

Cranbrook design students solid thinkers

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH

The uninitiated may think Cranbrook Academy of Art embraces a flock of avant-garde thinkers who ponder the celestial qualities of oranges. Students Jim Andral and Paul Sedan would dispute that notion.

Sure, they are involved with theoretical questions, they admit, but there is much more to it.

"The design program tries to make everything as relevant as possible," said Sedan. He is working under the Michigan Council for the Arts (MCA) grant to develop a new MCA learning kit for use at the middle school level.

Sedan's particular field of interest is graphic design and audio-visual presentations. He is involved in developing three-dimensional design, furniture, exhibits, multi-media shows and environmental design.

"THERE IS a little bit of each of these areas in the curriculum. We do theoretical work as well as some freelance which pays a small honorarium. It is a pretty intensive program which keeps us working for from six to seven hours per day six days per week," he said.

Andral said that Cranbrook Art Academy (CAA) affords him the luxury of theoretical work in architecture which would be impossible in a business setting.

"The environmental issues, for instance, are things which very few offices would be able to find time to work on. Mostly they are problems which confront the public sector client who most offices do not have time to service," Andral said.

Andral is employed as a designer by Rosetti Assoc., Detroit.

It is very beneficial to be con-

fronted with the realities of a real job — the codes, budget — all the built-in constraints which preclude experimentation," Andral said.

Both suggested that Cranbrook is best for people who've already had some practical experience. "There was a student last year who was disappointed by the architecture program. He'd received a bachelor's in liberal arts and wanted a degree in architecture from Cranbrook," Andral said.

"INSTEAD HE found that Cranbrook is theory-oriented. Gerald Exline (CAA's architecture department head) and all of us in the department are involved, in a small part, in creating a propaganda center for the creation of what the future building and living environment can be," Andral said.

Likewise, Sedan said the design department concerns itself with "honest" design, i.e., experimental work trying to get away from an automatic design attitude to consider the different contingencies.

"We are after designing for people. The user is the one who should be most taken into consideration. The elderly and the handicapped are two areas of people who are not designed for. Think of left-handed people, too."

"Black people also have specific needs in clothing design. Kitchens aren't designed for the user and cars aren't designed for people, either," Sedan said.

"Tools are the best example of 'honest' design," he concluded, "because they don't pretend to be something they aren't."

"WHEN WORKING in a business situation you are fairly limited in

being experimental. The pressure of time is there. The client always wants everything yesterday, for instance. Also you have the handicap of working in a conservative atmosphere, for the most part.

"At Cranbrook you have more time to take new approaches and it is a period of reassessment for me," Sedan said.

Previously, he had learned design on the job, with very little academic training, he said.

"When I was laid off from the public relations firm for whom I was working, I looked all over for a new job. The prospects weren't grim. It gave me some time to do some introspective thinking about where I wanted to be," Sedan said.

Andral is spotlighting on commercial strip development at Cranbrook. "I am working on the alternatives to this rather innocuous being," he said.

"Commercial growth has been so rapid and so ugly without planning. The systems don't work. There is traffic congestion, signage doesn't work and the direction is rather limited. Here we are chafing what we can do to make the strips which already exist more aesthetically pleasing and still work as commercial centers," Andral said.

"RIGHT NOW I am just studying. I have come to conclusions about it. It may take me the rest of my life. It all kind of centers on the ramifications of contemporary growth problems — the limits of growth and land use, for instance.

"Architects have to be practical. The image of the architect for most people is the man in the flowing cape — Frank Lloyd Wright, with his sketch-

book. But today that is an erroneous assumption. You can't convince a man who's going to spend \$5 million to build someone else's dream.

"I don't think you could find a better place in the country than Cranbrook for architects. It is such an incredibly marvelous architectural environment. Here you are constantly reminded of what architecture can be."

He said most people don't live in an architect-designed environment. Most cities, he said, are not reflective of architecture and that's because there's very little architectural input into their planning.

"There's an awful lot good about downtown Detroit. I'm not saying this because I work for Rosetti, but what he's done — to change an old garage into a good working environment — is what could be done in many areas of Detroit.

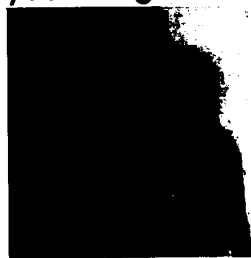
"WITH THE energy crisis, the suburban sprawl will end and people will return to the city to be closer to where they work. There are an awful lot of buildings downtown which are underused. The potential for Detroit is mar-

velous — whether they use the potential is something else," Andral concluded.

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