

spotlight

# Set to shine

Off-the-wall creations are winning awards for Sydney design graduates. **ANDREW TAYLOR** finds three who made the grade.

If necessity is the mother of invention, Ian Edwards may soon be the darling of Sydney's nail technicians.

Not only does Edwards's silent sander take away the ear-shattering din associated with most power tools, but it is also equipped with a shield to protect the home handyman's French manicure.

"I wanted to encourage DIY as a social hobby, something that might be done collaboratively among friends," Edwards says. "Tools that can be used while having conversations make for a friendly environment."

The 22-year-old industrial design graduate from Sydney's University of Technology is one of five winners of the Graduate of the Year Awards, which are given by the NSW branch of the Design Institute of Australia to the cream of last year's design graduates in NSW and ACT.

The awards aim to talent-spot young designers and promote their skills to industry, says the NSW president of the institute, Clive Solari. "We're really trying to pick out the students who have the skills and personalities to fit into a workplace and become a professional designer."

### Serene sander

Researching his serene sander, Edwards discovered that many potential DIYers are put off not only by noisy tools, but the instant rush of power when they are switched on.

"That inspired the power control in the sander so you can ramp up the energy after a soft start and get used to it," he says. "One girl also had an issue with wanting to protect her hands and fingernails. That was the main reason for designing the shield."

Despite its obvious attractions to DIY divas, Edwards says the sander was conceived as an idea, not a product to sell: "It's important to know the reasons behind what we're doing. Industrial designers have a responsibility towards how the environment looks and functions."

### Interactive designs

Fellow UTS graduate Leanne Crofts took out GOTYA's textiles design category with her Imprint and New Trapunto collections.

Crofts's Imprint fabrics explore the relationship between handmade and digitally made products by combining a design based on circuit boards with traditional handmade fabric techniques. She admits she was initially sceptical about digitally made products, "but I found this really wonderful synergy between the processes. I'm a convert now".

Hand-stitching

might have been laborious, but it was the high-tech element of Crofts's designs that provided the surprises.

"You're never quite sure what the digital printer might spit out, so you learn to work around it and embrace it or have a meltdown," she says.

Crofts's New Trapunto designs were also based on experimentation, employing 17th-century quilting techniques to create lush three-dimensional fabrics for the couture market.

"They're not very practical, but beautifully interactive to touch, and playful," she says.

Crofts, 25, of Elizabeth Bay, is now working on an interactive wall piece based on one of her New Trapunto designs, and recently exhibited a collection of framed fabric wall hangings based on her prize-winning project.

Her textile and fashion-focused design degree was a struggle at times, Crofts admits. "There were a few negative thoughts along the way, but now I'm out of it I've realised how much I learnt."

### Interior innovation

The winner of GOTYA's interior design and decoration category, Donna Martin, says her course at the International School of Colour and Design instilled in her the confidence to trust her own expertise.

"They don't spoon-feed," she says. "You're really encouraged to go and figure it out, and I loved that you really got your hands dirty."

Martin, 35, of Cromer, enrolled in the school after her husband died when she was pregnant. She says the course was taught by industry professionals and was "friendly towards her demographic". "I worked my bum off in the course. It was hard, hard work, but it hasn't got an element of snobbery about it."

Martin's winning interiors were designed specifically with a client's needs in mind.

"They wanted to have a Balinese edge, but be quite contemporary at the same time," she says.

Martin's starting point was to assess the nature and personality of both her client and the rooms they wished to make over.

"I saw this fabulous wallpaper with a beautiful chartreuse yellow," she says. "That really spoke to me - it was a bit of a gut feeling and from there the design grew from the dining area to the kitchen with these fabulous wall tiles, and to the living area."

Martin, who recently set up Welcome Home Interiors (phone 0404 859 980), aims to create interiors that are "warm, relaxed and welcoming, but with a wow factor", she says. "A place they feel good in and that really reflects their personality."



Thrills and skills Donna Martin (left), Ian Edwards and Leanne Crofts, with their prize designs. Photo: James Brickwood

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