

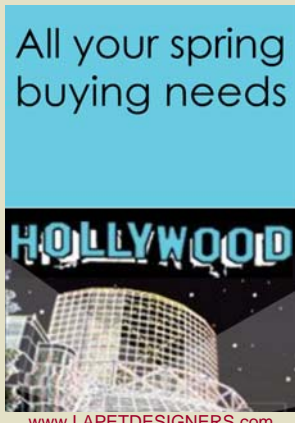
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Education at FIT Includes Pet Fashion

By Rose Gordon, Pet Style News

New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology is launching its first pet product design courses this spring and plans to implement a fuller curriculum in the future. Kris Lynch, president of New York-based Ruff Doggie Styles, will lead the two spring workshops, which will be offered through the school's Center for Professional Studies.



Janet Brav, FIT Professor

The first one, "Fashion Design for Pet Apparel," begins with an introduction to body forms, functional needs and a seasonal fabric guide. Participants will have the opportunity to create garments and sketches while receiving feedback on how to develop a pet apparel line during four evening sessions beginning March 5.

A second course beginning April 16 will address pet accessories and lifestyle product design, such as collars, bags and toys. It will tackle challenges related to both soft and hard goods design with an emphasis on "producing practical functioning products that meet today's consumer demand for more and more upscale fashionable items."

"We believe that these courses represent a 'first' in the history of higher education," said Janet Brav, a professor in the institute's Advertising & Communications Dept., and one of those responsible for the development of the pet product courses. Brav expects the courses to repeat again in June and July.

"This is uncharted territory," she said. "We plan on accommodating as many as we can."

A normal class size at the Fashion Institute is between 25 to 30 students, but the initial workshops will be limited to 18 participants each. Applicants can register online at www.fitnyc.edu.

Although the spring courses are noncredit, adult education seminars, Brav and her colleague Deborah David, an assistant professor in her 10th year at the school and, like Brav, a transplant from the executive corporate world of marketing and advertising, are working toward offering an interdisciplinary program for up-and-coming pet product designers. The program would provide students with a certificate or concentration in pet design with courses in jewelry design, apparel, fragrance and cosmetics, home product design, as well as the business side with marketing and licensing classes.

"I think if you're an astute marketer, you have to be aware of what's going on in the marketplace," Brav said. "This is a market that is frankly too huge to ignore."

With so many pet product companies cropping up in recent years, many lacking formal design training, the professors said they believe some of the Fashion Institute's 10,000-plus student body could fill that growing need with well-trained employees or even interns (all FIT students must complete a senior internship). Faculty members can also advise the pet industry on current trends in human fashion, including fabrics, colors, textile surface design or even package design, Brav said.



Deborah David, Assistant Professor, FIT

For example, when choosing a fabric, "safety, durability, odor control and so forth are paramount in pet design," David added. "FIT is committed to partnering with the pet industry."

The school's status as one of the 64 schools in the State University of New York equals terrific resources but also bureaucracy, the professors said. Meaning they don't know when a formal for-credit pet program will be in place, but Professors Brav and David hope to do so within the next year or two. The process is already in motion for some classes, they said. More importantly, the Fashion Institute's president is wholly on board and "very excited," they said.

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To develop this program, Brav and David say they "have been networking like crazy" and reaching out to the pet industry for advisors. They went to the H.H. Backer show in Atlantic City, N.J., last year, as well as Pet Fashion Week New York 2007. In 2008, Swarovski Crystals is sponsoring a pet fashion design contest, they noted.

Loaded with a roster of contacts, the two are also producing an e-newsletter, "Stylish Pets Report," to keep colleagues as well as the industry abreast of their activities, trends and other happenings.

"The pet industry has been so supportive of our outreach to them," Brav said. "Hopefully we're going to have a long and productive relationship."

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