



Anne-Marie Sargueil

**President of the l'Institut Français du Design (IFD),
(The French Institute of Design)**

With a background in humanities and a wide range of professional responsibilities in industry, institutions, and the press, Anne-Marie Sargueil ultimately chose to combine her talents. Convinced that innovation is the result of collective adventure, she has served as president of the Institut Français du Design (IFD) for over thirty years. The IFD works to promote design for businesses, individuals, and cities through its JANUS brand.

Since 1951, the IFD has been selecting products and services that prioritise respect for users and their environment.

The designer's intention, the ethical value of the creation, its appearance, the materials used, and the interest for the user are all criteria, if not values, that dictate the IFD's choice.

The French Institute of Design: Pioneers and visionaries

Anne-Marie Sargueil

I didnot know that by helping my father — Jean Sargueil - whom I deeply admired, an industrialist and President of the *Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle* (Institute of Industrial Aesthetics) in France, I was embarking on a long and beautiful story. What drew me into the world of design were the designers themselves, women and men who suffer from ugliness and discomfort, from what is overpriced or useless—confident personalities in the pursuit of creative solutions. I often compare them to psychologists — my first field of study, who help us seek harmony in our relationships with others; their common ground? The designer is a creator of connection.

Keywords: Design, Entrepreneurship, French Design, Janus Awards, Design Craftsmanship.

What binds me to the Institut Français du Design is a tribute to the pioneers and visionaries, and the desire to share and pass on this legacy.

Design without an entrepreneurial spirit is nothing more than a matter of style. I learned very early, working with Raymond Loewy's agency — a pioneer of design in France — that everything starts with a commission. Real investment always depends on the client's

engagement. At the Compagnie de l'Esthétique Industrielle (CEI), companies like Shell, Danone, L'Oréal, De Dietrich, the Dutch Railways, COOP, and NewMan sought the collaboration of designers who would later go on to found some of the most prominent design agencies. That is how I entered through the finest of doors: by meeting the best designers, building friendships (the warm, pioneering spirit of those early days), and embracing entrepreneurial ambition.

A few years spent later in government ministries and at MEDEF (French entrepreneurs organisation) confirmed my passion for serving the public interest.

What do psychology, politics, and the world of design have in common? The will to create common ground. To bring together talents from diverse backgrounds — hence the presence of the humanities in our juries — to build harmony, coherence, and serve the desire to be useful.

It was a designer, Philippe Turin — recently elected to the UFDI (Union Française des Designers Industriels) — who convinced me to take the helm of the Institut Français d'Esthétique Industrielle (now the Institut Français du Design) and its official trademark (created by ministerial decree). Professionals needed a representative and legitimate organisation; they all expressed their support and enthusiasm.

I then brought together the UFDI, SAD (Société des Artistes Décorateurs, based at the Grand Palais in Paris), and the design

schools — a collective adventure I have been leading for more than forty years, with the Janus Awards and the three founding pillars of the Institute. These pillars are: the Design Conservatory, the Observatory, and the Laboratory: to honour the history of people and objects, to describe and select key design achievements and identify talent, and to decode weak signals (of trends or issues) and promote future scenarios.

My “signature”? Juries that engage in dialogue, cross perspectives, and challenge one another’s views. Because beyond a seductive promise, there must be proof. The scenario must unfold for everyone. For me, good design orchestrates the emotions behind every interaction with a brand and all its stakeholders. Design succeeds in three stages: attracting attention, delivering on its promise in use, and respecting living beings.

If I may share a few secrets about the future: I want to enrich the world of the Janus Awards with examples drawn from public policy (the large scale) and with creations stemming from craftsmanship — not single creations, but those born of research and the potential of the creative gesture (the small scale).

Design for all, beauty that serves a purpose, the creative expression in the service of a vision for humanity: this is the ideal that has always guided my commitment. Le Dess(e)in. This term is pronounced ‘le design’ in French and is translated ‘purpose’ and without the (e) the word also translates as ‘drawing’.



Professor Vesna Popovic

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Vesna Popovic (PhD) is Professor Emerita at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia. Her research focuses on experience, expertise, intuitive interaction, and product design. Vesna integrates knowledge from humanities and technology to create human-centred artefacts and systems, enhancing the understanding of skills and experiences. She co-founded the Industrial Design Course and established the People and Systems (PAS) Lab at QUT. Vesna has a strong publication record and received numerous awards. She is a Fulbright scholar, a Fellow of the Design Research Society (UK), and the Design Institute of Australia (DIA), and is a member of ACM (CHI), and DMI. She served on the WDO /ICSID Board (1997-2001), is a Regional Adviser for WDO, and an Ambassador for Good Design Australia (v.popovic@qut.edu.au).

Vision, Initiative, and Opportunity: A Personal Reflection on a Life in Design

Professor Vesna Popovic

Abstract

This reflection traces the author's career in industrial design, built around human-centred, research-driven, and interdisciplinary approaches. Navigating opportunities across Europe, America, and Australia, the author's academic and professional journey was guided by vision and initiative rather than rigid planning. Central to the philosophy is (i) the integration of teaching, research, and industry, (ii) fostering innovation through empathy and critical reflection, (iii) real-world engagement, and (iv) developing interdisciplinary collaboration spanning design, technology, health, and engineering. The author's influence extends to international policy, as the first Australian elected to the World Design Organisation (WDO), advocating for global best practices in design education. The reflection also acknowledges the challenges faced by women and highlights the importance of mentorship and ethical practice. This reflection concludes that vision, opportunism, collaboration, and human values are significant for future design leadership.

***Keywords:* career development, design education, research and practice, design leadership.**

Reflecting on my career presents both a challenge and an opportunity—an invitation to examine the path I have taken in academia and the field of industrial design. Although my journey has not followed a strict plan, it has been guided by a strong sense of vision, initiative, and a willingness to seize opportunities as they arise and to take risks. Having lived, studied, and worked across three continents—Europe, America, and Australia—I have consistently progressed by making the most of the opportunities. Australia became the country where my academic career flourished and where my core design philosophy took root and grew.

At the core of my philosophy is the integration of research, education, and industry practice through a human-centred, innovative, and interdisciplinary approach. This philosophy is based on several fundamental principles:

- Human-Centred and Research-Led: Design must start with a thorough understanding of human experience and context. Whether working on a product, system, or environment, empathy and research underpin all stages of the design process. The educational programs and research laboratory I established focused on enhancing human experiences through practice and research, going beyond the creation of functional objects.**
- Integration of Teaching, Research, and Practice: Design education should reflect the design process itself—creative, reflective, and practice-oriented. I support an educational approach that seamlessly combines teaching with applied research and industry partnerships, ensuring students and colleagues engage directly**

with real-world challenges, thereby recognising the tangible impact of design thinking.

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Innovation happens when different fields come together. I have promoted collaborative projects that connect design, technology, psychology, health, and engineering, enriching the problem-solving process and producing research outcomes with greater social, commercial, and educational impact.
- **Promoting Leadership and Independent Thinking:** My educational ethos emphasises mentorship, leadership, and fostering the ability for independent and entrepreneurial thinking among students and colleagues. By incorporating leadership opportunities into both curricula and research environments, I aimed to prepare graduates not only to fill existing roles but also to forge new paths within the global design landscape.
- **Reflective and Critical Practice:** Promoting the use of reflective practice and critical analysis as key tools for creative problem-solving. Innovative teaching methods—such as self-directed learning projects, design concept workbooks, and qualitative research techniques—aid in the development of lifelong learning skills and adaptability.

Taken together, these principles establish a human-centred, research-driven, multidisciplinary, and innovation-focused design philosophy. Its mission is to empower designers and students to create contextually relevant solutions that have lasting and meaningful impacts.

My most enduring accomplishments come from this philosophy. These highlights include:

- **Transformative Leadership and Program Development:** At Queensland University of Technology (QUT), I led the development and expansion of the Industrial Design Program during a key period for the discipline in Queensland. The innovative, research-led curriculum set new standards of excellence, producing graduates who have gone on to lead design consultancies worldwide. By forging strategic alliances and creating new program structures, I built partnerships between academia and industry that continue to shape the professional landscape.
- **Human-Centred Research and the People and Systems (PAS) Lab:** As the founder of the People and Systems (PAS) Lab at QUT, I fostered an environment where interdisciplinary research thrived, encompassing design, IT, psychology, health, and engineering. The PAS Lab became a hub for pioneering work in intuitive interaction, user experience, and cross-disciplinary research methods, attracting significant funding and producing research outcomes that impacted public safety, eHealth, and advanced ergonomics.
- **Educational Innovation and Mentorship:** My approach to education has always been focused on mirroring the design process—emphasising creativity, reflection, and real-world connections. I combined theory with practice, introduced self-directed learning and qualitative research methods, and fostered a culture of intellectual independence and enterprise. This model has produced graduates who now hold prominent academic and professional

roles, regularly winning national and international design awards, which demonstrates the effectiveness of this educational approach.

- Global Leadership and Policy Impact: My influence extends well beyond QUT and Australia. As the first Australian elected to the World Design Organisation (WDO) (formerly ICSID), I played a key role in shaping international design education policy. I led the founding of the WDO Design Education Folio, contributing to the global conversation on design, and getting voting rights for educational members of WDO.**
- Design Practice Rooted in Human Values: Central to my teaching and work is the belief in humanising technology. By integrating research, education, and professional practice, and by fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical leadership, and entrepreneurial thinking, I prepare graduates not just for today but also for pioneering roles in the future of design.**

The lasting impact of these initiatives is clear in the strong growth of Queensland's design sector, the achievements of my graduates, and the standards established in design education and research. Through visionary leadership and a commitment to human-centred innovation and ethical practice, I have helped elevate the field's profile both locally and internationally.

On a personal level, my journey has been shaped by overcoming unique challenges. As a woman in a male-dominated field, recognition primarily came through visible success. Throughout my

career, I have appreciated the support from male colleagues and friends. Reflecting on my career, I was surprised to find that I had no single female supporter, and I faced significant challenges from some of my female colleagues. It would be helpful if women supported their female colleagues more.

My career has been shaped by seizing opportunities—often following an opportunity challenge rather than a strict plan. A pivotal moment came early: after completing my master's in the USA, I responded to a QUT advertisement, attended interviews across continents, and accepted a position at QUT in Brisbane after a chat in an Italian restaurant. This unconventional journey was driven by vision and ambition, and I have no regrets.

In summary, reflecting on these achievements reaffirms the value of an opportunistic approach, powered by vision and initiative, contradicting the current approach—'everything must be measured'. The legacy continues in the successes of my students, the evolution of design education, and the standards our programs now exemplify. I remain optimistic that the evolution of the field will favour collaboration, mentorship, and ethical practice—creating a more supportive, innovative, and humanity-centred future for all.