

# View from the Hill



First-year environmental design/interiors students created these lamps using seashells as the basis for their designs.

## At the Roots of Creation

College for Human Development professor Karen Bakke '67, G'69 wants first-year design students in her Visual Thinking course to know where creative ideas come from. Sure, some ideas seem to materialize naturally, but chances are the ideas came through good old-fashioned work by the designer, exploring others' creations and inspirations, combing through books, scouring the Internet, studying the natural world, and, as Bakke notes, literally going back to the drawing board, sketching away until an idea takes hold. "I tell the students that ideas are hard to come by and you have to be trained to get them," says Bakke, chair of the Department of Retail Management and Design Technologies. "I like them to understand the process and feel comfortable with it."

Bakke sees the course—taken by environmental design/interiors majors during the fall semester and fashion design majors in the spring semester—as the first step in the students' design careers. Through slides, readings, and discussions, she introduces them to different art periods and legendary designers. She takes them to the Everson Museum of Art to study works by Gustav Stickley and view the ceramics collection. And, most importantly, she challenges the students with projects that require them to meld theory and hands-on experience, creating things like stained-glass windows and tiles. "I want to make my students excited about design and designers," Bakke says. "I give them fun design projects that allow them to gain a sense of self-esteem in their work."

Last fall, Bakke passed a bag of seashells around the room. The

assignment: Pick a seashell and draw it from every imaginable angle. Sketchbooks were filled with drawings. Each student selected a drawing, made a pattern, and used it as the basis for creating a lamp design, first as a scale model and then as a wire armature around a lamp stem. Both the model and the lamp were covered with rice paper. "Everything about this class is creative," Sheryl Quan '04 says. "It's all about getting your ideas out."

For the students, the assignment was a journey into three-dimensional form and functionality. "I want to see pure form," Bakke says. "This is about shape and armature, and there must be luminosity."

During one class, the sound of wire being snipped permeated the classroom as students bent, twisted, and clipped wire into a variety of shapes caging the lamp stems. "She gives us a lot of artistic freedom," says Kailyn Burns '04.

Throughout the project, Bakke emphasized the importance of the process, focusing on each step and its relationship to the next. Once the sculptural lighting fixtures were completed, the students designed books to document the process. The books, too, must reflect a coherent theme through color usage and designs that link the pages together, and feature their sketches and thoughts on the project. Bakke, who has taught the course for eight years, also stresses teamwork and has the students do presentations and critiques of one another's work. "We talk about rules and breaking rules," Bakke says. "They learn to recognize that when they have an inspiration that would make the piece a lot better, they have to go with it."

—JAY COX