



IN THE GALLERY (BELOW), JOSEF ALBERS' BUTAQUE CHAIRS INSPIRED BY DESIGNER CLARA PORSET, 1927 DESK, BED AND ARMOIRE, AND A REPRODUCTION OF A 1922 STAINED-GLASS WINDOW

Dream haus

A new gallery in rural Connecticut showcases the visionary work of Bauhaus masters Josef and Anni Albers

PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM FRIEDBERG WRITER: EMMA O'KELLY

The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Bethany is one of Connecticut's best-kept secrets. Nestled in the woods, it's a magnet for pilgrims of the Bauhaus keen to learn more about the German emigrés who were among the school's brightest students. Featuring paintings, furniture and textiles produced by the pair throughout their long careers, the foundation has now put on permanent display never-seen-before furniture and textiles, accumulated over the past 40 years.

They appear in a new, barn-like building designed by Irish architect Eoghan Hoare, in collaboration with local architect of record Hunter Smith and Albers foundation artist and facilities manager, Fritz Horstman, a stone's throw from the foundation's headquarters. The existing campus includes a library, archives and studios for visiting artists, all designed by one of Albers' former students, Tim Prentice, and his partner Lo-Yi Chan. The new 3,000 sq ft space is christened Trunk, in honour of Trunk & Co, the Berlin-based furniture business owned by Anni's father. When Anni died in 1994, the company was sold and the proceeds enabled the foundation's director Nicholas Fox Weber to »





purchase the 75-acre site near where the Alberses had lived and set about preserving their legacy.

Weber called upon Hoare, a young graduate, after meeting him at a dinner party in Ireland. 'Josef was the son of a builder/maker and craftsmanship was very important to him. If he had to pick between an Armani-clad architect espousing theories about dialectics, or one who had his sleeves rolled up and a hammer in his hand, you know where he would have turned,' says Weber. Hoare, who has made furniture with master craftsmen in rural Japan and built kindergartens in Borneo, got the job.

Hoare based his design on the tobacco barns that dot this part of New England. He battled poison ivy and freezing winter temperatures to clear the site that would become a gallery, showroom and education centre, open by appointment only to curators, manufacturers and students. 'Galleries and museums can come and select pieces for shows, so the building is very much designed around the function of storing, moving and acclimatising pieces,' says Hoare.

Almost 40 works make up the display. Some, such as a reproduction fireplace made for a private house in Connecticut, have not been seen since they were put into storage after the 'Josef and Anni Albers: Designs for Living' exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Museum in 2007. Others are acquisitions from the estate of Fritz and Anno Moellenhoff, émigré friends of the Alberses. Both couples fled from Germany to North Carolina, and from 1933 to 1949, Josef taught at Black Mountain College. At the same time, he designed stacking tables, desks, beds, armchairs and ottomans for the Moellenhoffs, along with his masterpiece – a dining room console that is at The Art Institute of Chicago. All were made at Trunck & Co. Ten of Anni's woven

ABOVE, JOSEF ALBERS' MEXICAN CHAIRS, 1940, AND FRAMED SKETCHES OF THE DESIGN; TEA TABLES IN ASH VENEER AND MILK GLASS, 1928; AND THE ICONIC 1927 NESTING TABLES IN ASH VENEER, BLACK LACQUER AND PAINTED GLASS

BELOW, A REPRODUCTION OF THE SEATING DESIGNED BY JOSEF ALBERS FOR WALTER GROPIUS' WAITING ROOM AT THE BAUHAUS IN WEIMAR

tapestries and around 20 of her textiles are here too, among them pieces she made for the architect Philip Johnson (a lifelong friend, he helped the Alberses emigrate to the US in 1933), as well as newer designs now manufactured by Sunar, Knoll and Maharam.

A highlight is the Director's Waiting Room, a replica of a waiting room that Josef designed for outside Walter Gropius' office at the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1923. Josef was put in charge of the school's glass workshop in 1922, the year Anni enrolled as a student. A row of seats, a light, a stained glass window, bookshelves, a corner cabinet and table that made up the original space have been reproduced exactly, over ten years, by Berlin-based carpenter Justus Binroth. >>





LEFT, A REPRODUCTION OF THE BRICK FIREPLACE DESIGNED BY JOSEF ALBERS FOR THE ROUSE HOUSE IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, BUILT BY HIS ARCHITECT FRIEND AND YALE PROFESSOR KING-LUI WU

BELOW, ASCENSION, PART OF JOSEF'S 1942 GRAPHIC TECTONIC SERIES, WITH A 1950S JAPANESE VASE BY CHIKUHO, AND TWO OF ANNI'S WEAVING BOAT SHUTTLES



'It is tranquil, correct and workman-like, all values Josef believed in,' says Weber. At the other end of the building is a reproduction of his first stained glass window, created in 1918 for St Michael's Church in his hometown of Bottrop, Germany (pictured on this issue's Contents, page 052). 'Getting all these works back on display was long overdue,' says Weber.

By the 1960s, a string of professorships, teaching posts and shows across the US had led the Alberses to be seen as creative royalty. Charles and Ray Eames were friends, as was Johnson, 'although Josef couldn't stand his late architecture,' says Weber. 'He visited the Glass House and proclaimed that Johnson didn't know how to turn corners,' he chuckles. 'If you visit it, you see he had a point.' Despite rubbing shoulders with Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, Josef didn't believe in architect-built houses. 'He said none of them, with their flat roofs, knew how to build in Connecticut,' says Weber. Instead, the couple lived in New Haven in a plain house where Josef worked in the basement, Anni upstairs. 'Visitors, including myself, were shocked by how unsightly it was,' he adds.

Weber first met the Alberses in 1970 when he was doing a master's in art history at Yale. Fifty years Anni's junior, he became a lifelong friend to the couple,

**JOSEF ALBERS:
A LIFE'S TEACHINGS**

1888 Born in Bottrop, the Ruhr, Germany

1913 Travels to Berlin; becomes an art teacher

1920 Enrolls at the Bauhaus in Weimar

1922 Meets Anni, a fellow student. Both teach at the Bauhaus until its closure

1933 Moves to the US; teaches in North Carolina

1940 Teaches Basic Design and Colour at Harvard

1950 Starts his *Homage to the Square* series

1971 Becomes the first living artist to have a retrospective at the Met

1976 Dies in Connecticut

and stayed close after Josef died in 1976. 'He left the foundation two glass-top tables and not much else,' says Weber, whose acquisition of the couple's works and preservation of their legacy has been tireless and fruitful. In February, a new Albers Foundation opened in Senegal in the remote village of Sinthian (see W*194). In October, a show of their collection of pre-Columbian objects, assembled during sabbaticals in Mexico, will open at Mudec Museo delle Culture in Milan. (It was in Mexico in 1947 that Josef painted the *Variant* series, which evokes the domestic adobe architecture of the country, and Anni created her *La Luz* series of textiles.) The exhibition includes paintings, textiles, drawings, sculptures, lithographs and more than 20 photographs and photo-collages that have never been seen before.

Manufacturers, too, have been scouting around Trunk. Weber plans to have many of these newly visible Albers pieces put into production, alongside classics such as the nesting tables, produced by Ameico. 'His furniture is beautiful, comforting and functional. Josef understood proportion and materials better than anyone. We want to get it right.' ★
'A Beautiful Confluence: Anni and Josef Albers and the Latin American World', 11 October 2015 – 1 March 2016, at Mudec Museo delle Culture, Milan, mudec.it; albersfoundation.org