

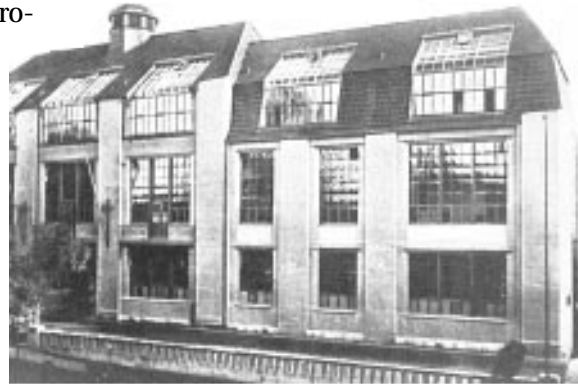
**Chapter 30 Primary Source Activity**

Many modern buildings and everyday objects look the way they do because of the Bauhaus, a design school started by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany, in 1919 (textbook pages 772–773). The Bauhaus taught craftsmanship in many fields—pottery, typography, carpentry, and especially architecture—using modern technology and materials. After the Nazis closed the school in 1933, leading members such as Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe moved to the United States. Here an American architect describes his studies at the Bauhaus. ♦ *As you read, think about the design of objects you see around you. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Studying at the Bauhaus**

The first problem which Mies [van der Rohe] gave us was a single-bedroom “court house,” a house, that is, facing a walled-in garden. Actually, the project involved the design of a series of such houses and gardens, joined together to form a settlement. This problem gave us our first introduction to Mies’s open planning. The houses that we did, guided by the hand of the master, were very much alike. They consisted of an elongated rectangle enclosed on three sides by brick walls and on the fourth, the long side facing the garden, by floor-to-ceiling glass. There was a bedroom and bath at one end and a kitchen and utility room at the other. The living-dining room, separated from the sleeping area by only a cabinet wall, occupied the central space between these. A garage and open service court adjoined the rear wall of the house. Mies could hardly have made the problem simpler, yet this house was eminently livable.

Mies’s court houses amounted to a revival, in modified form, of an ancient architectural usage; in light of the prevalence today of the exposed, free-standing house, it was an important innovation.



Bauhaus buildings in Weimar

Mies was to make many ingenious variations of this simple court house, and his students, including me, were also to experiment with it.

Mies was designing houses in those days and he set us to designing houses too, one after another. He was an exacting teacher. Time and again, when I presented him sketch plans which I thought had merit, he would say laconically, “Versuchen Sie es wieder” (“Try it again”). We respected his judgment too much to argue with him. Little by little, we began to catch on, to develop a feeling for this new kind of architecture. . . .

After making many sketches for him (Mies insisted that one should do at least a hundred!), I finally produced a house plan he liked. This was a one-story court house, with an elongated living-dining room and a single bedroom which communicated with it. . . .

Mies used to remark that if one could design a house well, he could design anything.

Source: *Inside the Bauhaus*, by Howard Dearstyne, ed. David Spaeth (Rizzoli, 1986).

**Questions to Think About**

1. What was Mies’s assignment to the architecture students?
2. What were some important features of the typical Mies “court house”?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** From this excerpt, what kind of teacher does Mies van der Rohe appear to be?
4. **Activity** Look in a book of modern design and architecture to see what familiar objects come from or were influenced by Bauhaus design. For a display on the Bauhaus, make a collection of pictures from design magazines, advertisements, etc. Add your own sketches if you wish.