

Die Wohnung (The Dwelling) - 1927 Stuttgart apartments
Minimalism takes a footing



Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Born 1886 Aachen, Germany.
Died 1967 Chicago, USA

As his architectural work began to progress he changed his name from "**Maria Ludwig Michael Mies**" to a combination of his stonemason father's surname "**Mies**" together with his mother's maiden name "**van der Rohe**" >> **Mies van der Rohe**

Mies van der Rohe's early architectural career in Berlin included training in the office of Bruno Paul from 1905 until 1907 and in the office of Peter Behrens from 1908 until 1911 (his co-workers included Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius).

He opened his own practice in Berlin in 1913 and soon developed a personal architectural idiom that combined the cool rationalism of the nineteenth-century German architect Karl Friederich Schinkel with the pure formalism of the International Style.

From 1926 until 1932 Mies van der Rohe was vice president of the Deutsche Werkbund, an association of designers and architects whose principal aim was the development of well-designed, mass-producible architecture and household objects by way of an alliance of art and industry.

In 1927 the Werkbund presented the influential exhibition "Die Wohnung" (The Dwelling), which included the Weissenhof Siedlung (Weissenhof Housing Estate), an experimental group of model apartment buildings built in a suburb of Stuttgart.



Students at the Bauhaus, 1929

Under Mies van der Rohe's direction, a number of important architects, including Mart Stam and Marcel Breuer, collaborated on the project, designing furniture for the apartments.

This graceful, elegant, and beautifully proportioned "MR" chair, developed from a 1924 design for a cantilevered chair by Mart Stam, was introduced by Mies van der Rohe at the 1927 Stuttgart exhibition and has remained in production ever since.

In the mid-1920s, Mies began working with the talented designer Lilly Reich, who remained his collaborator and companion for more than a decade. One of their most striking collaborations, the German Building Exhibition in Berlin, demonstrated new types of living arrangements. Each designed a model home and Reich also created an innovative display of building products.

The Bauhaus ("Building House"), started by Walter Gropius in 1919 to be a "laboratory for mass consumption", embraced the machine aesthetic which focused on design and material choices that were appropriate for mass production.

Designers were led to experiment with materials and carefully scrutinized their designs for manufacturability and efficiency, often more so than for aesthetics.

In the period between World War I and World War II, the machine had a powerful impact on culture and design in America and Europe. Artists and designers struggled to understand and make sense of the new machine-driven world, and experimented with the direction it might give to their work.



1923 certificate #14 from the Bauhaus School

Mies was the last director of the Bauhaus design school in Dessau, from 1930 until its closing in 1932.

The appointment of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as director of the Bauhaus in 1930 was programmatic: It was expected of him to reconcile Bauhaus patrons with the institution, to continue with the reforms introduced by Meyer, and, with the help of his outstanding artistic personality, to present a new Bauhaus image, particularly in architecture.

The tuition system developed by Mies was a reflection of his personal experience: The first step was the acquisition of a solid knowledge in building techniques. This was followed by studies on building types, and finally by designs in urban planning. Mies reserved the last semesters for his own classes. His personal architectural language stood at the base of his theories.





1915 Riehl House



Mies in a cafe in Brussels, 1934



1915 Riehl House



Mies with Le Corbusier



1930



1932



Farnsworth House (946 - 1950) weekend retreat Chicago
Glass box framed by 8 exterior steel columns.



In 1930, Mies met New York architect Philip Johnson, who was in Europe researching what would become MoMA's first architecture exhibition, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition." Through this 1932 exhibition, which featured several of Mies's projects, and through architecture publications, the work of the German architect began to be appreciated in the United States.

Though Mies continued to undertake many projects, such as the Gericke House, during the 1930s, none of his designs were built due to the sweeping economic and political changes overtaking Germany. In 1933, Mies permanently shut down the Bauhaus, where he was director and a teacher, under pressure from the new Nazi government.

Mies left Germany when it became clear that, unlike their Italian counterparts, the German fascists would never wholeheartedly embrace Modernist architecture.

He had succeeded Walter Gropius as Bauhaus director, but the Nazis had closed the school for good in 1933.

He settled in Chicago where, as director of the city's School of Architecture, he was to perfect the art of building minimalist, elegant, and often expensive homes for wealthy patrons and corporate clients.

His famous phrase "less is more" perfectly captured his steadfast devotion to pure Modernist design, and encapsulated the Modernists' search for rational solutions to the complicated problems of urban existence.

After becoming an American citizen in 1944, Mies' first major project in the US was at the Illinois Institute of Technology campus (1939-1956). His work there is a classic example of his "glass box" design. Simple cubes, framed in steel and covered in glass, became the homes for various Institute faculties.

His Farnsworth House of 1951 (a private commission for a wealthy doctor), saw the lessons of Barcelona translated into a living home.

And his stunning twin Lake Shore Drive Apartment blocks in Chicago remain the ultimate expression in luxury high-rise living.

By now, corporate America was keen to offer Mies the opportunity to build his pure glass cuboids on their expensive slices of real estate.

The most celebrated example was the headquarters for the whisky company Seagram. Completed in 1958, this 38-storey masterpiece was clad in bronze, with its own plaza keeping the rest of New York at arm's length.

The effect is an incredibly elegant addition to Manhattan's jumble of towers, and the Seagram Building remains the epitome of 20th century corporate Modernism.

The simplicity of Mies' buildings was deceptive however. It took a lot of effort to make skyscrapers like the Seagram building look uncomplicated, and the forest of inferior imitations which sprang up across the globe in the 1960s and 1970s did much to undermine Modernism's reputation. Nevertheless, Mies' ability to create simple, refined modern monuments is appreciated, even by critics of Modernism, to this day.



Krefeld House , Germany , 1928 door detail





Landhaus Lemke home , 1934

Mies, who strangely never owned a house of his own, designed the Landhaus Lemke house for Karl Lemke - the owner of an art gallery and printing works.

The house is situated on the parkland beside the lake Obersee in Eastern Berlin. **It was the last house Mies built in Germany before he emigrated to America.**

Whilst this building is rather modest and simple in comparison to his other projects, it still demonstrates Mies's unmistakable formal expression.

In 1945 Soviet troops requisitioned the house for use as a garage and storage space. Unfortunately serious structural damage occurred. In 1962 the East German Ministry of State Security took control. In 1977 the house was listed as a heritage building and was restored for public viewing in 1990





1955 At Farnsworth House



Mies tower sketching



1964 Mies in the dining room of his Chicago apartment



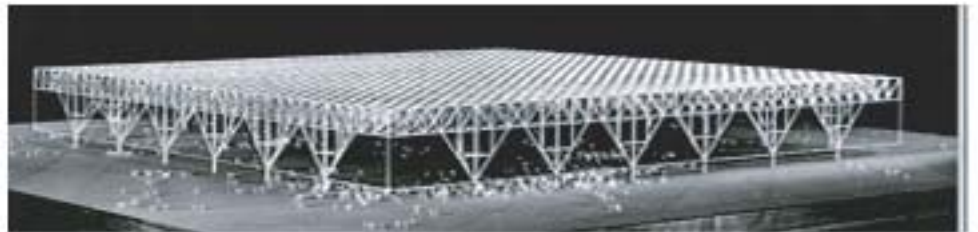
" I am convinced that architecture is the most significant expression of a civilisation "



Mies being interviewed at M.I.T



Inspecting the Chicago Convention Hall roof structure model



Model of the Chicago Convention Hall - 1963



Mies with his office staff at the Farnsworth site



Mies between the Twin Towers ,Chicago models



Mies was born in 1886 in Aachen, Germany.

His father was a master stonemason, and Mies very early on apprenticed as a bricklayer.

His background and early work experiences supplied him with a lifelong appreciation for building materials.

In 1905, at age 19, he moved to Berlin where he worked in the studio of Bruno Paul. His first commission was for a suburban residence for Professor Alois Riehl, which earned him the following praise from Paul: "The house has only one thing wrong with it that I didn't build it!"

Peter Behrens, one of the notable architects of that era, with a small office in Neubabelsberg later hired Mies to work in his office. In this environment Mies was introduced to the work of the great 19th century German architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, as well as the influential Dutch architect H.P. Berlage, both of whom had a strong impact on his own work for their adherence to classical simplicity and clarity.

In 1914 he opened his own practice in the Berlin borough of Steglitz, where for the next few years he designed residences in and around the city.

After the chaos and horror of World War I, artists and architects embraced the concept of a Utopian Society - ordered and structured, with architecture, or the New Architecture, playing an important role.

In 1919 the Bauhaus was established in Dresden.

Mies was swept up in the movement, wrote statements and essays for avant garde periodicals and designed visionary buildings.

In 1925 he was enlisted, along with other influential architects, to design and construct the Weissenhofsiedlung Housing Colony in Stuttgart.

A few years later the government hired him to design the German Pavilion for the Barcelona World's Fair.

This project put into practice the clarity espoused by the adherents of Utopia, with its reflecting pools, chrome plated columns and clean lines. Mies commented "This is a skeleton, the Barcelona Pavilion. It has only a base and a roof and a few columns and all the walls are no building walls and it gave a new space idea the floating space."

The Tugendhat House in Brno, Czechoslovakia, was his last architectural commission in Europe, and further explored Mies's ideas about architecture, as well as furniture design. The house is based upon a skeletal framework, much like that of the Barcelona Pavilion. Reference to this earlier work was also repeated in the central area, which contained an onyx wall that functioned symbolically as a domestic altar or fireplace.

Shortly after finishing this commission he accepted an appointment to the directorship of the Bauhaus where he imposed his concept of strict discipline on the students.

Closed in 1932 by the Nazis, the Bauhaus was moved to Berlin briefly as Mies's own private school before it was closed again.

Due to the ever increasingly hostile political environment in Germany, Mies decided to close his office in Berlin and emigrate to America.

In 1938 he accepted an appointment to become Director of the School of Architecture at the Armour Institute of Technology (AIT), which would soon become the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT).

In 1940 Mies was asked to redesign the campus, the first campus designed entirely in a modern style. The result of eight years of effort was a new model for urban design, in which open space flowed in and around campus buildings. He made use of the steel sections coming out of the mills of South Chicago and Indiana and explored the potential of steel I-beams and H-columns.

The IIT remains the ultimate "Miesian" Academy in design as well as curriculum.

In the 1940's Mies investigated his concepts of "universal space". These concerns centered around a hall that would be open and flexible enough to accommodate any function.

The Farnsworth House (Plano, IL), completed in 1951, realized Mies's goal of a versatile structure, uniting universal space with steel structure. With its references to a classical temple, the Farnsworth House best exemplifies the rebirth of the classic spirit in modern architecture.

In 1946 he met real estate developer Herbert Greenwald, who commissioned Mies' first large-scale commercial work, the high-rise towers of 860-880 Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.

These structures were built on plinths, that separated the towers from the surrounding cityscape. With their steel-frame structure and glass-infill skin, the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive buildings typified the modern skyscraper.

His use of non-essential I-beam mullions, he later explained served "to preserve and extend the rhythm of the exterior." His placement of the buildings at right angles with each other (partially due to the proviso that the structures not block views of the lake) became known as a Miesian complex generally composed of an open precinct with the buildings lining the street.

Samuel Bronfman, president of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons announced in 1954 that the company would construct a new headquarters on Park Avenue between 52nd and 53rd Street.

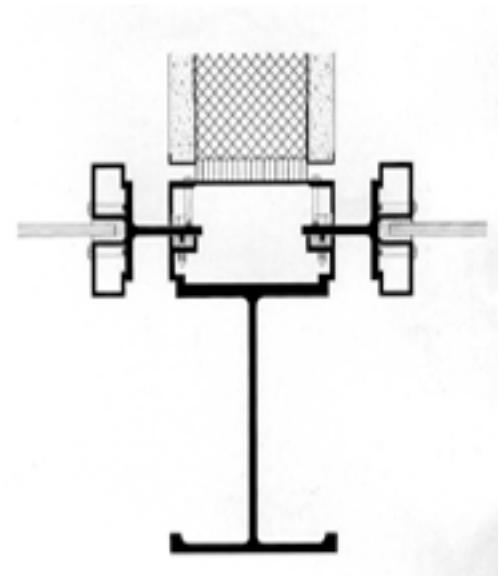
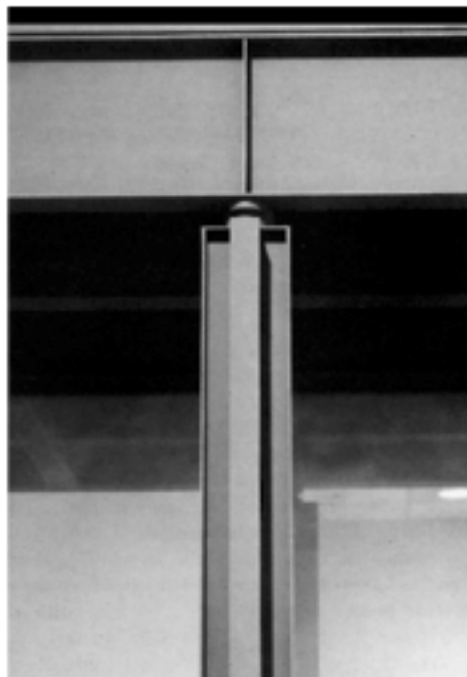
Phyllis Lambert, Bronfman's daughter upon reviewing the building plans reminded him that he had intended to build an important building.

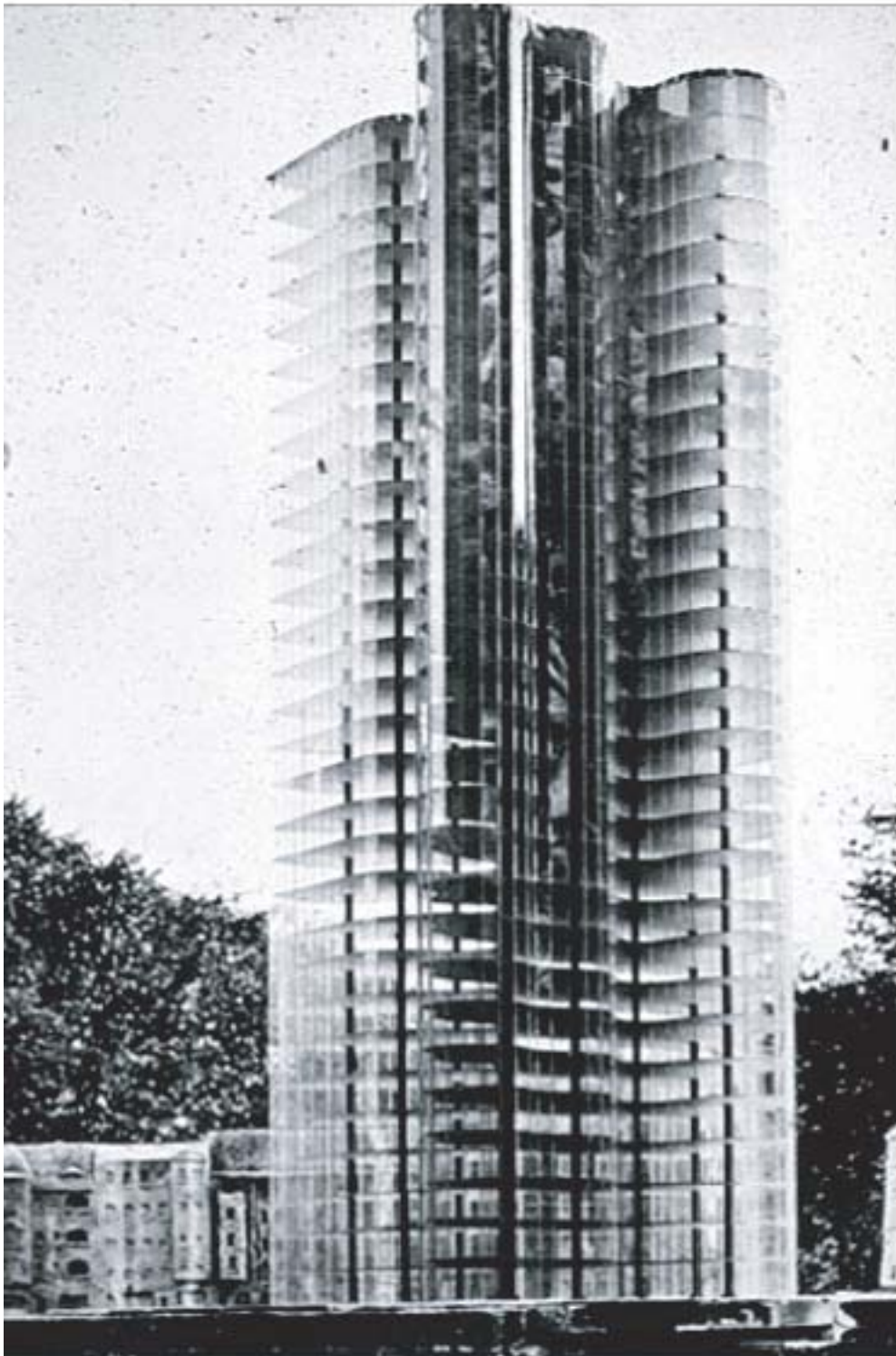
In response she was put her in charge of finding an architect. She commissioned Mies to build the headquarters. He approached the project by carefully studying Park Avenue; by walking its blocks and by constructing cardboard models of the neighborhood.

His final design comprised a sheer tower set back from the street, with an open plaza at the entrance, which served to open up the city's façade.

In 1962 Mies was invited by the Berlin Senate to design the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. This building, with its clear-span space and classical temple design, reminiscent of Schinkel, is the culmination of a vision developed over a lifetime. The hall is entirely walled in glass, with a 8mtr height. The roof is constructed of a grid of web girders and rests on eight columns. The hall was designed to exhibit temporary exhibits, while the podium housed the administrative offices and permanent collection.

The Neue Nationalgalerie was Mies' final statement for his homeland.





Mies's " Project for a Glass Tower " - Friedrichstrasse skyscraper drawn for a design competition 1919 and 1921 in Berlin

Mies designed two steel skyscrapers sheathed in glass from street to roof. Although the buildings were never erected, the designs are now accepted as the originals of today's glass-and-metal skyscrapers.



Twin Towers - 860 - 880 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago 1949 - 1951

Creation of an ordered precinct distinct from surrounds. The steel skeletal frame is based on a grid of 21 ft grid and is clearly expressed in the elevations, covering the fire-proofed columns and beams. Each bay is subdivided into 4 window apartments by 3 wide flange steel mullions. Within these divisions aluminium framed floor to ceiling windows are set.



Seagram Building, New York
1954 - 1956

37 storey - 160 mtr tall Bronze beams with bronzed glass .
Designed in collaboration with the famous American architect Philip Johnson. - who detailed the interior structure
The building was placed at the rear of the Park Avenue site thus separating the building from the city via a pink travertine open plaza, with twin fountain pools flanked by trees.



Mies with the model of the Seagram building 1955



In 1962, Mies's career came full-circle when he was invited to design the new National Gallery in Berlin, a museum that was to accommodate changing displays of contemporary art.

Mies developed a glass enclosed hall framed by a dramatically cantilevered roof resting on 8 tapered columns.

The design achieved his long-held vision of an exposed steel structure that directly connects interior space into the landscape.

Though he returned to Berlin several times to see the gallery under construction, Mies was too sick to attend the opening in 1968.



"Architecture is a language, when you are very good you can be a poet!"

