



Vitra Design Museum

Charles-Eames-Straße 2
Weil am Rhein/Basel
www.design-museum.de/en

PRESS CONFERENCE

18 March 2021, 2 pm (CET)
www.design-museum.de/YouTube

OPENING TALK

with Marion Ackermann,
Olaf Nicolai, Erik Spiekermann
19 March 2021, 6 pm (CET)
www.design-museum.de/YouTube

PRESS DOWNLOADS

www.design-museum.de/press_images

German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History

20 March to 5 September 2021, Vitra Design Museum

An exhibition by the Vitra Design Museum, the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, and the Wüstenrot Foundation

German design was put on the map in the 1920s by the Bauhaus school and the Werkbund association. After the division of Germany in 1949, design and everyday culture, too, went their separate ways on both sides of the border. In the West, design became a driving force in the »Wirtschaftswunder«, or economic miracle, while in the East it was absorbed into the socialist planned economy. More than thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Vitra Design Museum presents the first panoramic overview of post-war design in the two Germanies. From 20 March to 5 September 2021, the exhibition »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History« will offer a comparative selection of design from East and West Germany and explore ideological and aesthetic differences as well as parallels and interrelations between East and West. Exhibits range from iconic pieces of furniture and lamps to graphic, industrial, and interior design to fashions, textiles, and personal ornaments.

Cheap plastic and shrill colours in the East, cool functionalism in the West – the exhibition breaks with simplistic stereotypes and presents a differentiated view. Legendary automobiles like the »Trabant« (1958) and coveted everyday items like the radio-phono-combo ironically nicknamed »Snow White's Coffin« (1956) will be on display alongside new discoveries and rare objects such as Luigi Colani's sculptural loop chair »Poly-COR« (1968). The exhibition introduces important figures including Dieter Rams, Egon Eiermann, Rudolf Horn, and Margarete Jahny while also highlighting

the role of design schools and the Bauhaus legacy. Its broad panorama of design from the two Germanies illustrates how closely intertwined design and history, everyday culture and world politics were in Germany during the Cold War period.

The exhibition begins with immersive installations allowing visitors to experience the role of design in East and West Germany. The two new states sought to establish their identities by designing new coats of arms, currencies, passports, and symbols – right down to the stylized figures in pedestrian crossing signals. At the same time, objects like Peter Ghyczy's »Garden Egg Chair« (1968) illustrate that the division between East and West Germany was not nearly as strict as it often appears: the futuristic chair was manufactured in almost exactly the same form on both sides of the border. The exhibition also looks at German design before the Second World War, since many German designers were former Bauhaus students. By drawing on the modern ideas that had been taught at the Bauhaus and other design schools, post-war design practice and design education hoped to overcome the dark shadow of the Nazi era.

This introduction is followed by a chronological narrative of East and West German design history. It begins in 1949, when the Federal Republic of Germany was founded in the Allied occupation zones and the German Democratic Republic in the Soviet sector. The large-scale housing programmes by which both states sought to accelerate reconstruction led to a rapid rise in demand for consumer goods – from furniture and tableware to electrical appliances and automobiles. Everyday objects like the kitchen wall clock designed by Max Bill (1956) or Klaus Kuni's elegant watering can (ca. 1960) reflected a new domesticity as well as the growing popularity of modern design. In both East and West, several design schools were revived or established in order to train the young designers that industry needed so urgently, not least because design provided an excellent means of projecting a modern and open-minded image. Milestones in this context include the revival of the Leipzig Trade Fair in 1946, aimed at boosting East Germany's export economy, and the West German pavilion designed by Sep Ruf and Egon Eiermann for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

The construction of the Berlin Wall starting on 13 August 1961 finally enforced a hard border. Up until then, a number of companies and designers in East and West Germany had continued to work together; now the rivalry between the two political systems took hold in design, too. In West Germany, design came to be an important factor in a consumer society that coveted the latest furniture and automobiles as status symbols. The minimalist electrical appliances designed by Dieter Rams for the Braun company offer evidence of an increased understanding of quality and design culture. The concept of corporate identity also gained currency, as is illustrated by two iconic designs from 1972: Doris Casse-Schlüter's red lips logo for the city of Bonn, then the capital of West Germany, and Otl Aicher's pictograms for the Summer Olympics in Munich. In the automobile industry, these changes could be seen in the designs for Porsches – which only a fraction of the population could afford – whose reduced lines symbolized the perfect marriage of aesthetics and engineering. True design »Made in Germany«.

In East Germany, the design of this era was centrally regulated as part of the socialist planned economy. A separate government office – the Office of Industrial Design – ensured that it supplied

the wider population with affordable products while boosting the competitiveness of East German industries. Large-panel system-building made it possible to provide housing on a large scale, which in turn required furniture and interior design concepts. The »MDW-Einbauwand« (1968) developed by Rudolf Horn for the Deutsche Werkstätten company proved extremely popular; its versatile modular storage units were soon to be found in private interiors all over East Germany. In public spaces, too, design had an important role to play. The exhibition shows the original plans for Berlin's Cafe Moskau and spotlights a relief by Josep Renau (»Die Beziehung des Menschen zu Natur und Kunst«, 1982–84). This newly restored wall mosaic in Erfurt illustrates how the penchant for decorating large buildings with artworks defined the look of cities. In terms of industrial progress, it was the »Trabant« car, launched in 1958, which had the greatest impact, since it accelerated the mass motorization of the population at large. Today the »Trabi« with its body of recycled plastic is an icon of East-German design. Its production only ceased in 1991.

Thanks to West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's initiative to normalize relations between the two German states, the 1970s saw a rapprochement between East and West that culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Design on both sides of the border during this period reflected a growing critical awareness fuelled by events such as the 1973 oil crisis. The East German economy began to decline, but its designers proved inventive. Karl Clauss Dietel and Lutz Rudolph, for example, designed the »Mokick S50« motorcycle (1967–74) on a modular principle that made it easy and inexpensive to repair. Other designers turned to handicrafts or produced decorative art in small batches. In East Berlin, design and subculture met in a vibrant scene whose output in fashion, photography, ceramics, and decorative accessories expressed a new aesthetic of the everyday that was beyond the reach of industrialized planning. One of the last great projects launched by the East German government was a computer known as »PC 1715« and produced by the state-owned company Robotron (1985). It was reserved exclusively for state-owned companies, government authorities, and universities.

While West Germany did not emerge unscathed from the economic upheavals of the 1970s, its leadership role in international industrial design remained intact. The Volkswagen Golf, for example, launched in 1974, reflected a growing demand for small, efficient automobiles, and in the early 1980s, Steve Jobs asked Hartmut Esslinger and the German agency frogdesign to design one of the first Apple computers. During the same period, art-oriented and experimental tendencies gained importance in West Germany, paralleling developments in the East. Groups like Pentagon, Ginbande, and Kunstflug as well as design galleries and experimental shows influenced the development of a »New German Design« drawing on art, punk, and kitsch. Political détente gradually led to exchange and collaboration in design, too. Twin exhibitions featuring design from the other Germany took place in East Berlin in 1984/85 and in Stuttgart in 1988.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, large parts of East German industrial production were phased out, and many East German household names simply vanished. The exhibition »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History« compares East and West German design on equal terms and in so doing casts a spotlight on lesser known chapters of German design history. While emphasizing the political significance of design in the Cold War era, the exhibition also reveals the fascinating multiplicity of design styles and attitudes requiring a more differentiated approach than

one fixated on ideological differences. The exhibition is the first to address the history of design in East and West Germany as a shared history – one marked by contrast and clashes, but also by sharing and connecting.

After its presentation at the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein (20.03.2021–05.09.2021), the show will travel to the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (15.10.2021–20.02.2022). The exhibition and its international tour are supported by the Federal Foreign Office.

Exhibition publication

German Design 1949–1989 Two Countries, One History

- › **The first exhibition and publication to review comprehensively the post-war design history of both East and West Germany over 40 years up to German reunification in 1989**
- › **Interviews with key design practitioners from both sides, as well as contributions by leading design scholars and cultural historians**

The cheap, colourful plastic designs from East Germany pitted against the cool functionalism of West German design: The publication *German Design 1949 – 1989: Two Countries, One History* does away with such clichés. More than 30 years after German reunification, it presents a comprehensive overview of German design history of the post-war period for the first time ever. With over 380 illustrations and numerous examples from the fields of design—fashion, furniture, graphics, automobile, industrial, and interiors—the book shows how design featured in daily life on both sides of the Wall, the important part it played in the reconstruction process and how it served as a propaganda tool during the Cold War. Key objects and protagonists—from Dieter Rams or Otl Aicher in the West to Rudolf Horn or Renate Müller in the East—are presented alongside formative factors such as the Bauhaus legacy and important institutions. The exceptional case of the division of Germany allows a unique comparative perspective on the role design played in promoting socialism and capitalism. While in the Federal Republic to the West, it became a generator of the export economy and the »Made in Germany« brand, in the East it was intended to fuel the socialist planned economy and affordability for broad sections of the population was key. While the book highlights the different realities of East and West, the many cross references that connected design in both are also examined. It impressively illustrates the many facets of German design history in the post-war period.

With contributions by Paul Betts, Greg Castillo, Petra Eisele, Siegfried Gronert, Jana Scholze, Katharina Pfütznner, Eli Rubin, Katrin Schreiter, Oliver Sukrow, Carsten Wolff, among others; interviews with Prem Krishnamurthy, Renate Müller and Dieter Rams.



German Design 1949 – 1989 Two Countries, One History

Publishers: Vitra Design Museum;
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Concept: Mateo Kries, Thomas A.
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www.design-museum.de/shop

Statements of the exhibition partners and supporters:**Dr. Mateo Kries, Director of the Vitra Design Museum**

»With the exhibition »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History«, German post-war design history is examined for the first time in a major overview. To this day, perspectives on German design between 1949 and 1989 are shaped by clichés. Thus, colourful, retro-plastic goods are considered a feature of so-called GDR design from East Germany while design from the FRG in the West is often associated with the functionalist aesthetic of the Ulm school. The exhibition shows that the reality was far more complex than this, and that in addition to the differences, there were many things that connected design and designers on both sides of the border. (...)To this day, comparing East and West German design is a controversial thing to do. It touches on the fractures and injuries caused during the course of reunification. The exhibition aims to dismantle polarizations by juxtaposing design accomplishments from both sides of the wall at eye level.«

Thomas A. Geisler, Director of the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

»The current Annual Report of the Federal Government on the Status of German Unity draws a balance sheet, showing greatly improved equality of economic performance and living conditions in East and West Germany, yet the social inequalities and rifts cannot be overlooked. Against this background, the Kunstgewerbemuseum of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Museum of Decorative Arts – Dresden State Art Collections), with its considerable collection of objects relating to East German design history, sees it as its special responsibility to promote cultural exchange between East and West Germany. It may be possible to grow together if we contrast the attributions and comparisons between East and West with the entangled histories, interactions, and connections – for example, their common roots in modernity and the relationships during partition. This is precisely the subject of the exhibition and the publication, which comprehensively address this theme for the first time.«

Professor Philip Kurz, Chief Executive Officer of the Wüstenrot Foundation

»Design – from typography and porcelain through to architecture – is not just about aesthetics, it is also always an expression of specific lifeworlds. The Wüstenrot Foundation is grateful to have been a part of this project, as we are committed to the diverse cultural heritage of the second half of the twentieth century, to preserving it, and making it available to as many people as possible. One of our particular concerns are projects in eastern Germany, where we support conservation and research surrounding the modern heritage in design, architecture, and urban design. The Wüstenrot Foundation understands the polyphony of our cultural heritage as essential for our society's collective memory. It is only when the different temporal and geographical layers of the two post-war German societies are accorded equal importance that complex aesthetic contexts can be established, and with them, the possibility of a critical engagement with the past and the future.«

Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

»The exhibition »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History takes up an important aspect that has perhaps received too little attention in the period since reunification and which is now coming more to the fore: namely, the parallels and interrelations between East and West beyond the common biases and clichés which, unfortunately, continue to shape our views in many respects. Design constantly moves between art as an area of freedom and the real conditions of production and consumption – it reflects the art of what is feasible and socially agreed and gives a glimpse into the soul of a society. I am very grateful that the Vitra Design Museum, together with the Federal Foreign Office and other cooperation partners, has embarked on this ambitious journey around the globe.«

TALKS | EVENTS | WORKSHOPS

19 March 2021

Two Countries, One History?

Marion Ackermann, Olaf Nicolai, Erik Spiekermann

OPENING TALK (DE/EN)

6 pm (CET), YouTube

Guests for the opening talk include the renowned graphic designer Erik Spiekermann, the artist Olaf Nicolai, and Marion Ackermann, director general of Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Moderated by museum director Mateo Kries, the participants will discuss about design in East and West during the period of a divided Germany, different perspectives of a shared history, and the question of how design can contribute to Germany's continued reunification in the 21st century.

www.design-museum.de/YouTube

21 March 2021

Dieter Rams – A German Design Legend

Instagram Live Talk with Sophie Lovell

DIGITAL TALK (EN)

6 pm (CET), Instagram

Journalist and curator Sophie Lovell, who published the 2011 book »As Little Design as Possible: The Work of Dieter Rams«, is regarded as an expert authority on Dieter Rams' oeuvre. In a live talk on Instagram, Lovell will join curator Erika Pinner to discuss Dieter Rams, post-war German design and its effects on design trends up to the present day. The talk will be followed by an exclusive stream of the film »Rams« by Gary Hustwit on YouTube.

www.design-museum.de/Instagram

21 March 2021

Screening of the film »Rams« by Gary Hustwit

FILM SCREENING (EN)

6:45 pm (CET), YouTube

Dieter Rams is regarded as the most influential designer of the former West Germany, whose work ranges from legendary electrical appliances and minimalist furnishings to his manifesto »Ten Principles for Good Design«. As part of this evening devoted to Dieter Rams, the expert Sophie Lovell will discuss his work on the Vitra Design Museum's Instagram channel, followed by an exclusive screening of »Rams«, a cinematic portrait produced by New York filmmaker Gary Hustwit.

www.design-museum.de/YouTube

23 March 2021

How are you doing, Germany?

Christoph Amend and Aelrun Goette

DIGITAL TALK (DE)

6 pm (CET), YouTube

More than 30 years after German reunification, views of »Eastern« and »Western« Germany are still shaped by myths and clichés. Film director Aelrun Goette and Christoph Amend, Editorial Director of ZEIT-Magazin and author of the book »Wie geht's Dir, Deutschland?« (How are you doing,

Germany?), will discuss different biographies in the Eastern and Western part of the country, memories of German design and about the complex relations between design, identity and political history. Moderator: Mateo Kries
www.design-museum.de/YouTube

25 March 2021

Rudolf Horn

DIGITAL TALK (DE)

6 pm (CET), YouTube

Rudolf Horn is regarded as one of the most important furniture designers of the former GDR. His elegant, minimalist designs are rooted in the Bauhaus and the International Style and have left a lasting mark on East German design. Rudolf Horn talks with curator Erika Pinner about the work and training of designers in the former GDR, the role of ideology as well as creative ideas and ideals.
www.design-museum.de/YouTube

8 April 2021

**German Design – Making Of
Instagram Live Talk with Konstantin Grcic**

DIGITAL TALK (DE)

6 pm (CET), Instagram

Konstantin Grcic, one of Germany's most prominent contemporary designers, conceived the exhibition in-stallation for »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History«. Curator Erika Pinner talks with Grcic about their collaborative work on the show and the questions that arose: What stories can objects tell, how can politics and ideology be represented in an exhibition, and which aspects of German design history inspire Konstantin Grcic to this day?
www.design-museum.de/Instagram

20 April 2021

Portraying Dieter Rams

SPECIAL (EN)

7 pm, Stadtkino Basel

In cooperation with the Stadtkino Basel, we invite you to experience a special cinematic evening. Gary Hustwit's documentary portrait »Rams« (2018) offers unique perspectives on the work, inspirations and philosophy of German industrial designer Dieter Rams. After the screening, the director will share an exclusive account of the film's background and genesis in an online conversation with curator Erika Pinner. CHF 15.00 per person, tickets: www.stadtkinobasel.ch

5 May 2021

German Design 1949–1989

Two Countries, One History

WEDNESDAY MATINEE (DE)

10 am, Vitra Design Museum

Curator Erika Pinner gives a guided tour on »German Design 1949–1989: Two Countries, One History«, explaining the underlying concept, background and development of the exhibition.
€ 10.00 per person

6 May

Product or Propaganda?

Design in Cold War Germany

Jane Pavitt and Paul Betts

TALK (EN)

6 pm, Vitra Schaudapot

During the era of two divided German states, German design also functioned as a tool of Cold War propaganda. Paul Betts, professor of history, and Jane Pavitt, design historian, discuss the role of design in a political context. When does design become a propaganda tool? What was the significance of product design in East and West Germany? Moderator: Erika Pinner, Curator

Free admission, registration required at
events@design-museum.de

24 June 2021

Living the Postwar Dream:

Homes in East and West Germany

Herlinde Koelbl and Steffen Mau

TALK (DE)

6 pm, Vitra Schaudapot

The much-maligned Plattenbau housing estates were a coveted residential environment in the former East Germany. In his book »Lütten Klein« (2019), the Berlin author and sociologist Steffen Mau undertook a detailed, auto-biographically influenced study of these environments. The renowned photographer Herlinde Koelbl, a photographic chronicler of Germany offers in her photo series »The German Living Room« a unique glimpse into the often hidden inner life of the former West Germany. Mau and Koelbl discuss East and West from the inside perspective of interiors and everyday life: How did people live? What went on behind the façades? And what role did design play? Free admission, registration required:

events@design-museum.de

General information:

Exhibition:	German Design 1949–1989 Two Countries, One History
Duration:	20 March to 5 September 2021
Curators:	Erika Pinner, Vitra Design Museum Klára Němečková, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Assistant curators:	Mea Hoffmann, Isabelle Schorer, Vitra Design Museum
Curatorial assistant:	Fine Kugler, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Exhibition design:	Konstantin Grcic
Hashtag:	#VDMGermanDesign
Press images for download	www.design-museum.de/press_images
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