



***"Structure is not just a means to a solution
It is also a principal and a passion"***

Marcel Breuer

The designer and architect Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) numbers among the most important and prolific designers of the twentieth century.

Today he is best known for his furniture. The tubular steel pieces created by Breuer during his tenure at the Bauhaus and during the following years, which have enjoyed unflagging popularity for decades, must be counted among the great classics of modernism.

When one thinks of Breuer, the Wassily armchair, the Bauhaus stool or his famous cantilevered tubular steel chairs (Cesca, B35) quickly come to mind.

To a degree equaled only by Wagenfeld's legendary table lamp, these have become representative of the design philosophy and domestic culture of an entire era. Yet it was not only his tubular steel furniture that contributed to Breuer's international success.

The aluminum and molded plywood pieces from the 1930s also attained historical significance and had a lasting impact upon succeeding generations of designers.

Although Breuer advanced in just a few years' time from a Bauhaus student to one of the leading furniture and interior designers of the twentieth century, he regarded himself first and foremost as an architect.

As early as the mid-twenties, he considered building to be the primary aim of his work.

After halting attempts in Europe and (beginning in 1937) the USA, which were largely attributable to the Great Depression and World War II, his architectural career gained considerable momentum toward the end of the 1940s.



Marcel in his early 20's



John Calder drew a map (calder style) for Marcel to find his way to Calder's home



Invitation to the 10th Annual General Assembly at UNESCO



Canteen Bauhaus Dessau 1926; stools and tables by Breuer

The Vitra Design Museum possesses one of the most extensive and comprehensive collections of Marcel Breuer's furniture designs worldwide.

In addition, the Museum owns the archive of Anton Lorenz, a long-time business partner of Breuer who assembled an outstanding collection of original documents on the history of tubular steel furniture that includes important source material on the evolution of Breuer's furniture designs.

Therefore, the Vitra collection and archive offer a solid foundation for a comprehensive retrospective of the work of this innovative master.

Several American institutions (Archives of American Art in Washington, Syracuse University Library in Syracuse, N.Y., MoMA and the Whitney Museum in New York City) and previous co-workers of Breuer have been consulted for the research and presentation of his work in the USA.

With its retrospective on the work of Marcel Breuer, the Vitra Design Museum focussed on his seminal contribution to the development of furniture and interior design in the twentieth century.

At the same time, the exhibition provides an opportunity to reintroduce Breuer's long-neglected architectural oeuvre to the public and to reassess its place in modern architecture.

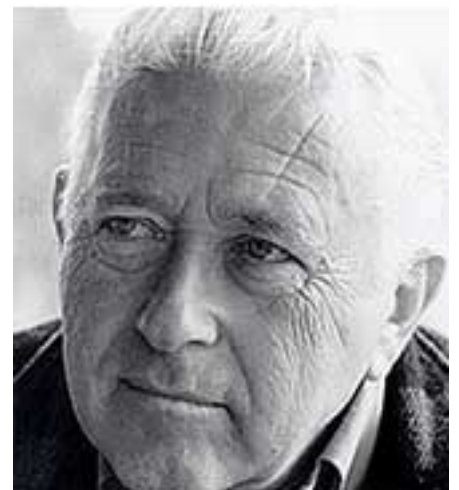
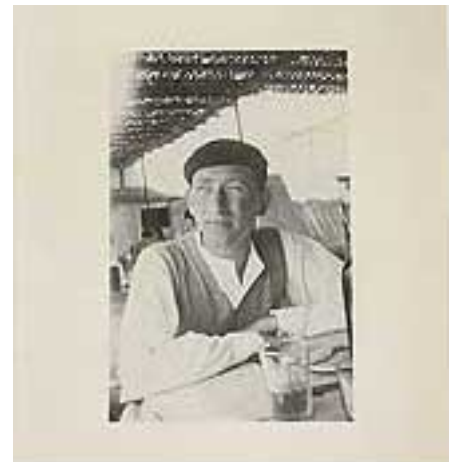
A pivotal contribution of this Bauhaus master to the history of design – and one that can be designated without exaggeration as revolutionary – was the "invention" of tubular steel furniture.

A presentation of the incremental development and perfection of Breuer's tubular steel furniture within the mere time of five years is, therefore, one of the main aims of the exhibition.

Of hardly less import, once from today's perspective, are Breuer's designs for aluminum and wood laminates from the thirties, which also represent ground-breaking innovations.

They will receive deserved attention, as well as the legendary interiors by Breuer during his early days at the Bauhaus.

Examples that had a significant influence upon twentieth century domestic culture include the interior of the master house for Walter Gropius in Dessau and the home of the famous theatre director Erwin Piscator in Berlin. Within the context of furniture design, the exhibition will explore the periodically intensive and consequential relationship between Breuer and Alvar Aalto.





IBM Research Center in La Gaude (France), 1960-62

In contrast to many other designers who have worked more or less simultaneously in the areas of architecture and design, Breuer's work in these two fields falls into relatively distinct time periods.

The most important part of his design career was already completed when his activity as an architect began in earnest. The few furniture pieces designed after 1945 did not achieve the same success as the models from the 1920s and '30s.

Yet even in the case of Breuer, it would be erroneous to consider his buildings and furnishings completely independent from one another.

The exhibition will strive to delineate the many parallels between these spheres of his creative work, for example, in the emphasis on construction, in the interaction of individual components, or in the attention to detail.

The exhibition provides the opportunity to re-evaluate Breuer's architectural oeuvre. While it was held in disregard during the postmodern period, such an assessment is fully unjustified. In contrast to his one-time teacher and mentor, Walter Gropius,

Breuer was not a stalwart advocate of an ossified and dogmatic Moderne creed. Rather, his work bears witness to the creative evolution of modern design principles.

Breuer was one of the first architects to use highly textured materials such as wood and untreated stone, which have become main characteristics of regionally influenced design in the postwar era.

The expressive forms of his large-scale projects, in particular, are both powerful and original.

His sculptural buildings with molded facades demonstrate a masterful application of the effects of light and shadow, and stand up to a comparison with Le Corbusier's contemporary work.

Finally, Breuer's influence on the development of the single-family home can hardly be overestimated.

With his own residences, with the model home presented in the garden of the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1949, and with villas constructed in Switzerland, Breuer repeatedly achieved exemplary solutions and provided new impulses for one of the twentieth century's prominent building types.

Breuer succeeded in expanding and refining the architectural vocabulary of modernism, first with the building of single-family homes and villas.

Beginning in the fifties, he was able to realize a number of prestigious large-scale projects, such as the UNESCO HQ in Paris, the IBM research center La Gaude in southern France and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Until 1976, when he withdrew from professional work for health reasons, Breuer was one of the most successful and internationally renowned architects of his time.

Breuer's extensive architectural work will be documented in the exhibition with drawings, floor plans, photographs, models and video projections.

For the Vitra Design Museum Curator Mathias Remmele works as a publicist, curator and docent. He writes for scholarly journals and national daily newspapers as an architecture and design critic.



Early 1920's photo taken of Marcel



Early 1920's photo taken of Marcel

He studied at the Bauhaus where he went on to head the furniture workshop from 1925 to 1928.

Breuer used new technologies and new materials in order to develop his 'International Style' of work.

Breuer first studied art in Vienna after winning a scholarship. Marcel was unhappy with the institution and found work instead at a Viennese architecture office.

From 1920 to 1928 he was a student and teacher at Germany's Bauhaus, a school of design where modern principles, technologies and the application of new materials were encouraged in both the industrial and fine arts.

During his time spent there Marcel completed the carpentry apprenticeship. While there he designed and made the African chair and the Slatted chair.

After completing his studies at the Bauhaus Marcel traveled to Paris, where he worked in an architects office. After a year he was appointed as head of the carpentry workshop at the Bauhaus. Breuer was given the title of 'young master'.

Breuer helped to develop modular or unit construction. This is the combination of standardised units to form a technically simple but functional complete unit.

Breuer was inspired by the shape and form of a bicycle handlebars when he created one of his most famous pieces, the Wassily Chair No B3 in 1925.

It was designed and made for Wassily Kandinsky. The frame of the chair was made from polished, bent, nickelled tubular steel, which later became chrome plated. The seat came in canvas, fabric or leather in black section. This chair has been widely copied.

Breuer designed a whole range of tubular metal furniture including chairs, tables, stools and cupboards. Tubular steel has lots of qualities; it is affordable for the masses, hygienic and provides comfort without the need for springs to be introduced.

Breuer considered all of his designs to be essential for modern living.

Breuer also designed the interiors and furnishings for the master's houses at the Bauhaus, which by then had moved to Dessau.

Not only did Breuer design furniture, he also designed a standardised metal house and later on designed his Bamboos house.

Breuer continued to teach at the Bauhaus until 1928 and for the next three years directed his own architectural practice in Berlin.

During this time he designed interiors, furniture and department stores. He became frustrated because the buildings he designed still remained unbuilt.

Because of a slump in the economy Breuer was forced to close his architectural office and traveled to the South of France, Spain, Greece and Morocco.

In the next year on his return one of his architectural commissions was realised. The Harnischmacher House, Wiesbaden. He later designed the Wohnbedarf furniture store in Zurich.

Two years later Breuer joined Alfred and Emil Roth. They worked on a joint venture in designing the Doldertal Houses. These were a pair of apartment blocks in Zurich for Sigfried Giedion the man who founded the Wohnbedarf company.

From 1932 to 1934, Breuer designed and realised a range of furniture made from flat bands of steel and aluminium. The range of furniture was manufactured and sold by the Wohnbedarf company.

His furniture was in fact more popular in the 1970's than it was when it was originally designed..

In 1935 Breuer was forced to emigrate to London. This was to escape the Nazis. He felt threatened as his origins were Hungarian-Jewish.

In London he worked in partnership with the architect, F.R.S Yorke and together they they completed several houses in Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire and Bristol.

In 1936 they designed the Gane pavilion in Bristol, which combined wood and local stone. This was very different from the type of work produced at the Bauhaus, combining steel, glass and modern materials.

When Breuer was employed at the Jack Pritchard's Company Isokon he designed and made five plywood pieces of furniture. These were a plywood version of his earlier metal designs.



Side chair - 1922



Tubular steel chair - 1926



Isokon chair - 1935



The design of these chairs were influenced by the work of Alvar Aalto. Aalto designed and made plywood furniture and exhibited in Britain in 1933.

After 1937 Breuer moved to America.

He was offered a professorship at Harvard University's School of Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

He set up an architectural studio with Walter Gropius in Massachusetts and together they designed the Pennsylvania Pavilion at the 1939 New York's World Fair. They also designed several houses together, including Gropius's own house.

In 1941 Breuer decided to set up his own architectural practice, which he moved to New York in 1946.

This proved to be one of Breuer's most productive periods. Between 1940 and 1950 he designed seventy private houses, one of which included his own house in 1947. In the same year the Museum of Modern Art in New York ran a touring exhibition of Breuer's work and in 1948 asked him to design a low-cost house in the grounds of the museum, which was targeted at the average American family. He filled the house with plywood cut-out furniture.

In 1953 Breuer worked as part of a team designing the UNESCO building in Paris and also designed the Bijenkorf department store in Rotterdam.

In 1956 Breuer as well as setting up Marcel Breuer and Associates in New York began using concrete for his architectural commissions. He was asked to design the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1966.

Breuer was one of the founders of the "Modern Movement "

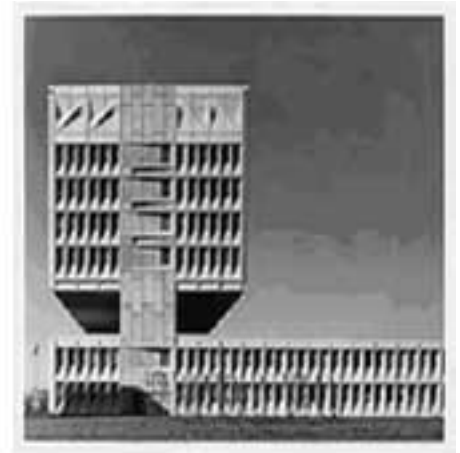
Breuer saw a practice that had been essentially residential finally expand into institutional buildings with the UNESCO Headquarters commission in Paris in 1952 and the first of many buildings for Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN two years later.

His New York-based firm moved through three ever-larger offices, with a branch in his beloved Paris to handle work in seven European countries; he gathered five young partners in the process.

By 1968, when he won the AIA's Gold Medal, he could look back on such world-famous monuments as New York's Whitney Museum (probably the best known), IBM's La Gaude Laboratory (his personal favorite), the headquarters of the Departments of HUD and HEW in Washington DC (he finally felt American), and Flaine (an entire ski-town in the French Alps).

In that same year, he won the first Jefferson Foundation Medal that cited him "among all the living architects of the world as excelling all others in the quality of his work."

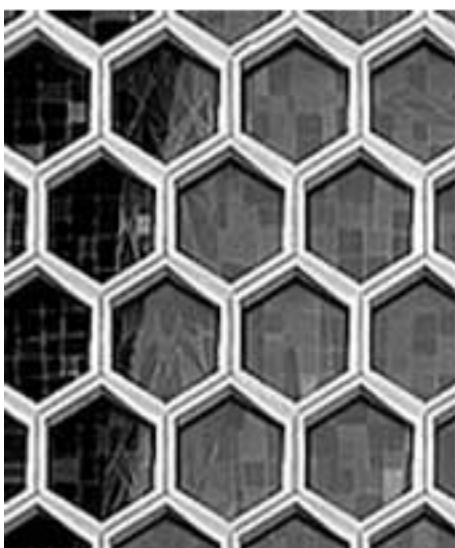
He retired in 1976 and died on the 1st July 1981 after a long illness.



Armstrong Rubber H.Q
West Haven Connecticut - 1970



Australian Embassy in Paris - in conjunction with Harry Seidler 1970 - 1976



Window detail at St Johns



Breuer discusses the St Johns' annunciation project with Mother Elaine Volk OSB and Hamilton Smith 1954



Hooper II House in Baltimore County (Maryland), 1956-59



Display in the Woenbedarf furniture store, Zurich 1930



Dolderthal apartments, Zurich 1934



H.U.D. Building Washington 1968



Geller house 2 Long Island New York 1959 - 1969



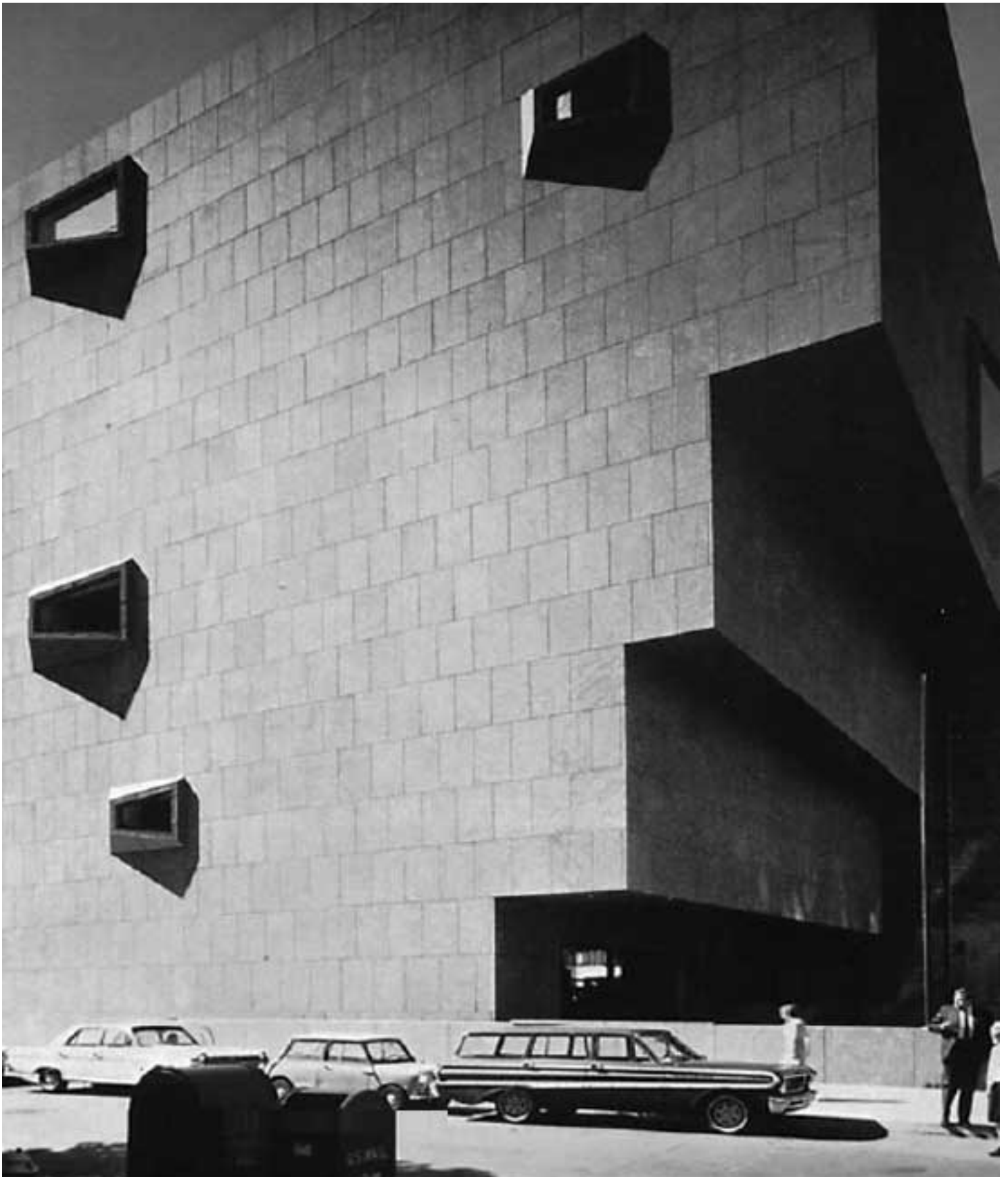
UNESCO H.Q. Paris 1953



Pack house in Scarsdale (New York) 1951



Front courtyard entrance of Pack house



Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1964-66