

# THE HERITAGE OF BAUHAUS AND THE CONCEPT OF HEALTH-AFFIRMING EVERYDAY PLACES

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## Abstract

This paper discusses how the concept of health affirming places, which influence physical, mental and spiritual healing, is rooted in the original Bauhaus philosophy. The main aim of Bauhaus was to unite all forms of creative arts to shape a human-friendly environment. The Bauhaus architecture is the architecture of everyday esthetics, humble, mindful and sensitive. Its user would enjoy well-defined details and high quality of materials. Social engagement and integration with other disciplines of art were the foundation for the Bauhaus philosophy. The original Bauhaus goal was to create art which then shapes people. Today it is important to bring this approach back because modern architecture lost this focus over time and is often met with social disapproval. This criticism spurred research and inspired numerous studies on what makes a human-friendly environment. Many studies proved the importance of ecology and everyday contact with nature. It was also demonstrated that beauty, understood as aesthetically pleasing built environments, are invaluable. It is important to revive the original Bauhaus philosophy to create health-affirming places. An example of contemporary residential architecture is presented at the end of this paper.

Keywords: health affirming landscapes; everyday esthetics; humble architecture

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of health affirming landscapes is being slowly incorporated into architectural and urban design. Urban health-affirming landscapes are understood as *“everyday places which unite the qualities of therapeutic landscapes to influence people’s physical, mental and spiritual healing”* (M. Trojanowska and A. Sas-Bojarska 2018). That definition derives from the definition of therapeutic landscapes coined by Wilbert Gesler defying them as *“physical and built environments, social conditions and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to healing”* (2003).

This paper discusses how the modern concept of health-affirming places is rooted in the original Bauhaus philosophy. This study’s objective was to explain the link between Eduard Francois – Flower tower

in Paris and the Bauhaus heritage. The methodology consisted of literature studies as well as comparative analyses of selected building forms.

### 1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF BAUHAUS AND NATURE

Bauhaus was a new way of thinking which proclaimed no antagonism between architecture and its natural settings. The environmental concern was important to the Bauhaus movement from the beginnings. According to the Bauhaus philosophy architecture and nature could achieve perfect harmony. Bauhaus buildings were planned to be shaped with exterior spaces. Modernism glass façades provided an unobstructed view of the outside world. One underlying idea of the Bauhaus was the unity of interior spaces and exterior

surroundings. The Bauhaus motto of “air, light, sun” was integrated into the architecture. The concern to provide a nice, heartwarming view of nature through a window that is crucial for health-affirming landscapes, and which the sustainable architecture is striving for today, originates from the Bauhaus philosophy.

Although landscape architecture was not the subjects taught at Bauhaus, there were Bauhaus architects who also conceived and planned the exterior spaces around their buildings. One of them was Mies van der Rohe. The novelty of the Bauhaus landscape was accentuating the existing terrain with mounds and recesses, hedges and walls, as well as opening perspective views to create long vistas. The minimalist architecture of Mies van der Rohe required the vivid accompaniment of lush greenery to create the final effect. (fig. 1)

### 1.1. Bauhaus and Biophilia

Today we go back to that philosophy and add the hypothesis of biophilia. Biophilia suggests that humans have an innate tendency to affiliate with other forms of life [Wilson 1995:p.416]. The Biophilic city is designed to facilitate everyday contact with nature. Back in the 1940's Laszlo Moholy Nagy pursued the “*happy and organic cities of which inhabitants have the experience of being amidst gardens and vegetation daily, not on their weekend trips only.*” [P. Anker 2005, p.245]. This proves that the original Bauhaus and biophilic design movements form a common ground for designers. The biophilic design is one of the fundamentals for health-affirming landscapes.

Walter Gropius wrote that he wanted the commemorative tree supposed to bear his name “*to be a tree in which birds of many colors and shapes can sit and feel sustained*” [W. Gropius 1956, p.11]. He wanted to include every vital component of life in architecture. The house which he designed for his family when arriving in the US is a good example of striving to blend architecture harmoniously into the surrounding landscape. Every aspect of the house and its surrounding landscape was planned for maximum efficiency and simplicity. The house was conceived as part of the New England organic landscape. Gropius utilized the connection between the indoor and outdoor spaces to accentuate a relationship between the structure and the site. He used a rise and stone retaining walls to sit the house. Gropius was able to retain a broad view of the south, east, and west. He created a lawn around the entire house and transplanted mature trees from the neighboring forest. Walter Gropius wanted a fusion between the vernacular architectural tradition of New England (wood, brick, and stone) and contemporary

industrial materials (glass block, welded steel, etc.) [W. Gropius 1956]. His attempts to harmoniously blend his design into traditional farmhouse aesthetics truly depicts the original philosophy of Bauhaus. His architecture seems hidden in the background to let the mature trees play the first role (fig. 2).

The Bauhaus philosophy led to the construction of everyday buildings that blend into the urban environment to form a background of human life. The Bauhaus architecture was a background architecture. The ornaments were truthful and grew out of construction or formal necessity. The Bauhaus architecture is humble, even if it experimented with new materials and technical possibilities. *Form Follow function* approach led to peaceful, elegant forms of unostentatious architecture deprived of any unnecessary decorations. This architecture is sensitive to the needs of the user, not a monument to the designer. The Bauhaus movement put people first and the design was crafted to make the human environment more viable.

## 2. LOST FOCUS AND REMEDIES

Nowadays it is important to bring this approach back because modern architecture has gradually lost this environmentally-based focus and it is often met with social disapproval.

What was lost was the biophilic connection between the building and the surrounding nature. The Bauhaus buildings were designed as a geometrical background for complex forms of nature, e.g. plants, boulders and other forms of the natural landscape. When deprived of that connection with the complexity of details found in nature, Bauhaus buildings are losing the biophilic qualities of health-affirming places.

Moreover, Bauhaus offered well-defined details and a high quality of materials. However, some later modernist buildings were of inferior quality when it came to materials and construction methods.

One of the major criticisms comes because modernist buildings follow the same geometrical principles regardless of regional context. Therefore, the internationalization of the modernist movement led to the globalization of forms and materials. The flat roofs were not suited for some of the climates, neither were glass nor steel curtain walls. That criticism led to a new movement called the critical regionalism. It combines the original Bauhaus philosophy with attention to regional constraints and possibilities. Traditional, available in situ materials are used, architectural forms are designed to blend with the environment. The local vernacular tradition serves as inspiration.



**Fig. 1.** Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona Pavilion (1929), The simplicity of architectural forms cedes the spotlight to nature. source:<https://www.flickr.com/photos/naotakem/31291292254/>, retrieved on 18.12.2019



**Fig. 2.** Walter Gropius House, Lincoln, Massachusetts (1938), Garden View, source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/newmundane/6668094003/>, retrieved on 18.12.2019

### 2.1. The revival of Integrated Design

The philosophy of Bauhaus was based on the cooperation of different crafts and artistic fields to create a human-friendly environment. This movement expressed anxieties about the soullessness of contemporary manufacturing. The machine-made objects no longer conveyed the artistic expression. The Bauhaus movement tried to revive the spirit of craftsmanship and combine it with serial production. They believed that it is possible to create art which then shapes people.

Today sustainable architecture requires Integrated Design – a comprehensive, holistic approach that unites all design branches together with prospective users to find the best possible and environmentally friendly solution. We can trace the beginning of this approach back to the Bauhaus school where all were working together to bring the integration of art disciplines. This method of education put stress on experiment and problem-solving which characterized the Bauhaus's approach and characterize Integrated Design today as well. The social engagement which was so important during the Bauhaus era comes back into the spotlight today. The creation of health-affirming landscapes stipulates the Integrated Design approach. There are many interesting examples around the world. One of them was chosen as a case study – the Flower Tower in Paris, designed by Eduard Francois.

### 2.2. Case study. Eduard Francois – Flower Tower

This building is located in Paris, XVII district, 23 rue Albert Roussel. It is a block of social flats. Therefore the budget must have been tight. The solution is as simple as ingenious. The flower containers put around the balconies to create a vertical urban garden. The building form is simple and left with the concrete finish, without any form of ornament. The articulation of the façade was created using the rhythm of giant precast concrete containers planted with bamboo. Bamboo is well known for its rapid growth and resistance, therefore it was chosen to quickly cover the façade with greenery. The irrigation dripping lines are supplied with rainwater. As bamboo grows the building gradually disappears behind the green façade. Moreover, the vegetation acts as a barrier to noise and a diffuser of light, preventing the façade from overheating. Additionally, it provides a gentle, rustling sound when touched by the wind blows and a bit of privacy to inhabitants. The tower is located next to an urban pocket park and acts as the vertical continuation of its greenery. The containers were put on three well-lit sides. The north façade is left in the concrete finish to look as if it was still waiting for its cladding or stucco finishing layer.

This façade is an example of biophilic design, where the plants which grow on balconies make a liv-



**Fig. 3.** Isokon (Lawn Road) Flats (1933) designed by Wells Coates, source: (right) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stevecadman/527667713>, (left) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rogersg/15907268506>, retrived on 18.12.2019



**Fig. 4.** Flower Tower, Paris - façade details, architect: Eduard Francois; photo: by the author

ing wall. The link between the exterior world and the interiors of dwellings is facilitating everyday contact with nature. A view through a window on bamboo growing in containers can be soothing especially if opposed to a view of stucco wall without any details. The view of the green façade may be attractive also to those living in neighboring residential blocks.

The building form is rooted in the Bauhaus legacy. The architectural analysis of the façade leads to a comparison to sculptural forms of the Isokon building in London (fig. 3). The rhythm of the balconies of Isokon was soothed in Flower Tower with the use of flower containers, but the main architectural concept bears resemblances (fig. 4-6).

## CONCLUSIONS

This criticism of modern architecture spurred research and inspired numerous studies on what makes a human-friendly environment. Many studies proved the importance of ecology and everyday contact with nature. The concept of Biophilia is gaining popularity, along with the growing legacy of Bauhaus buildings around the globe. However, the simplicity of forms at-



**Fig. 5.** Flower Tower, Paris, architect: Eduard Francois. Façade details; photo: by the author

tributed to the Bauhaus legacy should not overshadow the original concept of the unity of all arts and nature to create a perfect composition. The example of Flower Tower in Paris demonstrated how architecture can be hidden to direct the attention to the beauty of living nature (fig. 4-6), in the same way as original Bauhaus buildings worked. The humble architecture was the



Fig. 6. Flower Tower, Paris, architect: Eduard Francois. View from the street; photo: by the author

background to lush greenery to create a truly impressive union of art and nature of biophilic design to create the health-affirming places (fig 1-2).

The Bauhaus spirit was all crafts and design disciplines working together to create one - unobtrusive, but aesthetically pleasing form, which blended with its environment. Therefore it is important to revive the original Bauhaus philosophy to create the health-affirming places. We need not only contact with nature, but also beauty understood as aesthetically pleasing and intricate build environment. It is worthy to go to the roots of the Bauhaus movement and combine it with today's knowledge, continue studying and implementing its principles of humble, background architecture which facilitate everyday contact with nature.

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