

Reinventing the Bauhaus

# Rediscovering the past, looking to the future.

An extract by Hager

**:hager**

# What stays, what goes?

More than 100 years after the Bauhaus was founded, it is obvious that the famous design school still has a profound influence on our ways of thinking, working and living as architects and designers. But which elements of its legacy are still valid today? And which should we leave behind for good?





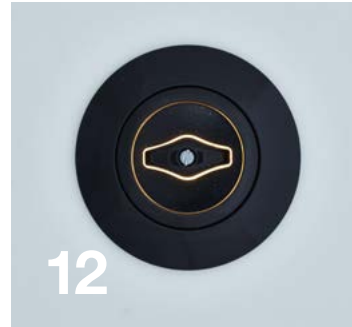
## Giving the Bauhaus a home

Roberto Gonzalez of Addenda Architects, on his plans for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau.



## Disrupting Bauhaus

How valid is the Bauhaus philosophy today? A quick test by Hager's Design Director, Erwin van Handenhoven.



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# Giving the Bauhaus a home

Roberto Gonzalez of Addenda Architects (Barcelona) on planning and building the new Bauhaus Museum Dessau:

## “We all need to take risks”

**Roberto, your competition entry for the Bauhaus Museum Dessau was selected from 831 entries from all over the world. How did you manage to stand out among several hundred concept ideas, especially as a young architectural collective with relatively limited experience?**

Roberto González: In such an interesting open competition, we were well aware of the fact that we would have to stand out from many others. So we used this challenge to clarify our concept: it had to be clear and easy to understand at first glance. But at the same time, it had to be powerful. As it turned out, our proposal for the competition was always one of the ones that went through to the next round after the jury's evaluation, precisely because it was both simple and powerful.



**And what motivated you to enter the competition in the first place? The chances of succeeding were quite slim, and it was quite possible that all your work would have been in vain.**

For young architects like us, there are not many opportunities to design and build a museum. This is especially true if you haven't built one before, and even more so if we are talking about well-known institutions. So when we read that the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation had announced an international open competition for a museum, we didn't hesitate too long. We thought that, even if the chances were slim, it was worth a try. That might be why there were so many participants.



**Could you explain your architectonic idea for the museum in just a few sentences?**

The idea for our project is quite simple to describe but complex to implement: a rectangular, concealed, concrete black box, only supported by two staircases, like a bridge construction, all covered by a glass box. The 20th century heritage of the Bauhaus Dessau would be presented in the concealed black box, which is separated from the ground and positioned five metres above it. Underneath the black box is a completely open space with views overlooking the park and the city – a place for activities, creativity and social interaction ... the Bauhaus of the 21st century.

**In fact, we're talking about not one, but two buildings: a soaring concrete/steelwork block in a glass envelope. How did you come up with this idea?**

First of all, we came up with the idea of the black box, a concealed room containing the 1,500 square metres of floor space required to exhibit the collection. This box would be 100 metres long and 18 metres wide. The black box would only be interrupted by two symmetrical staircases approximately 50 metres apart. And that would be it. Below and around it, we just had to protect the room from the environment – rain, wind, sun and so on – to support all the building's functions. As the museum would be built in a park, between nature and built-up areas, we thought that its shell should be made of glass to highlight the relationship between the two contrasting settings and the inside of the museum.

**As simple as they look, the construction elements of your museum are quite ambitious; they required a few special solutions, which you developed with the help of craftsmen and manufacturers ...**

The most important solution was the joint between all the dry walls below the black box and the black box itself. Within the next 20 years, the black box with its bridge-style construction may move up to 9 centimetres – three times the maximum of the standard joint solution for dry walls. Other custom solutions were the metallic grids around the façade and the fitted furniture in the public areas and offices. As on all other projects, we started from a standard element or product. In collaboration with manufacturers and craftsmen, we adapted it to the needs of the Bauhaus Museum project.



### **So the Bauhaus Museum is partly tailor made?**

Well, you have to work hand in hand with craftsmen and manufacturers if you really want to innovate. In the end, all of your ideas have to be brought to life by someone, so it's always worth engaging with artists, manufacturers, engineers, technicians and craftsmen. You have to do this to arrive at new, better solutions. And the more expertise you gather, the better the results. We're not the kind of architects who want to push boundaries in every corner of a building. We don't have to reinvent the wheel every Monday. But there are some special details that require us to push boundaries, especially in a country like Germany with such powerful industry, which tends to make it feel a bit comfortable in this position. But it's always nice to feel a bit of risk, because risk triggers your brain to look for new solutions and to push boundaries. We all need to take risks.



## 01 Giving the Bauhaus a home

**Such special solutions translate into extra effort and additional work for everyone involved, which is why so many people shy away from custom solutions and opt for standard components. How did you convince craftsmen and manufacturers to go the extra mile?**

With enthusiasm, perseverance and optimism. We told them that collaboration between craftsmen, engineers and architects is very common in Spain. The best results come from good teamwork among all parties, so you have to join forces to push boundaries and achieve success.

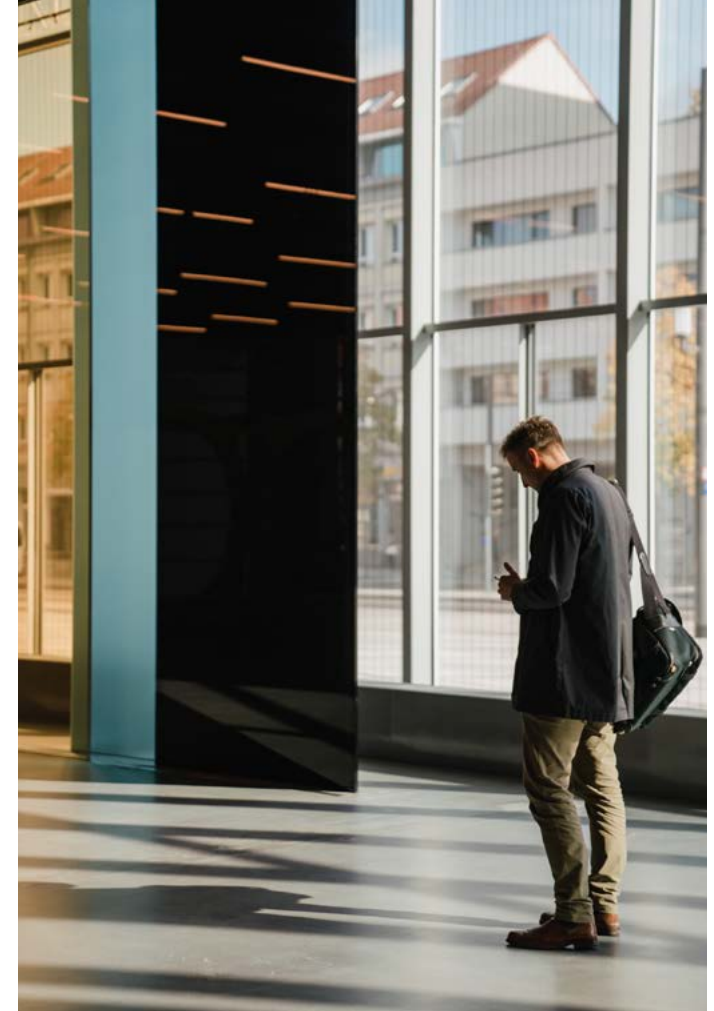
**How much Bauhaus is in the architecture of the Bauhaus Museum?**

In a way, you can find Bauhaus in our approach to the design process of the museum. We looked for references like industrial buildings and factories with clear functional forms and without trivial elements. Buildings where flexibility and scale play

a very important role. I think this has a lot in common with the way architecture was approached in the Bauhaus era.

**How has the Bauhaus project changed Addenda Architects? Are you the same now as you were when the project started?**

Above all, the Bauhaus project has allowed us to establish our firm and to work together from 2015 onwards. There has also been some media attention because the Bauhaus is such an internationally recognised institution. We are still the same people, and we're still approaching new projects the way we did with the museum: collaborating with many different people from a range of backgrounds with different areas of expertise.



**You're currently working on the Sagrada Familia public facilities in Barcelona. Are there any takeaways from your experiences in Dessau that will find their way into this new project?**

Yes, indeed. Although there are significant differences between the two functional purposes, and especially between the two sites and their contexts, the motto behind the design concept is the same: we are in the age of less, so instead of the "less is more" ideal, we follow the motto "more with less". Structural elements remain visible, a glass façade defines the shell of the building, materials are rough and direct, and flexibility becomes the functional purpose.

A man in a dark suit and glasses is standing on a wooden floor, gesturing with his right hand while holding a small object in his left. He is addressing a group of people seated in front of him. The room has a modern, industrial aesthetic with concrete walls and large metal pipes. A red patterned rug is on the floor. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue tint on the right side.

# Disrupting Bauhaus

A guided tour that explores new answers to an old question by Hager's Design Director, Erwin van Handenhoven.



**A**

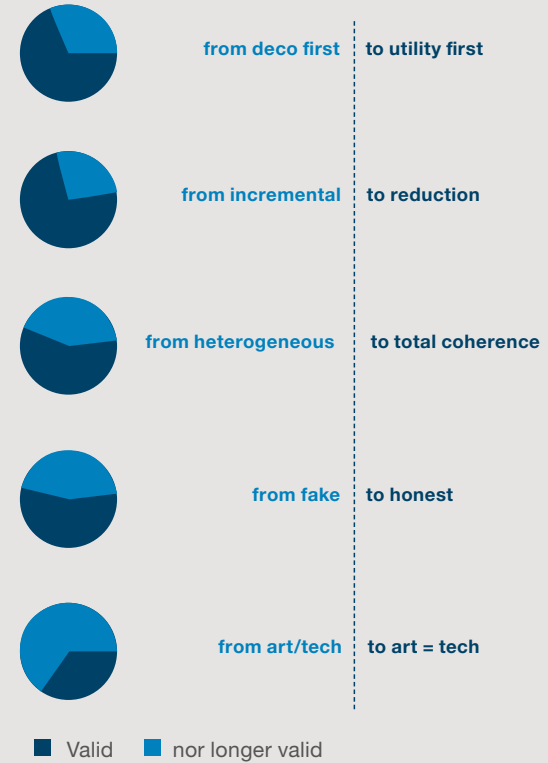
**The Bauhaus disrupted many convictions that were held to be self-evident in its time.**

Here are five of them.

In your personal opinion, which are still valid today and which no longer apply?



**Valid or nor longer valid?**



The results from 2 dozen European architects, invited for a workshop together with Erwin van Handenhoven in Berlin, October 2019.

**B**

We are all familiar with the maxim “form follows function,” which, among other ideas, influenced many designers of the Bauhaus era. But what about today’s designs? Take a look at these iconic designs – do you think their form follows their function?



Vacuum Cleaner  
© Dyson



Supoon  
© Dreamfarm



Cyber-shot Camera  
© Sony



Well Watering Can  
© Anderssen & Voll (Menu)

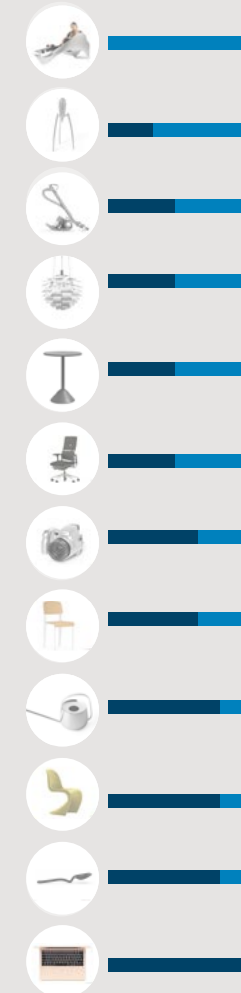


“Form follows function” Sofa  
© Daan Mulder



MacBook Air  
© Apple

Form follows function



■ Yes, form follows function

■ No, form does not follow function

The results from 2 dozen European architects, invited to a workshop with Erwin van Handenhoven in Berlin, October 2019.



Office Chair  
© Steelcase



Juicy Salif Citrus Squeezer  
© Philippe Starck & Alessi



Ding Table  
© Bentu



Standard Chair  
© Jean Prouvé



PH Artichoke Lamp  
© Louis Poulsen



Panton Chair  
© Verner Panton / Vitral

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black jacket, is leaning over a large, white architectural model of a building. She is looking intently at the model, which features a prominent white facade with a grid of dark, rectangular openings. The model is placed on a light-colored table. In the background, the legs and feet of other people are visible, suggesting a public or professional setting like a gallery or office. The text "Architecture's best-known (and most misunderstood) phrase" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

**Architecture's  
best-known  
(and most  
misunderstood)  
phrase**

**“It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognisable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.”**

When Louis Henry Sullivan, who has been called the father of modernism, wrote these sentences in 1896, he coined a phrase with origins that go far beyond his era. In fact, Sullivan himself attributed the concept to Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, commonly known as Vitruvius, the Roman author, architect and civil and military engineer who lived in the first century BC and became well known for his multi-volume work *De Architectura* (On Architecture).

In the years to come, **“form follows function”** (FFF) became a principle that is, in equal measure, a source of inspiration for designers and architects and the cause of numerous misunderstandings. One such misunderstanding relates to the question of how a function can actually be defined at all – and, as a consequence, which function it is that the form should follow. Sullivan, for example, regarded ornamentation as a functional element in representative buildings and therefore did not demand that decoration or ornaments be dispensed with in any way.

In 1908, the Austro-Hungarian architect and carpenter Adolf Loos wrote an allegorical essay entitled *Ornament und Verbrechen* (Ornament and Crime), which discredited the use of architectural ornaments by the Vienna Secession art movement. Later, Modernists adapted Loos' moralistic argument, as well as Sullivan's maxim. Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School, tried to teach “good form” as a design maxim.



## 03 Architecture's best-known (and most misunderstood) phrase

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the last director of the faltering Bauhaus School, adapted Loos' design theories, particularly the ideas of replacing elaborate applied artistic ornaments with the straightforward display of the innate visual qualities of materials and forms.

Mies van der Rohe adapted the minimalistic motto **“less is more,”** thereby coining a phrase which proved at least as influential as the famous FFF motto.

**“Misused though Sullivan’s quote has been, his point, that the style of architecture should reflect its purpose, made sense at the time, and continued to do so for much of the last century, not just for buildings, but objects too,”** writes an architecture critic.

**“That was then. Thanks to digital technology, designers can squeeze so many functions into such tiny containers that there is more computing power in a basic cellphone (not a fancy model, like a BlackBerry or iPhone, just a cheap one) than at NASA’s headquarters when it began in 1958. That is why the appearance of most digital products bears no relation to what they do.”**

So it seems that a good 120 years later, we need to rethink what will shape our work in an era where increasingly, technology is liberating itself from the objects it is attributed to.



# “Form follows... what?”

What would be a timely update to the famous “form follows function” principle?  
Here’s what some architects suggest:



“... sustainability.”

**Jennifer Gomes,**  
Arqui+,  
Algarve (Portugal)

“... ecology.”

**Joan Olona,**  
Olona Casas,  
Barcelona (Spain)



“... intelligence.”

**Reinhard Lepel,**  
Lepel & Lepel Architects,  
Cologne (Germany)

“... detail.”

**Andreas Henriksson,**  
Wingårdhs Architects,  
Malmö (Sweden)



“... people’s thoughts.”

**Nini Andrade Silva,**  
Design Centre Nini Andrade Silva,  
Funchal (Portugal)





“... availability.”

**Janpaul Scholtmeijer,**  
JPS.architecten,  
Amsterdam (Netherlands)



“... experience.”

**Gerben van der Molen,**  
Stars Design,  
Schiedam (Netherlands)



“... nature.”

**Gaultier Dugois,**  
Bernard Dubois Architects,  
Paris (France)

“The motto ‘form follows function’ was not even true at the time people formulated it, because these people designed hundreds of different forms that applied to the same functions. So it’s rather a hint or a concept, but not the goal itself. In the future, form will follow creativity, ideas and the person behind them.”

**Roberto González,**  
Addenda Architects,  
Barcelona (Spain)



“Form will increasingly follow human behaviour, and human behaviour is changing. So form will also change in the future.”

**Erwin van Handenhoven,**  
Hager Group,  
Obernai (France)





# Defining yourself

How an industry brand like Hager creates its own identity and meaning.

## Fast forward. Our vision for design

Brief essay by Erwin van Handenhoven on the Hager Group's design vision for the future.

As designers and architects, we are by definition occupied with the future. But there's no future without a heritage that influences all of our thinking and doing. The Hager Group's design philosophy is clearly shaped by designers and architects such as Walter Gropius, Theo van Doesburg and Mies van der Rohe, as well as Max Bill and Anton Stankowski.

With the foundation of our own design studio, we established a team that is responsible for all product design tasks within Hager Group. This change of direction did not come about by chance; we regard design as a strategic way to add value to a product (as well as to its manufacturer and users). This value lies in



the meaning it has for its users, which stems from its emotional and utility value. Our job as engineers and designers is to attribute this value to everything new that we develop for and offer our customers.

### Which brand do you trust?

By developing the phrasing for our distinctive design language, we became more and more recognisable to our customers. We started to create our own identity – something which is impossible to achieve by assigning a variety of outside

## 05 Defining yourself

designers, as skilful and famous as they may be. Through our specific design language, we formed a brand that consumers can trust, rely on, and happily decide to welcome into their homes. This leads to a fundamental question that every brand has to carefully consider: who are the people you call your customers? In our case, the answer is extremely complex. In the first place, our customers are electricians, panel builders, project managers, architects and the like; professionals who install our solutions in the buildings of their clients. So, indirectly, millions of people from different cultural backgrounds – Hager products are available in more than 120 countries around the world – become our clients, too. And this is where it gets even more complicated, as a switchboard, e-charging station or switch is never used by just one person, but in most cases by numerous, very different users – people we never get to know or even get a chance to talk to.

### Knowing your millions of customers

To make things even more fascinating, our products are in use for long periods of time, so they have to be suited to consumers with very different sets of experiences and expectations across different time frames.

In other words, we design for a number of clients whom we will never get acquainted with. We do so by developing empathy, by stepping into the shoes of the anonymous millions who, sooner or later, will press one of our switches, plug into one of our charging stations or look for the fuse box to flick a switch. With regard to the latter, in most cases, this still entails searching in staircases or dark basements.

### Reconciling the new with the old

Here's something that I find quite strange: until now, most clients in our industry have invested a lot of money in a switchboard or charging station only to hide it in their basement or garage. I think technology should be designed to be meaningful and beautiful so that customers are happy to have it around them, to live alongside it and even to show it off, just as they like to proudly display their hi-fi speaker system or a brand new steam oven to visitors.



## 05 Defining yourself

In lockstep with other preferences, our perception of buildings and what they are supposed to represent is shifting dramatically. From a solid, passive structure which provides protection and consumes a lot of energy, buildings are changing into something active that you can talk to, play with, use to produce electricity and even charge your vehicle with. I'm pretty sure that the idea of piloting your house will be quite common in a few years' time. And just as a pilot needs an uncluttered dashboard in their plane, we need to design control components for houses which are as easy to use as they are beautiful to look at, as they are sure to leave the basements and become guests in our living rooms.



## Touchpoints in our daily lives

That's another reason why we never create stand-alone models, but families of products at Hager: whatever new feature is added to a building, it should fit aesthetically with what is already there. It's exactly as Charles Eames noted: "The details are not the details. They make the design." At Hager, we are happy to produce beautiful details that significantly enhance the value and living comfort of a building.



# Growing together

By working towards a shared vision, architects and the electrical installations industry can shape our way of life.

## Form and functionality: the architect's responsibility

A word from Jacob Schambye, Hager Group

Around 100 years ago, the architect Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus School, an institution which turned out to be the most influential school of architecture and design of the 20th century. That same year, in a remote region of Germany called Sauerland, the Berker brothers founded their switch-making company, which is part of Hager Group today. In the following years, Berker and the Bauhaus evolved pretty much side by side. While Bauhaus design principles obviously influenced Berker, Bauhaus architects relied on our wiring accessories. Walter Gropius, for example, evidently chose Berker switches for his Dessau-Törten housing estate, which is still open to visitors today.



## Evolving side by side with the Bauhaus

It is therefore no coincidence that you'll also find Berker switches in the renovated Bauhaus buildings in Dessau today. When Bauhaus historians delved into the institution's past in their archives, they stumbled across Berker switches dating back to the days of the Berker brothers. Consequently, Bauhaus experts chose our famous Berker Glasserie switch when they restored the building complex a few years ago.

In other words, the story continues. From the very beginning, aesthetics and functionality have been the guiding principles of our work at Berker, as well as for all Hager brands. Design was, is and will always be an integral part of our DNA. It is crucial for creating great environments in which to live and work. And, of course, the same principles apply to architects and designers.

As we continue to develop alongside architects and their work, we see ourselves as natural partners for their projects. In collaboration with architects and designers, we develop outstanding solutions for residential and commercial buildings that add value to the buildings' aesthetics, as well as increasing their utility and real estate value.



### **The building blocks of a sustainable future: bricks and technology**

This is especially true when it comes to home automation, where architects and manufacturers like us share a common responsibility: to equip buildings with the most sustainable, long-lasting and useful technologies available.

For example, in the age of climate change, home automation can significantly increase the energy efficiency of buildings and minimise their carbon footprint. Currently, buildings

## 06 Growing together

account for 40 % of energy consumption in the EU. One third of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are attributed to the energy consumption of our buildings.

A smart building has great potential to reduce emissions. On average, it reduces a building's energy consumption by more than a quarter. And there's a lot of work to do: 65 % of European building stock was built before 1980, and 97 % of our buildings must be upgraded to achieve the 2050 decarbonisation goals that we are committed to.



## It's on us to leave a legacy that lasts

Design is as important to us today as it was in the beginning, if not more so. So it is more crucial than ever to make complex technology approachable and user-friendly so that consumers are willing to accept it in their homes. That's why we're listening so attentively to creative individuals; we know that they hold the key to people's hearts and minds when it comes to their built environment and intelligent building technology. It is therefore crucial that engineers and architects join forces, just as we did 100 years ago.



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