

## Tugendhat Villa (Czech Republic)

No 1052

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Tugendhat Villa in Brno
<i>Location</i>	Moravia, South Moravian region
<i>State Party</i>	Czech Republic
<i>Date</i>	26 June 2000

### Justification by State Party

As is apparent from the great deal of attention that has been afforded the Tugendhat Villa since its construction, this building is considered to be one of the most significant works to have been constructed in the 20th century. Doubts as to its innovatory concept, which arose for a short period following 1930, were soon replaced by admiration and enthusiasm. With time, this appreciation became unambiguously positive, as did the position that Brno held in the history of modern world architecture. Theorists, art historians, and architects are agreed that this work forms a milestone in the development of architecture, especially in the modern approach to living space and its construction. This is first and foremost due to the fact that the inward fusion and the outward open nature of the space considerably altered the relationship that one has to the spatial infiniteness surrounding the building in a similar way in which the interpretation of space was understood by contemporary philosophy and physics. From this point of view it is important to take into account the architect's designs and aims when evaluating the Tugendhat Villa, which have remained intact to the present day, both spatially and visually – ie they were not altered by the original inhabitants nor by the later disruptions in the history of the building. Its extraordinary value is also supported by the fact that the other ideas included in the architect's building programme have either remained intact in their original form or, with the help of the great deal of planning and photographic documentation available and technical building analysis that has taken place, may be restored to this original form. This is also true for the villa's sober furniture and fittings, the majority of which were designed by Mies van der Rohe, the lightness and relative lack of which lent superiority to the spatial element; all missing furniture in the main living area has now been replaced by replicas. It should be mentioned that the author of this building was able to realize his aims in full thanks especially to the ideal nature of his co-operation with the cultured Tugendhat family, which adds to the singular value and importance of the building. This fact was probably one of the reasons why such an analogically

conceived work was never to appear again in Mies's work, either in Europe or in America.

The Tugendhat Villa in Brno, along with several other works from the end of the 1920s (Glasraum in Stuttgart, the reconstructed Pavilion in Barcelona), is one of the masterworks of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In constructing this building, for the first time in the history of modern architecture, Mies realized to a monumental degree the idea of "new living," based on the new theory of freely floating space in the house and its relationship to its surroundings. This idea, which had previously only been touched upon by Adolf Loos and Frank Lloyd Wright and which had been applied to a lesser degree in small family houses or in apartment blocks, resulted in the occupants using the living space to its greatest extent, and not just a part of it. This in turn fundamentally changed the relationship that people had to their spatial surroundings, and even infinite space by suppressing anxieties that come from unknown distances. It was a revolutionary approach to construction, space, and materials and the mutual ties that they and the whole building have to their natural surroundings. **Criterion i**

The new theory of living space, which was related to existential philosophy and which transformed isolated living areas into a living environment without boundaries, brought new ideas to the development of the family house model and its variations. Because of its radical nature, these ideas could only gradually be implemented following World War II.

### Criterion ii

In addition, the Tugendhat Villa is a superlative example of the new concept of villa-type housing for the way in which it limits the traditional stately nature and formal surroundings in favour of heightening the standard of living both physically (comfort provided by technical equipment) and spiritual (using space as the highest aesthetic category of living). The building provides an example of a higher standard of living from the 20th century inter-war period, showing the lifestyle of a cultured, wealthy, and modern-thinking level of society. **Criterion iv**

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

### History and Description

#### History

The Tugendhat Villa was designed by the German architect, Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), for Grete Weiss and her husband Fritz Tugendhat, members of wealthy industrial families in the city of Brno in former Czechoslovakia. The architect accepted the commission in 1927, and the design process lasted about two years, parallel with designing the German Pavilion (1928–29) at the International Fair in Barcelona, commissioned by the German Government. The construction of the Tugendhat Villa was completed by the end of 1930. The architect took charge of the project down to the smallest detail, also designing all the furniture of the house, designs that have become world-renowned.

Mies van der Rohe was one of the principal architects in the development of the Modern Movement in Architecture, which characterized design and construction in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe and North America. Originally from Aachen and then working in Berlin, he was influenced by the work and teachings of Behrens and Berlage, by the principles of the *De Stijl* movement, as well as by Frank Lloyd Wright. His early interests were in developing design concepts for high-rise buildings in reinforced concrete and glass in the early 1920s: he designed the Weissenhof apartments in Stuttgart in 1927, another key work in the Modern Movement. From 1926 Mies van der Rohe was a member of the *Deutscher Werkbund*, and from 1930 to 1933 he was Director of the Bauhaus in Dessau. He later moved to Chicago in the USA, teaching at the Illinois Institute of Technology and designing large office buildings, his later trademark. His furniture designs have become classics in the 20th century.

During the German occupation, the Tugendhat family left Czechoslovakia and the Villa was taken over by the German State in 1939. It lost most of its original furniture, and was subject to some alterations and damage – eg that caused by a bomb explosion in the neighbourhood in 1944. After the war, the building was taken over by the State of Czechoslovakia; it served a nearby children's hospital and then the national health institute of Brno, becoming the property of the City of Brno. In 1962 the Villa was protected as a national monument. There was increasing interest in restoring it, and the first study to this effect was made in 1971, leading to a restoration campaign in 1981–85, which guaranteed the continuation of the use of the building on a provisional basis. The Tugendhat Villa Fund was established in 1993, followed by the decision of the Friends of the Tugendhat Fund to undertake a scientific restoration of the building. This work took place beginning in 1994 and funds were raised to furnish the building with replicas of the original designs by Mies van der Rohe.

#### *Description*

The Tugendhat Villa is a detached house in a residential area of the city of Brno, in Brno-Černá Pole at 45 Černopolní Street. The entrance to the house is from the street on the north side of the lot, which slopes down toward the south forming a small garden. The building is situated along the street and has three floors, one facing the street and three developing down towards the garden. The house has a flat roof, and each floor has a different plan. The total floor area is about 2000 m<sup>2</sup>.

The uppermost floor is entered directly from the street level and includes a terrace that traverses the house and forms a balcony on the garden side. From here one reaches a small entrance hall, family bedrooms, and services; the master bedroom and dressing room are on the garden side. The garage and caretaker's lodging are at the west end of the house. From the hallway and from the balcony there are stairways leading down to the main floor, which has three parts: the main living area with a winter garden measuring c 280 m<sup>2</sup>, almost two-thirds of the entire floor space, and subtle divisions between spaces with different functions – reception room, music corner, study and library, sitting areas, dining room, and services. The second part has kitchen facilities, and the third part consists of the servants' area. The living area has large windows on two sides and is directly joined to the terrace,

which is partly open, partly covered, and has a wide stairway leading down to the garden level. The ground level has utility rooms and is used for technical purposes.

The main structure of the house is made of reinforced concrete with steel frames. A structure of polished steel pillars supports the entire house. A steel skeleton also carries ceramic ceiling panels. The exterior of the house is rendered and painted white. Light-coloured travertine tiles are used in the staircases leading down to the garden, and in the living hall there is an ivory-coloured linoleum. The entrance is panelled with dark palisander wood. The back wall of the living area is made of beautiful onyx, articulated in 3m x 5m panels, the same division as in the glass wall opening toward the garden. The original furniture was designed by the architect himself and some of the pieces were made specifically for this house, such as the so-called Tugendhat chair, in chromium-plated flat steel elements and upholstered in stitched leather. The living area was furnished in such a way that each piece had its specific place. The mechanical equipment designed and built for the house was also exceptional, including special structural solutions for the use of steel pillars, for processing the onyx wall that was brought from the African Atlas Mountains, and for the electrically operated large steel-frame windows. The house had central heating and an air-conditioning system with a regulated fine-spray humidifying chamber.

#### **Management and Protection**

##### *Legal status*

The owner of the Tugendhat Villa is the City of Brno, represented by the Brno City Municipality. The administrator and user is the Brno City Museum. The Tugendhat Villa is classified as cultural heritage, and as a national cultural heritage property by Czech Republic Governmental Statute No 262/1995 Coll. on 16.8.1995. It is thus subject to protection under relevant legislation (No 20/1987, concerning the state conservation of cultural heritage and Decree No 66/1988; Construction Act No. 50/1976). A buffer zone has been designated for the property.

##### *Management*

The Villa has a property management plan. Since 1994 the responsibility for the management is with the City Museum of Brno. The main purpose is to maintain the villa and to present it to the public. In the past the villa was not accessible to visitors, but being now open it attracts an increasing number of Czech and foreign tourists (nearly 8000 in 1999).

#### **Conservation and Authenticity**

##### *Conservation history*

During World War II the Villa suffered damage and after the war there were several changes of occupancy, causing some alterations in the building. Since the 1960s the Villa has been protected as cultural property and efforts have been made both to undertake research and to care for its condition. The first restoration took place in the 1980s and another in the

1990s. Currently the Villa is in a good condition and subject to regular maintenance.

#### *Authenticity*

Over the period of its seventy-year existence, and in spite of the various alterations that the building has undergone since the loss of its first function, the original design of the architect has remained intact. The changes that have occurred over its lifetime have not affected the engineering features (construction, materials, and form). Its present condition results from the restorations in the 1980s and 1990s, based on detailed surveys of the building itself, the graphic and written documentation by Mies van der Rohe (archives in New York, Bauhaus Archiv of Berlin, Munich, and Brno), and recorded testimonies of the original inhabitants. The building has been furnished with replicas of the original designs. While the building has suffered in the past, it has retained all essential elements of its architecture and can be considered to satisfy the test of authenticity in all aspects.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS evaluation mission visited the site in February 2001. The committee of DoCoMoMo was also consulted.

##### *Qualities*

Mies van der Rohe worked both as an architect and as a furniture designer. In both fields his work is included amongst the principal references in 20th century design. The particular quality of Mies van der Rohe is in his drive for perfectionism in the design overall as well as in the smallest details. This could be seen specially in the fusion of neo-classical forms of simplicity, universality, and austerity with cleanliness, perfect proportions, elegance, and severity of detail. His aim was to find the essence in all construction elements and to develop his design solutions until he found the purest expression. It meant a further development of the spatial quality of the building, relating and articulating the various functions in the interior and linking with the exterior. The Tugendhat Villa (together with the Barcelona Pavilion) is the best known early example of his work in this line. The Villa is characterized by having its furniture designed by the architect, of which some pieces have become classics and are still in production today. In his later career Mies van der Rohe further developed his fundamental ideas, particularly in the construction of large office buildings, and his approach became extremely influential in the second part of the 20th century in America.

##### *Comparative analysis*

The Modern Movement in 20th century architecture responded to the rapidly evolving socio-economic situation, the new type of industrial production, and the emerging new needs, having its first expressions in 1910–20 (eg works by F. Lloyd Wright in USA and European architects such as H.P. Berlage in the Netherlands, O. Wagner and A. Loos in Austria, P. Behrens and W. Gropius in Germany, and A. Perret in France). Between 1920 and 1930 these beginnings developed into an International Style, acquiring universal significance as the fundamental basis for all subsequent development, and including examples such as the Rietveld-Schröder House of 1924 (inscribed on the World Heritage

List in 2000: criteria i, ii) in Utrecht, the Bauhaus of 1926 (1996: ii, iv, vi) by Gropius in Dessau, the Weissenhof Building of 1927 by Mies van der Rohe in Stuttgart (an exhibition settlement designed by the foremost architects of the time), the Viipuri Library of 1927 in Russia and the Paimio Sanatorium of 1929 (on the tentative list) in Finland, both by A. Aalto, and the Villa Savoye of 1928 by Le Corbusier in France.

The contribution of Mies van der Rohe to this development was fundamental, and his design of the Tugendhat Villa (1927–30) in Brno is among the most outstanding expressions of residential architecture of the period. (The contemporary German Pavilion in Barcelona was demolished and has recently been rebuilt.) Mies van der Rohe learnt his concepts from Behrens (also the teacher of Gropius and Le Corbusier), Berlage, and the *De Stijl* group. His architecture can be characterized as concentrating on the essential and aiming at the purest expression in each detail as well as in the whole. His approach contributed to the later industrialization of building methods. Unlike many other modern architects, Mies van der Rohe often opted for the use of symmetry in his designs. The architecture of Gropius is perhaps closest in its functionalistic Bauhaus spirit. By comparison, from an initial search for rationality and modularity Le Corbusier developed his expression in a more sculptural and even "brutalistic" spirit, particularly in his later production, while Aalto searched for humane contacts with society and nature, relating his works with the character of the place.

##### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

Considering the care given by Mies van der Rohe to the relationship of architecture with their settings, ICOMOS recommends that particular attention should be given to the garden layout of the Villa. Furthermore, while recognizing the current legal protection for the area of which the Tugendhat Villa is part, ICOMOS recommends careful control of land-use in the neighbourhood of the villa.

#### **Brief description**

The Tugendhat Villa in Brno (Czech Republic) was designed by the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and built on a commission from Grete and Frits Tugendhat in 1927–30. It is an outstanding example of a small residential building representing the international style of the Modern Movement in the early 20th century architecture.

#### **Statement of Significance**

The Tugendhat Villa in Brno, designed by the architect Mies van der Rohe, is an outstanding example of the international style in the Modern Movement in Architecture as it developed in Europe in the 1920s. Its particular value lies in the search for ways to implement innovative spatial and aesthetic concepts satisfying the emerging new needs in living standards as well as implementing the opportunities offered by modern industrial production. The Tugendhat Villa established a prototype for 20th century residential housing and became extremely influential in later designs.

### **ICOMOS Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iv*:

**Criterion i** The Tugendhat Villa is a masterpiece of the Modern Movement in architecture.

**Criterion ii** The German architect Mies van der Rohe applied the radical new concepts of the Modern Movement triumphantly to the Tugendhat Villa to the design of residential buildings.

**Criterion iv** Architecture was revolutionized by the Modern Movement in the 1920s and the work of Mies van der Rohe, epitomized by the Tugendhat Villa, played a major role in its worldwide diffusion and acceptance.

### **Bureau Recommendation**

That the Tugendhat Villa in Brno be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iv*.

ICOMOS, September 2001