

D Casa

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The best choice
by
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Schools – it is not important where, but how and with whom. Studying design is not the same all over. The best addresses are in Europe (especially in Milan).

Perhaps it is true, but today everything is design. To quote the German designer Axel Kufus, there is no area of our life that is not touched or “raped” by design. Behind every object, even the most banal, there is a complex and multilayered creative process and people who have initiated this process and brought the object to life. But how do you learn to design? Is there a course that introduces the subject better than others? Are there addresses and institutions that represent a guarantee of quality? We have tried to put together a short guide to the best design schools, realizing that orientation is difficult for someone who wants to go this way. An idea can be got from the so-called open days offered by universities and colleges of design to introduce their structure, teaching goals, programmes, and courses to future students. Here they try to communicate their “uniqueness”. In the long run the offerings are the same more or less everywhere, and there is a strong tendency to cover the whole field of human knowledge rather than to educate specialists.

In this globalized landscape, however, it is possible to recognize some differentiating characteristics of the various schools. For example the methodological approach, the specialities of the programme, outstanding personalities among the teachers, the efficiency and capacity of the facilities, the time available for the students, and whether a “design system” makes this school attractive or not. The interesting schools are still to be found in Europe.

We’ll start, as is only right, in Germany, the cradle of the first schools for industrial design, schools that were after all demanded by industry.

The Hochschule für Gestaltung Schwäbisch Gmünd, in the small German town of the same name that was dubbed “the secret capital of design in Germany” by the Financial Times, offers a decidedly analytical approach under the influence of the Bauhaus tradition and the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. It is dedicated to developing creativity that is not separated from holistic scientific skills. This is emphasized in one of its mottos: Don’t decorate, keep it simple, and mind the grid.

In contrast the Design Academy in Eindhoven is characterized by a very conceptual approach to projects. In 2005 *Icon*, one of Britain’s most renowned design magazines, described it as “the most influential organization in the heart of the most influential design culture in the world”. Its philosophy is to remove the separation into product or service oriented areas. Instead it offers the System

Compass, which offers individually tailored basic skills. It is no accident that the departments are called Man and Identity, Man and Mobility, Man and Leisure.

In the field of graphics Switzerland remains a prime reference. Alongside the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zurich the École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne has, thanks to the energy of its director Pierre Keller, been at the centre of an extraordinary process of development. The educational horizons and teaching methods have been completely renewed. This was done through a gradual internationalization, starting with the teachers. Here the best-known artists, designers, architects, photographers, philosophers, and thinkers hold classes, workshops, and seminars. This has attracted attention all over Europe and made it one of the most respected schools within a short period. Thanks to state funding it will open new spaces in the district of Renens this autumn: 20.000 m² of lecture rooms, laboratories with the most innovative equipment for prototyping, and also exhibition spaces, auditoriums, studios, and IT facilities – in short, all that is necessary.

In the field of post-graduate education the Royal College of Art in London is one of the most important institutions of art and design, counting among its graduates names like James Dyson, Ridley Scott, and Zandra Rhodes. Its major strength is its cosmopolitan character: in the last five years 30 percent of its students came from countries outside the UK, and the school maintains many connections to academic and business organizations worldwide. Not to mention the fact that it is in London, surrounded by thousands of events dedicated to the arts, concerts, conferences, and festivals.

Today it is imperative for students of design to think globally. For many years all universities and private institutions have had numerous exchange programmes to encourage the international exchange of students and teachers. There are also networks like led and Esmod, not yet widely known, but with operational branches worldwide. There are many possibilities and competition is leading to improved structures and services, which both enable more exchanges and make the students' lives easier.

Colleges in the USA are the best examples of this. Whether studying at RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) in Providence, Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, or the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, being involved in applications, experiments with new materials, research, and the methods and processes involved in projects can be a significant experience. The Institute of Design, part of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, is a veritable fount of excellence, with programmes emphasizing design-driven innovation. "We believe that true innovation begins with the needs of the user and demands many interdependent and complementary processes, theories, and reliable tools to achieve acceptable solutions", declares the web page.

In this extremely complex and multi-centred system Milan would deserve its own article. Antonello Fusetti is the head of the first Italian school of design and communication, the Scuola Politecnica.

He is convinced that the only way to study design is in Milan. Not only because of the choice of several schools, but also because the teachers, the planning offices, the companies, the Triennale, the Compasso d'Oro, Made in Italy, and fashion all meet in Milan. "The whole 'sistema-design-italia', which the world attributes to us and envies us for."

In addition to the Faculty of Design at the Politecnico di Milano the undergraduate programme at Naba (Nuovo Accademia delle belle Arti) is noteworthy. Naba is the only private institution recognized by the Ministry of Education to offer a degree equivalent to the diploma. Currently the quality of its courses, infrastructure, and programme design make it one of the most brilliant institutions around. For postgraduate education the Domus Academy, with its history, its faculty, and its nine Master's degree programmes, is second to none; a maker of design history with worldwide acknowledgement. You have the choice.

Practical tips:

Hochschule für Gestaltung
Schwäbisch Gmünd – University of Applied Sciences
offers 3 BA programmes in Communication Design, Product Design, and Interaction Design and an MA programme in Communication Planning and Design.
Information: Rektor-Klaus-Strasse 100, D-73525 Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany
www.hfg-gmuend.de

Design Academy Eindhoven
offers 4-year courses in Design and 2-year Master degrees in Humanitarian Design and Sustainable Style and also in Industrial, Interior, and Identity Design.
Information: Emmasingel 14 – PO Box 2152-5600, CC Eindhoven, Netherlands
www.designacademy.nl

École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne
offers 3-year Diploma programmes in Fine Arts, Visual Communication (with 4 specializations in Graphic Design, Photography, Media & Interaction Design, and Film Studies), Industrial and Product Design, and a 2-year Master programme in Film Studies and Design.
Information: 5, Av. du Temple, 1020 Renens-Lausanne, Switzerland
www.ecal.ch

Royal College of Art
is the only university worldwide specializing in post-graduate courses in art and design.
Information: Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU, UK
www.rca.ac.uk

Institute of Design – Illinois Institute of Technology
Master in Design Methods and the various research areas are very interesting.
Information: 350 N LaSalle Street, Chicago, IL 60610-4726, USA
www.id.ilt.edu

Rhode Island School of Design

offers 16 4-year diploma courses at the Department of Art and Design, and 7 2-year Master's courses, and has a superbly high-quality structure and more than 2200 students from all over the world.

Information: 2 College Street, Providence, RI 02903, USA

www.risd.edu

Naba-Nuovo Accademia de Belle Arti.

The diplomas are equivalent to a university degree and are recognized by the Ministry of Education.

Information: Via Darwin 20, 20134 Milano, Italy

www.naba.it

Domus Academy

The Interior Design and Fashion Design courses are especially interesting. The Master's course in Cultural Experience Design and Management begins in November.

Information: Via Watt 27, 20143 Milano, Italy

www.domusacademy.it