



Montana State University architecture students Cyndie Freier, left, and Eva Unruh hold a support brace for the roof of the horse corral they are building on the North Star Ranch east of Livingston Thursday.

Park County project teaches MSU students the hands-on approach

A college degree is nice, but many graduating students lack something most employers consider crucial when hiring a new employee — experience.

As a practicing architect, Montana State University architecture professor Lori Ryker knows the importance of experience.

She developed a program several years ago called The Remote Studio, which gives students an opportunity to gain practical, hands-on experience that employers look for in an applicant.

"It's not the same thing as sitting in the class," Ryker said of the program. "They learn practical experience — it's full immersion."

Indeed it is. This group of 10 students started from the ground up, collaborating and brainstorming ideas for what eventually will become a horse corral on the North Star Ranch, east of Livingston on Swingley Road.

They sat down with clients, designed plans, built models, haggled over design philosophy, and are now half-way through construction of what will eventually become a horse corral.

"When you're out here a minimal difference matters,"



Architecture student Nick Fulton, bottom left, and professor Lori Ryker, bottom right, go over plans as other students work on the corral.

Enterprise story by
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said fifth-year student Eva Unruh, explaining the contrast between creating a small-scale model in a dorm room and building the actual structure.

The students are also learning to pay special attention to the history and landscape surrounding their project — something Ryker said is often overlooked by architects "working hand-in-hand

with the developer."

"Unfortunately, (those type of architects) are probably producing a majority of the structures," she said. "They're not as responsive to place (location)."

Ryker said details of location and history are often pushed to the wayside mainly because of money and time.

The importance of his future profession wasn't lost on fourth-year student Joe Roodell.

"We want this to be here for awhile," he said of the structure. "We want it to weather and blend into the

landscape. (The corral) is about our feelings and philosophy. These ideas really are our own."

During the Remote Studio project, students immerse themselves into the landscape by living on the ranch and taking backpacking trips through the surrounding area.

"We're living in this remote area so we can get a connection to the place we're designing in," said student Steve Harrop, also a fifth-year graduate student.

When the structure is completed, it will blend into a surrounding hillside. It will also feature a butterfly roof — which will look sort of like a skewed letter "V," which will protect horses from the weather no matter which direction it comes from.

By working through all stages of the process, Ryker said the students will understand what all the architectural possibilities are when working later in their careers with clients, contractors and construction crews.

As students were sewing through lumber and pounding belts into their pre-drilled holes, Ryker smiled and said, pointing to the students, "That's the learning experience right there."