



From top: Poltrona Frau's Turner bookcase; Longchamp's Bauhaus-inspired monogrammed collection; Lutz Morris and KPM Berlin's limited-edition bag and tea set

REVOLUTION IN DESIGN

While Bauhaus, a school started in 1919 Weimar as a response to the changing political climate, was shut down by the Nazis in 1933 after they grew increasingly suspicious of its free-floating crowd that they branded as “communists”, its impact is one that has permeated our lives in ways we’re often not aware of. Brands like Ikea and Apple, cornerstones of modern living and unifiers of far-flung lives, owe much to the simple design of Bauhaus, as do your stackable boxes containing the evening’s crudités, and that free-standing lamp that hovers over your couch. Le Corbusier’s design for the Voiture Minimum is considered to be the precursor of the Volkswagen Beetle. Iconic designs like the ‘Wassily’ chair, the ‘Barcelona’ table and Marianne Brandt’s steel teapots have spawned countless imitations that draw from Bauhaus, even if they rarely acknowledge it. Panthaki Hoof underlines that “Bauhaus’s interdisciplinary and humanist approach of bringing about social change through collaboration, experimentation and discovery is something that design professionals can learn from today. Where every practice becomes a workshop to discuss, enrich, understand and rediscover the meaning of design and its responsibility to society.”

However, the perils of over-crediting cannot be ignored—Bauhaus and “Bauhaus-inspired” applying to things that have little truck with the design principles that governed the school. Those 100-windowed matchbox apartment buildings in Hong Kong? They are not what Gropius or his followers intended to populate the world with. Those propagators of high-rise buildings were also fond of the sight of greenery behind the glass. Also, Bauhaus design was characterised by a cleanliness, not the clutter wrought by materials. As this wonderful design movement steps into the next century, a deeper delve into its philosophy is what might be needed to prevent a case of missing the trees for the woods. ■

TALE OF A CHAIR

A history of design in six chairs



1919-1933: Bauhaus

The Bauhaus movement focused on purpose and functionality. The ‘Wassily’ chair, with its exposed stainless-steel frame and spare leather seating, is the best case in point.

1920-1940: Art Deco

Art Deco revived a love for all good things across battle-weary Europe. The club chairs were a plush product of those times.



1935-present: Scandinavian design

The Scandinavian design movement was characterised by minimalism. Finnish designer Alvar Aalto Aartek best summed it up with the ‘Paimio 41’.



1930s-1960s: Mid-century Modern

A phase marked by innovative explorations in material and form. Harry Bertoia’s (1950) ‘Diamond’ chair embodies all that’s exciting with this period.



1978-present: Postmodern art

Postmodern art borrowed heavily from popular culture. Alessandro Mendini’s ‘Proust’ chair (1978) is still emblematic of those times.



1981-1988: The Memphis Group

Peter Shire’s iconic ‘Bel Air’ chair bursts with the shock value that Memphis is notorious for. Gaudy? Maybe. Banal? Never.

