

Interview with an expert

BE P▲RT OF THE B▲UHAUS EXPERIMENT

In 2019, the famous Bauhaus school of ideas will be brought back to life in the new bauhaus museum weimar. In this interview, museum director Dr Ulrike Bestgen offers an insight into the innovative exhibition concept and the ongoing plans for this new 21st century home of Bauhaus.

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Be part of the Bauhaus experiment

The director of the new bauhaus museum weimar, Dr Ulrike Bestgen, gives us a first look at the plans for the exhibition.

The new bauhaus museum weimar opens its doors in 2019 to coincide with the Bauhaus centenary. What can you tell us about the format of the exhibition in the new museum?

We won't be presenting a linear chronology of the Bauhaus story. Instead, we will be exploring a question Walter Gropius famously once asked: How do we want to live? We'll try to answer this by explaining the Bauhaus ideas, experiments and proposed solutions. Our displays will, of course, include famous design icons, but our main objective is to present the Bauhaus as a school of dynamic yet contradictory ideas that concerned itself not just with the arts but first and foremost with everyday life. For example, one section of the museum explores the various educational and design approaches of the Bauhaus Weimar. Another looks at how the school wanted to improve the way we live, which we will demonstrate through the 'Haus Am Horn' prototype house. Each section gives the visitor a unique aesthetic, sensory experience centred around a different topic. The 'Stage' area, for instance, is inspired by László Moholy-Nagy's multimedia stage sets.

The Weimar years are widely regarded as a period of experimentation for the Bauhaus and the international art avant-garde of the 20th century. In what way does the new bauhaus museum weimar reflect this experimental spirit in the 21st century?

We will be integrating a lot of experimental and interactive elements in the bauhaus museum weimar. There'll be a variety of hands-on stations and completely open exhibition spaces, where designers, artists and students from the Bauhaus University of Weimar will be invited to express themselves on specific subjects. We will also have an extensive programme for children and young people, which our 'Bauhaus agents' are currently developing in collaboration with local schools. It is very important to us that visitors can really engage with the collection and the associated themes, which is why we are setting up workshop rooms where they can try out the old bookbinding equipment or have a go with a 3D printer. A lot of it is still a work in progress, but isn't that what experimentation is all about?

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What's so special about the Bauhaus Weimar collection that forms the basis of the exhibitions in the new bauhaus museum weimar?

The Foundation of Weimar Classics has the world's oldest collection of Gropius-approved Bauhaus artefacts. When the Bauhaus had to leave Weimar in 1925, Walter Gropius and the director of the Weimar Art Collections at the time, Wilhelm Köhler, selected 168 items that Gropius considered to best represent the first phase of the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1925. These included design classics like the 'Table Lamp' by Wilhelm Wagenfeld, Marianne Brandt's 'Teapot', Marcel Breuer's 'Slatted Chair', Theodor Bogler's ceramics, and rugs from Gunta Stölzl and Gertrud Arndt. These same objects form the core of our collection, which has since expanded to more than 13,000 exhibits. As well as reflecting early Bauhaus in Gropius's own eyes, they represent the shift in focus from expressionist Bauhaus to a new unity of art and technology that began in 1922/1923.

Which aspects of the Bauhaus story can only be seen in Weimar?

Once you've seen the works on display in the museum, you can step outside and see the places that inspired them. One of the fascinating things about this collection is its many links to our city and the surrounding area, where Bauhaus artists spent a great deal of their time. If you walk to the Stone of Good Fortune outside Goethe's Garden House, for example, you'll come across the spot that inspired Bauhaus designer Josef Hartwig to create his famous chess set. Another must-see is Lyonel Feininger's 'Cathedral', namely the church in the village of Gelmeroda. Visitors to bauhaus museum weimar can step inside Paul Klee's 'Water Park in Autumn' by taking a stroll through that very same park on the Ilm, where Johannes Itten used to bring his students for meditative exercises. The museum is also giving rise to a new cultural quarter for Weimar, bringing to life the ambivalent history of modernism through to the present day. For such a small city, Weimar is home to an extremely high concentration of important modernist sites.

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