

seat of fame

The future of the art world is in good hands as DASH molds tomorrow's budding designers.

Text Elizabeth Hanly

FIVE MIAMI KIDS – SOME OF WHOM HAVE NEVER traveled as far as the beach – will head to Switzerland this summer as honored guests at Art Basel and Design Miami/Basel. They come with five chairs.

The students are from the Design and Architecture Senior High (DASH); the chairs are prototypes of designs they made for a class assignment: "imagine a chair you think cannot be built." There's Johad Ellis, whose design is as lean and full of wild grace as many of the lines underpinning Miami construction. Jayson Brandon Martinez takes a cue from roller coasters and echoes. Jeremy Comrie sees music in three dimensions. Takamitsu Byrne designed a chair with no apparent means of support: it seems to hover in space. Precious Hannah's chair resembles a staircase leading to some private wonder.

"Other people may be stunned by their work," says Kelley Kwiatkowski, an industrial designer who heads DASH's industrial design program. "We know this is just what our kids do."

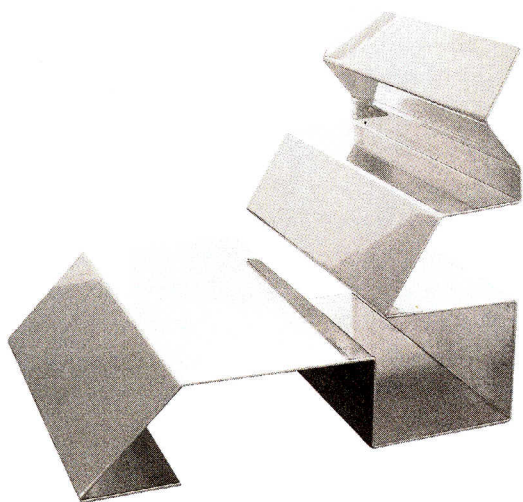
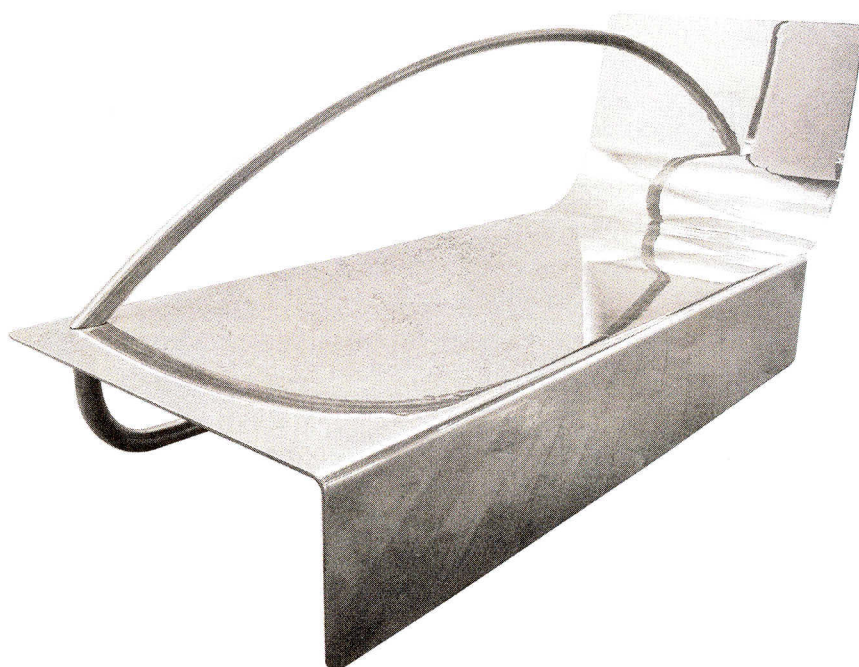
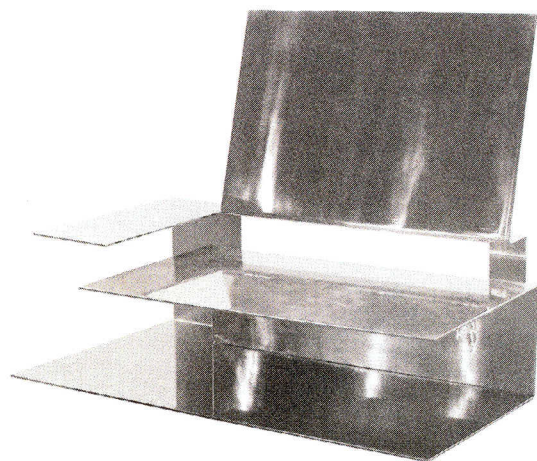
How did a public school become, in just 18 years, what Design/Miami founder Craig Robins and myriad others in the field

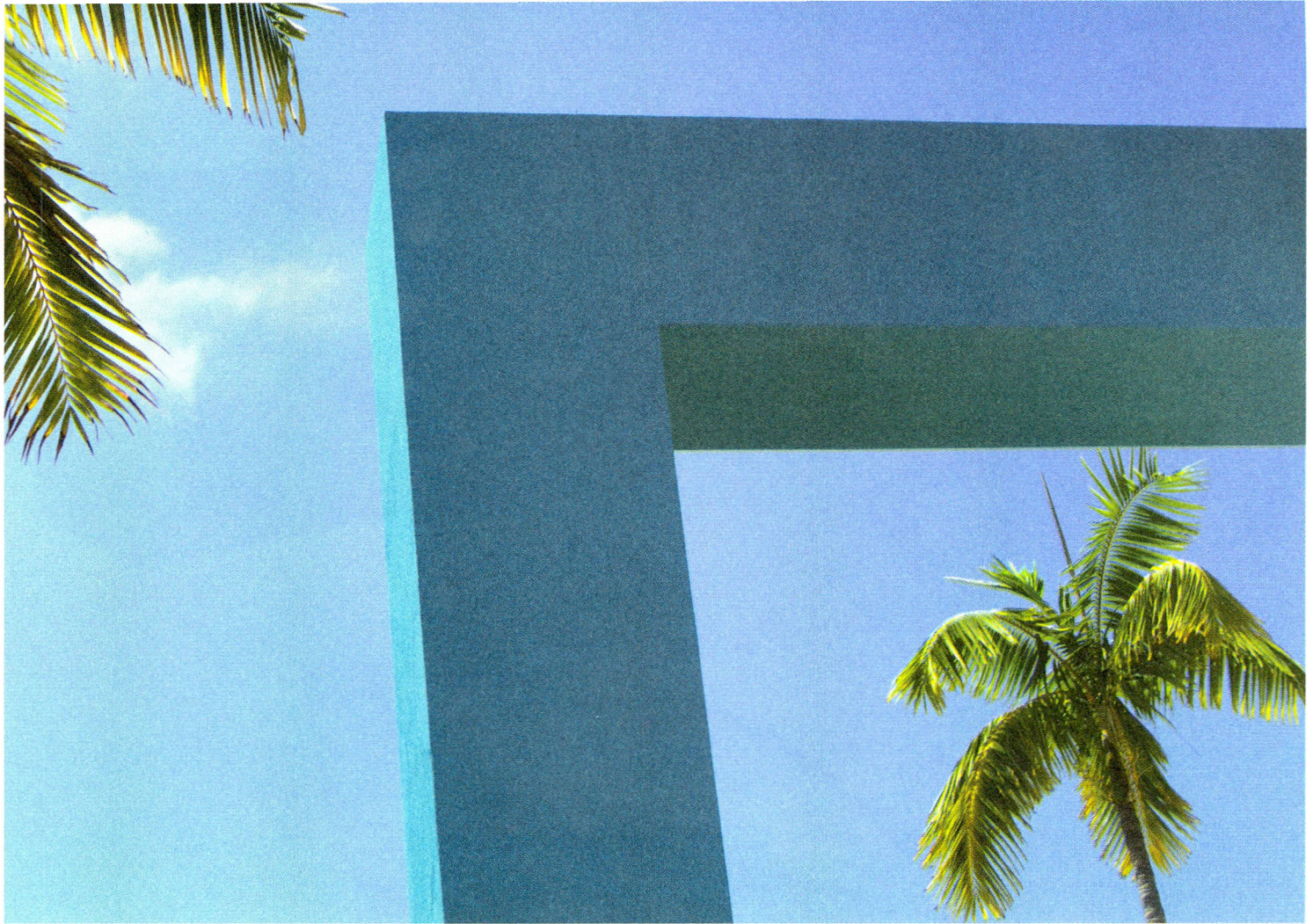
call the most important design high school in the nation? DASH, also celebrated for its academics, ranked among the country's top eight high schools in *U.S News and World Report* in 2007 and won a "Cool School" tag from *Teen People*.

Though Miami-Dade County has a 60-percent high school graduation rate, every DASH student finishes school and goes on to college. New York's Cooper Union broke precedent and accepted six students from the school last year. DASH kids regularly attend the Fashion Institute of Technology, Pratt, Parsons, Rhode Island School of Design, Central St. Martins in London and Art Center College of Design.

"It's no exaggeration to call the list of schools endless," says Mary Hartley, magnet lead teacher at DASH. Last year's senior class of 107 students received \$9.6 million in scholarships and the class of

OPPOSITE: (Clockwise from top left) Chairs designed by Jayson Martinez, Takamitsu Byrne, Jermaine Comrie, Precious Hannah and Johad Ellis





A bold architectural detail hovers over the courtyard at DASH in Miami's Design District. OPPOSITE: DASH student Guercy Eugene stands behind a painting on Plexiglas.

2008 received \$6.6 million in National Merit Scholarships alone.

The student body is a microcosm of the population. Kids come from 37 different countries, and about 40 percent fall within the federal poverty guidelines. Many kids willingly take three or four buses to DASH, where the school day is also an hour longer than anywhere else in the county. "Look to the creative impulse," Craig Robins says of the motivated students. Robins, who as the president of DACRA and a principal of Design Miami and Design Miami/Basel is the primary developer within the Miami Design District where DASH is located, donated an undulating metal fence and gate designed by the internationally acclaimed Marc Newson.

DASH was born in 1990 when the Miami-Dade School Board solicited proposals for innovative magnet schools. The late Jacqueline Hinchey-Sipes, DASH's founding principal, imagined a school with five programs: fashion design, industrial design, entertainment technology, architecture/interior design and visual communication (graphics)/web design.

The school remains small, with 500 students in the ninth through twelfth grades. There are five applications for each space in the freshman class. A portfolio is required. "One of my favorites was a series of ink-drawings on napkins," says DASH's principal of 10 years, Dr. Stacey Mancuso. Every application for a spot in the freshman class includes an on-site drawing audition with six judges. "It can seem a

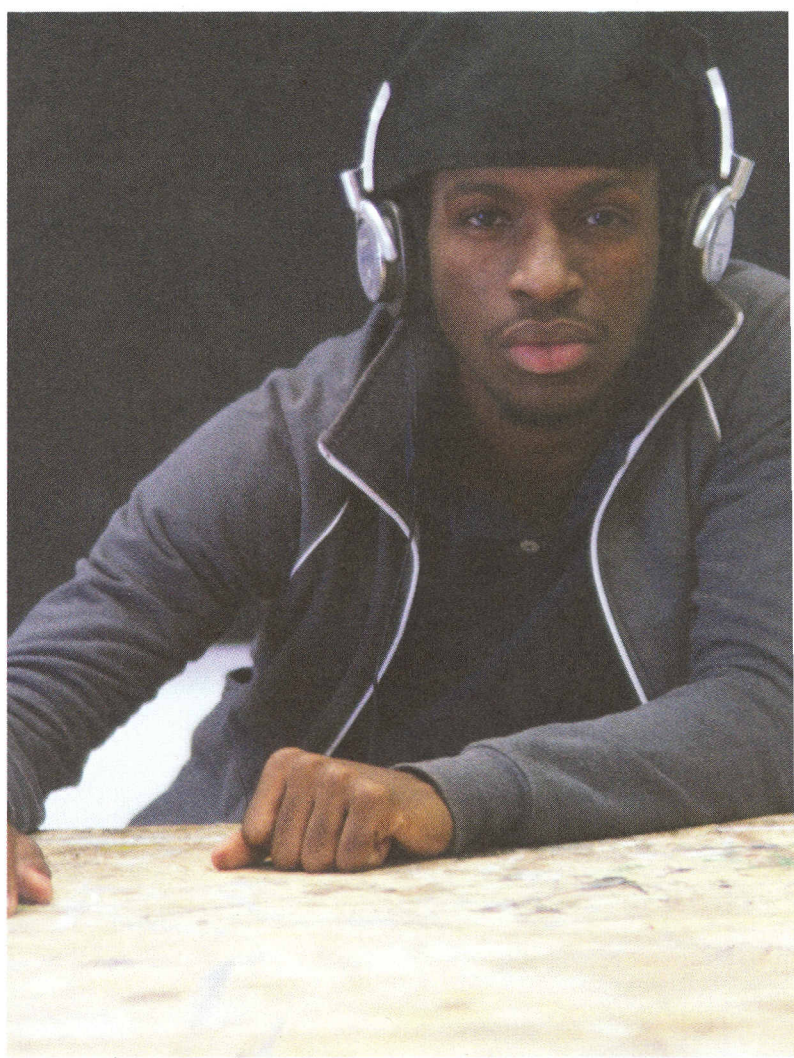
bit cruel to ask this of eighth graders," Mancuso says. "Still, the cream rises to the top."

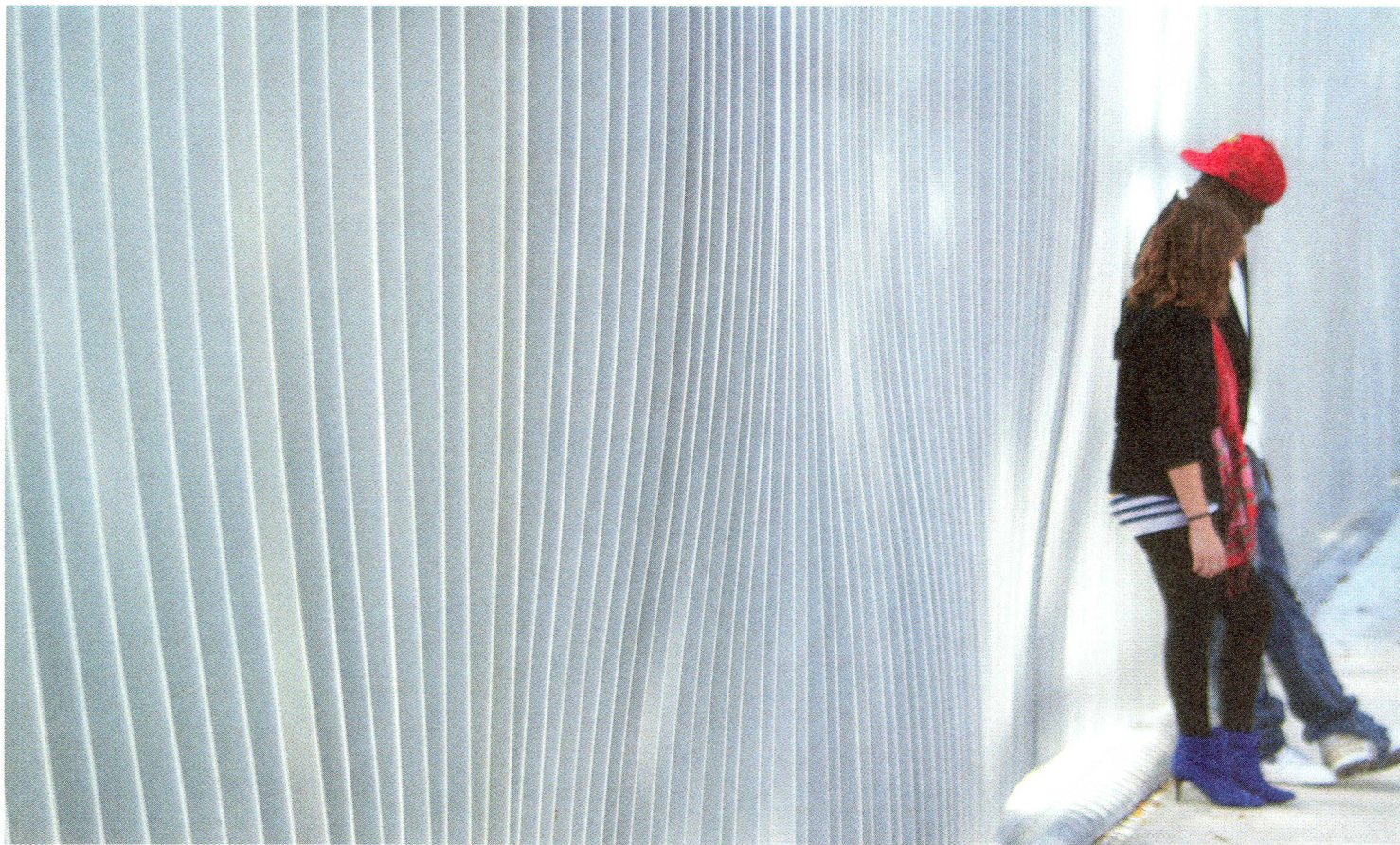
Students take two design classes every semester, but they must also fulfill state language arts, math, science, social science and language requirements. DASH offers 16 Honors and Advanced Placement courses, and every year more than half the juniors and seniors are mastering dual enrollment high-school/college-credited classes. Imagination permeates all courses. Biology department chair Eloisa Mena is creating a butterfly farm and working garden in one portion of the school's parking lot. Light filters through stained-Plexiglas, made by the students, in the greenhouse. And every semester, every student must study fine arts: drawing, painting and three-dimensional design/sculpture. Therein may lie at least part of DASH's secret.

"The school's insistence on the place of drawing and painting in its curriculum explains the ability of these kids to think as quickly, conceptually and imaginatively as they do," says John Marquette, whose 4141 Design showroom is next door to DASH. Marquette was responsible for bringing the aluminum chair project to the school.

Design projects are wildly varied. The school holds two fashion shows a year, and its Phantom Film Festival has already become a local Miami tradition. Under the direction of architect and teacher Eric Hankin, students designed houses in the Everglades to replace those destroyed by recent hurricanes. The city of Surfside asked the







DASH students rest against the Marc Newson fence, a gift from DACRA's Craig Robins, that borders the school's courtyard. OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left): Standing proud at DASH; student, Jeffrey LaTortue; surging creativity yields stacks of dirtied palettes; student, Jeannine Cottone.

kids to design life-guard stands. Other pupils have been developing a series of designs for Cadillac, many of which GM presented at this spring's Miami Beach car show.

Each program at DASH supports another. The architecture department builds stages for the fashion department's shows. The entertainment department videotapes them. The graphics department produces logos for each designer, and the graphics kids design the posters for the annual film festival.

Classrooms are often run as real-world businesses, which "can include learning how to handle being bossed around," says Dale Brooks, chair of the graphics department. Entertainment department chair and filmmaker Tom Pike turns his courses into production studios, complete with budgeting problems and checks from The First Pike Phony Baloney Bank.

Talk to any professional working at DASH, and the word "rigor" comes up. "The work load is plenty heavy here," says Kwiatkowski, from the school's design and architecture department. "You can't do it if you're scattered. Part of our responsibility as faculty is to help the kids learn how to get organized and disciplined. Their lives are going to depend as much on that as talent."

Eric Hankin came to DASH in part because of his experience with the DASH interns at the Russell Partnership, where he was then working. One was William Lai, class of 1994, who later designed Brickell

Station condos and other large-scale projects in Miami and Hong Kong. He is one of many DASH superstar alumni. The artist Adler Guerrier, class of 1994, was part of this year's Whitney Museum Biennial in New York. The artist Daniel Arsham, class of 1999, has designed sets for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Esteban Cortazar, class of 2004, heads creative development for fashion giant Emanuel Ungaro in Paris. Nike industrial designer Duane Lawrence, class of 2000, created signature sneakers for NBA star Dwayne Wade. Indeed, so many DASH graduates are working at Nike that the company is developing plans to work directly with the school.

Artists and institutions often call the school with intriguing proposals. Thanks to Design Miami/, HSBC Private Bank became interested in DASH. Its \$40,000 donation lifted the chair assignment from the classroom into a juried competition that included the production of five chairs. "Imagine what it means to have one of your designs actually come into being," Hankin says. "Imagine what that does for your portfolio. There are designers who have worked in the field their whole lives who aren't able to say that."

It doesn't end there. In Basel, the kids and the chairs will meet with executives from Vitra, manufacturer of cutting-edge modernist furniture. "We're going to re-design the world," says Precious Hannah. She may be right. ■