



## Is it all about Hand Drawing?

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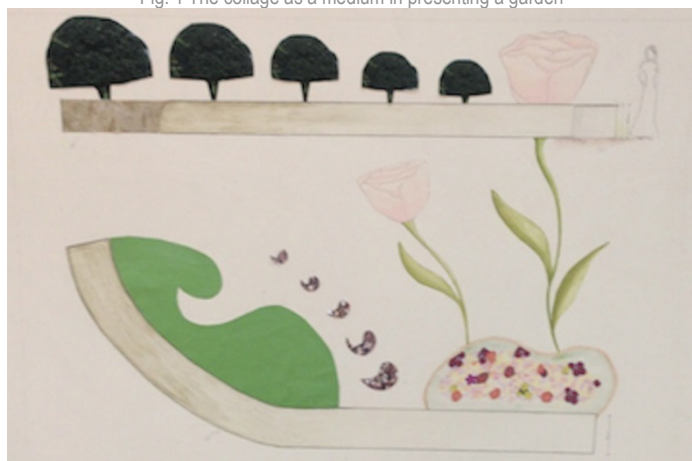
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**Abstract** Mo Zell in her book – The Architectural Drawing Course – states that “However, repeated construction of drawings will not necessarily result in becoming a good architect, although it might produce a good draughtsman”. She then adds that drawings and models can reinforce a designer’s ideas through presentational intention. But she also argues that “hand drawing provides the most direct way to transfer thoughts onto paper. The knowledge of how to construct three-dimensional images, to think using your hand on paper, and to analyse ideas through sketches provide an excellent foundation for architectural design” (Zell, 2011).

In interior design courses and studio projects the situation is similar. Why is hand drawing fundamental? What does hand drawing convey when it comes to presentation or expressing design ideas? Why do some students feel unconfident when it comes to hand drawings? More importantly, what do they do to express their ideas and projects effectively?

This paper explores these queries through student’s experiences in a design studio within the discipline of interior design. The main focus is to examine the means they have used in their projects and its functionality in expressing their ideas. Although the course project is not identical to the students, the case studies in this paper highlight some cases of students who tend not to use hand drawing in the final presentation. The cases chosen are of students’ projects and are a reflection of three years’ experience working in different courses. The study reflects their thoughts and opinions towards hand drawing, and explores some presentation techniques that students prefer. Moreover, it articulates the teacher’s observation and analysis, and the development of students’ knowledge and visualization. Finally, the outcome of the study endeavours to contribute to current research on conceptual presentation and its potential role in interior design.

Fig. 1 The collage as a medium in presenting a garden



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## Introduction

Architectural drawing, and hand drawing in particular, have been a part of the traditional teaching system in architecture studies for centuries (Celis, 2007). Judith Burton in the preface of the conference proceedings for “Thinking Through Drawing: Practice into Knowledge”, claims that drawing is an activity that is engaged in by a wide spectrum of individuals from artists to surgeons, psychologists to knitters, whose serious investigations offer a fundamental re-evaluation of its practices as medium and discipline. Whereas, Barbra Tversky describes drawing as the manifestation and extension of internal thought processes. Drawing offers an extension of memory and a place to generate and play with ideas (Kantrowitz et al., 2011).

Drawing has migrated from a support practice within the fine arts tradition to that of an independent medium. It provides a working compromise for many of the hardest issues of knowledge representation. This paper explores the role of hand drawing through student experiences in a design studio within the discipline of interior design. The main focus is to examine the means being used to express the designer’s thoughts and ideas. The focus of the study reflects students’ feedback as potential for further research. Taking that into consideration; students with the ability to draw perfectly are more likely to be chosen in the admission interview of art and design. Some schools use the ability, if not the perfection, of hand drawing as an indicator of success in design and architecture. This analysis demonstrates how the students navigate through this difficulty until they graduate. It highlights the backgrounds of the case studies’ educational environment and other factors that may have been influential. The analysis also illustrates the strategies being used throughout the study to obtain an in-depth discussion. Although the study is limited to the specific environment, the conclusion may be applicable to similar situations in academia.

## Context

Since 2009 I have developed a series of practical courses in the Interior Design (ID) program at Umm alQura University in Makkah. In that same year, the ID major started in the university for the first time within the female section only. It is worth noting that the first year of the program focuses on art courses, and the interior design division starts in the second year and continues through to the fourth year. That is, ID as a major continues for three years. The number of students was small in the first class. In the first year seven students joined, seven in the second year and thirteen students in the third year. Each year, there is one student who tends to avoid hand drawing and uses other medium in the final presentation. The case studies discussed in this paper have already graduated except for the last one who will graduate at the end of this term.

The students, Tasneem, Wajd and Moudi, were observed during the period when I was teaching them, and for at least one course per term until their graduation. This study analyzes their work from the level-four studios and the last one before the final term (level seven). It also includes other courses which I taught and observed as well. The images analyzed were from studio courses that lasted for five to six hours and the other courses with three hours minimum per week. Specific questions were put to each student to investigate the reasons behind their attitudes towards hand drawing in design presentation. The questions are the following:

- Why you do not rely on hand drawing to express your ideas, and tend to avoid it?
- Do you feel scared in expressing your ideas via hand drawing? Or do you think you are not good at it? Or do you think you cannot draw perfectly?
- How do you like to express your design thoughts and ideas? That is, what kind of medium do you like to use in order to express your designs, and why?
- Do you think that digital drawings and computer software are easy to use, and can express more than hand drawings?
- How did you present your final project, and why?
- Do you think that poor skill in hand drawing is a barrier to creativity, that is, if I cannot draw perfectly I cannot be creative!

Each year-group presented a different set of current issues and priorities, and different groups of students. This meant I had to adapt and up-grade every time, to re-assess and adjust the way to present different subjects and the most useful applications to be made. The study presents some of the challenges I encountered as a teacher and some of the results I experienced during these years.

### Case studies

Tasneem, from the first class, graduated in 2011. She managed to develop her style and technique from the early stages. Once she realised that she was not good at hand drawing, she started to teach herself computer software such as SketchUp and AutoCAD – from level four – and before her peers started. Tasneem learned how to use computers in her presentations before the course “Design Computer Applications” in level six. From level four, she managed to present her project of the first studio digitally. She is a computer addict, as she acknowledged, and a good self-learner. Due to that fact, she was in the first group who joined the class that I was concentrating on, as a teacher, to see the fruit of the new Major. It was easy and convenient to observe and support them, I simply showed them the directions to take so that they could discover the jewel inside them and get it polished.

Tasneem prefers to express herself with images, videos or digital media and tends not to tell stories or write a lot. Even her answers to the questions were short and precise. She manages to mix software together and jump from one application to another and play with sound and cinema as well. For instance, in a project to analyze local and Islamic motifs, she explored ornamentalations digitally and turned the two dimensional motif into a three dimensional one to observe broadly (al-Murahhem, 2011). She then managed to develop this motif in another project in the next level (Fig. 2). Tasneem’s answers reveal that she does not like drawing in the first place because it is complicated and it does not reflect her. She adds, *“I do not have the mood to enjoy drawing, and if I have had the ability to draw I would not feel scared. Frankly, I prefer to visualize my ideas digitally, in which I feel more realistic and challenging”*. Tasneem thinks that digital presentation is a must in any design project. She asserts *“I do not think that creativity should be through hand drawing. If hand drawings were a necessity, it would be a barrier for me to visualize thoughts and demonstrate final ideas. Everyone can be creative with the medium one chooses and enjoys working with. For me digital presentation is my arena where I can manipulate”*.

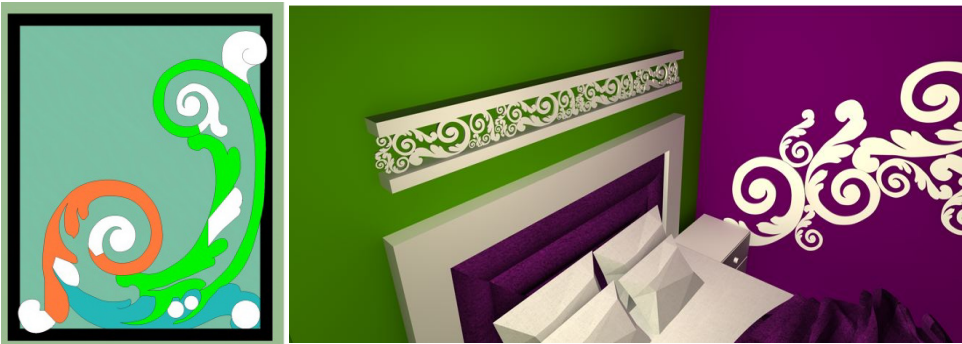


Fig. 2 the local motif in 3D form and its application on the final project

Wajd from the second class graduated in 2012. She believed that she could not draw properly and tended to use collage in her drawings. Although as a teacher I found that she has great ideas and she is up to date when it comes to current trends and design. Assessing her among her peers was different and difficult. For instance, in one of the assignments of designing a garden Wajd presented the project using collage instead of a mere drawing. She drew the plan and the elevation

of the seating area and completed the bigger image in collage (Fig. 1). She said, *“I don't have the ability to convey my ideas and designs through hand drawing. I used other easy media and techniques to express myself effectively and clearly”*. Wajd chose to draw simple sketches to reflect her ideas, in which the sketches did not have to be perfect. She claimed that *“these are sketches and not paintings or perfect drawings. I do not think that the interior designer has to be perfect in executing drawings.”* To clarify her thoughts and designs she expresses ideas through images or videos accompanied with simple sketches. She believed that she was not good at drawing, which is why she explored an interesting way to express herself. Wajd tended to use collage in her presentation to add beauty to the sketches, in which she felt satisfied. In another project she designed a Gift Shop and presented it in a different way (Fig. 3). She was trying to draw an axonometric presentation to visualize her project with a touch of collage and some colours to illustrate the colour scheme. This simple illustration was to give an idea of the layout of the shop, but the rest of the project contains drawings and concept boards which helped to give a complete idea of the whole assignment.

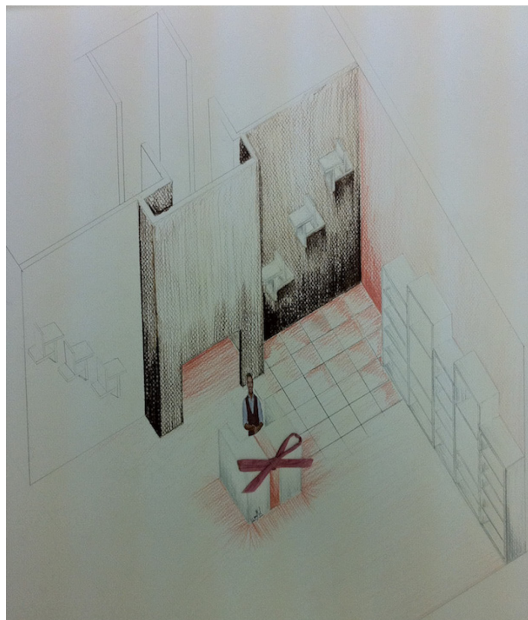


Fig. 3 The collage touch in one of Wajd' project (Gift Shop)

In another project Wajd was examining and analysing local motifs where she used photos and sketches together (Fig. 4). She uses a unique way of presentation, which involves collage but each time it is used differently. For her, using collage is an easy and interesting technique and she enjoyed it tremendously. She also tends to tell stories with her collage presentation. The collage was a critical tool of twentieth century architects, and through architectural drawings of a certain kind, stories can be told. In the final project Wajd used SketchUp and 3D application to present her ideas in which she succeeded. She announced *“It is much easier than I could have had imagined.”* She had refused to use the computer before and relied more on images expression. This time, she managed to present her project perfectly in a digital form. She admitted that she could not imagine that digital drawing was straightforward and expresses ideas efficiently. This final project was her first experience relying on digital drawings completely. She was fairly satisfied because digital drawings can mimic reality in building three-dimensional spaces. Such

drawings save time and effort, and they are easy to modify compared to hand drawing which could be a barrier for her, as she mentioned.



Fig. 4 The mixed media in one of Wajd projects

Moudi from the third class will graduate at the end of the second term of 2013. She thinks that hand drawing is not convenient for her to express her thoughts and designs. Moudi says *“I cannot convey my ideas through hand drawing, but with making models or three dimensional illustrations I can do.”* She tends to tell stories of her thoughts and ideas and expresses more in speaking. Moudi admits that her drawings would not express what she wants. This is the rationale for her tendency to make models or projected elevations with some images to visualize more. For instance, in her project of designing a light shop she used a combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms to present the shop elevations. She presented the elevations with cardboard being cut as a semi projected elevations, and the ceiling treatment in the same way (Fig. 5). Even when she illustrates the perspective, she draws it with its depth and cuts it in the same way with cardboard (Fig. 6). Although it takes time to draw the grid and the perspective and then to cut the cardboard in a semi-model perspective, she trusts this way of presentation. With models and semi-models technique she can visualize her thoughts and ideas more realistically than through mere drawing. More importantly, she enjoys making models to move furniture as objects within the space and to test location quickly. Moudi utilizes digital drawings as an easy way to imagine the space in three dimensions rather than in a two-dimensional scope. As she uses digital presentation in her final project, she acknowledges that she prefers to make models with real materials. She then adds that the effect of materials and real colours would be a problem and would not be demonstrated perfectly as in building a digital environment. Making models takes time; but it builds a real world.

The last two students tended to tell stories with the medium they choose. They try to visualize ideas within the space in a way that hand drawing cannot. The first student chooses the digital presentation and depends on images to tell the story. Today’s CAD systems can provide sophisticated drawing and support this notion. It seems that the more you become a digital oriented person; the less you tell stories.



Fig. 5 Elevations and ceiling treatment of Moudi's project (Light Shop)

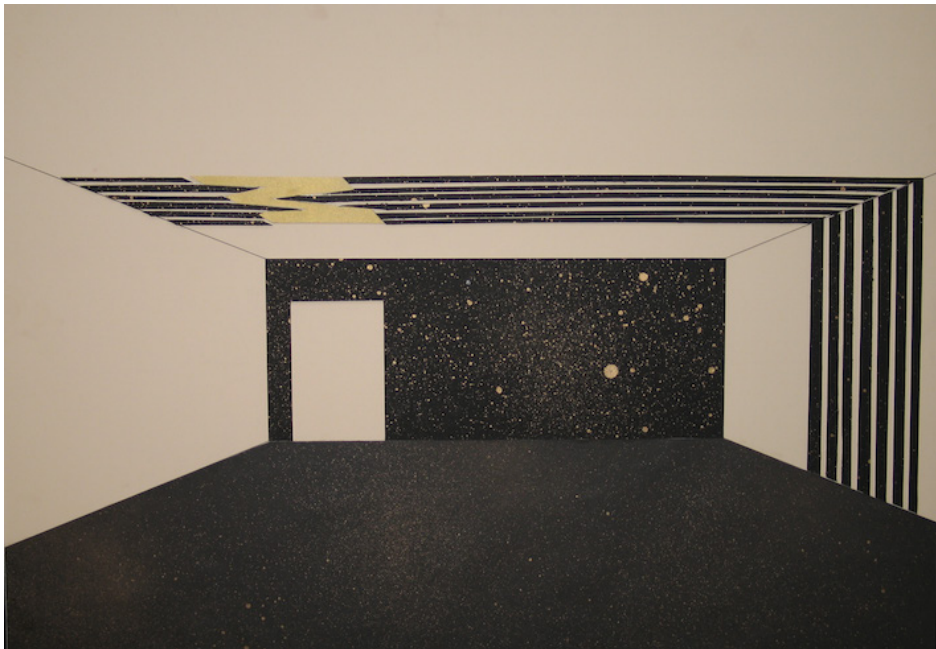


Fig. 6 Perspective of the "Light Shop"

## Discussion

No doubt, the role of hand drawing is effective in many disciplines. However, it is not an essential factor for creativity as the case studies demonstrate. Although drawing is a thinking tool and a way to develop cognitive skills and process, a compromise medium could be effective to finish the job. Some who believe that drawing is an important tool for improving brain function, not only as a means of expression of our thinking, but also a way of thinking about form and space, and that this applies to all, not only architects and designers. On the other hand, digital technologies in architectural design have increased in the recent years. New tools enable architects/designers to produce exact drawings, faster and easier. Computers offer an undoubted support during the design phase and for the composition of the construction documentation

(Panait, 2012). These visualization tools are important in terms of visual expression, client understanding and visual ‘connection.’ with a project. It is also important to utilize these tools to enhance experiential interior architectural elements, translating those elements from virtual three-dimensional forms to physical built environments (McAuliffe, 2007). This study is not for or against digital presentation because architecture presentation can be through drawing (hand, digital) or a combination of both.

The study underlines the role and the purpose of drawing in the education of design and architecture. This is evident in confronting the students’ answers and genuine reactions. For instance, Tasneem claims that she does not like or enjoy drawing, and if she had the ability to draw she would not feel scared. Whereas, Wajd stresses that she does not have the ability to convey ideas and thoughts through hand drawing only. Consequently, one needs to examine who is to blame regarding this fear? Perhaps this is an indication of the lack of hand drawing education within the program! From experience, I suggest that computer skills ought to be taught earlier than level six in the program. However, this does not mean that this skill will be used as a substitute for hand-drawn sketches. Hand drawing courses are a requirement in the foundation or the first years of the program. We may however, need more courses on hand drawing from early stages to train students and build up their confidence in this capability. The skill of hand drawing ought to be enhanced and taught effectively. For brevity, the drawing language captures a great deal of the ‘common sense’ knowledge of the building process. It also addresses many of the difficult problems of the design. Being within the Art Education Department may confuse the students in learning some irrelevant courses. However, intensive hand drawing courses could be learnt in this stage where the students can build confidence in their own styles. It is important to take into consideration that success and fulfillment do not necessarily mean that students have to follow the teachers’ aspiration.

Although students managed to handle the situation to express their ideas, as a teacher I admit the struggle in reviewing and marking on the final. Students also admit difficulty and misjudgment when they confront teachers who rely on a specific medium of presentations, rather than allowing them to be themselves. Teachers’ understanding through this process is crucial; otherwise, students’ originality cannot be discovered. Teachers ought to be passive and focus on guiding and supporting the student and prepare a proper environment for learning. That is, enriched learning environments contain more tools, means, mediums where the student has more interest on retaining control of the environment (Ucar & Kandemir, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Zell claims that to be a good architect or a designer is different to being a draftsman. This study finds that the necessity of perfection of drawing skills in the admission interview for art, design and architecture schools may seem groundless. New horizons should be opened where students are able to choose between hand drawing and digital presentation. Having this experience with the students, I perceive the importance of hand drawing in general and in design in particular. I also think that it is a matter of training, supporting and encouraging students within academia. Students can handle both skills as long as they have teachers understanding and genuine support.

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