

# All by design

*Catholic Central grad on his way towards architectural career*



Photo by Lindsay Hanifan

*St. Clair College graduate Allen Lui, left, is off to Dalhousie University to pursue an architecture degree but comes back to Catholic Central on a fairly regular basis to visit his favourite former teacher Josh Spina, right.*

(Windsor, Ontario, Friday, Feb. 22, 2018) – For someone who ‘accidentally’ ended up in a high school design course, Allen Lui has done all right for himself.

“I had to take one more class in Grade 11 and this was the only one that was open,” Lui says of Josh Spina’s technology design course at Catholic Central High School.

It turned out to be the best twist of fate that ever happened to the 21-year-old international student, who will graduate from the St. Clair College architectural technology program this spring with a 3.98 GPA before heading off to Dalhousie University in September to pursue a degree in architecture and community design.

Lui came to Catholic Central in 2013 from Beijing, China and was part of the early first wave of international students to enroll in WECDSB high schools. His father is a civil engineer and his mother is an urban planner, but his parents, who still live in China, were both adamant about him studying business.

Originally struggling with English and trying to find his way, he had signed up for three courses at CCHS when his guidance counselor explained that he needed one more. Even though he was technically in Grade 11, he decided to take Spina's Grade 10 design course, a technology class that's focused on acquiring basic architectural skills such as manual sketching, floor plans, elevations and the use of AutoCAD.

Lui took to the course like a duck to water, and so Spina entered him in the Get Skilled competition at St. Clair College, an annual contest that happens this year on March 24. His entry of a floor plan and four elevation drawings earned him second place in his category and a \$500 entrance scholarship.

"He had only been in Canada for six months, so that was a real boost to his confidence," said Spina, who is now in his eleventh year in teaching with the WECDSB, nine of which have been spent at CCHS.

In his second year in the competition, Lui took first place and ended with \$1,500 in scholarship money. After taking two more courses with Spina, he graduated in 2014 and went to St. Clair.

"It's a tough program," Lui said of his college experience. "They want to make sure you're serious about it. Most people think college will be easier than university. No way."

Besides all of the skills that he learned from Spina, Lui said that his teacher also provided him with all of the motivation and mental toughness that he needed to succeed at the post-secondary level.

"He told us that it wasn't going to be easy," he said, adding that Spina's class, which still has 'old-school' drafting tables, actually provided him with a competitive edge because of its focus on manual drawing and other fundamentals. "If you don't do the manual part of it, you'll never appreciate the computerized part of it."

Of course, Lui isn't the only student of Spina's to experience success. In 2014, then-Grade 12 student Marco Angione topped 600 other entrants and won a \$2,500 US first-place prize in a global competition called the Stratasys Extreme Redesign 3D Printing Challenge, where students were asked to improve a product design.

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***- Allen Lui***

Spina's students have consistently placed among the top performers in the Get Skilled architectural CAD category over the last four years, and many have advanced to the Skills Ontario provincial competition. They've also taken first place honours in the annual Ontario Association of Engineers Bridge Building Competition over the last four years, while others advanced to the provincials in the 2017 Skills-Ontario Cardboard Boat Competition. They also participate annually in the Sears Canada Design Exchange (DX) competition and the Skills Ontario Medal/Pin Design Competition.

"These courses and these competitions really open up a lot of doors for these students," says Spina, who spent 10 years in the construction and architecture sector before going to the Faculty of Education at Western University. "It gives them some direction and gets them thinking about where they might be going, by giving them some exposure to areas that they haven't thought about. You only know what you know, right?"

CCHS Principal Danielle Desjardins-Koloff said she's always impressed by the efforts Spina puts in to help his students.

"He's very motivated and goes above and beyond so that his students can be successful," she said. "The fact that he's got a wealth of experience in the industry and has a lot of connections there means that he can expose his students to a wider variety of really invaluable learning experiences."

As for Lui, he's grateful for the experience he's gained and is excited to move on to the next chapter in his life. He wants to earn a master's degree and plans to become a licensed architect. And he has some advice for anyone who's interested in following a similar path.

"If you're serious about architecture, design, or any of these subjects, you need to take these courses," he said.

You can follow Spina on Twitter at @designteacher1 and learn more about his classes at <https://sites.google.com/site/designcentralspina/>