MIAD’s Interior Architecture & Design Professor, Robert Lynch, talks to high school students about: Artistic Development, College Readiness, and Career Paths in IAD

What kind of artistic support did you receive from family and school?

My father worked as a graphic designer before he retired. He also did some illustration professionally and also painted. As a student in grade school I was strong in all the "academic" areas (I believe that art and design, if they’re taught well, are also academic). In grade school I was the kid who could draw. I think an aesthetic sensibility is something that one can inherit, I also know that it can be taught - that is, after all, why we're here. Getting back to the question, I guess I didn't need additional "support" because I grew up in an environment where art and design were prevalent and where art mattered.

What obstacles did you face?

I think the only "obstacle" I faced was that our culture does not seem to place sufficient value on art and design. I did not take any "art" classes in high school. Instead I was taking advanced math classes and the sciences. I did, however, take a couple of drafting classes. It was only later on in college and particularly in graduate school that I began to see the relationship between art and design, between art and architecture . . . and philosophy, and psychology, and sociology, and . . .

Did you plan your education with a career path in mind, or did it just sort of evolve?

In high school I never would have believed that I'd become a teacher, I always suspected I'd be an architect, but at the time I didn't really understand what architecture was about. I thought it was about buildings. It's not - at least, not really. Architecture is about people. The best designers know that.

In high school I was a good student but only because I didn't have to try very hard. It was only later, in college, that I developed a hunger to learn. I have been blessed to have had great teachers in college, to have worked with some extremely talented designers, and to have had some very committed and talented students over the years.
*How would you describe your design work?*

That's tough. Philosophically, I think my work is fundamentally pragmatic. At the same time I believe that in its conception it is highly. Intuition, I believe, is misunderstood. I used to think "intuition" was mysticism - an excuse for someone to do anything they wanted. However, I've come to regard intuition differently, as "embodied understanding", like tying your shoes. Your brain doesn’t tell your fingers how to tie your shoes, rather, your fingers simply "know". In time, design ability becomes intuitive, you just know.

*What new directions has your work taken ?*

I believe that architecture and interior design are at their best when they remain "open", incomplete, or rather when the work is only completed by the user, by the act of inhabitation. I try to create work that requires the input of the user, that both invites and encourages the participation of the user.

*How does design influence other parts of your life?*

All of us are designers. Design is just another name for forethought. All human beings think ahead, "design" their day, their lives. We all make design decisions all the time. Bad design irritates me, because I generally regard it as the product of a lazy mind. Often when I look at something I am compelled to ask myself how could I make it better?

*How do you continue to nurture your artistic development?*

I am a practicing architect. I love to design. I love looking at something afterwards and thinking to myself, "I saw that in my mind, I drew that on paper before it became real." And at other times I might say, "whoa, what was I thinking?" But that's okay, too. We must learn to embrace our mistakes as well as our successes.

*What influences your design work?*

My design can be influenced by almost anything. But mostly, I'm influenced by the work of other architects and designers, including my own students. I am continually fascinated by what we are able to conceive - increasingly the possibilities seem unlimited.

*What are important factors for projects? (i.e. client, budget)*
The most important factor in any project is integrity. Every project, regardless of budget, regardless of circumstances presents an opportunity. Every opportunity must be grasped and pursued.

Who should consider IAD as a Major?

That’s probably the toughest question because it involves knowing what IAD is. I believe that architecture is more fundamental to our humanity than any other discipline or course of study. Nothing says more about who we are as a people than the buildings we inhabit, and there is little, apart from the influences of other people, that can impact us as significantly. Architects and interior designers create the places in which we live. What could be more significant. Pick up a recent book on architecture or interior design and look at the images. If these images speak to you then perhaps there is something there for you.

What is the best preparation for an IAD major at the high school level?

The best preparation is to simply to want to learn, to live fully, and to be open to question what you know and what you believe. That, I suspect, is true of any discipline and it is no less true of this one.

What skills are important for me to master?

Thinking and questioning, responding to every questions and questioning every response. You do not “need” to know math, you do “need” to know how to draw. Does it help? Sure. But so does speaking well, or numerous other skills. Everything can help, but nothing is required short of a desire to learn.

What kind of technology is important for me to know?

All disciplines are touched by the computer - so that helps. There is nothing that you need to know that we can’t teach you. at the same time, anyone who has a background in building can bring that understanding to bear on their work.

What are the Career Options available to me in IAD?

We have had graduates go off into architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, product design, sales, graduate school, education, the Peace Corps, and other related industries. Options abound. The student really has the opportunity to take his or her education wherever they wish for it to lead them.