

Focus on Bauhaus and Nordic Architecture and Design

Editorial

Juhana Lahti & Leena Svinhufvud

Just like Nordic design, Bauhaus indicates modern, functional, and democratic design. What is the meaning of Bauhaus in the Nordic countries, and how does it relate to Nordic design and architecture today? Do a mutual philosophy and shared history exist, or should we see them as separate? The centennial of the German art school Bauhaus (1919–1933) in 2019 led to many publications, exhibitions, and events globally, and it was also honored in the Nordic countries. It was an opportunity to examine the link more closely, search for networks and influences, and study parallels and differences.

This special issue of the Tahiti journal originates from the Fokus Bauhaus Symposium, held on September 13, 2019 in Helsinki. Scholars and artists from Sweden, Norway,

Denmark, Germany, and Finland presented in two sessions: 1) Networks & transformations; and 2) Branding & marketing. The topics ranged from Swedish architects traveling to Dessau and Bauhaus weaver Otti Berger traveling in Norway and Sweden to experiencing “Bauhausian” handweaving in contemporary participatory art installations, and from Alvar Aalto as a brand to critical reflections on commercialized concepts of Bauhaus and New Nordic. The symposium was a collaboration between the Design Museum Helsinki and the Museum of Finnish Architecture, realized with support from the Estrid Ericsons Stiftelse, the Goethe-Institut Finland, and the Nordic Forum for Design History.

The symposium was part of the program for the Fokus Bauhaus (August 3, 2019–February 2, 2020) exhibition at the Design Museum. The exhibition featured one of the most iconic Bauhaus artifacts, the lamp de-

signed by Wilhelm Wagenfeld in 1924, and critically discussed modernist ideals using artifacts from the museum’s permanent collection. When planning this intervention, the curators, the designer and design historian Julia Meer and the curator and cultural manager Julia Kartesalo contacted the national specialist museums of design and architecture and challenged them to reflect on what Bauhaus means in Finland and in the Nordic countries. The editors of this Tahiti special issue responded to the challenge and organized meetings with invited specialists. The discussions delved into the meanings and value of Bauhaus in Finnish architecture and design history and in contemporary design practice. What was the influence and impact, and how can we measure it? What is the Bauhaus we are talking about? Is it about visual language, vanguard technology, or something else? And what is the relation



between historical knowledge and the image that is built in our minds today?

This publication focuses on Bauhaus and Nordic architecture and design.

The article by Juhana Heikonen traces newly discovered links between housing architecture in Germany and Finland before World War II, while Gerd Bloxham Zettersten examines the influence of Bauhaus architecture on the design of Nordic town halls before and after the war. Anders V. Munch writes about the Danish discussions of Bauhaus, which focused on the promotional value of everyday objects and the critique of conspicuous modernism. Adriana Kapsreiter, on her turn, traces immaterial ideas, pedagogical concepts, and philosophical conceptions in iconic Bauhaus objects, which most often are connected to functionalism and rationalism.

Kerstin Wickman, in her article, maps the developments of Swedish design education with respect to the Bauhaus school, and Christina Pech presents an event series “Bauhaus in the Archive” at ArkDes, Stockholm, and discusses the influence of institutions and archives in building the canon.

In an article by Susanna Aaltonen it is presented how Bauhaus appeared in Finland in

the 1920s and 30s, the author using as an example the Chat Doré café in Helsinki designed by Birger Carlstedt. And in the text by Petteri Kummala and Joonas Rantasalo, they review the Bauhaus anniversary exhibition at the Bröhan Museum, reflecting the relation between Bauhaus and Nordic design.

Finnish Architects and Bauhaus

The discussions mentioned above point to the fact that there is very little research on the interrelation between Bauhaus and Finland. The influence of Bauhaus on Finnish architecture while the school was open is not simple to track. The contacts by Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) and Aino Aalto (1894–1949) with the Bauhaus circles are perhaps the most obvious influences on Finland, together with the new style of publicity Bauhaus was producing. The iconic Bauhaus building by Walter Gropius was the place to see for modernistic-oriented Finnish architects at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s. It can be argued that personal contact with colleagues was more important than the Bauhaus school itself. The style of the new modern architecture spread through professional circles and the professional press from peer to peer and not under the Bauhaus label.

Of the pioneers of modern architecture in Finland, Erik Bryggman (1891–1955) and Erkki Huttunen were among the first to visit Dessau in the late 1920s.¹ Erik Bryggman’s visit dates to summer 1928, one year before the Turku 700th anniversary exhibition in 1929, which has been seen as the first event when new functionalistic architecture entered Finland. Aalto and Bryggman designed the exhibition architecture collaboratively.

Alvar Aalto seems to have visited Bauhaus only in 1931, according to correspondence with Josef Albers in the Alvar Aalto museum collections.² Aalto was active in CIAM circles and had contacts with László Moholy-Nagy and Walter Gropius. Aino and Alvar Aalto met both in 1930, when they traveled to Berlin and Frankfurt.

Erkki Huttunen (1901–1956) visited Dessau in Autumn 1929 and photographed the Bauhaus school and the Konsumverein building, both designed by Gropius.³ He worked for the Finnish Central Co-operative (SOK) designing functionalistic architecture from 1928 until 1941.

Conversely, Pauli E. Blomstedt (1900–1935), who was familiar with Gropius’ Total Theater design of 1927 and who designed steel furniture that reflected the furniture designed within Bauhaus circles, did not visit Bauhaus.



Bauhaus and Finnish Design

To demonstrate the concrete links between Finland and Bauhaus, the Fokus Bauhaus exhibition took as its reference the exhibition organized in the Design Museum Helsinki (then the Museum of Applied Arts) in 1983.⁴ Several exhibitions on Bauhaus have taken place during the past few decades. One of the earliest was in 1967, when the National Gallery of Finland organized a touring exhibition that presented the Bauhaus workshops in Weimar (1919–1925).⁵ Also in 1967, the designer Kaj Franck and Liselotte Kerbs, a former Bauhaus student living in Finland, were interviewed for the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE).⁶

We know there were no Finnish students in the Bauhaus school. However, Bauhaus has been present in designer training as a pedagogical ideal for decades. These ideas are connected to the designer Kaj Franck, who modernized the design curriculum in the 1960s. He had absorbed Bauhaus pedagogy in the US during his Lunning Prize trip in 1955. In Finland, Kaj Franck communicated that craft (handicraft) is a laboratory for industry. Many school projects led by him were based on teamwork and inter-disciplinarity.

He was also one of the initiators of the idea of social design and the social responsibility of designers.⁷

The developments in the 1960s were orchestrated by a new generation of designers connected to the success story called Nordic design. In recent interviews, design students of the 1960s and 1970s—today aged in their 70s—profoundly subscribed to the term “Bauhaus” in their personal design philosophies. The interviewed designers who worked as design teachers connected the concept to the meaning and importance of free creativity for rational design.⁸

Weaving is a special field of craft and a “mode of design,” as the art historian T'ai Smith, who has researched the intellectual legacy of Bauhaus weavers, puts it.⁹ The WeavingKiosk event organized by Rosa Tolnov Clausen and Emelie Røndahl as part of the Fokus Bauhaus Symposium presented handweaving as a social tool. The changing contexts of weaving as a medium are interesting here: sometimes it is presented as avantgarde art, sometimes as rationalistic production.

The handweaving example illustrates not only the constantly changing directions of ideas and influences, but it is also an excel-

lent example of the weight of time and historical setting. Otti Berger was one of the weavers who adopted their skills from the lively Nordic weaving cultures. In the Nordic countries, handweaving has remained, until today, a relevant medium for designers and artists and also a serious and popular hobby for many non-professionals.

In Finland, textile art tuition in the country's only design school in Helsinki began formally in 1929 when a weaving workshop started. However, handlooms had already been brought into the school before that, which communicates the central role of textiles in the modernization of design—with or without Bauhaus impact. The handloom was taken by educated designers as a productive tool, and this method was quite successful. As in the Bauhaus, we know now that the weaving workshop was commercially the most successful department of the school.¹⁰

Bauhaus in the Library

The collections of the Museum of Architecture contain several volumes from when the Bauhaus was located in Dessau from 1925 until 1933. The series of Bauhausbücher is obviously among the most influential together



with the books by Bauhaus teachers from other publishers.

The core collection of the museum's Bauhaus books is the volumes owned by architect Erik Bryggman, donated together with his drawing collection in 1989. Bryggman had brought some of the volumes with him from his visit in summer 1928.

The following summer, the Turku 700th anniversary, designed by Alvar Aalto and Erik Bryggman, opened. It has been seen as the first realization of new modern architecture in Finland. Bryggman's visit to Bauhaus certainly influenced his view of architecture.

Based on architects' donations to the Museum of Architecture library, several publications can be found over the decades. The most popular seems to have been J. J. P. Oud's *Holländische Architektur* from 1926 (*Bauhausbücher* 10). It belonged to the home/work libraries of Sigurd Frosterus, Risto-Veikko Luukkonen, Aili-Salli Ahde-Kjälldman, Erik Bryggman, and P. E. and Märta Blomstedt at the least.

The influence of the Bauhaus on Finnish architecture at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s can be seen above all in changes related to visual presentation: the way

architectural photography was taken, a new graphic look for journals, new types of fonts in architectural drawings, and the spread of new modern architecture through spectacular publications. Its later influence has primarily related to the organization of architects' education on the basis of the new modern ideas presented by the Bauhaus.

In that sense, it is interesting that the Bauhaus journal is not to be found in the records of either the Finnish Architects Association or Helsinki University of Technology. Based on archival records, however, we know that the journal was freshly acquired by the library of the School of Art and Design and that the issues were studied eagerly.¹¹

Endnotes

1 Riitta Nikula (toim.), *Erik Bryggman 1891-1955, arkkitehti* (Helsinki: Suomen rakennustaiteen museo, 1991).

2 Alvar Aalto Museum, list of Aalto's travels: 1931 Berlin CIAM inner circle meeting 4.-6.7. Visit to Dessau, home of Joseph Albers.

3 Teppo Jokinen, *Erkki Huttunen liikelaitosten ja yhteisöjen arkkitehtina 1928-1939*. Jyväskylä studies in the arts 41 (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1993).

4 Bauhaus, toim. Karl-Georg Bitterberg, suom. Vilma Vaikonpää. Stuttgartin ulkomaisten

kulttuurisuhteiden instituutin julkaisu yhteistyössä Suomen rakennustaiteen museon, Taideteollisuusmuseon ja Helsingin Goethe-instituutin kanssa (Stuttgart: Cantz'sche Druckerei, 1983).

5 Sakari Saarikivi. "Weimarin Bauhaus Ate-neumissa". *Helsingin sanomat* 14.4.1967; Bauhaus. Staatliches Bauhaus i Weimar. Verkstädernas arbeten från åren 1919-1925. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Weimar & Finlands konstakademis avdelning för konstbildning. Finlands konstakademis vandringsutställning 24/1967.

6 *Kun nykyaikaa rakennettiin: Bauhaus*. Risto Hallaste, Severi Parko and Seppo Miettinen, reader Teppo Ivaska. YLE, 1967, <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50168933>.

7 *Kaj Franck. Muotoilija formgivare designer*, toim. Kaj Kalin et al. (Helsinki: WSOY, 1992).

8 Kärt Summatavet & Leena Svinhufvud, "Takaisin 1970-luvulle – taideteollisuuden opettaja-haastattelut muotoiluhistorian lähteenä", *Tahiti* 3/2014, <https://tahiti.journal.fi/article/view/85540/44490>

9 T'ai Smith, *Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

10 Leena Svinhufvud, Hand-woven fabrics by yard. Unveiling modern industry of the interwar period, in Kjetil Fallan ed., *Scandinavian design: Alternative histories*, ed. Kjetil Fallan (London: Berg Publishers, 2012), 48–64.

11 Today, both the Helsinki University of Technology and the School of Art and Design form Aalto University together with the Helsinki School of Economics.

