

EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture / Mies van der Rohe Award: A tribute to Bauhaus

The EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture (also known as the EU Mies Award) was launched in recognition of the importance and quality of European architecture. Named after German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a figure emblematic of the Bauhaus movement, it aims to promote functionality, simplicity, sustainability and social vision in urban construction.

Background

Mies van der Rohe was the last director of the Bauhaus school. The official lifespan of the [Bauhaus](#) movement in Germany was only fourteen years. It was founded in 1919 as an educational project devoted to [all art forms](#). By 1933, when the Nazi authorities closed the school, it had changed location and director three times. Artists who left continued the work begun in Germany wherever they settled.

Recognition by Unesco

The Bauhaus movement has influenced architecture all over the world. Unesco has recognised the value of its ideas of sober design, functionalism and social reform as embodied in the original buildings, putting some of the movement's achievements on the [World Heritage List](#). The original buildings located in Weimar (the Former Art School, the Applied Art School and the Haus Am Horn) and Dessau (the Bauhaus Building and the group of seven Masters' Houses) have featured on the list since 1996. Other buildings were added in 2017.

The list also comprises the [White City of Tel-Aviv](#). German-Jewish architects fleeing Nazism designed many of its buildings, applying the principles of modernist urban design initiated by Bauhaus.

Barcelona Pavilion – Mies van der Rohe Foundation

Ludwig [Mies van der Rohe](#), the last director of this educational, artistic and experimental school, personified the vitality of Bauhaus. Forced to leave Germany in 1938, he moved to Chicago where, as head of the Illinois Institute of Technology, he helped to develop the '[second](#)' [Chicago School of Architecture](#), pushing back the limits of the original Chicago School's approach to simplified form and ornamentation and the technological achievement of the day – 10-storey skyscrapers.

Not limiting himself to the design of simplified, rectilinear skyscraper buildings, van der Rohe pursued his work on the aesthetics of pavilions, already begun in Europe. Together with [Lilly Reich](#), who was responsible for the interior design, he had created the [German Pavilion](#) for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona. The building, now known as the [Barcelona Pavilion](#), represented the new aesthetics of simplicity, clarity and open spaces, embodying its architect's guiding principle – 'less is more'. The pavilion was dismantled once the exposition ended in 1930, but in 1983, work began to rebuild it on the basis of photographs and original drawings and plans. Barcelona City Hall set up the [Fundació Mies van der Rohe](#) to accompany the process. Three years later the pavilion became the foundation's headquarters.

Mies van der Rohe award and EU prize

In 1988, two years after reconstruction of the Barcelona Pavilion was completed, the first edition of the biennial [Mies van der Rohe Award](#) for European Architecture was launched as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the Mayor of Barcelona. In 2001, the European Commission launched a call for proposals for a 'European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture'. It was won by the Fundació Mies van der Rohe, whose vision for the award included the idea to recognise the work of young architects at the beginning of their professional careers.

Since then, the foundation has been co-organiser of the [EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture](#), which is awarded every other year for outstanding architectural works built across Europe (with a main prize of

EPRS EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture / Mies van der Rohe Award: A tribute to Bauhaus

€60 000), and includes an 'Emerging Architect Special Mention' (€20 000). The prize is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, the EU programme supporting culture. Nevertheless, despite [recent efforts](#) to popularise it through a dedicated app, and its logo featuring on the websites of winners, finalists, architectural studios and national architectural associations, the prize has a relatively low profile in the EU.

Selection criteria and jury

The award ceremony is held in May in the Barcelona Pavilion, headquarters of the Mies van der Rohe Foundation. A group of independent experts, the member associations of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE), other European national architects' associations and an advisory committee nominate architectural works. The jury then evaluate all the nominations and present a selection of shortlisted and then finalists' works. The opinions of the users of the architectural works are also taken into consideration.

The selection includes not only private homes and public housing, museums and cultural installations, but also educational, health and sports facilities, as well as large-scale infrastructure projects and transport systems contributing to the construction of European cities. The idea behind the prize is to promote sustainable architectural practice. It reflects the original inspiration of the Bauhaus movement of combining the social, cultural and economic aspects of architecture and the arts.

Recent developments

Recently the prize has reflected the guiding principle of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to do more with less. The approach corresponds to sustainability criteria, with a preference for building more with less material, at a lower cost. The overall objective is to improve people's lives and the way people live together.

Nominated projects and winners – A variety of works

[Conferences](#), events and exhibitions are held to promote the 'technological, constructional, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic achievements' present in nominated and winning projects.

The examples below bear witness to the recent sustainability requirements and the diverse nature of the projects submitted.

Selected winners of the EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture:

- 2019 – Transformation of three housing blocks with 530 homes, Grand Parc Bordeaux, France
- 2017 – DeFlat Kleiburg, Amsterdam, Netherlands, transformation of the original building designed by Siegfried Nassuth in 1971, proposing new forms of 'affordable housing'
- 2015 – Philharmonic Hall, Szczecin, Poland
- 2003 – Car Park and Terminus, Hoenheim North, Strasbourg, France.

Some of the winners of the Emerging Architect Special Mention:

- 2015 – Luz House, Cilleros, Spain, an extremely low-budget project built inside the stone party walls of an existing structure in a small village to create a contemporary dwelling environment using existing resources
- 2009 – Gymnasium 46°09'N/16°50'E, Koprivnica, Croatia, a mixed-use building combining sports hall and school, transforming the suburban periphery by creating an emblematic place for young people
- 2007 – Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The selection process for the [2021 edition](#) had to be rescheduled because of Covid-19 restrictions. The 449 nominees were however [announced](#) in January 2021. The nominations reflect a huge variety of works and approaches and include: a [metro line](#); a [natural enclave](#) with watchtowers in the area of a former gravel pit; a [kindergarten](#); the [revitalisation](#) of former dragoon barracks; houses and a [riding centre](#); a [church](#); a [hospital](#); a [ballet school](#), a [city cemetery](#), the [transformation](#) of a classical religious room into a new space for other activities, a [daycare](#) centre, a [transport hub](#), an [airport](#), [timber dwellings](#), a home for the [homeless](#), a [graphic arts](#) centre, an [Olympic centre](#), a housing [cooperative](#), a public [pool](#), a waste-to-[energy plant](#) with an urban recreation centre; and, coming full circle, the expansion of the Moholy-Nagy [University of Art and Design](#), named after a famous Hungarian photographer and designer from the Bauhaus movement.

