Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America

Shiri Chapman-Daniel
Sotheby's Institute of Art

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Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America

Sotheby’s Institute of Art, New York

Master’s Project 2018: Curatorial Proposal

Shiri Chapman-Daniel
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Introduction to the Exhibition

*Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America* examines interior and furniture projects by the three European modern designers after emigrating to the U.S. in 1938. Many of these projects are not very well known, or are commonly discussed solely in terms of architecture, yet the interiors in fact reveal interesting and significant developments in Gropius, Mies and Breuer’s work. The exhibition highlights the evolution of their designs, as well as the extent to which they were affected by American tendencies and innovations and their lasting impact.

The current upswing of decorative art interest in the art market is influential to the exhibition and adds validity to the project; 2018 Valuations and Appraisals reports conclude that decorative art, including furniture, constituted a high majority of art valuations in 2017, indicating widespread interest in the field.¹ The importance of furniture in historical, artistic and societal terms is often overlooked, perhaps due to its functionality and fundamental presence in daily life. Furniture by Gropius, Mies and Breuer, in particular, is ever-present on the art market and in both private and public living and working spaces, causing its significance in these same terms to be forgotten. This exhibition reignites the associations between the designers’ work and historical, artistic and ideological themes through displays of examples of their interiors and furniture, narrated through and accompanied by photographs and archival and historical documents.

Exhibition Overview

The proposed exhibition opens in 2019, marking the centenary of the Bauhaus School’s founding in Germany, a significant and appropriate date for such an exhibition. The show features furniture by Mies, Gropius and Breuer – chairs, tables, couches and stools – most of which were conceived of before their careers in America began, but were re-modelled or adapted to fit with specific American environments. The three designers are so closely associated with the impact of the Bauhaus School that their work after its closure is rarely focused on in exhibitions. Moreover, this exhibition specialises in furniture and interiors, whereas displays of work by Bauhaus designers typically encompass several areas of the school’s craft. In this way, this exhibition considers their careers from an unusual, interesting perspective.

The exhibition will take place at the Met Breuer, on Madison Avenue and 75th Street in Manhattan’s Upper East Side. The building is highly fitting for such a display, having been designed by Breuer in 1963, originally as the new Whitney Museum. The show will occupy the second floor of the building. This is the only floor with wood parquet flooring, which Breuer conceived of to emanate an intimate environment. This is most appropriate for a display of interiors and furniture and will contribute to a more immersive experience for the viewer and encourage imagining the objects in situ. The proposed scheduling for the exhibition begins in September and ends in December, coinciding with major auction furniture sales at Christie’s and Sotheby’s, which typically feature pieces by these designers on a regular basis.
Visitors will be led chronologically through the different sections of the show, partitioned by temporary walls. The first section will offer an insight into the background of the three designers and of the Bauhaus School. Significant pieces of furniture from this period will be displayed here to convey their prominence in design in Europe at the time, and to offer a point of comparison for the development of their furniture in the rooms to follow. This section will also narrate the first contacts of Mies, Breuer and Gropius with America, and what first drew them to the continent. The second section will delve into the early years of their careers in America, featuring displays of Gropius House and Frank House, both collaboratively designed by Breuer and Gropius, as well as Mies’ designs, focusing on Farnsworth House and additionally noting his plans for Resor House and Illinois Institute of Technology campus. The initial modifications in their work and influence of the landscape will be explored here. The third section considers the reception and dissemination of ideas in their work, demonstrated through examples of their representation in exhibitions and popular culture magazines, as well as Americans in the same field responding to their designs. The fourth section is dedicated to the development of Mies, Gropius and Breuer’s designs, shown in a before and after style, offering comparisons between their work completed in Europe and in America. The fifth and final section will demonstrate the lasting impact of their careers in America, featuring displays of projects such as the Met Breuer, Philip Johnson’s Glass House, the Seagram building and Chicago Lake Shore Drive apartments through imagery and certain pieces of furniture featured in these locations.
Through this narrative and engaging display, the exhibition aims to demonstrate the evolution of the furniture and interiors designed by Gropius, Mies and Breuer, offering a rare insight into their work in America and promoting the significance of the subjects in their own right.

**Venue**

The Met Breuer is often referred to as ‘the Breuer building’ and is an ideal location to host a show on Breuer, Mies and Gropius, particularly one focusing on interiors. In keeping with the ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ philosophy of the Bauhaus, Breuer meticulously considered each aspect of the interior of the building as much as the exterior, such as the glimpsed views through the trapezoidal windows, particular lighting methods and wood, granite, concrete and bronze materials used throughout for their distinct effects on visitors. It is a prime example of the extraordinary work completed by the three modernist designers and the impact they had on American interiors. The Met Breuer is dedicated to presenting international modern and contemporary works and has previously exhibited Breuer’s work as a designer through the work of artist Luisa Lambri and photographer Bas Princen in 2017.  

Displays of interior designs, photographs, furniture and drawings also have precedence at the museum, featured in an exhibition of Italian designer Ettore Sottsass, also in 2017.

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The Met Breuer’s relatively recent establishment in March 2016 offers additional intrigue to hosting an exhibition there, contributing a sense of novelty and diversity: a celebration of modernism that resonates with the exhibition’s themes. The fact that it forms part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, along with the Met Fifth Avenue and Met Cloisters, places the exhibition within a thriving environment for success. The Met announced that in 2018 it received more than 7.35 million visitors a year and the highest amount of Membership contributions, government support and philanthropic gifts. This is a major indicator of the exhibition’s potential to achieve comprehensive and diverse public outreach, fulfilling its core intentions of engagement with the decorative arts, celebration of the centenary and successful revenue.

Curatorial Plan

Collection

Approximately 30-35 items will feature in the exhibition’s collection. The main objects will be furniture – couches, chairs, stools and tables – as well as digital and archival photographs and additional supplementary decorative items. The objects would be acquired on loan in agreements with various museum institutions, archives and private collections. The list below indicates institutions with objects of interest to the exhibition, most of which have already been contacted and are supportive in their loan offerings. The ideal list of sources for the exhibition’s collection includes:

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The Museum of Modern Art New York
- Knoll Inc. Archive and Collection
- Harvard Art Museum (including Busch-Reisinger Museum)
- Frank House Pittsburgh – Alan I W Frank House Foundation
- Gropius House - Historic New England
- Syracuse University Library Special Collections Research Center
- Elmhurst Art Museum
- Private Collectors
- Smithsonian Archives of American Art
- Bauhaus Dessau Archive

Due to the nature of the ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ philosophy of the designers, some of the furniture was newly created for specific projects and not reproduced or
manufactured for other purposes. This would be the main obstacle in obtaining works from the homes they designed, though is only true of Frank House amongst the interiors explored in the show. Frank House is now a Foundation owned by Alan I W Frank, whilst Gropius house is managed by Historic New England. Although these constitutions might involve regulations or restrictions that mean work cannot leave the premises, the issue is solvable with adequate alternatives. Pieces of furniture from Frank House has been collected in museums elsewhere, meaning loans are likely to still be feasible. The solution to this if not possible would be to project images of the house onto the walls, courtesy of the Foundation and organisations, and find supplementary material, which could be found at the museum where the furniture was once displayed, the Carnegie Museum of Art, or in Knoll’s extensive archive. The potential for restrictions on objects that would prevent them from being loaned is the reason for the approximation in the exhibition’s collection numbers. The following is a certain list of institutions that will loan to the exhibition should others not be possible (illustrated list on page 20)

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art
  → 8 objects: 5 pieces of furniture and photographs
- The Museum of Modern Art New York
  → 6 objects: archival photographs, museum exhibition documents and 3 pieces of furniture
- Knoll Inc. Archive
  → 15 objects: 10 pieces of furniture and photographs and supplementary decorative items
- Harvard Art Museum (including Busch-Reisinger Museum)
→ Archival documents, decorative objects, 2 pieces of furniture

- Frank House Pittsburgh – Alan I W Frank House Foundation
  → Photographs

- Gropius House and Historic New England
  → Photographs

- Syracuse University Library Special Collections Research Center
  → Drawings and digitised documents of Marcel Breuer’s furniture

- Private collectors
  → Supplementary decorative items, i.e. lamps and rugs

Knoll supports the exhibition and has agreed to offer objects from their collection and archival documents and photographs for the display without requesting loan fees, in order to share, educate and promote the significance and historical intrigue of the items.

MoMA is also supportive of the exhibition, and would offer objects and archival material on loan, though incurring cost. The fact that MoMA holds the Mies van der Rohe archive makes it a key source and, depending on agreements, MoMA would be a good institution to work with, if not partner, for the exhibition. This would reduce loan fees. Most other sources for the collection would not charge a loan fee, on the basis of their constitutional missions concerning public accessibility, sharing knowledge and education.
Installation

The installation will be used to create intimate environments that emulate the feeling of stepping into the interior. A number of temporary walls will be employed to create corner display areas imitating the rooms being displayed, the aim being to convey a mock interior. To fulfil this aim, the furniture will be supplemented by decorative objects, such as lamps and rugs, depending on their accordance with the respective interiors. The displays within the rooms will use the placing of objects in the actual houses as a guide and will be imitated as closely as possible within the space.

Floor plan
Inside the Met Breuer:

Displays from art fairs provide inspiration for the installation:
After passing through the first floor lobby of the Met Breuer and acquiring a ticket, upon entering the second floor visitors will be informed of the QR system incorporated into the narrative. QR codes will appear on wall texts in each room, which may be scanned by visitors and offer further information about certain topics. Images and information about the Bauhaus School, Gropius House, Frank House, Farnsworth House and several of the later interiors and projects presented later in the exhibition will appear, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the work. This digital interactive resource is incorporated to further enhance the immersive and engaging display and provide additional education.

Section One: Background on the designers and The Bauhaus

Room 1

Visitors will enter the exhibition to face the front wall panel introducing the title and central theme of the exhibition. This leads into the first room, which features three pieces of furniture, vitrines, images and text introducing the designers, their work in Europe and the Bauhaus School. Mies, Gropius and Breuer will be introduced individually through three separate wall texts, which will begin the narrative by detailing the beginning of their careers, their role in the Bauhaus and their attitudes and tendencies in design. One piece of furniture created by each designer prior to their careers in America will be displayed here in order to convey the artistic precedence and give visitors an object of comparison: Mies could be represented by a Brno chair, Breuer by a Wassily chair and Gropius by an F51-3 Sofa. These will be displayed on a raised platform, so as to distinguish them in the space and allow the viewer to
walk around and examine the objects from all angles. For these pieces of furniture and for each object throughout the exhibition, an accompanying label will inform visitors of the designer, date, materials and manufacturer of the object.

Also in this room, a projection or photograph (depending on what can be acquired) of the Bauhaus will feature on a wall, accompanied by a wall text specifying the Bauhaus’ origins, its design concepts in materials and ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ philosophy, as well as its socialist associations. A vitrine will display Bauhaus publications and American journals discussing Bauhaus design and members, leading the narrative into the first contacts with the U.S.

The final part of the first section features a wall display and text demonstrating a selection of elements in American design at the time. This display will feature mainly photographs, which will be arranged to resemble that of an interior display, grouped together in an eclectic fashion, offering a snapshot of contemporary design in America and setting the scene for Mies, Gropius and Breuer’s arrival.
Section Two: Interiors designed within the first ten years

Room 2

This section will portray interiors designed and completed in the first ten years of their arrival. In the first room, a display of Gropius House (1938-9) will be created, Breuer and Gropius’ first project in America. Furniture in this house was mostly brought from Europe when Gropius and his family emigrated. The way in which it was considered and interpreted within the new landscape will be discussed in wall texts, as well as how new elements were incorporated into this interior. This includes materials and motifs drawn from the typical homes in New England at the time. Items from the living and dining rooms will be displayed, with a rail and curtain hanging in between objects – an important element of the interior that highlights a modification undertaken by the designers in the U.S.

Room 3

The next room features Frank House (1940), another collaboration between Breuer and Gropius. Provided that certain pieces from the house can be acquired on loan, this room presents the first total work of art in America and new furniture designs by Breuer. The nature of this commission, the influence of its patrons and the new elements of design that were incorporated into this interior will be highlighted here. The apparent impact of industrial design, the
vernacular, and new manufacturing methods are prominent in this example of Gropius and Breuer’s work and will be overtly communicated through additional images and text.

Room 4

The next room moves on to the work of Mies van der Rohe. Here, plans for the new campus for the Illinois Institute of Technology (then the Armory Institute) will be shown in vitrines, highlighting one of Mies’ most important commissions in America. Focusing on the architecture building Crown Hall, photographs of the exterior and interior would allow visitors to understand Mies’ style and to compare it with what they have previously seen at Gropius House. Mies distanced himself from Gropius, Breuer and the Bauhaus throughout his career in the U.S., which is important to highlight and will be translated to visitors through marked distinctions in design and approach. The similarities between the three will also be conveyed here, using the total work of art concept to tie their philosophies together.
A mock interior display of Farnsworth House (1945) will feature in this room. This was Mies’ first completed commission for a home, which makes it comparable with those completed by Breuer and Gropius. The house also employs furniture designed in Europe, specifically the furniture Mies designed for the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929. These models will be presented in a sparse layout, reflecting its arrangement in the home. A blown-up projection of the house with the extending view of the landscape could be displayed on the wall behind the furniture, emanating its ambience and connection to its surrounding nature, which was deeply considered by Mies in its design.

This section will begin to discuss how the house was interpreted by Mies’ patron, leading the narrative into the next section: the reception of their work in America.

Section 3: Reception and dissemination of their work

Room 5

In Room 5, a selection of contemporary popular culture documents and magazines will be visible through vitrines to convey how their work, particularly Mies’ at first, was discussed and perceived. Their reception and
dissemination will be highlighted through representation in magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *Playboy*. The role of MoMA and exhibition representation in the dispersal of their work will also be discussed in this room, with examples of the various shows and events they participated in. Archival documents from the exhibitions will be displayed in vitrines most likely, for their protection, accompanied by blown up images, either projected or printed, of these events, such as the ‘House in the Museum Garden’ at MoMA, which was designed by Breuer.

MoMA’s role in creating connections between international modern artists will be highlighted here, particularly focusing on the evolution it provokes in the designers’ use of materials and form in their progressing ideas. Sketches by Mies van der Rohe for chairs using plastic, for example, will be displayed.

Section 4: Development

Room 6

Room 6 involves a reflection of what has been seen so far and the continued development of their ideas in design compared with their primary designs and concerns prior to America. This will take the form of a before and after, with examples of interiors such as Villa Tugendhat in Europe compared with McCormick House and Breuer House II in America. The comparisons will be drawn through images principally; one piece of furniture relating to a few of
the example interiors would be appropriate for this part, as images would give a more complete illustration of the developments and convey more clearly the points to be made in the narrative. Accompanying wall texts will enhance the illustrative devices and demarcate the various changes.

Section 5: Impact

Room 7

The final room is dedicated to the lasting impact of their work in America, featuring image displays of the Met Breuer, Philip Johnson’s Glass House and interior views of the Seagram Building and Lake Shore Drive apartments. The aim for this section is to convey the prolific imitation and production of furniture and aesthetic professed by the designers in order to conclude their monumental influence and lasting impact in America, which continues into the present day.
Illustrated sample list of works/referenced interiors per section

The following is a suggested, preliminary list of furniture and interiors to be included in the exhibition. The photographs in this list offer examples of how the objects might be displayed within the exhibition space. Not all of the furniture desired for the display are shown here, which is because some are specific to the interiors they were designed for. The furniture visible in these photographs will be sought for the show and models are available at listed institutions including Knoll and MoMA. The designers employed their furniture models repetitively throughout their careers, and for certain models in the list, including the Wassily chair, Barcelona furniture and Brno chairs, several would be required for display in various different sections of the show. In some of these cases, the interiors are listed instead of the furniture to convey the differences.

Section 1

1
Marcel Breuer
*Wassily Chair*
1925
Model from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

2
Walter Gropius
*F51-3 Sofa*
1920
Model from Knoll
Section 2

3 The Bauhaus Dessau, photographed 1925 ©Bauhaus-dessau.de

4 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe *Brno Armchair* 1930 Model from The MET

5 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe *Barcelona Chair* 1929 Model from Knoll

6 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe *Barcelona Daybed* 1929 Model from Knoll
7
Marcel Breuer
*Cesca Chair with Arms (B64)*
1928
Model from Harvard Art Museum

8
Walter Gropius
*Desk*
c.1920
© Gropius House and Historic New England

9
Marcel Breuer
*Isokon Long Chair*
1935-36
Model from Knoll

10
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
*Barcelona Stool*
1929
Model from Knoll

11
Marcel Breuer
*Nesting Tables (B9)*
1925-6
Models from MoMA
12 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
*Illinois Institute of Technology Campus Plans*
1939
MoMA Collection

13 Marcel Breuer
*Armchair for Frank House*
1940
© Alan I W Frank House

14 Walter Gropius
*Gropius House, photograph*
1939
© Historic New England Gropius House

15 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
*Farnsworth House, photographs*
1946
© Carol Highsmith, Farnsworth House
Section 3

16
Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer
Frank House, photographs
1939
© Alan I W Frank House

17
Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer
Frank House, photographs
1939
© Alan I W Frank House

18
‘The Playboy Townhouse’
1962
© Playboy Magazine

19
Marcel Breuer
House in the Garden installed at MoMA
1949
Photograph from the MoMA Archive
20
Marcel Breuer
*House in the Garden installed at MoMA*
1949
Photograph from the MoMA Archive

21
House Beautiful Magazine
1950s
House Beautiful Magazine

22
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
*Sketches for Conchoidal Chairs*
c.1940
MoMA Collection

23
Charles and Ray Eames
*Plastic Chairs*
1950
Models from Vitra
Section 4

24 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
_Villa Tugendhat interior, photographed_ 1929-30
© Villa Tugendhat

25 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
_McCormick House interior, photographed_ 1950s
Elmhurst Art Museum Archive

26 Marcel Breuer
_Breuer House II, photographed_ 1951
Photograph from the Smithsonian Archives of American Art

27 Walter Gropius
_Bauhaus Building Dessau, interior photographed_ 1925-6
©Bauhaus-Dessau
Section 5

28 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
_The Seagram Building, photographed_ 1958
Photograph from the Knoll Archive

29 Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson
_Seagram Building restaurant_ 1959
Photograph from the Knoll Archive

30 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
_860-880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments_ 1949-51
Brochure from the MoMA Archive

31 Marcel Breuer
_The Met Breuer Lobby_ 1966
©Beyer Blinder Belle

32 Marcel Breuer
_Chamberlain Cottage_ 1940
©Sotheby’s
Marketing Plan

The marketing plan focuses on events surrounding the exhibition and advertisement, both print and online. The exhibition encompasses topics of modernism, decorative art, furniture and interiors. This broad spectrum, particularly with the inclusion of interiors, gives it the potential to attract a wide audience, likely a broader range than a typical art-specific exhibition. The marketing plans have been carried out with this in mind, targeting sources that might not usually be considered. The marketing has been devised to outline intent of the exhibition for visitors, whilst celebrating the decorative arts and interiors simultaneously with the centenary of the Bauhaus, its designers and their outstanding impact.

The opening of the exhibition will involve an opening evening event two days prior to public opening, where a VIP audience will be invited to preview the show. Invitees will include individuals and institutions with a professional interest in the themes, including academic, auction house and museum and gallery professionals, as well as esteemed donors, museum members, sponsors and partners of the exhibition. Members of the press will also be invited, including representatives of interior magazines and organisations to advance the attraction of this market.

A reception of canapés and drinks will be served in collaboration with the museum’s restaurant chef and staff. Guests will be welcomed into the first floor foyer and downstairs in the restaurant area for the event, where a special guest will deliver a talk about certain themes in the exhibition related to their
academic expertise. Potential guests who could be pursued for this talk include Lynette Roth, Head of Modern and Contemporary art at Harvard Art Museum with a speciality in German art and politics, and/or a representative from Knoll, whose expertise would offer an insightful perspective of the exhibition for the guests prior to viewing. The open, free flowing nature of the lobby and the downstairs restaurant provide an ideal space for this event, as well as setting the scene for the exhibition’s themes as a Breuer-designed interior.

The advertisement for the show will employ the museum’s usual advertising resources, including printed banners and posters throughout the city, online advertising spaces and promotion through the museum website. Advertisement in magazines such as The World of Interiors, Condé Nast Traveller, House and Garden, Architectural Digest, as well as online magazines, will also be considered as targets for the market they reach and range of visitors they might draw to the exhibition.

A Press Release will be issued in several stages in the months leading up to the exhibition opening, detailing the venue, schedule, overview of themes and highlights of its collection. Posts on social media will tie in with the release stages in the lead-up, focusing on the designers and the interiors to be shown.
**Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America**

Exhibition Dates: September-December 2019

Exhibition Location: The Met Breuer, Floor 2

Opening September 2019 at The Met Breuer, *Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America* explores the interiors designed by Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius after fleeing Europe for America. With work spanning from 1938 to the 1960s, the exhibition brings together a fascinating array of furniture, recreating models of significant modern interiors by the legendary designers for the first time.
The immersive display will highlight the evolution of their designs through the elegant interiors, including Gropius House (1938), Farnsworth House (1945) and Frank House (1939). The show focuses on the developments in design concept and how principles in European modern, or ‘Bauhaus’ design, were brought to and interpreted in America. The impact of these concepts on the American interior landscape is explored through later work on now emblematic buildings, as well as the influences of contemporary American design on Breuer, Mies and Gropius through comparisons with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Eames, amongst others.

2019 marks the centenary of the Bauhaus School’s founding in Weimar, Germany, thus giving the exhibition a further purpose of celebrating the School’s innovation, whose monumental source of influence is still relevant today. Furniture highlights from the pre-American era include The Wassily Chair (1925), Cesca Chair (1928), F51-3 sofa (1920), Isokon Long Chair (1935) and Barcelona models (1929), made possible with the help and dedication of significant collections of Bauhaus furniture.

The Met Breuer expresses its gratitude to the Knoll Archive, MoMA New York, Harvard Art Museum and private collections, as well as its esteemed sponsors.
Financials

Shipping, insurance and loan fees will be the major cost generators for the exhibition. Though modernist and Bauhaus furniture is widely collected internationally, the extent of the impact of the three designers in America means an extensive and valuable collection of their work is fairly locally available, which minimizes these costs. The Met Breuer’s implication with the Metropolitan Museum of Art means it will have easy access to its own collection, which holds several pieces of interest. The estimations for these expenses are based on agreements with Knoll and MoMA, both of which are esteemed and well-established institutions, experienced in exhibition fees and thus a trustworthy source to base costs from other institutions on.

Loan and preparation fees are based on an average of the local institution’s fees, which vary and may include a loan fee, handling or preparation fees and a condition-reporting fee. Conservation is only applicable as necessary, which is not predicted with the proposed objects. Although insurance is likely to be the greatest expense generator, this fee is based on length of presentation and, most importantly, the current market value of the objects, which works in favour of the museum’s finances as furniture is typically at the lower end of the art market spectrum in terms of monetary value.

Knoll has agreed to support the exhibition and provide archival documents, photographs and furniture. Knoll is keen to support museum exhibitions and will not charge loan fees; the only potential fees it sometimes requires according to past incidences concern shipping and insurance. This is subject
to discussion with the museum and, although their headquarters are located in Pittsburgh, the fact that Knoll has a showroom and accessible archive in New York City means these costs are likely to be minimal if required. The supplementary decorative objects that will feature in the various mock-interior displays will be provided courtesy of Knoll, the MET’s own collection, and potentially some private collectors, meaning the only costs that need to be considered for these objects are in shipping and insurance.

The marketing plans provide the other main expense generator. Costs have been kept low in projections for the opening event and the plans employ the museum’s usual marketing methods and budget. All of the expenses will be covered by the Met Breuer’s typical annual budget for curatorial projects and special exhibitions, which expended $20,296 in 2017. The estimated total expense for this exhibition is $382,490 with $1,892,240 in revenue, which covers these expenses. The estimated costs remain within the lower margins of the usual budget and are therefore feasible.

Sotheby’s, Christie’s, and Condé Nast are some of the proposed sponsors for the exhibition. Several are existing sponsors of the Met Breuer and provide major corporate support for its curatorial operations. These sponsors have also been incorporated for their connection with the theme; Condé Nast works with significant interior designers, artists, architects, monuments and

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interiors in its various publications and this exhibition will increase exposure of their content and promote its historical and cultural significance.

Christie’s and Sotheby’s have seasonal sales of furniture and works by the designers featuring in the show, making it an ideal opportunity for exposure and promotion of the works. The auction houses and museum will have clients in common, and participation in sponsorship would enhance and develop these connections. This has been factored into the proposed schedule, coinciding with Interiors and 20th Century Design auctions, which typically occur between September and December in the auction calendar. Companies such as Knoll and Vitra who sell and have the manufacturing rights to designs by Gropius, Breuer and Mies are also proposed sponsors for the exposure this exhibition brings them and potential to increase sales.
### Estimated Expenses

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<td>MoMA objects and photographs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$500-$1,000</td>
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<td>Crating</td>
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<td>Dependent on object value: range from c.$700-10,000</td>
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**TOTAL**

$377,000.00

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<td>Catering staff costs</td>
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<td>Drinks</td>
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**TOTAL**

$5,490.00

**TOTAL EXPENSES**

$382,490.00
No additional admission fee is administered for the exhibition, in keeping with the museum’s standard for special exhibitions. This decision respects the MET’s mission and code of ethics in aiming to educate, share and provide interest for a wide public. The estimated revenue for admissions is based on an average of the various admission fees paid by visitors from outside of New York State ($12 to $25), which constituted 68% of visitors in the 2018 financial year. The number of visitors is based on one quarter of these 2018 visitors. The sponsorship revenue has been calculated in reference to previous exhibition support at the MET and its existing sponsors.

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Curatorial Essay

Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer are frequently referred to in all forms of artistic discourse as pioneers of modern design. Their approaches, distinct whilst also sharing common ground, encompass aesthetic as well as social and progressive ideologies. Their associations with these ideologies were paramount to the development of their careers, with both negative and positive effect. The increasingly hostile environment in Europe in the 1930s led the three designers to consider new opportunities in America and embark on a new phase of their careers. Gropius, Mies and Breuer are consistently discussed within the context of the Bauhaus School and their work in Europe, when, in fact, projects realised in America reveal their experimentation with materials and form, ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ philosophy and development in aesthetic at its apex. Furniture and interiors by the three designers are revered and ever-present, not only in the art market but also exponentially in private homes, civic buildings, offices and commercial spaces alike worldwide. The historical significance of their designs is often overlooked in this monumental presence. Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer: Designing for America returns to the core intentions, ideologies and values in their various designs, which are examined through examples of interior projects, the reception and dissemination of their work and exhibitions in the U.S., illustrating the development and lasting impact that occurred during this American era.

The Bauhaus School’s legacy was authored by its faculty and students between 1919-1933, at Weimar, Dessau and finally Berlin. Machinery and modern
materials used to create products of simplicity, sustainability and availability to all levels of society underpinned the school’s production, teaching and aesthetic. Preceded by the Arts and Crafts Movement and subsequent German response, the Deutsche Werkbund, which examined the craft in industrial design and employed new materials and machinery, Bauhaus lead the concept of creating a total work of art, or ‘gesamtkunstwerk’, where a single designer considers every aspect from the architecture to the interior, inclusive of materials, appliances, furnishings and decorative objects. The Bauhaus “saw beauty in pure, undecorated geometric forms” and disclaimed the need for interfering opulence or bourgeois decoration, such as thick rugs, tasselled lamps or throw pillows. It professed the use of utilitarian furniture that echoed the working environment, including tubular steel, bentwood, cane, canvas and linoleum flooring.

The Bauhaus’ encouragement of societal equality, novelty and modernism in design, aesthetic and philosophy ultimately led to its downfall in Germany. The Nazi Party was ascendant by the early 1930s and considered Bauhaus philosophy a threat to its conservative ideals in life as in art. On August 22, 1932, a legislative decision in the city of Dessau announced the forced dissolving of the school. Many followers then fled Germany to pursue careers abroad, several emigrating to America. In America, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe made the greatest impact in interiors and

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surrounding architecture, designing numerous private homes and public buildings.

Walter Gropius, often considered the leader of Bauhaus design and social philosophies, first worked with the Deutsche Werkbund and in his own studio before founding the Bauhaus in 1919. He led the cabinetmaking workshop in Dessau, where he began working with Breuer. Breuer was a student and received commendation for his innovative table and chair designs, which were consistently employed in his collaborative work with Gropius in the following decades. His first designs used wood, though his interest in and experimentation with tubular steel furniture ensured Breuer’s international acclaim and legacy. Mies van der Rohe, also renowned for his work with steel, was considered a rival to Breuer throughout. Mies distinguished himself from Gropius, Breuer and the Bauhaus in its final years and once in America.

Mies professed his differences, claiming he “never liked the Bauhaus”, which is contradictory when considering he served as director before its closure. He certainly seemed to interpret interiors according to Bauhaus philosophy, designing every visible element, from light fixtures to curtain track holders.

Gropius was a central influence in the migration of European modern designers to America. Well-known for founding the Bauhaus, he was frequently linked to its design concepts by the 1930s. The principle manner of dissemination of European modernist ideas in America occurred in academic circles, through art, architecture and design journals. Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson and Alfred Barr, influential American figures in art and architecture, visited Europe in the late 1920s, experiencing the latest design tendencies and published in these journals. Gropius first visited in 1928, establishing connections and recognition that lead to negotiations with Joseph Hudnut, Dean of Harvard University. He was appointed to Harvard’s Graduate School of Design’s Architectural Department and proposed that they also hire Breuer for the faculty. Mies arrived in America through his connections with Alfred Barr, director of MoMA New York, and Philip Johnson, whose admiration for his work played a crucial role in his career in America. Mies emigrated in 1938 to teach architecture at the Armory Institute, Chicago (now Illinois Institute of Technology).

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Burns, “Bauhaus in America,” 183.
Kentgens-Craig, The Bauhaus and America, 119-122.
The rapid rise of modernism in America would have appealed to the design concepts and progressive efforts of Mies, Breuer and Gropius. With its thriving urban culture, skyscraper architecture, electric light, forward-looking museums and universities, America epitomised modernity.\textsuperscript{14} Breuer wrote of the impact of the skyscrapers upon his arrival: “In New York I had one of the greatest impressions of my life”.\textsuperscript{15} With institutions such as MoMA, Harvard and Yale demonstrating support and admiration for their work, they could continue designing without the restrictions of Nazi politics. Though the Bauhaus School initiated their recognition, its socialist philosophy and agenda was not emphasised in America; the interest and focus of European modern design was exclusively aesthetic, “reduced to an appearance”.\textsuperscript{16} America was firmly Capitalist and, to a certain extent, left the deeper political affiliations these designers founded their ideas on unexplored at first.

The Art Deco style was prominent in contemporary American design. Derived from the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, connotations of French luxury contributed to its popularity amongst the upper classes, whose homes were decorated with exotic materials, handcrafted ceramics and furniture with geometric motifs. Polished surfaces and tubular furniture featured in its design vocabulary, yet more decoratively than those of the Bauhaus. American modernism developed

\textsuperscript{16} Burns, “Bauhaus in America,” 184.
or ‘Americanised’ Art Deco concepts to create its own ‘style moderne’, presenting the skyscraper as the symbol of its aesthetic and ideals.

The rise in prominence of industrial design also contributed to American contemporary design, as did an increased interest in both democratisation of design and consumerism. Industrial designers such as Walter Teague examined transportation interiors and advertising, creating forms inspired by streamlined, aerodynamic features of airplanes. Designed and manufactured for function whilst still maintaining elegance in aesthetic, they added to the democratisation of design.17 ‘Good design’ became more accessible to all levels of society, similarly to the Bauhaus. Frank Lloyd Wright, often considered the most prominent architect and designer in America in the 1930s, embraced modern democratisation. He designed inexpensive urban homes using

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modern materials of concrete slabs and thin walls of wood.\textsuperscript{18} He incorporated the external environment into the interior design, apparent in Fallingwater (Figure 4), which is cantilevered over a waterfall in Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

Wright’s consideration of the vernacular and the connection between a building and its environment was an important feature adopted by Gropius and Breuer in their first design projects in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Contemporary New England homes had a specific aesthetic and use of materials, including clapboard, brick and fieldstone, which the pair each adopted in their respective homes. This signifies the first impact America had on their designs; it was distinct from the sparse, machine aesthetic of the Bauhaus.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fallingwater_interior.jpg}
\caption{Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater, 1937-9. ©Fallingwater}
\end{figure}

Gropius House (1938) first shows the landscape influence interpreted in their interiors. Gropius declared, “a house and its furnishings must be meaningfully related to one another”, calling for broader examination of the building’s

\textsuperscript{18} Eldridge and Halliwell, \textit{American Culture}, 145-155.
entire design so as to understand its concept. Gropius and his wife, Ise, studied vernacular architecture around New England before commencing plans. They created a house of rectangular form with flat roof and ribbon windows, which also incorporated elements of traditional New England construction, including retaining walls, a brick chimney and redwood exterior. These features combine with industrial, modern materials, with innovative technology, chromed banisters and a glass block entrance wall. Gropius manipulated the New England clapboard to fit his own concept: instead of horizontal layering, the clapboard is fixed to the walls vertically in the front hall interior (Figure 5). This served a function as well as being a novel aesthetic; “he used their verticality to create the illusion of height and a practical surface for hanging artwork”. The clapboard demonstrates Gropius and Breuer’s interest in vernacular materials and how they adapted to the environment. This is significant; it reflects the direct influence of contemporary American tendencies. The interior space is essentially free flowing downstairs, following typical European modern style. Curtains allow for room separation, another clear development in interior design: previously curtains had been considered “too fussy and unhygienic”. The curtains (Figure 6) contribute warmth and

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item “Gropius House.”
\end{itemize}}
tradition whilst blending with the surrounding Colonial houses, demonstrating Gropius’ study and consideration of the vernacular.

Figure 6: Gropius House dining room with Breuer B40 dining chairs, Nesting tables and curtain. ©Gropius House, Historic New England

Most furniture in the house was made at the Bauhaus and brought to America by the family, the majority of which was designed by Breuer. In letters written by Ise Gropius about the first house they rented in Lincoln, she states, “our Bauhaus furniture looked indeed strange in the small rooms of this prim little house of Colonial style.” Examining Gropius House, it appears Ise found solutions to incorporating their furniture suitably with the environment; some of the furniture was modified to fit with the region. The Isokon Long Chair (1936) is usually either displayed bare, revealing the laminated birch plywood, or with an upholstered seat. Ise added a sheepskin throw in this case, a softer, warmer variation. The Breuer-designed tubular steel B9 Nesting Tables (1925-26), B40 dining chairs (1926) with white seat and backing, white Formica dining table (1928) and Isokon book holder also feature in the home. Breuer created the maple and butternut veneer double desk in the study, originally

“Gropius House.”
for Gropius at the Bauhaus Dessau. Gropius ensured in his design that this fit under the ribbon window, exemplifying his concept of designing a house and furnishings to relate to one another - a fundamental theme continued in this project.  

The prominence of designs for the Isokon Company in the house is significant; they were manufactured during the three years spent in London prior to America and so were a novel addition to the interior aesthetic. The use of wood reflects how Gropius and Breuer were influenced by this period in England, where plywood, local and laminated woods were favoured in interiors for their warmth. The use of laminated birch is also indicative of the impact Finnish designer Alvar Aalto was having on furniture; the Paimio Chair designed for Paimio Sanatorium in Finland provided a source of inspiration for Breuer’s Isokon Long Chair in terms of its organic lines in form and the technological innovation of creating curvatures in laminated wood. Despite the fact the Bauhaus had used wood in furniture, it was mainly employed in its earlier years, and most production in recent years had focused on metal. The incorporation of wooden furniture, therefore, symbolises a development stage, whilst also endeavouring to create an appropriate style for Massachusetts.

Although Gropius House demonstrates clear shifts in aesthetic relating to the incorporation of the surrounding environment, the project still employs European and Bauhaus furniture designed and manufactured prior to 1938. Frank House, however, is the first complete work of art executed by Breuer

— “Gropius House.”
Robert and Cecilia Frank commissioned Frank House, Pittsburgh, as their new home in 1939 after hearing Gropius lecture on architecture. The couple were prominent in society in Pittsburgh and desired a home suitable for hosting gatherings that reflected modernity, which Robert was keenly interested in as an engineer and owner of a steel company. They were involved in the designs and communicated their ideas and queries weekly throughout construction. The interior can, therefore, be considered a prime example of European and American modern ideas combining. The house demonstrates the result of direct influence and input of both American design and client involvement, developing a new standard for the construction and interior design industry.

Despite it being a project designed completely from scratch, Frank House shares elements in common with Gropius House. The entrance also features a glass block wall whilst the exterior evokes its environment by using a local fieldstone base, wooden panelled walls of pear wood, redwood or travertine and a curved glass façade that allows the surrounding landscape to visually enter the interior. Similarly to the softer aesthetic of Gropius House, the Franks requested a warm, friendly atmosphere, which is reflected in the materials. Breuer designed all furniture and furnishings for the project, treating it as an experimental process and incorporating new materials and manufacturing methods. For example, most of the furniture is made of wood,

many pieces featuring upholstery that newly incorporated Lucite, a polymer material that had recently been developed by DuPont and manufactured by U.S. company Schmieg & Kotzian.27

The project represents one of the few opportunities for the European designers where they could experiment more freely in their ideas. The dining table in Frank House (Figure 8) exemplifies this: Breuer had long been known for creating lifted objects through cantilevered tubular steel-framed chairs, but the dining table is the first production of a table with this same sense of levity, with transparent tubular table legs.28 Most of the furnishings and cabinets are built-in and wood-panelled, which is apparent in the master bedroom and en suite. This design resembles a ship-like cabin, with curved panels and compactness (Figure 7). These features draw on industrial design vocabulary and the transportation interiors that employ compact,
streamlined, built-in elements. This novelty reflects an influence of industrial design on Gropius and Breuer as well as their patrons. The built-in and site-specific nature of the furniture and interior furnishings in Frank House highlights a significant difference between the design process in America compared to Europe: typically, they designed for a specific place but with the intention of manufacturing and employing the objects in other settings, whereas these hundreds of objects only exist in and for Frank House. This demonstrates how the aesthetic of their designs was separated from their socialist ideals at this point. Though democratisation of design had precedence in America, they ultimately designed for elite society.

Mies van der Rohe’s first projects in America also involved commissions from wealthy clients. Mies distanced himself from Breuer and Gropius in projects and went to Illinois. His first commission came in 1937 from his connection to Alfred Barr, who recommended him to Stanley and Helen Resor for the construction of their summer home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Though never built, the designs for a glass box-style predict the creation of Farnsworth House in 1945-51 in Plano, Illinois.29 Farnsworth was built for Dr Edith Farnsworth as a weekend retreat. Philip Johnson commented on the house’s innovative expression of the floating volume, raised above ground, and continuous glass walls that extend from floor to ceiling, where “the purity of the cage is undisturbed”.30 These features relate to Mies’ desire to bring the surrounding woodland and Fox River into the interior, similarly to Gropius

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and Breuer. Mies seems to take this concept further than the other two, attempting to disturb nature as little as possible, even blending the colours inside the home with the surroundings. These ideas echo Frank Lloyd Wright’s, who had then recently completed Falling Water. Mies visited Wright in 1937 and witnessed several ongoing projects, implying that his level of incorporation of nature influenced his design. This novelty in Mies’ work is perhaps why it was considered “a radical departure from [his] European domestic projects”.

Unlike Frank House, Farnsworth House employs the concept of creating a total work of art without designing furniture specifically for the space. The open-plan house is sparse and features furniture models that Mies originally designed for the Barcelona Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition in Spain. The chair (Figure 10) and stool exemplify Mies’ skill in working with

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* Claire Zimmerman, Mies van der Rohe (Köln: Taschen, 2016), 62-66.
steel, this time with a frame of flattened tubes over curved X-shaped legs, the seat and back covered with leather upholstery. The chair was conceived of for the King and Queen of Spain at the Exposition, which Mies reflects by employing the X-shape, referencing forms used in medieval seats whilst bringing it into modernity with material, technology and elegance. In the living space in Farnsworth House, the couch, stool and chair are arranged at a substantial distance from one another, which creates a marked relaxation area without disrupting the openness of the interior; the only fixed divider of space is the wardrobe unit separating the bedroom. The primavera wood unit (Figure 9) matches the panels above the fireplace, unifying the interior and harmonising with the deep brown leather upholstery of the Barcelona furniture. These details attest to Mies’ unification of the interior and exterior which is enhanced by the floor finish of small travertine marble slabs used both outside and inside, as well as the exterior white painted steel-work and interior white plastered ceiling.33 Although Mies, Gropius and Breuer all incorporate the surroundings of their projects into the interiors, their approaches to this concept are clearly distinct: Mies blends with the exterior to disturb nature as little as possible, whilst Gropius and Breuer blend with American design vocabulary and the vernacular.

Mies’ distinct unification of interior and exterior relates to ideological ways of living. In harmonising the living space with nature, the inhabitants feel part of the outside or a greater whole, which alludes to ideas of a collective and

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interdependent society. This aspect of Mies’ work was criticised in American popular culture. An article in *House Beautiful* magazine just after Farnsworth House was completed attaches Communist associations with the Mies’ style, Frank Lloyd Wright even placing his distrust and defiance of ‘Internationalism’ and ‘Communism’ on the same level. This offers an insight into Wright’s interpretation of European modernist or ‘Internationalist’ design concepts, of particular interest when considering the parallels that can be drawn between his own work and Mies, Gropius and Breuer’s. It demonstrates the initial reception of their design in America - an environment that was hostile towards Communist ideals, preferring to draw on their aesthetic concepts rather than political associations.

Mies’ work was also criticised by Dr Farnsworth, who “refused to use the furniture” in her house and overtly complained about various aspects of its interior design and construction. Farnsworth House is therefore an example of the negative interpretation of Mies’ work from the perspective of his client as well as in certain parts of popular culture. The designer only produced one further singular private home in America, McCormick House (1951-2), which follows the interiorly sparse, glass-box concept of Farnsworth. Mies is now more widely praised for his skyscraper apartment buildings, as well as the redesigning of the Illinois Institute of Technology campus (1941-58), referred to as his most important commission. Mies designed buildings for the entire campus, from the halls of residence to the library, some of which echo

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* Zimmerman, Mies van der Rohe, 62-66.
* Martin Pawley, “Revisits: Number 1,” 55.
concepts seen in Farnsworth House, but on a different scale and in a distinct context. The architecture department’s Crown Hall, for example, consists of large, free flowing open space without disruptions, a raised ground floor and floor to ceiling glass panels.\textsuperscript{38} The veneration with which this project is associated and discussed in literature indicates how the reception of Mies’ work varied. His distinct ‘Internationalism’ and lack of integration with American design precedence appears to have been more attractive to patrons of the larger scale, public buildings than to those who desired singular residential second homes. In 1985, \textit{The Architects’ Journal} cites the contemporary interpretation of Farnsworth House as having an “odd and disconcerting resemblance to a mobile home, the cheapest form of American housing”. This signifies distaste for his work amongst the echelons of American society who commissioned second homes, as well as indicating an avoidance of democratisation in housing.\textsuperscript{39}

This said, Gropius, Breuer and Mies’ work was viewed in a positive light, apparent in various examples of popular culture, literature and museum exhibitions through which their work was disseminated. One, perhaps surprising, source that influenced the acceptance and admiration of their designs was \textit{Playboy Magazine}. Beatriz Colomina professes the crucial role the magazine played in modern design culture in America, arguing it

\textsuperscript{*} Zimmerman, Mies van der Rohe, 70-72.
\textsuperscript{*} Pawley, “Revisits”, 55-58.
“integrated the state of the art designers and architects into a carefully constructed vision of a desirable contemporary lifestyle”.40

Playboy published furniture and architectural features on Mies, Breuer and Gropius, sharing their work with a broad, everyday public as opposed to the confined academic or elite circles in which their designs first became known in the U.S. Colomina discusses the contemporary conservatism amongst Americans with regards to their architecture and interiors.41 Playboy promoted the modern ideals of living in an efficient, technologically advanced, functional and elegant environment, displaying interiors that emanated European modern precedence. An article from May 1962 features ‘The Playboy Town House: Posh Plans for Exciting Urban Living’, with images of interiors and furniture by modern designers (Figure 11). One image of a

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bedroom is particularly significant for the lifestyle it promotes: all the necessities of modern living, including a television, telephone, fireplace and food and drinks space are contained within one room (Figure 12). This is reminiscent of concepts of functionalism and efficiency in modernism and the consideration of modern needs when designing interiors, dating back to Le Corbusier’s ideas about homes as machines for living in. Though sexualised and promoted as the ideal lifestyle for a bachelor, these features brought about widespread acceptance of modern living and aesthetic through its presentation as part of popular culture and promoting its appeal to American consumerism as a new commodity.42

![Figure 12: Bedroom in 'The Playboy Townhouse', 1962. ©Playboy Magazine](image)

Another principle vehicle through which Gropius, Mies and Breuer’s work was disseminated to a wider public was in exhibitions, most notably at MoMA New

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York, where they exhibited extensively. Importantly, MoMA shed light on the ideological concerns in Bauhaus designs, which had been dismissed by many. An exhibition in 1938, when the designers were new to America, showcased the Bauhaus School, its background, faculty and workshop production. Displays involved discussion of design concepts, which included notions of democratisation. They continued to feature in exhibitions from this point onwards, in 1941, 1945, 1947 and 1981, to name a few, exploring topics such as new teaching techniques and housing and the evolution of their work in America is reflected in the nature of the exhibitions. Mies, for example, had a show dedicated to his designs in architecture and furniture in 1948, whilst Breuer created a ‘House in the Museum Garden’ in 1949, an entire model home designed and overseen by him (Figure 13). This house not only serves as an example of the promotion and dissemination of Breuer’s designs for homes in America, but also indicates shifting ideas and tendencies in his work. The house was intended as a model that could be replicated; Breuer included plans for any local contractor to use.

These ideas of democratisation and designing for the masses had a strong presence in the Bauhaus School and were present in America. Breuer became interested in wartime, essentially mobile homes that compactly contained necessary living conveniences and were designed to be replicated to provide housing for a wide public. This interest in living conditions and creating a standard for the masses indicates the impact of long years of war and depression suffered internationally. In this sense, the ideological sensibilities in their work were highlighted at MoMA. Moreover, the fact that it was
influenced by similar American concerns emphasises its importance and relevance in society.

Expanding on the connection between modern design and social philosophy, MoMA directed an international competition in 1948 for low-cost furniture design. American designer Charles Eames was well known for his interest in mass production and participated in the competition. Eames focused on lightness, mobility and advanced technology, setting new standards and acting as a monumental source of influence in design and technology internationally. Eames had been designing and manufacturing moulded plywood chairs that, by 1946, were developed enough in technique to produce

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over 5,000 units, fulfilling objectives of mass production. Before the MoMA competition, Eames had begun experimenting with mass-produced stamped aluminium steel furniture, which featured in the chair design that earned him second place. When it was published and manufactured, however, the material changed to moulded plastic (Figure 14). The rise in prominence of using moulds pressed by machine in manufacturing at the time allowed for curved and streamlined forms to be created in one piece and using modern materials, such as sheets of steel. It was discovered that plastic forms could be produced in the same way, which were then developed and resulted in the production of iconic plastic furniture, such as Eero Saarinen’s 1957 armchair and Verner Panton’s 1968 side chair, the first one-piece to be mass-produced. MoMA holds sketches by Mies from c.1940 of ‘Conchoidal chairs’ (Figure 15) that suggest employing plastic and using one material for the entire

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* Eames and Drexler, *Furniture*, 16.
* Eames and Drexler, *Furniture*, 14.
piece. These sketches indicate the influence Mies had on Eames in this sense, whilst the curved, organic shapes of the furniture are distinct to the regularity of his Barcelona furniture and, in turn, demonstrate the influence of American modern designers, such as Eames, on his own artistic development. Thus, the design ideas of European and American creatives blended to form a new, world leading forum.

The lasting impact of the three designers in America can be measured through the extent of completed projects across the country, both collaboratively and independently. Mies’ relations with Johnson led him to significant design projects, such as the Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut (1949), and the Seagram Building (1958). The Seagram Building restaurant, in particular, represents the gesamtkunstwerk, sparse modernist aesthetic that Mies maintained, still employing his Barcelona and tubular steel furniture designs from the pre-American era in each project. The designer’s impact in Chicago is apparent in the Miesian-style architecture throughout the city, where his Lake Shore Drive Apartment buildings and IIT Campus are faithfully maintained. His impact is also evident in the work of his followers: architect Jack Viks, a
former student of Mies, designed a house in Lake Forest, Illinois in 1960 featuring floor to ceiling windows that bring the exterior inside and Barcelona chair models, both in imitation of Mies (Figure 17). Breuer’s Wassily Club chairs also feature, indicating collective impact.

Breuer and Gropius continued to collaborate and began additional pursuits individually. Apart from his work with Breuer on Chamberlain Cottage (1940) and independent design for the Richards and Child Harvard campus residence halls, Gropius founded The Architect’s Collaborative in 1946 and his role in exhibition participation and developing the modernist style of teaching architecture and design in the U.S. increased throughout his career. Breuer received commissions for independent designs for both housing and civic purposes. Originally created as the Whitney (1966), the Met Breuer building exemplifies the exactitude in design that Breuer maintained. He used concrete, granite and terrazzo inside, with occasional pieces of wood “to bring warmth to elements that visitors touch, such as handrails and furniture”.46

Figure 18: The Met Breuer Lobby. ©The Met Breuer

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The lighting was designed to enhance the building’s materials and dramatic linear forms, the full effect of which can be seen in the dome lights in the lobby, creating a uniform illumination against the bluestone floors and concrete walls cantilevered over the lower restaurant level (Figure 18).47 These materials were also employed in his homes. The third home Breuer designed for himself in New Canaan features the same bluestone floors and reveals a combination of influence and development: the house uses floor to ceiling glass panels, is surrounded by local stone and incorporates his own tubular steel furniture with new designs, such as Eero Saarinen’s tulip table and chairs. This incorporation of new ideas conceived of and manufactured with modern design and technology is present in several of Gropius and Breuer’s interiors, including the Womb Chair in Gropius House and Eames’ furniture in Breuer’s ‘House in the Museum Garden’. This idea of developing the interior and updating it with new furniture innovation seems to be more evident in Breuer and Gropius’ work than Mies’, which nearly always employed the same Bauhaus-era models. Whilst Breuer and Gropius appear to have incorporated the traditions, tendencies and trends in the local environment in their furniture and interiors, Mies, though evolving in some ways, consistently employs furniture and aesthetics established previously in Europe. His designs are therefore distinct and seem to eventually lead him to develop new architectural projects for large, public and apartment buildings.

The Knoll furniture company holds the official rights to manufacturing not only Mies’ furniture designs, but also Breuer’s. The fact that an American

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Bergdoll, Marcel Breuer, 37.
company holds these rights conveys and solidifies the impact and importance they achieved after emigrating. The three designers are consistently referenced for their work in Europe, at the Bauhaus and the concepts created there, yet in examining their trajectory in America and the extensive number of projects completed, this era assumes greater significance in terms of the development, execution and legacy of their work. Through identifying design elements in just three interior examples from an almost inexhaustive list, Gropius House, Frank House and Farnsworth House portray substantial differences and modifications made within just the first ten years of their arrival in America. They brought the vernacular and the surrounding nature into the interior, experimented with new materials and in their approach to the gesamtkunstwerk. Gropius, Breuer and Mies’ designs are symbolic of significant art historical and societal developments in the same way that architecture, fine art and sculpture embody local and global attitudes. The duality in the reception, dissemination and execution of their work represents the dilemma of society, partly conservative and elitist, but increasingly moving towards democratisation and standardisation.
Bibliography


