

Rhode Island School of Design
History of Industrial Design
LAEL LE-38
Syllabus Spring, 2019
Class location:
Mondays 6:30 to 9:30 pm College Building 412
Wednesdays 9:00 am to 12:00 College Building 412
Professor: Matthew Bird
Contact information: mbird@risd.edu

“The best prophet of the future is the past.” Byron, 1821

Overview:

History is a powerful tool. You will be a better designer with a basic understanding of the history of design. You should be familiar with important design styles, movements and designers.

Identify your own interests and concerns by examining the work of other designers. Use history to focus your own work to avoid distractions, false starts, pitfalls, and unnecessary mistakes.

The practice of Industrial Design is based on research, investigation, collaboration, and interpretation. Why duplicate the prior efforts of others when you could build on them?

Also, history can inspire; knowing how designers have solved problems in the past informs today’s problem solving, leading to stronger, richer, and faster solutions. Focusing your eyes and brains on designs that inspire you infuses your own work with excitement and passion.

Objectives:

This class will offer a chronological overview of history of Industrial Design, presented in a lecture format. Topics discussed will include major design styles and movements, significant designers, manufacturers, and design-related companies, innovations in technology and material use, and the development of sales, marketing, user-focused designing, and the history of design process. Students will explore different definitions of Industrial Design and identify historical, contemporary, and future boundaries of the profession. One objective of the class is to produce basic comprehension of the history of Industrial Design. The larger objective, though, is to afford you access to the widest possible range of information and images, to allow personal exploration and deeper knowledge where you choose. This will help you bring history to life in a way that is useful to you in studio practice and beyond. By the end of the semester, we will have looked at nearly 4,000 images.

Details:

Class time includes a combination of lectures, group discussions, and in-class student presentations. Homework consists of reading assignments, and written reading notes. Each student will produce an in-class presentation and a research project.

Grading:

Please refer to the grading chart handed out and reviewed in class on the first day, and also found at <http://historyofid.tumblr.com>. It is your responsibility to retain all work returned to you, to assist in resolving any grade disputes that may occur.

Assignments:

All assignments, requirements, and deadlines are reviewed in class the first day. Assignments are all posted on line (found at <http://historyofid.tumblr.com>). It is your responsibility to understand the assignments, plan your work schedule, and meet the deadlines involved.

Expectations:

- You must attend class.
- You must be on time for the start of class, and after the break.
- Lateness will affect your grade.
- Attendance includes being awake in class and engaged in the experience. Being asleep in class, working on unrelated things in class, and being inattentive will affect your grade.
- If you don't return from the break, you won't get credit for attending class.
- If you have a friend turn your attendance sheet in for you instead of actually coming to class, you won't get credit for attending. Neither will your friend.
- You can't get a grade on work you didn't turn in.
- I confirm the receipt of all emails. If I didn't let you know I got it, I didn't get it.
- Posting your work to a random Google Drive and hoping I will find it is not the same as turning it in (assignments include details).
- If you are ill or unable to attend class, you must contact me (mbird@risd.edu) or the ID office (454-6160) before class.
- Three unexcused absences from class is grounds for a failing grade.
- Three excused absences also result in a failing grade. You may then petition the Registrar to change this failing grade to a W (withdrawal from the class for medical reasons).
- Laptops are not allowed in class.
- Neither are cell phones or tablets. Texting in class will affect your grade.
- You may not record this class.

You must create the work you complete for this class. Any work with content copied from another source, presented as your own work, is plagiarized (this includes cutting and pasting text from other people's writing). Plagiarism is wrong for 100 reasons,

ESPECIALLY at RISD where we value you for your creative abilities. Plagiarism has serious consequences. You will not receive credit for the assignment. You might not pass the class. You will miss opportunities to develop your own ideas, and that's the worst part.

RISD's full Academic Code of Conduct, also found at <http://policies.risd.edu/academic/academic-code-of-conduct/> is:

RISD seeks to help its students realize their fullest intellectual, artistic, and personal potential through a distinctive combination of studio and liberal arts courses. The College values the creative process and freedom of expression. The College also honors its responsibility to protect the values and standards of an academic community.

The College recognizes the need for risk-taking and experimentation in a challenging art, design, and liberal arts education. Moreover, the long history of appropriation, subversion, and other means of challenging convention in the arts may, at times, complicate attempts to definitively codify forms of acknowledgement/attribution. That said, forms of experimentation that do challenge these boundaries must at all times adhere to the fundamental value underlying academic conduct at RISD: honesty in the creation and presentation of one's work as well as in one's relations to others and their work.

Academic writing must follow conventions of documentation and citation. Others' ideas—whether quoted directly or paraphrased, whether taken from a book, website, or lecture—must be clearly attributed both to provide a record of the writer's research and to avoid plagiarism, or presenting another's ideas as one's own. Liberal Arts faculty will often explicitly address documentation expectations, including preferred styles, in class.

In the studio culture the conventions governing the use and reference to others' work are less clearly defined than in academic writing. These conventions are often defined by particular disciplinary histories and practices and are best addressed in the context of the particular studio experience.

Given the wide variety of disciplinary histories, conventions, traditions, and practices applicable to liberal arts and studio activities, the individual faculty member defines, within reason, what constitutes academic misconduct within the context of a given course.

Definitions of Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct compromises the academic integrity of the College and subverts the educational process. Primary, but not exclusive, kinds of such misconduct are:

Cheating

The use of unauthorized information, study aids or other materials, or unauthorized communication with, or copying from another student on papers, projects, tests, or other academic work. It is the responsibility of students to consult with their faculty concerning what materials and types of collaboration are permissible.

Plagiarism

The passing off of someone else's ideas, writing, or work as one's own is plagiarism. Appropriate methods and forms of attribution vary by discipline. Some courses will include instruction in appropriate conventions for citation and attribution within the field. Students are advised to seek out relevant guidelines on their own (the RISD Writing Center offers resources and guidance), to ask faculty when in doubt about standards, and to recognize that they are ultimately responsible for proper citation.

Falsification and Fabrication

The attribution of information or material included in one's work to a false or fabricated source, or the falsification or fabrication of the information or materials themselves.

Unauthorized Reuse

The submission of substantially the same work to satisfy requirements for one course that has previously been submitted in satisfaction of the requirements for another course or that was created for another purpose, without permission of the faculty of the course for which the work is being submitted. Students are expected to create new work in specific response to each assignment, unless expressly authorized to do otherwise.

Unfair Academic Advantage

The theft, destruction, or defacement of, or other interference with, the work of other students for the purpose of gaining academic advantage; the engagement in other activities that place other students at an academic disadvantage, such as theft, concealment, or alteration of needed resources or other materials; or other manipulation of the academic system in one's favor.

Noncompliance with Course Rules

The violation of specific course expectations set forth in a syllabus or otherwise provided to the student by the instructor whether verbal or written.

Students With Disabilities:

Rhode Island School of Design is committed to providing equal opportunity for all students. If you are a student with a disability that may require accommodations to complete the requirements of this class, I encourage you to discuss your learning needs with me during the first week of the term. Once an approval letter from the Office of Disability Support Services is submitted, accommodations will be provided as needed. For more information on how to receive accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 401 709-8460 or disabilitysupportservices@risd.edu

Civility Statement:

All students should be well-served by this course. The diversity that students bring to this class is a resource, strength and benefit. History has not been respectful of diversity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, or any sort of diverse background characteristics. Today we struggle to become so, and strive to improve our ability to appreciate our differences. Learning about history will help make this progress, which is important and necessary. Your suggestions about how to connect history with our need to improve the value of diversity in today's world are encouraged and appreciated.

Schedule:

The planned lectures will be introduced on the first day of class, though their content and order may be revised to better respond to the experience of taking and teaching the class. Each week, a summary of the lecture content and a list of names introduced will

be posted. The proposed schedule follows:

Week 1 (February 18/20)

How do you define Industrial Design? How will this course? Centuries of innovation predate our profession, and the smarts on view will astound you. What did the world of craft-based, make - what - you - need production, royal patronage/guild systems, and agricultural economy look like?

Review expectations and assignments for the class.

Week 2 (February 25/27)

The Shakers were innovators who used design to improve their world in ways that continue to surprise and inspire designers today. Systematized manufacturing and distribution were beginning to introduce design into what, for centuries, had been craft. In England, the work of Josiah Wedgwood serves as a neat introduction to the Industrial Revolution.

Week 3 (March 4/6)

How did water and steam power lead to a consumer culture and a world fueled by manufacturing? We will do a little thinking about the Arts and Crafts movement as well.;where does man end and the machine begin?

Week 4 (March 11/13)

The Art Nouveau period is written off as a period of design confusion. But the wonderful, rich, strange objects produced at this time demonstrate designers' struggles to accept the machine and imagine mass production. Also, colonialism, global commerce, advances in science and technology, an explosion of new material opportunities, the continued development of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the Great War.

Week 5 (March 18/20)

Faster transportation created a culture obsessed with speed and travel. Prohibition, jazz music, Hollywood, and the Great Depression focused attention on entertainment. Designers interpreted these themes into the Art Deco style. But new technologies like small motors, electricity, plastics, heavier-than-air travel, and automobiles needed new ways of designing and led to the creation of of Industrial Design as a profession.

Week 6 (April 1/3)

Fasten your seat belts for a ramble through Henry Ford's and FW Taylor's assembly lines, the Gilbeths' pioneering time and motion studies, Christine Frederick's application of Scientific Management to the domestic landscape, Greta Schutte-Lihotzky's application of that work to invent the kitchen as a designed object, and finally the development of universal design and how it blossomed right here at RISD with the Universal Kitchen project.

Week 7 (April 8/10)

Bauhaus designers and their European peers introduced a machine aesthetic that was too removed from popular taste and practical manufacturing practices to be afforded or accepted on a broad scale. American designers took the materials, combined them with production manufacturing methods, and produced designs that didn't have the conceptual purity of the Bauhaus, but did find their way into homes around the world, making the modern style a part of daily life.

Week 8 (April 15/17)

Contrasting Henry Dreyfuss to Raymond Loewy, and their early, enormous, successful design offices, lets us examine the long careers of these important designers. We will ALSO explore the development of design processes and techniques that are still in use by today's designers (model making techniques, rendering styles, ergonomic and human factor considerations, marketing, research methods, business practices, and inter-disciplinary teamwork).

Week 9 (April 22/24)

Design after World War Two, especially in America, displayed a mastery (for the first time since the advent of machine manufacturing) of production methods, material use, and user-focused design. The result of this newfound confidence was an era of vibrant sculptural form combined with functional considerations long overlooked. We will examine the factors involved in this perfect storm (cultural, political, economic, material, and business).

Week 10 (April 29/May 1)

Post-War confidence in design, business, and lifestyle help fuel corporate growth. Unlike today, people believed that participating in corporate culture was a duty to help economies grow. Designers shift their focus from the home to the corporation. We will look at iconic objects that communicate this theme, as well as the arrival of anonymous designs, created to satisfy market and user surveys. Hold on to your hats, because here comes the cubicle!

Week 11 (May 6/8)

Plastic sent designers scrambling to work with intent, leading to new, exciting, startling objects. AND a lot of crap. There were significant advances (food storage! small appliances!), but also some problems (cheap disposable toys, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch). Discussing this conflict will lead us to Buckminster Fuller and his work to create an awareness of the fragility of our planet.

Week 12 (May 13/15)

Considering electronics, computers, and digital technology sent design in new directions. Considering form with no specific function, with few engineering limitations or ergonomic considerations, is exciting and terrifying all at once. So designers began to use metaphor, narrative, and semantics in place of good-old problem solving and user focus stuff. It all led to our current period of Celebrity Obsession: How did we wind up stuck with this culture of celebrity designers? Why did Philippe Starck pose for so many

pictures with his shirt off? And in one final chapter, what is happening to Industrial Design in this information age? The whole semester of looking at objects ends by looking at work involving no objects at all, like interface and system design.

Liberal Arts Exam Day, May 17: Research project final documents due.