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Summary

Mies van der Rohe 70 years old Buildings from the years 1938–1953 and new plans (pages 217–218)

Mies van der Rohe, one of the most important architects of our age, can look back over 70 years of a productive life. In conveying our best wishes to him on the occasion of his birthday we present in this number some of his finest and most perfect buildings from the years 1938–1953. His work has had a purifying and clarifying effect everywhere on all who are concerned with building.

After his years of apprenticeship with Bruno Paul and Peter Behrens, in whose studio he worked with Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius he was active as architect, publicist and organizer of exhibitions, especially of the "November Group" in Berlin. Under his direction was built in 1926 the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart; his pavilion at the International Exhibition of 1929 in Barcelona for the first time brought him world fame as an architect. Haus Tugendhat in Brunn and the leaders of Bauhaus represent the final stage of his European activity. America calls him in 1938 as director at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, the new plan of which consequently becomes one of his chief projects. His design for the Mannheim Theater is a new milestone in his development.

Mies van der Rohe pushes the principle of "Less is More" to the point where architecture as such completely disappears. No one takes architecture more seriously, no one works out details with more precision than he does. For him architecture is not so much "Queen of the Arts" as it is Servant of Life.

The Editors

Mies van der Rohe Chicago School 1938–1956

The Theoretical Basis

Technology should yield an effect of familiarity.

We should learn with it how to work from the material of the present.

It is the material basis of our buildings. For we are children of the technological age.

Chicago built wholly in the spirit of this technological age.

The steel industry determines from the very beginning the architectural appearance of Chicago.

In the Eighties the architect Louis Sullivan founded the Chicago School.

There arose the first skyscrapers in the world with steel skeleton frameworks. A phrase describing Mies van der Rohe's approach to building is "skin and skeleton." This formula defines a method of architecture wherein a sharp distinction is drawn between the purely structural and the merely superficial elements in building.

Hence it became possible to open up the solid walls which had been necessary in traditional stone and timber construction. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe bases his program on this purely material supposition.

His program:

The structure as an architectural factor; its possibilities and limitations.

Space as a means of architectural expression.

The expression value of materials.

Painting and sculpture in their relationship to architecture and the application of these principles by means of free creative work.

His program therefore is the solution of all architectural problems in line with basic principles.

In the primary conception is included the general lines of all possibilities and all limitations.

The nature of space is not determined by the mere presence of limiting surfaces, but by the intellectual principle behind this limitation.

The formal disposition of space proceeding from structure itself is the essential task of architecture.

The achieved work is not the building, but the ordered space.

There is a law of proportion at the basis of all art, as indication of the ordering power of the human mind.

In the proportions the formless medium takes on form: Witness to the mastery of the human mind. Proportion therefore has to be the decisive means of architectural expression. But no form without relationship to medium.

The expressive value of the medium is not inferior to that of design.

There arises the necessity of finding the ideal medium for the design or the ideal design for the medium.

The artistic statement is a statement of the unity of form and medium.

From this arises the further necessity of creatively integrating, from the start, the art of the painter or of the sculptor with the emerging spatial form.

This was a self-evident fact in the great artistic periods—although probably the great builders were not conscious of it. It is up to our generation, in full consciousness to forge anew an intellectual-artistic unity.

The mind is a unity, and this unity has to be striven for again.

The intellectual unity, form, has to be integrated into the cultural life of society as a whole, just as the person is in private life.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's great service is to have shown architecture again the way into the heights of the mind and therewith into its unity.

We, his pupils, have the task of recognizing the intellectual character of architectural problems and of solving them in creative freedom.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe wished to point out to us not the What in architecture, but the How.

His achievements in Chicago between 1938 and 1956 carry on the tradition of the "Chicago School."

Werner Blaser

Our views are provided by Werner Blaser, Basle, who took them on the occasion of his stay in Chicago from 1951 to 1953. The statements of Mies van der Rohe published as quotations come from personal notes made by Blaser. His intensive analysis of the architectural principles of Mies van der Rohe brought Blaser subsequently to Japan, where, enriched by his activity in Chicago, he wrote the work on Temple and Teahouse in Japan.

Lake Shore Drive Apartments (pages 218–221)

In most attractive part of Chicago near Lake Michigan not far from center, two apartment houses, north building containing 5-room apartments, south building 2½-room apartments. Elevation elements suspended from top of steel skeleton, each element comprising 4 windows. In addition standard sections were welded in front of main columns and corner supports as well as in front of intermediate columns between individual windows.

"It is very important to preserve and extend the rhythm which the profile section set up on the rest of the building. We looked at it on the model without the steel section attached to the corner column and it did not look right. Now the other reason is that this steel section was needed to stiffen the plate which covers the corner column so this plate would not ripple, and also we needed it for strength when the sections were hoisted into place.

McCormick House in Elmhurst, Illinois (pages 222–223)

Single house, type designed for serial production, with same steel frame construction as 860 Lake Shore Drive Apartments. Roof supported entirely by outer skeleton. Steel frames prefabricated and erected on building site. Elevations in yellow brick. Unspoiled park landscape forms integral part of new living sphere.

Illinois Institute of Technology (pages 224–225)

On the world of Mies van der Rohe:

The side entrance to the Chemical Building leads onto the inner patio. Door and window framings are in aluminium, door panels in natural oak. Brick walls and grey terrazzo floors.

"It was the greatest decision I ever had to make. It is more than ten years since we started building and by now it was all supposed to be finished—but of course, it will be another twelve years yet. If you build one building, you can go away and leave it. But 25 years is a long time these days—and I know our way of building had to reach across this time and not be out of style."

And:

"Architecture should be concerned with the epoch, not the day. These buildings will not grow old... they are of noble character, constructed of good materials and have beautiful proportions... they are done as things should be done today:

taking advantage of our technological means.

They were meant to be simple and in fact, they are simple. But in their simplicity they are not primitive but noble—in fact, monumental."

Farnsworth House, Fox River, Illinois (pages 226–227)

The architect's own words:

"I have always wanted to express a building as it really is. I don't want to hide its structure. It is hopeless to try to use forms of the past in our architecture. It is not possible to move forward and to look backwards, he who lives in the past cannot advance. Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space, living, changing. And not yesterday, not tomorrow, only today can be given form."

The moral influence of the architecture of Mies van der Rohe (pages 228–229)

There are people sustained by the confidence infused in them by an inner vocation who have the courage, cost what it will, to remain steadfast in their principles. It makes no difference whether they are religious fanatics, politicians, scientists or artists. Some architects are an exception to this rule. To be sure, they can be counted on the fingers of one hand. By this we do not mean to say anything against lesser talents; on the contrary, they are indispensable. If only—and let us insist on this—the major voices of architectural creativity of a country are not drowned out, as is so often the case in democratic societies.

The influence which an uncompromising architect can exert upon the conscience of architecture I call his moral influence.

The phenomenon of Mies van der Rohe and his work is a confirmation of the fact that an independent man, ever rejecting banality, can nevertheless prevail provided, I repeat, provided that the creative atmosphere is not vitiated by the rule of mediocrity.

The influence of Mies van der Rohe on the huge architectural projects in the USA can almost be described as magic, and his magic formula runs: "Less is More." His example has brought about a radical reformation of American architecture by his meticulous attention to detail and by his inexorable hostility to everything that he regards as aesthetic compromise.

Mies van der Rohe builds

Our period is scarcely more negligent about anything than artistic creativity. This attitude is given an edge by the hatred displayed in modern times by political dictatorships to everything artistic that lacks a reactionary orientation. If Mies van der Rohe, to whom peacefulness and quietude are second nature, had not been brought to Chicago in 1938, what would have become of him? The fate of the German architects and of German architecture generally, one of the most depressing spectacles of our age, provides the answer.

Now his tall apartment houses are multiplying on the finest sites in Chicago and since 1939 he has been working on the buildings of the Illinois Institute of Technology, completion of which might take a quarter of a century. That is usually the length of time it takes an American skyscraper to pay for itself. Mies van der Rohe seems to have instilled some of his innate quietude into the American big business men.

The spatial grouping of the 24 college buildings is best clarified if we go back to his country house plans of 1923. There arises from them, through the relationship among the single wall sections, the feeling of an interpenetration of all elements fusing in a unified space, without this being directly visible. The same is true of the buildings on the Chicago Campus. Like the walls of those early plans the buildings stand in a rational right-angled relationship to one another; they are, however, arranged in such a way that there is formed among them an all-embracing, but not palpably visible spatial unity, a space that only in relation to the given instant—i. e. to movement through it—slowly impinges upon the consciousness. Proceeding exactly as did the Egyptian sculptors with their cliff carvings, Mies van der Rohe has superimposed upon all buildings of the Campus a square system of co-ordinates. His modulus amounts to 24 feet. Every distance between supports in the build-

ings impresses it unconsciously upon the observer.

Along with Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe is one of the few architects who consciously base their buildings on proportions, and in fact in the Pythagorean sense, in which number signifies not number simply but in which are inherent qualitative as well as quantitative properties.

Care in establishing proportions is united with care in the treatment of materials. In the buildings for the Illinois Institute of Technology there are no onyx walls and chrome columns as in the early days. All the more cautiously are proportion, structure and materials here interwoven.

The lateral walls of a laboratory or of a factory with their visible skeleton and their panel walls—usually unnoticed incidentals—are here made to fulfill the highest artistic function.

The indifferent observer may not become conscious of all this. In spite of this fact there is no doubt that such surroundings make their influence felt even without his knowing it. Just as the Weissenhof-siedlung project of 1927 was a manifesto of his subsequent development, the buildings on the Chicago Campus constitute an appeal for the artistic purity of architecture.

Three decades after his skyscraper plans Mies van der Rohe brings to completion in 1949 his skyscrapers by Lake Michigan. One of them, Promontory Apartments, is situated on the south side of Chicago. The view out of the large studio windows on to the open expanse of Lake Michigan is overwhelming. Twenty-two storeys. Ferro-concrete skeleton. U-shaped plan like the Marquette Building of Holabird and Roche, Chicago, 1894. Promontory Apartments really constitute a dual building—separated lift shafts and stairwells. The fittings are almost monastically severe.

In these skyscrapers there is achieved a remarkable symbiosis: a harmony between the formal creative power of the artist and the enormous mechanism of industrialized construction.

Around 1880 Adler and Sullivan still carried their plans into execution themselves, not to mention William le Baron Jenny, engineer and building contractor. This is no longer possible today. The list of those who contribute to the construction of a large building is longer even than that for a present-day film. But just as a film is good or bad depending on the intensity of the director, a big construction project depends on the capability of the architect who conceives the design. He has to infuse into it that imponderable something which we call expression. The fact that—in rare cases—even the industrial construction company in America has confidence in an artist and not only in routine builders, may be an indication that a symbiosis between artist and a high stage of mechanization is possible. Should the creative architect succeed in mastering the enormous keyboard of mechanization and understanding how to play on it, we need have no fears for the future of architecture.

The emigration brought about by events in Germany had more far-reaching effects on the scientific and artistic culture of the USA than almost any previous emigration. Prof. Cook, who had developed out of nothing the Institute of Art History of New York University so that it has become one of the most important in America, used to say:

"I am very much obliged to Hitler. He shakes the trees and I gather the apples." This applies to many fields, not least to architecture. The appointment of Walter Gropius by Harvard in 1937 and that of Mies van der Rohe by the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1938 resulted in an influence on the younger generation which even today cannot be fully estimated. Once more it was shown how important it is not to entrust training of students to clever men of routine, rather to really creative figures.

However, the most important function of Mies van der Rohe is the setting-up of examples in the form of his buildings. He came to the great metropolis of the Middle West: Chicago. After an architectural development (Chicago School) which was unique for the period between 1883 and 1893, there followed a dormant period of more than four decades. It is no exaggeration to say that it was the activity of Mies van der Rohe that put an end to this dormancy and made Chicago aware of itself. Hence even the statement of Gordon Bunshaft made to me recently is understandable: Don't you think that Mies van der Rohe is of all architects the most American?"

By that the architect of Lever House meant that passion for the pure surface

which is deeply rooted in American architecture. But things develop more slowly in America than is generally imagined. Even Mies van der Rohe had to wait until he could make his entry into the building market of the real estate promoters. This he succeeded in doing with Promontory Apartments on the south side of Chicago in 1949. This was followed by the two Lake Shore Apartments in 1951. They constituted a kind of manifesto of purity in architectural form. Their influence spread with striking rapidity and was creative. New York's purest skyscraper, Lever House, on Park Avenue, in 1952, comes immediately after the Lake Shore Apartments.

In 1956 two more apartment houses are under construction next to the Lake Shore Houses. Somewhat farther north, also with a view over Lake Michigan, there are going up at the same time four new apartment houses arranged like a court of honour. They were originally planned with steel skeletons, but short supply owing to boom conditions led to the adoption of ferro-concrete.

In New York in 1955 on Park Avenue, just opposite Lever House, is the Administration Building of the Seagram Whisky Co. with its exterior walls of bronze under construction, an undertaking carried out by Mies van der Rohe in co-operation with Philipp Johnson.

The interesting design for the Theater in Mannheim, 1952/53, was much too uncompromising for present-day German taste to be carried into execution. Of much greater importance perhaps is the in many respects still incalculable influence of Mies van der Rohe upon the younger generation. It can develop into a dangerous obsession. What attracts these young architects is the uncompromisingness with which Mies van der Rohe aspires to integrity of design and is willing to sacrifice everything to it. It is by no means the only possible solution to present-day architectural problems. It is worth noting, however, that in Mies van der Rohe's manipulation of the pure surface and the structural elements, an extreme avant-garde spirit emerges hand in hand with the most recent production methods, indeed, it spurs them on to still more far-reaching solutions: Magic and Materials!

S. Giedion

Store in Sydney (pages 230—231)

A small store for a private company on a small irregular site. On the ground floor along the one fire wall runs the entrance hall with lift and stairwell. Office rooms extend over entire floor for the most part without any divisions. On the fifth floor the Management. Entire west elevation protected against sun by system of adjustable sun shields one storey high, of aluminium. Supports recessed behind elevations, ceilings project. Continuous glass wall along west side of rooms. Architecture clearly conceived and unequivocal.

"Pelikan" Apartment and office building on Langstrasse in Zurich (pages 232—233)

An office building erected within the scope of district zoning requirements and elevation of which is adapted to importance of Langstrasse, one of the most important thoroughfares of Zurich.

On ground floor, in addition to a shop and news stand, there is planned a café-restaurant. Unfortunately interior construction not part architect's plans but turned over to a furniture factory, which worked it out in the current style and so kept to requirements of general bad taste. Four upper floors house offices, doctors' consultation rooms etc. Fifth upper floor, containing apartments, with continuous terrace on quiet courtyard side with flower stands.

Ferro-concrete slab construction rests on two ceiling joists running along corridor and suspended from supporting ferro-concrete parapets. In this way offices have continuous ceilings not broken up by ceiling joists. Window rows broken by masonry surfaces to facilitate erection of office partitions as desired and to introduce the required freedom into disposition of office space. Entire building rests on columns, street as well as courtyard elevations wholly glazed. Corridors with demountable suspended ceilings of plaster slab elements behind which are installed water, gas, light and power lines.

Dunlop Building in Munich (pages 234—235)

Within scope of building program of German Dunlop Rubber Co. AG, assignment comprises storerooms for tires, foam rubber products and flooring slabs, office, sales and personnel rooms, three flats, garages as well as good loading and unloading facilities.

A corner site with separate approach and exit for cars, about 300 m. from central station on a main thoroughfare. Four-storey front elevation with 45 m. display window accented by third upper floor being recessed on side facing side street and also faced with dark asbesto-cement. Nearly entire basement floor taken up by large garage connected by tunnel with nearby service station. Main entrance hall on ground floor contains reception, agency, main stairs and access to tire sales. First upper floor houses personnel rooms, cloakrooms, sales rooms for special appliances.

Ferro-concrete skeleton. Axial dimension about 7 m. square. Solid ceilings provided with floating floor, floors paved with Dunlopian flooring slabs in 33 different patterns. Ytong parapets faced with terracotta coloured asbestos-cement.

Factory Buildings near Giesshübel Station in Zurich (pages 236—240)

Site: 6000 sq. m. in industrial area near Giesshübel Station. Plan had to be flexible because at time of drafting actual buyers or tenants not yet known.

In plan of these factory buildings presented here various advantages are combined: Available for unloading of goods, forwarding and storage large interconnected ground floor areas at level of truck and railway loading ramps. Basement floor accessible by drive-in and exit ramps. Thoroughfare runs through entire basement floor, can also be used as parking space for trucks.

Central interior courtyard above 1st floor distributes daylight uniformly over ground floor areas; also solves lighting and ventilation problem for upper floor areas with large, interconnected workshops and facilitates subdivision into small rooms. Subdivision also facilitated by concentration of stairs, lift, and WC.

Construction: Ceilings, columns, ceiling joists and walls and parapets respectively concrete with an axial distance of 6 x 6 m., has turned out to be very economical. Also for reasons of economy there was selected a concrete-encased ceiling heating system. Window elevations faced with concrete and in part utilized structurally as suspender beams. Good ventilation assured by row of casements directly under ceiling and somewhat recessed, kept in shadow and glazed with dull panes. The transom element situated beneath houses the Venetian blinds and as Z profile is at same time a horizontal stay. Projecting upper floors provide welcome protection against rain on sides facing street and railway.

Interior construction kept simple: In basement and ground floor Duratex hard concrete flooring, on upper floors Kera-vin square-pointed flooring on under layer and insulation (ceiling heating).

For the sliding partitions there was developed an element which can as desired be utilized as corridor partition or as office partition; it also contains door elements. Concrete surfaces left rough painted, projecting parts dull white, recessed line of ground floor and stairway elements gray, still farther recessed casement row dark gray. Plastic effect accentuated by this colour scheme. Built-in elements in interior in part painted in lively colours, as are window parapets on inside. Structural elements in dull white, flooring on alternate floors gray, red, blue, yellow and green.

Administration Building of an Insurance Company in Winterthur (pages 249—250)

A new building to be built as annex to already existing baroque edifice which, along with stand of old trees in neighbouring park, is to be preserved. The main building is situated at right angles to a one storey section parallel to the main street, connected by a ground floor set back; the two upper storeys comprised within one framework. Construction materials: artificial stone slab facing, light metal window frames and parapets, glass and glass-concrete. Supports along elevation are steel tubular elements treated with concrete. Ceilings free of joists. Office section can be easily rearranged. Ready for occupancy at end of 1956.

Plan for renovation of the Laurentius Medicated Bath at Shaan (pages 251—252)

An usual building assignment and a clearly conceived up-to-date solution. For their preliminary examination the patients go to the small consultation room situated in the garden, contains consultation room, waiting room, and rest room along with WC. Large pool gives effect of spaciousness to cozy garden. In wing on street side are 18 sick rooms with baths, diet kitchens, massage rooms. Beneath, at street level, utility and store rooms. Architecture neat, clearly conceived, unequivocal. In its modesty it does not pretend to be other than it actually is: a small private clinic in the country.