

WEIMAR – « MODEL HOUSE AM HORN » RESTORATION PROBLEMS OF THE FIRST BUILDING OF THE BAUHAUS IN WEIMAR

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Weimar, a small city with 60.000 residents in the heart of Germany, is the historical central of the German classical period of literature. In view of its universal importance, this cultural heritage, closely connected with the name of Goethe, Germany's greatest poet, has been included in the World Cultural Heritage List along with 11 of Weimar's buildings. These comprise the living and working quarters of the classical poets, the city church, and three palaces with their surrounding parks.

After the German classical era, the city of Weimar was time and again the focal point of the German and European elite. In 1902 the Dutch painter and architect Henry van de Velde came to Weimar and founded an art and an applied arts school. With these schools and their "art nouveau" buildings, Weimar's tradition as an educational centre for architecture and applied arts was established.

As early as the year 1919, the architect Walter Gropius joined the two schools together and created the "Staatliches Bauhaus". This new idea sought to unite all handicraft disciplines under the leadership of architecture: building as a true "Gesamtkunstwerk", a complete work of art. The more realistic aim of the comprehensive design and shaping of the living environment later replaced this ambitious social-utopian ideal.

As a living expression of this idea, the "Haus Am Horn" came into being in 1923 as an experimental house for an exhibition. It is the first and only architectural manifestation of the Bauhaus in Weimar and, together with the Bauhaus buildings in Dessau, has been designated a World Cultural Heritage Site since 1996.

The house was designed by the painter and Bauhaus master Georg Muche. It was built in four weeks, making intensive use of new buildings materials and constructions. The "Haus Am Horn" was the prototype for a model residential development that aimed at providing a new, modern way of life by accommodating the needs of its residents.



The settlement, however, was never built.

The square living room, with its raised ceiling, lies in the centre of the ground plan, and all the other rooms are grouped around it. It forms a clear geometrical cube in as pure a form as possible, and can only be experienced when, as in a classical centrally planned building, the surrounding rooms are walked through. Thus it can be understood as a symbol for the centre of the house, where the family life of

modern people can unfold as best as possible. Building form and facades are clearly ordered geometrically; they express elementary forms that for the most part create symmetry.

The question of form, however, cannot only be explained with reference to these formal and aesthetic considerations: it is also closely tied to practical design problems. Thus the ground plan is a well-thought-out functional organism that fits into both determinate squares. An inevitable functional logic forms the basis for the group of surrounding rooms: kitchen, dining and children's rooms, wife's room, bath and husband's room, work and guest rooms. From a modern perspective several positive features, such as the skilful arrangement of the kitchen, stand alongside several disadvantages, including usability of the rooms and the lack of an opening into the spacious garden.

The professional planning and construction work was managed by the private construction office of Gropius himself, who as director secured the necessary vote from the Bauhaus. Its special achievement was to raise the issue of modern housing construction and handle it convincingly with new building materials and technical means. This is most impressively seen in the cavity wall construction made of lightweight concrete panels, where energy is saved through the use of high-grade insulation, and in the iron-stone ceiling made of hollow blocks.

The living space is artistically designed to the very last

detail. The interior rooms are treated according to the principle of a differentiated polychromy that does not compete with the architecture in any way. Colour is used as a room-enhancing factor that respects and supports the unique qualities of the room with respect of lighting and size and makes the house more comfortable. Soft pastel tones divide and accentuate the rooms in a restrained and uncontentional fashion. Stronger colour accents through skirting, doors, furniture, or woven rugs.

Architecture, room design, and built-in furniture form an inseparable unity. The built-in wall and ceiling lamps as well as the closets and built-in shelves become important functional and room-shaping elements. The movable inventory, consisting of furniture, carpets and lamps, was provided for the model house in part by Bauhaus students. Unfortunately, this was for the most part irrevocably lost.

In 1924 the house was sold and received several extensions in the course of the following years (1926, 1927 and 1933). Several different tenants and owners followed, and from 1971 to 1998 an architect's family lived in the house and made

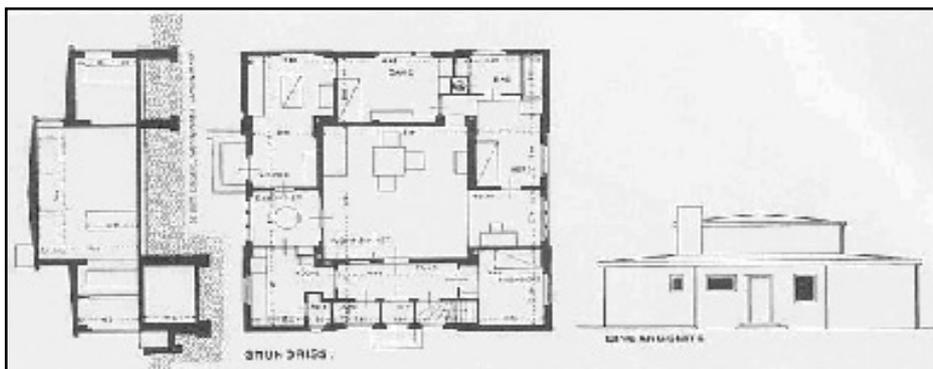
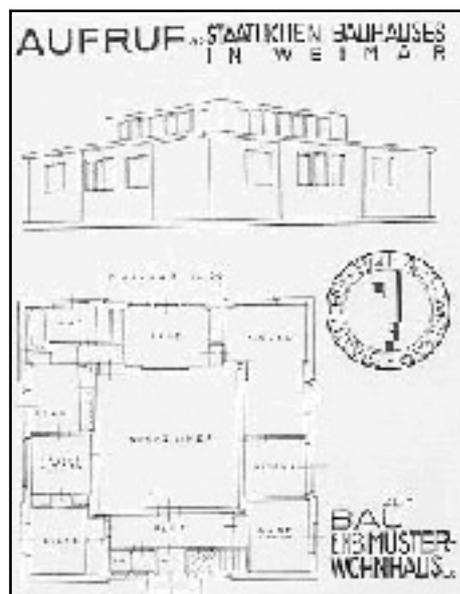
efforts for its preservation. After the clarification of ownership and financing questions, comprehensive renovations, by this time urgently necessary, were begun in 1996. Fully in the spirit of traditional historic preservation methods, all preparations were first carried out..

These were:

- The archaeological investigation of the house and registration of all details of the building and its furnishings.
- The structural and technical evaluation of structures and materials.
- The investigation of polychromy and
- The research and evaluation of its well-documented building history, contemporary photos and publications and other archive materials.

The restoration of this "incunabulum", this early work of modernism, was not without problems and discussions with regard to seeking and making decisions. It was a matter on the one hand of the renovation of a historical utopia, namely the idea of an experimental house and showpiece in the first Bauhaus exposition, and on the other hand of the preservation of the historic original along with its inherited changes and structural extensions.

These subsequent additions did indeed make the architecture, originally intended for an exhibition, more liveable in, but stood in contradiction to the programmatic clarity of the building.



With them were lost not only the clear message of the ground plan and its optimal walking space, but also the inherent relationship of the large living room with the small, monofunctional surrounding rooms. Moreover, the poor quality of the extensions, whose construction had to be removed for this reason, rendered their reconstruction absurd.

The restoration of this early work of modernism aimed at first at the rediscovery of its special qualities in relation to what followed in the future. The appeal of the "incunabulum" lay in its manifesto-like character compared with later adaptations, in its simplicity compared with later complications. The restoration of an utopia does not restrict itself to the documentation of the parts that were found or the results of their subsequent use; it requires a vision in which classic Modernism finds its appropriate place, without being reduced to a museum object in the process. From this, the decision to rebuild the house according to its original form of 1923 was justified.

What are exemplary in this small white building, however, are not only its form but also its experimental character and the boldness of its architects, who responded with a self-contained model to the challenges of the time. The legacy of

the avant-garde in this place demands creative discussion, Thus an essential component of the house's future use should be an appropriate corresponding accessibility to a large, professionally interested public through tours, exhibitions, and special events. In the hope of carrying the architect's ideas further, a Design Transfer Institute will be given space in the house. This institute will serve as a catalyst between the Bauhaus University and the latest technological research and which, should the occasion arise, could be further developed by adding a new building in the immediate vicinity.

A third aspect of the restoration should be also noted: the aim of maintaining as much of the original building as possible and restoring it as a historic monument was undisputed. Soon, however, questions arose that demanded decisions about its use and its aesthetic conception as a whole. While the restored polychromy may be regarded as a minor art-historical surprise, the reconstruction of the windows with double glazing or the installation of a modern heating system remain problematic.

Finally, the "Haus am Horn" experiment employed materials that are no longer in use as well as industrially-manufactured products, like insulation, lightweight concrete and ceramic stones for walls and ceilings or flooring. An appropriate replacement for these – when possible also industrially-produced – needed to be found in order to restore the house's original appearance.

Dealing with lighting and built-in furniture was even more

difficult. The spectrum of possible methods ranges from restoration of the original to faithful copy according to original sources, or even – in the case of the kitchen – to adaptation in order to enable modern use.

This variety of methods and their consequences, which require critical and balanced evaluation, are components of a conscientious building documentation. They should provoke the necessary critical dialogue about the way in which we deal with building material and with architecture of the early twentieth century; as well as demonstrate methodological approaches to the principle of exclusive preservation.

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