

Designing a career the hands-on way

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PULLING things apart to find out how they work and then putting them back together again might seem a destructive activity to most parents. But for budding product designers it's the perfect childhood hobby, as it was for Turkish designer Esin Isik who started fiddling about with domestic appliances at the age of 11.

Esin, 21, a graduate in industrial design from the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, is the most recent offshore intern to work with Dot Dot Dot Ex Why Zed Design (...XYZ Design), a Cape Town product design company which put South African design talent on the world map with its wind-up radio for the Freeplay Foundation. This product is on display in the London Design Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

At any time of the year, there will be fledgling product designers serving varying terms of internship at ...XYZ Design where they get crucial hands-on experience of the commercial side of product design. Some interns are from local technical universities or vocational schools, others are foreign industrial design graduates seeking practical experience at well-known studios around the world.

During her month's internship at ...XYZ, Esin helped prepare a presentation for potential investors about the studio's ideas on how best to apply traditional techniques to home wares.

This is part of the design stu-

dio's strategy of having interns help designers research whether, and how, materials from sustainable resources can be used for new products. Sometimes, bringing technology into the mix opens up myriad possibilities. These new ideas, if feasible, then become part of the armoury at the disposal of the main designers to propose to clients for their commercial product development.

"It was fascinating to get to understand traditional African craft methods and then see how their combination with technology could produce viable products. It was an enriching experience for me. I became sensitised to the colours and graphics all around me. Cape Town is like a fruit bowl with its variety and colour," said Esin.

Some of what she learned at ...XYZ will go back to Europe and the Middle East where she plans to study towards her master's degree in industrial design.

When she was 11, Esin's fascination with household products prompted many drawings of kettles and furniture.

"I started to think about how people wanted to live and how to provide the things they needed for their lifestyles. When I heard I could make a career as a product designer, I never wavered in my decision. I competed with 2.5 million other Turkish youngsters to win one of 30 places to study industrial design at university. My graduation project was a baby's cot that converts to a bed for an eight year old."

A South African student who re-



BRIMMING WITH ENTHUSIASM: Turkish product design student Esin Isik, left, explains her childhood passion for the innards of kettles to budding South African designers Marcellino Jonas and Thabo Mboneni, right.

Gently did a brief job-shadow stint at ...XYZ Design, Marcellino Jonas, 30, has his sights set on producing furniture. Currently a student at the Raymond Ackerman Academy for Entrepreneurial Development, he had the opportunity to see how product design companies operated.

While at the studio, he became

involved with the studio's development of an integrated computer-desk using wood off-cuts. His task was to draft the product specifications and research the desk's ergonomics and sources of materials.

"The product innovation at ...XYZ Design has been an inspiration and convinced me that I want

to be a furniture designer," says Jonas, whose group at the academy is discussing forming a small company to design and produce furniture after graduation.

Thabo Mboneni, 25, is an intern who opted to stay on at ...XYZ Design to get further practical experience rather than continue his industrial design studies at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. His dream is to design sports cars - and he hopes to have gained enough experience by next year to study automotive design in Britain.

"By then, I will have a good portfolio of product design experience, and having worked at ...XYZ Design will help open doors for me," says Mboneni.

Byron Qually, ...XYZ Design's design director, says being exposed to the practical side of converting good ideas into great innovations and then into commercially viable products, is essential for young product designers.

"The interns bring a fresh approach to the creative process - sometimes including ideas from different parts of the world - and in return, we give them a feet-on-the-ground approach to producing products.

"With us, they experience how to manage client expectations of the product development process and how not to get carried away by a great idea that has little chance of commercial success.

"They also contribute to the development of some potentially award-winning products, which is valuable for their portfolios."