



Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius

Nikolaus Pevsner

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Moving from William Morris to Walter Gropius, taking in artists and architects from Britain, Europe and the USA, the author shows how the foundation of the best that remains today was laid by a small group of people who thought and taught as well as designed. First published in 1936 and twice revised since then, this survey explores a period of major, exciting transition away from stale Victorian historicism to the 20th century and our modern machine age.

Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius Details

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From Reader Review Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius for online ebook

David Mortimer says

A helpful introduction to modern design. Not brilliantly written but still fascinating and informative.

Bertrand says

Pevsner's book is remarkable: it is short enough and well illustrated, which should make it an easy and accessible read for both the profane eager to find that the modern style did not appear, despite its claims, through divine revelation, but out of a tumultuous historical process, and to those more familiar with the subject, as Pevsner wide ranging knowledge of European and American architecture will have most likely something to teach them.

To this day few writers endeavour to cover both aspects of modernism, that is the technical one and the much more popular 'cultural' one: Pevsner adresses both with a certain brio, and unsurprisingly given its early publication, with fairly little secondary sources. He seems just as much at ease with the tracing of concrete and metal use in architecture back to the eighteenth century, as he is taking his reader from Arts & Crafts to Modernism, via Art Nouveau, synthesizing convincingly many aspects and influences, and especially emphasizing those liminal styles like Secession or the work of Hodler which exhibit what others might have deemed incompatibilities form and content. The one thing that could be found lacking is a more in depth look at the politics involved in the battle between historicism and modern style, and in particular on the peculiar 'neither left nor right' position of art nouveau. Then again surely the context might easily be blamed for Pevsner not lingering on such sensitive questions.

Last but not least, any lover of modernism will be delighted to read such a history written by a militantly unapologetic "defender of the faith." Writing in the thirties, at a time where he could still claim with a straight face a status of pioneer for his historical endeavour, the author radiates a candid confidence in the principles of modernist design, in the 'style of today' as he likes to call it. Yet already, betraying the nostalgia and conservatism inherent in the grasp of modernism as coherent whole, he feels the need to scold the late comers such as Le Corbusier or Niemeyer, for their deviant, indulgent expressionism. His judgements and evaluations of schools and individuals are virtually reducible to one single scale: how close did their work brought design history to its final, rational and angular apotheosis. He concludes: "[A]rchitects as well as clients must know that today's reality, exactly as that of 1914, can finds its complete expression only in the style created by the giants of that by now distant past." In other words, this book is both a landmark for the writing of its history, and for modernism itself!

Mary Ellen says

I've recently gained a new level of appreciation for William Morris and found a reference to this book in a bibliography. What a great find! This is considered a classic work, and in the 2005 addition is complemented by commentary from Richard Weston. I am clearly a novice in architecture and art, but I could follow the argumentation and learned from the wealth of exemplary photographs and art designs. Give it a try if you have a high comfort level with academic writing.

Jen says

I read this before studying in Paris and it was a gorgeous read. It certainly opened my eyes to architecture that I would otherwise just walk past. I recommend this to students of art history and also to those who are about to travel to Western European cosmopolitan areas.

Read it with google handy to enhance your experience. Look up what you don't understand or recognize. Great resource!

Will says

Two stars is generous for this wordy and poorly illustrated book that has a poor chronology. It is annoying when the author talks about items extensively that are not illustrated or with illustrations that lack scope. The subject is great. I am a big fan of Morris, Wright and Klimt, to name a few, but I will try another text to get a better understanding of what lead up to the modern movement. Don't waste your time or money on this one.

Nico Macdonald says

Exhibited as an influence in Terence Conran: The Way We Live Now.

Erin Reilly-Sanders says

Another book read for class that I likely would not have chosen, I ended up enjoying this one more than most. The arc of its argument seemed easier to understand than most, looking at how the arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau came together with other ideas to create modernism, all from an English perspective. Additionally, the book piqued my interest due to the subject matter of two movements that I

Stella Mill says

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W...>

Vanlilith says

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Ralph Zoontjens says

Very good book treating developments around architecture and design during the 19th and early 20th century, up to early modernity. This has been the most important period for shaping the future of our mass-manufactured world, where we are now slowly climbing out of, entering the 3rd Industrial Revolution.

Sam says

I may be reading this for class, but I like it enough to put it on here. It's an interesting take on art history, not a textbook.

Edit: This is pretty much all you need if you're interested in modern design. I don't always necessary agree with him but he has a certain way of putting things that is pretty endearing. I wish he was still alive just so I could see what he'd write about postmodernism. Actually, he'd probably have a heart attack about it.

Zaiga says

This book was originally published in 1936, and the copy I'm reading was revised and rewritten in 1960. I love reading about modern design's beginnings from someone who is living in that era. :)

Erin says

A classic, but very dated and heavy-handed.
