

Bauhaus Spirit Thrives Amid Colorado's Peaks

Aspen is celebrating its links to a designer from the influential German art school.

By CINDY HIRSCHFELD

As Germany celebrates the centennial of the Bauhaus in Weimar, Dessau and Berlin, the short-lived revolutionary art school is also being honored in a surprising location: Aspen, Colo.

The prolific Bauhaus artist and designer Herbert Bayer lived in Aspen from 1946 until 1975, and he left a rich, lasting mark on the mountain resort town. A yearlong slate of events includes walking tours, exhibitions, gallery shows, talks, art workshops, musical performances and more. You can even order a Bauhaus-style pastry made of squares and rectangles of cake in primary colors at Plato's restaurant at the Aspen Meadows Resort.

A good place to begin: the exhibition "bayer & bauhaus: how design shaped aspen" (through April 2020) at the Aspen Historical Society's Wheeler/Stallard Museum. The overview features sketches, posters, photographs and other items related to Bayer's commercial design work, his local architecture projects and the impact he had on the community. It also answers the question of how the Austrian-born Bayer, who left the Bauhaus in 1928 for an advertising career in Berlin, wound up in a remote mountain outpost, which, at the time, verged on a ghost town.

Designing a Town's Rebirth

The short version: The Chicago industrialist Walter Paepcke and his wife, Elizabeth, jump-started Aspen's renewal several decades after the town's silver-mining economy went bust in 1893 and the population dwindled to 700. In 1946 Paepcke invited Bayer — then living in New York City after having left Nazi Germany — to Aspen to help design and market the town's rebirth.

In addition to buying up many of the town's disused buildings and getting the fledgling ski area off the ground, Paepcke



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envisioned Aspen as "a cultural utopia, a place to discuss the issues of the day in a neutral spot," said Lissa Ballinger, the art curator at the Aspen Institute. The area's incredible natural beauty also played into the idea of feeding one's body, mind and spirit, as the Paepckes' high-minded concept for Aspen is now characterized.

To this end, in 1949 the couple organized a 20-day bicentennial celebration to honor Goethe, the German writer; the event introduced the town to hundreds of visitors, including Thornton Wilder and Albert Schweitzer, and led to the establishment of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies (the latter part of the name has since been dropped) and a long-running international design conference.

With Aspen back on the map, Bayer, the quintessential influencer of his time, dove into the task of spiffing up and advertising the town and its amenities. From the mid-1940s to the early '70s, Bayer worked on a wide range of projects: designing buildings, helping set local policies and creating ski posters that promoted Aspen's cachet as a ski destination. He designed the annual programs for the Music Festival, and even created custom stationery for the Hotel Jerome, which he restored. (Much of this graphic work is now on show at Wheeler/Stallard.) He renovated the Wheeler Opera House, closed since a fire damaged it in 1912, and designed the summit lodge atop Aspen Mountain — his first architecture commission — with an innovative component: a concave roof over the fireplace that caught snow, which then melted into a water source.

"He was like a bulldog on projects," said the artist Richard Carter during a spring talk at the Aspen Art Museum. Mr. Carter served as Bayer's assistant during the 1970s. "Work was everything, and he couldn't imagine not doing it."

Bayer also became a hyper-engaged citizen. "An artist or designer functions in society, not as a decorator, but as a vital participant," he wrote in "Herbert Bayer Visual Communication, Architecture, Painting." He helped found the local historical society, advised town government on historic preservation, and chaired the planning and zoning commission for five years.

Not all of Bayer's attempts succeeded. Hoping to brighten up the town's aging buildings, he encouraged local residents to paint their houses in unconventional colors like Pepto-Bismol pink and a shade now known as Bayer blue. "It was kind of a flop," said Lisa Hancock, vice president and curator of collections at the Aspen Historical Society. And it took time to introduce Bauhaus-style architecture to a community of potato farmers and ranchers. "It was culture shock to Aspen residents at the time,"



Ms. Hancock said.

The local peaks reminded Bayer of his beloved Austrian Alps, and he incorporated images of the environment — mountains, wildflowers, snow — into both his graphic design and fine art. His buildings, meanwhile, straddled the line between indoors and out, integrating their surroundings through expanses of glass and pared-down facades that don't compete with the landscape.

Recently, during one of the free art and walking tours she leads across the Aspen Institute's campus, Ms. Ballinger, the curator, pointed to the Koch Seminar Building. "Every single thing Bayer built was in deference to the mountains," she said. Indeed, with its low roof, numerous windows and neutral colors, the structure allows the nearby peaks to dominate. "You shouldn't be paying attention to the exterior, only to the interiors," Ms. Ballinger said, referring to one of the principles of Bauhaus architecture.

The campus, known as the Aspen Meadows, is considered Bayer's greatest total environment, said Ms. Ballinger, and is the only Bauhaus enclave in this country. From 1953 to 1973, Bayer, with the assistance of the local architect Fritz Benedict (who was also Bayer's brother-in-law), designed seminar rooms, lecture halls, a health club, guest quarters and residences across the 40-acre property. Today, attendees of the Aspen Institute's forums and other events, as well as visitors to the Aspen Meadows Resort on the west side, keep the campus vibrant (the original hotel rooms were rebuilt in the 1990s, but retain Bayer's aesthetic).

Equally compelling as the buildings is the outdoor art on the campus; many of the works were created by Bayer. You will find



them on one of the interpretive walking tours led by a landscape architect and Aspen city councilwoman, Ann Mullins. The seven-piece sculpture "Anaconda," erected last year, is one of many pieces that the oil company Arco commissioned from Bayer for its corporate art program. A series of large grass mounds reflects Bayer's interest in earthworks before it became an art world movement. In his etched "Sgraffito Wall Mural," black lines echo the undulations of the surrounding mountains.

New this summer, the Aspen Historical Society's twice-weekly Bauhaus Architec-

Clockwise from top: Herbert Bayer designed the "Kaleidoscreen" sculpture, which is on the campus of the Aspen Institute; an exhibition of Bayer's work is at the Wheeler/Stallard Museum in Aspen; his "Sgraffito Mural" adorns a wall at the institute; a fence he designed surrounds a house where he lived in Aspen; and another one of his sculptures sits on the institute's campus.

IF YOU GO

Go to bauhaus100aspen.org for a list of events, including the following:

The Pitkin County Library's self-guided **Story Walk** (through Aug. 31) introduces children to the Bauhaus through a progression of illustrated signs along a short trail.

"A Total Work of Art: Bauhaus-Bayer-Aspen," at the Aspen Institute's Resnick Gallery, explores the impact of the art school on Bayer's work in multiple media. At the Institute's Paepcke Gallery, "Bauhaus 1919-1928" showcases photographs of Bayer's pioneering displays for the 1938 Bauhaus exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (both exhibits run July 1 to June 2020).

A print exhibition at the Red Brick Center for the Arts plays off Bayer's "Great Ideas of Western Man" advertising campaign for Walter Paepcke's Container Corporation, with contemporary pieces that mix images and Bauhaus quotes (through July 18).

An exhibition of Bauhaus-inspired furniture curated by the furniture maker Brad Reed Nelson, accompanied by paintings by Dick Durance and Richard Carter, takes place in nearby Carbondale (through July 5).

The Aspen Music Festival and School performs selections from Gunther Schuller's "Seven Studies of Paul Klee" (July 14).

The architect Heiki Hanada, who designed the new Bauhaus Museum in Weimar, speaks at the Aspen Art Museum (July 17).

natural Walking Tours wind through the West End, highlighting Bayer-designed homes and other examples of modern architecture. "Our post-World War II modern design reflects the strength of our environment and of our community," said Nina Gabianelli, vice president of education and programming at the Historical Society, who helps guide the tours. "That's what makes Aspen, Aspen."

Something Old, Something New

Another thing that makes the town what it is: the architectural blend of old and new. Perhaps paradoxical for an avant-garde artist — but in keeping with a philosophy expressed by the Bauhaus founder, Walter Gropius, when he visited Aspen — Bayer was an advocate for maintaining Aspen's numerous Victorian houses, and even lived in one himself, with his wife, Joella, before moving into a home of his own design. "One of his greatest contributions," said Ms. Ballinger, "was to say, 'Don't tear down these perfectly kept Victorian homes, but when you build, build modern.' He's one of the reasons Aspen is not a faux Swiss village."

Despite the current hoopla, Bayer doesn't share the same high profile as his Bauhaus colleagues like Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe. "What Bayer did was more influential than his name," said Gwen Chanitt, curator emerita at the Denver Art Museum and author of a book on Bayer and Aspen, during a recent talk at Aspen's library.

She attributed that partly to his voluminous output. "His critical acclaim suffered because people didn't know how to categorize him," she said.

After suffering a heart attack while traveling in Europe, Bayer moved to a lower elevation in 1975, leaving Aspen for Montecito, Calif., where he died in 1985. The noted Aspen architect Harry Teague, whose newest building is a Bauhaus-inspired classroom pavilion he designed for the Aspen Center for Physics, said: "What's really exciting to me is the enthusiasm about the centennial. It seems to have awakened an aspect of the town that was beginning to languish."



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Take a Drive Back in Time

In the Hudson River Valley, one of the most beautiful parts of New York State, remnants of the Dutch colonial era are hiding in plain sight.

By RUSSELL SHORTO

Some people travel with a particular objective in mind: to find the past in the present. It's an impossibility, of course — you never truly succeed, because the present is so very present. But in a wayward, fast-moving world, a focus on history can root you and offer perspective. This was my idea on a recent trip when I set out to find New York's origins.

In the early 1600s, the Dutch founded a colony called New Netherland, with its capital, New Amsterdam, on Manhattan Island. It was the base from which they laid a claim to the New World, and from which they tussled with their archenemy, Britain, and her colonies in New England and Virginia. The British won the power struggle when they took over in 1664, rechristening New Amsterdam as New York City.

New Netherland may be history, but its

legacy is hiding in plain sight. It can be found in old houses and barns, in street patterns and in New York place names, from Harlem to Rotterdam, from "Breuckelen" (now Brooklyn) to Rensselaer. It's in American culture broadly: "Cookies" are Dutch; so is coleslaw. These small-scale legacies mask larger inheritances. The Dutch of the 17th century pioneered the concepts of free trade and religious tolerance, key ingredi-

The Van Cortlandt House, in Van Cortlandt Park, dates from 1768 and is the oldest building in the Bronx.

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An Aerie of Southern Hospitality

Can Blackberry Mountain be a wellness retreat if you are drinking and not hiking? (Yes.)

By SHEILA MARIKAR

To get to breakfast at Blackberry Mountain, a resort built into Chilhowee Mountain in Tennessee, you could lace up a pair of sneakers, ideally with rugged soles, grab a walking stick, and set off on a 1.4-mile uphill climb shaded by chestnut oak trees that culminates at the Firetower, the property's restaurant (elevation: 2,800 feet) that serves inspired riffs on traditional breakfast dishes — sunny-side-up eggs topped with house-fermented hot sauce and avocado yogurt — alongside panoramic views of Tennessee, Georgia and the Carolinas. On the way, you might pass candy-striped mountain laurel (don't lick, it's poisonous) and jet-black ravens. The trip up takes about an hour.



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Or you could call the front desk and ask for a ride in one of the in-house Lexus S.U.V.s. On the way, you might pass golf carts. The trip up takes about five minutes — and still ends with a delicious breakfast.

This is one example of the "choose your own adventure" philosophy advanced by Blackberry Mountain, described by its proprietor as "your own private national park." Opened in February, it is the sister resort of Blackberry Farm, the award-winning bastion of Southern hospitality.

While the resort at the farm, a pastoral paint by numbers with lush green lawns and white wooden rockers, is bucolic bliss, the one at the mountain, seven miles away in the Great Smoky Mountains, with 25 miles of private hiking and biking trails, is summer camp stepped up. Stepped way up: Rates start at \$995 per night (for double occupancy, including dinner and breakfast). The robust slate of activities ranges from sound bathing (a guided meditation en-

Blackberry Mountain is the sister resort to Blackberry Farm, an award-winning getaway nestled among the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. At left is a view of the main lodge, the swimming pool and cottages.

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