



Revitalizing a YMCA Youth Shelter: Sheridan Furniture Design Student Success Story

Standing in front of an audience of vocal and potentially critical at-risk youth, Katrina Ennamorato was nervous.

“It was a totally new experience pitching an idea and having no predetermined expectation with how they’re going to react,” said the Sheridan Furniture Design graduate. “You’re forced to have confidence in your ideas.”

Quickly finding that confidence, she presented her designs with conviction. That experience will benefit her as she embarks on her career, having just completed the Furniture Design program this spring.

Katrina and 16 other furniture design students from the Faculty of Animation, Arts and Design (FAAD) completed their final year-end project that involved designing furniture pieces for the YMCA’s Vanauley Street youth shelter and drop-in centre. Sheridan instructors Peter Fleming and Connie Chisholm conclude the students’ studies with a real-life, experiential learning

assignment and connected with the YMCA who were working with Hilditch Architects to renovate a youth shelter and wanted to include new furniture. (Up to 20-80 youth use this shelter to search for jobs, write resumes, spend time with counselors or to take part in social activities – all with the goal of helping them transition away from street life.)

The students designed and built 20 pieces including couches, lounge seating, tables, computer stations, entertainment cabinets and side tables – that was Katrina’s assignment. The students met with the youth and YMCA staff and heard their ideas, concerns and wishes as part of their project research, and returned to Sheridan’s furniture workshop to develop some designs. At subsequent meetings, discussions were tough.

The challenge for Katrina and her classmates was coming up with designs that struck a balance – the pieces had to be warm and visually pleasing, but also durable and versatile.

They also had to be designed in such a way that the youth felt their ideas were heard. “You have to try to address the core wants and mold it into something that makes sense,” said Katrina. “You have to be open to changes and you have to make compromises.”

For Katrina’s six side tables, they had to be solid enough that someone could sit on them, or eat off of them, but they also had to be light enough to be easily moved around. She used a material called Corian, for the side tables’ surface with a wood frame. Often used for counter tops, Corian is stain resistant, tough, can withstand a lot of abuse, and yet it’s pleasing to the eye.

As each piece came together, Peter was gratified to see how the students matured over the course of the project. “I saw a tremendous level

of growth in confidence,” he said. “They already know how to design and build furniture, but this project showed them how to present their concepts cohesively, how to carry themselves in a client meeting, and how to read cues from clients and absorb them into their practice.”

Katrina’s side tables and all of the other pieces are now finished and will be unveiled at a ceremony when the shelter’s renovations are complete.

“Our goal was to create spaces that give these youth a sense of dignity and safety,” said Katrina. “With our designs, we want to help turn this shelter into an environment that encourages them to move toward their next stage in life with the YMCA’s support.”



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