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Yulin

Hello, hello, hello. Welcome to the PG Tips podcast. I'm your host, Yulin. And I'm currently studying MA Fine Art here at Central Saint Martins. And this is going to be an open and safe space for current post grad students here at UAL to come on here and have a chat about what they're doing on their course, which I'm sure we're all very curious about. And maybe if they have any tips or advice for the rest of us. Oh, and of course, to be an open platform for us to find people to connect and network with, and you'll be able to find contact details attached to each episode. So yeah, let's get right into it.

Yulin

Welcome back to episode four of the PG Tips podcast. I'm your host Yulin. And I'm very excited to be here today with amazing Najwa Alhariri who's doing her postgraduate diploma in Interior Architecture and Spatial design at Chelsea College of Arts. So thank you so much for joining me.

Najwa

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so happy to be here.

Yulin

Of course. Yeah, I'm really excited because this is actually a special episode, because this is the first episode of this academic year. And I'm excited to have you on here because you just started your course at UAL. And I really wanted someone to be on here who's just started, because I'm sure yeah, there are many people like you who've just started, who might feel like they want to connect with people as well. I actually met you in one of the post grad mixer events.

Najwa

That's right. Yeah.

Yulin

How did you find that?

Najwa

It was amazing, you know, meeting with all those people doing, you know, Postgraduates. It was really interesting.

Yulin

Yeah it was. The actual event was an exhibition at the Wellcome Collection 'On Happiness'. It was really a valuable event. I'm really glad the Post-Grad Community team is arranging these mixer events to meet with like, people who have just starting out like you, and I got to meet you. And like, have you on this podcast. Which is great.

Najwa

Basically, I was afraid to, you know, to make new friends. But when I you know, when I attended that event, it was really useful for me, you know, to relax, and you know, to start getting know some people around. So that was really useful.

Yulin

Yeah, I agree. And also, having the event how that's such a cool and interesting exhibition, like, such a conversation starter as well. And like, see that everybody was making friends and like networking before and after, and that was really cool to see.

Yulin

Do you want to talk a little bit about where you're from? And how did you come to find this course at UAL?

Najwa

Yeah, of course, I'm from Kuwait. But originally, I'm Syrian-Egyptian. Originally a civil engineer, why I chose to take this course is because I initially wanted to be an architect. But somehow I ended up doing civil engineering which I found a little bit boring, to be honest. And I'm more into creative fields and making aesthetic things you know. So that's why I decided to defer my whole career to something related to art and design. I'm really interested in interior design. So I want to push interior architecture to limits where humans live comfortably and aesthetically pleased yet designing spaces innovatively.

Yulin

Oh, that sounds amazing. Can you explain like, what a civil engineer is for people who don't know.

Najwa

So civil engineering is basically when you know architects draw the building, right? And do the plans and so on. So we, civil engineers, we take those plans, and we design them but in a different aspect, which is related to steel. So I mean, we design the steel, we design the concrete, we design the building itself, how it's gonna work in real life.

Yulin

Mm hmm. So all the practical stuff.

Najwa

Exactly, the practical stuff, not related to art.

Yulin

Oh, wow. So how did you like discover that you were more interested in this creative side of it?

Najwa

As I mentioned before, I'm more into being a creative person. Okay, because I like to draw, I like to paint, I like to style and I used to create like events in my college and I used to design those kind of events. I mean, the interior of the events itself. From that point, I felt like that is the right career for me to be an interior architect.

Yulin

Oh my god, it's amazing that you were able to make such a bold choice from civil engineering to something so creative in the big university like UAL in London. So this is your first time in London or?

Najwa

Yes, it's my first time.

Yulin

How are you finding adjusting to the environment here?

Najwa

Okay. I'm not gonna lie. It's hard. It's hard. Because it's a whole different environment, you know? Well, I am enjoying my time here. And I have some tips for those who are moving for a first time in London, I can share some.

Yulin

Please do.

Najwa

The first thing guys, please arrange a place to stay as early as possible. Because I know a lot of people who couldn't find a proper place because they were, you know, late. And make sure to make a full research about the area and what services it has. And you know, if it's good for your preferences. And the public transportation thing as an example, the tube station is near or not? Because it's really important. Yeah. The other thing is, it's important to start organising all these basic things that make your life work. It will help you feel comfortable in your new surroundings and give you a sense of familiarity and stability, which I believe is really important in the early days, because moving to another country is a really big change, you know, so you have to be sure to start setting up all the things you need in your day to day life and prepare mentally for everything and take it slowly. Don't rush anything.

Yulin

Sounds like you're very prepared for this move.

Najwa

Yeah, exactly. I have to you know? Because I'm coming from a different background, you know?

Yulin

Definitely, yeah.

Najwa

And the other thing, it's really important to understand the cost of living, don't pay full the price for everything. Guys, there are a number of websites that have a great discount vouchers. And there's no shame using them. Because I think everyone in London does that right?

Yulin

For sure. Especially for students.

Najwa

Yeah, exactly. What else? Yeah, you have to know how to get around. I think your first port of call should be an off license to buy an Oyster card, which is used in place of paper tickets for the bus, train or tram. And guys, it will cost you five pounds for the card, which is refundable, and you can put credit on it, or buy a weekly/monthly/yearly pass. I think it's an important thing everyone has to know for who's you know, moving for a first time. Yeah, don't be afraid to make new friends. Yeah. And there are people in the same situation as me as you guys. So it's easy to make new friends in London, don't be stressed, don't be frustrated. Of course, you will meet like people when you start studying. But a few other great ways are to join, of course social events, like the Post-Grad mixer events. Right.

Yulin

Exactly, exactly. Yeah, I would have loved if that was happening when I first came here because I remember feeling so like oh my god panicky and a little bit when I first came here.

Najwa

Exactly. I felt that too. But just take it easy, guys. And I would also recommend reaching out to friends who live in London, or have lived in London before. And yeah, establish your social circle staying busy and getting out and about help you ease into your in your life. And that's it.

Yulin

Exactly. Yeah, that was super helpful. And it reminded me of when I first got here and I chose to be in the UAL student accommodation, just because it was the easiest thing. For any of that, but you're also in a student accommodation now. Are you?

Najwa

Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Yulin

And it's good because they have students... are they called reps? or people who are living in the same place as you?

Najwa

Yes. Yeah. People who help you and show you the stuff that you don't know and etc.

Yulin

Exactly. And so there's nothing to be afraid of. And they also have a full like, programme as well. And I keep seeing those images and it looks really exciting like the events that they put up. Yeah, okay, I'm really glad that you're settling in smoothly. It sounds like

Najwa

I'm trying my best,

Yulin

Oh my gosh. So how are you enjoying your course so far? Because I guess you've just started for

Najwa

Almost one month.

Yulin

Oh my gosh, a new course. So what have you been doing on your course? It's a very specialised course it sounds like?

Najwa

Yeah, it is. So you want me like to share my project right now?

Yulin

Yes, please.

Najwa

Yeah, okay, I did an art installation, which was basically about picking your favourite colour and represent what that colour means to you. So for me, I picked navy blue, which represent for me the sea and the sky at night since I'm coming from my country, which is all about the sea. Basically, what I did was I recreated that whole view by doing a 3d modelling for the beach wave. And the beach wave was created by using panels. And those panels were painted with gradient blue colours. So in the top, it was dark navy blue, and the colour became lighter and lighter and lighter when the panels you know, goes down. And yeah, currently, I'm working in a project, which is about designing a window for contemplation. I'm still developing this project. I'm not done with it. But I can say that initially, my idea is to create an organic design based on geometric lines driven from the plants and sand dunes. And yeah, it's still the beginning of the course. I don't have too much to share. I'm sorry about that.

Yulin

No, it sounds really exciting already. And it sounds like bringing in a lot of the outside indoors. Right.

Najwa

Exactly, exactly.

Yulin

And that's kind of the particular research interest you're interested in now.

Najwa

Yeah, is here on here. Architecture is really an amazing and very interesting field. Interior architecture basically allows you to show off your creative skills by designing you know, homes, offices, commercial places, like coffee shops, spas, or any functional spaces. They interact with a variety of clients to take on a new project. And every new task is challenging, actually, because it's different from the previous one, right. And it plays an important role in posting your creativity, with the increase in the demand for interior designing across different industries. It's the right time, I think, to consider this kind of career because it's really interesting. Also, this field has a large potential with various growth opportunities, you can enhance your skills, and take them to a new level, even if you don't want to be you know, a professional learning interior architect, but also it allows you to be creative with your own job. It doesn't consider to be only in designing homes or designing places you can, you know, design fashion shows, you can design furniture, pieces, textiles, because everything related to each other, you know.

Yulin

The way you're making me want to do this course now. Oh my gosh. So why do you think, oh, this is a kind of big question. Why do you think interior design is so important right now?

Najwa

These days, buildings keep on developing. They want everything to be modern, they want everything to be aesthetically pleasing. Everything driven from imaginary designs, nothing related to basic design. I think they did to all vintage designs. So people want to be pleased with arts, you know what I mean?

Yulin

Exactly, yeah.

Najwa

So right now, the industry itself, they're demanding more interior designs, more interior architects because they want to create more and more and more spaces.

Yulin

And I think also that having a meticulously designed interior space really impacts how people feel when they use that space, you know, as we are living in such a big city all the time, at least in London, and we're surrounded by interiors all the time. Yeah, a really interesting concept to think about. So how much of the practical side of things are in your course? Do you think about that still? Or is it purely creative?

Najwa

I think it's a mixture between creativity and practicality, because we are teaching both sides, you can't be only creative, you have to know all the practical work, because as an example, you want to design a door. Okay? You have to know the practical side of the door, right? What is the height of the door? What is the thickness of the door so you can choose one side and leave the other side.

Yulin

So it's amazing that you came in here with your civil engineering variance. So was it very hard to put together a portfolio for this course?

Najwa

No, it wasn't hard for me, because in civil engineering, they already teach you how to use AutoCAD, how to design plans how to design 3d modelling. I already know how to do all those stuff. But maybe the challenging aspect gonna be how to be more artistic how to be more creative, you know? Because learning is all about practicality, right? Oh, maybe this is the challenging part. But otherwise, no, it wasn't hard for me at least.

Yulin

Do you enjoy the challenge every time?

Najwa

Of course. It's not easy. I have to say it's not easy, but it's not hard. If you are passionate about something, I feel like you're gonna do great, whatever challenges you're gonna face. You know?

Yulin

That's so true. Yeah. I think to a certain extent, every practice does have that kind of challenge between the practical and the creative.

Najwa

If you set up your mind, if you put your mind in the game, you're gonna do great.

Yulin

Yes, that's very encouraging. To hear that. Because, you know, and MA fine art, which is what I do, you know, yeah, to think about, you know, how to set up a painting or an installation. And that's what I'm struggling with right now.

Najwa

With practicality, right?

Yulin

Because I'm kind of like almost the opposite. As you I don't really know how to think about the practicalities that much. Yeah. Really more.

Najwa

I feel like you're gonna do great. You're gonna do great.

Yulin

Oh, my gosh. Also, I was curious about how your course is operating is that a lot of individual work or some group work as well.

Najwa

It's like a mixture. It's a mixture, because I have some group work. And I have an individual works. But mainly it's an individual works, because they want us everyone of us to show their creativity side. So mainly, it's an individual work. Yeah.

Yulin

And was the art installation an individual work?

Najwa

Yes, it was.

Yulin

So what kind of group work were there so far?

Najwa

Mainly research project, like I have a research project, which is about taking a furniture piece and study that furniture piece. How did they use it before and how it's being used right now. So that was a research project. And it was a group project.

Yulin

So it's very, like particular, you're researching a furniture piece? Yeah. Yeah. And that is part of interior design as well.

Najwa

Of course, because you have to know every aspect practical athletic architecture, aspect. Textile aspect.

Yulin

Hmm. I can't wrap my head around it because, you know, I'm quite foreign to the whole interior design.

Najwa

It's not, it's interesting.

Yulin

It sounds amazing, like so you think about not only the actual space, but also the things inside the space. Right?

Najwa

Of course, you have to deal with everything, the interior, the exterior, everything.

Yulin

Wow, it's so cool that you're so passionate about this. Did you always know that you were interested in designing spaces? Or did you grow up to be like, all creative as well?

Najwa

I would say box because I wanted in the first place to be an architect.

Yulin

Right? One like out the womb? You're like, I want to be an artist.

Najwa

Exactly. But unfortunately, I ended up being a civil engineer. But yeah, that's fine. I guess what's

Yulin

The main difference between the architects and the civil engineer.

Najwa

Civil engineer, it's more about the practical aspect. Because it's all about calculating, it's all about dealing with the physics of the building with the mathematics of the building. It's all about the numbers. If you want to build a building, you have to calculate the strength of the building, what kind of concrete as an example you have to use, what kind of steel you have to use. And it's all about, you know, physics and architecture is about drawing, designing the building deal with structure at all, unlike civil engineering, they deal with structure and this kind of boring stuff. I have to say, I'm sorry.

Yulin

No, I'm so impressed that you're able to do that. Did other are the people on your course coming into this with similar experience? Or?

Najwa

No, no, they they have different backgrounds. Some of them are architects, some of them are already interior designers. And some of them are from a whole different career. Some of them are doing business and accounting things that are not related to art at all, nor an engineering aspect, you know?

Yulin

Well, that's really interesting. Post grad courses, you always get a lot of people from different backgrounds and ages and experiences and that's so cool when you're like networking and making friends.

Najwa

The other thing it helps you to expand your knowledge. That's right. Important designing anything you have to know other point of view?

Yulin

Yeah. And I'm sure in your industry, you have to network with a lot of other people as well, right?

Najwa

Oh, of course. Yeah. You have to.

Yulin

Would you say that's easy for you?

Najwa

I think, yeah, it's easy because my Bachelor University, I used to work in Engineering Society, and American Institute for concrete. I used to deal with a lot of people. So it's not hard for me at least. But I think it would be hard a little bit for other people to interact with someone from a whole different background, a whole different mindset. But I think it's through maybe it's a bit challenging, but it's interesting, and it's really useful. It's, it's not scary at all, you know.

Yulin

And, you know, because I'm pretty introverted.

Najwa

I am permitted to, but yeah, I think you have to step out of your comfort zone you will live in probably have to deal with the environment, because you're a quasi graduate student, right? You have to start build your connection. So it's gonna help you later on in your career,

Yulin

It's just that thing where you know, you're going into an industry where having a good expanding network will only help you. And yeah, it's, it's been hard for me, honestly. But it's like little baby steps, you know, and some people might find it easier to make friends online. Like, you don't have to always be like, the social butterfly who was always talking to everyone.

Najwa

You don't have to be like 100%, extrovert, you can you guys still have friends, you can still build your connection, even if you're an introvert, or you feel like I can't mingle with people, you know? Just take the first step, and it's going to be smaller.

Yulin

Exactly. I'm trying to think of tips for fellow introverts out there. But I sometimes find it easier to maybe DM people, like, for example, like after an exhibit, I'll be like, really loved your work today, you know? Yeah, just little connections like that.

Najwa

I would say just start slowly, you don't have to get into like a big crew immediately, you can start start knowing like small groups, small amount of people. And by the time you're gonna have more like abilities to get involved more into bigger and bigger groups.

Yulin

Exactly. And a lot of things like that happen by you know, one person and that person knows another person.

Najwa

Exactly, and that's how you expand your, you know, your connection.

Yulin

And also, like, remembering that not everybody is for you, you know, you don't have to be like, like everybody as well.

Najwa

You don't have to like everyone, guys. No, everyone has to like you. It's fine. Go out. Enjoy your time know people, and you can you know, get closer to whoever you feel more comfortable with.

Yulin

Yeah. Sounds like you're having a great time in London so far, then. Well, I hope you have an amazing rest of the course. Because it's a short course, isn't it? It's only a year?

Najwa

Yeah, it's it's a one year programme. Yeah.

Yulin

I hope you make as many friends as you want to in this time and hope it goes within this not too stressful.

Najwa

Thank you. I hope so.

Yulin

But yeah, I think you gave a lot of useful tips today.

Najwa

I hope I was helpful today. So yeah. Suntory take it easy and enjoy your time.

Yulin

Yes. Thank you so much for being here with me today.

Najwa

Thank you for having me thank you so much. I really had so much fun with you. Thank you.

Yulin

Thank you, then have a nice rest of the day, then.

Najwa

You, too. Thank you.

Yulin

Okay, bye.

Yulin

I hope you guys enjoy the chat I had with Najwa. It was fascinating to hear more about interior architecture and spatial design course at Chelsea. And of course, it was super refreshing to hear from someone who has just started their course, and how they've been adjusting to living in London. And remember, you can always contact the UML student advice service if you are feeling a bit lost or having a difficult time. They're always very helpful from counselling to be sent financed queries, etc. And of course keep a lookout for those social programme events as well as our post grad mixer events, to meet new people and make new connections that hopefully make London feel just a bit more like home. But yeah, I hope you're enjoying the start of the academic year and wish you a smooth rest of the course no matter how far you are in it. All right. Bye.