

## **Home Stories**

### **100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors**

8 February 2020 – 28 February 2021

**Our homes are an expression of the way we live, they shape our everyday routines and affect our well-being. The major exhibition at the Vitra Design Museum, »Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors« shows how societal, political, and technical shifts have shaped the design of our domestic environments. Innovations in home design range from the introduction of open-space planning in the 1920s to the triumph of informal dwelling in the 1960s to the present, where the Corona pandemic has triggered yet another fundamental change in our approach to domesticity.**

#### **Mateo Kries, director of the Vitra Design Museum, about the exhibition »Home Stories«, now extended until 28 February 2021:**

»In the past six months we have learned – somewhat against our will – that our homes are not just where we live. In times of social distancing and under the present, exceptional conditions, our home has become a place of refuge for many of us. Thanks to digitisation, it also serves as a workplace and communication centre: the new venue for video conferences is the kitchen table, yoga classes are live-streamed into the lounge, and some of us have had to turn their own four walls into nursery schools or photographers' studios. Before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, people staged carefully curated versions of their homes on Pinterest or Instagram, but now that Zoom, Skype, and Teams broadcast unedited glimpses of our domestic interiors, a new candour is taking hold. We have started to take a more pragmatic, direct, and fundamental view of our homes. Ambitious aesthetics make way for practical considerations. How can we reconcile working and living? How can schoolchildren study at home? How can we ensure privacy when space is limited? When first planning the exhibition, curator Jochen Eisenbrand and his team intended to launch a new debate about the private interior, its history and its future perspectives. No one could have expected »Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors« to gain such immediate, urgent relevance. However, visitors will discover fascinating ideas for coping with challenges that now arise anew but, like the creation of work zones in private living spaces, were addressed as early as the 1920s by such architects as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Some of the living pods designed in the 1960s, too, might have been intended as hygienic social distancing solutions.«

The exhibition is organized around twenty iconic interiors by architects such as Adolf Loos, Finn Juhl, Lina Bo Bardi, and Assemble; artists like Andy Warhol or Cecil Beaton, as well as interior designer Elsie de Wolfe. It shows that interior design for the home has come to sustain a giant global industry producing furniture, textiles, ornaments, and lifestyle accessories. Past and present trends from the world of domestic interiors feed an entire branch of the media, including magazines, television programming, blogs, and social media channels. While housing has long been the subject of lively public debate, however, there is little serious discourse about the domestic interior. The exhibition »Home Stories« closes this gap with selected works by outstanding designers, architects, and artists demonstrating how interior design has always been inspired by other disciplines, including architecture and product design, the fine arts and stage design. Contrasting the repetitive DIY- and

Instagram-inspired look of modern Western living, a sumptuous range of exhibits reveals interior design as a discipline full of surprises and variety. The exhibition thus constitutes a compelling journey through the recent history of the domestic sphere.

### **Space, Economy and Atmosphere: 2000 – Today**

The exhibition starts with a look at a few selected contemporary interiors which reflect the radical shifts in private interiors that we are currently experiencing. As an answer to rising property prices and the resulting shortage of affordable living space, micro-housing design utilizes built-in and convertible furniture. This can be seen in »Yojigen Poketto« (which translates to 4D pocket), an apartment designed by the architecture studio Elii in Madrid (2017). At the same time, innovative conversion projects, such as Arno Brandhuber's »Antivilla« near Berlin (2014) – which uses textiles as movable space dividers – offer strategies for efficiently optimizing space and reflect a new definition of comfort and luxury based on simplicity and the language of material. Another societal change reflected in interior design is the increasing relevance of the sharing economy. One example for this is the project »Granby Four Streets Community Housing« in Liverpool (2013–17) initiated by the multidisciplinary collective Assemble. In close collaboration with the prospective inhabitants, Assemble saved a Victorian terrace of houses from urban decay, gutted and redesigned the interiors for contemporary needs, and helped establish a workshop that reuses building materials to create furnishings for the new spaces.

Internet platforms like Airbnb, Instagram, and Pinterest have all fuelled the perception of the private interior as a commodity that can be displayed and capitalized at any moment. However, the imagery and display strategies in many private interiors today can be traced back to pre-modern or even vernacular dwelling traditions. This can be seen in a slide show by Jasper Morrison exclusively commissioned for the exhibition, which explores how the arrangement of objects fundamentally affects the character and the atmosphere of a private space.

### **Rethinking the Interior: 1960 –1980**

The second section of the exhibition looks at the radical shifts in interior design from the 1960s to the 1980s. With the spread of postmodernism, designers began to reflect on the symbolic meaning of furnishings, patterns, and decorations, most famously embodied in the works of the design group Memphis. A passionate collector of Memphis designs, fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld turned his apartment in Monte Carlo into a postmodern Memphis showroom in the early 1980s. During the two previous decades, private interior also reflected social upheavals. In collaboration with philosopher Paul Virilio, architect Claude Parent introduced the concept of »the oblique« to interiors to counter the predominant neutral, cube-like spaces prevalent at the time. Parent furnished his own apartment in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France (1973), with built-in, multifunctional inclined planes that could serve as seating, dining, or workspace – or as a daybed. Andy Warhol's New York Silver Factory (1964–67) evolved as a prime example of early loft-living and became an almost mythical symbol of the artist's studio as an ideal combination of living- and workspace.

At the same time, the furniture manufacturer and retail company IKEA was set to revolutionize the industry with its agenda of providing modern furniture to the masses. IKEA's rise to fame as the

world's largest furniture manufacturer and retailer has contributed to the groundbreaking shift in how we perceive furniture now – from an object that is passed on from generation to generation, to the short-lived, disposable, and rapidly superseded consumer product it is today.

Verner Panton's colourful designs demonstrate the love of experimentation characterizing the interiors of the 1960s and '70s, not least his own house near Basel (1972). Few other designers knew how to handle space in quite the way that Panton did. He designed furnishings for the floor, the walls, the ceiling – and particularly for the space encased by them. This holistic approach was further enhanced by Panton's deliberate use of colour and light to create ambience. In front of the museum, George Candilis's »Hexacube« micro-house (1971) demonstrates how prefabrication, modularity, and mobility shaped notions of domesticity.

### **Nature and Technology: 1940 –1960**

Another important era in the formation of the modern interior were the post-war years, when the modern interior design style that had been developed before World War II entered the domestic realm of an increasing number of people in the Western world. During the Cold War, the political competition between East and West crystallized around the question of living standards, culminating in the famous »kitchen debate« between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev that took place in an American prefabricated house displayed in Moscow in 1959. Leading up to this, the mid-twentieth century saw the language of the modern interior become more refined, and approaches to interior design emerged that are still relevant today. The »House of the Future« designed by Peter and Alison Smithson for the Ideal Home Exhibition in London in 1956 embraced prefabrication methods and household automation, including the latest kitchen appliances and a self-cleaning bath. Much more sceptical of technological progress and functionalist design, Jacques Tati staged the Villa Arpel in his film »Mon Oncle« (1958) as an aseptic home with a mind of its own, dominating its inhabitants.

By combining modern forms and materials with a feeling of »homeliness«, Scandinavian interiors became increasingly influential around the world, as exemplified by the private residence of architect Finn Juhl and his house in Ordrup, Denmark (1942). Juhl used his own home to test the furniture he designed, to explore how it would work as part of an interior. Moreover, »living with nature« and the »fluid boundaries« between indoors and outdoors became key topics for architects like Lina Bo Bardi and characterize her Casa de Vidro in São Paulo, Brazil (1950/51). Bernard Rudofsky, another architect to contemplate the relationship between the private dwelling and its natural surroundings, took inspiration from vernacular building traditions to promote houses with outdoor rooms. Together with the artist Costantino Nivola he created an outdoor living space known as »Nivola House-Garden« in Long Island, New York (1950).

### **The Birth of the Modern Interior: 1920 –1940**

The 1920s and '30s saw the emergence of several key concepts of domestic space and interior decoration that still dominate our interiors today. In these early years of modern design, much different from today, the private interior stood at the centre of architectural debate. This is exemplified on a very large scale by the public housing programme »Das Neue Frankfurt« (1925–

30). Directed by architect Ernst May, it included not only the famous Frankfurt kitchen by Margarete Schütte Lihotzky (1926), but also affordable furniture designed by Ferdinand Kramer and Adolf Schuster. While May pursued a strong social agenda, other architects radically reinvented the distribution and versatility of domestic space. In his Villa Tugendhat in Brno, Czech Republic (1928–30), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe created one of the first houses based on an open-plan concept, with fluid spaces in which carefully placed furnishings and textiles created islands for different uses. Adolf Loos advocated the »Raumplan«, a concept of spatial planning that could not be understood in two dimensions because of its three-dimensional complexity. His Villa Müller in Prague (1929–30) features a carefully choreographed sequence of spaces at different levels and of different heights, which exceed the standard notion of single-plane floors. Fellow Austrian, architect and product designer Josef Frank introduced the concept of »accidentism«, whereby interiors would grow organically over time and look as if composed by chance.

Contrary to these modernist positions, some of their contemporaries embraced ornamentation as a means of expression. Elsie de Wolfe, who published her book »The House in Good Taste« in 1913, is often regarded as one of the first professional interior decorators. De Wolfe advocated the interior as a representation of the identity of the person living in it. This was also true for the interiors created by photographer and interior designer Cecil Beaton, who used his domestic settings as a means of self-expression. For his »Ashcombe House« (1930–45) he drew inspiration from the arts, the theatre, and even the circus.

Throughout the twentieth century, the debate on interior design evolved between the polar opposites of standardization, functionalism, and formal reduction on the one hand and individualization and ornamentation on the other, both of which continue to shape our homes to this day. The exhibition »Home Stories« revisits some of the crucial moments of this evolution and thus raises the question for today: How do we want to live?

## **Publication**

In context with the exhibition »Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors«, a comprehensive publication has been released including contributions by Jochen Eisenbrand, Joseph Grima, Anna-Mea Hoffmann, Jasper Morrison, Matteo Pirola, Alice Rawsthorn, Timothy Rohan, Penny Sparke, Adam Štěch, and Mark Taylor; interviews with Nacho Alegre, Charlap Hyman & Herrero, Ilse Crawford, Sevil Peach. Editors: Mateo Kries and Jochen Eisenbrand, softcover with flaps, inside pages with paper cut-outs, 25 × 25.5 cm, 320 pages, approx. 500 images, 59.90 € (German retail price).

**Fact Sheet:**

Exhibition title: Home Stories: 100 Years, 20 Visionary Interiors

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