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## Thought process

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# THOUGHT PROCESS

The HKDI's Department of Product & Interior Design operates on the belief that great designs only become fabulous products if they have good working principles behind them. As programme leader Bill Chan reveals to **SUMMER CAO** this approach helps create sustainable careers and a healthier design environment.



"WE DON'T WANT OUR STUDENTS to redesign existing models or products, like commercial entities do in order to maximise profits," says Bill Chan, explaining the philosophy behind the HKDI's product design course. "Through our students' graduation project as well as all the other projects they undertake during their time at HKDI, we aim to increase their capacity for holistic planning and creative thought."

For the 2012 graduation project students were required to identify a segment of the lifestyle market, and investigate its existing problems, consumer needs and behavior, brand preferences, technological development and cultural

differences. Based on this research, students developed their designs, branding strategies, packaging and promotion materials.

"The most important part of the project is the research," says Chan. "Students were required to investigate a particular human activity such as listening to or making music and discover ways that it could be performed more effectively – they were told not to concentrate on an existing product. Based on the chosen activity, students had to decide how to position their products."

Chan cites a vacuum tube amplifier, designed by Kenneth Fung as a good example of how the department's approach works.

The amplifier has a chic black appearance with elegant icons in the shape of musical instruments on the four pairs of vacuum tubes, to represent the different sounds they each produce.

Vacuum tubes control electric current in a hermetically sealed container, and give music an especially rich sound. They are indispensable for music lovers and musicians, who choose them because they reproduce sound with great accuracy and depth. However, tubes creating different sounds might look very similar and there isn't a standard for tubes that have a particular effect. Different electronic companies also produce their own tubes and this adds to the difficulty for beginners. Fung's design makes it easier for musical novices to choose the right vacuum tube.

For the jewellery design graduation project, students were expected to combine the storytelling techniques and craftsmanship learnt in the 2-year's courses.

"In Hong Kong where the market is dominated by big brands, jewellery is usually designed for mass production, whereas in Europe, people pay more attention to craftsmanship and the stories behind a piece of jewellery," says Chan. "In order to enable the students to employ their talents to the fullest, and prepare them for future developments in the industry, students must be trained according to the standards that apply in both of these contexts."

The key to achieving this, according to Chan, is craftsmanship. "The more craft techniques students have in their repertoire, the more flexible and

LEFT KENNETH FUNG'S VACUUM TUBE AMPLIFIER  
BELOW A POSTER DISPLAYING CYNTHIA LUI'S  
JEWELLERY DESIGNS



Architectural esthetic elements are extracted & reconstructed in term of jewellery design. Dynamic wearings are created through integrating the basic jewellery units. Every single new ideas show what you have learnt from the past and in the development process it shows how you transform history into life. In this project I would like to express how history could be transformed to new ideas by reconstructing the old English architectures based on the principles of Fragmentation, Layering and Distorting.



imaginative they can be when turning their concept into a design. Then there is the passion that I think is the most important element to drive a designer to create better work. Students should be fascinated by the jewellery world and become self-driven. Only in this way can they improve and be successful."

Chan recommends a jewellery set designed by Cynthia Lui as a good example of his approach. It consists of five pieces inspired by the different window shapes found in ancient architecture that were transformed into jewellery. The design also included stars and clouds and other features that could be seen through windows.

The final grade for each student for both programmes was based on the way students tackled the design process, as well as by the finished product. "In the design world and in society as a whole, most people only think about results. As educators, we want to stress the importance of the design and execution process to students. Only in this way can they form healthy habits in their careers that will enable them to treat obstacles positively and tackle them independently.

"Both of the students I mentioned showed progress throughout the project. I saw Fung deal with a tough time, break through constraints and steer his design onto the right track. And Lui had a strong focus and knew what she wanted from the beginning, she put her design concept into a video which became a successful way to present her work."

The HKDI's Department of Product & Interior Design has had great success in placing its students with design companies in Hong Kong and elsewhere, a sure sign that its holistic approach is paying big dividends. ☺