

Mercier, who studied History and the History of Art at La Sorbonne, has a broad range of experience, not only in interior design, but also in the visual arts and related fields.



Eve Mercier, Principal and founder of design school Insight

After completing her studies she worked as an art journalist and then in the modern art department at auctioneers Christie's. A stint in the world of fashion - with Shanghai Tang and then working on her own brand – followed, before she joined high-end London-based property developer Candy & Candy as a member of the interior design team.

"Then I set up my own studio and I did interior design for private clients and for a big five-star hotel in Cannes."

Mercier has forged links with the famous KLC School in London and cites it as an inspiration, but says that Insight is much more tailored to the Asian market.

"There is a tendency here just to look at what the west is doing and ignore the roots and local culture," she says. "But we've just launched a course called Hong Kong Design Heritage."

And there are other concessions to the uniqueness of Hong Kong.

"We are also running a small space design course which not only provides practical tips and tools but also shows that being practical doesn't mean you have to forget the look - you can be chic and clever."

While short and part time-courses - for amateurs and for those already working in related fields - are already being taught at Insight, in September a full-year diploma programme will be launched. This will provide the training needed for a professional career in the industry and will include residential interiors and commercial interiors certificate options.

"We have lots of links with the industry, and the students know they are going to create a portfolio of at least five projects they can show to prospective employers," Mercier points out.

"I created the school to be very inspirational and very practical," she says, and she believes that inspiration will come from the presence of industry-renowned tutors, while the fact that, "all the teaching is going to revolve around real-life projects", will ensure nuts-and-bolts knowledge and training is provided.

Students will follow projects through from beginning to end.

"Everything starts with a client," Mercier says, "you're not designing for yourself."

Therefore participants will learn how to interview real clients, with a big property developer and a major hotel chain already very interested in collaborating.

After they've completed a design analysis, a design statement and presentation boards, complete with technical drawings and materials boards, the students will present their designs to the clients.

"We'll also have contractors coming to the school, explaining things like the difference between a good and a bad joint, and the students will be brought to building sites," Mercier adds.

She is keen to point out that all of Insight's teachers are working professionals. Last month, Come Remy, who ran the decorative arts department at Christie's in Monaco, Amsterdam, New York and Paris, came in to lecture on the history of art and the history of furniture. Douglas Young, the founder of G.O.D, is pencilled in to lecture on Hong Kong identity and what makes it special.

While the gleaming new structures of the West Kowloon Cultural District have still to make the leap from computer screen to concrete reality, at the eastern end of Hong Kong Island a more hands-on creative scene is already burgeoning.

Last month, the Insight School of Interior Design joined the photographers, film makers, and galleries who've set up home in the old industrial buildings of Chai Wan.

"We feel we are part of a very artistic and creative community, both western and Chinese," says Eve Mercier, the French founder of the school.

Mercier, a qualified interior designer and art historian, returned to Hong Kong a year-and-a-half ago.

"I felt this was the right moment to open the school," she explains. "When I was last living in Hong Kong 15 years ago, this is not a concept that would have worked at all, but Hong Kong has changed tremendously in terms of the interest in culture and anything creative."

On her return she was soon made aware of the need for an institute such as hers.

"When I spoke to architects, property developers, interior designers or recruiting firms, they were all telling me the same thing which was, though there are masses of projects in the region, at the moment there are very few properly trained interior designers."

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Eve Mercier