

## School of Fashion director Louise Valentine on designing for change.

It has been a year of change for Louise Valentine, PhD. She moved with her husband from her home in Dundee, Scotland, to become director of Kent State's Shannon Rodgers and Jerry Silverman School of Fashion Design and Merchandising in August 2019. Previously, she had served as professor and chair of design at the University of Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design.

Six months into adjusting to the new job, home, culture and continent, she found herself presiding over the rapid switch to remote working prompted by the pandemic and solving the "wicked" challenges of safely conducting the school's fashion business work.

Meanwhile, Valentine, who holds the Margaret Clark Morgan Endowed Leadership Chair as director, continues to pursue a fresh vision for the School of Fashion's future: a "think bigger" opportunity that brought her to Kent State to support a higher international profile through an ambitious initiative aimed at bringing new voices—from different industries and communities—to the conversation.

"What does it mean to lead with inclusivity within fashion for higher education?" asks Valentine. "KSU Fashion wants to be on the forefront of answering that globally significant question."

She also is focused on continuing the progress of the \$7.3 million renovation planned for the School of Fashion's home in Rockwell Hall, overseeing a brand development for the school and increasing international student enrollment from 5 percent to 13 percent.

Challenging work lies ahead, but Valentine, with expertise in designing for change, is up for the task.

As an applied design researcher, with a doctoral degree in designer's thinking, she studies user needs—emotional as well as

practical—and uses that information to design innovative solutions. Her research has focused on how design for business innovation is perceived and communicated, and the value design adds when used as a tool for leadership and performance management in business.

"[Kent State's] School of Fashion had prepared itself for change," she says. "And it welcomed transformation by inviting me to be the director. I look forward to leading it in its next stage of development."

We asked her to tell us more about herself and what she values.

**On the value of diversity:** One of the things I have championed my whole career is having people from different backgrounds in the room to help you solve a problem. Through diversity we can begin to glimpse the significance of imagination and a level of innovation that individuals cannot accomplish on their own. Everyone has something of value to give along the way.

**On the value of design:** Design is a strategy for the highest levels of innovation, but not just in a product or economic sense. It's also about what that looks like culturally and socially. It's as much about how it impacts the individual as it does the organization.

**On guiding young fashion thinkers:** One of the biggest things is to allow students to find their voice and to understand that *their* voice is what people want to hear. Not them mimicking other people's voices.

**On fostering focus:** As a creative thinker, my mind dances a lot. I purposely choose to be outside to help me think and be creative. One of my favorite places is the Cairngorm Mountain range in the Scottish Highlands. Being exposed to brutal weather, all you can focus on is getting one foot in front of the other and breathing. To focus so purely and intensely clears my mind.

—Candace Goforth DeSantis, BS '94

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