



## MODERN TIMES

Lasting influences of the Bauhaus design movement.

By Jacquelin Carnegie

Almost everything we think of as modern—from architecture to furniture to painting—came out of the Bauhaus design movement, founded in Germany in 1919. When the Nazis closed the school in 1933, Bauhaus disciples fled and spread their concepts of art and architecture worldwide, notably to Chicago, Boston and Israel, where Tel Aviv's "White City" of Bauhaus-style buildings has been named a UNESCO World Heritage site.

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Bauhaus school and its celebrated masters: architects Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe; painters Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky; designer Marcel

Breuer and other artistic talents including László Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers and Lyonel Feininger.

Even if the Bauhaus style is not your taste, you've got to marvel at a group of avant-garde artists who fundamentally changed the aesthetics of architecture and design.

### Beginnings

The winds of artistic and social change had been blowing through Western Europe since the late 1800s, but were fueled by disillusionment after the devastation of World War I.

In a rebellion against politically repressive regimes and authoritarian views of what constituted "art,"

avant-garde movements with similar ideals began to emerge throughout Europe—the Vienna Secession in Austria, De Stijl in Holland, Futurism in Italy and the Bauhaus in Germany.

These movements rejected prior bourgeois notions of beauty in painting, architecture and furnishings. They focused on creating objects and buildings in unembellished forms and believed that elegantly designed items could be produced using industrial techniques and materials such as steel, concrete, chrome and glass. The artists also wanted their work to be socially responsible, making attractive dwellings and furniture affordable for the working class.

### Bauhaus 101

Adhering to the dictums "Form follows Function" and "Less is More," the Bauhaus ("building school") curriculum emphasized interdisciplinary learning and industrial production. The Bauhaus teachers, referred to as "masters," were some of the most talented artists of their time. Their motto, "Art & Technology—a New Unity!" required students to apply industrial aesthetics to the design of interior furnishings, household items and residential spaces.



**Previous Page:** Brandt's metal teapot and Breuer's Wassily chair. **This Page:** The Bauhaus school in Dessau, Germany, and its students.

Study began with a mandatory preliminary course (*Vorkurs*) providing an introduction to the Bauhaus ideas and design fundamentals, followed by a number of workshops such as architecture, carpentry, metalwork, stained glass, weaving and typography.

As the school changed directors—Walter Gropius (1919-1928), Hannes Meyer (1928-1930), Mies van der Rohe (1930-1933)—and locations (Weimar, Dessau, Berlin), the basic principles remained.

At first considered revolutionary, then repudiated by the Nazis, today nearly every art curriculum in the world includes foundation courses based on the Bauhaus model.

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### The Bauhaus Legacy

The Bauhaus had a profound influence on developments in art, architecture, graphic design, interior design and industrial design.

The products created in the Bauhaus workshops made the idea of functional design acceptable. Pieces produced by Bauhaus masters have become iconic: Breuer's Wassily chair and Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair, Wagenfeld's WG 24 table lamp, and Brandt's metal teapots and pendant lamps.

Companies still producing Bauhaus designs include Rosenthal (Gropius' TAC chinaware), Jenaer Glas (Wilhelm Wagenfeld glassware) and Tecolomen (Marianne Brandt and Wagenfeld lamps).

After the Nazis closed the school,

Walter Gropius was appointed chairman of the Harvard School of Architecture. (Both Philip Johnson and I.M. Pei were his students.) Marcel Breuer joined Gropius as a Harvard professor.

In Chicago, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe headed the department of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology and László Moholy-Nagy founded the New Bauhaus (the Institute of Design). Josef Albers became chair of the department of design at Yale University.

Hence, the radical Bauhaus ideas became part of the curriculum at mainstream American institutions and were passed on to the next generation of artists and architects.

### Bauhaus Über Alis

Ninety years have passed since the Nazi regime dismissed the Bauhaus and shut down the school.

Design and architecture are still taught at the Bauhaus University of Weimar in the original school building. The Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, a research center for experimental design, is in the Gropius-designed building. These, along with the remaining "masters' houses," are all UNESCO World Heritage sites and can be visited, as can the Bauhaus buildings in Tel Aviv. Throughout 2009, there will be numerous Bauhaus-related exhibitions and symposiums.

This fall, the Museum of Modern Art in New York will present Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity, the first comprehensive retrospective of the Bauhaus at MoMA since 1938.

But all you have to do is look out the window at sleek skyscrapers or at your stereo components, desk lamps and kitchen utensils to see that Bauhaus concepts still prevail.