

## SOTHEBY'S TO SELL THE FARNSWORTH HOUSE

### MIES VAN DER ROHE'S MASTERPIECE WILL BE OFFERED IN THE DECEMBER 12, 2003 AUCTION OF 20TH CENTURY DESIGN



(© George Lambros, 1997)

**LOCATED IN PLANO, ILLINOIS, THE HOUSE IS ESTIMATED TO SELL FOR \$4.5/6.0 MILLION**

New York, NY, October 6, 2003 - Stuart Siegel, President and CEO of Sotheby's International Realty announced today that on December 12, 2003, Sotheby's International Realty, in cooperation with Koenig & Strey GMAC Real Estate, will work with Sotheby's to offer for sale Mies van der Rohe's masterpiece, The Farnsworth House, in an auction of Important 20th Century Design in New York. Universally regarded as a seminal work of art, the house was commissioned by Edith Farnsworth, a member of a socially prominent Chicago family, and completed in 1951. In 1972 Lord Palumbo, art collector, philanthropist and former Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, acquired the house from Dr. Farnsworth, beginning his collection of 20th century architecture. For the last 30 years Lord Palumbo has painstakingly restored the house to preserve its original design and in recent years has opened it to the public. As Sotheby's did with the groundbreaking sale of The Philip Johnson Townhouse in 1989, The Farnsworth House will be offered as the last lot of an auction of 20th Century Design and is estimated to sell for \$4.5/6.0 million.



James Zemaitis, Senior Vice President and Director of Sotheby's 20th Century Design Department, said, "The Farnsworth House is one of the seven wonders of the modern architectural world. It was the most staggering development in 20th Century domestic architecture, and set on pastoral grounds of breathtaking beauty, it takes its rightful place alongside Fallingwater by Frank Lloyd Wright as the most recognizable icon of the American modernist landscape."

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) was born in Aachen, Germany, and worked initially as a draftsman specializing in furniture design and rendering. After working with the progressive German architect Peter Behrens, Mies opened his own office in 1914 and soon achieved international recognition as one of the leading figures of modern architecture, through such works as the German Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, Spain, and the Tugendhat House in Brno, Czechoslovakia. He also established a reputation in the field of architectural education, having been affiliated with the famed Bauhaus school of design in Germany. In 1938 Mies emigrated to the United States and in the winter of 1945-46 was introduced to Edith Farnsworth at a dinner party on Chicago's North Side.

Edith Farnsworth was a young, single doctor at Passavant Memorial Hospital in Chicago looking to build a weekend retreat on the north bank of the Fox River, 58 miles southwest of Chicago. While Mies' reputation in Europe rested on numerous completed residences, he had never had the opportunity to complete a house in the United States, and thus he eagerly pursued the commission.

The design of the Farnsworth House is one of Mies' most successful applications of his adopted motto "less is more." Speaking of the house, Mies himself noted that, "When one looks at Nature through the glass walls of the

Farnsworth House, it takes on a deeper significance than when one stands outside. More of Nature is thus expressed - it becomes part of a greater whole."

Today's generation of architects look to The Farnsworth House as a seminal influence. Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate and Contemporary architect, Tadao Ando, commenting on the auction, said, "This space of glass and steel, honed to exquisite limit, that Mies had left behind has truly taught me the meaning of 'transparency' in architecture. This 'transparency' transcends mere physical clearness, it is the logical clarity of the space. The Farnsworth House is the archetype of the true transparent space, thus for it, I maintain respect as well as awe up to today."

The Farnsworth House is constructed of a carefully crafted steel skeleton frame of beams, girders, columns and hand-chosen travertine. The façade is made of single panes of glass spanning from floor to ceiling, fastened to the structural system by steel mullions. The building is heated by radiant coils set in the concrete floor. The December auction will also comprise the furnishings from the house which include a dining table and desk designed by Dirk Lohan, the Chicago architect who is the grandson of Mies. Farnsworth lived in the house until she sold it to Lord Palumbo.

### **Lord Palumbo**

Lord Palumbo, former Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain and current Chairman of the Trustees of the Serpentine Gallery, resides in London, England and in Frank Lloyd Wright's house Kentuck Knob in Chalk Hill, Pennsylvania, close to Fallingwater. Additionally, Lord Palumbo owned Le Corbusier's Maisons Jaoul in Neuilly on the outskirts of Paris. Lord Palumbo has been a Trustee of the Mies van der Rohe Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York since 1977, and in the late 1960s proposed the construction of a tower in London by Mies. Lord Palumbo has also worked closely with renowned architects Lord Richard Rogers and the late Sir James Stirling.



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