

Honing a passion for their craft

TRANSFORMING a run-down home into an all-female hostel with a modern touch was no easy task. But one architect and a handful of Interior Architecture students and alumni from UCSI University made it all possible.

The story began with David Koo, currently a partner at an architecture company that manages myriad projects from temples to shops and hotels.

Having taught these students in his previous role as a UCSI lecturer, all Koo had to do was mention the project, which was immediately taken up by the students as part of their Co-Operative Placement Programme (internship). The rest is history.

The transformation

Taking approximately four months to complete, the house located near UCSI's North Wing premises in Kuala Lumpur looked transformed. On the ground floor, little details such as soft lights, wooden furniture and flowy curtains made the bedrooms look cosy and inviting. All this and a meshed back door for extra security made this an ideal place for a female hostel – one that saw the rooms all snapped up before the renovation was even completed.

But there was more to the project. Working closely with Koo, the team transformed an entire floor into two additional bedrooms, a pantry, a washroom and a spacious balcony.

"The project is a collaboration between UCSI's School of Architecture and Built Environment and our company," says Koo. "I supervised the team but they did a lot of interior work themselves. It's pretty impressive."

"It was a lot of hard work but it was time spent doing something worthwhile."

The learning curve

From their glowing smiles, the UCSI students together with UCSI alumni Lam Sook Wan and Elaine Ng clearly had the same feelings.

Hamda Ibrahim, 24, was put in charge of marketing – from managing the rental agreement to interviewing potential tenants and preparing receipts for the tenants.

Morteza Bozorgi and Hesam Mirsafdari

specialised in piecing together furniture using recycled materials.

To do this, they needed to use the university's Make Lab and they credit UCSI for their skills, which they have applied to the project.

Interestingly, most of their furniture, especially the bed frames, tabletops and chairs are made from old doors or formwork used to support the construction of the floor slab.

The students' passion for their craft is evident in the handmade furniture, late nights, and their commitment to constant reinvention.

"We have built a shelter using pallets at UCSI before and decided to pitch the idea for this project. Pallet furniture was definitely not part of the plan, so we're glad our idea was accepted," says Hamda with a laugh.

"The most important thing we learned was 'making things happen' – not on screen but in real life. Overall, I'd say it was a fascinating experience."

Mirsafdari finds the project enjoyable yet challenging.

"Constructing the interior of a home is different from putting it on drawing. You encounter little hiccups in the design that need to be resolved quickly," he says.

"One example was a washroom on the ground floor. The door could not be closed as the countertop was constructed too close to the door. To resolve this, the countertop and sink had to be reduced in size."

Nurturing talent

These experiences are precisely what Koo wants the students to be exposed to. A firm advocate of "freedom of expression", Koo is passionate about doing what he believes in.

With decades of experience in the industry, he has seen graduates – achievers in the university – having to leave behind what they studied just to meet the needs of their clients.

"It's a shame when you are required to work on something you don't really like. I try to make our projects as interesting as possible," says the humble architect.

"Take this team for example, I can see that they love what they do and are very passionate about it."

"So I give them a free rein to demonstrate their skills in the project. I want them to believe in what they studied at UCSI for four years."

Koo is engaging the same team to assist in his next project – a 35-room hotel.

■ For more information, visit Chaos Lab's Facebook page. To find out more

about programmes under UCSI's School of Architecture and Built Environment, call 03-9101 8882, e-mail www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry or visit the NAPEI Education Fair on June 14 and 15 (11am to 6pm).



Bozorgi (right) and Mirsafdari working on a table.



The newly renovated hostel is a joint effort between Chaos Lab Sdn Bhd and UCSI University.