



## Courses in Chelsea

# Daisy Yellow or Dead Canary?

Check into an interior design school and learn how to avoid making your worst mistakes, says **Caroline Phillips**

**W**HEN I set out to redecorate and furnish our house I started by thumbing through interiors magazines and buying paint. Once the painting was under way I hit the shops, selecting fabrics and furniture as I went along. I was making a big mistake.

I had to repaint the newly decorated sitting room because that Daisy Yellow colour was more Dead Canary once it was on the walls. Painting, it turns out, is not the start of a design process. It's a lesson I learned the hard way – but it was hammered home on the very first day of a five-day interior design course I recently joined.

In a classroom on the fifth floor of a tower block at Design Centre Chelsea Harbour, 12 of us attended KLC School of Design's course – Interior Design: The Essentials. The students ranged from twentysomethings to vintage and there was just one man among us, a hairdresser from Dublin.

Women, it seems, are more interested in décor than men, and far more likely to want to take the subject further. Some in our class were considering a diploma course and a career change; others simply sought the confidence to do up their own property, using a week's holiday from work to gain experience.

### LEARNING THE TRADE

My group included Di, a senior executive at Expedia, who was converting a barn near Oxford; Marianne, who is in finance and was looking to build her own home, and Lillian, a teacher from the Netherlands who wanted a new career. There were presentations, lectures from experts and Blue Peter-style

workshops with lots of cutting and sticking. We got a whistle-stop tour of the entire interior design process, how to create a cohesive scheme from concept to completed presentation board.

Over the week, we worked individually on a mock project to handle the interior design for a room in a house in Cornwall. "Torquil was built in 1911," read my brief. It belongs to my make-believe clients, Steve and Katie Doyle. "They favour a comfortable, classic-contemporary look."

My task was to interpret the detailed brief, produce a visual concept and a furniture layout – "Think before you ink," advised tutor Diana McKnight – and then a decorative scheme presented on a sample board.

**My clients wanted something** "not too expensive". I learned tricks for working with a limited budget. I could pick two key items, such as a rug and a light fitting, statement pieces to add drama. Or get a cheap lamp and add an amazing shade. I could source lower-price fabrics from Ian Mankin or Warwick Fabrics, adding trimming for interest.

Paint is another cost-effective way of adding colour. If I wanted less-pricey wallpaper, there was Harlequin. "But expensive wallpaper is worth it," explained course tutor Fiona Bell. "For £80 a roll, you can do a statement wall that lasts 10 years."

My head buzzed with new knowledge. I was struck by how lighting is an often-overlooked aspect of a scheme. "It should be as important as the furniture," revealed lighting designer Rebecca Weir. We were told how to layer lighting from ceiling to floor, and to think about the different types of light-

**After five days my head buzzed with new knowledge. Armed with my scheme, I chose only textures and colours that fitted it**



**Think before you ink:** interior design students are given a mock project and guided by experts



ing effects – general, ambient and task. Technology has also brought exciting developments. "LED lights can achieve the same warmth as halogen while lasting much longer, being far cheaper to run, and you can dim them."

### MATERIALS MATTER

Another big element of interiors is the creative use of materials, from mohair to leather and polyester. "Fabrics can be used for absorbing, reflecting, filtering or obscuring light," enthused expert Julia Ranson.

I pressed on with my clients' project. Armed with the brief and a floorplan, I set about creating a mood board. I researched colours, patterns and textures, using travel, nature and the catwalk for inspiration. I was taught to use three main words – "Comfortable, smart and relaxed" – to capture the look and feel of my scheme. I glued magazine pictures on to my board, in a concept and colour combination that would be carried through to implementation.

Next, I sketched three different layouts. I had to think about "traffic flow" – people walking through – and about "zoning", or dividing the space into functions. Natural and artificial light were also considered. I drew the furniture that I'd sourced online to a scale of 1:25.

Only at this point did we finally visit the sample room for fabrics, flooring and paint colours. I also went downstairs to glamorous, glass-domed Design Centre Chelsea Harbour with

**It's a small world:** after first sourcing furniture online, students draw it to a scale of 1:25 for their layout

its host of interior design shops, taking an iPhoto of my concept board.

**A**RMED with my project plan to stick to, for once I wasn't overwhelmed by the huge choice on offer. I selected only textures and colours that fitted my scheme.

Afterwards my finished work got the thumbs-up from KLC director Julia Begbie: "Lovely composition, great transfer of colour from concept to presentation board." I even discovered why that Daisy Yellow paint looked like Dead Canary at home. It's the light orientation of the room, you see...



**All things considered:** it's important to build a design concept by researching "traffic flow" of people, colours, textures, lighting and furniture



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