

Gropius, Walter 1883 - 1969



Georg Walter Adolf Gropius [commonly known as Walter Gropius] was born in Berlin, Germany on 18 May 1883 and studied for a term at the Technische Hochschule in Munich (1903-04). He then worked briefly in the office of the Berlin architects Solf & Wichards and served as a cadet in the German Army (1904-05), before continuing his architectural studies at the Technische Hochschule in Charlottenburg, Berlin (1905-07, following which he then spent a year studying in Spain. On his return to Germany, Gropius was employed as chief assistant in the office of the architect Peter Behrens in Berlin where he remained until 1910 when he established an architectural practice with Adolf Meyer in Neubabelsberg, Germany (1881-1929).

Projects by Gropius and his office during the years up to the outbreak of war in 1914 included a factory for the shoe manufacturers Fagus in Alfeld, Germany (with Adolf Meyer, 1911-12), a diesel railway car for a factory in Königsberg, Germany (1913), interiors for the Exposition Universelle et Industrielle (Wereldtenoonstelling) in Ghent, Belgium (1913), workers' housing for an automobile factory in Bernburg, Germany (1913), furniture and interiors for the house of Dr Karl Herzfeld in Hanover (1913), steel furniture for the battleship 'Von Hindenburg' (with Adolf Meyer, 1914) and houses and shops for farm workers in Dramburg, Germany (1914).

In 1911 Gropius joined and subsequently became an active member of the Deutscher Werkbund, editing the 'Jahrbücher' of the Werkbund between 1912-14, and participating in their exhibitions. Gropius spent most of the First World War (1914-18) on active service in the German Army.

In April 1919 he took up an appointment as director of Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, a newly created art school formed from the merger of the Grossherzogliche-Sachsen-Weimarische Hochschule für angewandte Kunst and the Grossherzogliche Kunstakademie in Weimar. In his 'Bauhaus Manifesto' of 1919 Gropius explained that the aims of the school were to do away with the barriers that had hitherto separated the artistic, craft and industrial skills. To do this he had to develop a totally new teaching programme for the Bauhaus. It also required teachers attuned to the philosophy of the school. Staff appointed to the faculty in its early years included Johannes Itten, László Moholy-Nagy, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Gerhard Marcks. Gropius remained director of the Bauhaus until 1928, first in Weimar (1919-25) and then in Dessau (1925-28).

Projects by him during this period included the Adolf Sommerfeld House at Dahlem in Berlin (1921), an entry in the Chicago Tribune Competition (with Adolf Meyer, 1921-22), a war memorial sculpture in Weimar (1922), renovation of the State Theatre in Jena, Germany (with Adolf Meyer, 1923-24), the Fröbel Institute in Bad Liebenstein, Germany (with Adolf Meyer, 1924), furniture for the Feder department store in Berlin (1925), the Bauhaus Building in Dessau (1925-26) and the Weisenhof Houses in Stuttgart (1926-27). In 1928 Gropius resigned from the Bauhaus and moved to Berlin where he remained until 1934. During these years projects by his office included the the Feder furniture stores in Berlin (1929), the Am Lindenbaum housing development in Frankfurt (1929), Spandau-Haselhorst housing development (1929-30), automobiles for the Adler Automobilwerk (1929-33), and the Deutscher Werkbund exhibition in Paris (1930).

Following the harassment and eventual closure of the Bauhaus by the National Socialist Party in 1933, and the change in the political climate in Germany, Gropius moved to England in 1934. Between 1934 and 1936 he was in partnership in London with the architect [Edwin Maxwell Fry](#) (1899-1986) as [Gropius & Fry](#). Architectural projects by the partnership included apartments in St. Leonard's Hill, Windsor (1935); Impington Village School in Cambridgeshire (1936); London Film Production Workshops in Denham, Buckinghamshire (1936); a school in Histon, Cambridgeshire (1936); and Levy House in Chelsea, London (1936).

In 1935 Gropius began designing pieces for Jack Pritchard's Isokon furniture company and in 1936 he became the firm's controller of design, at which point the partnership with Fry was dissolved and Fry subsequently practised alone.

In 1937 Gropius left Britain to take up an appointment as professor of architecture in the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in Cambridge,

Massachusetts, a post he held until 1952. He subsequently remained in the USA for the rest of his life. Between 1937-42 he was in partnership with Marcel Breuer who had also recently moved to the USA. Among projects by the pair were several private houses including the Gropius House in Lincoln, Massachusetts (1938), the Breuer House in Lincoln, Massachusetts (1938) and the Frank House in Pittsburgh (1938). They also designed the Pennsylvania Pavilion for the New York World's Fair of 1939-40. There were few opportunities for private commissions during the Second World War year. Projects during this period included a factory in Greensboro, North Carolina (1944) and a jeweller's shop in New York City (1944). In 1946 Gropius and seven associates co-founded The Architects' Collaborative (TAC) an architectural firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This was the beginning of a very productive phase in Gropius's career as an architect. Projects included numerous schools and academic buildings, the Interbau apartment in Berlin (1956), the United States Embassy in Athens (1957), the Pan Am Building (with Pietro Belluschi, 1957), the Rosenthal Ceramic Factory in Selb, Germany (1963), the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin (1964), the Huntington Gallery in Huntington, West Virginia (1968) and the John F. Kennedy Federal Office Building in Boston, Massachusetts (1968). In 1968-69 Gropius also designed tea services for Rosenthal.

Gropius was the author of numerous books and articles, including 'The New Architecture and the Bauhaus' (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), 'Rebuilding Our Communities' (Chicago, Illinois: Theobald, 1945), 'Architecture and Design in the Age of Science' (New York, NY: Spiral, 1952) and 'The Scope of Total Architecture' (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955).

Gropius received many honours and awards including the Royal Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1956, and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 1959. He was also elected an Honorary Royal Designer for Industry (Hon.RDI) by the Royal Society of Arts in London in 1947.

Gropius died in Boston, Massachusetts on 5 July 1969.

The papers of Walter Gropius and his wife, Ise Gropius (1897-1983), are held at the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art in Washington, DC.

Worked in
Germany
UK
USA
Works

See: Whittick, Arnold. 'Walter Adolf Gropius' in Contemporary Architects, edited by Ann Lee Morgan and Colin Naylor. [contains a detailed list of architectural projects by Gropius 1909-1968. **Bibliography below**]

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