

The Heritage of Mies

BY NORBERT HANENBERG, DANIEL LOHMANN AND CHRISTIAN RAABE

Mies van der Rohe's built work covers a timeframe of over 60 years, including two world wars and several revolutionary events in the history of architecture. The extraordinary architect has influenced 20th century architecture worldwide like few others have. In the context of several restoration projects, the time has come to review the condition of his buildings: Is their materiality as timeless as their appearance? Did his constructions, which are of sometimes an experimental nature, prove to be sustainable, or did they fall into disrepair? How can Mies van der Rohe buildings be documented, repaired, restored, reconstructed, without losing the characteristic details of his work, and in order to preserve the architectural integrity and relevance of the Mies van der Rohe's oeuvre?

This journal is the result of a set of activities concerned with the documentation, restoration and artistic reception of the oeuvre of Mies van der Rohe. These endeavors go way beyond questions of an adequate conservation and restoration of his preserved buildings. They begin with an academic approach towards Mies van der Rohe's oeuvre in the context of several architecture schools, where his buildings are the focus of hand-in-hand teaching and research. The work with a current generation of architecture students and future protagonists may offer a relevant contribution to the actuality of Mies van der Rohe, especially in the discussion about Modern Movement and its allocation in a system of values that must be repeatedly reconsidered. In times of changing scientific objectives and methodology, research about this architect may offer new approaches and results, despite the large amount of literature that has shaped our image of Mies van der Rohe as an architect and a leading character of modernism. But beyond all theory, numerous projects from the practical world of conservation and restoration dealing with Mies van der Rohe's built work have been initiated or finished recently, after many of his buildings have reached the end of a chapter in their lifecycle. Finally, several quite diverse approaches to the curatorial dissemination of Mies van der Rohe's work through classical exhibitions and other ways of artistic reception and presentation have helped to show the role of modern architecture as a whole and its impact and relevance for our society.

The aim of this journal was to create a broad overview on the recent and current activities concerned with the heritage of Mies van der Rohe.

The exhibition *Mies and the Inheritance of Modernism*, which (Schunck* Glaspaleis Heerlen, Netherlands, April–August 2016) presented an overview of the built work of Mies van der Rohe with a detailed focus on five buildings and the

methods of their preservation and restoration. Through this exhibit, and its broad framework program of lectures, symposia and guided tours, awareness was successfully raised for the concerns of heritage conservation of modernism and especially the built work of Mies van der Rohe. The contribution of curator Andrea Croé in this issue gives a good insight into the general concept.

The essays present restoration projects and other activities from academia and dissemination, and follow the chronological order within the professional life of Mies van der Rohe. He was born in 1886 as the youngest son of a stonemason in the West German city of Aachen. Around the occasion of celebrating 130 years since Mies van der Rohe's birth, researchers Maike Scholz and Daniel Lohmann have gathered new information about Mies van der Rohe's professional and personal relations to his home town, in order to add a dimension to the understanding of his first years in practice and his later work.

Amongst the numerous assignments that Mies van der Rohe received from Krefeld, Germany, the silk factory *Verseidag* has been disproportionately neglected in research, although it was the only industrial building that he ever built. On the occasion of current reuse and restoration work, a group of researchers and students directed by Norbert Hanenberg and Daniel Lohmann joined the team of architects and restorers to provide a scientific consultancy. Their article shows the way in which restoration decisions are based on current investigations into the history and materiality of the building. A new tenant in the former gatehouse of the silk factory is the company Interface, who is contributing to revive the site. Interface has developed a strong interest in *Verseidag's* history and restoration, and has been a supporter in the realisation of this issue of the **docomomo Journal**.

Also in Krefeld, in the summer of 2013, an initiative of Christiane Lange led to a widely perceived and respected exhibition of a temporary artistic reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe's unbuilt Golf Club as a 1:1 model. In her article, she describes the project's background and the way, in which the architects Paul Robbrecht and Hilde Daem created an adequate and intelligent enrichment of the current discussion about full reconstruction through deliberate artistic abstraction and interpretation.

Concerned with the Krefeld commissions of Mies van der Rohe, Norbert Hanenberg and Daniel Lohmann have gathered new material from the archives of the *Verseidag* company archives to clarify the architectural history of the urban layout of the plant, and the possible involvement of

Mies van der Rohe in this process. In this way, the correlation of this last of his pre-war European commissions to his first American project – the urban design of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago – was investigated and offered new information about continuity in his oeuvre.

The paper about the restoration of the Tugendhat house in Brno, Czech Republic by Ana Tostões, Ivo Hammer and Zara Ferreira present the spectrum between historic significance, thorough research and careful restoration that led to the revitalization and restored accessibility of the public to one of Mies van der Rohe's masterpieces.

Two of the buildings on the IIT campus have been restored recently, and help to show the importance of thorough preparatory studies in order to execute a comprehensive refurbishment preserving the building's structural and visual integrity. In the first article, Mark Sexton and his team deliver insight into the intense forensic research that was carried out on the S. R. Crown Hall, the heart of the Chicago campus, and the complex path towards material choices for its repair, in order to closely maintain the originally intended appearance of the Mies van der Rohe masterpiece. Secondly, Gunny Harboe was facing quite similar challenges in his restoration project of Robert F. Carr Memorial Chapel of Saint Savior, whose minimalism is expressed in the nickname "God Box". His article shows how the small building on the IIT campus was restored over a long period of time with challenging financial means, in order to rehabilitate the important religious and social function of the building on the campus.

Back in Berlin, Germany, and after its opening in 1968, the *Neue Nationalgalerie* had been in continuous intense use since its construction and was in urgent need of restoration. Because of the immense significance of the building, a meticulous process is currently being carried out in the coordination of a team of architects in the office of David Chipperfield. As the article by Martijn Jaspers shows, the project may serve as a textbook example of conservation in the future, in the same way that Chipperfield's *Neues Museum* concept has already enriched the conservation discussion not only in Berlin and Germany, but internationally.

With this variety of essays, not only significant restoration solutions are documented through different projects of outstanding value and in varying dimensions, but also a range of diverse methodologies for research and conservation. Historic building research contributes to understand and preserve the work of Mies van der Rohe. The survey of the original substance gives indications of the time determination of individual components and provides evidence for the reconstruction of the architectural concept and the process of construction. As shown in the case of the survey of the Verseedag site and the restoration of the Crown Hall, new assignments to the oeuvre are possible and temporal developments become visible. Without an understanding of the building's idea, the structure and the substance, restoration work and thus the preservation of the buildings of Mies van der Rohe are unthinkable.

His architecture is essentially determined by the selection and fitting of materials and less by constructive inventions. If we understand the concept of Tectonics in architecture

as a narrative element that leads the spatial structure, the volumes of material and space as the appearance of the materiality to a concerted statement, then this is very similar to the work of his important model Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Both combine traditions of architecture with their own new ideas. In this sense Schinkel commented very carefully on his *Bauakademie*:

"Some will rarely notice the novelty, whose (...) merit will lie more in the consistent application of a quantity of inventions made over a long period, which could not be brought together before in architecture"¹.

Notes

- 1 Mackowsky, H., *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Briefe, Tagebücher, Gedanken*, Berlin, 1922, 194 (Free translation).

Norbert Hanenberg

Architecture Studies at RWTH Aachen and University of the Arts in Berlin. Freelance architect since 2005 in Vienna (until 2014) and Aachen. Scientific researcher and lecturer for Design and Construction at RWTH Aachen University (2001-2013). Professor for Design and Construction at OWL University of Applied Sciences in Detmold, Germany (2015-2016). Professor for Design and Construction at THM University of Applied Sciences in Gießen, Germany (since 2016).

Daniel Lohmann

Architecture studies at RWTH Aachen and Edinburgh College of Art. Freelance architect in documentation and conservation since 2004. Research grant of the German Archaeological Institute (2006-2009). PhD degree from BTU Cottbus University (2015). Scientific researcher and lecturer for conservation and documentation at RWTH Aachen University (2009-2017). Professor for the History of Architecture at TH Koeln University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany (since 2017).

Christian Raabe

Architecture studies at Technical University of Berlin. PhD from RWTH Aachen University in 2007, where he is Full Professor for Historic Building Conservation and Research at the Faculty of Architecture. Scientific researcher and assistant professor at the Institute for History of Construction at the University of Cottbus (1993-1994). Lecturer at the International Film School in Cologne (1998-2002), and at the Berlin University of Applied Science (2001-2004). Founder and practicing architect at *Abri+Raabe Architekten*, since 1994, in partnership Martina Abri. Development of several conservation projects, such as the restoration of different Karl Friedrich Schinkel's architectural works. He has received the Schinkel Award by the Association of Architects and Engineers in Berlin (1997), and the Borchers Plaque by the RWTH Aachen University (2009).



01 Teaching on-site. RWTH Aachen teachers and students in Mies van der Rohe's *Verseedag* factory, Krefeld, Germany. © Daniel Lohmann, 2014.