

# A legacy OF INVENTION

## The Work of Charles and Ray Eames – A Legacy of Invention

[[www.design-museum.de](http://www.design-museum.de)]

A legacy of invention has been organised by the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in partnership with the Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany. The European tour is organised by the Vitra Design Museum. The U.S. tour is organised by the Library of Congress.

### The Work of Charles and Ray Eames – A Legacy of Invention Charles Eames (1907-78) and Ray Eames (1912-88)

gave shape to America's twentieth century. Their lives and work represented the nation's defining movements: the West Coast's coming-of-age, the economy's shift from making goods to producing information, and the global expression of American culture. The Eameses embraced the era's visionary concept of modern design as an agent of social change, elevating it to a national agenda. Their evolution, from furniture designers to cultural ambassadors demonstrated their boundless talents and the overlap of their interests with those of their country. In a rare era of shared objectives, the Eameses partnered with the federal government and the country's top business to lead the charge to modernize postwar America.

Charles and Ray Eames practiced design at its most expansive. From the 1940s to the 1970s, their furniture, toys, buildings, films, exhibitions, and books aimed to improve society – not only functionally, but culturally and intellectually as well. The Eameses' wholehearted belief that design could improve people's lives remains their greatest legacy. Even more remarkable is how they achieved their seriousness of purpose with elegance, wit, and beauty. This exhibition brings together the sources of the Eameses' inspiration, the personal documents of their lives, and the finished products of their talent. In order to understand the processes that led to the Eameses' achievements, this exhibition is organized around challenges posed to them by clients or – as with most creative geniuses – posed by themselves:

- How to build economical, yet well-designed, space for living and working?
- How to produce affordable, yet high-quality, furniture?
- How to help people see beauty in the everyday?
- How to make fundamental principles accessible to lay people?
- How to help Americans and other cultures understand each other?

The Eameses' vast body of work illustrates their solutions to these challenges. It also demonstrates the ambition and scope of their agenda – from the utilitarian chair to complex issues of human perception, understanding, and knowledge.

### Structure of the exhibition

#### Space

From their own house in Los Angeles to their proposal for the "Do-it-yourself" Kwikset House, the Eameses sought to bring "the good life" to the general public by integrating high and low art forms, modern materials and construction technologies, craft and design. Their architecture promised good design for minimal cost through the use of prefabricated standardized parts. Although ultimately the Eameses designed few buildings, they popularized basic tenets of their architecture through their toys, furniture, films, and slide shows.

#### Culture

Charles and Ray Eames' careers in the 1950's mirrored America's postwar shift from an industrial economy of goods to a post-industrial society of information. Rather than furnishings and buildings, the Eames Office focused its efforts on communication systems – exhibitions, publications, and films. In these endeavors the Eameses used imagery of daily rituals and entertainments, vernacular landscapes, and ordinary objects to promote popular culture as the currency of exchange between nations and people.

#### Beauty

Charles and Ray Eames' philosophy of the educational role of everyday things led them to develop projects that would spur people to find beauty in the commonplace. Charles heard the music of Bach in the splash of soapy



water on an asphalt schoolyard – and made the film Blacktop. Ray saw beauty in the shape of utilitarian leg splints – and transformed them into elegant sculptures. The Eameses' ability to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary is one of their greatest legacies. Their films and slide shows gave the spectator, in Charles' words, a "new depth of vision."

### Sciences

To help people understand new technologies and their potential, Charles and Ray Eames produced approximately 60 films, exhibitions, and books for such corporations as IBM, Boeing, Polaroid, and Westinghouse. A major theme in all the Eameses' scientific endeavors was the beauty and elegance of scientific principles and the tools used to study them. Revealing science's complex integration of art, philosophy, and nature, their films and exhibitions successfully related the unfamiliar aspects of science with familiar and comfortable facets of everyday life.

### Furniture

For forty years Charles and Ray Eames experimented with ways to meet the need for affordable, yet high quality furniture for the average consumer. They designed flexibility into their compact storage units and collapsible sofas for the home; seating for stadiums, airports, and schools; and chairs for virtually anywhere. An ethos of functionalism informed all their furniture designs: "What works is better than what looks good," Ray Eames said, "the looks good" can change, but what works, works." The Work of Charles and Ray Eames.

### The Work of Charles and Ray Eames – A Legacy of Invention

#### Initial idea

Alexander von Vegesack

#### Development Team:

The exhibition was directed by Donald Albrecht, who also edited the catalog, and was designed by Craig Hodgetts and Hsin-Ming Fung. Responsibility for concept development was shared by Donald Albrecht and Hodgetts + Fung Design Associates, in collaboration with the organizing institutions. The exhibition's media was designed by Eames Demetrios.

#### Venue Requirements:

Shipping: Venues pay prorated shipping.

Space: 6,000 square feet/ 600 m<sup>2</sup>

Security and environmental: Exhibition requires high security. Venues must maintain temperatures at 70 degrees F. (+/5) and humidity at 50% (+/- 5%).

**Insurance** is included

**Exhibition displays** are included

#### General Checklist

- Approximately 88 objects ( furnishings, furniture prototypes, molds, jigs )
- Eames designed toys
- KAZAM machine
- Rotating chair testing machine
- Original art works from Ray & Charles
- Correspondence from Ray and Charles
- Graphic works from the Eames Office
- More than 100 pieces of professional and personal ephemera, including correspondence, promotional material, graphic designs, and decorative objects collected by the Eames incl. a selection of Mexican and Indian objects from the Eames.
- Model of the Eames House
- Architectural plans and drawings from the Eames House, originals and reproductions
- "Powers of Ten" – Production panels (32 reproductions in original size)
- Light tables with aprox. 300 slides made by Charles Eames.
- Approx. 20 Films
- Multi-Media installation " Glimpses of the USA "

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a r c h i t e c t u r e

b e a u t y

c o m m u n i c a t i o n

c o n s t r u c t i o n

c r e a t i v i t y

c o l o u r

**d e s i g n**

f u n c t i o n

r e f l e c t i o n

s e n s i b i l i t y

w a r e h





# Mies v.d. Rohe

## Mies van der Rohe

### Architecture and Design in Stuttgart, Barcelona, Brno

[www.design-museum.de]

An exhibition of the Vitra Design Museum in collaboration with the Weißenhof-Institut at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Stuttgart **Mies van der Rohe** was first and foremost an architect. Only Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright had the same impact on modern architecture as Mies. His impressive legacy of ground-breaking buildings and his activity as organiser and teacher confirm this status. His most significant European building projects, the German pavilion at the Barcelona World Fair (1929) and the Villa Tugendhat in Brno (1930) enabled modern architecture to emerge from experimental infancy.

In 1932, Philip Johnson coined the term "International Style" when he staged an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; it was an attempt to summarise the various currents and ambitions of the European avant garde in the field of architecture. Since then, the term has predominantly been used to describe the elegant steel-and-glass buildings in the style of Mies van der Rohe, a style that continued to dominate architecture and construction until well into the 1960s. Siegfried Giedion made a poignant remark about the difference between Mies's buildings and the bulk of those that looked similar: "Along with Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe is one of the few architects who have made a conscious decision to base their buildings on proportions, but not simply in the sense that a number is just a number but in the sense that a number possesses characteristics of quantity as well as quality." This statement emphasizes the principle characteristics of Mies van der Rohe's **furniture designs**.

Although he designed furniture only for a relatively short time (1927 to 1932), his designs are among the most influential of the modernist movement. He designed the first-ever cantilever chair for the Weißenhof estate in 1927, establishing tubular steel as a standard material for furniture production. Then, in 1929–30, when a wave of tubular steel furniture – already derivative and lacking innovation – swept the market, Mies designed three entirely new models.

The chair for the German Pavilion in Barcelona as well as the chair and armchair for the Villa Tugendhat used flat rather than tubular steel; the Barcelona chair, in particular, became symbolic of the elegance of Mies's furniture designs. As in his buildings, this elegance did not, however, simply rely on the use of exclusive materials, but on careful proportioning and detailing.

## Architecture

Between 1907 and 1919, Mies van der Rohe built several private homes, his style still influenced by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Hendrik Petrus Berlage and Peter Behrens. In the period from 1919 to 1923, however, he surprised everyone with a series of five private homes and high-rise buildings, which constituted an important step for modern architecture.

When modern architecture became established during the following years, and most architects failed to recognize anything but rational and technical problems, Mies referred to architecture as "the will of an epoch translated into space", showing that he was still very much aware of questions of style and artistic content in relation to his own work. His rigorous marketing efforts for his own tubular steel furniture range were also considered highly unusual at the time; indeed, many people thought he had sold out on the social ideals of modern architecture in accepting commissions to design two exclusive buildings, the pavilion in Barcelona and the villa in Brno.

His directorship at the Bauhaus from 1930 to 1933 proved yet another controversial period in his life: he introduced sweeping changes to the left-wing programme of the Bauhaus school, streamlining this educational institution into a school for architecture.

After the war, Mies's reputation continued to grow, in contrast with the fate of many pioneers of modern architecture, who found it difficult to resume the work they had abandoned in the late 1930s. None of the German architects who emigrated to the US adapted so thoroughly to American standards as Mies did; his Seagram building in New York is testimony to this transformation.

## The Exhibition

A wealth of outstanding exhibits testify to the quality of this exhibition. Most of exhibits come from the



Vitra Design Museum collection and the archive, including important documents from the estate of Anton Lorenz, a key figure in the development and spread of tubular steel furniture, which will go on public display for the first time as part of the exhibition. However it has to be said that true highlights of the show are bound to be the rare items of original furniture on display, which will include not only a large number of items from the initial phases of production but also prototypes and unique pieces from Mies van der Rohe's private estate.

Complemented by reproductions of drawings, patents and sales catalogs, these items serve as documents of the process of furniture design. Architectural models – some including furniture miniatures – sketches, and a large number of photographs come together to create a multilayered.

### **Curator**

Mateo Kries

### **Exhibition Objects**

30 objects incl. six architectural models  
Three architectural models (complete) on a 1:100 scale.  
Three architectural models (sections of rooms) on a 1:6 scale.

2 video documentation, 1 audio documentation  
1 interactive computer station: walk through the Villa Tugendhat.

### **Educational Material**

Comprehensive texts on the objects and the architectural projects.  
Approximately 120 original patent licenses, historical photographs, drawings, catalogues and architectural plans.  
A biography of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

### **Exhibition Installation**

The exhibits will be displayed on wooden plinths (height 30 cm) with an inset Plexiglas panel lit from below. (14 items measuring 130 x 130 cm, two items measuring 300 x 150 cm, one item measuring 300 x 300 cm). The documents will be displayed in six identical lit vitrines. (95 x 300 x 60 cm).

The architectural models will be displayed on stands (height 95 cm) The photographs will be displayed in six wall-mounted frames. (30 x 300 cm). 10 format prints (approximately 3.00 x 4.00 m) showing plans and photos from the objects and buildings.

### **Space requirement**

Approx. 500 – 800 sq.m.

### **Shipping volume**

Transport volume is four containers.

### **Insurance**

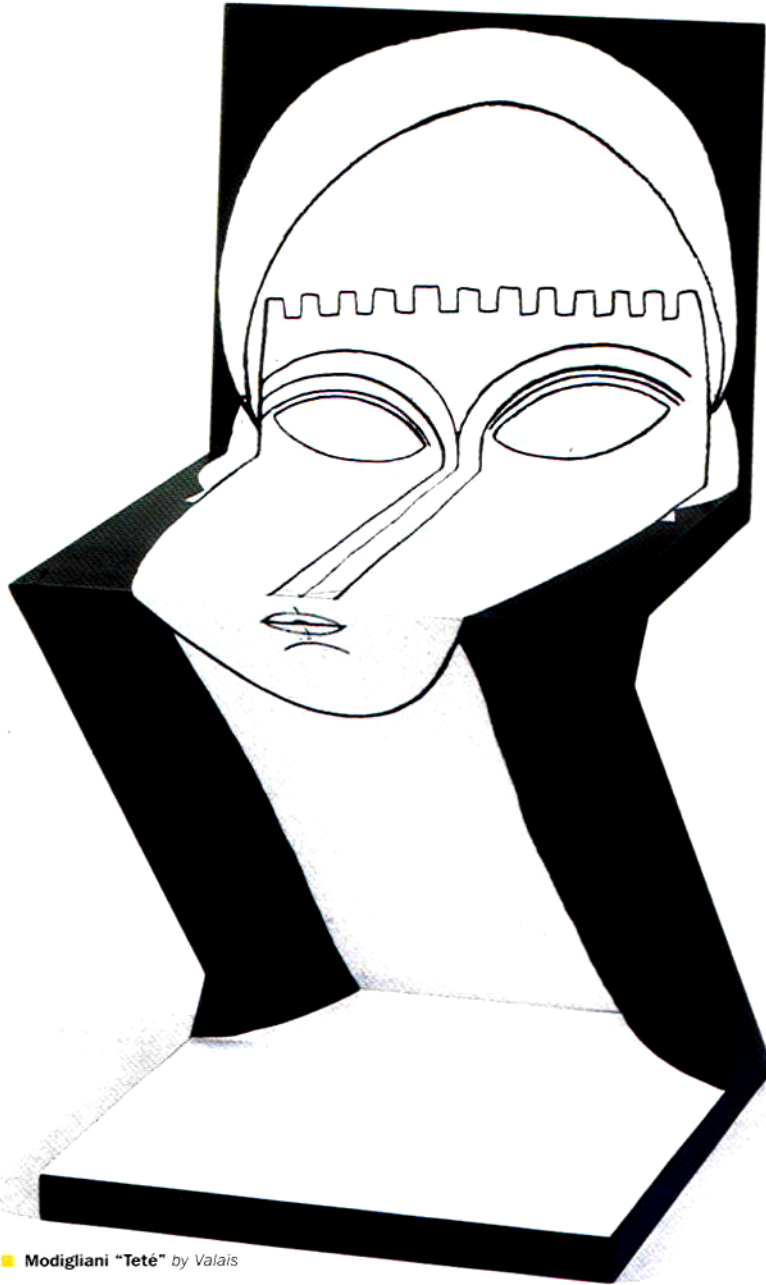
The exhibition is insured by Vitra Design Museum's "nail to nail".

### **Exhibition Catalogue**

260 pages, format: 29 x 24 cm, approx. 250 illustrations, including approx. 50 colour.  
Includes contributions by Dr. Otakar Macel, Werner Blaser, Dr. Wolf Tegethoff, Lenka Kudelkova, Karin Schulte, Mateo Kries.  
Publication date: Oct. 1998.

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■ Modigliani "Teté" by Valais

[Asensio, 2002:133]

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## **The material world of childhood**

The exhibition has been curated by independent curator and writer Lucy Bullivant, London and Jutta Oldiges, Vitra Design Museum. The current curator of the exhibition is Dr. Barbara Fehlbaum, Basel, Switzerland. This exhibition aims to explore and critically illuminate the changing relationships between children and adults as expressed by their immediate, everyday material environments in societies in and beyond the Western world.

Cross-cultural patterns of adult provision for children are traced through a geographically far-reaching selection of furniture and other daily artefacts. Contextual images showing activities and objects in use, and a video about children's play with footage from the 1920s to the present day, are woven into the layout. These offer glimpses of the material world of childhood that build up a wider, global perspective of the developing child's response to its environment and its closest relationships.

From a Biedermeier nursery to work-orientated Shaker communities in New England, a Iatmul house in Papua New Guinea to the collective space of a Chinese kindergarten, the material worlds of childhood are made up of furniture and artefacts that are potent carriers of meaning. Irrespective of culture or period, and conspicuous by their presence (or relative absence), they communicate messages about adult attitudes towards learning, the child's physical and psychological development, intimacy and order in the family, control, autonomy and personal territory, and above all the role of play.

The child's own improvised intervention in the adult world encourages us to consider the meaning of play, and above all, the play between the two worlds of adult and child.

## **The exhibition**

The exhibits are grouped into five themes defined by contrasting functions, featuring typologies that illuminate patterns of sleeping, basic functions, mobility, play forms, institutions of formal and informal learning. The selection of exhibits cuts a broad swathe through many cultures and periods in order to illuminate links between them.

## **Patterns of sleeping**

Contrasts in patterns of infant and child care mark out specific cultures, periods and stages in the child's development, and nothing is more central to perceiving this than the place of sleep. Whether elaborate or simple, fixed or mobile, through its design, materials, symbolism and methods of manufacture we can unravel adult attitudes towards the child's social context and family aspirations.

Only in the Western world, for example, are children expected to sleep alone. Cots, cradles, hammocks, mats and cradleboards embody themes of intimacy and distance, security, mobility, adaptability and multi-purpose use as play objects.

## **Basic functions**

The "invention" of the nursery in the seventeenth century, and of furniture designed specifically for it, brought highchairs and a proliferation of other designs relating to the daily care of children - supporting feeding, toilet training, bathing, grooming, nappy changing and storage. As children began to be seen to have rights alongside adults, furniture for their daily care gradually broadened from being miniaturised versions of adult furniture, developing in adaptability while maintaining scope to control.

Enabling participation in the adult world, which baby-care designs can curtail by estrangement, starts at birth. The vast inventory of childcare products of the industrialised nations, which can turn homes into hospital wards, is not prevalent in non-Western cultures like the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea, where the encouragement of personal initiative, through food gathering and preparation, and autonomous activities, are traditional features of everyday life.

## **Play**

Children the world over play as a matter of necessity, stimulating their imagination and shaping their psychic identity. Without the tangible, commercial objects of play, they draw on their own resources, using indigenous raw materials and found objects from the external environment. In industrialised cultures, arrays of play furniture are provided within interior settings often geared to adult use.





Their hybrid nature erases the boundaries between practicality and play, between furniture and toy, and ideally encourages spontaneity of use. Assemblages, or rocking or constructional forms, which sometimes double up as practical items such as highchairs or cots, assist motor skills, logic, role-play, eye-hand co-ordination and creativity. Improvisational play, with its lack of reliance on a pre-defined programme, reinvents the adult order.

### **Mobility**

The pram, the sling and buggy, like the idiosyncratic forms of the baby walker known since medieval times, are all vehicles facilitating the mobility of the child with their own history and culture. The classic coach-built pram, well upholstered and elegantly gleaming, often bought as a family investment, has been overtaken by the lightness and convenience of carrycots and transporters which separate and fold down for storage and for traveling, and also by the slings and baby carriers originating in many non-Western cultures where the younger child is kept physically close to its mobile parents.

The sling attunes children to rhythms of the adult world; the pram positioned them at arm's length from their carriers: in the Western world, both are social statements.

### **Formal learning**

The kindergarten or day nursery might best be described as an extension of the home, not a substitute for it. This context for the child's first social relationships outside the home has produced various communally used designs. Desks for formal learning are not universal; nor are schoolrooms. In fact, a long period of compulsory schooling is a recent Western invention. In previous centuries not all children went to school, nor do they now in some cultures.

The organization of space for learning, whether at school or in the home, reflects widely varying definitions of "education". Conforming patterns of provision have been increasingly broken by the initiatives of designers keen to explore design solutions supporting learning that is informal, personal and, as a result, usually fun.

### **Concept and Curator**

Lucy Bullivant, London (independent curator), Jutta Oldiges, Vitra Design Museum; The current curator of the exhibition is Dr. Barbara Fehlbaum, Basel, Switzerland.

### **Exhibition Design**

Dieter Thiel

### **Exhibits**

approximately 140 objects  
6 large format prints ( 382cm x 256cm)  
Photos (in frames)  
7 frames with didactic material (122cm x 92cm)  
4 frames with didactic material (62cm x 92cm)  
1 video documentation, to be played on 6 stations

### **Space requirement**

600 – 800 sqm

### **Shipping volume**

three 40 ft containers

### **Min. ceiling height**

3.0 m

### **Catalogue**

Editors: Alexander von Vegesack, Jutta Oldiges and Lucy Bullivant.

### **Size**

320 pages, 24 x 28 cm, German and English version.

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