

An Exemplar of Modern Architecture

History And Theory Assignment 2

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Barcelona Pavilion - Mies van der Rohe

The Barcelona Pavilion, found in Montjuïc hill Barcelona, is highly important to the evolution of architecture as it structured the beginning of the theme 'less is more' which helped further modern architecture. The pavilion was designed by renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and his lesser known companion Lilly Reich back in 1929 for the International Exposition in Barcelona. Throughout history the meaning and use of the pavilion has developed differently to its original use, it was built like a conventional exhibition hall but used as a space for the official reception of King Alfonso XIII and intended to represent a "spirit of peace" by using the colour often affiliated with peace with that being white. As time progressed, the pavilion was used for more educational purposes so architects could study the use of materials, reflections and space. It is also at the forefront of the current debate on modernism as a whole in architecture from lecturers, students, and practicing architects (Rost Architects, 2022; Jackson Crane, 2024).



(ArchDaily, 2022; ArchDaily, 2024).

The plan and section of the Barcelona pavilion, as shown in the published sketches by 'Archdaily' reveal a highly ordered yet fluid spatial composition. These drawings are essential in communicating the architect's intention, showing how space is defined not by enclosed rooms but by careful placement of planes. In plan, the pavilion is organised through a free flowing layout, where walls do not fully enclose spaces but instead guide movement and create zones. Circulation is informal, allowing visitors to move freely between interior and exterior areas, reinforced by the continuity of materials such as marble and glass. The building appears minimal, with a flat roof supported by slender cruciform steel columns, creating a sense of lightness and openness. The roof also highlights the low horizontal emphasis, which strengthens the connection to the surrounding landscape. The principal elements include the reflective pools, polished walls and the iconic column grid, all of which work together to dissolve boundaries between inside and outside. Together, the plan and section demonstrate Mies van der Rohe's recurring modernist principle of "less is more," achieving clarity, balance, and spatial harmony (Architectures Models, 2024; ArchDaily, 2024).

The Barcelona Pavilion has an excellent use and blend of materials and light, which allows a great sense of space and atmosphere. The pavilion achieves this by using materials like marble, travertine, onyx, glass, and steel for both practical and aesthetic reasons. The marble and travertine floors and walls reflect light, making the space feel bigger and brighter, while the onyx wall gives a warm, glowing effect when sunlight touches it. Glass walls let natural light enter and help connect the inside with the outside. Thin steel columns hold up the flat roof without blocking views, keeping the interior open and simple. The surfaces are smooth and polished, which makes the space feel calm and elegant. The details, like the way the stone slabs and glass panels meet, are very neat and show careful planning. Overall, the choice of materials, how light interacts with them, and the clean details help the pavilion feel open, light, and balanced, once again showing Mies van der Rohe's idea of "less is more." (ArchDaily, 2022; ArchDaily, 2024).

The Barcelona Pavilion embodies 3 key modernist ideas: openness, simplicity, and the integration of interior and exterior spaces. These ideas emerged after World War I, when architects aspired to have functional, rational designs supported by new materials such as steel and reinforced concrete. At the time, the pavilion came across as a new idea because it broke away from traditional enclosed rooms. As an alternative, Mies van der Rohe used free-standing walls, minimal structural supports, and open circulation paths to create a continuous space. The idea of 'less is more' is repeated by stripping away decoration and using high-quality materials in their natural state, the Pavilion demonstrates how elegance can be achieved through proportion, light, and spatial composition alone. Luxury materials such as marble and onyx are used not for ornamentation but to enhance the sensory experience of the space; it makes it appear smooth, helping the idea of continuation. The Pavilion's influence is far-reaching since it established new ways of thinking about the relationship between structure, materials, and spatial experience. The open-plan concept, integration with the landscape, and refined detailing influenced the development of minimalism and modernist architecture in the twentieth century. (Rost Architects, 2022; Jackson Crane, 2024).

The Barcelona Pavilion is a great example of how architecture can be both simple and powerful at the same time. Its design shows that a building does not need decoration or complicated details to be impressive. The open plan allows people to move freely through the space, and the thin steel columns support the roof without getting in the way, making the interior feel light and airy. The glass walls help connect the inside with the outside, reflecting the pools and surrounding landscape, which makes the space feel bigger and more connected to its environment. The careful choice of the materials marble, travertine, onyx, glass, and steel helps add elegance and a sense of luxury, but without being too flashy. The light interacts beautifully with these materials, reflecting off polished surfaces and creating shifts in color and atmosphere throughout the day. At the time it was built, the Pavilion was very different from most other buildings because it did not have separate enclosed rooms. Instead, it encouraged visitors to move and explore, giving them a new way to experience space. Mies van der Rohe wanted to create a modern building that was functional, elegant, and visually striking, and he managed to achieve this through the simplicity, precise detailing, and careful material use. The Pavilion still inspires practicing architects, students, and designers today because it demonstrates that architecture is about more than walls and roofs, it is also about space, light, materials, and how people experience them. In short, the Barcelona Pavilion succeeded in meeting its goals, and it remains an enduring example of

modernist design, teaching lessons about minimalism, spatial freedom, and harmony that are still relevant in architecture today.

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