



Karin Kirsch

**The Weissenhofsiedlung. Experimental Housing
 Built for the Deutscher Werkbund, Stuttgart, 1927**

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Karin Kirsch studied and worked under Herbert Hirche, a Bauhaus student and staff member of Mies van der Rohe in Berlin. She taught architectural history and other subjects at the Hochschule für Technik Stuttgart. She devoted intensive research not only to the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart but also to Japan's influence on modern architecture and devised two exhibitions for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen that were shown very successfully in 40 cities all over the world.

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Karin Kirsch The Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart, 1927

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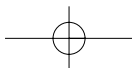
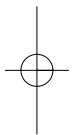
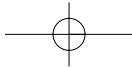
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Drawings from architects' final plans
by Gerhard Kirsch

Edition Axel Menges

To whom?
Gerhard, Konrad and Valentin Kirsch

To whom besides?
Gustaf Stotz

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
I THE CLIMATE AFTER WORLD WAR I	
Politics and Society	9
The Cultural Situation in Stuttgart	10
The Deutscher Werkbund	12
The Revolutionary Groupings of November 1918:	
Arbeitsrat für Kunst and Novembergruppe	14
Der Zehnerring and Der Ring	16
Der Block	16
II THE WERKBUND EXHIBITION	
The Aims of the 1927 Exhibition	17
The Opening	18
The International Exhibition of Modern Architecture:	
Designs and Models	21
Indoor Exhibitions: Gewerbehalle and	
Stadtgartenumgang	24
The Weissenhof Test Lot	30
III THE WEISSENHOF SIEDLUNG	
Prologue	33
Choice of Site and Evolution of Site Layout	33
The Selection Process	41
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: Houses 1, 2, 3, 4	47
Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud: Houses 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	77
Victor Bourgeois: House 10	88
Adolf Gustav Schneck: Houses 11, 12	93
Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret: Houses 13, 14, 15	100
Walter Gropius: Houses 16, 17	120
Ludwig Hilberseimer: House 18	128
Bruno Taut: House 19	134
Hans Poelzig: House 20	141
Richard Döcker: Houses 21, 22	147
Max Taut: Houses 23, 24	154
Adolf Rading: House 25	159
Josef Frank: Houses 26, 27	164
Mart Stam: Houses 28, 29, 30	168
Peter Behrens: Houses 31, 32	176
Hans Scharoun: House 33	187
APPENDIX A	195
The Deutscher Werkbund Announces the 1927 Stuttgart Exhibition, December 1926	
APPENDIX B	197
Mies van der Rohe's Undated List of Types (Siedlungstypen)	
APPENDIX C	198
Mies van der Rohe Sums Up, 1927	
APPENDIX D	199
Some Contemporary Reactions	
CHRONOLOGY	202
BIOGRAPHIES	203
NOTES	209
BIBLIOGRAPHY	217
GLOSSARY OF GERMAN TERMS	220
INDEX	221

PREFACE

"The problems of the New Dwelling stem from the altered material, social and intellectual structure of our time; only on that basis can these problems be understood.

The degree of structural change determines the character and extent of the problems. They are in no way arbitrary.

They cannot be solved with catchwords, nor can they be made to go away by using catchwords.

The problem of rationalization and standardization is only a subproblem. Rationalization and standardization are only means, and must never be an end. The problem of the New Dwelling is basically an intellectual problem and the struggle for the New Dwelling is only one element in the great struggle for new lifestyles."

(Mies van der Rohe, preface to the 1927 exhibition catalogue)

The fundamental significance of the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart for the history of early modern architecture should not be underestimated. Almost all the influential architects of the 20th century built their proposed solutions in response to the theme "a home for modern city dwellers" on the beautifully located slope on the north side of Stuttgart. The choice of architects and the fact that a project of this type could be implemented at all so few years after World War I and the inflation, is one of the outstanding characteristics of this building exhibition.

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An interesting situation thus arose: Members of the municipal council belonging to all social classes had to decide on the merits of this pioneering project. The majority voted for it on 29 July 1926. The result is surprisingly unambiguous: 25 yes votes, 11 no votes and 6 abstentions.

One might think that after the municipal council approved the project nothing stood in the way of its implementation. Far from it. The members of the council's construction department interfered even in the selection of architects. For instance, they rejected Le Corbusier, who was from western Switzerland, for "national reasons" and Hans Scharoun because of his "peculiar artistic attitude". At the time, so shortly after the end of World War I, rejection for "national reasons" was understand-

able for everyone: Western Switzerland is French Switzerland, and France was Germany's traditional enemy. It was possible to take care of all these details. As a result of an argument about the architects' fees in 1926, Erich Mendelsohn, Heinrich Tessenow and Hugo Häring, who had until then been scheduled to be part of the building team, were replaced by Peter Behrens, Bruno Taut and Victor Bourgeois. Bourgeois designed a building for a private client at the site where the Viennese architect Adolf Loos would have planned to build. (See the chapter on Victor Bourgeois.)

How did this project ever come to Stuttgart, anyway? What made it possible was a favorable constellation of both personnel and chronological circumstances. Gustaf Stotz must be regarded as the project's initiator. It was he who managed to fire up the enthusiasm of the leadership of the German Werkbund and of the city about the project. It is also thanks to him that Mies van der Rohe undertook to be its artistic director. In an interview with the curator of the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Ludwig Glaeser, Erna Stotz denied that Stotz had become aware of Mies through the German Werkbund, saying that it had happened as a result of the publications of avant-garde groups. "And then my husband decided it had to be somebody who was prominent, actually a dark horse" – a truly unusual selection criterion by today's standards, though a shrewd one.

Mies and many of the architects of the Weissenhofsiedlung were relatively young and not established. They had a fine reputation in avant-garde circles, but hardly outside them. This explains why they were rejected by Paul Bonatz and Paul Schmitthenner, two esteemed academicians and practicing architects in Stuttgart. Moreover, in the German Werkbund the entire project was regarded as not really important – a sort of practice piece for a "world building exhibition" that would take place in Berlin in 1930. It is true that there was a building exhibition there in 1931, but due to the international economic crisis and unemployment at the end of the 1920s the exhibition proved to be much more modest than the planners had intended. The building of the Weissenhofsiedlung took place exactly in the timespan between the great inflation and great depression. There would have been no chance of implementing the project of the German Werkbund and the city of Stuttgart either prior or subsequent to this period.

The Weissenhofsiedlung was the core of the Werkbund exhibition titled "the dwelling" ("Die Wohnung"), which opened on 23 July 1927. It included a total of four parts and was sited at three different Stuttgart locations. The Weissenhofsiedlung, with 21 houses comprising 63 dwellings, was built and furnished by 17 architects, i.e. altogether 55 architects and interior architects. On an

adjacent site, the "experimentation site", there was a display of building materials and construction methods. In the center of town there was an exhibition of hand-picked home furnishings and the "Internationale Plan- und Modellausstellung neuer Baukunst" (international plan and model exhibition of new architecture). The latter was nothing more and nothing less than an initial and, as it turned out, important inventory of early modern architecture. Architects from ten countries, in more than 500 exhibits, showed their ideas on the regeneration of building and lifestyle. There was increased impact abroad when the exhibition toured 15 European cities. In Sweden students reacted by protesting against outmoded teaching methods, and many architects rethought their approach to their work.

Modernism and its principles radically transformed architecture. Weissenhof, and all that is connected with it, also transformed the lives of the participants. As we all know, from 1933 to 1945 the calamitous National Socialist regime held sway in Germany. The Weissenhof architects were stigmatized and either went into exile or into "inner emigration".

Just as fate scattered the people who had once built a settlement on a Stuttgart slope, the documents relating to the project were scattered in all directions. Some of them were kept in strange places. The entire estate of the exhibition management and the personal estate of Gustaf Stotz were destroyed during or after World War II. Estates relating to the Weissenhofsiedlung were in part preserved in professionally managed archives, while others survived in the private archives of family members.

A particular stroke of luck is the existence of letters, plans and records in the Stuttgart city archive. During World War II, the "important" documents, for instance, those relating to the "Third Reich", were evacuated to "safe" locations in the countryside, while the "unimportant" ones were left in basement files in Stuttgart. The documents in the country were burnt, while those in Stuttgart were preserved in spite of the fact that the city center was almost totally destroyed.

However, not only the documents were miraculously preserved, but so were the houses of the Weissenhofsiedlung. In 1938 the city of Stuttgart sold the settlement, which, soon after the Nazis came to power, had been declared to be the "disgrace of Stuttgart", to the German Reich to be torn down. The tenants moved out in the spring of 1939, and a competition was organized for the new construction of a German V army corps headquarters on this site, but the advent of the war prevented the demolition. However, Allied bombs destroyed the central part of the settlement. During the postwar period additional houses were converted due to ignorance and negligence and were often transformed until they were no longer recognizable, or even razed. Le Corbusier's single-family house was under threat of demolition in the 1950s. Thanks to public protests a period of rethinking began, and the settlement was declared a historical monument. Eleven of the 21 houses that had remained intact were restored and Le Corbusier's terraced house was made accessible to the public as the Weissenhof Museum.

In the 1960s Heinz Rasch, one of the young architects who had been involved in the Weissenhofsiedlung in 1927, wrote the following summarizing statement in the monthly journal of the German Werkbund: "The basic principles developed in the 1920s are the foundation of our modern architecture, whether you like it or not. Load-bearing and separating structural members, cantilevered constructions and suspended storeys und suspended

roofs, as well as cantilevered chairs, movable partition walls ... and much more: the breakdown of a building into walls and openings, the clarifying of the concept of space – that is how it started in the twenties, with 'direction' relating to landscape, street, sun, access, public areas and resting places, etc." He also stated that the additive system, i.e., the addition of "spatial modules like domino pieces", and the "subdivided [system], ... i.e., 'the partitioned suitcase'", were developed as a template.

There is spirit in modernist architecture. Its principles may be partially obsolete today, and other problems may be in need of solving. But the principles have enduring value as a benchmark and comparison. Unlike a number of individualistic approaches in architecture, they are teachable.

Karin Kirsch, August 2012

I THE CLIMATE AFTER WORLD WAR I

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

In the preamble to the Weimar Constitution of 1919, we read

In the wake of the revolution that followed the horrors of World War, the German nation was confronted by the urgent need of a new constitution which would maintain its political and cultural identity by setting its existence as a State on a new legal foundation. Now that all the old sources of power had collapsed, reconstruction could take place only on a basis of total equality, embracing all sections of the people, without regard to occupation or wealth, sex or local origin: and thus on a basis of pure democracy. To this end, only a few weeks after the Revolution, the decree of November 30, 1918, was issued, providing for elections to a National Constituent Assembly. This convened in Weimar on February 6, 1919. . . .

The name of Weimar means for every German, transcending all the vicissitudes of history, the memory of a time when that city witnessed the richest and freest development of German intellectual life.¹

Elections took place in Württemberg on January 12, 1919, and in the Reich as a whole on January 19. In the Württemberg capital, Stuttgart, the task of forming a government fell to a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Wilhelm Blos. His counterpart in the government of the Reich as a whole was Friedrich Ebert, another Social Democrat; the same "Weimar Coalition" was in power nationally and locally.

In Württemberg, where the departing king had taken care, as one of his last public acts, to arrange for the old civil service to be taken over intact by the new State, the restoration of order went more smoothly than in the rest of the Reich. There existed a revolutionary council (or soviet) of workers and soldiers, and even a "brainworkers' soviet" whose members included the architects Bernhard Pankok and Paul Bonatz.

An initial optimism soon succumbed to an inflation to this day remembered with horror. At its climax, in 1923, no price remained stationary for more than a few days or even hours. Every citizen suffered a financial body-blow. The main sufferers were the middle class, the wage and salary earners, and the unemployed. The situation was stabilized by the introduction of the Rentenmark (exchanged for the existing paper currency at the rate of 1 to 1 trillion, on and after October 23, 1923) and later (from August 30, 1924) the new Reichsmark. A brief interlude of peace and reconstruction in the economy, in housing, and in politics made possible the building of an experimental housing project at Weis-

senhof, in Stuttgart—the Weissenhofsiedlung.

This was a time of seeming stability in Germany, starting with a shift of about two million votes from the extremist parties to the SPD during 1924 (when there were two Reichstag elections); nor was there any great change for the following three-and-a-half years, after which the Socialists again increased their vote. The Mark remained steady, thanks largely to American investment following the Dawes Plan, and there was a high level of public spending.²

Architecture and design in Germany had been crippled by the war years. Either the architects went off to war, like other sections of the population, in a mood of patriotic enthusiasm, or else they totally rejected the war and anything connected with it—as did Bruno Taut, who so weakened his body through hunger that the medical board had no alternative but to classify him as unfit to serve. This status, once achieved, had to be maintained: Taut took on a job as resident architect in a munitions factory, and then an office job in a factory making furnaces, to make sure that he was not just "unfit" but "engaged in essential work."³

Instead of silver spoons and luxury flatware, the factory owned by the champion of modern design and chairman of the Deutscher Werkbund, Peter Bruckmann, was making grenades, which were then shipped in packing-cases made in the workshops of the "Pope of Furniture," Karl Schmidt, at Hellerau.⁴ The few commissions forthcoming at the end of the war went to established architects. The "young" were deprived of work, although not of ideas; the resulting enforced theoretical activity lasted almost halfway through the 1920s.

Military equipment and its spare parts, the assembly of prefabricated components in improvised workshops, exactness of fit, and truth to materials were the essential wartime lessons that sparked off a rethinking of the building process: "standardization, normalization, rationalization, puritanism, constructivism, functionalism" was Emanuel Margold's summary of the "slogan mania" that now set in.⁵ The enthusiasm for forms derived from structure (or apparently derived from structure and from clearly definable function) was summarized by Le Corbusier:

Our eyes are constructed to enable us to see forms in light.

Primary forms are beautiful forms, because they can be clearly appreciated.

Architects today no longer achieve these simple forms.

Working by calculation, engineers employ geo-

metrical forms, satisfying our eyes by their geometry and our understanding by their mathematics; their work is on the direct line of good art.⁶

The automobile, the ocean liner, and the airplane as the signs of a new spirit—signs which would be industrially produced—led Le Corbusier to reflect on the problem of the house, speaking for his own generation:

The airplane is the product of close selection. The lesson of the airplane lies in the logic which governed the statement of the problem and its realization.

The problem of the house has not yet been stated. Nevertheless there do exist standards for the dwelling house. Machinery contains in itself the factor of economy, which makes for selection. The house is a machine for living in.⁷

Was this standardization, as Hermann Muthesius had used the term? Certainly, no slogan did more to inflame the imagination and to promote the debate about new ways of building, and of living, than did Le Corbusier's phrase, "a machine for living in."

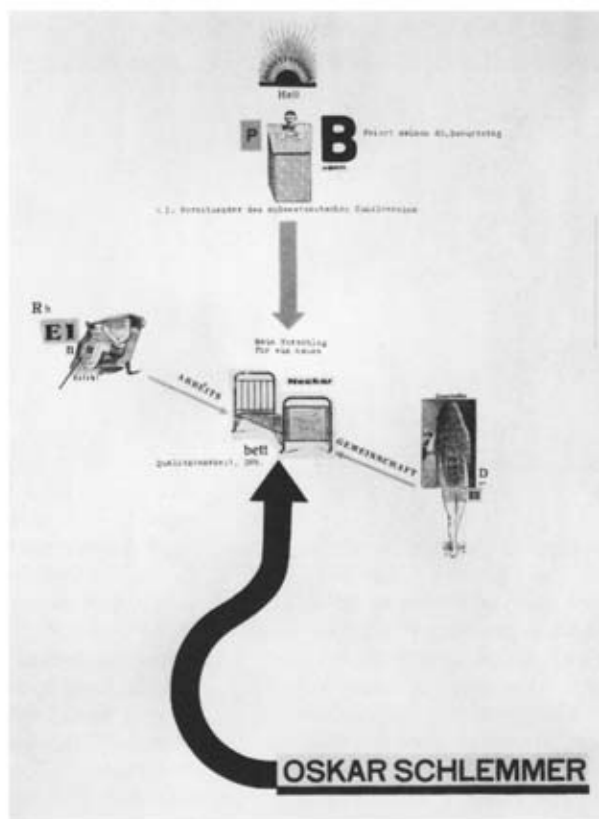
THE CULTURAL SITUATION IN STUTTGART

The history of the Weissenhofsiedlung project is also the story of individuals. For many, their part in this project was a decisive event in their careers.

The exhibition *Die Wohnung*, held in Stuttgart in 1927, represented the climax of Peter Bruckmann's longstanding commitment to the Deutscher Werkbund and its work for German design. He was involved at the very beginning: at the age of forty-two, vice president and prospective chief of the family silverware firm of P. Bruckmann & Söhne, Heilbronn, he spoke as the representative of industry at the founding ceremony of the Werkbund in Munich in 1907. All his life, Bruckmann upheld the objectives of the Werkbund: to couple excellence in design with commercial success; to enhance the prestige of Germany; and to give precedence to the expressive resources of the present day over the imitation of past forms.

From 1908 to 1909, Bruckmann was deputy chairman of the Deutscher Werkbund; from 1909 to 1919 chairman; from 1919 to 1926 deputy chairman again; and from 1926 to 1932 once more chairman, before becoming honorary chairman. But these were not his only public offices; he was a city councilman in his native Heilbronn, and a member of the Württemberg legislature (the Landtag) representing the German Democratic Party, which he helped to found, and whose chairman he became after the death of Conrad Haussmann. He was an honorary Doctor of Engineering of the Technische Hochschule, Aachen (1920, cited for "services to German quality workmanship"), and of the Württembergische Technische Hochschule, Stuttgart (1924, cited for his pursuit of "ideal and cultural objectives" and his selfless work for the ideals of the Werkbund).

Gustaf Stotz, once an apprentice in the Bruckmann flatware factory, is a background figure who tends to go unmentioned; a street in the Weissenhofsiedlung is named after Peter Bruckmann, but none after Gustaf Stotz. Yet without Stotz the project would never have come to fruition. His boyhood friend, the future West German President Theodor Heuss, was to call him a "propagandist for others";⁸ Mia Seeger has called him a "key figure."⁹



Oskar Schlemmer: collage for Peter Bruckmann's sixtieth birthday, January 13, 1925

As the history of the Weissenhofsiedlung is closely tied to individual personalities, it is also inseparable from the story of the Deutscher Werkbund and from that of the Südwestdeutscher Kanalverein (Southwest German Canal Union). A number of the most important individuals involved in them were the same.

Bruckmann, as has been said, was chairman of the Werkbund for many years. In 1915, while a member of the German Progressive Party, he committed himself to the canalization of the River Neckar. The Südwestdeutscher Kanalverein was set up in 1916 at Maulbronn (a small town in the Kraichgau district that had a fine Benedictine monastery but no access to the Neckar). Bruckmann became chairman of the working committee. From 1919 until well after the Weissenhof project was completed, the Stuttgart addresses of the Kanalverein and the Deutscher Werkbund (or rather its Württemberg section) were identical—at Neckarstrasse 30 until 1919, then on Geiss-Strasse, and then at Eberhardstrasse 3. In 1921, the Kanalverein, as the organization with overall responsibility, set up an incorporated joint-stock company to execute the canal project. Thus there were three organizations at one address;¹⁰ the chairman of two of them was Bruckmann; and the administrator of both the Kanalverein and the Württemberg section (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) of the Werkbund was Stotz.

Among those with whom the Südwestdeutscher Kanalverein had to deal were the elected representatives of the city of Stuttgart, Mayor Dr. Karl Lautenschlager, and Building Commissioner Dr. Daniel Sigloch. It was Lautenschlager who presented Bruckmann on his sixtieth birthday with a painting by Reinhold Nägele of the Neckar canal works, with all the working structures involved. (The same artist was to paint a view of the Weissenhofsiedlung in 1927.)

In the course of the 1920s, the Württemberg section of the Werkbund mounted a succession of exhibitions in Stuttgart. In February and March of 1922, the *Werkbundaussstellung Württembergischer Erzeugnisse* (Werk-



Peter Bruckmann
Gustaf Stotz
Karl Lautenschlager

bund Exhibition of Württemberg Products) at the Staatliches Ausstellungsgebäude, part of the preparatory work for a Munich Trade Show, was intended both to show what Württemberg artists were capable of and to solicit the participation of those who had previously been too diffident or too uncommitted to come forward.¹² In May of 1922, the exhibits finally selected for showing in Munich were collected together. Exhibitions of liturgical objects and of indigo textile printing and garments followed and led to the exhibition *Die Form*, mounted in the newly founded Stuttgarter Handelshof, the former crown prince's palace at Königstrasse 32, as part of the summer art festival, the *Stuttgarter Kunstsommer*, of 1924.

This exhibition, which ran from June 29, 1924 through the end of July, was a kind of dress rehearsal for the larger undertaking of 1927. On a comparatively small scale, it held the nucleus of the idea of the Weissenhof project. A printed "Invitation to Participate in the Werkbund Exhibition *Die Form*" laid down the following principles:

The Deutscher Werkbund has charged its Württemberg section with the execution of the exhibition *Die Form*, which is to include only those objects from the realm of the applied arts which bear no ornament whatsoever. This exhibition will include works from all over Germany and German Austria, which will demonstrate the extraordinary wealth of expression that can be embodied in pure form without the addition of any ornament.¹³

Alongside examples of "technical form," the show also included examples of "primitive form":

The "primitives" are almost all women. And the outstanding examples of technical form stem from men. This seems right: technology has hitherto remained an exclusively male concern. But, just as it takes man and woman together to constitute the true, complete human being, it takes technical and primitive form, seen as one, to give us the true, complete image of our time. . . . Salvation lies only in the Either/Or of technical and primitive form.¹⁴

Die Form subsequently went on tour to four other Ger-

man cities,¹⁶ and was an unqualified success. But one event connected with the 1924 exhibition was to have its repercussions in 1927. Adolf Loos, the high priest of Modernism, visited the exhibition and had an altercation with those responsible on the grounds that his own contribution to the formulation of the show's central idea had not received sufficient credit. Nor, indeed, had it been mentioned at all. As Stotz was to tell Mia Seeger, the story was soon all over Stuttgart and beyond;¹⁵ in consequence, when the Weissenhofsiedlung project came along and architects had to be selected, it was felt that life was going to be difficult enough without Adolf Loos. He was kept out.

It was in the summer of the 1924 *Die Form* exhibition that the government building advisory service (Staatliche Beratungsstelle für das Baugewerbe) organized the first major building exhibition in Germany since the war, *Bauausstellung Stuttgart 1924*.¹⁷ The leading Stuttgart architect in charge of the exhibition, Hugo Keuler, had enlisted as his administrator a City Hall accountant, Carl Hagstotz, who was to play an important part behind the scenes at Weissenhof in 1927; and the show included a wide spectrum of building trade products as well as prefabrication systems and a group



Richard Herre: poster for Werkbund exhibition, *Die Form*, 1924

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| C3 + C4 | 5. Gropius |
| C5 | 6. Hilberseimer |
| C6 | 7. Taut, Bruno |
| C7 | 8. Poelzig |
| C8 + C9 | 9. Döcker |
| C10 + C11 | 10. Taut, Max |
| [D1 + D2 | Dr. Frank] |
| D3 | 11. Scharoun |
| D4, D5, + D6 | 12. Stam |
| D7 + D8 | 13. Behrens |
| D9 | 14. Rading. ⁸⁶ |

Only one name, that of Hans Scharoun, was separately put to the vote at the insistence of the architect and SPD floor leader, Karl Beer, on the grounds of what Beer is reported to have called "the particularly idiosyncratic attitude of this architect in artistic matters." Scharoun was accepted by six votes to one, with three absten-

tions.⁸⁷ The absence of the name of Josef Frank from the list was an oversight.

The publication of the fifteen names in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on December 10, 1926, brought the selection process to an end. Döcker was appointed superintendent.⁸⁸ When Baurat Dr. Schmidt of the city architectural department, on behalf of his chief, Commissioner Sigloch, asked Döcker what were the principles on which the commissions had been distributed, Döcker did not venture on a personal interpretation but consulted Mies, who replied,

Please tell Herr Baurat Schmidt that the architectural commissions were distributed on a basis of appropriateness, and above all with an eye to the greatest possible unity of the project. What else am I supposed to say?⁸⁹

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

HOUSES 1, 2, 3, 4

Design: Mies van der Rohe, architect
Berlin W 35, Am Karlsbad 24

Rental apartment building consisting of four row houses each containing six apartments of varying sizes: cellar, first story, second story, third story, roof story with roof garden, laundries, and in Houses 3 and 4 drying rooms and attics.

Construction: iron frame filled with single-tier brickwork, 4 cm [$1\frac{1}{2}$ in] of Torfisootherm insulation. Plastered to interior and exterior. Ceilings in hollow structural tiles between iron joists. Internal partitions in pumice concrete blockwork, Celotex board, Fulgurit, or plywood.¹

Economic considerations today, in the building of rental units, demand rationalization and standardization of production. The constantly growing diversity of our housing needs, on the other hand, demands great flexibility in the use of the accommodation. In future it will be necessary to do justice to both considerations. Skeleton construction is the most appropriate building system in this case. It permits a rationalized production process and affords every possible scope for varying the internal divisions. If the architect limits himself to treating the kitchen and the bathroom as constants, because of their plumbing, while partitioning the remaining living area with movable walls, I believe that by these means it is possible to satisfy every reasonable dwelling need.²

In these terse words Mies described his Weissenhof apartment building in *Bau und Wohnung*. The formula, with its structural system derived from industry—skeleton construction—dates back to the genesis of his first layout plan. The first model, and the first layout sketch, show a structure of several stories, at the highest point of the development, which seems to be holding the smaller buildings together. As Mies never put anything in writing about the allocation of the buildings to individual architects, it is impossible to be quite sure that he always kept this particular lot in mind for himself; but any alternative supposition would be even more speculative.

The form of the structure underwent a succession of changes from parallel, staggered cubes to the ultimate simplification, a large, wide rectilinear building with windows neatly fitted, almost flush, into a facade articulated only by door canopies and French-looking balconies.

Mies, as his own artistic director, did not enter into correspondence about his building until the time came to start building, when he had dealings on the subject with Döcker, as superintendent, and with city hall. The

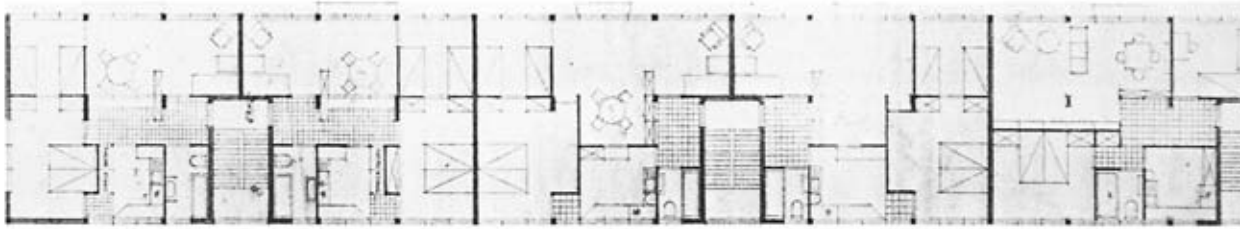
earliest letter on file concerning the design of Mies's building is actually from Schneck, offering the services of his own students as "cheap labor" to prepare plans and working drawings. Schneck particularly praised the skill of Rudolf Frank.³ Mies declined the offer with thanks, saying that he first wanted to work "the thing" through himself; later, however, it might be time to discuss the offer. And, a little later, he does seem to have accepted the offer of assistance.⁴

Schneck was not the only one who offered help: Döcker did the same. With the best of intentions, he wrote Mies, "For your designs, I would recommend drawing sections and basement and roof-level plans, as well as front and rear elevations corresponding to the lie of the land."⁵ Eventually, in exasperation, he gave up; Mies's answers were patronizing, not to say brusque.

Mies, who kept his public utterances terse, left it to the visitors to the exhibition to extract from his laconic explanatory text the quintessence of his design concept—the flexibility of apartment plans according to size of family and individual requirements. It was not the first time he had concerned himself with the problems of flexible floor plans. In 1921, in his project for an office building on Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, he avoided static divisions. "The only fixed points in the whole plan," he told the readers of Bruno Taut's magazine, *Frühlicht*, "are the stair and elevator shafts. All other subdivisions are to be adapted to individual requirements and constructed in glass."⁶

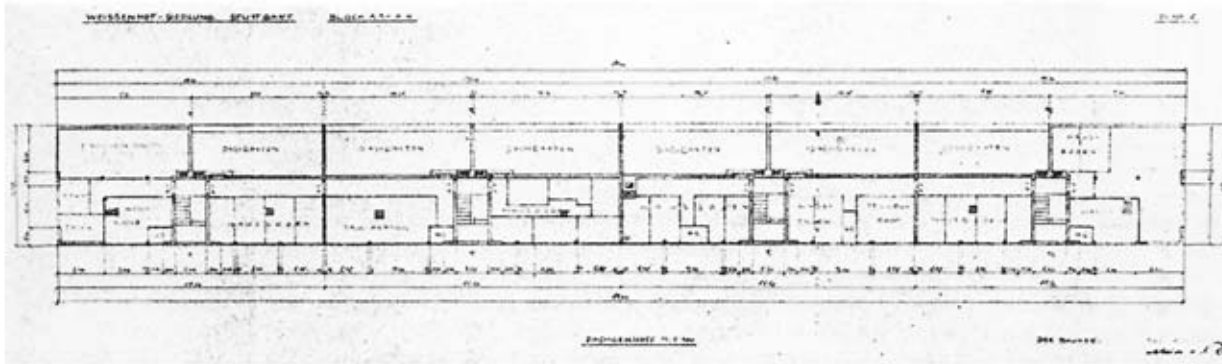
In Stuttgart he demonstrated the wide variety of possibilities by enlisting twenty-nine architects and interior designers (including the thirteen Swiss members of a Schweizer Werkbund collective) to design the interiors of his twenty-four apartments, not before investigating the furnishability of the dwellings from every angle and taking advice from Erna Meyer in matters of cooking and domestic economy. We owe to his correspondence with her—as we do in the cases of Le Corbusier and Oud—some essential statements of planning principle:

As you know, I intend to try out the most varied plans in this apartment house. For the time being, I am building only the outside and common walls, and inside each apartment only the two piers that support the ceiling. All the rest is to be as free as it possibly can be. If I could contrive to get some cheap plywood partitions made, I would treat only the kitchen and the bathroom as fixed spaces, and make the rest of the apartment variable, so that the spaces could be divided according to the needs of the individual tenant. This would have the advantage that it would make it possible to rearrange the apartment whenever family circumstances changed, without spending a lot of

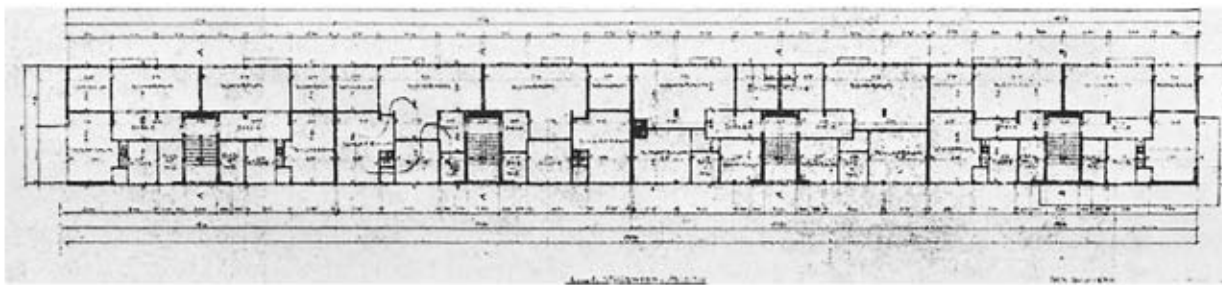


Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: first version of Houses 1–4

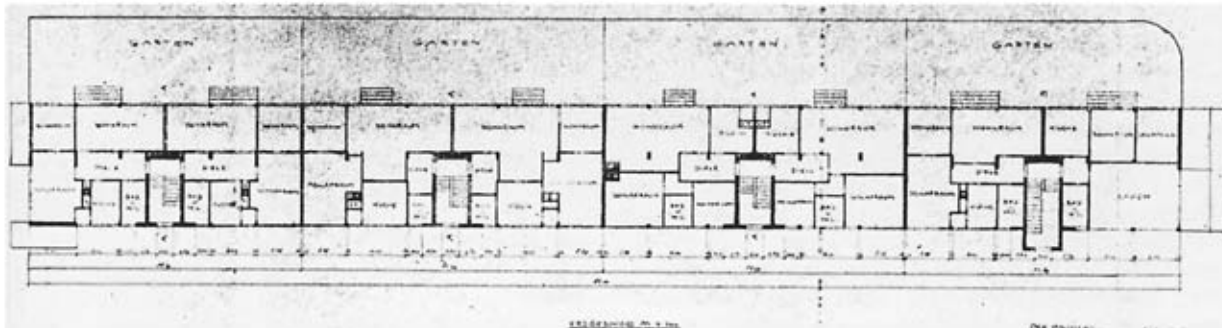
Floor plan study, showing an entrance lobby to each apartment, and various versions of the kitchen balcony demanded by Erna Meyer



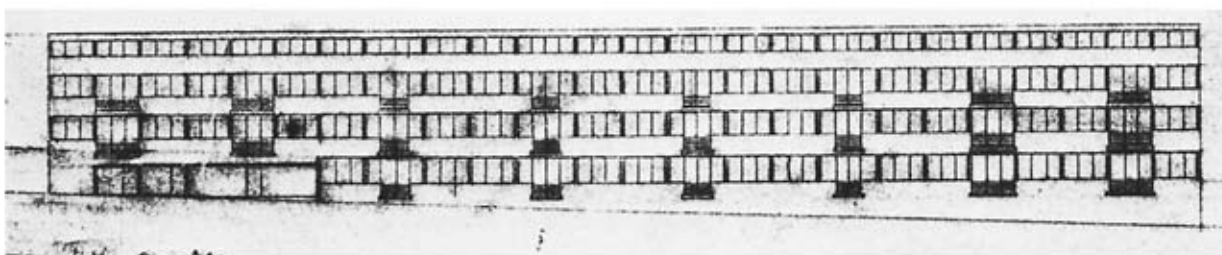
Plan of roof level, showing roof garden and drying and storage rooms, undated, probably December 1926



Plan of upper (second or third) floor showing paired identical floor plans within each house and kitchen balconies



Plan of first floor with same floor layout as second and third floors, but with a retail unit at the south end of the block



Elevation of garden (east) front, undated

money on a conversion. Any carpenter, or any practically minded layman, would be able to shift the walls.⁷

The first version of the design as shown to city hall and the exhibition directorate differed in external and internal form, and in overall dimensions, from the building as it was finally built. Four houses, organized in mirror-image pairs, added up to a considerable length of 84 meters [275½ feet]. The apartments were not, in this first design, partitioned flexibly, but with fixed, although light, partitions. The living room differed from the other rooms only in size. The idea of using it for access to

other parts of the apartment was manifested in only one way—but this quickly attracted criticism, as he told Erna Meyer. Döcker asked Mies how “getting from the parents’ and children’s bedrooms to the toilet by way of the living room” was going to work; and it really was the case in this plan (House 3), that the way from the bedroom to the bathroom (which contained the toilet) was either through the living room or via the kitchen balcony and the kitchen.

In 1927 it became necessary to shorten the building by 12 meters [40 feet] to save costs,⁸ and the organization of the plan changed. The principle of twinned houses was kept, but the mirror symmetry of the apartments

within the houses was abandoned so that larger and smaller apartments faced each other across each stairwell.

Houses 1 through 4 are described in the official catalogue as a "Rental apartment building consisting of 4 row houses." A surviving account of the building by Mies furnishes precise information on the hot-water central heating system, the radiators, the installation of the pipes in the apartments, the design of the ceiling-high internal doors, apartment entrance doors, and external doors, the equipment of the kitchens and bathrooms, with sanitary fittings and gas cooker, and the electrical wiring: "Each room will have a light pendant and a receptacle."⁹

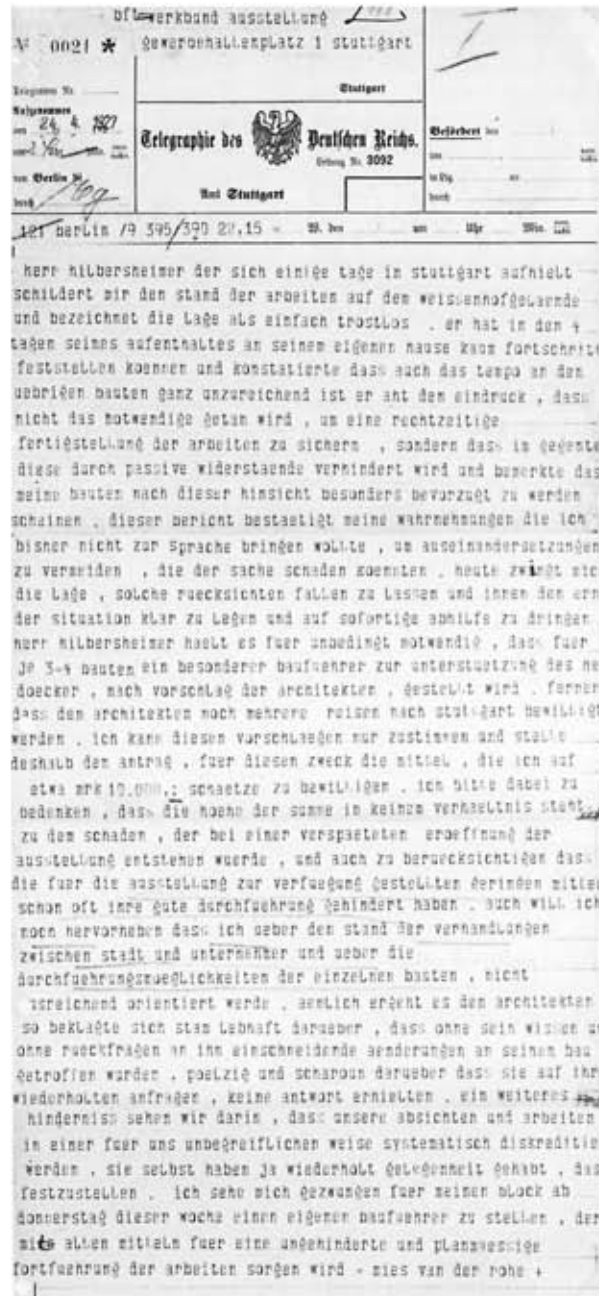
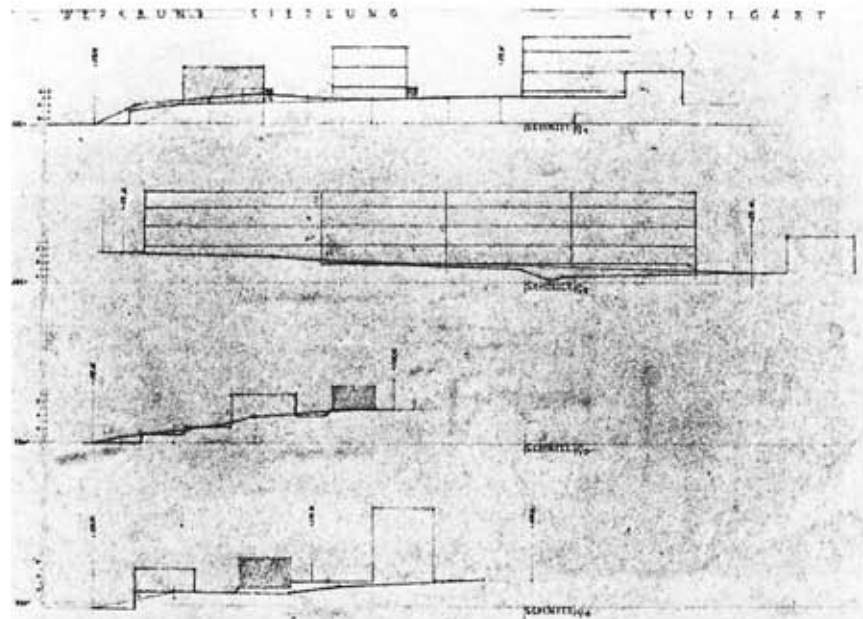
The contract for the work was placed on March 5 with the firm of Stephan, jointly with Stuttgarter Baugeschäft, for a price of 263,000 marks. Döcker's final accounts as superintendent, dated December 30, 1927, show the total net building cost as 310,085.63 marks.¹⁰ Such a large increase in building costs was bound to cause unpleasantness. Mies, who had specified a price of 35 marks per cubic meter for all the prospective participant architects, found himself in the awkward position of having to depart from his own original design because of cost overruns. Worse, although his design changes were repeatedly—and urgently—asked for, they did not arrive in Stuttgart until too late. The excavations for the foundations were already complete: as a result, all work had to be halted and workers let go. The contract was at a standstill—four months before opening day.

This began a tale of woe with consequences even on a personal level; the tension between Döcker and Mies came into the open to such an extent that Döcker eventually refused to act as superintendent for this part of the project.

Not only were the excavations far advanced when the new drawings arrived, the whole planning of the project was called into question by the excessive structural loads involved. The foundations had to be reinforced; on the side facing south, toward Oud's row houses, a concrete raft was laid to bed the house firmly in the back-filled soil on which it was built. Mies had asked the city authorities for exact information on the soil structure but did not get a final answer until the middle of March, 1927, by which time a Berlin civil engineering firm had already done all the calculations.¹¹ Things were made worse by Mies's slowness in sending the necessary drawings; Döcker sent endless imploring cables. Mies did give instructions and send answers, but not enough to keep the work progressing briskly.¹²

When Ludwig Hilberseimer returned to Berlin in April, 1927, after spending a few days in Stuttgart, what he told Mies spurred him to action. Mies wired the exhibition directorate in Stuttgart:

Herr Hilberseimer, who has been in Stuttgart for a few days, has reported to me on the state of the works on the Weissenhof land and describes the situation as simply deplorable. In the four days of his stay he observed virtually no progress on his own house and found the speed of work on the other buildings to be equally unsatisfactory. It is his impression that the necessary steps are not being taken to ensure the punctual completion of the works, but that on the contrary progress is being blocked by passive resistance, and he has observed that my buildings appear to be singled out for particular attention in this respect. This report



Sections, undated

Wire from Mies van der Rohe in Berlin to the exhibition directorate in Stuttgart, April 24, 1927 (for translation see text)

confirms my own impressions, which I have not wished to voice hitherto, in order to avoid controversy which might make matters worse. Now the situation forces me to lay such constraints aside, to make clear to you the seriousness of the situation, and to press for immediate remedial action. Herr Hilberseimer considers it absolutely essential that for every three or four buildings an additional resident architect, to be nominated by the [participant] architects, be appointed to assist Herr Döcker. Also that the architects be allowed additional visits to Stuttgart. I can only concur with these proposals and propose that funds for this purpose, which I estimate at approximately 10,000 marks, be made available. Please consider that the size of this sum bears no relationship to the damage that would result from a delay in the opening of the exhibition, and that the inadequate financial resources granted for the exhibition have already often impaired the progress of the work. I would also emphasize that I am not kept adequately informed as to the status of dealings between the city and the contractors or the practicalities of construction work on individual projects. The same goes for the architects. Thus, Stam complains forcefully that major alterations are being made to his building without his knowledge and without consultation; Poelzig and Scharoun complain that they have received no answer to repeated enquiries. A further obstacle, it seems to us, is that our intentions and our work are systematically disparaged and undermined in a way that to us seems incomprehensible. You yourselves have repeatedly been in a position to observe this. I have no alternative but to appoint, with effect from Thursday of this week, a resident architect for my own building, who will devote all his efforts to ensuring that work proceeds unhindered and according to schedule.¹³

The representative whom Mies sent to Stuttgart, to save the situation and expedite the work, was Ernst Walther. On arriving, Walther's initial reaction was that "all concerned have done their best to further the work," and that the main trouble was a shortage of building materials in southern Germany.¹⁴ He was very soon disabused, and found himself blocked at every turn. He was refused any responsibility for the building. Deputy Mayor Sigloch came along in person and told him that he was not recognized as resident architect, and that he was to do nothing on his own authority. Walther was to work through the existing resident management—the same management that Mies had so sharply criticized in his telegram. Walther wrote to Mies: "Since the last wire the gentlemen here have not a good word to say for Herr Mies, or for Herr Hilberseimer either."¹⁵

The contractor, Stephan, gave an entirely different account of the reasons for the slow progress of the building work, especially the work on Mies's building. He wrote to the city architectural department:

I must stress once more that I very much regret that, on this highly important project, "rapid construction" is turning out to proceed so very slowly. If the choice of materials had been left to me, the shell of the structure would be up and roofed by now. The partitioning and the other work which Herr Mies van der Rohe wants incorporated in the completed shell would have been entirely preserved. . . . I have the impression, increasingly,

that these so-called rapid construction methods are actually techniques for building more slowly.¹⁶

Stephan's comment, which was echoed by his fellow contractor Gustav Epple in connection with Gropius's houses, reflects the conflict that has smoldered ever since the Renaissance between the architect who designs and the craftsman or contractor who executes. The builder is expected to follow instructions exactly, but would prefer, in the light of experience, to do things differently; the architect will not allow it. Thus, Mies strongly resisted Stephan's attempts to alter the construction of the staircases because he could not accept so wide a deviation from his plans. Over less important details such as the smoke flue or the cellar walls he did give in—even when it came to so manifest an impairment of his design as the use of single glazing in the windows in place of double glazing.¹⁷

At Weissenhof Walther wrestled with contractors, foremen, building code officials, and the superintendent's office, and reported back to his "Herr Baumeister" almost daily on the progress of the work, the on-site conflicts, and his own efforts. Walther's enquiries revealed that the situation had been unclear and unsatisfactory from the very start; that Stephan's firm had subcontracted the ironwork to Stuttgarter Baugeschäft, and all concerned had been out of their depth because it was the first steel skeleton construction they had ever done and because the designs of a detail fanatic like Mies made no allowances for the robust, profit-oriented pragmatism of time and the existence of often contradictory pressures from every side. Walther wrote Mies,

It always comes to the same thing: there is always one who was never told, and one who doesn't want to know. . . . There ought to be a resident engineer in the team. . . . I hear that even one of Dr. Döcker's assistants said . . . "Let's give the man from Berlin some say in what happens; he must know best, he did do it in the first place."¹⁸

Walther—a pleasant man, according to Max Berling, Poelzig's resident architect—was surely one of the high-spirited volunteer firefighters who rushed to Mies's building when sunlight reflected from the red wall of Bruno Taut's house opposite appeared to set it alight.¹⁹ No doubt, too, he was one of those resident architects who went to Mies's aid and set him free when he got stuck in the narrow passageway in Le Corbusier's two-family house.²⁰

Apart from the miscalculation of the load on the foundations of Mies's building, many difficulties were caused by the arbitrary changes made to the construction by the various contractors. Mies had prescribed diagonal braces to give rigidity to the skeleton, where the contractor wanted to use masonry infilling: familiar problems which were more acute then than they are now because skeleton construction in residential building was new. The column anchors were not installed as instructed:

Instead of our anchors, which pass right down into the foundations, there are only bolts, 42 cm [16½ in] long, concreted in. . . . No checking has yet begun, because contractors have not supplied the materials on which we based the load calculations asked for by the city engineer's office, but different ones. Hence the constant objections, be-

cause Dr. Schnittmann [city engineer] rightly doubts the correctness of the structural calculations.²¹

Walther's reports are richly informative, but they also betray a resigned acceptance of his own impotence. All this was to change radically when, after an on-site inspection on May 2, 1927, the city authorities agreed to appoint the additional resident architects requested by Mies. The city paid them through mid-July, although some—including Walther and Le Corbusier's resident architect, Alfred Roth—stayed on until September.²²

Mies's relations with Döcker's team became increasingly strained, especially Mies's wire to the directorate. Mies and Döcker continued to correspond on matters of detail, and drawings were passed to and fro, but on Mies's fairly frequent visits to Stuttgart the two men avoided each other. Franz Krause, who worked in Döcker's office, seems to have taken over part of the task of dealing with Mies—and also a considerable proportion of Döcker's duties as superintendent of the project as a whole.²³

Döcker sent out copies of Mies's wire to the other participant architects, with his own comments on its implicit accusations:

As for Herr Mies's own building, on April 21, 1927, I received the further load calculations which are important for the execution of the iron construction, but which were returned to me by the city building control office on the grounds that they were incomplete and too complicated for so simple a structure.

As Herr Mies's wire, if read between the lines, mainly consists of criticisms of me, I would like to say something about the expression "passive resistance." If my own office had not done some of the drawing work for the Mies building, the building would not be so far advanced as it now is. I feel that the less said about the drawings received for the Mies building the better.²⁴

Döcker was not the only one who criticized the way Mies interpreted his position as artistic director of the exhibition: the relevant officials in City Hall, from Sigloch on down, felt the same way. Such was the mood that there was serious thought of taking the job away from Mies and giving it to Döcker. Messages to this effect reached the architects in circulars, and Mies in letters from city hall. He was accused of neglecting his responsibilities and of being far behindhand both with his own building and with the supervision of the other architects, and told that his complaints about City Hall and the superintendent were "sheer hallucinations," and that he would be held responsible for additional costs occasioned by his own dilatoriness.²⁵ Sigloch considered canceling the contract with Mies, and, in accordance with normal practice, took the matter up with the city attorney, Dr. Waldmüller.²⁶

Feelings against Mies were still running high after the site visit on May 2, which led to a review of projected completion dates. It was now clear that neither Mies's apartment building nor Behrens's would be ready for opening day (still at that time set for July 1). Councilman Krämer, one of the council representatives on the main exhibition committee, remarked that this meant that 50 or 60 percent of the project would not be ready to go on show.²⁷

When Döcker replied that at least the most interesting parts of the project, the single-family houses, would

be ready—although some had not yet even been begun—Krämer remarked that his understanding had been that "the primary idea in the whole project had been to provide cheap, modern, and large-scale housing, not houses for single families."²⁸ Döcker mollified him somewhat by saying that Mies's building was in four parts, and that one of these could certainly be completed in time.

The disagreements, the criticism to which Mies was subjected, and the proposal to put Döcker in instead of Mies as artistic director prompted Stotz to interpose "that Herr Mies van der Rohe has already made great sacrifices out of idealism," and that he would be making more in the future. Mies had "traveled far and wide, and gone to great expense, to obtain modern and practical constructional methods for his apartment building."²⁹ The main cause of all the delays, he said, lay in the tardiness of the city departments responsible in dealing with the whole matter, added to by the constant rain.

To remedy the delays the builders worked double shifts, and all the architects were asked to appoint resident associates of their own choice to supervise the work.³⁰ Walther and Roth, who were already at work, were confirmed in office and had their pay backdated.

The unedifying and damaging quarrel between Döcker and Mies was laid to rest on May 13, 1927, by a letter from Bruckmann to all the architects and to the city administration:

As chairman of the Deutscher Werkbund I am anxious to clarify the situation by stating the following facts:

Herr Mies van der Rohe is charged with the direction of the Werkbund exhibition. In this respect nothing has changed. At the meeting on May 3, Dr. Döcker was confirmed in the authority and the duty previously conferred on him, as superintendent architect in charge of building operations for the Weissenhof project, to set up a technical office on the site and to engage further representatives of the participating architects to assist him, in order to make it possible to finish the projected buildings punctually. There has been no change whatever in the authority or the responsibilities involved. Herr Mies van der Rohe is now, as before, in overall charge.³¹

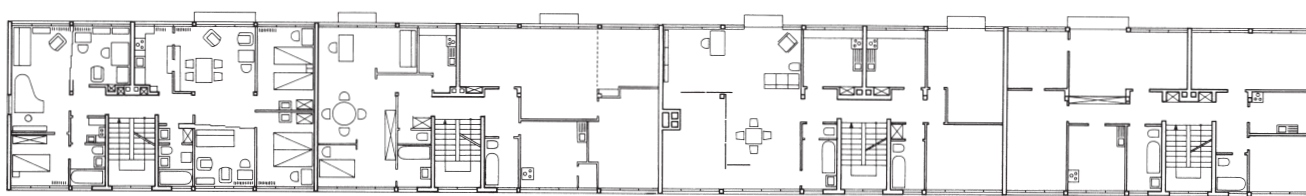
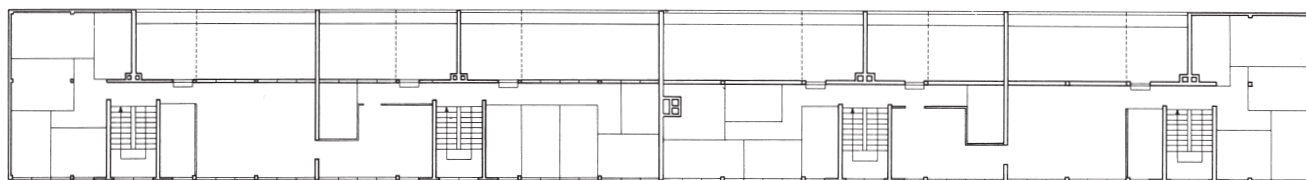
Among Mies's papers there are a number of drafts for this letter of Bruckmann's; all are in Mies's own handwriting.

The division of responsibility had been reaffirmed, but feelings still ran high. Döcker disowned any responsibility for Mies's apartment building; and City Hall was in no mood to do Mies any favors whatever, as the disagreements over its painting were to make only too clear.

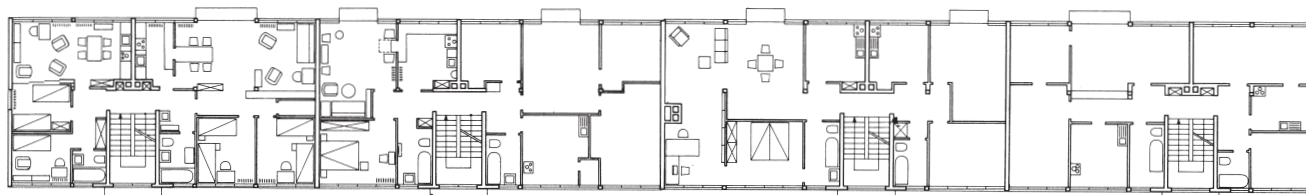
Mies now received an ultimatum to submit an overall design for the outdoor works on the Weissenhof development for city approval by June 10, failing which—or

*Als unter Vorzeichen der D. W. D. Stuttgart zur Klärung der Sachlage
folgendes steht:
Der Herr v. d. Rohe ist zum künstlerischen Leiter und der Herr
Döcker zum technischen Leiter der Weissenhof-Entwicklung ernannt.
Der Herr v. d. Rohe trägt als Oberleitung der Bauarbeiten
für die Häuser selbst und die dazugehörigen Anlagen
die Verantwortung, die Gebäude nach einem Plan und nach
den Bauvorschriften auszuführen und abzuwickeln.
Für den provisorischen und dauerhaften Einrichtungs-
plan der projektierten und bestehenden Dienstleistungen.*

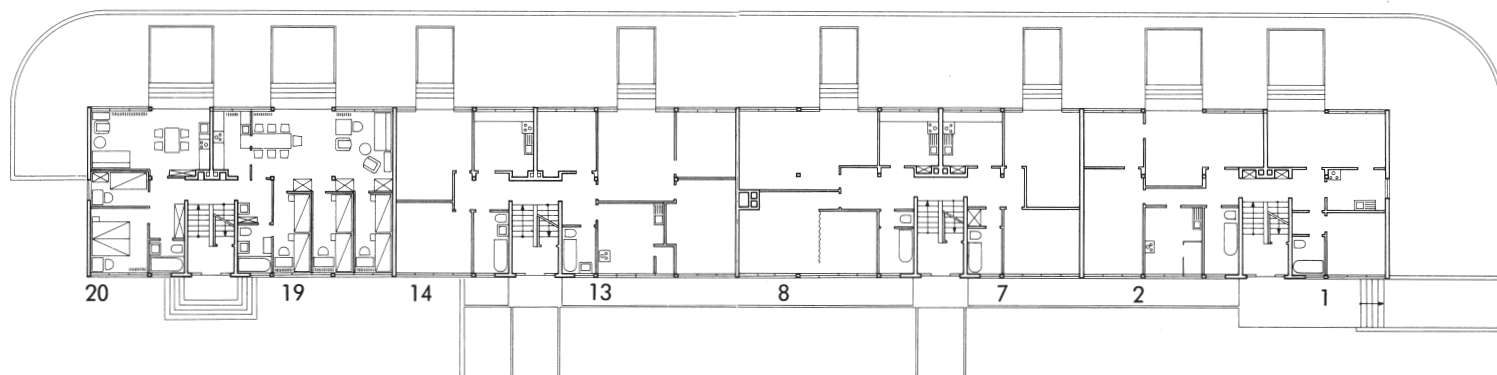
Handwritten draft by
Mies van der Rohe for
Bruckmann's letter of
May 13, 1927



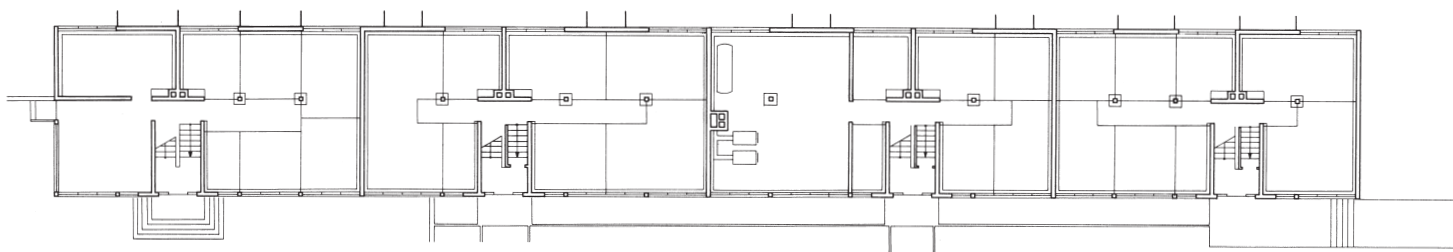
24 23 18 17 12 11 6 5



22 21 16 15 10 9 4 3



20 19 14 13 8 7 2 1



Houses 1, 2, 3, 4
Architect: Ludwig
Mies van der Rohe
Plans and elevations
drawn from the archi-
tect's building code
submissions of March
22, 1927

Roof level with roof
garden, lofts, laun-
dries, drying rooms

Third floor with interi-
ors by (left to right):
(24) Schweizer Werk-
bund, (23) Schweizer
Werkbund, (18) Rasch
brothers, (17) Arthur
Korn, (12) Mies, (11)
Mies (empty), (5) Fer-
dinand Kramer, (6)
Ferdinand Kramer

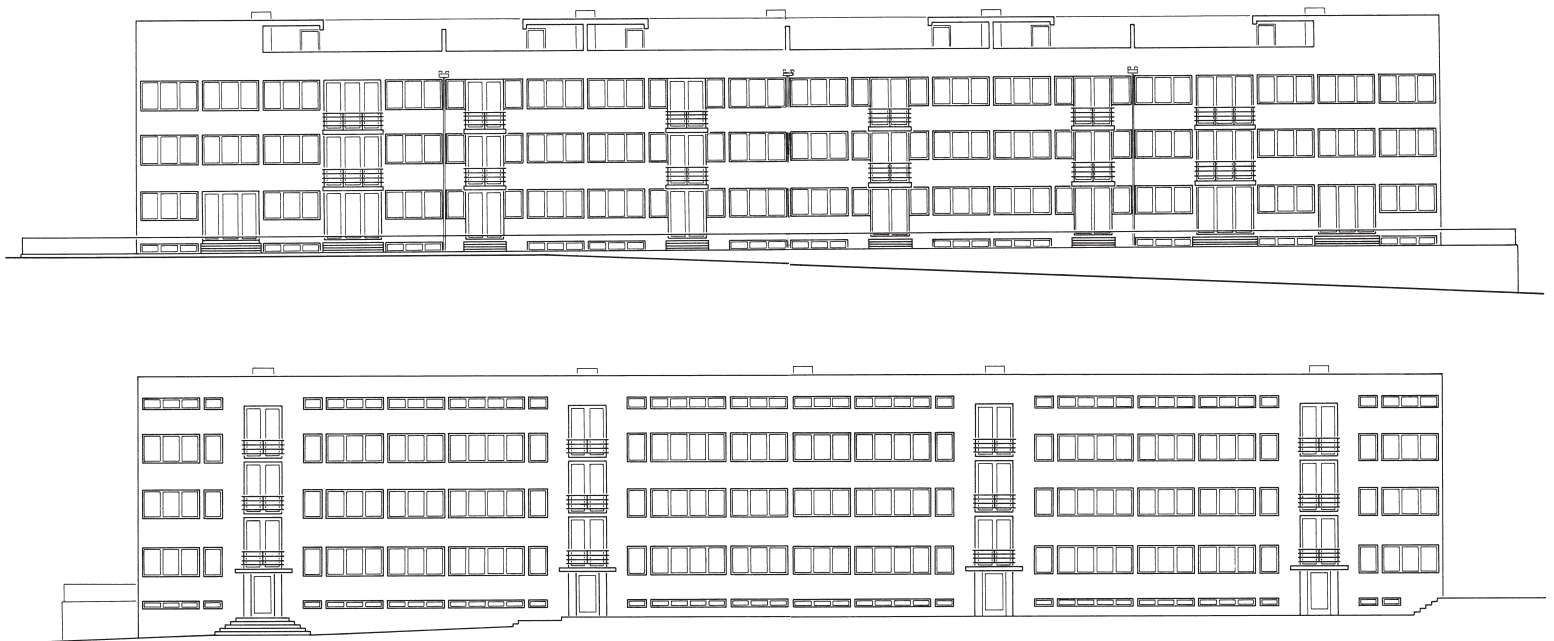
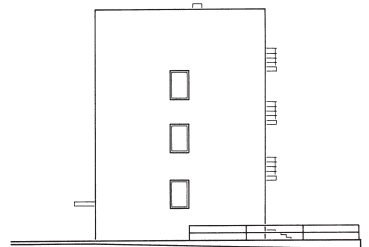
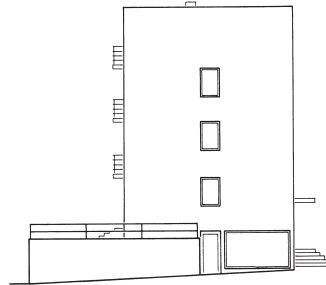
Second floor with in-
teriors by: (22) Sch-
weizer Werkbund,
(21) Schweizer Werk-
bund, (16) Franz
Schuster, (15) Adolf
G. Schneck, (10)
Mies, (9) Erich Dieck-
mann, (4) Adolf Mey-
er (empty), (3) Adolf
Meyer

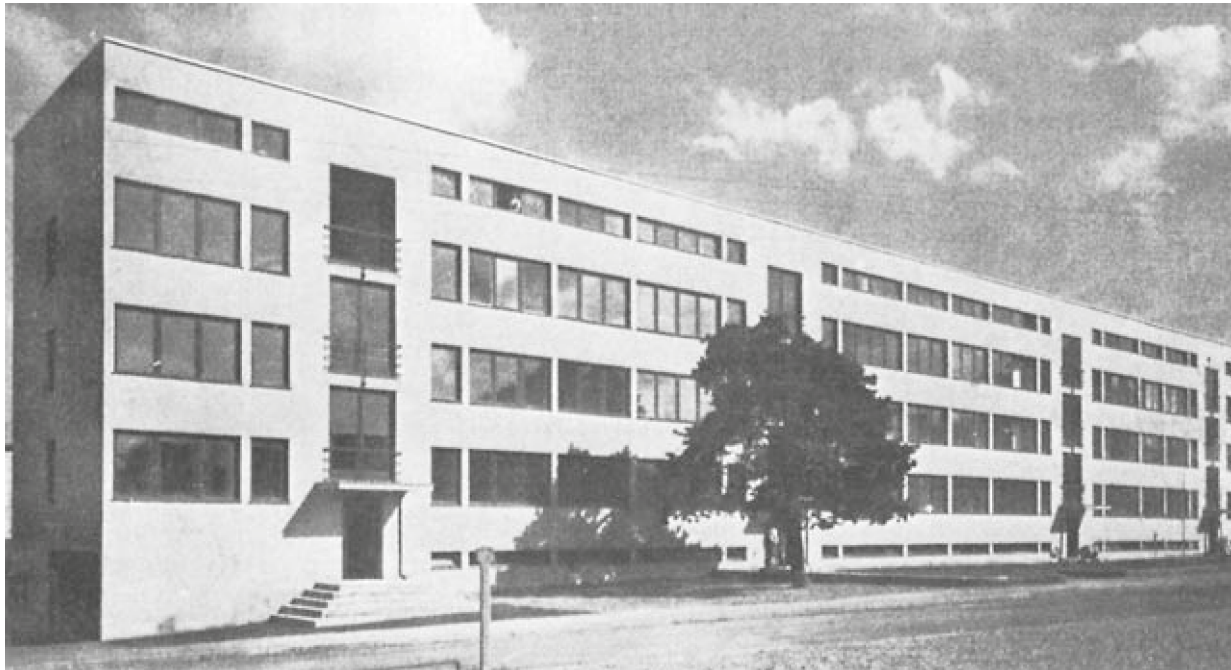
First floor with interi-
ors by: (20) Schweizer
Werkbund, (19) Sch-
weizer Werkbund,
(14) Camille Graeser,
(13) Max Hoene (Bay-
erische Hausratshil-
fe), (8) Lilly Reich, (7)
Rudolf Frank, (2)
Richard Lisker,

(1) "Apartment of the
Professional Wom-
an" by Hans Zimmer-
mann (kitchen),
Reinhold and Marga-
rete Stotz (bedroom),
Walter Schneider (liv-
ing room)

Cellar floor with retail
unit and ancillary
rooms (north end),
store cellars and
heating

This page: elevations
from north, south,
east, west





The Mies building
from the east
(entrance side)

if the plan were to be too expensive—the city as ultimate client for the project would make its own decision on who should make the design, and how.³² No secret was made of the fact that the person whom City Hall had in mind for this was Döcker.

As far as City Hall was concerned, Mies failed the test. He did send a letter in due time, on June 9, in which he gave information on the overall color scheme for the project, and mentioned some outdoor features; but otherwise he limited himself to a brief account of his own on-site work on landscaping. Mies wanted to explain himself on the spot; but City Hall, and Döcker, wanted plans. A senior official of the city architectural department, one Baurat Faerber, wrote on the margin of the letter: "Drawing required! So this is the plan requested for 10th inst. for the environmental works, terracings, boundary and retaining walls, landscaping, and color scheme. Please advise whether Herr Döcker is now to be commissioned to draw up the plans."³³

What were Mies's instructions as to the color scheme? The answer will amaze anyone who has lived through the long debates in recent years over color in the Weissenhof project, and who now goes to look at them in their renovated (not "restored"!) state. Mies instructed "that all the buildings in the Weissenhof project except those of Max Taut and Bruno Taut be painted off-white. . . . I have arranged for sample patches to be painted on, and when I am next there, in the course of the coming week, I shall make a final choice."³⁴

Whether Mies rethought the colors in conjunction with the architects in mid-June, and whether the various tints added to the white were suggested, supervised, or approved by him, is not known. One thing that is certain, however, is that his own building was not painted at all. Mies's surviving papers and the meticulous records kept by the city of Stuttgart reveal that two or three weeks after opening day (July 23, 1927) Mies's building was still not ready, that the final stages of the work were overrunning, and that Döcker's refusal to take responsibility for this building as he did for the others was a contributory cause of the delay.

In mid-August, Mies wanted to have his building scaffolded in order to apply the paint. It must have come as a great surprise to find how unanimously the

city side closed ranks to frustrate him. Dr. Waldmüller, the city attorney, wrote in person to the exhibition directorate: "I have expressly forbidden it [the painting work], because I would regard it as a positive catastrophe for anyone to see scaffolding on this building now, even if only on one part of it."³⁵ This and the orders of Deputy Mayor Sigloch were enough to quash Mies's proposal to scaffold the four houses one at a time for painting.³⁶ The city council building committee confirmed the decision: it resolved "No Painting."³⁷

All this sounds very like revenge—among other things, for the obduracy with which Mies had refused to grant permission to the tenant of the neighboring Schönblick Restaurant (built for the Bau- und Heimstättenverein by an architect, Karl Beer, who was also the SPD leader on the council and a member of the building committee) to run a line of telephone posts the length of Mies's apartment building. When posts were erected, Mies had them torn down so that from the beginning of August onward the restaurant was cut off. The matter was not cleared up until September, 1927, when the exhibition directorate announced that a telephone line had been installed.³⁸

Over the matter of the painting of the walls, City Hall remained implacable; but by patient attention to detail Walther was able to deal with a number of Mies's other complaints. The wrong windows had been delivered, and details of the interior fittings did not conform to the plans: they were replaced.

On September 6, 1927, Mies's building, together with a number of other buildings, was declared "ready for exhibition." On September 9, Walther sent to Berlin some first reactions from visitors: "The general reaction of visitors to Houses 1 through 4 is good. The floor plans are very much liked . . . as for practical experience, I will report in Berlin."³⁹

In 1986, when Mies van der Rohe would have been one hundred years old, Deutsche Bundespost brought out a postage stamp in his honor, and all over the world he was commemorated as a great twentieth-century architect. But in 1927 the overall direction of the Werkbund exhibition was very nearly taken away from him and handed over to Richard Döcker. Stotz and Bruckmann—with some others—stood by Mies, preventing



The Mies building
from the west (garden
side)

what now seems like an act of blasphemy.

From his holiday retreat on the island of Sylt, Mies let City Hall know what was on his mind:

The whole trouble with this exhibition is that our work was initially delayed because people without sufficient professional knowledge found fault with our decisions.

I reserve the right to publish in the architectural press the constructional decisions which we took, and which you presume to criticize, as well as the way in which the matter has been dealt with in practice in Stuttgart.⁴⁰

THE INTERIORS OF MIES'S APARTMENT BUILDING

Mies had declared it his policy to satisfy the requirements of rationalization, standardization, and freedom in the internal division of space through the use of a steel skeleton constructional system with panel walls and continuous window bands; but true flexibility remained to be demonstrated in the detail of the interiors, through the floor plans and furnishings of the individual apartments.

Limited in this only by the fixed position of the stairwells and of the kitchen and bathroom in each apartment, he set out to realize his own concept of "freedom of use," which resided in the combination of maximum flexibility in the interior with a strictly articulated, well-proportioned overall external form. The Mies building as a whole, which from a planning point of view served as the backbone of the whole Weissenhofsiedlung, worked internally as an ordering, unifying force: multiplicity in unity, and multiplicity also beyond that unity.

Once Mies had made up his mind to build a large-scale structure with varied internal plans, and satisfied himself that his conception would work, he needed to prove that the internal partitions could be intelligently resited, not only by him but by any other architect or interested person. Eschewing long-winded explanations, Mies let visitors enter his very austere-looking building and experience for themselves the variety of interior design possibilities that existed within it.

The work was done by architects and interior designers of Mies's choice, working either individually or collectively on one or more apartments. The largest collective was the thirteen-strong Schweizer Werkbund group, which designed six apartments; the smallest was a group of three designers, commissioned by the Commission of Stuttgart Housewives, who did one room each: the kitchen, living room and bedroom of Apartment 1, "The Apartment for a Professional Woman."⁴¹

Mies assigned the jobs, specified materials, supplied technical data, and passed on to the designers the guidelines supplied by Erna Meyer and the Stuttgart housewives' organizations. Only a few of these sets of instructions have survived, but we may assume that each designer received his or her own. Individual licence was forestalled, partly by the choice of designers, and partly by Mies's excellent advice to use "furniture off the peg." In four cases designers included furniture that they themselves had previously designed "for the low-cost home" or for issue by local and regional government bodies. Mies's word for all this was *Konfektion*: ready-made. He himself did the interior design for two apartments, and left a third unfurnished to demonstrate his system of movable partitions.

Not all the interior designs for the building can now be visualized; some of them seem to have been decidedly unattractive, so much so that no photographs exist. However, the official catalogue contains precise specifications of design and furnishing work. All the designers are listed, with the work they did, and so are all the suppliers.

With the exception of those in House 4, designed by the Schweizer Werkbund, all the internal doors go right up to the ceiling. When Deputy Mayor Sigloch asked Mies why this was so, Mies is said to have answered, "That's the way I do it. You can do it some other way."⁴²

The process of selecting the interior designers—as we shall call them here, for simplicity's sake, although not all of them would have described that as their principal occupation—was a much less dramatic story than that of selecting the Weissenhof architects, although it was not without its bruised feelings and its displays of temperament. The designers were chosen partly from the local Stuttgart membership of the Werkbund and