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Dornbracht workshop: shaping interfaces

by Selina Denman on Apr 13, 2009

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Interior design

A Dornbracht-organised workshop encouraged students from across the UAE to reconsider the interaction between man, space and water



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Dornbracht partnered with the Association of Professional Interior Designers (APID) to organise a two-day student workshop and competition entitled 'Performing Water – Shaping the Interfaces between Man and Space' last month.

Created for architecture and design students at the five UAE universities in the APID network, the workshop was conducted on behalf of Dornbracht by architectural theorist and philosopher Kurt C. Reinhardt. The aim was to sharpen awareness of the principles of future bathroom design and reconsider the interaction between man, space and water.

In order to participate, students initially had to develop a conceptual design for a bathroom located in a suite of an international five-star luxury hotel. Based on the design sketch entries, 25 out of a total 65 entrants were selected and invited to attend the second round of the workshop, which took place at The Address Downtown Burj Dubai on February 22 and 23.

The workshop kicked off with a lecture on Ritual Architecture, which highlighted the bathroom's role as a centre for rest and self examination, and a place for people to take pause and reflect. The evolution of the bathroom, and cultural differences and rituals within the space were also explored, as was the work of the famous architect and interior designer Le Corbusier, with particular attention paid to the Villa Savoye. The aim was to transfer as much knowledge as possible and then encourage the students to transcribe this information into individual design work on day two.

On day two, the mission was to develop a conceptual design for an apartment. The ground plan given was a perfect circle with a diameter of 30m and a maximum height of 15m, limited to three floors. Biography and demographic data of a fictitious family was provided and emphasis was placed on creating different spots of human/water interface.

Students were coached throughout the day by Reinhardt and Markus Stebich, APID member and director of development, spas and interiors, Jumeirah Group.

The international nature of the workshop created great opportunity for the exchange of ideas, Reinhardt pointed out.

"I appreciated the internationality of the workshop. That's what working in the 21st century is all about and the one thing that struck me about Dubai is it is such an international place. In one part of the workshop I just moderated the exchange between the students and then they had to present their own cultural experiences with water; that was one of the most valuable exercises.

"Everyone was very happy and proud to have shown their culture and background. It gave them an awareness of how difficult it is to design a bathroom. You have to address very personal aspects of life and that requires a special relationship between the architect and the client," he said.

The winner of the workshop was a twenty-year-old Iranian student from the American University of Dubai, Fatemeh Banizaman. "In the eyes of the jury, Fatemeh delivered the best SPACE, which is translated as 'Shaping a Personal Architectural Cultivating Environment'. She scored the highest number of points from all judges. Due to her spatial layout of the apartment and the interaction of water with the inhabitants, she has proven her understanding of the mission.

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"Her formal consistency and level of innovation, in co-operation with her approach towards the scenic qualities of water in a living surrounding, were regarded as outstanding. She solved the mission with impressive creativity and imagination," said Reinhardt.

"I confess, the mission was quite hard," he added. "The students all admitted that it wasn't easy but they were there to learn and learning is all about the difficult assignments, not the easy ones. The workshop in its structure shows exactly what Dornbracht is all about – providing knowledge and asking questions. It was a two round workshop so the winners of the first round were awarded with the workshop. For the final winner, the award was a trip to Iserlohn, Germany where Dornbracht is headquartered, which is an opportunity to gather more content and more knowledge," said Reinhardt.

Having worked with Dornbracht for eight years, in various capacities ranging from consultant to trainer, Reinhardt has been well positioned to witness the company's evolution into much more than just a product manufacturer, he explained.

"Since 2003, Dornbracht has been addressing not only product design but integral aspects of space planning. It has totally changed the perspective of planning and designing spaces. It went forward from product design to integrating products with their environment and that is a totally different approach; it is thinking more like an architect than a product designer," Reinhardt said.

"The most successful companies here in Germany have taken the same approach. For example, Erco says: 'We are not providing lamps, we are providing light'. It is the same with Dornbracht – they are not just providing products. They are providing a service – the experience of water – and that's something totally different. The general understanding is totally different and Dornbracht is absolutely the leading company when it comes to content and perspective."

Reinhardt, himself, also brought a unique approach to the exchange. "For architects and designers, I come, perhaps, from a strange background. I studied philosophy and physics – and if you are curious about the world, this creates more questions than answers! I also studied a bit of psychology and sociology and politics, so I am more into the soft sectors of architecture.

"So, for example, when it comes to urban planning, I have other ideas apart from the formal or technical or economical ones. I also question how the built environment influences individuals and the behaviour of groups and all of these different things. When I work with architects, both sides very much appreciate the different backgrounds and perspectives. And by combining these we create slightly different solutions to the others. It's all about uniqueness."

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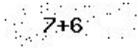
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