

The Museum of Modern Art

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MIES VAN DER ROHE: FURNITURE AND DRAWINGS

The most complete view to date of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's furniture designs, from initial sketches to completed chairs and tables, including one chair never executed during his lifetime, will be on view in a special exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art from March 3 through May 3, 1977.

MIES VAN DER ROHE: FURNITURE AND DRAWINGS is directed by Ludwig Glaeser, Curator of the Museum's Mies Archive, and has been made possible by a grant from Knoll International. In addition to the Reclining Frame chair of 1932, never before produced, the exhibition includes six other chairs and a table which have not been produced since the 1930s. These eight models are now being put into production for the commercial market by Knoll International, which has been manufacturing furniture by Mies since 1948. Among the other works in the exhibition are two lounge chairs made in 1929 for the living area of the Tugendhat House in Brno, Czechoslovakia, and the steel and leather side chair of 1927. Eighty-six small pencil sketches and ten full-scale working drawings plus curvature studies are also included. All of the works are from the Archive and the Museum's Architecture and Design Collection.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) is primarily known as an architect, but he was also interested in creating furniture suitable for his new architecture, furniture which would express a new lifestyle, which would use industrial materials and "the methods of our time," and which would "create form out of the nature of our tasks," in Mies' words.

"The furniture designs reveal perhaps better than any other aspect of Mies' work the range of his imagination...", writes Ludwig Glaeser in the catalogue which accompanies the exhibition.* Many of the designs are accompanied

*LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE: FURNITURE AND FURNITURE DRAWINGS FROM THE DESIGN COLLECTION AND THE MIES VAN DER ROHE ARCHIVE by Ludwig Glaeser. 88 pages, 52 photographs, 86 reproductions of drawings. Paperbound, \$4.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York

by the original sketches or detailed curvature studies. The drawings, none of which has been shown before, present a unique view of Mies' design process. Although Mies' furniture is known for its simplicity, clarity, and rigorous restraint, these factors "...affected only the final stages of the design process and, as the drawings so clearly demonstrate, did not diminish his initial inventiveness," according to Glaeser.

Among the unfamiliar pieces in the exhibiton which have not previously been in commercial distribution are a Reclining Frame chair never built during Mies' lifetime; another version of the tubular steel lounge chair, chaise longue, and coffee table; a tubular frame version of the dining chair designed for the Tugendhat House in Brno; the lounge chair with arms from the same house, and versions with arms of the 1927 side chair and 1931 lounge chair. The eight prototypes for the exhibition have been produced by Knoll International. Knoll currently produces eleven designs by Mies and has contributed to the Museum ten of the fifteen models of Mies' furniture in the Museum's Design Collection.

Mies began working in Berlin in 1905, opened his own office in 1912, and in 1930 was made director of the Bauhaus, succeeding Walter Gropius. The Nazi regime made it impossible to continue the school, however, and it was closed in 1933. In 1938 Mies came to the United States to become director of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. All of the executed furniture pieces in the exhibition were designed before 1933. Although Mies continued to explore possibilities for new variations and models until 1936, after leaving Germany, he did not seriously pursue furniture design. He spent the majority of his time on opportunities to build at large scale, although a series of sketches done in the 1940s for a new type of chair is included in the exhibition. As Ludwig Glaeser writes, "he saw no need to involve himself again in the design of furniture, as he regarded the existing pieces as definitive statements which he felt would serve all purposes in his future work." The current models of Mies' designs have only slight variations from the originals

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due to technical and practical improvements prompted by current production methods or by more demanding institutional use of the furniture.

Many of Mies' furniture designs have become universally used and recognized. Among the well-known works in the exhibition are the chair and stool designed for the German pavilion at the Barcelona world's fair in 1929, the Tugendhat square coffee table, the flat bar version of the dining chair designed for the same house, and the tubular steel and leather side chair of 1927.

"Mies' designs [seem] less than ever confined to their period of origin. To the degree they have become timeless, they now stand out as the work of an individual whose achievements in this area confirm his preeminence among the designers of our century," says Glaeser.

Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, writes in the preface to the catalogue that Mies' furniture "...achieves the same immunity to fashion that distinguishes his buildings. The Barcelona chair, designed in 1929, has been in continuous demand and increasing production since that date. Today it is the uncontested monument to calm and effortless elegance--almost a cult object for connoisseurs and yet, at the same time, so well-known to millions that it may safely be used in all kinds of advertisements as the unmistakable sign of quality."

The Museum's Mies van der Rohe Archive was established in 1968, and before his death in 1969, Mies bequeathed more than 15,000 drawings and documents related to his work. The activities of the Archive, which is funded entirely by outside sources, are supported by the Friends of the Mies Archive.

The current exhibition is the second in a series focusing on the work of individual designers represented in the Design Collection. The first was devoted to furniture by Charles Eames.

Photographs and additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, or Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Tel. 956-7504; 7501.
