

Bauhaus

Staatliches Bauhaus, commonly known simply as **Bauhaus**, was a school in Germany that combined crafts and the fine arts, and was famous for the approach to design that it publicized and taught. It operated from 1919 to 1933. At that time the German term *Bauhaus*, literally "house of construction" stood for "School of Building".

The Bauhaus school was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar. In spite of its name, and the fact that its founder was an architect, the Bauhaus did not have an architecture department during the first years of its existence. Nonetheless it was founded with the idea of creating a 'total' work of art in which all arts, including architecture would eventually be brought together. The Bauhaus style became one of the most influential currents in Modernist architecture and modern design.^[1] The Bauhaus had a profound influence upon subsequent developments in art, architecture, graphic design, interior design, industrial design, and typography.

The school existed in three German cities (Weimar from 1919 to 1925, Dessau from 1925 to 1932 and Berlin from 1932 to 1933), under three different architect-directors: Walter Gropius from 1919 to 1928, Hannes Meyer from 1928 to 1930 and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe from 1930 until 1933, when the school was closed by its own leadership under pressure from the Nazi regime.

The changes of venue and leadership resulted in a constant shifting of focus, technique, instructors, and politics. For instance: the pottery shop was discontinued when the school moved from Weimar to Dessau, even though it had been an important revenue source; when Mies van der Rohe took over the school in 1930, he transformed it into a private school, and would not allow any supporters of Hannes Meyer to attend it.

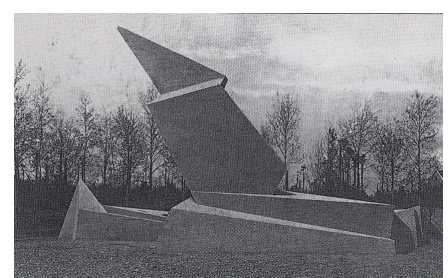
Bauhaus and German modernism

Germany's defeat in World War I, the fall of the German monarchy and the abolition of censorship under the new, liberal Weimar Republic allowed an upsurge of radical experimentation in all the arts, previously suppressed by the old regime. Many Germans of left-wing views were influenced by the cultural experimentation that followed the Russian Revolution, such as constructivism. Such influences can be overstated: Gropius himself did not share these radical views, and said that Bauhaus was entirely apolitical.^[2] Just as important was the influence of the 19th century English designer William Morris, who had argued that art should meet the needs of society and that there should be no distinction between form and function.^[3] Thus the Bauhaus style, also known as the International Style, was marked by the absence of ornamentation and by harmony between the function of an object or a building and its design.

However, the most important influence on Bauhaus was modernism, a cultural movement whose origins lay as far back as the 1880s, and which had already made its presence felt in Germany before the World War, despite the prevailing conservatism. The design innovations commonly associated with Gropius and the Bauhaus—the radically



The Bauhaus Dessau



1921/2, Walter Gropius's Expressionist Monument to the March Dead



Typography by Herbert Bayer above the entrance to the workshop block of the Bauhaus, Dessau, 2005

simplified forms, the rationality and functionality, and the idea that mass-production was reconcilable with the individual artistic spirit—were already partly developed in Germany before the Bauhaus was founded. The German national designers' organization Deutscher Werkbund was formed in 1907 by Hermann Muthesius to harness the new potentials of mass production, with a mind towards preserving Germany's economic competitiveness with England. In its first seven years, the Werkbund came to be regarded as the authoritative body on questions of design in Germany, and was copied in other countries. Many fundamental questions of craftsmanship versus mass production, the relationship of usefulness and beauty, the practical purpose of formal beauty in a commonplace object, and whether or not a single proper form could exist, were argued out among its 1,870 members (by 1914).

The entire movement of German architectural modernism was known as Neues Bauen. Beginning in June 1907, Peter Behrens' pioneering industrial design work for the German electrical company AEG successfully integrated art and mass production on a large scale. He designed consumer products, standardized parts, created clean-lined designs for the company's graphics, developed a consistent corporate identity, built the modernist landmark AEG Turbine Factory, and made full use of newly developed materials such as poured concrete and exposed steel. Behrens was a founding member of the Werkbund, and both Walter Gropius and Adolf Meier worked for him in this period.


The Bauhaus was founded at a time when the German zeitgeist ("spirit of the times") had turned from emotional Expressionism to the matter-of-fact New Objectivity. An entire group of working architects, including Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut and Hans Poelzig, turned away from fanciful experimentation, and turned toward rational, functional, sometimes standardized building. Beyond the Bauhaus, many other significant German-speaking architects in the 1920s responded to the same aesthetic issues and material possibilities as the school. They also responded to the promise of a "minimal dwelling" written into the new Weimar Constitution. Ernst May, Bruno Taut, and Martin Wagner, among others, built large housing blocks in Frankfurt and Berlin. The acceptance of modernist design into everyday life was the subject of publicity campaigns, well-attended public exhibitions like the Weissenhof Estate, films, and sometimes fierce public debate.

Bauhaus and Vkhutemas

Vkhutemas, the Russian state art and technical school founded in 1920 in Moscow, has been compared to Bauhaus. Founded a year after the Bauhaus school, Vkhutemas has close parallels to the German Bauhaus in its intent, organization and scope. The two schools were the first to train artist-designers in a modern manner.^[4] Both schools were state-sponsored initiatives to merge the craft tradition with modern technology, with a Basic Course in aesthetic principles, courses in color theory, industrial design, and architecture.^[4] Vkhutemas was a larger school than the Bauhaus,^[5] but it was less publicised outside the Soviet Union and consequently, is less familiar to the West.^[6]

With the internationalism of modern architecture and design, there were many exchanges between the Vkhutemas and the Bauhaus.^[7] The second Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer attempted to organise an exchange between the two schools, while Hinnerk Scheper of the Bauhaus collaborated with various Vkhutein members on the use of colour in architecture. In addition, El Lissitzky's book *Russia: an Architecture for World Revolution* published in German in 1930 featured several illustrations of Vkhutemas/Vkhutein projects there.

History of the Bauhaus

Bauhaus and its Sites in Weimar and Dessau*	
UNESCO World Heritage Site	
	
Bauhaus building in Dessau	
Country	Germany
Type	Cultural
Criteria	ii, iv, vi
Reference	729 ^[8]
Region**	Europe and North America
Inscription history	
Inscription	1996 (20th Session)
* Name as inscribed on World Heritage List. ^[9]	
** Region as classified by UNESCO. ^[10]	

Weimar

The school was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919 as a merger of the Grand Ducal School of Arts and Crafts and the Weimar Academy of Fine Art. Its roots lay in the arts and crafts school founded by the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach in 1906 and directed by Belgian Art Nouveau architect Henry van de Velde.^[11] When van de Velde was forced to resign in 1915 because he was Belgian, he suggested Gropius, Hermann Obrist and August Endell as possible successors. In 1919, after delays caused by the destruction of World War I and a lengthy debate over who should head the institution and the socio-economic meanings of a reconciliation of the fine arts and the applied arts (an issue which remained a defining one throughout the school's existence), Gropius was made the director of a new institution integrating the two called the Bauhaus.^[12] In the pamphlet for an April 1919 exhibition entitled "Exhibition of Unknown Architects", Gropius proclaimed his goal as being "to create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist." Gropius' neologism *Bauhaus* references both building and the Bauhütte, a premodern guild of stonemasons.^[13] The early intention was for the Bauhaus to be a combined architecture school, crafts school, and academy of the arts. In 1919 Swiss painter Johannes Itten, German-American painter Lyonel Feininger, and German sculptor Gerhard Marcks, along with Gropius, comprised the faculty of the Bauhaus. By the following year their ranks had grown to include German painter, sculptor and designer Oskar Schlemmer who headed the theater workshop, and Swiss painter Paul Klee, joined in 1922 by Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky. A tumultuous year at the Bauhaus, 1922 also saw the move of Dutch painter Theo van Doesburg to Weimar to promote De Stijl ("The Style"), and a visit to the Bauhaus by Russian Constructivist artist and architect El Lissitzky.^[14]

From 1919 to 1922 the school was shaped by the pedagogical and aesthetic ideas of Johannes Itten, who taught the *Vorkurs* or 'preliminary course' that was the introduction to the ideas of the Bauhaus.^[12] Itten was heavily influenced in his teaching by the ideas of Franz Cizek and Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel. He was also influenced in respect to aesthetics by the work of the Blaue Reiter group in Munich as well as the work of Austrian Expressionist Oskar Kokoschka. The influence of German Expressionism favoured by Itten was analogous in some ways to the fine arts side of the ongoing debate. This influence culminated with the addition of Der Blaue Reiter

founding member Wassily Kandinsky to the faculty and ended when Itten resigned in late 1922. Itten was replaced by the Hungarian designer László Moholy-Nagy, who rewrote the *Vorkurs* with a leaning towards the New Objectivity favored by Gropius, which was analogous in some ways to the applied arts side of the debate. Although this shift was an important one, it did not represent a radical break from the past so much as a small step in a broader, more gradual socio-economic movement that had been going on at least since 1907 when van de Velde had argued for a craft basis for design while Hermann Muthesius had begun implementing industrial prototypes.^[14]

Gropius was not necessarily against Expressionism, and in fact himself in the same 1919 pamphlet proclaiming this "new guild of craftsmen, without the class snobbery," described "painting and sculpture rising to heaven out of the hands of a million craftsmen, the crystal symbol of the new faith of the future." By 1923 however, Gropius was no longer evoking images of soaring Romanesque cathedrals and the craft-driven aesthetic of the "Völkisch movement", instead declaring "we want an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast cars."^[15] Gropius argued that a new period of history had begun with the end of the war. He wanted to create a new architectural style to reflect this new era. His style in architecture and consumer goods was to be functional, cheap and consistent with mass production. To these ends, Gropius wanted to reunite art and craft to arrive at high-end functional products with artistic pretensions. The Bauhaus issued a magazine called *Bauhaus* and a series of books called "Bauhausbücher". Since the Weimar Republic lacked the quantity of raw materials available to the United States and Great Britain, it had to rely on the proficiency of a skilled labor force and an ability to export innovative and high quality goods. Therefore designers were needed and so was a new type of art education. The school's philosophy stated that the artist should be trained to work with the industry.

Weimar was in the German state of Thuringia, and the Bauhaus school received state support from the Social Democrat-controlled Thuringian state government. From 1923 the school in Weimar came under political pressure from right-wing circles, until on December 26, 1924 it issued a press release accusing the government and setting the closure of the school for the end of March 1925.^{[16] [17]} In February 1924, the Social Democrats lost control of the state parliament to the Nationalists. The Ministry of Education placed the staff on six-month contracts and cut the school's funding in half. They had already been looking for alternative sources of funding. After the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, a school of industrial design with teachers and staff less antagonistic to the conservative political regime remained in Weimar. This school was eventually known as the Technical University of Architecture and Civil Engineering, and in 1996 changed its name to Bauhaus University Weimar.



Foyer of the Bauhaus University in Weimar

Dessau

Gropius's design for the Dessau facilities was a return to the futuristic Gropius of 1914 that had more in common with the International style lines of the Fagus Factory than the stripped down Neo-classical of the Werkbund pavilion or the *Völkisch* Sommerfeld House.^[18] The Dessau years saw a remarkable change in direction for the school. According to Elaine Hoffman, Gropius had approached the Dutch architect Mart Stam to run the newly-founded architecture program, and when Stam declined the position, Gropius turned to Stam's friend and colleague in the ABC group, Hannes Meyer.



Meyer became director when Gropius resigned in February 1928, and brought the Bauhaus its two most significant building commissions, both of which still exist: five apartment buildings in the city of Dessau, and the headquarters of the Federal School of the German Trade Unions (ADGB) in Bernau. Meyer favored measurements and calculations in his presentations to clients, along with the use of off-the-shelf architectural components to reduce costs, and this approach proved attractive to potential clients. The school turned its first profit under his leadership in 1929.

But Meyer also generated a great deal of conflict. As a radical functionalist, he had no patience with the aesthetic program, and forced the resignations of Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and other long-time instructors. As a vocal Communist, he encouraged the formation of a communist student organization. In the increasingly dangerous political atmosphere, this became a threat to the existence of the Dessau school. Gropius fired him in the summer of 1930.^[19]

Berlin

Although neither the Nazi Party nor Hitler himself had a cohesive architectural policy before they came to power in 1933, Nazi writers like Wilhelm Frick and Alfred Rosenberg had already labeled the Bauhaus "un-German" and criticized its modernist styles, deliberately generating public controversy over issues like flat roofs. Increasingly through the early 1930s, they characterized the Bauhaus as a front for communists and social liberals. Indeed, a number of communist students loyal to Meyer moved to the Soviet Union when he was fired in 1930.

Even before the Nazis came to power, political pressure on Bauhaus had increased. The Nazi movement, from nearly the start, denounced the Bauhaus for its "degenerate art", and the Nazi regime was determined to crack down on what it saw as the foreign, probably Jewish influences of "cosmopolitan modernism." Despite Gropius's protestations that as a war veteran and a patriot his work had no subversive political intent, the Berlin Bauhaus was pressured to close in April 1933. Emigrants did succeed, however, in spreading the concepts of the Bauhaus to other countries, including the "New Bauhaus" of Chicago.^[20] Mies van der Rohe decided to emigrate to the United States for the directorship of the School of Architecture at the Armour Institute (now IIT) in Chicago and to seek building commissions.^[a] Curiously, however, some Bauhaus influences lived on in Nazi Germany. When Hitler's chief engineer, Fritz Todt, began opening the new autobahn (highways) in 1935, many of the bridges and service stations were "bold examples of modernism" — among those submitting designs was Mies van der Rohe.^[21]

Architectural output

The paradox of the early Bauhaus was that, although its manifesto proclaimed that the ultimate aim of all creative activity was building, the school did not offer classes in architecture until 1927. The single most profitable tangible product of the Bauhaus was its wallpaper.

During the years under Gropius (1919–1927), he and his partner Adolf Meyer observed no real distinction between the output of his architectural office and the school. So the built output of Bauhaus architecture in these years is the output of Gropius: the Sommerfeld house in Berlin, the Otte house in Berlin, the Auerbach house in Jena, and the competition design for the Chicago Tribune Tower, which brought the school much attention. The definitive 1926 Bauhaus building in Dessau is also attributed to Gropius. Apart from contributions to the 1923 Haus am Horn, student architectural work amounted to un-built projects, interior finishes, and craft work like cabinets, chairs and pottery.

In the next two years under Meyer, the architectural focus shifted away from aesthetics and towards functionality. There were major commissions: one from the city of Dessau for five tightly designed "Laubenganghäuser" (apartment buildings with balcony access), which are still in use today, and another for the headquarters of the Federal School of the German Trade Unions (ADGB) in Bernau bei Berlin. Meyer's approach was to research users' needs and scientifically develop the design solution.

Mies van der Rohe repudiated Meyer's politics, his supporters, and his architectural approach. As opposed to Gropius's "study of essentials", and Meyer's research into user requirements, Mies advocated a "spatial implementation of intellectual decisions", which effectively meant an adoption of his own aesthetics. Neither van der Rohe nor his Bauhaus students saw any projects built during the 1930s.

The popular conception of the Bauhaus as the source of extensive Weimar-era working housing is not accurate. Two projects, the apartment building project in Dessau and the Törten row housing also in Dessau, fall in that category, but developing worker housing was not the first priority of Gropius nor Mies. It was the Bauhaus contemporaries Bruno Taut, Hans Poelzig and particularly Ernst May, as the city architects of Berlin, Dresden and Frankfurt respectively, who are rightfully credited with the thousands of socially progressive housing units built in Weimar Germany. In Taut's case, the housing he built in south-west Berlin during the 1920s, is still occupied, and can be reached by going easily from the U-Bahn stop Onkel Toms Hütte.



Bauhaus building in Chemnitz



The Engel House in the White City of Tel Aviv: architect: Ze'ev Rechter, 1933; a residential building that has become one of the symbols of Modernist architecture and the first building in Tel Aviv to be built on pilotis



A stage in the Festsaal

Impact

The Bauhaus had a major impact on art and architecture trends in Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Israel (particularly in the White City of Tel Aviv) in the decades following its demise, as many of the artists involved fled, or were exiled, by the Nazi regime. Tel Aviv, in fact, in 2004 was named to the list of world heritage sites by the UN due to its abundance of Bauhaus architecture,^{[22] [23]} it had some 4,000 Bauhaus buildings erected from 1933 on.

Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and László Moholy-Nagy re-assembled in Britain during the mid 1930s to live and work in the Isokon project before the war caught up with them. Both Gropius and Breuer went to teach at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and worked together before their professional split. Their collaboration produced The Aluminum City Terrace in New Kensington, Pennsylvania and the Alan I W Frank House in Pittsburgh, among other projects. The Harvard School was enormously influential in America in the late 1920s and early 1930s, producing such students as Philip Johnson, I.M. Pei, Lawrence Halprin and Paul Rudolph, among many others.

In the late 1930s, Mies van der Rohe re-settled in Chicago, enjoyed the sponsorship of the influential Philip Johnson, and became one of the pre-eminent architects in the world. Moholy-Nagy also went to Chicago and founded the New Bauhaus school under the sponsorship of industrialist and philanthropist Walter Paepcke. This school became the Institute of Design, part of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Printmaker and painter Werner Drewes was also largely responsible for bringing the Bauhaus aesthetic to America and taught at both Columbia University and Washington University in St. Louis. Herbert Bayer, sponsored by Paepcke, moved to Aspen, Colorado in support of Paepcke's Aspen projects at the Aspen Institute. In 1953, Max Bill, together with Inge Aicher-Scholl and Otl Aicher, founded the Ulm School of Design (German: Hochschule für Gestaltung - HfG Ulm) in Ulm, Germany, a design school in the tradition of the Bauhaus. The school is notable for its inclusion of semiotics as a field of study. The school closed in 1968, but the 'Ulm Model' concept continues to influence international design education.^[24]

One of the main objectives of the Bauhaus was to unify art, craft, and technology. The machine was considered a positive element, and therefore industrial and product design were important components. *Vorkurs* ("initial" or "preliminary course") was taught; this is the modern day "Basic Design" course that has become one of the key foundational courses offered in architectural and design schools across



Ceiling with light fixtures for stage in the Festsaal



Dormitory balconies in the residence



Mechanically opened windows

the globe. There was no teaching of history in the school because everything was supposed to be designed and created according to first principles rather than by following precedent.



The Mensa (Cafeteria)

One of the most important contributions of the Bauhaus is in the field of modern furniture design. The ubiquitous Cantilever chair and the Wassily Chair designed by Marcel Breuer are two examples. (Breuer eventually lost a legal battle in Germany with Dutch architect/designer Mart Stam over the rights to the cantilever chair patent. Although Stam had worked on the design of the Bauhaus's 1923 exhibit in Weimar, and guest-lectured at the Bauhaus later in the 1920s, he was not formally associated with the school, and he and Breuer had worked independently on the cantilever concept, thus leading to the patent dispute.)

The physical plant at Dessau survived World War II and was operated as a design school with some architectural facilities by the German Democratic Republic. This included live stage productions in the Bauhaus theater under the name of *Bauhausbühne* ("Bauhaus Stage"). After German reunification, a reorganized school continued in the same building, with no essential continuity with the Bauhaus under Gropius in the early 1920s.^[25] In 1979 Bauhaus-Dessau College started to organize postgraduate programs with participants from all over the world. This effort has been supported by the Bauhaus-Dessau Foundation which was founded in 1974 as a public institution.

Bauhaus artists

Bauhaus was not a formal group, but rather a school. Its three architect-directors (Walter Gropius, Hannes Meyer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe) are most closely associated with Bauhaus.

Furthermore a large number of outstanding artists of their time were lecturers at Bauhaus:

- Anni Albers
- Josef Albers
- Herbert Bayer
- Max Bill
- Marianne Brandt
- Marcel Breuer
- Avgust Černigoj
- Christian Dell
- Werner Drewes
- Lyonel Feininger
- Naum Gabo
- Ludwig Hilberseimer
- Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack
- Johannes Itten
- Wassily Kandinsky
- Paul Klee
- Otto Lindig
- Gerhard Marcks
- László Moholy-Nagy
- Piet Mondrian
- Oskar Schlemmer
- Lothar Schreyer
- Joost Schmidt
- Naum Slutzky
- Gunta Stölzl

Footnotes

- ^a The closure, and the response of Mies van der Rohe, is fully documented in Elaine Hochman's *Architects of Fortune*.

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- [13] Whitford, Frank, ed. *The Bauhaus: Masters & Students by Themselves*. London: Conran Octopus. p. 32. ISBN 1850294151. "...He invented the name 'Bauhaus' not only because it specifically referred to bauen ('building', 'construction') -- but also because of its similarity to the word Bauhütte, the medieval guild of builders and stonemasons out of which Freemasonry sprang. The Bauhaus was to be a kind of modern Bauhütte, therefore, in which craftsmen would work on common projects together, the greatest of which would be buildings in which the arts and crafts would be combined."
- [14] Hal Foster, ed. "1923: The Bauhaus ... holds its first public exhibition in Weimar, Germany". *Art Since 1900: Volume 1 - 1900 to 1944*. Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson. pp. 185–189. ISBN 0500285349.
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External links

- bauhaus-online.de (<http://bauhaus-online.de/en>), web platform published by the three institutions which preserve the Bauhaus heritage (the Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung Berlin, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and the Foundation of Weimar Classics).
- Bauhaus Dessau (<http://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/>), the foundation maintaining the school and master houses in Dessau.
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- Bauhaus typography collection, 1919-1937. (<http://library.getty.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=132985>) The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California. A collection of printing published by the Bauhaus, designed by Bauhaus teachers and students for internal school purposes and for outside commercial use, as well as other printing relating to the Bauhaus.

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