



Image from "Ratatouille,"
courtesy of Walt Disney Studios.

Alumni Profile

Kim White, '91

Technical director, Pixar

If you have seen "Ratatouille," "A Bug's Life," "Toy Story II," "Monsters Inc.," "Nemo" or "The Incredibles," you have seen the handiwork of Kim White ('91 photo/video). A technical director at Pixar, where she has worked for more than a decade, Kim handles lighting and also has done some prop modeling.

"We light the shot and light the sets," she said. "We typically are thinking about color, composition and leading the eye."

Flashback to the late 1980s and early 1990s, and you would have seen Kim doing computer graphics at KCAI, studying with Patrick Clancy, chair of Photography at KCAI.

After completing her B.F.A. degree at KCAI, Kim enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she continued to work with computer graphics and animation, using these tools in installation work. Kim completed an M.F.A. degree in art and technology there and then pursued freelance opportunities for a post-production house. Eventually

she was approached by Sierra Online, which had seen her reel or had heard about her capabilities.

Started in adventure games

"They called me and asked me to apply for a job," Kim said. "I worked for them in Oakhurst, Calif., outside Yosemite, working on adventure games like Phantasmagoria." Later they transferred her to the firm's headquarters in Seattle, where she worked for three years.

"About that time I realized that I didn't play games anymore," she said. "I saw that the company was changing. It was getting bought by a bigger firm, and the spirit there had changed. Some of the best artists were leaving, including some of the people from whom I was learning the most, and I began to feel that my growth wouldn't continue to be as strong."

Kim put a reel together, applied at Pixar and was hired. "At that time, there weren't as many people in the field," she said, adding that the firm was hiring people for "A Bug's Life." As fun

and funny as Pixar's films are to watch, they entail long hours and hard work for the crew creating them.

"We put in a lot of hard hours, especially toward the end of a project," Kim said. "But we believe in what we are doing, and we want to make a good movie. It's nice to work in a place where quality is really important."

Lots of perks and even more hard work

Kim said looks can be deceiving, because visitor to the Pixar campus may give the appearance that everything is fun and games. The campus includes a swimming pool and gym. There are ongoing professional development opportunities that provide creative inspiration, including guest appearances by performers such as Penn & Teller or big-name film-makers. "Pixar University" offers classes for employees in painting, yoga, ballet, sculpture, film-making — all for free. But behind the scenes are those long hours and tough demands.

Prepared for success

Kim credits her student experience at KCAI with preparing her to succeed in jobs that have demanded a strong work ethic.

"I learned a very good work ethic there," she said, recalling her undergraduate experience. "We worked hard and learned how to take critique, which is something we do at Pixar all the time. You have people giving you feedback on your work, and you can't take it personally. We had a lot of critics at KCAI, and we learned how to take it constructively."

Kim said she is on "the flip side now" — offering criticism at least as often as receiving it — and she feels she learned how to give criticism as well as how to take it. Patrick Clancy is her role model for this, she said.

"Patrick Clancy brought out the best in the work and helped us understand how to get better," she said. "That experience taught me how to give good feedback to others."

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