island has always been tight.

"There might be only a dozen on the Island," Ellins says, "and yet we have a lot of people working in the design industry."

Ivan Meade, owner and principal designer at The Meade Group in Victoria welcomes the news. As an employer, he's found searching for qualified interior designers rife with frustration.

"You want a designer to come in with a shared base of knowledge," says Meade, who eventually hired two graduates of Malaspina's two-year interior design and graphics diploma program.

"When I was interviewing, I



Although they agree a sense of style is innate, designer Ivan Meade, left, and builder Steve Copp say that holding a degree in the subject indicates the person is serious about design and construction.

found so many called themselves designers, but they didn't even know the first thing about window treatments or design basics."

Steve Copp, president of Victoria's Canadian Home Builders Association, takes a neutral view on the new program.

"As a builder, it's obvious that education and training in any part



JOHN MACKAY, DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST:

of the industry is good," Copp says. "But as far as the question of whether we only use people who are certified designers, the answer is no. If someone has a sense of colour or style, they do. If they don't, they don't."

Meade agrees there is much about design that is innate or best learned on-the-job. Where both he

and Copp see the value in the new program is that it will build a base of designers who are serious about design and construction.

"The degree would be an asset," Copp says, "because it might indicate that you're dealing with someone who is involved in the market, is paying attention to current trends and who approaches their business as a professional. But that doesn't mean I wouldn't work with someone who doesn't have one."

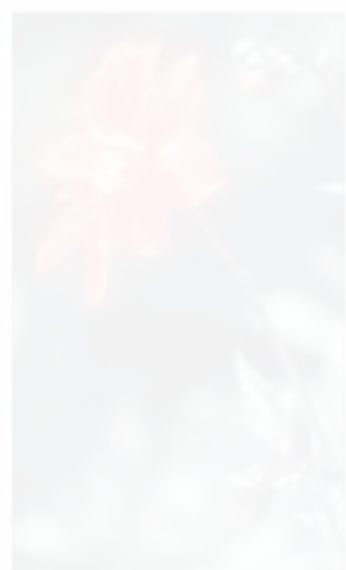
When the transition to professionalizing interior designers is complete, Echo Eaton, an interior designer at the Meade Group, will not be able to advertise herself as an interior designer, even though she completed Malaspina's two-year interior design diploma program.

She's OK with that, saying that she will likely eventually upgrade. In the meantime, she welcomes the news. "It is really great to see things moving locally to promote the design industry."

Designers can't forecast what impact an influx of four-year graduates will have on the local design scene.

But Ellins says most such schools are based in Ontario, so Malaspina's new program could advance a more distinctive West Coast style that is independent of Eastern Canadian influences.

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The Bishop of Landaff Dahlia's dark green foliage sets off its bright red petals.

Dark dahlias delight

Near-black foliage a growing trend for gardeners

STEVE WHYSALL
Garden News Service

Today the trend in dahlias is to grow varieties that have fantastic dark foliage.

Everyone loves the Bishop series — Bishop of Canterbury, Bishop of York, Bishop of Oxford, Bishop of Leicester and the old favourite, Bishop of Landaff.

All of these are sensational with beautiful flower colours ranging from apricot-orange to bright yellow to coccinea red.

There is also the Chic series and Happy series that offer wonderful flowers and dark foliage.

And then there's the City series — City of Allmoor (apricot), City of Leiden (magenta) and City of Rotterdam (scarlet). They all have cactus-style flowers and lovely bronze-coloured foliage.

Add to this list such popular long-time favourites as Preston Park and Ellen Houston, both of which have dark foliage, and you have an amazing collection of specialty dahlias.

The popularity of these dahlias shows that gardeners have something of an obsession with dark foliage.

This fascination does not start and end with dahlias, of course. It also extends to other plants with attractive dark, near-black, foliage such as Sambucus Black Lace, purple ninesbark (Physocarpus Diabolo), black mondo grass (Ophiopogon planiscapus Nigrescens) and the sweet potato vine (Ipomoea batatas Blackie).

But back to dahlias.

There are two kinds of dahlia enthusiasts — those who grow them as a hobby, usually to exhibit flowers at shows, and design-conscious gardeners who have an eye for clever colour and texture combinations and also have a flair for exotic, playful planting schemes.

Both groups of enthusiasts have good knowledge of the various styles of dahlias available, from massive dinner-plate kinds to spidery cactus-types to beautiful pompoms, anemones, waterlily and ball-shaped cultivars.

> See LOW-GROWING, Page E3



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MEADE GROUP

The client conference room at The Meade Group in Victoria features an oversized damask wall covering designed in-house. Owner and principal designer Ivan Meade has already hired two graduates of Malaspina's two-year program and welcomes the news of a four-year degree program.

Standards coming for designer title

Members will soon be required to hold a recognized degree

> From Page E1

Eaton says Island homeowners used to favour more traditional styles, but the growing design industry will help us become less pigeon-holed. "There is an array of local talent with a multitude of design styles, and I think our town is ready to embrace it."

Anyone can call himself or herself an interior designer, but the industry has plans for setting standards and professionalizing designers. Toward that end, the registered Interior Designers Institute of British Columbia, a provincial professional charter group, has entered into a merger with the Architects Institute of British Columbia. That means there will be stricter requirements for members, among which is that they graduate from a recognized degree program.

All of this is a move toward interior designers attaining professional recognition from the government, which will enable them to protect the title in much the same way that architectural associations closely guard the designation of architect.

What does that mean to the consumer? Maybe not so much, except that when hiring a registered interior designer, there will be a level of qualification that comes with having to meet standards set out in both Canada and the United States.

Ellins says, "It will mean that when they [consumers] hire an interior designer, they can be assured that they're hiring a professional." But what else?

Interior designers (as opposed to interior decorators) will have completed a four-year-degree program, and a two-year internship. Designers can plan spaces, draft plans, monitor adherence to building codes, bid and administer contracts, and are versed in fire safety, electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems so they can collaborate with all members of a construction team. They cannot modify or design load-bearing walls, but they can change non-load-bearing walls, and advise on sub-floors, materials and more.

Interior decorators work with the surface esthetics in the residential design such as selecting furnishings, colour themes and textiles and coordinating style.

There may be overlap with interior designers depending on the skill set of the interior decorator.

Malaspina's interior design school



DRAWINGS BY ECHO EATON, MEADE GROUP

Above: Echo Eaton, an interior designer at The Meade Group, plans to upgrade her two-year diploma from Malaspina. Below: Eaton's drawings show that a designers' role extends beyond surface esthetics.

will be British Columbia's second accredited four-year program. The other is Kwantlen University-College in Vancouver, where third-year students recently won first place in the Interior Design Educators Council student competition, which covers the Pacific Northwest.

Both Kwantlen and Malaspina receive many more applications for their interior design programs than

they can accommodate. Applications at both schools hover between 75 and 125, with only 20 or 24 places available at each school.

Malaspina intends to maintain its current level of enrolment.

And while the booming construction industry might lead one to expect that enrolment would rise, Peter Chevrier at Kwantlen says exactly the opposite has occurred. The abundance

of available jobs, and the increased competition from other schools has led Kwantlen's enrolment to drop over the past few years.

In fact, Eaton says she would like to upgrade to the degree, but she's employed full-time and happy in her current role as designer at The Meade Group. "I've got a lot going on here," says Eaton.

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ROBERT LANGRISH, CND
Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles is an unusual design, challenging to the untrained eye.

Awful or avant-garde?

Eclectic designs often supported by classical elements

KELVIN BROWNE
Canwest News Service

Sometimes it's a fine line, trying to determine whether a room has innovative interior design or just terrible design.

First, what is terrible design? I think it's horrid stuff thoughtlessly thrown together in an ugly box of a room. But this concept is really not too far removed from "eclecticism" — unusual objects juxtaposed with each other to bring out a room's idiosyncratic or eccentric architecture. Or from a room seemingly thrown together with disparate elements when, in fact, it was painstakingly contrived with a designer's eye for drama and the aim of making you look twice at things that might initially appear ordinary.

In architecture these days, the stranger the better. Few observers want to be labelled as philistines by saying they don't like Frank Gehry's designs or whatever shocking building appears on their street corner. It seems there's a fear that complaining about an unusual design will get you labelled unsophisticated — usually by those self-identified as the intellectual elite.

The good and bad news is that most rooms — just like most buildings, fashion or virtually anything designed — make little or no lasting impression. You notice a lamp here, a picture there, but you can't remember much detail five minutes later.

If you see a room you like, ask yourself why. Is it the proportion, the colour, the sunlight pouring through the windows, the quality of the art?

One of the best ways to learn about architecture and design is to analyze a place that makes a strong impression on you.

And if you think the room is a jumble, filled with stuff at odds with its architecture, you can learn from this, too. If nothing else, commit that room to memory so you don't inadvertently re-create it.

The trick is to be able to discern the useful from the avant-garde. You'll see rooms that look unlike anything you've seen, maybe you can't decide whether you like them, but they're mesmerizing. I bet you'll find that on closer inspection, regardless of how strange they may look, these are rooms that have a classical underpinning. Sure, the furniture doesn't match but the scale is perfect for the space and the shapes of individual pieces work well together. The walls may be a peculiar combination of colours but are as carefully contrived as a Roman fresco or a Renaissance mural.

The unconventional room that works makes an important point. It endures because underneath its style are the basic principles associated with beauty — proportion, massing and balance — that have been with us for millennia. The rest is packaging.