International Style:
the MoMA exhibition

Richard Guy Wilson

A complete history of the International Style exhibition, called 'International Exhibition of Modern Architecture,' which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York 50 years ago, is traced on the following pages. The author discusses the show from many points of view to give a complete picture of its organization, its inclusions and omissions, and its ultimate impact.

When the International Style exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred Barr, the museum's director, announced: "The present exhibition is an assertion that the confusion of the past 40 years, or rather of the past century, may shortly come to an end." As important as the London 1851 or the Chicago 1893 exhibitions, the Museum of Modern Art exhibit named and legitimized a brand of Modernism that came to dominate American and international developments. The exhibit was accompanied by two publications: a catalog, "Modern Architecture," and a book, The International Style: Architecture Since 1922. Written by the show's organizers Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., and Philip Johnson, with a preface by Barr, The International Style, while appearing scholarly, was polemical and set the standard against which all other types of Modernism—Functional, Decorative, Neo-Traditional, Stripped Classical, Streamlined, Wrightian, and Expressionist—would be measured and found wanting. The exhibit and the books argued the 20th-Century style was that of the European radical extreme, the seemingly ahistorical and machine-oriented Bauhaus by Walter Gropius of 1926 (1), the Hook of Holland housing of 1926 by J.J.P. Oud (p. 93), the Villa Savoye of 1930 by Le Corbusier (2), and the Barcelona Pavilion of 1929 by Mies van der Rohe (3).

To understand the importance and ultimate influence of the International Style exhibit, the context of the period and the content of the show and the books need to be examined. The social context of the exhibit was the Great Depression. Unemployment, mortgage foreclosures, bank closings, bread lines, and the Dust Bowl were the concerns of the day. By 1932, architects felt the decline in business investment; the professional journals explained how to economize in the office, how to attract clients, and what to do when out of work: soap carving and strolling about town were suggestions.

In 1932 there also occurred another important opening: the public viewing of the first buildings of Colonial Williamsburg (4). Somewhere between the two openings in Virginia and New York, most American architecture existed. The profession was largely dominated by men trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts or at an American derivative. What they admired can be seen in the AIA Gold Medal award. In 1929, Milton B. Medary, a Philadelphia eclectic who designed in the Arts and Crafts, Gothic, American Renaissance, and Art Deco modes received the medal. In 1932 (presentation in 1933), the Gold Medal went to Ragnar Ostberg for his widely acclaimed—and eclectic—Stockholm City Hall of 1912-1923 (p. 93). The next Gold Medal went in 1938 to Paul Cret in recognition of his role as an American Beaux Arts educator and as the master of the stripped Classical mode, so prominent in governmental buildings, and as seen in his Folger Shakespeare Library of 1932 (5) in Washington, DC.

Another indication of taste is seen in a poll of admired buildings conducted of architectural offices in 1932 by the Federal Architect magazine. The results were: 1 Lincoln Memorial (Henry Ba-
Oud, Hook of Holland housing (above); Østberg, Stockholm City Hall (above right); Klint, Grundtvig Church (below).
International Style

con); 2 Empire State Building (Shreve, Lamb & Harmon); 3 Nebraska State Capitol (Bertram G. Goodhue); 4 Morgan Library (McKim, Mead & White); 5 St. Thomas Church, New York (Cram & Goodhue); 6 Chicago Daily News Building (Holabird & Root); 7 Scottish Rite Temple, Washington, DC (John Russell Pope); 8 Columbia University (McKim, Mead & White); 9 Harkness Memorial Building, Yale (Goodhue and James Gamble Rodgers); 10 Folger Library (Paul Cret).

The poll reveals a respect for the older turn-of-the-century architects, such as McKim, Bacon, and Pope, who worked within the confines of an academic tradition. Also apparent is admiration for the younger generation who, recognizing the changing circumstances and new requirements, tried to update tradition by stripping away historical ornament and creating large, massive forms. Bertram Goodhue was the hero of this Neo-Traditionalist-Moderen, or Art Deco group, and although he died in 1924, he remained well into the 1930s a figure of reverence. (Goodhue posthumously received the Gold Medal in 1925, the same year as Edwin Lutyens.)

Eliel Saarinen must be counted with the Neo-Traditionalist-Modernists; his entry in the 1921–1922 Chicago Tribune Competition helped to form the style. Involved ornament, textured materials, picturesque composition, and the stylization and simplification of historical elements made his Cranbrook Schools (6) in Bloomfield, Mi., a much admired design throughout the 1930s. Saarinen carefully separated himself from the radical Modern; evolution, not revolution, was the theme of a talk he gave to the AIA in 1931.

Consider ancient Greek origins of the poll were the older generation of American Modernists, Sullivan and Wright. Louis Sullivan died in 1924, building very little in his last years. Although his work was published extensively, Sullivan’s lack of clients came from personal failing and not from conspiracy. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, his reputation underwent a rehabilitation by historians and critics, and instead of a failure, he became a prophet of Modernism. Frank Lloyd Wright, like Sullivan, was well known to the architects, but his day seemed past; he had no work and no apparent prospects. He was a 65-year-old romantic eccentric pontificating from the hills of Wisconsin or the deserts of Arizona. From 1925 to 1932, only five of his designs were built, of which two were for himself and one for a family member. In retrospect, however, Wright was on the comeback trail; his most personal life was finally in order. Wright was in demand as a speaker, and he was writing, most notably the essays “In the Cause of Architecture” for Architectural Record (1929), An Autobiography (1932), and the initial prospectus for the Broadacre City scheme, When the Industrial Revolution Runs Away (1932). In the summer of 1931, he announced the Taliesin Fellowship, and the first class began in the fall of 1932. In 1932, he received the Wiley house commission at Minneapolis.

Wright was well known to the Europeans; Oud, Mies, and Gropius all acknowledged their debt to him, and actually Mies and Gropius appeared as sponsors on the initial announcement of the Taliesin Fellowship. While Wright used their names, he believed they departed too far from his principles, and in early 1929, before the Museum of Modern Art exhibit opened, he attacked the “ready-made culture” of the “internationalists” as “the only modern improvement on the old eclectic.” George Howe, stung by Wright’s gibes, responded: “Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright, abandoning the part of Moses, is suddenly turned Pharaoh. . . . Why should he who has led us out of bondage turn and destroy his children?”

By 1932, there was also a general younger group who found their lead in the more radical European architecture that would be proclaimed “the International Style.” The spokesman for this group was George Howe, older and Beaux-Arts trained, who experienced his “crise à quarante ans” a few years earlier and had thrown over a conventional Philadelphia practice to search for a Modern American architecture.

In the professional press

An examination of the periodicals to see what the American architect would know of European architecture reveals the 1920s designs of modern buildings such as Le Corbusier’s Ville Savoie (1925–26) (p. 93), the new Beerbier building in the Hague, with both the dominant and secondary aspects of the set-back skyscraper this preference for the hero becomes an essential element of the Holland, the most architecturally advanced European had arrived in the 1920s. The reviewer for the Illustrated London News (1923), Schindler, Kranz, and the late 1920s, the architecture gained a new coherence, especially with Le Corbusier and other innovators such as Mies van der Rohe and the Stuttgart, the appearance of the following, though new.

Le Corbusier and his American counterpart, Frank Lloyd Wright, are credited by the architectural establishment with the 1929 Architectural Record. Earlier that year, Gropius, “in spirit and attitude, for his enthusiasm for his uncompromising view of the new Architecture,” was the great advocate of expression of industrial production and mass production methods, of concrete walls, and all unnecessary ornament must be abandoned, and that architecture must be simple and truly new and not in any way eclectic.

This interpretation (and by extension, the radical Modernist) was functionalist; it was about the machine and would be about the International Style. Ralph Bunche, in 1939, was spiritual, and thus can never be said to have designed architecture. It was, of which, while taking into account the emotions of the “Robotic Walker,” Walker, in “The Architecture of the Future” of “forms and an architecture as his Barclay (10).” Ironically, New York Times as the first language edition.

The concern architects with European designs were sponsored by the AIA, the professional organization. The spread...
the 1920s dominated by photos of brick buildings such as: Östergö town’s city hall (p. 95), P.V.J. Klint’s Grundvich church of 1926 (p. 95) in Copenhagen, and Fritz Hoger’s Chilehaus of 1923 (8) in Hamburg. To some degree, six illustrations both influenced and confirmed the dominant direction of American architecture in those years in the decorated, set-back skyscraper. Well into the 1930s, this preference continued, with the new hero becoming Wimmin Marinus Dudok of Holland. The more radical Europeans had appeared sporadically in the 1920s. The AIA Journal in 1925 began reviewing foreign periodicals, and published illustrations of Mies, Le Corbusier, Scharoun, and others. By the later 1920s, as the new European architecture gained more prominence, coherence, and similarity of appearance, as especially as seen in the 1927 Weissenhof housing exposition buildings by Mies, Gropius, and Oud (9) in Stuttgart, there was accordingly more appearance in American periodicals, though never as a unified movement.

Le Corbusier published his first American article in the drastically updated Architectural Record of August 1929. Earlier, in 1927, Samuel Chamberlain, in “search of Modernism,” enthusiastically endorsed Le Corbusier’s “uncompromising voice,” and a reviewer of the English translation of Vers une architecture claimed: “He sees the greatness of our future in a scientific expression of the possibilities of steel beams, mass production units, bare concrete walls, and a complete avoidance of all unnecessary detail. In a word, we must consider the function of a building, and that only, if we are to arrive at a truly new and beautiful architecture.”

This interpretation of Le Corbusier (and by extension, of all the European radical Modernists) as unabashed Functionalist was common in the U.S. and would be one of the issues the International Style would seek to disclaim. Ralph Walker reacted to Le Corbusier in 1928: “The fundamental, spiritual, and intellectual needs of man can never be satisfied with the thin, austere design of the engineer-architect, which, while perfectly honest, fails to take into consideration the thoughts or emotions of anyone other than a Robot.” Walker argued for a “new architecture” of “infinite variety of complex forms and an intricate meaning,” such as his Barclay Vessay building of 1926 (10).

Ironically, Le Corbusier-used this New York Telephone Company building as the frontispiece to the English language edition of Vers une Architecture.

The concern of many American architects with European Modernism and what their architecture should look like came to the forefront in a debate sponsored by the AIA at the 1930 convention. The spokesmen were: George Howe for the Moderns; C. Howard Walker for the Traditionalists; Ralph Walker for the Neo-Traditionalists; and Earl H. Reed, Jr., for the Wrightians. The moderates claimed, “We are facing a crisis”; and Howe noted a development “away from order toward architectural chaos.” Howe concurred in a position in Functionalist terms, denying that Modernism had a style and attacking the “grab-bag” styles of the Traditionalists. For him, the “Modern movement” was essentially technical, the prospect of using “modern construction and modern materials to the full, for architectural expression as well as for practical ends.” C. Howard Walker of Boston couched his arguments in an urbane and witty manner, and criticized the Modernist position. Earl Reed of Chicago argued against the “alien” Classicism of the 1893 Worlds Fair and pleaded passionately for the Mid-Western tradition of Wright, Sullivan, and their contemporary followers. Holabird & Root. Ralph Walker noted the typical American “colonial mentality”: “Our architects are looking to Germany, France, and Holland for that which sprang from our own loins, but has now the foreign touch of flavor.” Grain elevators were of more importance than Roman baths, but he criticized Le Corbusier and Gropius for the analogy between transportation and houses. Walker condemned the search for a “formula” for Modern architecture and pleaded for individualism.

That the American architect had a right to be confused is obvious; European Modernism could appear almost simultaneously in exhibits such as those of Ehrich Mendelsohn in New York at the Contempora Gallery and Peter Behrens and his students of the Vienna School of Architecture at the Brooklyn Museum. Sheldon Cheney wrote the popular News World Architecture in 1930 in which he introduced the term “space-time,” but did not describe it, and included as his heroes Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Bernard Maybeck. The imprisionment of the different positions is evident in the claim of one writer of “a kind of Kyrie eleison, ‘Sarainen, Le Corbusier, Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright.”10 Straightening out this confusion and demonstrating that an order, a unified expression did exist, which passed beyond national boundaries, would be the role of the Museum of Modern Art.

MoMA

The idea of a museum exhibition of Modern architecture resulted from equal measures of youthful moralistic earnestness to bring America up to date with advanced European architecture, a tweaking of the nose of the bourgeoisie, and self-promotion on the part of the exhibition’s organizers. Barely two years old in 1922, the Museum of Modern Art had been founded in 1929 by a group of wealthy New York art collectors. The early trustees and officers of the museum read like a roll call of important American patrons of advanced art: Miss Lillie Bliss, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., A. Conger Goodyear, Chester Dale, Duncan Phillips, and Paul Sachs.

8 Hoger, Chilehaus.

9 Weissenhof housing exposition.

10 Walker, Barclay Vessay building.
The man entrusted with implementing the idea and who gave it a distinctive cast was the first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the son of a Detroit Presbyterian minister, whose missionary passion for Modern art approached that of a religion. Barr had gained a certain fame—or notoriety—by teaching a course at Wellesley College on the arts of the 20th Century that included painting, sculpture, prints, posters, advertising, films, theater, photography, industrial design, and architecture. His course became the prospectus for a museum that he envisioned would encompass the sprawling modes of Modern art, prove it popular with the public, and give serious academic attention to the subject.

Barr had wanted an exhibition devoted to advanced European architecture, and by the summer of 1930 he had approached Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., with the idea. Hitchcock, only 27 years old, was already a respected architectural historian and critic. He had graduated from Harvard in 1924, done some postgraduate work, lectured and taught, and published extensively. His writings were on a variety of subjects, but most prominently on contemporary American and European architecture: an article (1928) and a book (1931) on J.P. Oud, a book on Frank Lloyd Wright (1929), and a large book, Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration (1929), that attempted to put the historical architecture of Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, Oud, and Le Corbusier, or as he termed them, the “New Pioneers,” into perspective with the half-Modern or more derivative work of Wright, Berlage, Behrens, and Dudok, which he termed “The New Tradition.” Barr reviewed the book for a Harvard “little” literary magazine and highly praised the New Pioneers’ work as a more original development than even the Gothic or Byzantine styles.12

Philip Johnson was 24 in 1930 when he graduated from Harvard, having studied classics and philosophy. An interest in architecture came through Hitchcock’s article on Oud. Later he recalled: “Only Modern and only that kind of Modern architecture . . . thrilled me—not de Klerk, nor Berlage, not Poelzig or Lutyens . . . I especially and contemptuously decried the Modern Movement (i.e., Morris and Voysey) and Frank Lloyd Wright.”13 Johnson became close friends with Barr and after graduation moved to New York and volunteered his services to the fledgling museum, along with George Howe (who was working on designs for it, which were, of course, never executed). Johnson served on the junior advisory council; he oversaw renovations of the museum’s rented quarters, worked on the museum’s typography, and organized the “Modern Architecture” show. The creation of the Department of Architecture with Johnson as the first head did not occur until after the exhibit was mounted.

**Background of the exhibit**

Ideas were developed and materials collected for the exhibition from mid-1930 onwards, while at the same time the ground was laid and events occurred that ensured the show would be controversial. The tenor of the proposed show was exemplified by Johnson’s prospectus written in early 1931: “Modern architecture is born and exists in an era of applied science. Modern architecture does not fight the machine age, but accepts it.” He claimed the new style “will not be a Greek temple made into a bank, a Gothic church become an office tower, or, worst of all, a ‘modernistic’ hodgepodge of half-hidden construction and fantastic detail.”14 In an article for Arts magazine in March 1931, Johnson attacked Joseph Urban’s recently completed New School for Social Research (11) in New York—one of the buildings funded in the U.S., with a façade strongly related to Brinkman and von der Vlugt’s van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam of 1928 (p. 91). But for Johnson, the New School had “the illusion of a building in the International Style rather than a building resulting from a genuine application of the new principles,”15 which he claimed were: 1) purpose and function, a structure that creates the interior and subsequently the exterior; 2) function and structure create the decoration, not applied ornament; and 3) fine proportions and simple design create the feeling of beauty.

In April 1931, the Architectural League of New York held its annual exhibition that also commemorated its 50th anniversary. Raymond Hood was president and Elie Jacques Kahn was in charge of the exhibits. The League’s annual Gold Medal went to Elie Saarinen for Cranbrook (6) and to Shreve, Lamb & Harmon for the Empire State Building of 1931. The exhibition was inclusive, showing highly traditional work, along with Östberg’s city hall (p. 93), Asplund’s Stockholm Exposition designs of 1930 (12), Howe & Lescaze’s PSFS of 1932 (p. 98), Hood’s Daily News of 1930, three Norman Bel Geddes designs, including the Ukrainian State Theater (13), and Kocher & Frey’s full-scale model Aluminaire house of 1931 (14) (purchased by Wallace K. Harrison and moved to Syosset, Long Island). Rejected for the exhibit were a group of younger architects committed to Modernism and closely identified with Howe. Johnson, with the blessings of Howe and Barr, rented a storefront, set up an exhibit of the rejected work, and hired a sandwich-board man to parade in front of the League’s building.


Hazen 1931: 123-141.


Richardson 1931: 154.


Johnson 1931: 154.


Johnson 1931: 154.

attained to substitute the awkward phrase "The New Pioneers" and avoid the sticky word style, but the term International Style stuck.

'Modern Architecture' exhibit

The long-awaited "Modern Architecture" exhibit finally opened on February 9, 1932, in the museum's temporary quarters of the Heckscher Building on Fifth Avenue and remained on view until March 23. Subsequently, the exhibit, with slight alterations, appeared in museums and galleries in Philadelphia, Hartford, Buffalo, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Rochester, Toledo, Cambridge, Worcester, and in Los Angeles at the Bullocks Wilshire Department Store.

The displays of photos, drawings, and models were installed by Johnson, although Mies had earlier been announced as the designer of the exhibition. (Johnson was already a disciple of Mies, who had designed Johnson's New York apartment interior—a photo of it appeared in The International Style. Johnson had written two articles admiring Mies's installation of the 1931 Berlin Building Exhibition. A footnote in The International Style announced that Johnson had a book on Mies in preparation, but it did not appear until 1947.)

The museum trustees requested that American architects be accorded equal representation, and to circumvent this restriction, Johnson split the exhibit into three parts to mask the European predominance. The parts were: first, a survey of the extent of Modern architecture; second, an in-depth examination of the leaders; and third, a section on housing. This arrangement, with the addition of essays and a slightly different and lesser number of illustrations, was followed in the catalog Modern Architecture. Barr provided a polemic foreword, took swipes at the "Modernistic or half-modern decorative style," and asserted that the "aesthetic principles of the International Style are based primarily upon the nature of modern materials and structure and upon modern requirements in planning." Johnson followed with a "Historical Note" that outlined the classical litany of formative influences: 19th-Century train-sheds, bridges and engineering, Cubist painting and sculpture, and the architecture of Richardson, Sullivan, and Wagner. Le Corbusier's Vers une Architecture announced the new style, and "Since 1922 the new style has not changed in its fundamentals." The quantitative section on "The Extent of International Architecture" consisted of the exhibit of photographs of 40 buildings from around the world: six were by American firms: R.G. & W.M. Cory's Starrett Lehigh Building of 1931 (15); Frederick Kiesler's Film Guild Cinema of 1929 (16); and Thompson & Churchill's Office Building of 1930 on the northwest corner of Lexington Avenue and 57th Street—all in New York—and Kocher & Frey's Harrison house (14) at Syosset; Tucker & Howell's (with Oscar Stonorov as associate) Biological Laboratory of the Highland Museum of 1931 (17) in North Carolina; and Claus & Daub's Filling Station of 1931 (18) in Cleveland for the Standard Oil Company of Ohio.
Neutra, Lovell house (above); Howe & Lescaze, PSFS building (below left); Schindler, Lovell house (below right).

20 Rietveld, Schröder house.

The result from Aalto in Turku, Schröder in Deventer, and Uno in buildings, and Wright's Schröder's Chemnitz Starrett Lectures that the Regional Style is the most are not all as evident in The International Style in the exhibitions. Some have an essent the mode of the modern world. The second

of nine a fine European, a great one, while Neutra and Wright's Wright, Howe & Bose, Denver of the Bauhaus (1927; (2)); J.P. O. Corbusier at a sister and not Tugendhat, Howe & Lescaze, the housing project of the Richard Sleeman (35); Richard on project (26); Lux apartments.

With the Europeans provin, the models models were the U.S. The strange of important aesthetics of the were beyond the. Also strange is Raymond Hood, moving in the predominant Graw-Hill Building completed in the Tower apartments.

Wright's influence is difficult to explain. The exhibit of Modern America's most was another related to the work was one of the most important sources. Wright was tre...
The remaining 34 buildings ranged from Aalto's Turun Sanomat building in Turku of 1928 (19), Rietveld's Schröder house in Utrecht of 1924 (20), and Ueno's Star Bar in Kyoto. All the buildings in this section, even Mendelsohn's Schokken Department Store in Chemnitz of 1928 (21) or the Cory's Starrett Lehigh Building (15), had features that were identified as International Style. The catalog contained none of these illustrations (most would appear in The International Style), but did have an essay by Hitchcock and Johnson that read individuals either in or out of the movement, and criticized the "half-Modern."25

The second section explored the work of nine architects/firms; four were European, and of the five Americans, Neutra and Lescaze were born and trained abroad. Shown were photographs, drawings, and models. The nine and their models were: Frank Lloyd Wright, House on the Mesa project for Denver of 1931 (22); Walter Gropius, Bauhaus (1); Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye (2); J.J.P. Oud, project for a house in Pinehurst, NC (p. 89) (for Johnson's sister and never built); Mies van der Rohe, Tugendhat house of 1930 (23); Howe & Lescaze, Chrystie-Forsyth housing project of 1931 (24) for New York; Raymond Hood, Country Tower project for the New York suburbs of 1932 (25); Richard Neutra, Ring Plan School project (26); and Bowman Brothers, Lux apartment project (27).

With the exception of Oud, all the Europeans presented actual buildings in model form, while all the American models were experimental and hypothetical. In the catalog, Hitchcock provided eight of the essays on the individuals, and Johnson the one on Mies. The leaders, openly stated, were Le Corbusier, Mies, Gropius, and Oud. Of the Americans, Howe & Lescaze were clearly the most important. Neutra's Lovell house (p. 98) was claimed as stylistically the most advanced house in the U.S. The Bowman Brothers were a strange inclusion; they had built nothing of importance, and their proclaimed aesthetics of function and construction were beyond the thesis of the exhibit. Also strange was the presence of Raymond Hood, but he appeared to be moving in the right direction with the predominant horizontals of the McGraw-Hill Building (28) in New York, completed in 1934, or the Country Tower apartments (25).

Wright's inclusion was the most difficult to explain, yet how could any exhibit of Modern architecture ignore America's most famous Modern? Barr explained that Wright "is not intimately related to the Style although his early work was one of the Style's most important sources."26 And on that basis Wright was treated by Hitchcock as an
individualist who recognized no boundaries of style and an innovator of new concepts of plan, space, form, and image. The difference between the architects "throughout the world who work consciously or unconsciously in a single international style" and Wright was that: "At the bottom they are Classicists and he Romantic."

Part three, housing, had a large model and photos of Otto Haesler’s Rothenberg housing development in Kassel, Germany, and photos of the work of Ernst May, Oud, Henry Wright, and Clarence Stein, and American slums and housing developments. The catalog contained an essay by Lewis Mumford and a short entry by Johnson on Haesler.

The International Style

The book, The International Style, went far beyond the schematic catalog and diametrically laid down the principles of the new style. The principles were three: "architecture as volume rather than mass," "regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of organizing design," and the proscription of "arbitrary ornamental detail."

These three principles differed markedly from those announced by Johnson earlier in 1931, and in fact differed slightly from those of Barr's foreword to the catalog. Evident is the dominance of Hitchcock's primarily aesthetic artistic approach over the more technocratic-deterministic attitudes of Johnson and Barr. In an article written shortly after the exhibit opened, Hitchcock strongly defended his approach: "It seems possible through aesthetic criticism to bring certain people to an interest in and even a certain understanding of Modern architecture who are bored by technicians and sociologists." Prominent was the scholarly apparatus Barr had sought. The Germanic art historical approach of Wollfin and Frankl underlay much of Hitchcock and Johnson's theorizing: "The unconscious and halting architectural developments of the 19th Century, the confused and contradictory experimentation of the beginning of the 20th, have been succeeded by a directed evolution. There is now a single body of discipline, fixed enough to integrate contemporary style as a reality and yet elastic enough to permit individual interpretation and to encourage general growth."

The argument developed by Hitchcock and Johnson was complex and ultimately misunderstood, for while they recognized the importance of the ideas of designing for function and of incorporating the new expressive possibilities of (supposedly) 20th Century materials and structure, these were not the determinants. For a style—or an aesthetic—had developed that provided a method of arranging façades, fenestration, plans, and details. The International Style was, in other words, an aesthetic that really did not depend upon the ideas of function and materials, which of course was proven by buildings that looked like them-walled various containers, but were stucco-covered brick. This was perfectly acceptable to Hitchcock and Johnson: "from the aesthetic point of view, brick is undoubtedly less satisfactory than any other material, including stucco. Indeed, brick is often covered with stucco." Surprisingly, given the importance that expressed or articulated structure came to have in the 1940s and 1950s in "International Style" buildings, structure was downplayed in 1932; walls were thin, flat, and unbroken by the structural cage. When structure does appear, as in the piloting, it is an object separate from the wall. Also, details when they appear, whether window frames or railings, are objects, mechanically in appearance. As William Jordy later argued, the process is more of a symbolic objectification of the machine age than the real thing.

Space was not defined as a principle per se, but treated under the concept of architecture as volume, although buildings were presented with no sections, only plans. The free plan, or "interiors which open up into one another without definite circumscribing partitions," as in those of Mies and Le Corbusier, were claimed as the particular innovation of the International Style. The use of screens, curved and oblique, gave to the interior a new type of abstract space "unknown in the architecture of the past."

Essentially, The International Style became a cookbook, a set of do's and don'ts: "Anyone who follows the rules, who accepts the implications can produce buildings which are at least aesthetically sound." The rules are set forth extensively: "Good Modern architecture expresses in its design this characteristic orderness of structure and this similarity of parts by an aesthetic ordering which emphasizes the underlying regularity. Bad modern design contradicts this regularity." The flat roofs normal with modern methods of construction have an essential aesthetic significance. Flat roofs are so much more useful that slanting or rounded roofs are only exceptionally justified. The mark of the bad modern architect is the positive cultivation of asymmetry for decorative reasons.

Horizontality is noted as one of the conspicuous characteristics of the International Style and justified by construction and function. The horizonality made the International Style stand apart from the usual verticality of American skyscrapers, and for this reason, Raymond Hood's McGraw-Hill building (28) could be grudgingly included as "within the limits" of the International Style. Yet, after extensively discussing horizontality and depreciating the "average American client," who found it "unspectacular aesthetically," it was noted, "Horizontality is not in itself, however, a principle of the International Style."

In both the text and the captions, suggestions were made with regard to specific buildings. For Mendelsohn's Schokken Department Store (21) in Chemnitz: "The setbacks required by building laws give an unfortunate stepped effect, as in New York skyscrapers"; and for Tucker and Howell's Biological Laboratory (17) of the Highclands Museum: "Pipe support is incongruous and appears too frail." The problem of a too rigid adherence to the rules was faced by Hitchcock and Johnson, with the admission that "dull" buildings could result, and the observation that "It is the privilege of great architects to interpret the aesthetic discipline of the style according to the spirit rather than the letter."

The emphasis upon aesthetics and style, Hitchcock and Johnson conspicuously placed themselves on one side of a debate raging in European Modernist circles between the straightforward Functionals, such as Hanses Meyer and Mart Stam, and those such as Le Corbusier and Mies, who claimed that the architect was an artist concerned with composition, beauty, and aesthetics. The Functionalist view that any concern with proportions or problems of design for their own sake was decadent and reminiscent of the 19th Century was noted and criticized: "Consciously the period of expression had given way to the period of abstraction, where the architect who has made free choices before his design is completed. In these choices the European Functionalists follow, rather than go against, the principles of the general contemporary style. Whether they admit it or not is beside the point."

Barr, in the preface, actually suggested an alternative name for the International Style—Post-Functionalism. Fundamental to this split was the sociological and political orientation of many European architects: they were largely left-wing, if not communist, and in the cases of Meyer and Stam, and saw their work not as aesthetics, but at attempts to solve problems of housing and standards of living, and as spurs to collective action. This leftist political orientation would be clearly unacceptable not only to the Museum's trustees, but also to the majority of the American public, especially those with the power to commission buildings.

Housing

Some critics exhibit and write of the social aspects of the International Style. For American architects, the architecture of the International Style was admired, but the final chapter of German housing was included in the catalogue, and they had part in its development. The contributions were critical, but statistical in nature, and has no place in this essay. Often in Functionalism, it was implied that the importance of the commission was of log was as a house. The housing, the new city, was for the International Style.

The exhibit was largely the work of Catherine de Vries, who essay. De Vries was a mechanical engineer at the Wellfleet Research Laboratories, and had been involved in the development of ideas on the history of the exhibition. The work of the architects had been prepared and reviewed by the director, John V. Johnson.

The exhibit was planned by John and May in consultation with the architect, and in the NJ, and on the horizon to the shaping of the architecture of the architectural look. Gardens was a part of the International Style. In the exhibit's preface, the architectural changes and development, new issues of housing, traffic separation, and the European concept of housing, were not discussed. The comment, urban enterprises, and housing and planning were developed. The book, "The City," would only be published in the "new pictures," and would be written by Mumford and de Vries. The biological, agricultural, and industrial use of housing is also discussed and by improved efficiency, and the various uses of housing that can be found in the town.

Progressive Architecture 2:82
American skyscrapers (Raymond Hood's 1928) could not be contained within the building's "skin." Yet, in the Heights parking garage, the American architects succeeded in preventing the "vertical" principle of tracery, regarding to Miesian's (1923) invention, in the spirit of the International Style.

The case of the Corbusier's de Mandrot house illustrated the importance of the application of the International Style. The originality of the house was "modern architecture, with its strong lines, its disdain for the quaint and the pretentious," its "unmodified unity, its submergence of the individual unit in the design of the whole," and not a "poor substitute for our abandoned houses..." The concern was for the application of the International Style.

The actual section on housing was largely the work of Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer—giving them the essay and she assembling the materials. Mumford's reputation as an architectural critic and historian was already well established; his fundamentally social (as distinct from Hitchcock's fundamentally aesthetic) viewpoint had been developed, though his later critical essays on the machine were not yet evident. Catherine Bauer, a protégée of Mumford, had traveled in Germany in 1909, and, in her words, was "so excited that it transformed me..." The exhibit attempted to show the totally planned communities of Haeslers and May in Germany, Oud in Rotterdam, and Wright and Stein at Radburn, NJ, and on Long Island, in comparison to slums. Certainly the Traditional Architecture of Radburn and Sunnyside Gardens was at odds with the International Style, but on the level of comparatively prehensive planning, large-scale development, and a recognition of the issues of hygiene, open green space, and traffic separation, they were equal to the European models. Mumford's essay went the farthest towards political comment, using terms such as "collective enterprise," "economic revolution," and stating that adequate housing would only be possible with "Limited Profits" and State Subvention. The neo-picturesque quality of most American housing was roundly condemned, and Mumford translated the social, biological, and economic requirements of housing into Modern architecture—by implication into the International Style: "Modern architecture, with its strong lines, its disdain for the quaint and the pretty," its communal unity, its submergence of the individual unit in the design of the whole, is not a poor substitute for our abandoned houses..." The concern was for the application of the International Style.

The major result of the Museum exhibit was the establishment of the International Style as the approved image of the 20th Century. How accurately Hitchcock and Johnson summed up the current radical architecture of Europe and the work of the four leaders will always be a matter of controversy. They had some difficulty fitting Mies's Barcelona Pavilion (3), with its lack of fixed volume, into their principles. Le Corbusier's De Mandrot house of 1921 (29) near Hyères, with solid rubble walls, was also included as an extension of the style. Essentially a return by Le Corbusier to a rustic vernacular and a rejection of the style of the 1920s, it was contemporary with his Pavillon Suisse in Paris (not in the exhibit), which had rubble walls and dramatically sculptural pilasters. Hitchcock has noted that if the book and exhibit had been either earlier or later, the resultant definition and image might have been different. However that may be, they caught and enshrined for all time a particular architectural image and style, essentially one of the last 1920s.
Reputations, and to a certain degree what was deemed important and worthy of study, were defined by the exhibit and books. Rudolf Schindler asked to be included, claiming not an affinity with "the so-called 'International Style,'" but with problems beyond style and materials. Johnson responded curtly: "From my knowledge of your work, my real opinion is that your work would not belong in this exhibition"; and by his definitions it did not. Certainly not all of Schindler's subsequent problems can be blamed on his exclusion, but it hurt, and he remained largely a regional figure. (He did participate in the Museum's 1985 "Modern Architecture in California" exhibit.) In contrast, Richard Neutra's exploitation of the publicity resulting from the exhibit gave him a position of prominence equal to—for a period of time—that of Wright, Mies, and Le Corbusier.

Foreign omissions

Certain foreign omissions or slighted were equally damaging. Erich Mendelsohn, certainly the most successful of the German Modernists and well known in the U.S., received marginal inclusion with a plan and photo of the Schocken Department Store (21) in Chemnitz and a photo of the German Metal Workers' Union Building of 1930 (30) in Berlin (designed with R.W. Reichel). Hans Scharoun had a plan and a photo of a Berlin apartment house in the book. By the late 1920s their work was well within the bounds of the International Style. Perhaps their earlier Expressionist work—certainly an excess in terms of the International Style—made them questionable. However, Mies and the Bauhaus of the immediate post-war years were also largely Expressionist, yet their reputations had been sanitized by the later 1920s. Other figures—Hugo Häring, the Amsterdam School, Bruno and Max Taut—could also be mentioned, yet their architecture passed beyond the Hitchcock and Johnson boundaries.

Only one building was included from Italy, Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini's house at the Monza Exposition of 1930

Reactions

Reactions to the exhibit indicate how the International Style could be interpreted. If the term was William Heytens' 1920s notion, it was worthy of the name. Certainly better, no question, than any of the other schools of the time. Fuller and others thought the International Style Functionalist, and in "economy" the stark, unadorned.

(31) In Italy by Luigi Figini, for the International Competition at Novoceramika, 1929 (31); for the Monza Exposition, 1930 (33); for the Venice Biennale (33); for the Belgrade Biennale (33); for the Moscow Exhibition (34); and for the Manifesto of the New Gothic Style in Moscow (34).
(31). In actuality, little had been built in Italy by 1932 that accorded with the International Style definition, though Giuseppe Terragni had completed his Novoconun apartments in Como by 1929 (32). Pier Luigi Nervi's Florence Stadium was also completed, but would have been considered engineering.

Far more political was the almost complete absence of new Soviet architecture. None of the Museum's organizers was unaware of Russian Constructivism, and in fact Barr had traveled in the USSR and written in 1929 about the "advanced" architecture, though he criticized it for poor details and finish and complained that the "fantastic paper architecture" seemed to overwhelm the actual built examples. Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International project of 1920 (33); Viktor Leonid, and Aleksandr Vesnin's Palace of Labor project of 1923 (34); and many of the projects of the Soviet architectural school and of the Vkhutemas (Free State Art Studios) were paper architecture and beyond the boundaries of the International Style. Yet there were also many works in accord, such as Le Corbusier's Cen-
trosoyus Building in Moscow under construction from 1929 onwards, the workers' clubs of the 1920s by Konstan-
tin Melnikov, such as the Rusakov Club in Moscow of 1929 (35), and Ilya Golosov, and the Narkomfin flats in Moscow by Moisei Ginsburg and I. Milinis. The Soviet identification of Modern architecture with revolution would not be conducive to selling the International Style in the U.S. Consequently, the Russian contribution became a few photographs of the insignificant Electro-Physical Laboratory and Institute in Moscow (p. 90).

Reactions

Reactions to the exhibit and books indicate how the International Style would be interpreted. Typically conservative was William Adams Delano: "After centuries of struggle to evolve a culture worthy of his position in the animal kingdom, is this to be man's end? No better, no worse than the insects, ants and caterpillars..." And William Williams in Pencil Points: "How did they come into being—such houses? Certainly no owner with an eye to his comfort ever specified one in detail." On the other side there were Buckminster Fuller and Knud Løsberg-Holm, who thought the International Style was too preoccupied with aesthetics and did not accept technology as the only determinant. Talbot Hamlin found the International Style too concerned with "strict Functionalism" and interested primarily in "economy, efficiency and bareness." The editor of Architectural Forum approved of the exhibit and interpreted the stark, unadorned character as "an expression of the fast-growing band of scientific-minded who believe in the universal efficacy of machine efficiency." He felt the exhibit might clear away the "chaff of copyism" though the style could become "the happy hunting ground of copyist charlatans." The debate on Modernism was removed from the confines of architectural journals and schools through review in the popular and art press. Ralph Flint in Art News wrote several articles praising the International Style show, the honest treatment of materials, the applicability for large-scale work, the nonderivative nature, and the simplicity that made even the work of "Modernists as Frank Lloyd Wright . . . look overloaded and fussy." Out of these reactions a pattern emerged: the illustrations made more of an impact than the printed word; images and details were assimilated more readily than aesthetic theory. In spite of Hitchcock and Johnson's caution on functionalism, the International Style became the Functionalist style; its seemingly historical image was the expression of necessity and not art. Severity, flat spartan surfaces, revealed structure, and mechanics became the identifying features. The white building in the
International Style

landscape and the white interior were its trademarks. It was the machine style, even if the forms were rarely dictated or made by machines. The International Style, according to most interpretations, expressed the scientific mind of the 20th Century.

Portents

The future transformations of the International Style are beyond the boundaries of this article, except to sketch some outlines. Certainly one reason Mies, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, Breuer, Hilberseimer, and other Europeans were so readily accepted in American architectural schools in the later 1930s can be attributed to the favorable climate created by the exhibit. As for actual designs, by 1932 the leaders, Mies and Le Corbusier (as noted), were already separating themselves from the doctrinaire phase chronicled by Hitchcock and Johnson. Gropius would similarly change. Oud, because of health, produced little work. Buildings within the strict canons of the style were produced in spite of strained economics. If they had included a broader spectrum, the outcome might have been different. Later generations have discovered the Constructivists, Schindler, Cret, the American skyscraper, Scharoun, and others. To bemoan their loss is understandable, but not a futile flailing at history, because the International Style is now history. The wheel has turned again, and a very different consensus or "controlling style" is emerging.

Footnotes

2 "The Federal Architect, 3 (February 1932).
4 Lewis Mumford, "Sticks and Stones" (1924) and "The Brown Dances" (1931) were especially important. The two editions of Thomas Tallmadge's The Story of American Architecture have different chapter titles, 1927, "Louis Sullivan and the Lost Cause," and 1956, "Louis Sullivan Parent and Prophet.
5 Frank Lloyd Wright, "For all may raise the flowers now for all have got the seed," and George Howe, "Moses turns Pharaoa," T-Square Club Journal, 2 (February 1932), pp. 6–9.
18 Philip Johnson, "Rejected Architects," Creative Art, 8 (June 1931), pp. 483–485.
20 Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., "Four Harvard Architects," Hound and Horn, 2 (September 1928), pp. 41–47.
24 MA, p. 20.
25 MA, p. 21.
26 MA, p. 15.
27 MA, p. 37.
30 JS, p. 20.
31 JS, p. 52.
33 JS, pp. 86, 87.
34 JS, p. 68.
35 JS, p. 57.
36 JS, p. 44.
37 JS, p. 80.
38 JS, p. 156.
39 JS, pp. 66, 67.
40 JS, pp. 177, 223.
41 JS, pp. 65, 67.
42 JS, p. 57.
44 JS, pp. 92, 93.
46 MA, pp. 180, 182, 184, 187.

### Progressive Architecture

**Editorial: Landmark architectural statements**

### West Week

Participants, program, and products featured at West Week.

### Architectural design

**Introduction: The International Style at fifty**

A tribute to the Museum of Modern Art exhibition of Modern architecture on the show’s 50th anniversary and to the International Style it recognized.

**Prologue: the crimson connection**

In America, the International Style dealt with problems of aesthetics; in Europe, it concentrated on social or functional concerns. Helen Searing

**The exhibition**


**The immediate effects**

The effects of the Modern architecture exhibit were scant, but it did succeed in establishing the new style in the public's mind. Robert A. M. Stern

**Image and morale**

A facility designed by CRS for a Michigan manufacturer of interiors products represents the efforts of both architect and client to respond to employee needs.

**Bared necessities**

A spare design, within a tight budget, by Frederick Fisher for a ceramicist's studio and apartment in a modest space.

**Invitation to the Haj**

Senior editor Richard Rush talks with designers and users of the Haj terminal in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which accommodates thousands of pilgrims on the way to Mecca.

**Technics**

**Specifications clinic: Hard and soft information**

**Finding the best answer**

An examination of sources of information available to architects to help them in their designs.

### Departments

**Views**

**News report**

**Perspectives**

**In progress**

**Calendar**

**It's the law**

**Books**

**Products and literature**

**P/A in March**

**Building materials**

**Job mart**

**Directory of advertisers**

**Reader service card**

**Loose subscription card in U.S. and Canadian issues**

### Subscription Information:

Send all subscription orders, payments, and changes of address to Progressive Architecture, P.O. Box 69579, Cleveland, OH 44110 (216-446-0500). When filing change of address, give former as well as new address and zip codes, and include recent address label if possible. Allow two months for change. Publisher reserves right to refuse unsolicited subscriptions. Professionals include architectural and architectural-engineering firm personnel and architects, designers, engineers, and draftsmen employed in allied fields.

**Subscription rates:**

- **Professional:**
  - U.S.: $18.00
  - Canada: $22.00
  - Foreign: $40.00
- **Nonprofessional:**
  - U.S.: $36.00
  - Canada: $42.00
  - Foreign: $60.00

**Single copy:** $6.50

**Permission to photograph is granted for own registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), provided that the fee of $1.50 per page is paid to CCC, 22 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970. Code number is ISSN 0033-0730.

Indexed in Art Index, Architectural Index, Engineering Index. Second-class postage paid at Cleveland, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. Volume LXIII, No. 2. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1982, PentonIPC.