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Modern Industrial Design in Europe

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Syllabus

When modernity took over craftsmanship, industrial design was born. The rise of modern architecture called for an entirely new repertoire of products and furniture reflective of the new design idiom, based on industrial technology and on an unwavering belief in its inherent benefits on the human experience. Modern living became a social project of collective participation to the democracy of design for the masses. This course will survey the creativity of European masters and their visions for our everyday objects.

Lesson 1. GERMANY: PETER BEHRENS, MARCEL BREUER, MIES VAN DER ROHE, LILLY REICH, DIETER RAMS.
Industrial design found in Germany a fertile ground for growth and ultimate flourishing. The second most industrialized country in Europe, after the United Kingdon, Germany provided the birthplace of the industrial designer, a new design professional in the creative scene. The work of Peter Beherensin paved the way among the proto modernists to reform the surroundings of day-to-day life, both residential living and workplace. Directly connected to Behrens' legacy, Marcel Breuer erupts in the avant-garde with the invention of tubular steel furniture. Shortly after Mies Van der Rohe added to that vision with Lilly Reich. Dieter Rams is the heir of this extraordinary legacy. This first talk covers the gallery of these greats.

Lesson 2. FRANCE: LE CORBUSIER, EILEEN GRAY, CHARLOTTE PERRIAND, JEAN PROUVÉ, PHILIPPE STARCK
France trailed behind Germany in contributing to the reformation of the built environment at the scale of the hand. A precursor on the French scene in the industrial design sector was Pierre Chareau, a cabinet maker turned into architect. Le Corbusier designed his tubular steel furniture together with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret and a young designer named Charlotte Perriand, who later will acquire renown in the same field for imaginative designs of her own. Eileen Gray vastly contributed to the field through her groundbreaking products, some still in production today. Philippe Starck is the ultimate star designer, adding prodigiously to this day to his already substantive creative output. These figures will be discussed in this second conversation.

Lesson 3. ITALY: GIO PONTI, FRANCO ALBINI, MARCO ZANUSO, ACHILLE CASTIGLIONI, ETTORE SOTTSASS
Italy is renowned for its industrial design. However, it was a latecomer in contributing substantively to re-imagining contemporary living and working in modern terms.

Towering figure in the first phase of the industrial design revolution in the country was Gio Ponti, based in Milan, the epicenter of industrial design production. Later generations of architects/designers latched on Ponti's legacy and vastly expanded the repertoire of inventions impacting the daily functioning of the modern citizen. Franco Albini, mentor of Renzo Piano, designed some of the most original products in Europe. Marco Zanuso was a chief designer for Olivetti as well as for other industrial companies of exorbitant influence on the post-war economic miracle Italy went through. Achille Castiglione and Ettore Sottsass provided radically different responses to the invention of modern life as it was transitioning to the post-modernist phase. These will be subject of the third delivery.

Lesson 4. NORDIC COUNTRIES: AINO+ALVAR AALTO, ARNE JACOBSEN, POUL KJÆRHOLM, BRUNO MATHSSON.

Wood is synonym with Northern Europe. Called the "green gold" of those national economies, wood also represents the primary material through with their distinct identities is promoted abroad. The revolutionary designs of Aino and Alvar Aalto, co-founders of the Finnish company Artek, became instant classics when they were produced in Europe in the early 1930s. Danish Arne Jacobsen, a sort of Nordic Leonardo, extended his creative talent to redesign all sorts of products in the home and in the office. The chairs of Poul Kjærholm and Bruno Mathsson are some of the most original and elegant industrial designs ever conceived. This last lecture closes the class on the European contribution to industrial design.