

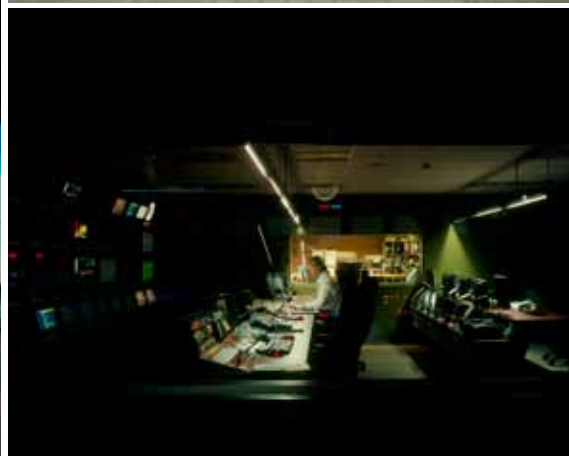
MY IDOL

LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE

German architect
Martin Ebert finds
inspiration from the
modernist pioneer

BY NOAH DAVIS

AS A TEENAGER GROWING UP IN BERLIN IN THE '80S, MARTIN Ebert idolized Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Even 25 years later, he still remembers the first time he saw an exhibit of his work. "I remember looking at a large-scale photograph of the Farnsworth House against the backdrop of the Indian summer and being almost overwhelmed by the clarity of the structure, its lightness, and the relationship between building and landscape," he says. "Other contemporary architecture seemed trivial in comparison."







*Des Moines Public Library, photos
by Farshid Assassi*

*Opposite page: Ernsting Service
Center in Coesfeld, Germany, photo
by Christian Richters*



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The Farnsworth House near Plano, Illinois, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1951

But it was van der Rohe’s structures in Chicago—a city where Ebert twice studied under the legendary architect’s protégés—that crystallized his worldview. “The clarity and simplicity, but also the sheer power that some of those Chicago buildings have, made a very lasting impression on me,” Ebert says. He cites van der Rohe’s post office—“What a beautiful civic building in contrast to its rather mundane function”—as well as the architect’s Crown Hall and 860-800 Lake Shore Drive as particularly inspirational.

Ebert now runs his own firm, Studio Meda, and the Miesian influence has manifested itself throughout his career. The Ernsting Service Center in Coesfeld, Germany is a prime example. The building, which he completed during his time at Berlin firm David Chipperfield Architects, explores the relationship of frame and envelope, structure and skin. It is 90-percent glass, but its

defining feature is a series of deep concrete balconies. “There is a shadow gap,” Ebert says. “On one hand, the structure is very heavy, but on the other, it’s almost floating above this grassland.”

His work on the Des Moines Public Library in Iowa refines this concept further. “The building is a more contemporary take on the headquarters of the ’50s and ’60s, but it’s about the very simple structure and the very clear idea of how the skin wraps around it,” Ebert says. The copper tint of the library shines in the sun, setting it off from the surrounding brick buildings and fields of landscaped green grass.

Fittingly, Studio Meda’s website proudly features a van der Rohe quote: “We want to stand with both feet firmly on the ground, yet push our heads high up in the sky.” A bit of poetic inspiration ready to be discovered by another architecture-obsessed teenager. ✨