

# Ann Walsh

804 572-9558

ann@thestudiojones.com

www.thestudiojones.com

## Teaching Philosophy

Learning is a four part process. A student must be introduced to new concepts and techniques, given space to explore these new ideas, practice using them and have their use reviewed. I like to use the learning of language as an analogy. As a baby, we have no words; slowly we are introduced to new ones. We try them out and mix them up and see what response we get from the people around us. When we get the response we want, we know we are using our language correctly. In sculpture, I view materials and techniques as words. The students need to have a good base of knowledge in the materials and techniques that are available to them, so that when they have something to say they know how to say it.

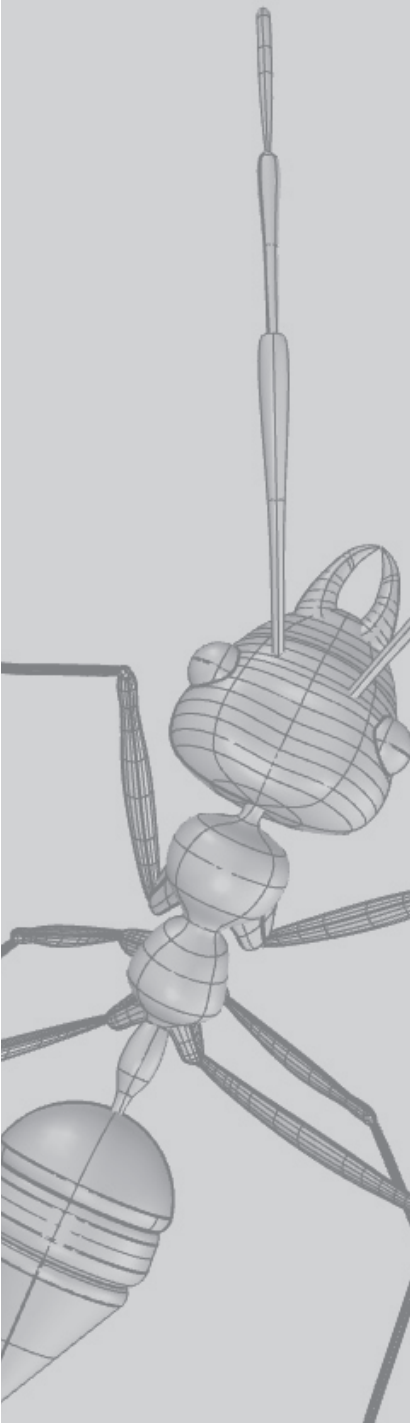
As a teacher of both furniture design and sculpture, I find that using the four part guideline allows me to create curricula that can be adapted to both disciplines. There are broad skills that are important in the two, such as, curiosity, discipline, problem solving and decision making, and there are disparities. Furniture design as an applied art is more constrained by functionality, while sculpture is more visceral and intuitive. I have what I like to think of as a curriculum template that I use and can adjust to fit either discipline.

Through my experience I have discovered that it works well to set up a schedule that includes the completion of three projects, interspersed with exercises that allow the exploration of different methods and concepts. The three projects begin with a prompt or list of optional prompts devised to start the brainstorming process, followed by a sketch critique. This sketch critique is important to inspire interaction between students and to stimulate curiosity. A direction for the project is then decided on based on what the student wants to do and what I deem is feasible in the allotted time frame. In my advanced furniture design classes I have a policy that requires the students to build what they propose; I feel that this is important because they will eventually have clients that will expect the piece as it was proposed to them. In the introductory levels of woodworking and in sculpture I give them more freedom to see where the building process takes them. This is important in woodworking because it allows the student to get a better feel for what wood can do. Sculpture is more of an intuitive process and I know in my own work much of the afflatus occurs during fabrication.

My goal with my curriculum is to keep ideas and projects malleable in a strict environment. I set up rules about how the studio runs, students are required to be present and on time and I am very strict about deadlines. I give detailed prompts for assignments to inspire students at the beginning of projects but allow them to veer off if they can offer me a convincing argument. This allows them to explore options that they themselves are interested in, which keeps them excited about their work while allowing me the oversight to make sure that they are learning what they need to.

A large part of my teaching ideology is peer review; critiques are the exams of the art school. If run correctly, they allow a student important feedback about their work from classmates and the professor. This relates back to figuring out if they are using their new language correctly. Critiques also provide me, the professor, a chance to gauge the understanding my students have of the new concepts and techniques that were covered, as well as informing me of what they still need to learn. I know when I am succeeding as a teacher when my students are intrigued by what they are learning, well spoken about why they are making and sincerely proud of what they have accomplished.

It is in my nature to always try to make things better and more efficient. My teaching skills get more refined every year as I am constantly looking for ways to improve by observing and interacting with other teachers, and by using my



student evaluations to find problem spots. I have always enjoyed teaching; when I started I felt like it was my job to teach the students everything, very quickly and immediately and try to cram as much as possible into a semester. Now I know that each student has a team of teachers and it is my job as a member of that team to teach my part very well. This has tempered my approach and made me more focused on the critical lessons in my area. It is my hope that in doing so I can help my students make the necessary connections to what they are learning in their other classes.

It is important to me that the students leave my classes having enhanced their curiosity, discipline, decision making ability, problem solving skills, and rulebreaking acumen. Curiosity is crucial because it will keep them moving forward, even after they graduate. Discipline and confidence in their decisions establishes good working habits which will allow them to succeed in whatever they do. Problem-solving will provide them the ability to keep teaching themselves. Being able to judge when and how to successfully break rules is imperative for innovation in any specialty. I feel it is my job to establish in my students the skills and habits that will make them successful wherever they end up.

