

Students take architecture lessons to the bank

NAIT competition brings fresh ideas to CWB redesign

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Published: Thursday, February 3, 2011



Michelle Wiese displays her redesign for an environmentally redesign of Edmonton's main Canadian Western Bank.

Photograph by: Nathan Liewicki , The Journal

Second-year NAIT architectural design student Michelle Wiese was surprised to win a competition to come up with a more environmentally sustainable redesign of the Canadian Western Bank's Edmonton main branch.

"I was just gunning for third," Wiese said with a laugh.

She was one of about 90 second-year architectural design students at NAIT who entered the competition. On Thursday, the top 20 designs were recognized by the bank's senior vice-president, Jack Wright. The 10 finalists received cash prizes totalling \$8,500, with Wiese awarded \$2,000 for her efforts.

"We found that all strategies were creative and well thought out, and we'll take those ideas with us as we build more branches," Wright said of the finalists' designs.

He said it must have been somewhat daunting for the students to present their concepts in front of so many people in suits, but he thinks they gained some necessary experience.

"This was a valuable client-student interaction that you wouldn't find in a classroom," Wright said of the competition. "The designs were all functional to what would make a branch recognizable in a real environment."

When asked why Wiese's design won out over the others, Wright said she came closest to the environmental and eco-friendly initiatives the bank wants in its new building. Other things that stood out in Wiese's design were the artistic features that coupled with sustainability practices such as natural light, water conservation and natural materials, and met most of the city's building codes.

"It was a pretty even competition, and I guess the bank liked what they saw in my design," said Wiese, who will have the chance to present her design concepts to the architectural firm overseeing the renovations.

Wiese now thinks architecture is a career she wants to pursue.

"I would definitely like to go far in the profession, and maybe even go to architecture school," she said.

"Before, I was only interested in residential designing, but I'm now interested in commercial architecture too."

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