

Catering Design Group grows its own designers

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Faced with on-going skilled labour shortages within the architectural design sector, restaurant and commercial kitchen design company, Catering Design Group (CDG) has taken two young students and grown them from within to become valued members of their design team.

Hazel Barnes and Tansin Blankley joined CDG in 2014 at their Daventry corporate headquarters on one-year work experience placements when studying Interior

Architecture and Design at Nottingham Trent University. Tansin returned to the company in 2016 as a designer. Hazel followed in December last year as a technical designer after finishing her Masters in Interior Architecture and Design.

Helen Davis, commercial director of CDG, said: "Recruitment within our particular sector is challenging. Commercial kitchen and restaurant design is a specialist niche and, given the breadth of our offer, from back of house to front of house, we need a wide skills set to meet the design needs of a diverse client-base.

"Working with placement students and graduates gives us the ability to mould and develop their skills to suit. It was clear that Hazel and Tansin not only had the technical and creative skills we needed but they fitted seamlessly in with the rest of team."

Born just three minutes apart, on the same day and the same year, it seems that the stars aligned to bring these two creative individuals together.

Hazel said: "Although we knew of each other at university, it was really when we joined CDG on placement that we became close friends, as well as colleagues."

Both speak highly of their placement experience with CDG, where they developed their design and technical skills within a supportive and creative working environment.

"Having been to twelve interviews – several of which were in cramped working environments in central London, I jumped at CDG's offer of a placement at their light and airy design offices in Daventry," said Hazel.

Tansin also seized the opportunity to gain experience with the company which places relationships at the heart of its business. She said: "I was made feel welcome and supported from day one. It has very much a family feel where we all help one another and learn from each other. "

Hazel is now a technical designer with CDG, working on the technical aspects of kitchen and restaurant/servery design within private education, universities and the business and industry sectors. Both of her parents are trained chefs so this gives her first-hand insight into the challenges facing chefs in a busy commercial kitchen environment.



Tansin's work is all about finishes, designing in the 'wow' factor within front of house settings to keep customers coming back for more.

Tansin said: "We have complementary skills so we collaborate daily on projects and bounce ideas together. Although our personalities could be described as like 'chalk and cheese', when it comes to design standards and our work ethos, we are a good fit!"

Both designers accepted Catering Design Group's invitation to work with them full-time after graduation because of the positive experience they had on placement, which also fuelled their love of their new career path within the commercial restaurant design sector.

Hazel said: "What we covered at university seemed very conceptual in comparison to the experience of working in a real commercial design environment where we got to work on live projects with actual budgets, deadlines and challenges."

While both developed their technical skills, using design software like AutoCAD and Photoshop, it was the people aspect of the experience that gave them the broader life skills and confidence to join the company on a permanent basis.

Tansin said: "Catering Design Group not only gave us creative freedom to grow as designers but they helped us to develop other vital workplace skills also. To be given opportunities to meet suppliers and clients, and to go out on-site and see concepts come to fruition was the best possible experience any design student could wish for. Above all, it was the encouragement from CDG's tight knit team and seeing the rapport they had with each other, their suppliers and clients that made me absolutely certain that I wanted to work with them."

Helen Davis, commercial director of Catering Design Group, said: "Engagement is everything to us. We are a small design company with a loyal client-base and loyal staff who never cease to surprise and impress us.

"Working within the hospitality sector is not without its challenges but our formula is simple; we invest in the development of our people, we recognise individuality and young talent, reward success and perhaps, most importantly, have fun every day."

Tansin's advice to interior architecture and design students:

"Just go for it! Take every opportunity to learn and pick up knowledge, information and experience from all around you. Go on site visits, meet as many people as possible, always keep an open mind and never, ever stop learning."

Hazel's advice to interior architecture and design students:

"Don't lose sight of why you spent so much time and money on your university education. Apply what you have learned to the sector you find yourself in and adapt it. The learning should never stop so continue to fuel your interest and keep on the pulse of design trends."

