

Modern architecture essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This style of architecture evolved at the start of the twentieth century, and was chiefly started by a group of influential figures, such as the German architect Peter Behrens, who felt it was necessary to begin the new century afresh to suit the “ modern man” that it had given birth to. They aimed to rid themselves of the preoccupations with style and ornament, or the “ stylistic pluralism” of the past, and to create buildings that created a new, more functional sense of space, free of historic or traditional style, using modern materials.

This fresh approach made itself most felt not in Europe, where most of the avant-garde innovations in art had taken place over the last 100 years or so, but in America, where the technological progress of the modern style was not weighed down by tradition and history as was the case in Europe. One of the most innovative and certainly most successful architects to make his mark on the scene was the American Frank Lloyd Wright, who accomplished the difficult task of convincing his clients to accept an entirely unorthodox and untested design for their houses and buildings.

He first demonstrated his ability to do so, as well as his originality in a series of houses in Chicago, the most famous of which is Robie House, built in 1909. This large residential house exhibits what Wright referred to as his aim of ‘ organic architecture’, which meant that “ a house must grow out of the needs of the people and character of the country like a living organism” – the ‘ prairie style’ of this house reflects in its ground hugging, horizontal design the long and low-lying far horizons of the great plains of the Mid-West of America, and in his own words “ develops from within outwards in harmony with the conditions of its being”.

This style of architecture was designed to work from inside the building outwards to its facade, replacing the search for strict axial symmetry by one for logical and 'functional' planning, and in doing so it also eliminates the need for arbitrary decoration that was the norm before the movement.

In 1914 Wright lost his wife and several members of his household when a servant burned down Taliesin, his home and studio in Wisconsin, built by himself, but following the tragedy he immediately re-directed his architecture toward more solid, protective and most importantly more monumental forms. Although he produced few works during the 1920s, Wright theoretically began moving in a new direction that would lead to some of his greatest works. Walter Burley Griffin was among the many prominent architects to emerge from the Wright studios as one of his students.

During the 30s, however, he designed and built both Fallingwater, with the interlocking geometry of the planes and the flat, textureless surface of the main shelves that are characteristic of the International Style, and the Johnson Administration Building - designs which re-invigorated Wright's career and led to a steady flow of commissions, particularly for lower middle income housing. Wright responded to the need for low income housing with the Usonian house, a development from his earlier prairie house.

During the last part of his life, Wright produced a wide range of work. Particularly important was the Guggenheim Museum in New York, built in 1956. This building, which looks more like a sculpture than a building, consists of a continuous spatial helix, a circular ramp that expands as it coils vertiginously

around an unobstructed well of space capped by a flat-ribbed glass dome. This rather seamless construct is the building which evoked for Wright “ a quiet unbroken wave”, and is certainly the most popular, prestigious, and famed of his dozens of designs.

Due to his early prairie houses, Wright’s fame was international by 1910, mostly due to the folio publication of his work in Berlin. By then however, Germany was also approaching the pre-eminent position that it was to hold during the next few decades in terms of architecture and its theory, with such influential figures as Behrens, but also his students such as the German Walter Gropius. This architect was best known for establishing his school of art and architecture at Dessau called the Bauhaus.

This school was designed by Gropius himself, in the now more established Modern, or International style, so called since it effectively breached all national and cultural boundaries in its influence. The building is comprised of very simple, geometrical forms and plain undecorated surfaces that is archetypal of the style taught to Gropius by his teacher Behrens, who developed the trends central to Modernism and the Bauhaus itself, together with another architect called Auguste Perret, such as the enthusiastic approach to the use new materials such as open, plate glass, exposed steel, poured concrete, and glass bricks.

At the Bauhaus itself, which included such teachers such as Kandinsky and Klee as well as Gropius himself, it was taught that art and engineering should not be separate but should instead benefit each other, and students were encouraged to use their imagination and experiment boldly when it came to

design. Yet they were still keen that the students should not lose sight of the purpose which their design should fit, and the idea of ‘functionalism’ which was the roots of the Bauhaus theory – if something is designed to fit its purpose, its beauty will evolve naturally out of it.

Despite being an oversimplification, since many things which are functional are not beautiful, many Modernist architects kept to this slogan, and for the successful ones it worked due to the fact that they were designers with dexterity and taste. As war became eminent, however, Gropius left the Bauhaus and resumed private practice in Berlin but eventually was forced to leave Germany for America, where of course the heat of the International Style and Modern Architecture movement was occurring, and where he subsequently became a professor at Harvard University.

From 1938 to 1941, Gropius worked on a series of houses with Marcel Breuer, a US architect who had also taught at the Bauhaus during the 1920s with Gropius, and in 1945 he founded “The Architect’s Collaborative”, a design team that embodied his belief in the value of teamwork, and anti-individualist approach. Gropius continued create innovative designs that borrowed materials and methods of construction from modern technology.

This advocacy of industrialized building carried with it a belief in team work and an acceptance of standardization and prefabrication. Using technology as a basis, he transformed building into a science of precise mathematical calculations, and towards the end of his career in 1950 Gropius designed one of the few major buildings he constructed during his lifetime at the university he worked – the Harvard Graduate Center.

Another one of Behrens students, and indeed also one of Auguste Perret, was a Swiss-born Frenchman that also followed these architects' theories of using modern materials of concrete and steel in particular to form a Gesamtkunstwerk or 'total work of art'. Le Corbusier's early work was related to nature, but as his ideas matured, he developed the Maison-Domino, a basic building prototype for mass production with free-standing pillars and rigid floors.

From around 1922 he worked with his cousin Jeanneret, and during this time Le Corbusier's ideas began to take physical form, mainly as houses which he created as "a machine for living in" and which incorporated his trademark five points of architecture, such as the House at Weissenhof, built in 1927. His most influential late work was his first significant post-war structure-the Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles built from around 1947-52. It was a giant, twelve-story apartment block for 1.00 people and the late modern counterpart of the mass housing schemes of the 1920s, similarly built to alleviate a severe post-war housing shortage.

The most famous of this architects works, however, lies in America, where, as Gropius, he moved later on in his life- The United Nations Headquarters, finished in 1957, despite not being built solely by Le Corbusier but other American and international architects, the 39 storey Secretariat tower building, as well as the lower part, shows off Le Corbusier's influence and fame throughout the world as one of the finest architect that characterises the Modern Style.

The Modern Architecture style evolved from new tastes, new materials, and new advanced technology produced by industrialisation, but most importantly by a new way of thinking, with the start of a new century. The works of artists such as Lloyd Wright, Gropius, and Le Corbusier are just a few most famed which exemplify these innovative conceptions and theories that brushed aside the fictitious 'orders' of the previous centuries and their symmetry and ornament, replacing them with simple outlines of concrete forms, exposed steel beams and vast panes of plate glass.