



Kunstmuseen Krefeld

Haus Lange

Haus Esters



ENGLISH

The History of Haus Lange and Haus Esters

The villa ensemble comprising Haus Lange and Haus Esters in Krefeld is one of the architectural jewels of the modernist style in Germany. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), a modernist architect who remains influential to this day, designed and built the two private villas between 1927 and 1930.



Haus Esters, Krefeld, Garden View, Photo: Volker Döhne

They were designed in an era of new beginnings known as the Golden Twenties. Women were wearing their hair in a bob, Fritz Lang's movie *Metropolis* presented audiences with a cruelly beautiful future, and Josephine Baker danced the Charleston nude. The New Objectivity style set the tone in art, design, and architecture by viewing reality in a way that was not only realistic but also imposed order. A construction boom saw residential developments and private houses built in the new, functional International Style. The Bauhaus school was a hotbed of ideas and a field of experimentation at this time – above all in the liberal and applied arts, design, architecture, and pedagogy.



Haus Lange, Room of the Lady, 1930/31, Berliner Bildbericht, © VG Bildkunst Bonn, 2019

Mies van der Rohe and Krefeld



Mies van der Rohe working at Haus Esters, ca. 1927/28 © VG Bildkunst Bonn, 2019

It was the textiles manufacturer Hermann Lange (1874–1942) who brought the young architect Mies van der Rohe to Krefeld. He and his friend Josef Esters (1884–1966) were both members of the board of the Association of German Silk Weavers (Verseidag). Lange was also a member of the German Werkbund and, being an art collector, supported the efforts of Krefeld museum directors Friedrich Deneken (1857–1927) and Max Creutz (1876–1932) to bring together contemporary art, handicrafts, and industry. Hermann Lange and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe probably met through the Berlin gallery owner Carl Nierendorf in 1927.



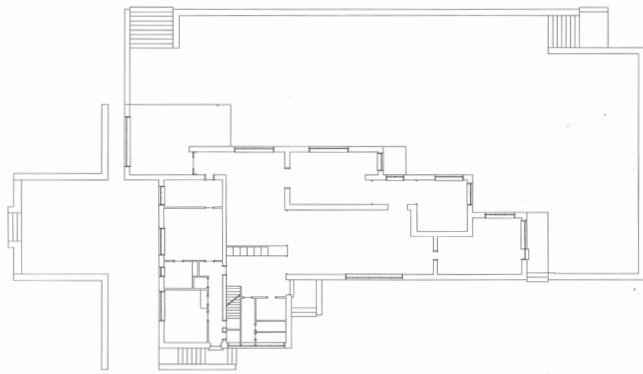
Verseidag, Krefeld, 1938, © VG Bildkunst Bonn, 2019

Over a number of years, Mies van der Rohe did a great deal of work for Krefeld: together with Lilly Reich, he designed the exhibition stands “Velvet & Silk” (Berlin 1927) and “German Silk” (Barcelona 1929) for Verseidag. In 1930/1931, a dyeing mill and gentlemen's lining fabric works was built for Verseidag; it is the only Mies van der Rohe factory building that is still standing today. Draft designs for a club house for Krefeld Golf Club (1930), for a private house for Ulrich Lange (1934/1935), and for an office and mail order building for Verseidag (1937/1938) were never realized. Mies van der Rohe left his mark on Krefeld more than on any other European city.

How Haus Lange and Haus Esters Came About



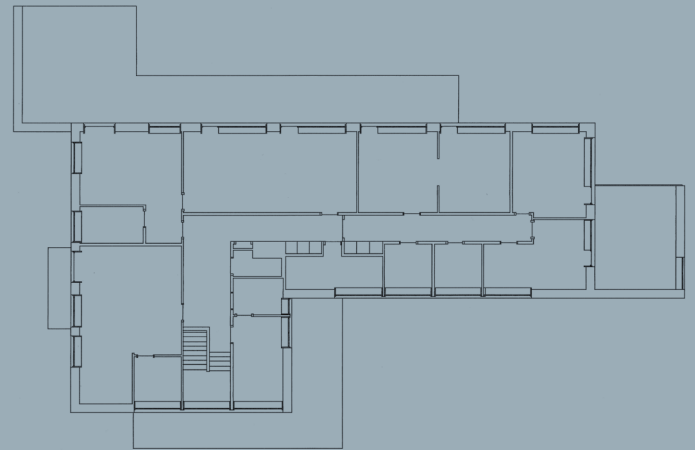
Haus Esters, Krefeld, Garden View, Photo: Volker Döhne



Haus Esters, Ground Floor (2019)

In 1927, the architect drew up a floor plan for Haus Esters. This preliminary project was the starting point for an intensive dialog with the two clients. The draft design was adapted to meet the individual requirements of their families. The first plan features a radically open layout with a glass wall that was to link the building and the garden. The ideas were visionary but the requirements of the two Krefeld families were dictated by their day-to-day lives and their social pretensions. Consequently, two houses were built that appear very similar at first glance but in fact differ considerably in their details. Certain room functions, like the lobby that serves as a public social space, are reminiscent of structures that were common at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the salon. The staff entrance has a modern and functional feel, for example; it is situated immediately next to the main entrance.

The construction of the brick villas is supported by numerous steel girders, mostly arranged horizontally in the floors of the first story. This does not constitute a completely autonomous steel structure, however.



Haus Esters, First Floor (2019)

The brick “skin” of the building has no load-bearing function itself. Nonetheless, the steel girder structure gave the architect relative freedom in terms of where to place walls and to create large window openings. This means that individual cuboid units could be constructed that have a box-like appearance. Inside, the room segments are interconnected and hint at the open layout that is typical of Mies van der Rohe – even though the rooms can actually be separated by doors. On the street side, the buildings appear

relatively closed and compact. To the rear, the cuboid elements are staggered like a flight of steps, starting with the narrowest side from west to east, where the building increases noticeably in volume. As for the materials used, brick dominates on the outside, while various types of wood (oak, walnut, and Macassar ebony), travertine, and white walls predominate inside. The two houses were completed by 1930. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was not only responsible for the architecture; together with his then partner Lilly Reich (1885–1947) he also designed numerous interior details.



Haus Esters, Krefeld, Garden Door (outside, detail) Photo: Volker Döhne

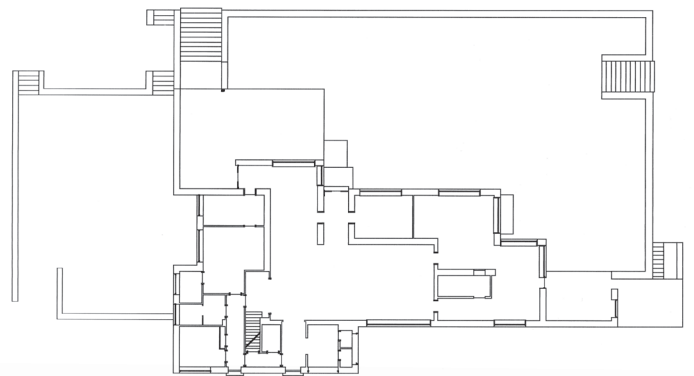
From the door handles and window mechanisms to the ceiling lamps, cladding for the radiators, display cabinets embedded into the walls, and a complete furnishings concept, everything was coordinated to harmonize. So that art could be displayed in the private rooms, Mies van der Rohe and Reich had designed a special system of rods and hanging rails all the way around, plus plinths made of travertine.

Thanks to their large window openings, the houses enter into a dialog with the nature that surrounds them. The two gardens with their different collections of trees and plants, and the vegetable patch, were likewise designed by Mies van der Rohe. The whole plot, which today encompasses both gardens, was modeled on the English landscape garden. Groups of plants offer sudden vistas of the houses, paths lead all across the plot, and an artificial terracing system provides a good overview of the entire ensemble. While working on the two private

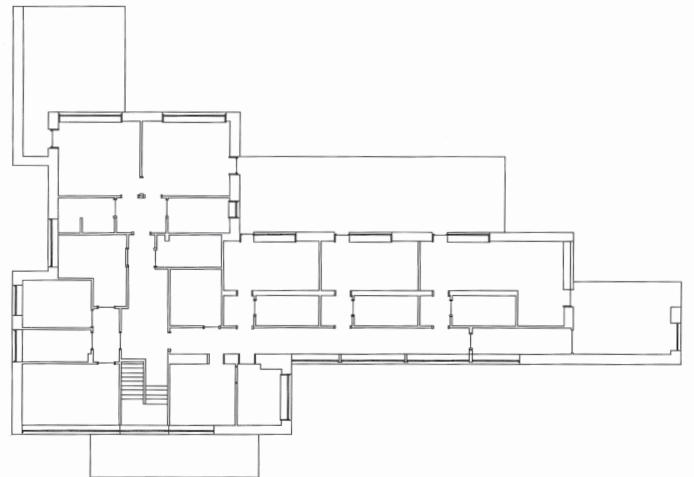
houses in Krefeld between 1927 and 1930, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe experienced the first highpoint of his career. In 1927 he had just completed his work on the German Werkbund exhibition entitled “The Dwelling” in Stuttgart (the Weißenhof Estate).



Haus Lange, Garden View, South, Photo: Volker Döhne



Haus Lange, Ground Floor (2019)



Haus Lange, First Floor (2019)

For the world exhibition in Barcelona, he developed what was probably his most radical vision of an open, material-dominated building: Germany’s exhibition pavilion, known today as the Barcelona Pavilion. At the same time, he worked on Villa Tugendhat in Brno (in what is today the Czech Republic). It was here that the architect was able to turn many of the visionary ideas that he had originally had for Haus Esters and Haus Lange into reality. Mies van der Rohe had studied under Bruno Paul and Peter Behrens in Berlin. As its last director, it was his job to shut down the Bauhaus in Berlin in 1933. His international career in the United States then began when he established his Chicago office in 1938 and built his high-rise towers constructed of modules, grids and curtain facades.

Directly next to Haus Esters, on what used to be the kitchen garden, there is a summer house with a history of its own. It was one of the first prefabricated “turnkey” buildings of the Weimar period. The concept was developed for the Deutsche Werkstätten Dresden-Hellerau by an architect who was unknown at the time. In individual parts, it was shipped to Josef Esters in 1923 and installed on site on top of a brick-built basement. Thus it was already in place when construction began on Haus Esters in 1928. The Esters family used it initially as a small summer house, and later as a garden house. Mies van der Rohe incorporated this charming little house into his garden concept; after all, his wife Ada Bruhn had spent some time living with the dancer Mary Wigman in the garden city of Hellerau.



Summer House, Haus Esters, Krefeld,
Photo: Kunstmuseen Krefeld



Haus Esters, Krefeld, Terrace,
Photo: Volker Döhne

Haus Lange and Haus Esters have been landmarked buildings since 1984, as has the summer house since 2007. Thanks to a private initiative launched by local Krefeld citizens, and with funding from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the two houses were extensively restored between 1998 and 2000. Within the framework of the “Euroga 2002+” project, the gardens were restored two years later, with the result that the entire complex today corresponds more or less to the original plans. With funding from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, both the houses, the gardens, and the summer house were restored once again in keeping with preservation principles between 2016 and 2019.

Haus Lange and Haus Esters as a Museum

Haus Lange has been used by the Kunstmuseen Krefeld as an exhibition space for contemporary art since 1955, as has Haus Esters since 1981. In a generous gesture, Ulrich Lange (1905–1972), the son of Hermann Lange who originally commissioned the house, donated his house to the city of Krefeld in 1968 so that it could become a permanent place for contemporary art in Krefeld.



Yves Klein in the room *Le Vide*, Haus Lange, Krefeld, 1961, © VG Bildkunst, Bonn 2019, Photo: Charles Wilp

In 1961, a tradition of staging site-specific exhibitions began at Haus Lange—one that continues to this day. In the house, Yves Klein used his monochrome pictures and sculptures to create rooms of color in blue, gold, and pink. An empty space was additionally established to induce visitors to adopt a state of openness and sensitivity. Ever since, artists and designers have repeatedly engaged in different



Elmgreen & Dragset, *The Newcomers*, Haus Lange, Krefeld, 2017.
Photo: Volker Döhne, © Elmgreen & Dragset

ways with the architectural vocabulary of modernism, the private house as public space, the history of the families, the social interconnections between the houses, or the dialog between architecture and nature. In around 1970, site-specific projects – some of them quite spectacular – were realized by Christo, Hans Haacke, the Haus-Rucker-Co group of architects, Richard Long, and Fred Sandback. More recently, John Baldessari, Rosella Biscotti, Jasmina Cibic, Elmgreen & Dragset, Alicja Kwade, and David Reed have created works



Alicja Kwade, *Degree of Certainty*, Haus Lange, Krefeld, 2013.
Foto: Volker Döhne, © Alicja Kwade

and projects in situ. The history of art is reflected at this place in a very special way. While new temporary exhibitions of contemporary art are constantly on show in the rooms of Haus Lange and Haus Esters, the surrounding gardens feature permanently installed sculptures.



Jasmina Cibic, *The Spirit of Our Needs*, Haus Esters, Krefeld, 2017, Photo: Volker Döhne, © Jasmina Cibic

Ten sculptural works installed in the garden convey intimate insights into forward-looking sculptural approaches of the past four decades, beginning with a work by Richard Long created in 1969. Other works include sculptures from artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Richard Serra, and Ulrich Rückriem.

Today two artists' rooms are permanently connected with Haus Lange and can be visited upon request: *Le Vide* (1961) by Yves Klein and *Dark Room* (2018) by Elmgreen & Dragset. With her site-specific installation comprising a table, a bench, and stools, the artist Andrea Zittel turned the summer house into a place for encounters in 2019.



Haus Lange, Krefeld, Photo: Volker Döhne

Visit

Haus Lange Haus Esters
Wilhelmshofallee 91–97
D-47800 Krefeld

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum
Joseph-Beuys-Platz 1
D-47798 Krefeld

Ticket

Haus Lange Haus Esters
Adults 7 Euro,
reduced 3 Euro

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum
Adults 7 Euro,
reduced 3 Euro

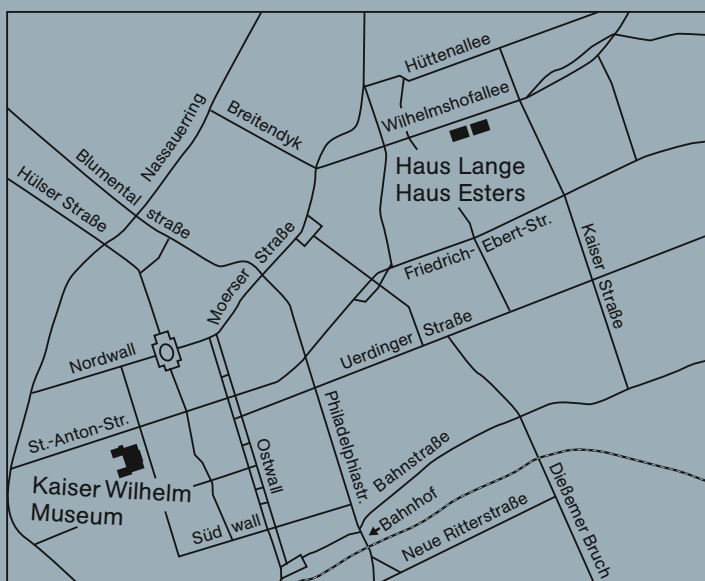
Combi ticket for all
three houses
Adults 12 Euro,
reduced 4 Euro

Guided Tours
2 Euro additional
to admission

Opening Hours

Haus Lange Haus Esters
Tue, Thu–Sun 11 am–5 pm
Wed 3 pm–9 pm (to 26.01.2020)

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum
Tue–Sun 11 am–5 pm



Information & Registration

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STADT KREFELD
INNOVATIV – KREATIV – WELTOFFEN

Haus Esters, Krefeld, Garden View,
Photo: Volker Döhne