

Reed Benhamou

Chairing the Indiana University Department of Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design (AMID) may very well be among the most interesting and challenging positions in the College of Arts and Sciences. Imagine, instead of heading up a single academic field, you are responsible for several disciplines . . . seemingly related in many ways, but vastly different in others.

You have to understand three diverse academic fields—fashion design, apparel merchandising, and interior design. You must meld faculties with disparate backgrounds and academic interests. You need to recognize and harness the vast resources of professional firms that turn to your department to recruit talented students for their employee bases. And you must oversee a curriculum to help ensure an outstanding academic experience for hundreds of students each semester.

Reed Benhamou assumed this challenge and helped position AMID so that it is now among the College's most vibrant and sought-after centers of academic excellence. During her tenure the number of undergraduate students majoring in the department's programs grew nearly 200 percent, making AMID one of the College's largest undergraduate programs.

It seems almost a foregone conclusion that if you lead a department where creativity and inspirational design intersect with technology and academic rigor, you must have a gifted sense of style. Reed did not disappoint us. We suspect her great sense of style perhaps emanated from a certain "joie de vivre" and love of French art, classical European culture, and architecture.

As an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, Reed received a bachelor's degree in French. A decade later her academic interests gravitated toward design and a master's degree in interior design from Purdue University where her thesis, "In Search of an Alternative Approach to Interior Design," signaled a growing curiosity for nontraditional and varied design viewpoints, a trait that would ultimately serve her well as AMID chair.

Yet it was the classics that called out to Reed for her Ph.D. studies at Purdue. Listening to the beckoning call of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French masters, she received her doctorate in history with a dissertation on "Public and Private Art Education in France, 1648–1793."

Reed's publications were as varied as the IU department she would eventually come to chair. She contributed articles, monographs, book chapters, dictionary entries, and conference proceedings on a diverse range of subjects, including:

- *Depicting Women in the Age of Watteau*
- *Discipline and Punishment in the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*
- *La Voix de Blondel dans le commentaire de Fréron*
- *Casting the Antique: Behind the Scenes at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*
- *Who Controls This Private Space? The Offense and Defense of the Hoop in Early Eighteenth-Century France and England*

Reed led the Department of Apparel Merchandising and Interior Design at a pivotal point in its history. Technology enhancements were redefining how design courses were taught and how students prepared for future careers. Cable television programming was creating a massive surge in interest for the department's academic offerings among students aspiring to be the next great fashion runway designer, retailing expert, or interior design hotshot.

As chair, Reed led the department through the early stages of this evolution with a steady hand, balanced outlook, and recognition that managing through change required the support of a talented faculty. Perhaps her most lasting legacy to the IU community was her selection of outstanding faculty members who are now leading the department in its next phase of growth and rebranding as one of the world's great centers for undergraduate education in retail and design studies.

Thanks to Reed's contributions and leadership, the department is now seen as a multidisciplinary academic environment within the College. It was through her support that AMID became recognized by students, alumni, and industry professionals as an educational center that offers a unique blend of academic theory combined with practical knowledge and skill-building techniques. She challenged the faculty to create programs and courses that encourage critical, independent thinking by students, and prepare graduates to be leaders in their chosen fields.

And of course, throughout her tenure at IU, Reed Benhamou inspired thousands of design students with the sense of style and joy of life that permeated her personality and teaching. We salute Reed and thank her for her contributions to the department and the university community.

C. Thomas Mitchell