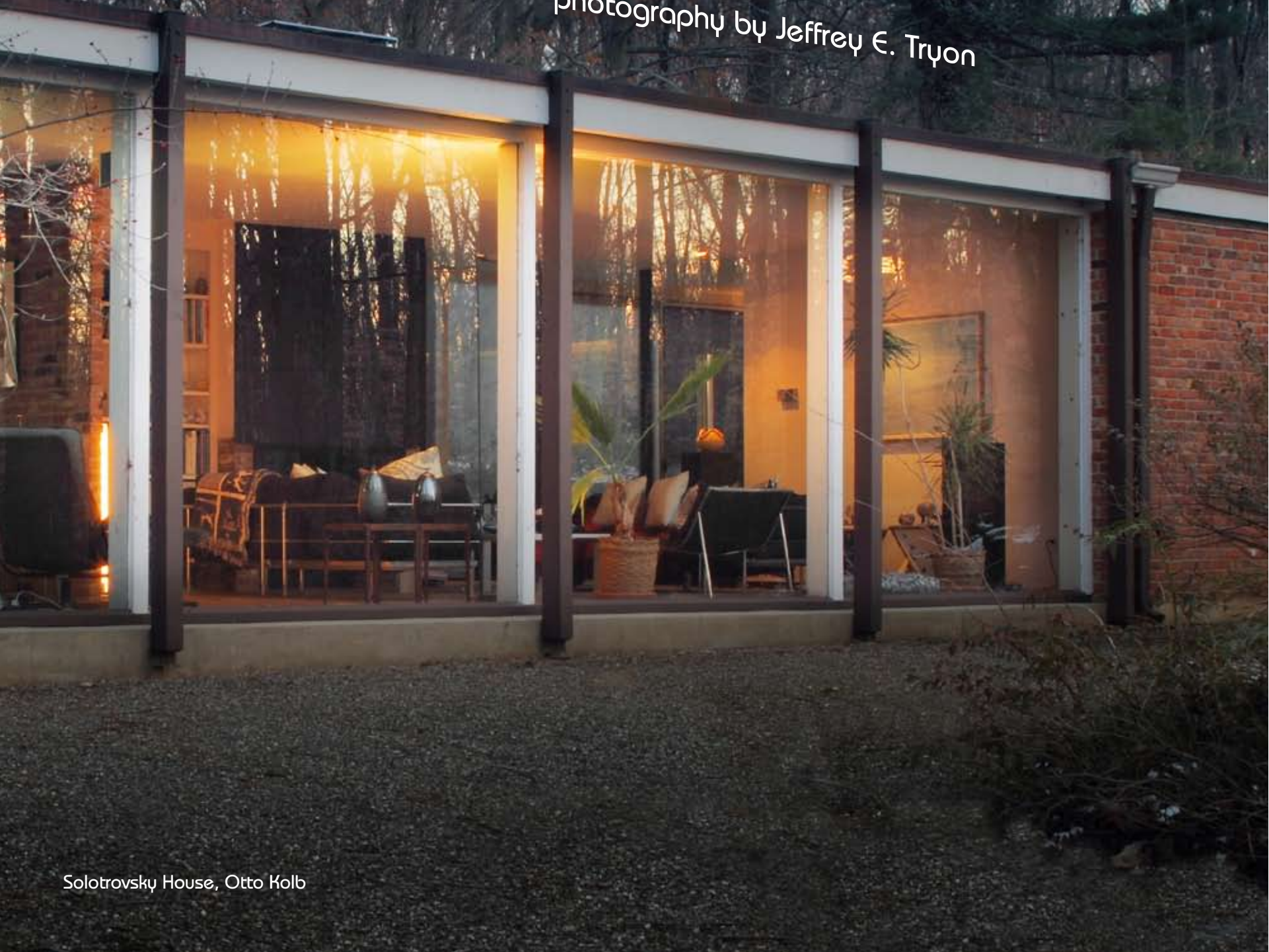


# PRINCETON BAUHAUS MODERN

by Michele Kolb  
photography by Jeffrey E. Truon



Solotrovsky House, Otto Kolb

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(TOP-LEFT) The Bauhaus Building in Dessau, Germany. (TOP-RIGHT) Wassily Kandinsky, *Circles in a Circle*, 1923. (LOWER-LEFT) Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Pneumatik*, 1924. (MIDDLE) Type designed by Herbert Bayer for the Bauhaus in Dessau, above the entrance to the workshop block. Photograph by Jim Hood, 2005. (LOWER-RIGHT) Marcel Breuer seated in his *Wassily* chair, first all-tubular steel chair, 1925. Photograph license from Alamy.com.

Some of the most significant architects of the Bauhaus school designed homes in the Princeton area. Why and how did Princeton become a Mecca for Bauhaus architects?

The Bauhaus was an art institute in Germany founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius, with the aim of unifying art and technology in the machine age. According to the Gropius Manifesto of 1919, “The ultimate goal of all art is the building.” The school believed in teaching a new way of seeing in which the character of a building was perceived as the totality of its parts. The key principle of the new architecture—“form follows function”—combined architecture and engineering, its principal mission a radical simplification that would provide an architecture for the masses. The core principles are that construction should be rational, functional, honest and simple in form and should embrace emerging technology.

In 1933, while Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

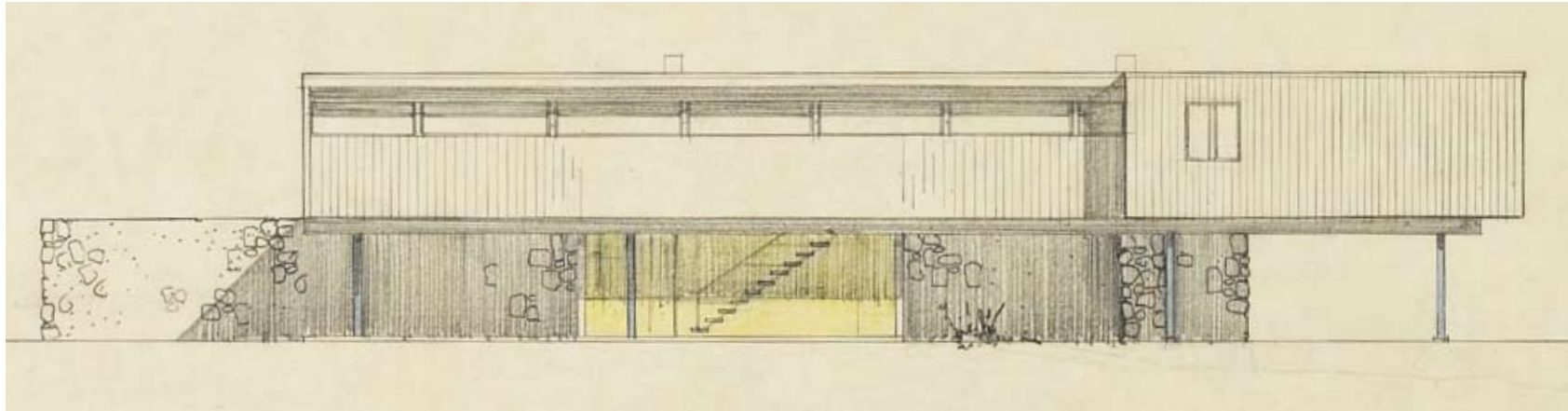
headed the school, political pressure had caused the closing of the Bauhaus. After World War II many founding members emigrated to the United States, where faculty and architects joined prominent U.S. architecture schools. Their goal was to reinvent America’s post-war identity. Among the noted architects and designers who found teaching opportunities and opened practices were Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer who taught at Harvard and the Institute of Design, which was founded in Chicago by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and became known as The New Bauhaus.

Princeton became a hub for academics and intellectuals who also emigrated to the United States after the war. Their taste in design and desire to embrace new technology were their links to émigré Bauhaus architects. Marcel Breuer completed two homes and member housing at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton. The Breuer homes included the Lauck and Levy houses.

The Lauck house was commissioned in

1948. The intent was that this design could be built by any builder and would serve as an archetype of living for the twentieth century. Its key attributes were a single story, a low rise with a flat roof, a lack of ornamentation, a sustainable design, and large windows allowing for natural light and integration with nature. The design was intended to be “bi-nuclear” (i.e., designed to flexibly change as the life stages of the resident family changed). Modular additions and subtractions would be based on need.

Breuer’s Levy house was commissioned by Marion Levy, a professor of Sociology and International Affairs at Princeton and his wife, Joy. A Breuer classic, this home remains intact today, and is still held by the original family. The home is the essence of International Style. The front appearance is discreet and well-integrated into the sloping landscape. The main rectangular living area integrates symmetrical side additions, and cantilevers the rear slope. The overall rear elevation appears



Original Marcel Breuer elevation of the Levy house, courtesy of Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University Libraries.



to float. In classic Bauhaus style, the large windows dissolve the interior and exterior of the house into one. As in all these historic homes, the Levy house offers an opportunity for restoration.

Breuer was also commissioned by the Institute of Advanced Study to design their member housing. Breuer's approach—utilizing the Bauhaus architectural principle of adaptability to different lifestyles and circumstances—was well-suited to accommodate the multi-cultural presence and various family sizes at IAS, and his design reflects this compatibility. It was also a great opportunity to design for a nature-centric location adjacent to the Institute woods. The complex was intended as a semi-retreat from the busier environment to foster theoretical research and intellectual rigor and create a communal space for academics. The original design of Institute housing has transcended

time and with very little renovation continues to function as intended to this day.

Another surviving example of International Style mid-century residential design in Princeton is the Solotrovsky house, designed by architect Otto Kolb, a young Swiss architectural apprentice who was drawn to the Bauhaus and its ideology. Post-war, he was invited to Chicago by Serge Chermayeff to teach at the Institute of Design which later became the Illinois Institute of Technology, headed by Mies van der Rohe after the war. At this New Bauhaus, International Style architecture was Kolb's passion. The ideology of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total environments) encompassed architecture integrated with lighting, furniture, and accessories.

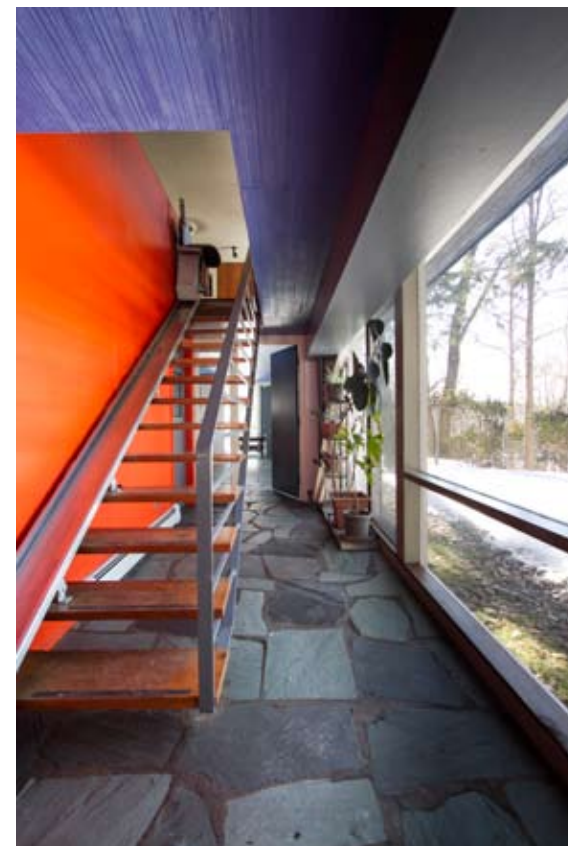
Commissioned in 1948 and completed in 1952 for Morris Solotrovsky, a European pharmaceutical research doctor and professor at Rutgers who was introduced to Otto Kolb

through his circle of European colleagues, the Solotrovsky House demonstrates early principles of sustainability with integration of radiant heat and large overhangs for solar control, simplified constructions, planar and simple materials such as brick, wood and plaster. Innovative technologies included a dual living room-kitchen fireplace, recycled brick and expressed exterior columns. The 1949 design pushed technology and included floor-to-ceiling-height glass windows, eliminating the perception of a barrier from interior to exterior. Additional innovative technologies included complementing the design of the large glass windows by creating continuous walls of cabinetry with operable venting to allow for exterior air flow.

Among the most notable examples of Bauhaus International Style architecture in mid-century homes located in and around the Princeton area, these monuments of



Levy House, Marcel Breuer





Member Housing at the Institute for Advanced Study, Marcel Breuer



Lauck House, Marcel Breuer





Solotrovsky House, Otto Kolb

design, technology and innovation remain as aesthetically current and completely functional for resident family needs today as when they were first conceived. Princeton's European academics and intellectuals demonstrated their deep-seated commitment to the Bauhaus architectural movement and to a new architectural idealism in America with these homes, which represent unique tributes to the International Style, and as with all architecture at the turning point of an era, deserve preservation. **■**

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She has 30 years of professional experience working with some of the most prestigious designers and architects in the country. Her experience includes historic restoration and LEED-certified projects. She lives and practices in Princeton and New York City. Her father was the Swiss Bauhaus architect, Otto Kolb. Additional article research by Brian Poirier.



Otto Kolb, courtesy of the Kolb family archives.

