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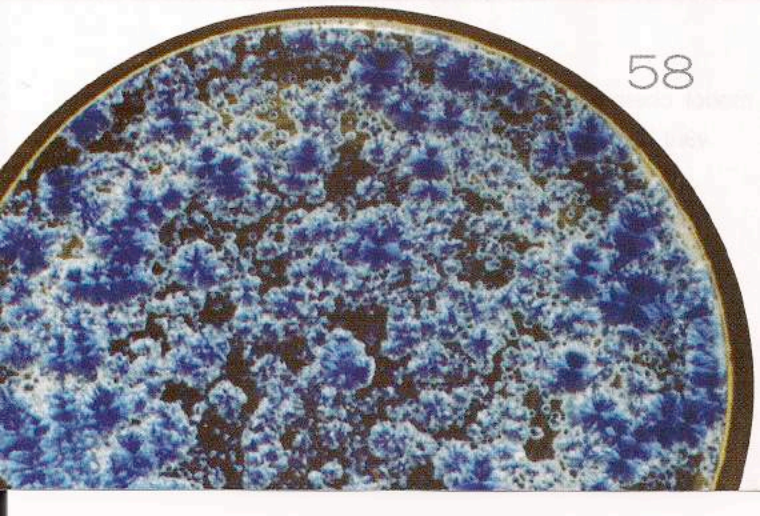
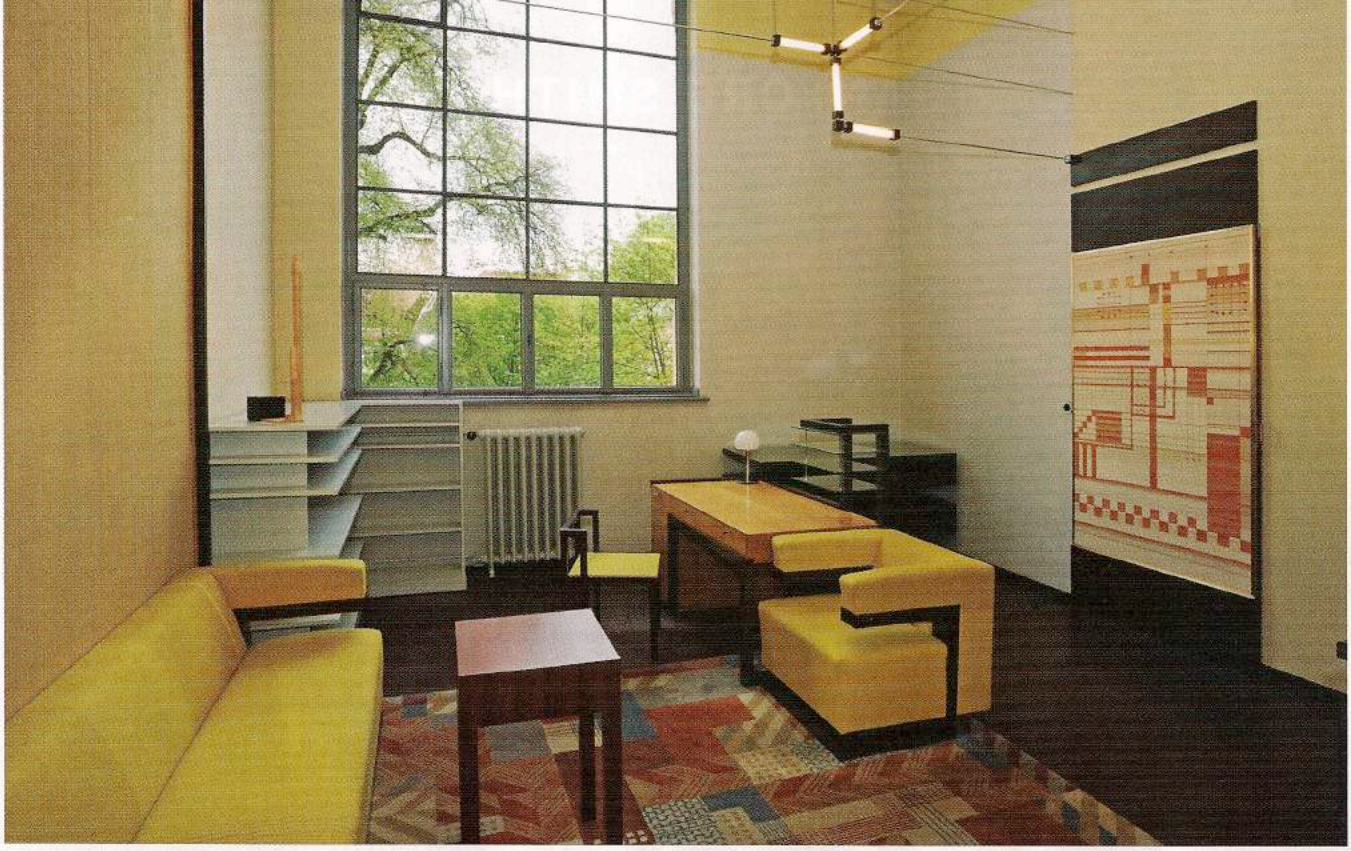
DEPARTMENTS

FEATURES



On the cover An admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Mosbrooker designed this house in Beverly Hills for his family in 1962. Victor Cohenca's renovation and addition hew to the original intent while providing a home that works for his own family. Photograph by Tim Street-Porter.



© Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

Bauhaus Fever 2009

By Cynthia Elyce Rubin

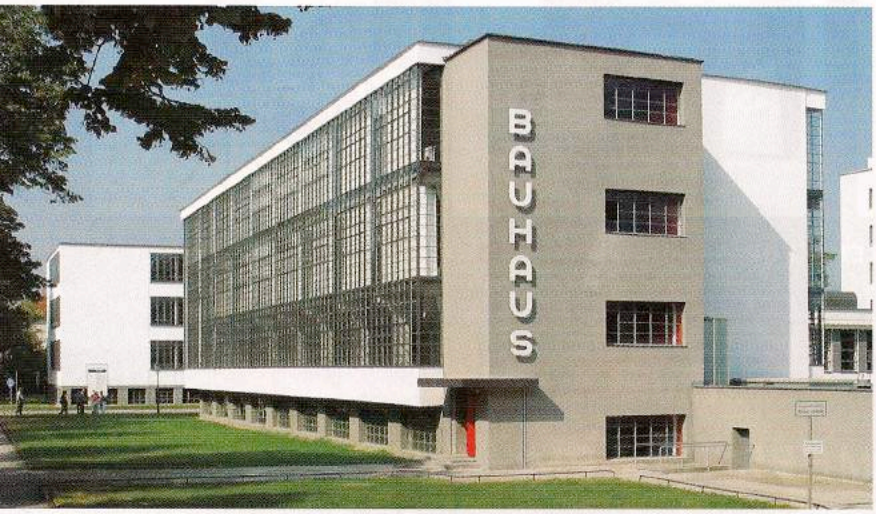


Photo courtesy Bauhaus Dessau Foundation.

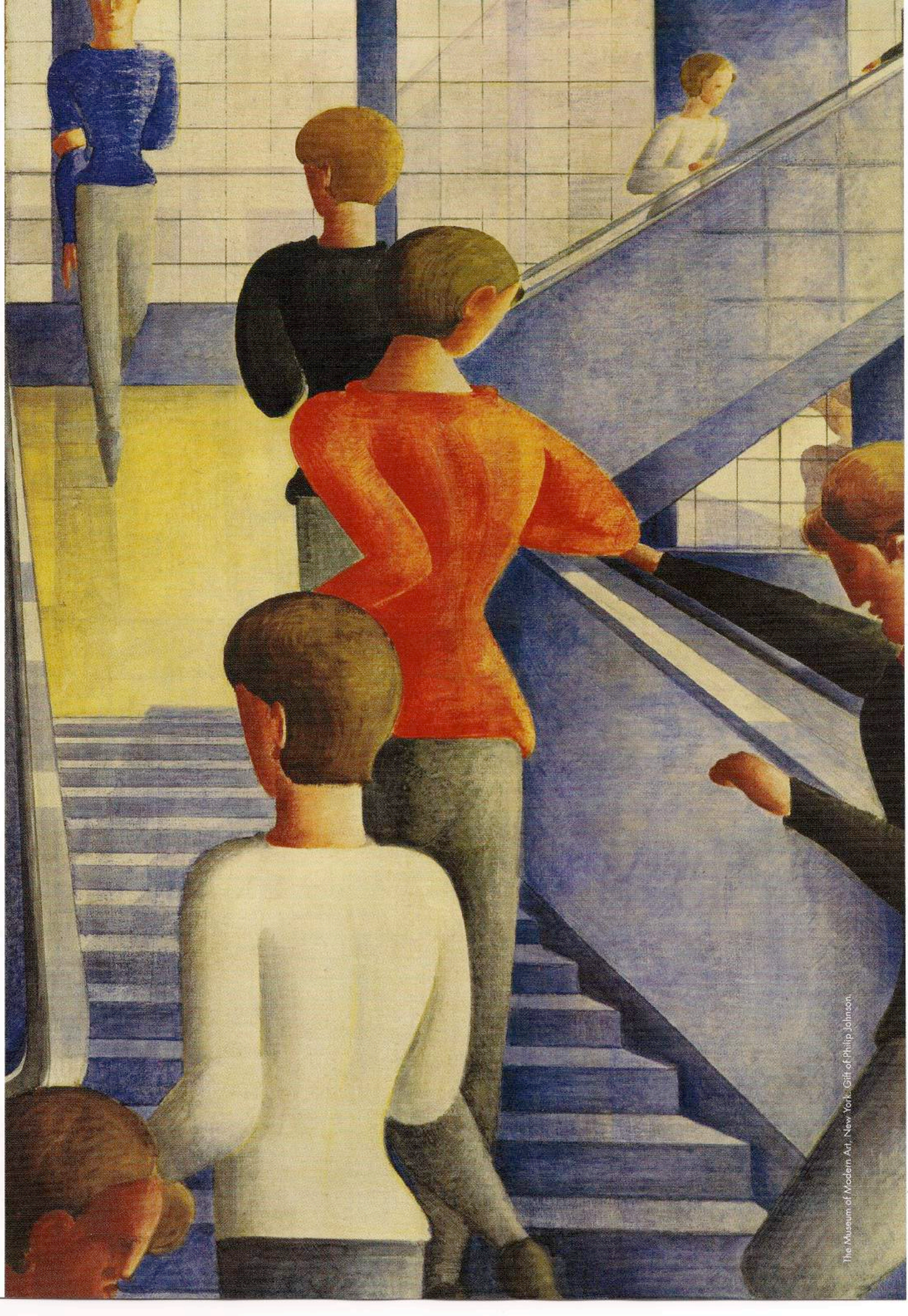
"The room seems so small," a visitor remarked, taking in the office of the director of Bauhaus, the interdisciplinary institution that set out to reform Germany's art education system and ended as the most influential design school of the 20th century. Its story, as complex as the volatile historical events of the times, still resonates today in the shaping of buildings, cities and lives throughout the world.

The Bauhaus existed successively in three cities: Weimar from 1919 to 1925, Dessau from 1925 to 1932 and Berlin from 1932 to 1933, when it finally closed under Nazi pressure. But the Bauhaus's influence did not end. Indeed, historical events, including the rise of Hitler and World War II and the postwar division of Germany into East and West, have shaped and broadened the Bauhaus's reach in ways that could never

Above The Bauhaus building, designed by Walter Gropius, in Dessau, Germany, with its glass curtain wall. The signage was designed by Herbert Bayer. Completed in 1926, the building was restored in 2006.

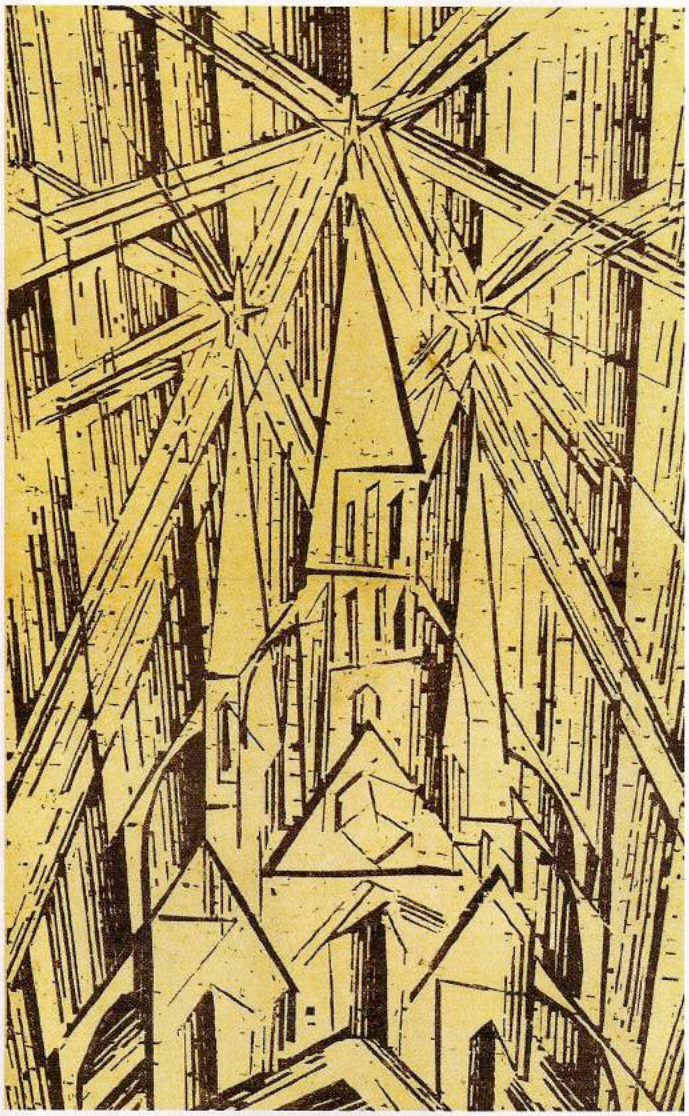
Top This reconstruction of Walter Gropius's office was created at Bauhaus University, Weimar, in 1999. The university has carried the Bauhaus name since 1996 following the establishment of the Faculty of Art and Design in 1993 and the Faculty of Media in 1996. Gropius designed the furniture, as well as the fluorescent tube ceiling lamp, based on a model by Gerrit Rietveld. The original furniture, tapestry and rug were made in the Bauhaus workshops.

Opposite Oskar Schlemmer's *Bauhaus Stairway*, 1932, is characteristic of his style in which wooden doll-like figures are arranged in a defined space.



The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson.

Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; © VG BildKunst, Bonn 2009.



Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; © VG BildKunst, Bonn 2009.

Above, left Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, *Wabe* (honeycomb), contribution to the idea competition for the skyscraper at the Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse, 1922. Photograph, supplemented by drawing.

Above, right Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral,* cover page of *Bauhaus Manifesto and Program,* April 1919. Zinc etching after a woodcut.

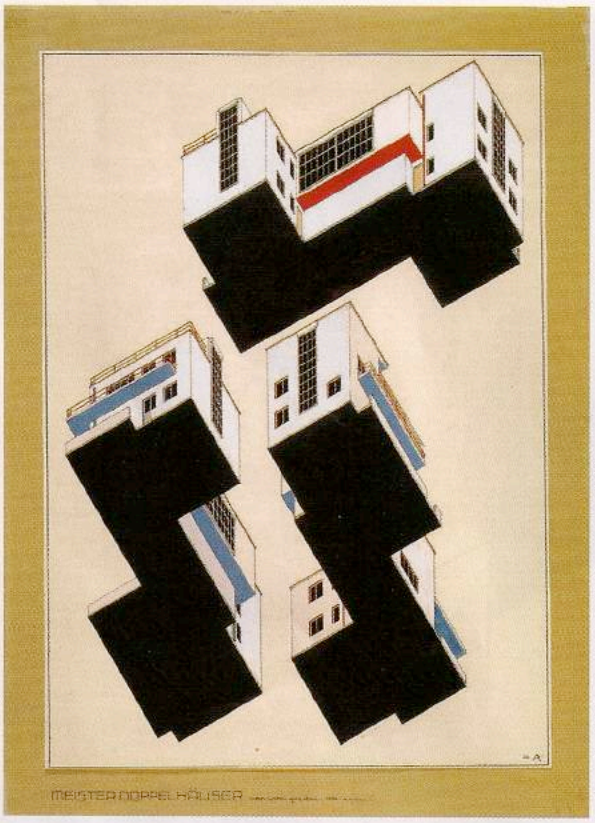
have been foreseen by its founders or the teachers and students allied with it during its brief existence.

This year, two decades after the reunification of Germany and the renewal of relations among the three cities where it made its home, the Bauhaus is being fêted around the world. Germany is celebrating the 90th anniversary of the school's founding with special exhibitions, concerts and events in Weimar and surrounding towns, as well as in Dessau and Berlin. Tel Aviv, founded in 1909 and named a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its extraordinary collection of Bauhaus-style buildings designed by European exiles starting in the 1930s, is hosting centennial exhibitions at the Bauhaus Center and the new Bauhaus Museum. Most notably, two landmark exhibitions in Germany and New York City bring together, for the first time since the postwar division of Germany, three major Bauhaus-related collections once divided between West Berlin and East Germany. Thanks to the citizens of the German Democratic Republic who, on November 9, 1989, had the courage to tear down the Berlin Wall, these collections — held by the Klassik Stiftung Weimar (Classic Foundation Weimar), Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau (Bauhaus Foundation Dessau) and the Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin — are today free to tell the whole Bauhaus story, enabling scholars to appraise the school in previously unimaginable depth. The three institutions have collaborated to produce "Modell Bauhaus" (through October 4, 2009), at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. In New York, to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Museum of Modern Art — an institution inspired by the "dazzling constellation of artist-teachers such as no art school has ever known before or since," in the words of Alfred Barr, MoMA's founding director, after his visit to the Dessau Bauhaus — the German archives are working with MoMA to present the major retrospective "Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity" (November 8, 2009 – January 25, 2010).

The back story of the Bauhaus begins with reaction to the profound social changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution in the mid-1800s. William Morris and John Ruskin, founders of the

Arts and Crafts Movement in England, argued that artists and architects should embrace decorative arts and design. Similarly, the German Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine, Ernst Ludwig, whose motto was "my Hesse should flourish, and the art in Hesse, too," believed that art can make daily life meaningful — and, by extension, be good for business. He enlisted seven artists in 1899 to organize an artists' colony in Darmstadt, his residence and seat of government for the Grand Duchy. Their first task was to design and build living and working quarters, to be presented to the public in the colony's first exhibition in 1901. Peter Behrens, artist and self-taught architect, designed his own house to reflect his ideal of the inexorable link between life and art. His experience over four years in the Darmstadt experiment convinced him of the transformative power of the arts. In 1907, he worked as consultant to the German electrical firm AEG (Allgemeine Elektricitäts Gesellschaft), a pioneer in power transmission, for which he designed an entire corporate identity, from logo and stationery to furniture and factory buildings, making him the world's first industrial designer. That same year he founded the Deutscher Werkbund (German Work Federation), an organization of independent artists and industrialists, whose purpose included "the refinement of commercial processes through the collaboration of arts, industry and crafts." It aimed to uplift Germany's economy after the chaos of World War I by "enhancing craft work." This entailed helping designers find industrial employment; improving the quality of German-made products; and creating functional, affordable wares and inexpensive, healthy housing. Behrens, whose assistants over the years included Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, organized some of the Werkbund's first exhibitions of modern design.

Belgian Henry van de Velde was another versatile designer, architect and educator who joined the Werkbund. An ardent admirer of William Morris, he abandoned his specialty of painting in 1894 and, with no formal training in architecture, decorating

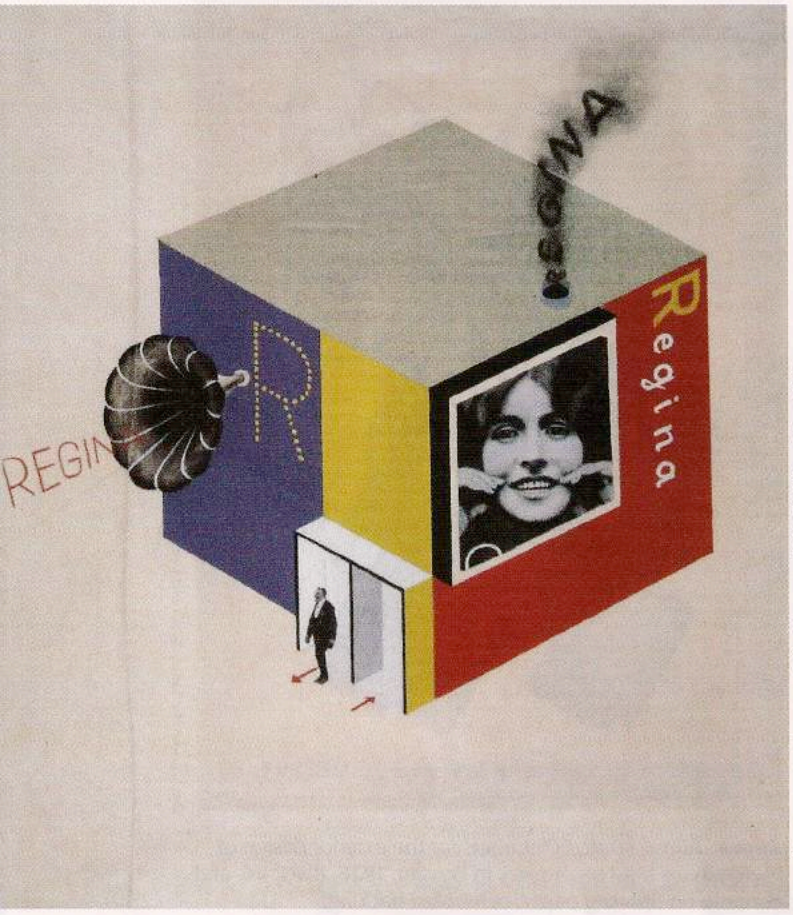


Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; © VG BildKunst, Bonn 2009.

Above Alfred Arndt, Color plans for the exterior design of the Bauhaus Masters' Houses in Dessau, 1926. Black ink and tempera on drawing paper; cardboard backing.

Below The Bauhaus masters on the roof of the Bauhaus building in Dessau on Inauguration Day, December 5, 1926. From left, Josef Albers, Hinnerk Scheper, Georg Muche, László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, Joost Schmidt, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Gunta Stölzl, Oskar Schlemmer. Photo by Walter Gropius (with automatic release).

Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.



Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of the artist; © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009.

Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

or furniture making, became manager of a furniture factory. His first architecture and interiors project was the design of his home in Uccle, a suburb of Brussels. Before long, his interiors and furniture for Samuel Bing's influential Parisian art gallery, the Salon de l'Art Nouveau, turned him into a guiding intellectual force of the Art Nouveau movement, known as Jugendstil in Germany. After a move to Berlin to work on private commissions, he was summoned to Weimar to become advisor for industry and crafts to Grand Duke Wilhelm Ernst and consequently developed the Kunstgewerbliches Seminar (Arts and Crafts Seminar). He increased his influence by founding the Kunstgewerbeschule (Arts and Crafts School) in 1907, through which he advised regional craftsmen, such as pottery makers, basket weavers and wood carvers, and small industries, including stove manufacturers and glass and metal workshops. The practical training at the Kunstgewerbeschule was supplemented by required classes in elementary subjects; this dual-pronged approach proved so successful that the school became the most important in the country's commercial educational system. With the outbreak of World War I, however, van de Velde had to leave Germany, and the school closed — but not before he recommended Walter Gropius as a possible successor.

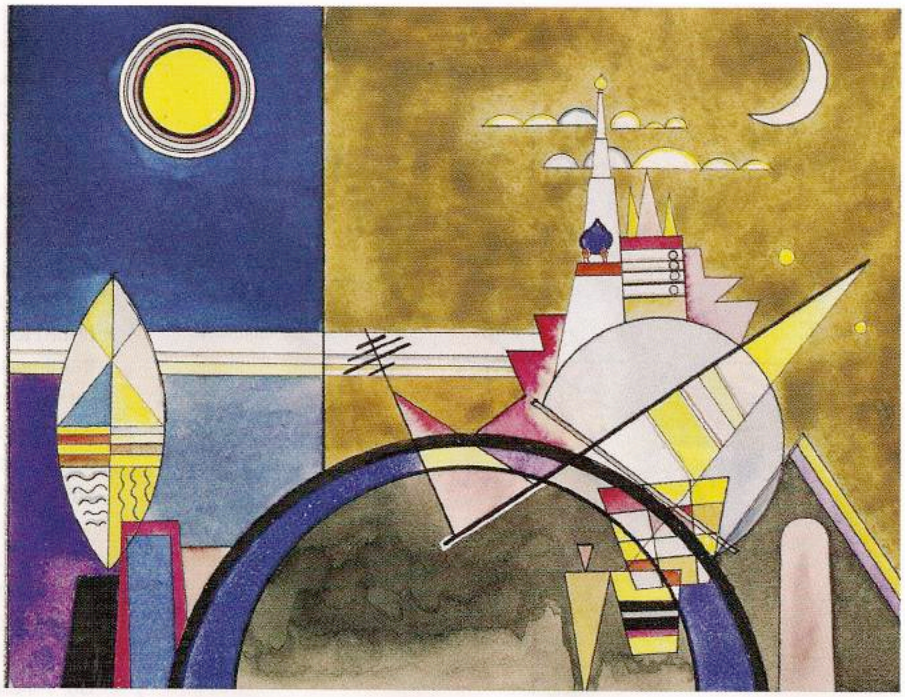
A well-to-do Berliner who put his architectural studies on hold to take a job with Behrens in his Berlin office, Gropius worked on the AEG projects, laying the groundwork for his understanding of industrial design. In 1910, Gropius opened his own Berlin office and shortly thereafter, with Adolf Meyer, designed the Fagus Shoe Company factory. This building presented something entirely new: glass exterior walls with no load-bearing function, a portent of the glass façade on the future Bauhaus building in Dessau. That same year, Gropius joined the Deutscher Werkbund; he would design, with Meyer, several buildings for its 1914 exhibition in Cologne, including an office building with unusual glass-enclosed staircases at the corners.

In April 1919, Gropius organized an exhibition for the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Work Council for Art), a group of architects and artists of a social-revolutionary disposition that had announced its goal of "bringing the arts together under the aegis of architecture." The Work Council published a pamphlet that extolled architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art), a concept originally developed for the music of Richard Wagner. The term was later applied to the decorative arts to encourage a unified aesthetic among disciplines.

Later in 1919, Gropius was offered the directorship of a new art school formed from the merger of the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Arts and Crafts in Weimar. The city was the capital of the newly established Weimar Republic that paved the way for a democratic Germany after World War I. It was no coincidence that the school would be founded in this city, an intellectual and cultural center since the Age of Classicism and home to Goethe for much of his life. Charged with reforming arts education, Gropius would explore ideas shaped by his work with Behrens and the vision and pedagogical methods of van de Velde.

Gropius named the school Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar (State Bauhaus in Weimar). According to biographer Reginald Isaacs, Gropius envisioned a "Bauhütte with a few like-minded artists." In the Middle Ages, a *bauhütte*, which means "building hut," would be erected next to a cathedral under construction to serve as a meeting place for guild members, such as stonemasons, painters and joiners, involved in the cathedral's construction. Bauhaus loosely translates as "house of building." Given Gropius's high regard for architecture as the supreme union of all the arts, this catchy one-word combination was entirely fitting, as was Lyonel Feininger's expressionist woodcut depicting a soaring cathedral that decorated the cover of Gropius's revolutionary tract of 1919, the *Bauhaus Manifesto*.

The *Manifesto* called for artists and craftsmen to work together under one roof, under the dominance of architecture, guided by a sense of social responsibility. It rejected historical monumental styles, elevated crafts to the level of fine art and embraced lofty social ideals: "The ultimate aim of all creative activity is a building!...Let us desire, conceive, and create the new building of the future together. It will combine architecture, sculpture and painting in a single form, and will one day rise towards the heavens from the hands of a million workers as the



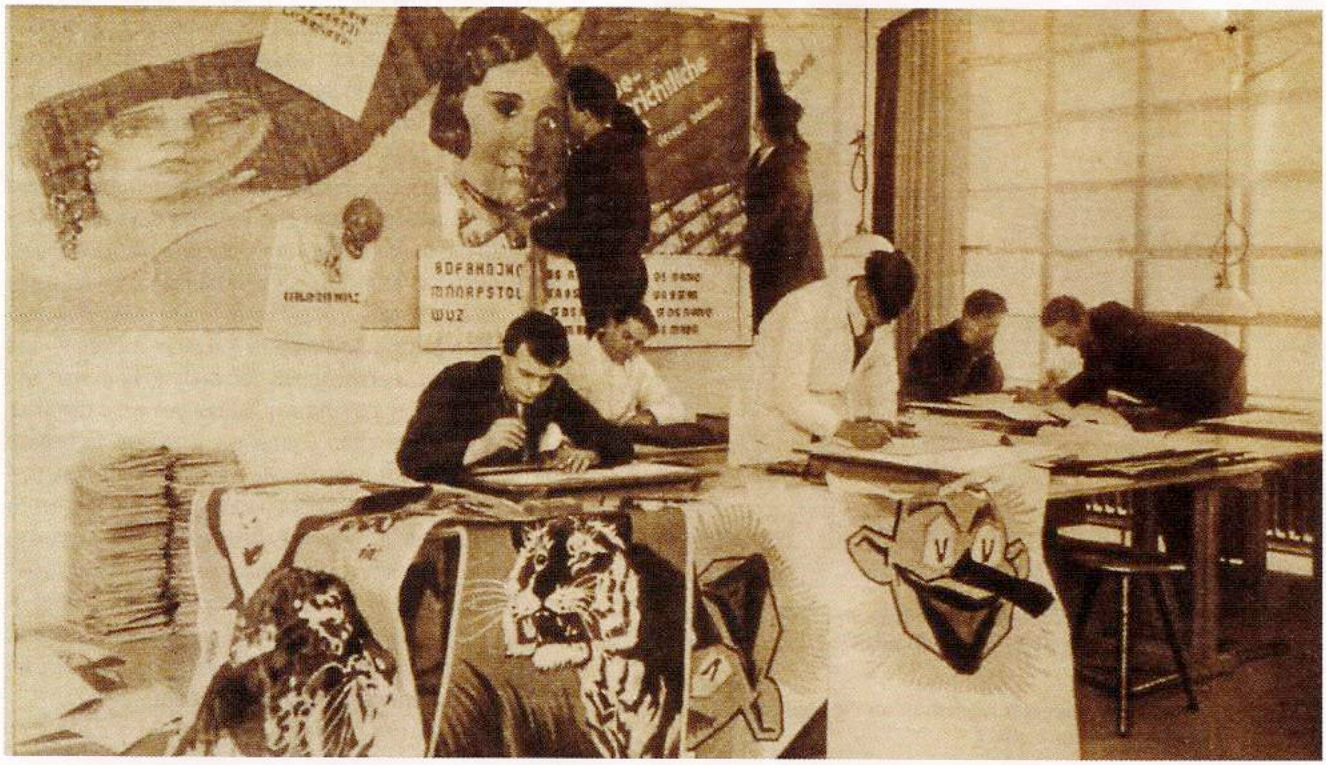
Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, University of Cologne. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009.

Above Wassily Kandinsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Stage design for Scene XVI: The Great Gate of Kiev, ca. 1930. Ink, tempera, watercolor on Fabriano hand-made paper.

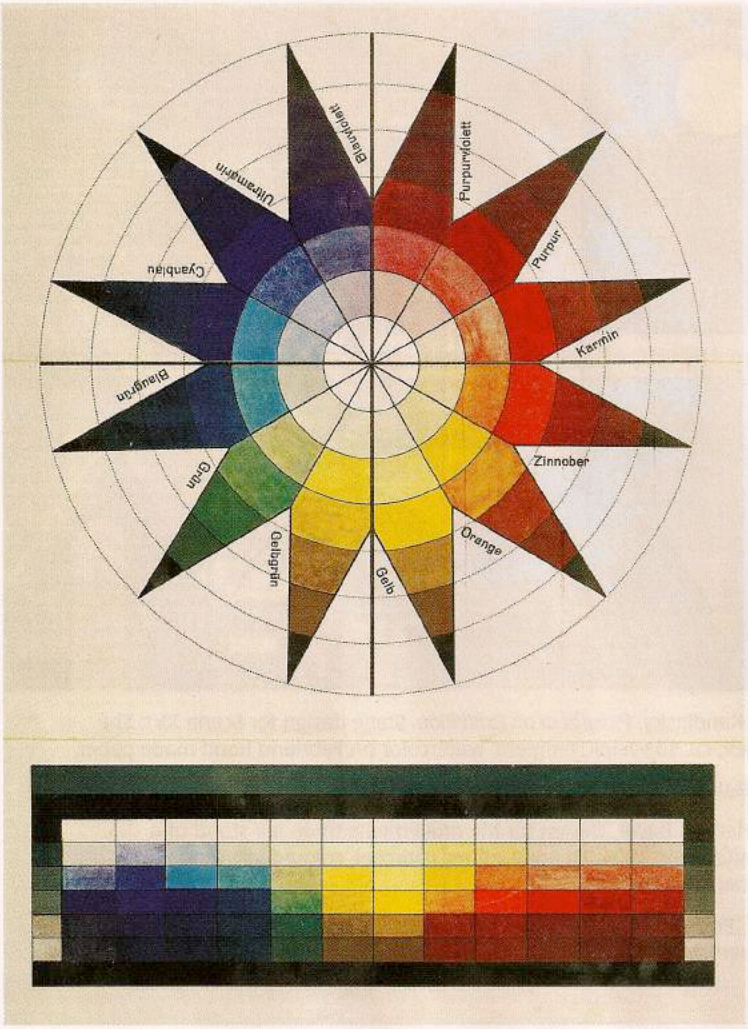
Below Poster designers at the Bauhaus, Dessau, c. 1927.

Opposite, left Herbert Bayer, Design for the multi-media trade fair stand of a toothpaste manufacturer, 1924. Opaque colors, charcoal, colored ink, graphite and collage elements on paper.

Opposite, right Poster for the 1923 Bauhaus Exhibition by Joost Schmidt, who later ran the advertising and typography workshop. Color lithograph.



Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.



Klassik Stiftung Weimar; © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009.

Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Top Johannes Itten, *Color Circle in 7 Light Stages and 12 Tones*, 1921. Lithograph. According to Itten, the diagram depicted the "structure of color tonality."

Bottom Members of the theater workshop on the roof of the Bauhaus building in Dessau, c. 1927.

crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith."

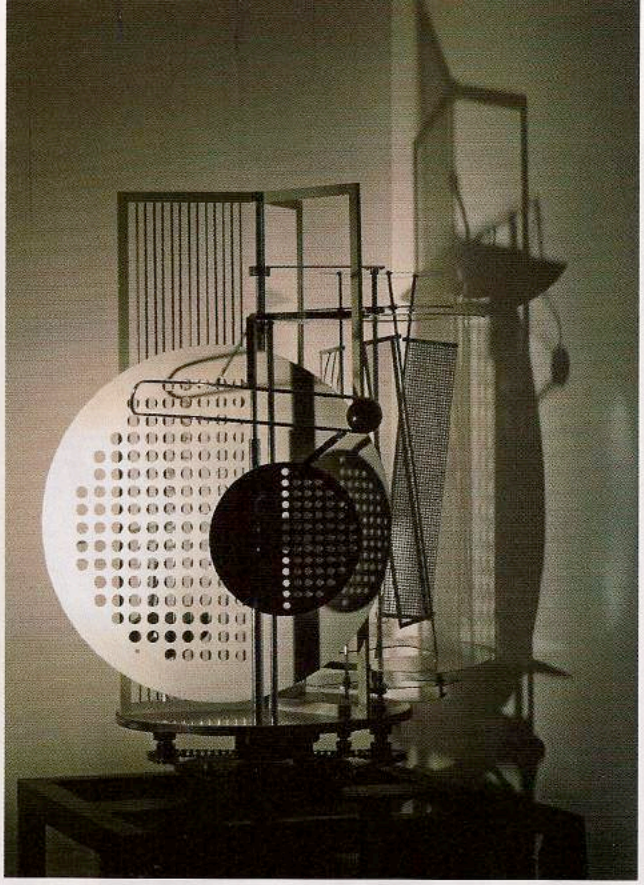
Breaking with the past called for a new curriculum. During the first semester, students worked to discard preconceptions in the compulsory preliminary course, or Vorkurs, the backbone of the program. To tap into their creativity, they practiced exercises using texture, form, color, tone and line analysis. Training to become a master craftsman in the artisan apprentice tradition was equally important, since craft was considered the ideal unity of creative design and material production. "Schools," the *Manifesto* proclaimed, "must return to the workshop." Students had to complete hands-on training with both a master of form — an artist responsible for the aesthetic aspect of the work — and a master of crafts, who oversaw technical skills. This dual approach promoted collaboration and the merging of method and technique with intuition and creativity.

In a highly unusual move, Gropius chose masters of form who were not academics. After all, who better to teach art than people who practiced it? The first appointments, all associated with the avant-garde Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin, were Feininger (German-American painter and cartoonist), Johannes Itten (Swiss painter and mystic) and Gerhard Marcks (sculptor, printmaker and fellow Werkbund member). Then came artists Oskar Schlemmer, Georg Muche, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, this last already a noted theorist of synthesis in the arts. These men, with a shared sensibility, curious about fundamental problems and strong-willed, were more likely to embrace new ideas than craftsmen, or so Gropius believed.

But should a modern school revive age-old crafts? When the avant-garde Dutch founder of the De Stijl movement, Theo van Doesburg, arrived in Weimar in 1921, his skepticism galvanized the Bauhaus students and forced Gropius to deal with issues that ultimately turned the school's direction away from crafts towards industrial methods of production and their consequences for design. Rejecting this new focus, Itten, who conceived and taught the Vorkurs, departed, paving the way for the charismatic Hungarian Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy.

From the beginning, the dual-masters system heightened friction over mundane issues like vacation days and salary raises. With the masters equal in theory only, Gropius's ideal of the Bauhaus as a microcosm of a utopian society would not be fulfilled. Despite unrelenting efforts to quiet proliferating tensions against a backdrop of turbulent monetary and political crises, internal squabbles demoralized both staff and students. In addition, government authorities were demanding evidence of the school's progress. It is hard to believe today, when Bauhaus is practically a term of adulation, that during its brief life, the school and Gropius were subject to great hostility. As director from 1919 to 1925, "Gropius had to fight against the same adversity that was typical in Weimar," writes Thomas Föhl in *Bauhaus-Museum Weimar* (2006). A state-financed school, the Bauhaus depended on subsidies, but almost from its inception, its very existence was endangered by attacks from conservative politicians.

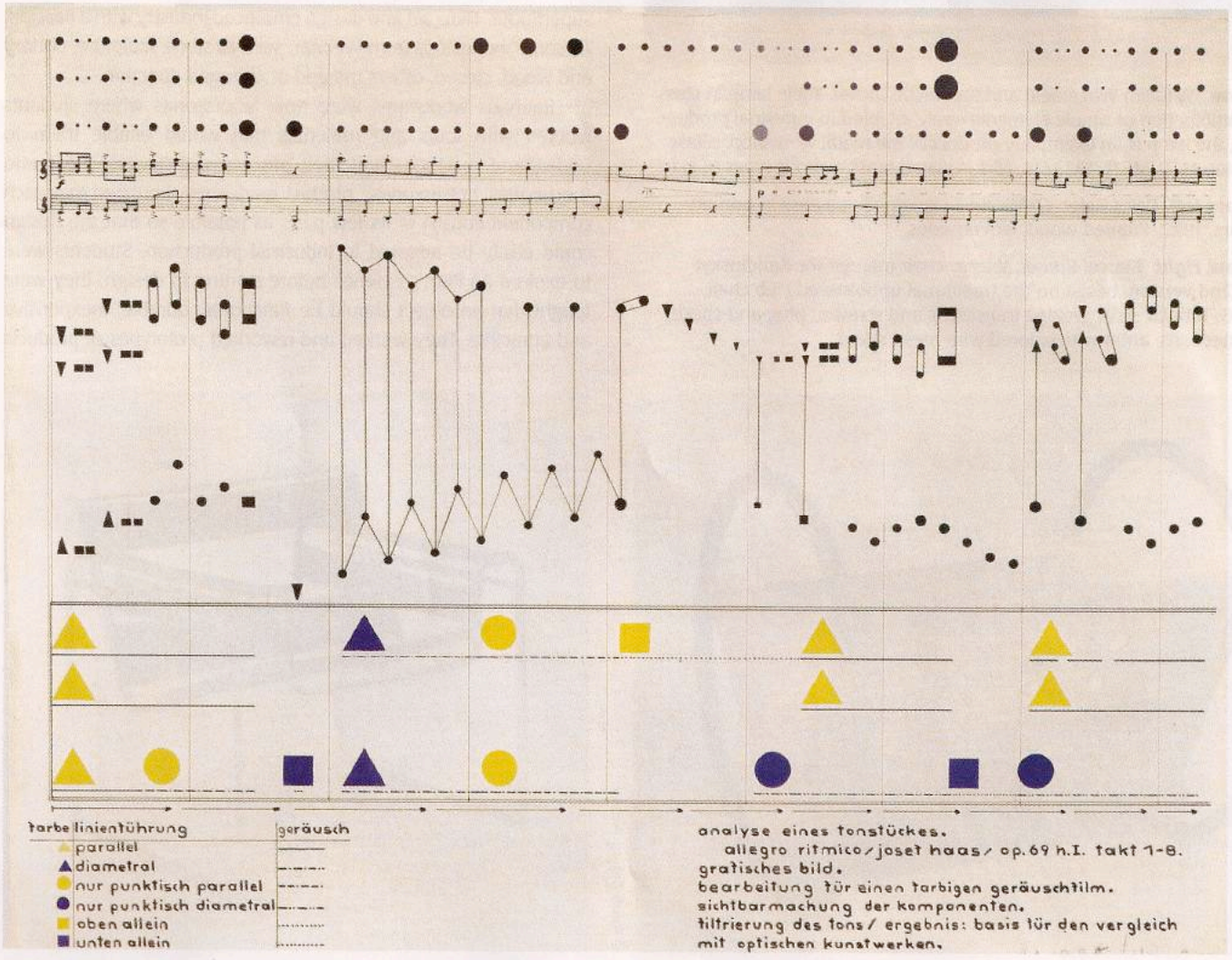
To placate official demands, Gropius staged "Bauhaus Week" in 1923, an event that included modern dance and music performances; an exhibition of Bauhaus products under the theme, "Art and Technology: a New Unity"; and the construction of the *Haus am Horn*, the prototype for the ideal single-family house of the future, furnished with carpeting, lighting and furniture from the workshops. Based on a design by Georg Muche and constructed with the help of Gropius and Adolf Meyer, this house was envisioned as the first dwelling of an entire Bauhaus settlement, a project that never came to fruition. The *Haus am Horn* was a milestone in 20th-century domestic architecture with its built-in furnishings and use of steel and concrete, and Gropius's savvy marketing drew thousands of visitors from across Europe. But despite success beyond expectations, the exhibition did nothing to increase funding. It was, however, a seminal moment in the development of the Bauhaus's identity, marking clearly its shift towards an ideology of industrial production.



Hartwig Klappert, Berlin. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin; © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009

Right László Moholy-Nagy, *Light Space Modulator*, 1922–30 (1970 replica of the original in the Busch-Reisinger Museum). Chrome-plated steel, aluminium, glass, plexiglass, wood, electric motor. This kinetic sculpture was used for experiments with light and its relationship to the perception of space.

Below Heinrich Bormann, Analysis of a piece of music, 1930. From Wassily Kandinsky's class.



Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Klassik Stiftung Weimar © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009.

Above Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Karl Jacob Jucker, Table lamp in glass. A combination of simple elements easily adapted to industrial production, the lamp is an exemplary product of the metal workshop. (Glass version MT9/ME1), 1923/24. Nickel-plated brass, various types of glass.

Below, left Peter Keler, *Child's cradle,* originally painted in primary colors, 1922. Painted wood, woven sides.

Below, right Marcel Breuer, *Wassily* chair (named for Kandinsky) B3, 2nd version, based on the traditional upholstered club chair, 1926. Tubular steel, welded transitions and screwed plug-and-socket connections, anthracite-colored wire mesh straps.

Modernity had arrived, but few cheered. Among the detractors were political officials under pressure from hostile unions, frustrated conservative academics, and townspeople who commonly scared children with the admonition, "I'll send you to the Bauhaus if you don't behave." Government officials reacted by cutting funds and revoking the masters' contracts, forcing the end of the Bauhaus in Weimar. As Gropius searched for alternative locations, Mayor Fritz Hesse of the industrial city of Dessau was able to make a persuasive offer, thanks to the largesse of the Junkers airplane company. Hesse, who saw the Bauhaus as "a chance to renew the city's cultural prestige," according to Reginald Isaacs in *Gropius: An Illustrated Biography of the Creator of the Bauhaus* (1991), promised money not only to build a campus and a group of masters' houses, but also a lucrative contract to design Törten, a low-income workers' housing development that to this day remains filled with people and activity.

With the move to Dessau in 1925 and the completion of the Gropius-designed complex, the school began to focus on architecture and serial production on a large scale. The factory-like building housed the workshops, school, auditorium and dining hall, and featured an attached dormitory, the first student housing of its kind in Germany. Filled with innovative details, its outstanding visual feature – a vast glass wall on the main building's workshop side – epitomized the "all it takes and no more" philosophy that considered plush carpets, cushioned seats and velvet curtains superfluous. Here, art and design embraced industry with a passion. As some workshops from Weimar, such as stone sculpture, pottery and wood, closed, others merged or changed direction.

Bauhaus workshops were now laboratories where students worked with tools and materials that would enable them to understand machines and their processes. Following the motto "necessities, not luxuries," product guidelines stipulated that each component consist of as few parts as possible so that the design could easily be adapted to industrial production. Students were to explore an item's essence before starting to design; they were taught that an object should be functional, durable, inexpensive and attractive. They worked and reworked prototypes of products

© Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

Hartwig Klappert, Berlin. Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau.

and furnishings by combining squares, triangles and circles, often in the primary colors of red, yellow and blue, using contrasting textures, proportions and unusual materials such as chrome-plated steel tubing, plastic and neon lights. They also sought new ways of working with standard materials such as glass.

But growing acclaim for Bauhaus products — among them, Marcel Breuer's tubular steel furniture, Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Karl Jacob Jucker's table lamp, Marianne Brandt's silver teapot — and rising enrollment after accreditation in 1926 could not halt the financial difficulties, political attacks and internal dissent.

Gropius resigned in 1928. He was succeeded by Swiss architect Hannes Meyer, who continued to make low-cost furnishings a priority, but reoriented the institution toward architecture, sacrificing many basic courses in the process. Although Muche and Moholy-Nagy had earlier introduced photography as a means of visual training within the basic curriculum, Meyer, to his credit, established an independent photography course in 1929 under Walter Peterhans. But Meyer's Communist leanings amidst tumultuous political times would lead to his downfall. Under the succeeding directorship of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the Bauhaus abolished the apprenticeship system altogether and, from 1930, focused exclusively on architecture. Then, in 1931, having achieved control of the Dessau city parliament, the Nazis fulfilled their campaign promise. "The disappearance of this so-called 'School of Design' will mean the disappearance of one of the most significant sites of Jewish, Marxist 'artistic' will from German soil," wrote Paul Schultze-Naumberg in the September 30, 1932, issue of the *Anhalt* newspaper. Although the Bauhaus tried to survive as a private institution in Berlin, it was forced to close in 1933.

Ironically, this repression enabled the vast proliferation of Bauhaus ideas beyond Germany. Josef and Anni Albers became professors at the avant-garde Black Mountain College in North Carolina; Gropius taught and practiced architecture in England before his arrival in the U.S., where he became chairman (1938–52) of the architecture department at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. In 1937, Moholy-Nagy took over the direction of a design school in Chicago that he named the New Bauhaus; it would later become the Institute of Design. From 1938 to 1958, Mies van der Rohe led the architecture department of what was later renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago; he designed much of the campus, including his masterpiece building, S.R. Crown Hall, to house the architecture school. Swiss Bauhaus student Max Bill became the first director of the distinguished College of Design in Ulm, Germany. And the list goes on. In addition, Bauhaus-trained students who immigrated to Palestine arrived at a pivotal moment. Founded in 1909 when some 66 families gathered in a land lottery, Tel Aviv was in the process of transformation from empty sand into the first Jewish city.

© Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Above Teachers, students and guests at the Bauhaus in Weimar, c. 1922. Photographic paper with silver halide salts in gelatin. Photographer unknown.

Within a decade of the students' arrival, Tel Aviv became known as the "White City" because of its many Bauhaus-style buildings, constructed with modern planning principles geared to the Mediterranean climate, including small windows that kept out the heat and ribbon balconies that enabled outdoor living.

The secondary meaning of the verb *bauen*, "to build," is "to till" or "cultivate." Although Gropius could not have predicted the future path of the school he named in 1919, world events disseminated its students and teachers like seeds across the globe to lands where their ideas took root and blossomed, challenging prevailing design and architecture principles and transforming Bauhaus philosophy into an irrepressible worldwide force that powers design to this day. Could Gropius have coined a more perfect word?

"The responsibility of the Bauhaus," wrote Gropius in *The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus* (1923), "consists in forming human beings who recognize the world in which they live and who, out of the connections between their realizations and their acquired skills, are able to devise and design distinctive forms that symbolize this world."

Cynthia Elyce Rubin, Ph.D., *is a curator, lecturer and author of books and exhibition catalogues, including* Southern Folk Art, ABC Americana from the National Gallery of Art *and* Larger than Life: the American Tall-Tale Postcard, 1905–1915.