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Reports from the Field 2

By Annie Wu



Annie Wu was a 2008 summer intern for the Center for Architecture Foundation, hired through Futures and Options. She is attending Skidmore College and is contemplating a career in health. She also has an interest in photography, architecture and teaching.

Not all subway stations are created equally! As a New York City resident of seventeen years I take the subway frequently, yet I have a confession – I have never actually noticed the subway station entrances. I have always regarded them to be mundane structures scattered across the city and failed to observe the details.

But this summer, as a result of my internship at the Center for Architecture, I can say that I feel more observant of and in touch with my surroundings.

The Center of Architecture Foundation runs a summer program called Summer@theCenter. During the first week-long summer camp, Subway Insider, ten high school students participated in a real life project and learned about model building. With educators Eric Ratkowski and Tim Hayduk leading the way, I journeyed with the students to study various subway stations, including Bowling Green Station, 51st Street and Lexington Avenue station, Union Square Station, and Astor Place Station. I documented the trips by taking many photographs of the sites as well as of the students sketching.

Fortunately I also had the chance to participate with the students, spending a few minutes observing the subway canopies and even sketching a few. I finally began to notice that some canopies encompassed elaborate antique details while others displayed more modern designs. I learned that architects have been choosing glass type materials for canopies because the translucent properties allow natural light to shine through into the station. Seriously, do you think many people would often stop in front of a subway station to scrutinize these fine details? Not unless, if you are an architect or a tourist!

The most memorable experience was when we went down to the construction site of the South Ferry Station, with the chief architect, Judy Kunoff. It was very exciting to see how the station would look before its completion! It was also interesting to hear about the history of the station, that it had to be renovated because it could only accommodate the first five train cars.

The students had a big project on their hands: to come up with an innovative design for the South Ferry Station. I saw their preliminary sketches and they had great ideas. Though it got to be messy and frustrating at times, they all seemed to enjoy making a scale model of their ideal vision for the station.

On the last day of camp, the students rushed to finish everything that needed to be done. It was amazing to see the process of the students' works: starting with sketching, building the scale model, creating a 3D computer model, and finally making a presentation board. The parents could not wait to see their kid's presentations. I was impressed; as I am sure the parents were too, seeing the students' products and illustrations during presentations. One parent came up to me and said his son did not mention all the activities he did in the summer camp but after seeing the presentations, this parent thought the camp did a great job guiding students through this project and he was certainly proud of his son.

I have a better understanding of architects and their role in the city. It is so awesome to participate in this internship; I learned so much about subways and design. Check out the photos that I took!

If you are interested in an internship, please email Grace Hwang Program Coordinator, at ghwang(@)cfafoundation.org. Priority is given to students who have previously attended our programs. If you are interested in Summer@theCenter programming, email info(@)cfafoundation.org.