

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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Attached is a statement by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.,
on Miss Elizabeth Gordon's article in the March
issue of House Beautiful. It was made in answer
to a question propounded by Retailing Daily.

Milwaukee Journal
Times, Trib, House Beautiful, World Telegram
Arch Forum, Arch Record, Prog Arch, Artist Arch.

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The idea that foreign influence on our architecture and furniture constitutes a serious "Threat to the Next America" through some sinister dictatorship of taste seems to me preposterous. No one needs to live in an "International Style" glass house if he or she doesn't want to. Some people do. As a guest, I've lived in the most famous of them, the one at New Canaan, Connecticut. I can testify to the following facts. The glass house is no threat to privacy: all you have to do is to draw the curtains. There is no threat to the consumption and storage of consumer goods which so alarms Miss Gordon: I found more closet space in the New Canaan house than any house I know designed to accommodate one or two people. There is plenty of kitchen equipment and storage space, too - and all in a "living kitchen" which House Beautiful so much admires.

The charge that the architects of the International Style or formerly of the Bauhaus or de Stijl, are today designing with the primary goal of making their "furniture and buildings look like a Mondrian painting" is equally laughable. The five illustrations which presumably illustrate this assertion all date from before 1925 (pages 240-241). The two large illustrations of International Style houses both date from about 1930, but Miss Gordon fails to point out to her readers that already they demonstrate the reaction against cubist influence and toward classical regularity and symmetry which set in about that time.

In this connection it is amusing to study the house by John Yeon reproduced on the very cover of House Beautiful. There we see the glass walls first developed by the International Style (affording privacy at will by means of curtains just as in the case of the Mies van der Rohe house of 1930 used to illustrate Miss Gordon's tirade). And there are the chairs which closely resemble Bauhaus and Le Corbusier prototypes. Yeon's interiors, it is true, are enriched by antique Chinese (foreign!) and European (foreign!) furniture and rugs, but Mies's are enriched by handsome walls of warm-colored marble and macassar wood with pigskin-and-metal chairs of his own design.

Ironically, the founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, and his successor Mies van der Rohe, came here from Germany not for racial or political reasons but because Hitler's chauvinistic tyranny put an end to their professional careers. Hitler denounced their work because it was modern, flat-roofed, international, un-German, and involved (he shrieked) with a conspiracy to undermine the good old German way of life. Soviet authorities have followed suit.

This is still a free country. Some people prefer a completely accommodating architect whose chief goals are comfort and Gemütlichkeit; they are free to hire him. Others prefer an architect who will provide surroundings of a greater elegance of form or consistency of style. If they hire him they may have to make some concessions.