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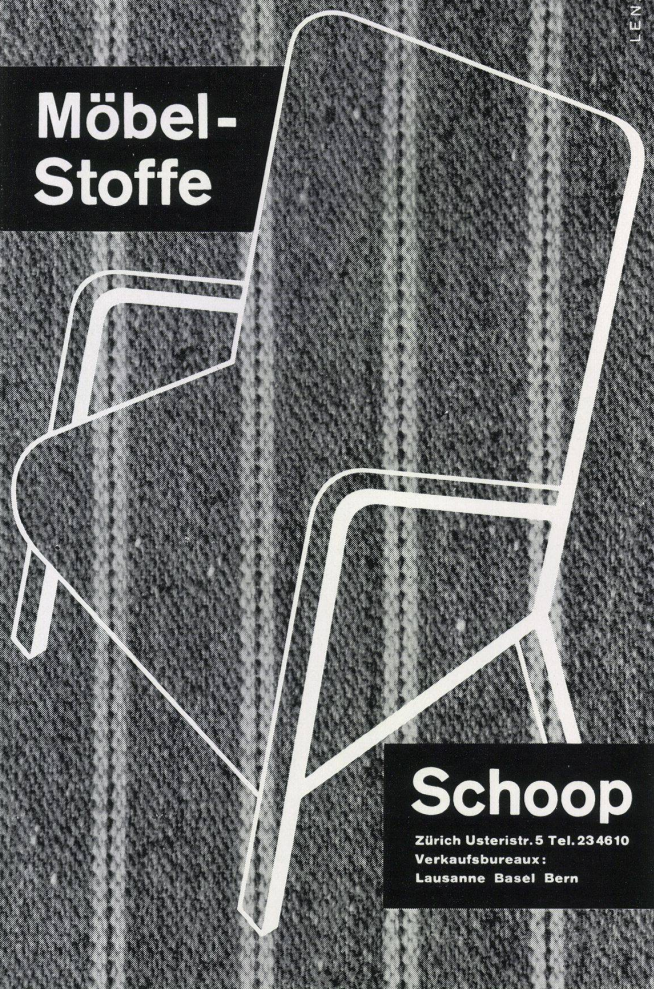
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concrete demonstration of his architectural philosophy show every promise of spreading into the depth and width of general building activity.

It is no exaggeration to say that Mies has found his proper architectural home in Chicago. But prior to discussing the architectural trends in Chicago we would recall Mies van der Rohe's historical contribution to the development of recent architecture:¹

"From Behrens I learned general form, and from Berlage I learned structure", says Rohe of his essential education. The observer of his earliest work will not overlook the influences of Schinkel and, later, of Frank Lloyd Wright. Schinkel gave the classic style, the noble withdrawal from everything patently dramatic, but also the feeling for the clear, careful articulation of the individual structural elements. Wright gave the idea of the open plan and showed new plastic means or the cubic structure of the structural masses.²

Elucidation of structural possibilities

It was only after the first world war, as from 1919, that Mies revealed his real self. His projects for steel and glass buildings (1919—1921) and for an office building in concrete construction (1922) are characterized by a clear distinction between primary and secondary structures, skeleton and filling, bones and skin of the building. This fact has caused Theo van Doesburg to call Mies an anatomic architect. The deliberate exploitation of this elucidation of structural relations, which, according to Mies himself, was at first instinctive, determines his future contributions as an architect and educator. The result of the logical hierarchy of structural order is the liberation of the fantasy in space.

Spaces to Space

Mies obtains the flowing space, the totality of space. The articulation of space is achieved subtractively by means of free intermediate walls. Wright had already opened the unitary spaces, eliminated the strict separations and accented passages and connections. Differentiation in the structure of spatial volumes characterize the work of Loos and Le Corbusier. Logical care in the contact with things structural enabled Mies to go a step further in the formation of space. The master-piece of the new conception was the Barcelona Pavilion of 1929. The floating floor and ceiling slabs, free supports and the non-bearing walls, free in space and functioning as articulations, were to become Mies van der Rohe's personal style.³

Dignity of the Material

With the Barcelona Pavilion a further characteristic of van der Rohe's art reached its summit: the love of beautiful material and the insistence on perfect work. The proportions of the Barcelona Pavilion were determined by the size of

the available onyx block. Twice the height of the stone gave the height of the room. Vertical or horizontal polished stone slabs or noble wood panels are typical aesthetic nuances of his buildings. The furniture that Mies invented and created during this time bear the same characteristics: structural and aesthetic economy, material elegance by proper use of the materials and sensitive use of contrasting effects.⁴

Proportions

Harmonized structural relations, acceptance of new "technical" materials and their expressive use go hand in hand with conscious development of the language of form. Proportions are taken seriously irrespective of purely material functions. The determination of proportions is for Mies the means of expressing an inner functional order. The danger of a superficiality of the language of forms, the deterioration into the purely decorative formalism is more foreign to his work than to that of most architects. His visual language in its discipline is related to the world of Mondrian and Malevich, and Mies, like them, is averse to the individual solution and concerned with the approach to anonymous, universal order.⁵

Chicago

It is known that the Chicago architect John A. Holabird had Mies van der Rohe come to Chicago. David Adler is said to have been the decisive factor for Holabird's decision. Adler, a historicizing architect, builder of French-style period castles in the neighbourhood of Chicago, was convinced that Mies was the only modern architect of taste. Be that as it may, Mies came here, into the town that had undertaken the most progressive building programme in America in the 'eighties, and which was the home of great architects such as Sullivan and Wright.

¹ Mies van der Rohe by Philip C. Johnson, the M. of M. A., N.Y. 1947.

² Mies remembers a fountain designed by Schinkel in Aachen; he studied Schinkel's buildings in Berlin while working with Behrens. Wright's work is exhibited in Berlin in 1910.

³ In connection with the free wall, it is interesting to note that Mies filed a patent in 1927 for a plywood wall which could be placed between the floor and the ceiling by means of a simple screw mechanism. Thickness: 3 cm. First used in the dwelling house of Weissenhof Estate, 1927.

⁴ In an early discussion of the possibilities of monumentality of modern architecture Peter Behrens argues with Bruno Taut, who denies this possibility: "Just have a look at the kid-glove chairs of Mies — you are afraid to sit on them."

⁵ Mies was a friend of many contemporary artists. To-day Klee is his favourite visual company. His Chicago flat contains a large and varied collection of Klee's important works.

In 1922 he meets Malevich, Lissitzky and Gabo in Berlin. Doesburg introduces Mies to Mondrian. Mies meets Arp and Schwitters in Berlin.

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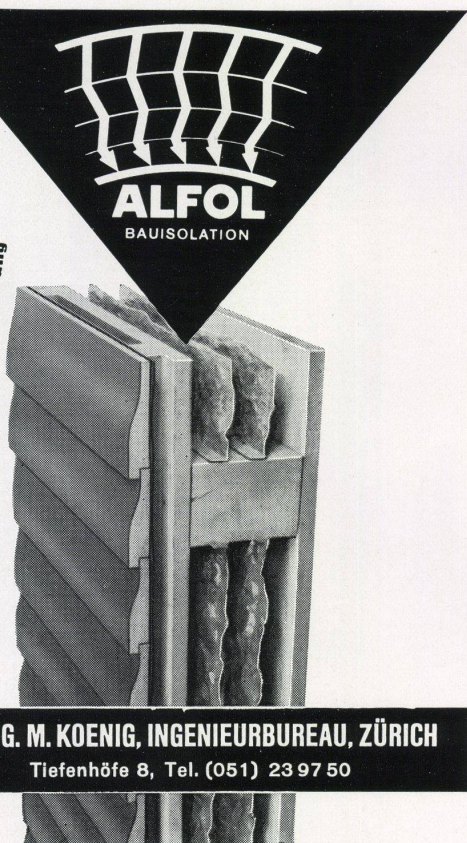
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