

Catering Design Group grows its own designers

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L-r: Tansin Blankley and Hazel Barnes from Catering Design Group.

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 the firm's Daventry corporate headquarters on 1-year work experience placements when studying interior architecture and design at Nottingham Trent University. Blankley returned to the company in 2016 as a designer, while Barnes 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.

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"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 individuals together.

Barnes 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 what the distributor feels is a supportive and creative working environment.

“Having been to 12 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,” added Barnes.

Blankley also seized the opportunity to gain experience with the company, detailing: “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.”

She 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.

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

She 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.

Barnes 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.

Blankley commented: “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 onsite 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, its suppliers and clients that made me absolutely certain that I wanted to work with the company.”

Davis added: “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.”