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**THE INFLUENCE OF DESIGN AT HOME: FROM ELEGANCE TO EFFICIENCY**

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# The Influence of Design at Home: From Elegance to Efficiency

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Households have undergone great changes in recent centuries. However, the influence that design has had on these changes has seldom been shown. Everything that surrounds us is design, as Paul Rand said, and yet we generally do not realise the influence design has on our lives. We know that hospitals are usually painted in light colours because they transmit peace or supermarkets are structured so that we buy more products. But we rarely use these strategies in our homes. At least, we were not so conscious of it until the arrival of the organisational expertise of Marie Kondo (2014).

In this article, I want to focus on three movements within the world of design that revolutionized the world of the home: the Art & Crafts movement, the Bauhaus and IKEA. All of them advocated for beauty to permeate everyday design to reach every household and facilitate the lives of individuals. The proposed route will show us how they achieved this goal progressively, with increased emphasis on the efficiency of the designs.

## The First Revolution: Art & Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement was born around 1880 and influenced the world of design until the beginning of the 20th century. The ideology of the movement focused on the defence of the process of collaborative work and craft design (Cumming, 2004). Both Art and Crafts interior designs and its ideas about life had a strong impact on both British and international homes.



The most important designer of this movement was, without a doubt, William Morris, a Renaissance man in the Victorian era, at a time when industrialization seemed to impose itself with great force. Morris criticised both Aestheticism and Industrial Brutalism. He defended also the restoration of unity between arts and crafts, between pure beauty of art and accessory, or utilitarian beauty, of ornament and tool. Beauty was presented as something truly necessary for human life, as he stated in his famous conference 'The Beauty of Life': "For that beauty, which is what is meant by ART, using the word in its widest sense, is, I contend, no mere accident to human life, which people can take or leave as they choose, but a positive necessity of life, if we are to live as nature meant us; that is, unless we are content to be less than men." (Morris, 2012).

Morris' ideal of beauty does not refer to the work of geniuses exhibited in museums. His craft and collaborative spirit made him center on the home. A beautiful home was a project of a community for a community (Wagoner, 2000). Moreover, Morris proposed a moral idea of the way of life in these homes. This simple lifestyle inspired by nature was summarised in the following golden proposal: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." (Morris, 2012). The creation of objects for these homes was characterized by their quality, their elegance, their functional character and respect for the authenticity of the materials used. For those same reasons, the price of the pieces was so high that only families with good resources could afford them.

Despite the huge impact of the Arts and Crafts movement, not all designers followed Morris' doctrines. On the one hand, Christopher Dresser embraced machinery and industry, becoming, in a way, the first modern designer. Dresser created hundreds of mass-produced items, from textiles and wall coverings to glassware and metal items. The combination of strong geometric shapes and organic patterns gives his work a surprisingly contemporary look (Whiteway, 2004). On the other hand, the architect Josef Hoffman and the designer Koloman Moser established the Wiener Werkstatte, or Vienna Workshop, to manufacture and sell high-quality furniture, glass and tableware (Schweiger, 1990). In order to reach the Viennese population, they broke with the traditional forms and bet on the utility: "Utility is our first requirement and our strength has to be in good proportions and the materials must be handled well". However, these were cases of isolated designers. We will have to wait for the appearance of the Bauhaus to witness a new revolution in the home.

## **The Second Revolution: The Bauhaus**

The Bauhaus was the first design school in the world. Its first director, Walter Gropius, was convinced that, in order to change the bourgeois society of his time, a change in artistic education was necessary. Following the principles established by Morris, he decided to create a curriculum that would unify the production activities, so that the differences between artists and

craftsmen would be eliminated. The foundation of the art was in the craft, so artists had to go back to manual work, as stated in their manifesto: "Let us then create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist!" (Bergdoll & Dickerman, 2009). In this sense, the recovery of artisanal methods in the constructive activity unified crafts and fine arts.

The Bauhaus School influenced the democratization of the design product because, while they idealized the artisan, they did not reject industrialization. The Bauhaus opted for functionalism believing that art could be beautiful without ceasing to be useful. In addition to the excellent designs, mass industrial production drove the costs down so that their products were affordable for the general public. This approach was pioneering and laid the foundations of the modern design movement.

At the same time, the Bauhaus process was an aesthetic extension that extended to all areas of everyday life, "from the chair you sit on the page you're reading." (Heinrich von Eckardt). In this way, we can say their aesthetics are characterized by the absence of ornamentation, as well as by harmony between function and form. Mies van der Rohe, with his famous phrase "less is more" imprinted a special character to the School. This ideal can especially be seen in the style of rectangular concrete and glass buildings and in the defence of functionality.



Nowadays we have become accustomed to this style of building, back then they were scandalous. Nobody believed that this could be a home. So for a long time that particular style was reserved for offices. However, the product design was expanded especially through appliances and Braun products. The designer of the most significant School in structural work by functional modules was Marcel Breuer. He invented a system applicable to both buildings and furniture. He was also the creator of designs that have become contemporary classics such as the Wassily chair (1925) that the painter and teacher of the Wassily Kandinsky School admired.

## **The Third Revolution: IKEA**

Ingvar Kamprad started IKEA in the early 1950s. Following the guidelines of the Modern movement initiated by the Bauhaus designers, the Scandinavian style began to take its first steps. Ikea designs followed the modern and functional line but gave a human touch. Beauty was again found in nature.

World War II completely transformed the world. Europe saw its great ideals fall apart. Society was in full change both outside and inside the home. Individuals were no longer comfortable with furniture designed for the nineteenth century, which showed solidity and permanence. The new society was mobile and changing and needed a design that could fit that.

The designs of IKEA were fully efficient: they allowed for ease of movability of the furniture, from the store to the home, as from one house to another. The minimalist style did not go out of fashion quickly. At the same time, IKEA's low price allowed for the purchase of new pieces of furniture without great concern. In this sense, it can be seen how design influences the type of relationship we have in the home and that we can even have with the individuals who live in that house.

IKEA was innovative with its materials and technologies and surprised the world with minimalist designs that could be adapted to any house. However, the most important revolution was in the construction of their designs. For the "do it yourself" concept to work, the pieces had to be light and the DIY assembly kit had to be easy for the consumer to understand how to build the furniture. Consumers chose for themselves, transported and built the furniture at home, saving many of the costs involved. Furthermore, successfully building a piece of furniture as an expert could have done provided a sense of well-being that influenced the appreciation of the object (Norton, Mochon, Ariely, 2012).



All this movement supposed a democratization of design that induced a revolution in the home. The company itself refers to its democratic design as follows: “Democratic design brings good design to many people by providing well-designed home furnishing solutions, with great form and function, high quality, built with a high focus on sustainability and at an affordable price.” This democratization has, however, caused the interior of homes to be too similar to each other.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have wanted to talk about the influence of design on the home. For this reason, I have exposed briefly the history of three movements within the world of design that driven a real revolution in the world of the home: the Art & Crafts movement, the Bauhaus and IKEA. All of them wanted beauty to permeate everyday design, reach every household and facilitate the lives of individuals.

The passage through design’s different stages has helped us track the influence that the design has had on the transformations inside the home. The ideas of the Art & Crafts movement had a decisive influence on the designers. However, craftwork raised the costs of his designs, making them only affordable to wealthy people. For its part, the Bauhaus continued with the artisanal ideal without rejecting the industry, which allowed the creation of the first modern designs. Households no longer had to decide between artistic beauty or functionality, since these designs contained both. But total democracy came from the hands of IKEA. The simple and cheap designs revolutionized the market and home designs. Their low-cost furniture was not only attractive to low-income households; even those that could afford pricier designs would also purchase IKEA furniture. It is a design with worldwide appeal.

Nevertheless, as I said, this democratization has a drawback: nowadays the interiors of homes are too similar to each other. We find our desk in a friend's house or our chair in a cafe. Usually, we don't like to be the same as others. We like to humanize and to personalize our spaces. For this reason, the trend nowadays is to re-customize the designs. The appearance of the 3D printer allows the production of a design perfectly adjusted to the needs of each user. The consumers will soon be creating the product themselves. The customer will buy the designs and completely make them at home in a short space of time. We still have to wait a few more years for the prices of 3D printers to go down and to reach every home. What is clear is that, when they do arrive, it will be the beginning of a new revolution in home design.

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