

Sally Campbell  
Feature Writing Assignment

In a fast-paced, consumer-driven world, people often are not aware of all that goes into the making of a product or service they use. After discovering the product design program at the University of Oregon, 19-year-old Léo Cramer knew it was the clear path for him but had to push through some internal conflict to reassure himself why he chose the field he did.

“I love design, product design, all of it, but there's so much that goes into it and a lot of bad that's come from it, that's done damaged to the world, to people, all of that,” says Cramer, “and sometimes I just question it—do I really wanna do this, do I really wanna sign up for this?”

One thing Cramer didn't question was what he was going to produce in his first full-term studio in Winter 2022. On the first day in January, the class of 15 received their directive for the term: to produce a household item that takes behavioral design into account. On the second day of class, each person had to present their top three choices of products they wanted to create. Cramer stood before his classmates to share his ideas of a chair, something to collect your items and a clothes rack, explaining to his professor that he would not be picking one. He wanted to combine all three into a singular entryway item. Still standing at the front of the classroom, Cramer watched his professor and his classmates laugh at this idea in disbelief of him.

Three months later, Cramer had designed and executed what he described as his best and most complete item—an entryway bench. Made of 2-inch-thick cherry wood, it consists of a 4-foot horizontal piece of wood, serving as a place to sit, and a 4-foot vertical piece of wood that a coat can hang on. With all flat surfaces and slightly curved edges, Cramer crafted his entryway bench with the intent to be simple and understandable.

Whether he was walking in silence, sitting behind his desk at his job in the design library, or working in the woodshop to cut pieces by hand, Cramer spent many waking moments dedicated to thinking about and actively working on this project.

As a college student still forming opinions in all areas of life, making choices and being confident in them creates a lot of second-guessing and requires Cramer to overcome the difficult tendency to overthink. “A part of it comes with just not knowing, part of it comes from not wanting to waste resources because the world doesn't need resources wasted,” he says.

When it came to his bench project, Cramer loved the process of completing something 100% of the way through. He said the biggest obstacle for him throughout the term was the element of decision-making after the initial decision of what he would be making.

Cramer vocalized how one of the biggest rewards that provided that feeling like no other was seeing the final product of something that so much time and energy went into creating. Producing something tangible and being excited by how it turned out created a sense of internal fulfillment.

While still young and learning what exactly it is that he wants to make, Cramer plans to stick to his intention of his products being things he feels inclined to create. With all that goes into product design, and as Cramer said, all the bad that has come from it, it is critical for product designers to take on projects that give them satisfaction and serve as a constant reminder of why they are in the particular field.

“My biggest hope right now, the way that I’ve articulated it, is being able to produce things that create moments of connection and joy for people,” says Cramer, explaining what this fulfillment looks like for him. “So accumulating as much skill and knowledge as I can to be able to do that is the goal.”