

OnManitoba

CONNECTING ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



A Pair With Purpose

Winnipeg couple
Arni Thorsteinson
and Susan Glass

Website Designer Hopes
His “Digg” Leads to Paydirt

ONE TO WATCH:
Keep it Cartesian
Design Collective

Reunion
Roundup
for 2009

What does the
U of M mean to
you? Take our online
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\$1,000! ▷ page 8

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ON THE COVER:

Arni Thorsteinson [BComm(Hons)/71]
and Susan Glass [BComm/67]

Photo: Thomas Fricke



She sings, she plays and she juggles (two careers and a family). Meet Shelley Marshall [BSc/92, BN/99] on page 23.

Photo: Jason Halstead [BPE/92]

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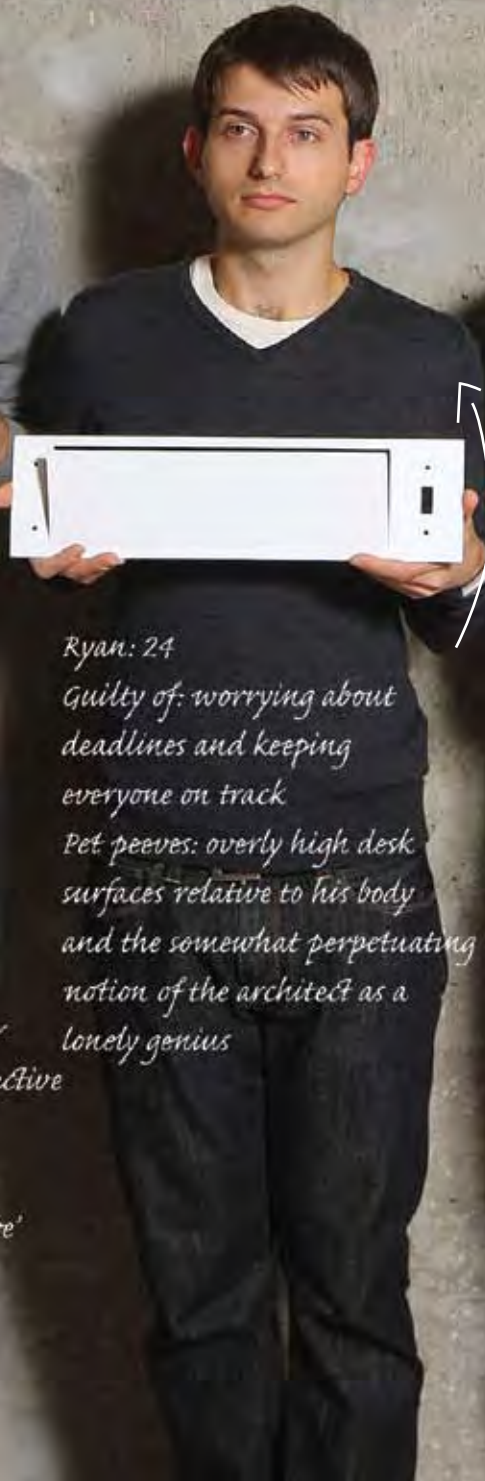
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Keep



*Thom: 21, youngest member of the Keep it Cartesian collective
Guilty of: witty drawings and graphics
Pet peeve: the term 'pet peeve'*



*Ryan: 24
Guilty of: worrying about deadlines and keeping everyone on track
Pet peeves: overly high desk surfaces relative to his body and the somewhat perpetuating notion of the architect as a lonely genius*



*Nils: 25
Guilty of: keeping the group organized and efficient
Pet peeves: mediocrity and the sound of people eating chips*

p it

CARTESIAN



Photos and artwork: Courtesy keepitcartesian.com

Their moniker, Keep it Cartesian, begs the question *What's with the name?*

What does the work of this four-member design collective (all students in the University of Manitoba's faculty of architecture) have in common with 16th-century French philosopher Rene Descartes, the man who stripped down the notion of human existence to a basic, famous phrase: "Cogito ergo sum" (in English, I think therefore I am)?

The answer, it turns out, is equal parts clever catchphrase and design creed.

As **Ryan Litovitch** explains, "We liked how the name resonated in our heads, but it also speaks to the notion of taking calculated moves with a design. Essentially, avoiding the tendency to unnecessarily over-design an object."

Applying this minimalist mindset, Keep it Cartesian breathed new life into otherwise ordinary household items. Earlier this year, their series of metallic faceplates for plug outlets and light switches (that double as cell phone cradles, key hooks, letter boxes and cord wraps) garnered the attention of popular online design blogs like Montreal-based mocoloco.com. And they were recently invited to present their prototypes at the Interior Design Show 2009, Canada's largest contemporary design event to be held in Toronto this coming February. Their creations, fabricated from steel, are fashionable yet functional – a hallmark of what they consider to be good design.

"Form and function go hand-in-hand, to make a product successful," says **Kaley Lawrence**. "It must be extremely functional but also pleasing to the eye."

Keep it Cartesian say their work is influenced by, "the stuff around us, problems we see that need to be fixed." With the faceplate series, they've come up with an answer for a twofold interior design dilemma: how to dress up an apartment (without losing your damage deposit) and at the same time create something useful. "Changing faceplates and cupboard handles are one of the few things you can do to change your apartment," says **Nils Vik**. "The sad thing about faceplates is that there aren't any really good options to begin with...I suppose we also wanted to try and get more out of the current options available. We added a function to a functionless object."

Their straightforward but effective solutions could provide a cure for apartment-dweller design apathy and they hope to turn their prototypes into marketable products. That would be some feat for an idea born of a class assignment that challenged them to use a sheet of metal to make a container.

So, where does Keep it Cartesian see itself in 10 years?

"I wish I could see that far ahead," say **Thom Fougere**.

For now, the foursome's focus is on class work – they're on track to earn their undergraduate degrees in spring 2009 – and (hopefully) sharing their wares with the world.



*Kaley: 22
Guilty of being Keep
it Cartesian's voice
of reason
Pet peeve: bumper
stickers*

Photo: Jason Halstead [BPE/92]

▷ On the Web: keepitcartesian.com

JEREMY BROOKS [BA/98]