



## *'An interior design course helped me turn my passion into a business'*

Alison Dow tells how KLC School of Design gave her the know-how to start afresh in her fifties

Over the years, I have had many different homes and enjoyed renovating them, changing the looks and colour schemes. My husband and I bought a large, run-down house in the South of France, overlooking Pampelonne Beach and the Mediterranean, which we renovated to become one of the top hotels in St Tropez. We had no experience in running a hotel, but created a place that we would like to stay in and, luckily, this attracted like-minded guests. This is when my passion for interior design really came through.

The hotel gave me great creative scope to try different interior schemes and colours, but I also had to bear in mind the practical requirements of our guests. There were endless schemes to experiment with, and each year I would change the decor and improve the bedrooms, garden, pool, terrace... I commissioned sculptures and fountains for the garden, designed a

new veranda and improved the look of the hotel. Throughout all the creativity, it is important not to lose sight of practicality. I thought about all the places I had stayed in, where I couldn't plug my hairdryer near a mirror, or there was not enough hanging space in the wardrobe, and how much it affected my mood. The mantra I still work with on all my projects is "the

space has to look good and work!"

The hotel was a great success and when we sold it in 2012, we had some very sad guests who had become

our friends. I returned to London single, ready for a fresh start and determined to follow my passion for interiors. I'd had a lot of practical experience but wanted the technical know-how to back it up. Technical drawing, lighting schemes, plumbing, making mood boards are all things a client would expect the designer to know.

KLC was excellent in every way – an intensive course and a small class

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of determined designers who wanted to learn everything in the shortest time. The course consumed our lives – we had no time for anything else. It was so exhilarating and challenging, and there was a great camaraderie. I remember running out of planning paper in the middle of the night, just before a deadline. I called a classmate who lived not too far from me, jumped in a cab, grabbed some paper from her and was back at my drawing board for a sleepless night in order to hand in my design the next morning.

As I'm in my fifties, no one would employ me, but also I didn't want a full-time job. I'm now my own boss and work with other freelancers who can supplement my skills for the projects, which have been so diverse – from an Art Deco hospital conversion to a small bedroom conversion – I love it all.

I love the satisfaction of finishing a job with a happy client, and would sum up my appeal as innovative but ever practical. I enjoy being thrifty by renovating a client's old pieces, the ones that were going to the tip, such as picture frames and old mirrors. These can be like new with a makeover. I'm always happy when I've made someone else happy! **w&h**

Alison completed a 12-week Certificate Course in Interior Design at KLC School of Design, London. Fee £8,995. The school also offers a range of different qualifications.

The British Academy of Interior Design offers certificate courses in interior design at its London and Manchester locations. A three-month classroom-based course is £795.

Inchbald School of Design offers ten-week interior decoration certificate courses, fee £7,828. Also various online interior design and decoration courses, from £1,260.

Many universities offer short courses in interior design, from introductory to advanced level.