

**“THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES” –
NOW PLAYING IN PLANO**

by John C. Blew

**A Paper Delivered at a meeting of the Chicago Literary Club
on January 3, 2011**

©Copyright 2011
by John C. Blew

“THE EMPEROR’S NEW CLOTHES” – NOW PLAYING IN PLANO¹

When I was a child, my mother read to me many of the fairy tales written by Hans Christian Andersen. One of my favorites was “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” In the story, an Emperor who cares for nothing but his wardrobe hires two swindlers, posing as tailors, who promise to make him the finest suit of clothes from a fabric invisible to anyone who is unfit for his position or “just hopelessly stupid.” The Emperor cannot see the cloth himself, but pretends that he can for fear of appearing incompetent or stupid; his ministers do the same. When the fraudsters report that the suit is finished, they pretend to dress him, after which the Emperor marches in a grand procession before his gathered subjects. Many in the crowd “ohhed and ahhed,” until a little boy cries out, “But he isn’t wearing anything at all!” With that, others in the crowd agree and are emboldened to say what they really see. The Emperor cringes, suspecting that he has been duped, but nevertheless holds himself up proudly and continues the procession. Only later did I learn that Anderson was poking fun at the hypocrisy and pretension of Danish high society.²

The saga of the iconic Farnsworth House, designed by Mies van der Rohe and located near Plano, Illinois, 60 miles southwest of downtown Chicago, reminds me in some important respects of the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” This paper sets forth the reasons for that view. It is an unpopular and minority view, but one which deserves airing amid the onslaught of what I believe to be excessive and one-sided praise of the House by most members of the architectural establishment and many others. And lest you think that my remarks merely reflect the simple-minded prejudices of one who dislikes modern architecture, I assure you nothing

could be further from the truth. Without a doubt, Mies was a great architect whose buildings and teaching had enormous influence on the built environment of the second half of the 20th century.

However, not every building designed by even a great architect deserves to be placed on a pedestal, if you will forgive the pun. This is a universal truth. Our finest creative professionals and artists occasionally produce a clunker. What I find interesting in the case of the Farnsworth House is that its shortcomings as a place to live, which I believe are numerous and in several cases serious, have been generally overlooked entirely or minimized over time as the House has attained near mythic status.

The story of the creation of the Farnsworth House and of the dramatic and ultimately tragic relationship between its architect, Mies van der Rohe, and his client who commissioned it, Edith Farnsworth, has been told many times, including in a paper entitled “A Little House in the Country” delivered two years ago from this same podium by our own Don Wroblewski, who was one of Mies’s students at IIT. That story is not the focus of my paper, but there is certain basic information which is necessary to put my remarks into perspective.

The original nine acre tract of land on which the House is located fronts on the Fox River in Kendall County. It was purchased by Edith Farnsworth in 1946 with the intent of building a weekend house there. An abandoned farmhouse and barn were on the property, which Edith later removed. After first trying without success to hire George Fred Keck to design the house,³ Edith engaged Mies for that purpose. Although Mies came up with the basic design of the House in relatively short order, for various reasons construction did not begin on it until the Spring of 1949. The House was completed two years later, in March 1951, at a total cost of \$74,000, which translates to approximately \$600,000 in 2009 dollars.⁴ In 1947, Philip Johnson curated a

major solo exhibition of Mies' architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in which a model of the Farnsworth House was prominently displayed and received much attention. As a result of this show and other publicity, the House gained considerable fame even before it was built.

During the long gestation of the House, Mies and Edith became good friends and visited the Plano property on a number of occasions. However, as construction on the House progressed and its cost escalated, tension developed between architect and client which, coupled with uncertainty over Mies' fee and other issues, ultimately led to a complete and bitter break in their relationship. In October 1951, Mies filed suit against Edith in the Circuit Court of Kendall County, seeking as damages unreimbursed costs to build the House and unpaid architect's fees in the aggregate amount of \$20,000. Edith, no wilting violet, promptly filed a counterclaim against Mies, seeking damages of \$34,000, being the difference between the \$40,000 that she claimed Mies agreed would be the cost of the House and the amount that she had actually paid for its construction. Following a hearing that lasted some 25 days in the late Spring and early Summer of 1952, a Special Master in Chancery appointed by the Court issued his report in May 1953, finding for Mies and against Edith on nearly every point in contention. Thereafter, rather than prolong the proceedings, the parties settled, with Edith agreeing to pay Mies an amount which different sources state ranged from \$2,500 to \$14,000.⁵ After the case was concluded, Mies and Edith never spoke again and Mies never again visited the House. Nor did he ever design another house.

Mies van der Rohe was born in 1886 in Germany and died in Chicago at age 83 in 1969. He was a famous avant garde architect in Germany and the last director of the Bauhaus there whose modern style fell out of favor with the German Government and who immigrated to the

United States in 1938, when he was in his early '50s. He settled in Chicago and assumed the position of director of the architecture program at what became shortly thereafter the Illinois Institute of Technology. While holding his position at IIT, Mies established a private architecture practice from offices in downtown Chicago. Except for the master plan for the IIT campus and several new buildings there, he did little design work in the United States prior to receiving the Farnsworth House commission. It was an important opportunity for him to perfect the structural vocabulary which he would replicate to varying degrees in the many successful commercial and institutional projects which he undertook in Chicago and elsewhere in subsequent years.

Edith Farnsworth was a fascinating woman. Seventeen years younger than Mies, she was born in 1903 into a wealthy and socially prominent Chicago family. She attended the University of Chicago while at the same time studying violin at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. Having decided to pursue a career in music, she moved to Italy to continue her violin studies. Eventually, she gave that up and returned to Chicago. However, during her stay in Italy Edith became fluent in Italian and developed a serious taste for Italian poetry and a love of that country.⁶

After returning to Chicago she settled on medicine as a career. In this respect Edith was a pioneer of sorts, medicine being largely a male pursuit at that time and for a number of years thereafter. She enrolled in Northwestern University Medical School, from which she graduated in 1939 at the age of 36 with an M.D. degree. She maintained a private practice in Chicago and served on the staff of Passavant Memorial Hospital for over 30 years thereafter. For a time she was also an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Northwestern's Medical School. Her specialty was nephrology – diseases of the kidney – in which she did distinguished research and

contributed to significant advances in the field.⁷ She worked hard, often, as she states in her unpublished memoirs, without the recognition from her male counterparts that she felt she deserved.

Dr. Farnsworth was highly cultured. She loved classical music and opera, wrote poetry and was a serious collector of Asian art. She moved in Chicago artistic circles, including those centered around the New Bauhaus and later the Institute of Design. However, she came late to modern architecture, and based upon entries in her memoirs, it seems to me her knowledge of it was superficial.⁸ While not unattractive physically, Dr. Farnsworth was no beauty. She was tall – six feet by her own admission, and rather homely. She never married but appears to have had a wide circle of friends of both sexes. One source described her as being rather snobbish,⁹ and I deduce from the tone of her memoirs that she probably had a prickly personality.

Much has been made of a possible romantic relationship between Edith and Mies,¹⁰ but as far as I can tell it is all speculation, most of it idle. However, based on statements in her memoirs, it does seem that early on she developed an emotional attachment to Mies at some level. She seemed to derive considerable pleasure from and was proud of her friendship and professional association with him. My conclusion is that she was star-struck by Mies – and his apparent interest in her, whatever it was – and quite willing for him to have his way regarding the design of her country house.

The House is a simple though elegant and refined rectangular steel and glass structure. It consists of eight wide-flange steel columns, four on each long side spaced 22 feet apart, to which two sets of steel fascia channels were welded to form a perimeter frame at the roof and floor levels. Steel cross-girders were welded to these longitudinal channels, and pre-cast concrete

planks were placed on these girders to form the roof and floor slabs. The roof cantilevers almost six feet beyond the columns on the east and west ends. Above the roof slab is a low service module. Beneath the floor slab is a cylindrical iron drum housing all drainage pipes and incoming water and electrical services. There are no gutters; the roof has a slight inward pitch directed to a downspout pipe leading down through the interior core to the ground below the House.

The floor is elevated just over five feet above the ground, both for flood protection and to enhance the views from inside the house. The service drum below the floor is painted black, so that it is hardly noticeable from most exterior viewing points. Consequently, as many have noted, the House appears to float above the ground. All four walls consist of single panes of one-quarter-inch-thick floor-to-ceiling glass, the largest of which are over ten feet wide and nine feet high.

The interior space of the House is approximately 1,600 square feet. The exterior upper deck or porch on the west side is approximately 600 square feet and the large rectangular lower deck or terrace, set off to the west from the main structure, is about 1,300 square feet. To reach the interior, the visitor ascends two sets of 12-foot wide stairs which are perpendicular to the horizontal planes of the roof, floor and terrace, one from the ground to the terrace and then another from the terrace to the porch. The glass double doors into the interior are set in the west wall of the House.

The interior of the House is a single column-free space 55 feet long, 28 feet wide and nine feet six inches from floor to ceiling. It is divided only by a free-standing service core sheathed in a wood veneer, and, perpendicular to the core, a free-standing wardrobe also made of

wood. The service core, situated off-center, is 25 feet long and 13 feet wide and runs east-west; except in the center, its walls do not reach the ceiling. The core contains two bathrooms, one at each end, a galley kitchen, a fireplace and a long narrow interior space packed with utilities. The wardrobe is six feet high and 12 feet long. The core and the wardrobe serve to define various “zones” within the House, a living room area to the south, centered on the fireplace and facing the river, a sleeping area to the east, the long and narrow galley kitchen with stainless steel countertop and cabinets overhead to the north and a dining area to the west which could also double as a place for a guest to sleep.

The steel columns and welds were sandblasted to assure a completely smooth surface and then painted white. The plaster ceiling is also painted white. The surfaces of all of the floors and steps, inside and out, are covered by rectangular slabs of travertine stone which are off-white in color. Light-colored floor to ceiling curtains surround the entire inside perimeter of the House.

Outside, there are no service buildings within view to mar the natural environment. Dr. Farnsworth built a garage at the north end of the property where she parked her car and then walked several hundred yards down to the House. During her ownership there was a crude roadway to the House which was sometimes used by her and by guests.¹¹ This has since been relocated. The House sits in pristine isolation to this day, surrounded by a meadow to the north, woods to the east and west and the river to the south.

There have been three owners of the House since its construction, but only one who lived in it as a home. That one was Edith Farnsworth, who owned the House for 20 years from its completion in 1951 until 1971. During that period, Dr. Farnsworth, whose primary residence

was an apartment on the Near North Side of Chicago, used the House as a place to spend weekends, holidays and some vacations, sometimes in the company of overnight guests or visitors for the day.

The second owner was Peter Palumbo, a wealthy British real estate developer who purchased the House from Dr. Farnsworth in 1971 for \$120,000,¹² held it for 32 years, and sold it in 2003. Palumbo, who was married and had three young children when he bought the House, was an aficionado of modern architecture, an admirer of Mies and a collector of architecturally significant houses. At one time, in addition to the Farnsworth House, he owned a pair of townhouses near Paris designed by LeCorbusier and a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright located near Fallingwater in Western Pennsylvania.¹³ Throughout the period of his ownership of the Farnsworth House his primary residence remained in London and his visits to the House amounted to no more than a total of six weeks each year.¹⁴ While he and his wife often stayed overnight in the House when visiting, they actually lived with their children in a Victorian house which Palumbo purchased in the nearby town of Plano.¹⁵ I mean no disrespect to Palumbo, who by all accounts was an excellent steward of the House who twice restored it at great expense, once in 1972 shortly after his acquisition of it and again in 1996 following a devastating flood. For both of these projects he employed Dirk Lohan, Mies' grandson and also a prominent Chicago architect who carried on his practice after Mies' death.¹⁶ In 1997 Palumbo essentially turned the House into a museum, hiring docents and opening it to public tours as a way to defray some of the costs of its ownership.¹⁷

However, those mounting costs and other reasons led Palumbo to put the House up for sale in 2000. Many in the local architecture and cultural communities became alarmed that the House might be moved out of state or otherwise abused by an insensitive purchaser. Eventually,

a deal was brokered for the State of Illinois to purchase the House for \$7 million to be operated as a house museum. After that agreement fell victim to politics and a lack of public funds, Palumbo's patience ran out and he put the House up for auction as Lot 800, the centerpiece of Sotheby's 20th Century Design sale in New York on December 12, 2003. You all know the dramatic story which ensued. In an extraordinary and ultimately successful effort, an ad hoc consortium made up of some of Chicago's civic and cultural elite, together with the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and the National Trust For Historic Preservation, raised sufficient funds, literally at the eleventh hour, to enable the National Trust to make the winning bid of \$6.9 million at the auction. With the additional buyer's premium, the astonishing price was over \$7.5 million.¹⁸

To complete the story, since its December 2003 acquisition by the National Trust, the House has been operated and managed as a publicly accessible museum. While it is hard not to admire this heroic effort to "save" the House, I believe it is legitimate to ask whether it was worth it. I, for one, think not.

Architecture is a profession. An architect is technically trained to design buildings and then is examined and licensed to practice by the state. The services of an architect are engaged by a client. The relationship between architect and client is one of trust and confidence. But it is rarely if ever one of equality. When a client engages an architect to design a house, the client can specify his or her requirements and wishes for the house, but the architect has the responsibility of seeing to it that the house which is designed not only meets those requirements but is otherwise safe and secure and fit for the intended purpose.

What makes for a great building? There are many attributes, but the two most important to me are that the building be functional and beautiful. Above all else, the building must be functional, by which I mean that it must work well for its intended purpose. However, being functional is not enough. Unfortunately, our city, like most others, is littered with buildings that function well but are visually bland or downright ugly. For me, a great building is not only functional but beautiful to look at, one which engages the emotions in a positive way. When these criteria are applied to the Farnsworth House, I believe it falls short of being a great building. The House is undeniably beautiful. I have visited it at least five times, in every season, and I never fail to be moved by its beauty. However, notwithstanding its aesthetic appeal, the House suffers from a number of inherent defects which so compromise its fitness as a home as to warrant its disqualification as a great building.

First and foremost, the location of the House is seriously, one could almost say fatally, flawed. As previously mentioned, the original nine acre tract on which the House is located was acquired by Dr. Farnsworth in 1946. Ten years after the House was built, Dr. Farnsworth bought an additional 60 acres to the east of the original nine acre tract, accounting for the bulk of the site when visited today. The nine-acre site which Mies had to work with is bounded by Fox River Drive on the west, River Road on the north, woods on the east and the Fox River on the south. The Fox River Drive Bridge over the river is directly southwest of the House. Much of the tract is level with the river, although it slopes up fairly high toward the north end, along River Road. Most of the site consists of an open meadow.

The Fox River, as it flows westerly through this part of Kendall County, is a major recreational waterway. It was in the 1940s and remains today notorious for flooding, and much of the nine-acre property is located in the floodplain. Notwithstanding that, Mies chose a site for

the House directly in the floodplain and only a few feet from the riverbank, even though there was higher ground at the north end of the property. In the proceeding before the Special Master in 1952, Mies testified as follows:

“We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of both places [i.e., the lower ground or the higher ground] and I proposed to Dr. Farnsworth to build close to the river where there were beautiful old trees. She was afraid that the river would go over the bank, but I still stuck to this place because I thought that [the flooding threat could] be overcome in one way or the other.”¹⁹

Other sources confirm that Mies chose the site in large part because of its proximity to a single giant old black maple tree which would provide shade for the House, not an insignificant consideration for a structure with glass walls on all sides.²⁰ (As an aside, that tree, which has been on life support for several years, is scheduled to be taken down next month.)²¹

The way in which Mies chose to address the flooding concern was to elevate the floor of the House just over five feet above the ground, which he believed after some investigation would be above the highest likely flood stage of the River. Had he raised it any higher, however, the aesthetic quality of the House would have suffered. It would have then resembled a house on stilts. As it was, he had to create a lower level deck, the so-called terrace, to ease the transition from ground to floor level. When he requested information from the State of Illinois on the highest flood stages of the Fox River, Mies was informed that no such records existed, and instead the State advised Mies by letter to “interview old settlers in that vicinity.”²² While this was apparently done, there was a great deal of guess work involved, and as proven by subsequent

developments, the stakes were high. One person apparently not interviewed was Leola, the wife of the local tavern keeper who lived near the Farnsworth House. In her memoirs, Edith quotes Leola as telling her, shortly after she moved in:

“I could have cried when I saw you was going to build down by the shore You don’t know how quick the river can rise. Often I can’t sleep at night for fear it is going to drown us all. Once it came up and flooded your barn so that the farmers could catch fish with a pitchfork.”²³

Kendall County did not begin keeping accurate flood records until the 1980s. Nor would the County have issued a building permit for the House on that site were it to be built today.²⁴ But things were different 60 years ago.

The river overflows its banks on average two or three times a year at the site of the House.²⁵ Usually when this occurs, the House “floats,” meaning that the water surrounds the House but does not rise to a level above its floor. However, there have been several disastrous floods which have devastated the House since it was built. The more recent of these, in July 1996 and August 2008, occurred long after Edith had sold the House. In the 1996 flood, the water level rose to five feet inside the House and broke two of the window wall sections; most of the furniture and several works of art were severely damaged or destroyed and the wood of the core unit was warped beyond repair.²⁶ In the 2008 flood, the water level reached two feet above the floor of the House and did considerable damage,²⁷ some of it still in evidence today. There was also a flood in February 1997, in which the water reached a foot above the floor, but no

serious damage was done since the House was empty as a result of the major flood the year before.²⁸

Much of the literature regarding the House states that these floods rising to such disastrous levels have resulted from the population explosion and building boom in recent years in Kendall County and the other “collar counties” through which the Fox River flows, causing a loss of natural drainage areas for rain water and consequent greater severity of flooding.²⁹ This may be true to a point, but it overlooks the inconvenient fact that in 1954, just three years after construction of the House was completed and while Kendall County was undeveloped farm land, the River flooded to a level of four feet above the floor of the House. The steel structure remained intact (as it did in the later floods), but the wood of the core required expensive restoration and most of Dr. Farnsworth’s furniture and curtains had to be replaced.³⁰ The Executive Director of Farnsworth House, Whitney French, told me that she believes, but has not yet fully documented, that on at least two subsequent occasions during Edith’s ownership, flood waters entered the interior of the House.³¹

Dr. Farnsworth gets a bad rap by many in the architectural establishment for the way in which she furnished and maintained the House. Those who criticize her fail to note that when she moved into the House in 1951, she furnished it throughout with pieces from Jens Risom, a highly respected “mid-century modern” Danish-American designer, which were in keeping with the modern style of the House.³² Whitney French speculates that it was only after the disastrous 1954 flood, when this sympathetic furniture was damaged beyond repair, that Edith got new furniture for her Chicago apartment and moved what was there to her country house.³³ This replacement furniture apparently looked dowdy in such a contemporary space, but who can

blame Dr. Farnsworth for no longer wishing to place valuable furnishings or art at risk of further damage.

This constant risk of flooding remains the most serious of a number of problems facing the House today. The National Trust has explored several possible long-term solutions, all of them extremely expensive. To deal with the situation on a short term basis, Ms. French and a team of volunteers who live in the immediate area stand ready to remove or raise the furniture and core panels on more or less a moment's notice should flooding threaten. And a moment's notice is no exaggeration. According to Ms. French, it takes approximately nine minutes from the time water overflows the riverbank until it envelopes the House to a depth of several feet.³⁴

Can you imagine the anxiety of owning an expensive house in a remote location that was prone to sudden and severe flooding during many months of each year? Even if the water did not rise above floor level, Dr. Farnsworth was constantly at risk of being stranded in the House while it was surrounded by water or, if not in residence at the time, of being unable to access the House, except by boat. Ms. French told me local lore has it that on more than one occasion Dr. Farnsworth was carried from the House by a neighboring farmer as the flood waters rose around it.³⁵

The siting of the House, as it turned out, only got worse in 1968, when the State took 2.2 acres at the west side of the original nine-acre parcel by eminent domain as part of a project to construct a new and much larger and higher bridge over the river and to create a new and elevated approach to it on Fox River Drive, 200 feet closer to the House.³⁶ These improvements, together with the suburbanization of the surrounding area, have resulted in greatly increased traffic on Fox River Drive, within easy sight and hearing of the House, further contributing to the

decline in the quality of living there. For Edith it was the last straw. Not long after, she sold the House and property to Palumbo and moved to Florence. She purchased a villa there and set about writing her memoirs, translating modern Italian poetry and composing poems of her own. She died in Italy in 1977 at age 74.³⁷ Dr. Farnsworth's papers, including the journals containing her memoirs, are now housed at the Newberry Library.

Is it fair to criticize Mies for his choice of a site for the House? I believe it is. As an experienced architect he should have known better than to build an expensive home in a serious floodplain practically on the bank of the river, with so little hard data to rely upon in determining an elevation of the House which would have protected it from flooding. This is particularly true, given that alternative building sites were available at the north end of the property which if utilized would have eliminated the risk of flooding while providing beautiful and unobstructed views to the south over the open meadow to the river. And as it turned out, had such a site been used, the negative effects of the bridge project would likely also have been mitigated. However, this would have placed the structure near River Road, and it would have required a different type of house and not the one Mies was keen to design.

There were several other drawbacks to the House. One was its lack of adequate ventilation. The House was not air-conditioned during the 20 years that Dr. Farnsworth owned it. There were two small adjacent hopper windows at the base of the window wall on the east side of the House. Each of these opened in from the top to about a 45 degree angle and were screened. The only other source of fresh air was the glass double doors at the opposite end of the House. However, there were no screens for these doors, so that opening them was out of the question unless the porch was screened in. Even when opened, the location of the core and the wardrobe as well as the small size and location of the two west side windows impeded the

circulation of air. While air conditioning may have been rare for houses of even wealthy Americans in 1951, access to fresh air was not. The lack of cross-ventilation and absence of any screening of the sun coming through the glass walls except for the foliage of the large maple tree, meant that in hot weather the interior could be like an oven.³⁸ Dr. Farnsworth addressed this in a 1953 interview, stating that “In the summer the air [inside the House] gets very hot and stuffy.”³⁹

The House was heated during cold weather primarily by radiant heat from hot water coils in the floor, supplemented by hot air which could be blown into the living room area by a small furnace located in the service core. According to one commentator, such underfoot heating systems produce insufficient heat during mid-winter cold and also require a long period to warm up that is poorly suited to a house which is only occupied intermittently.⁴⁰ Commenting about other aspects of the House in cold weather, Edith had this to say:

“The windows steam up in the winter and drive you crazy. You feel as though you are in a car in the rain with a windshield wiper that doesn’t work And when everything in the core is in operation, the noise is enormous. You hear the furnace kicking on and off, the blower exhaust going, everything at work. The cost of heating is incredible. . . . I pay more for heating my week-end house than my four-room apartment in Chicago.”⁴¹

Referring to the condensation that streamed down the chilled glass in winter and collected on the floor, the author of a leading monograph on the House called it “an elementary design fault whose consequences Mies must have foreseen and could have avoided, but presumably chose to ignore so as not to destroy the beautiful simplicity of his glass-and-steel facades.”⁴²

When the House was completed in March 1951, it had no screens on the porch. It is hard to imagine a house in a Midwestern river bottom without screens or a screened porch. Not only would the mosquitoes eat one alive but the occupant would be effectively prevented from the pleasure of relaxing outside during the summer months. The bug problem was exacerbated at night by the light emanating from inside the house, which with glass walls practically glowed in the dark. In fairness to Mies, it appears that while he expressed his dislike for screens, he accepted the need for them on the porch. The model for the House done by Mies' office for the 1947 Mies exhibition at MOMA showed the porch screened in. However, the relationship between Mies and Edith was severed before screens were ordered. She lived in the House for the summer of 1951 without them, but that was enough. She had them built and installed in April 1952 by one of the young architects in Mies' office, supposedly on the sly. However, the architect in question sought and received Mies' counsel during the screen design process.⁴³

Once installed, these screens were permanent, remaining up 12 months of the year during the subsequent 19 years of Edith's ownership. While providing a much-needed place to relax outdoors in good weather and a source of fresh air inside, one look at photographs of the House with the screens will show how much they detracted from the aesthetic quality and beauty of the structure. In the restoration of the House undertaken by Peter Palumbo shortly after he bought it, air-conditioning was installed and the screens were permanently removed.⁴⁴ Throughout Palumbo's 32 year ownership of the House and during the last seven years that it has been owned by the National Trust, the House has been "presented" in its purest form, with the porch open and unscreened.

A fireplace is another amenity which virtually any owner of a Midwestern country house would wish to have, and Edith was no exception. Mies made provision for a fireplace on the

south side of the core, facing the “living area” of the space. However, inexplicably, he failed to provide for a defined hearth, requiring the logs to be laid on the floor of the structure. According to Professor Franz Schulze, Mies’ biographer and perhaps the leading authority on the House:

“Fires lit even from logs lying on a makeshift hearth had the unhappy effect of creating a wild circulation of ash throughout the interior [of the House]. Edith Farnsworth . . . only rarely used the fireplace.”⁴⁵

Dirk Lohan sought to rectify this design error by installing a slightly raised travertine platform and a metal grid to serve as a hearth as part of his 1972 restoration of the House.⁴⁶ Whether this actually solved the problem is unclear, but for Edith Farnsworth it was too late in any event.

In any house, privacy is always a necessity. Not necessarily in its public areas, but certainly in those spaces used for more intimate purposes. There are two dimensions to this: privacy from persons on the outside looking in and privacy from other persons within the structure. In the case of a house being designed for use by a single woman in a remote location, one would think that both types of privacy – and security – would be of even greater concern. But not for Mies. In her memoirs, Farnsworth recalled that during an early visit to the property by the two of them, before the House was designed, she asked Mies what kind of materials he was thinking of using for the House. According to her, he said in reply:

“I would think that here where everything is beautiful and privacy is no issue, it would be a pity to erect an opaque wall between the outside and the inside. So I think we should build the house of steel and glass; in that way we’ll let the outside in.”⁴⁷

I find it remarkable that Mies would not consider privacy, and the possibility of being seen from the outside throughout the House, to be circumstances to be addressed in the design. It is true that there were floor to ceiling curtains on all four glass “walls” and that these could be drawn when privacy was desired. But doing so negates the very purpose of the glass walls – to permit an unprecedented closeness to the natural world outside. The effect – and I have stood in the bedroom area with the curtains drawn – is gloomy and claustrophobic.

In the case of a house for a single person – man or woman – there is also a greater need for privacy within the house than is the case for a house designed for a couple or a family, who are used to living together on intimate terms. To socialize, a person who lives alone must by definition have one or more guests. Their relationship is different, and each will generally want some sphere of privacy during the course of any visit. A completely open space, even one in which the core and wardrobe provide some internal privacy, is challenging in that regard.

Addressing this in her memoirs, Edith had this to say:

“Another contested point [between Mies and me] was the ‘open plan’ of the interior, according to which a guest would have a bathroom but no bedroom. He, or she, could sleep on a sofa or I would spread a mattress on the travertine floor. We would co-habit a sort of three dimensional sketch. I in my ‘sleeping space’ and he in his – unless sheer discomfort and depression drove us together.”⁴⁸

The lack of privacy from the outside was a constant issue for Farnsworth throughout her occupancy of the House. When asked in an interview whether she felt “calm” in the House, she replied as follows:

“The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evenings I feel like a sentinel on guard I can rarely stretch out and relax.”⁴⁹

She was frequently disturbed by architecturally inclined trespassers wanting to see the House up close. In addition, boaters on the river, just a few feet from the House, had a clear and close-up view of the House and anyone in it. Apparently bitter about this to the end, she wrote in her memoirs that:

“It was hard to bear the insolence, the boorishness of the hundreds of persons who invaded the solitude of my shore and my home, and I never could see why it should have to be borne.”⁵⁰

Other than George Fred Keck’s so-called “Crystal House” exhibited during the second year of Chicago’s Century of Progress fair in 1934, and a house designed for his family by Jacques Brownson, a student of Mies, in 1952 in Geneva, Illinois, the only other fully glass house that was actually built of which I am aware is that which Philip Johnson designed and built for himself in 1949 at his estate in New Canaan, CT. Johnson readily acknowledged his debt to Mies, stemming from seeing Mies’ model of the Farnsworth House at the 1947 MOMA show. In this case, Johnson, like Brownson, had only himself to please, since he was his own client and could do whatever he wanted. But even though Johnson’s heavily-wooded 47 acre estate is

surrounded by a high brick wall and his glass house cannot be seen from the street, he was clearly cognizant of the need for privacy for himself and his partner, since at the same time he erected the glass house he also built the adjacent brick house, a highly private structure with only three round windows to admit some natural light.⁵¹ Edith Farnsworth had no such luxury.

As Edith perceptively observed at one point in her memoirs, Mies “seemed to have a singular predilection for luxury materials.”⁵² For the Farnsworth House, notwithstanding that it was simply a weekend house in an isolated Midwestern country location, Mies employed slabs of imported Italian travertine which he individually selected for all of the floors and stairs, inside and out, primavera wood veneer from Central America for the core unit, teak for the wardrobe, and silk shantung fabric for the floor to ceiling curtains. While accounts vary, the travertine alone appeared to represent between 20% and one-third of the total cost of the House.⁵³ These were favorite materials for Mies, both in his European and American buildings, and Edith (reluctantly according to her) endorsed their use.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, I believe Mies can be properly faulted for failing to use local stone and wood and a less expensive fabric which were of equal utility and beauty and available at a fraction of the cost of these imported materials.

There were other issues as well. There was virtually no storage space inside or outside the House. There was nowhere to hang pictures. There was nowhere to keep books, magazines or newspapers. The refrigerator, placed under the counter-top in the kitchen, was tiny. The four walls being glass and integral to the experience of the House, placing solid objects against them was out of the question. And there was simply no room for any type of, for want of a better word, the “clutter” of normal living. Early photographs show how much the beauty of the interior space was compromised by Edith’s efforts to deal with these shortcomings. In an interview, Edith addressed these issues in the following terms:

“Mies talks about ‘free space,’ but his space is very fixed. I can’t even put a clothes hanger in my house without considering how it affects everything from the outside. Any arrangement of furniture becomes a major problem, because the house is transparent, like an X-ray.”⁵⁵

The cost and work required to maintain the House are also substantial, greater it would appear than for a more conventional structure. Heating and cooling costs are very high. The windows need to be washed frequently. The steel rusts. The travertine slabs, especially outside the enclosure, deteriorate. All need to be addressed on a regular basis. Utility repairs and replacements pose a special challenge, given the way in which they are crammed into the long and very narrow space for them within the service core.

So what does all of this mean? Alluding to the unequal relationship between architect and client which I earlier referred to, I think the distinguished architectural historian and professor at Wellesley College, Alice Friedman, gets it just right when she concludes, and I quote:

“If Edith Farnsworth agreed in principle [with the design of the House] – or hoped she did in the early days – it is clear that for her a great deal was lost in translation from the model to the house in which she was supposed to live.”⁵⁶

I believe it is fair to speculate that Dr. Farnsworth, who was enamored early on with the unique nature of the design for her home and enjoyed the wide publicity it engendered, failed to appreciate its flaws and the strictures which it would impose on day-to-day living. Much of this

is clouded by the bitter dispute and ensuing litigation between Mies and Edith. Her vociferous complaints about the House, both in court and in the media interviews which she granted during the same period, tend to be disregarded or minimized by many as being the exaggerated claims of a “woman scorned.” That is unfair to Edith. Most architectural historians who have studied the house and written about it in depth acknowledge many of its functional shortcomings. They accept that in important respects it was ill-suited for the purpose for which it was intended by its owner, who after all commissioned and paid for it.

For example, Maritz Vandenberg, in his well-received 2003 monograph on the House, states that “. . . it is undeniable that the Farnsworth House suffers from serious and elementary design faults.”⁵⁷ He goes on to note the House’s “. . . lack of privacy, lack of storage space, and very little adaptability For normal living these are crippling defects.”⁵⁸ Making the same point more delicately, Professor Schulze states that “The house is more temple than dwelling, and rewards aesthetic contemplation ahead of domesticity.”⁵⁹ Notwithstanding, these writers and most others recognize the House as being, in the words of Blair Kamin, “an architectural masterwork.”⁶⁰ As capstones to this recognition, the House received the 25-year award of the American Institute of Architects in 1981 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2006, the highest award that the federal government can bestow on our nation’s historical and architectural treasures. Why is there this seeming disconnect?

The architecture of the House, it is said, represents the ultimate refinement of Mies’ minimalist expression of structure and space. Mies himself referred to the design as “almost nothing.”⁶¹ When completed, its principal design elements served as the template for most of the substantial body of projects subsequently undertaken by Mies. In addition, these elements so clearly articulated by Mies in the Farnsworth House appear to have significantly influenced and

been copied by many other architects throughout the world designing in a modernist style during the second half of the 20th Century, often, unfortunately, less successfully from an aesthetic standpoint. I would also argue that many in the architecture community were and continue to be mesmerized by the elegance and beauty of the House, especially when fitted out with carefully placed pieces of furniture of Mies' own design, as it has been since its acquisition and restoration by Peter Palumbo almost 40 years ago.

I believe one observer hit the nail on the head when she suggested that the House can be seen as a success on one level and a failure on another, depending on the evaluation criteria being applied. Thus, she states that:

“The Farnsworth House succeeds as a piece of architecture where the evaluation criteria [are] aesthetics, relation to site [and] craftsmanship of construction . . . , although it fails as a place to inhabit based on the evaluation criteria of comfort, enjoyment, security, warmth [and privacy].”⁶²

What has happened, especially over time, is that the only evaluation criteria applied to the House are those relating to its aesthetics, while those pertaining to its functionality have been overlooked or dismissed as of little continuing importance.

Writer after writer whose works I have consulted use one or more of the following terms over and over when describing the Farnsworth House: “spiritual,” “temple,” and “work of art.” I will mention just a few examples. Writing in 1954, Vincent Scully called the House “an unabashed work of art.”⁶³ Peter Palumbo, in a 1986 article, states that “I saw the house very much like the temple at Paestum, rising like a jewel out of the informal setting of a rough cut

meadow.”⁶⁴ Don Wroblewski, in his paper delivered here two years ago, said that “When left alone inside [the House] I have found it possible to get a connection to the spiritual as strong as I have felt anywhere else.”⁶⁵

To me, all of these lofty comments betray a failure to consider the simple but crucial fact that the Farnsworth House, as its name implies, was intended by its owner to be her residence – not a temple or a work of art or a place for spiritual contemplation. I do agree that the House functions well as a “temple,” which after all is what it has become. Looking at it from the riverbank raised on its “plinth,” held up by evenly spaced white columns with an open void within and reached by a ceremonial set of stairs, it is easy to understand the comparison to the stunning Greek temples at Paestum.

The dark side of all this, however, is that Mies ignored the needs of his client in order to pursue his own design aesthetic. He built what he wanted and not what she needed. In her memoirs, Edith quotes Mies as telling her “I will build this house for you as I would build it for myself.”⁶⁶ This was intended, apparently, to reassure her. A few years ago, Dirk Lohan stated that “. . . even though he designed it for his friend, Edith Farnsworth, he thought of it almost as a house for himself.”⁶⁷

I believe Mies, wittingly or otherwise, took unfair advantage of Edith and the opportunity with which she presented him. Warned, before the House was built, by members of her family and friends who were outside the “charmed circle,” as she called it, that the House appeared to have serious design shortcomings, she stated in her memoirs that “These were trying moments for me, but loyalty to [Mies] . . . prevailed.”⁶⁸ She stuck with him and trusted him, and he let her down. Beautiful yes, functional no. Based on that, the Farnsworth House does not deserve its

reputation as an architectural masterpiece. To end where I began, the House is the Emperor's new suit of clothes, the many architects, historians, critics and others who rave about the House are the Emperor, his ministers and the crowd, and I, of course, am the little boy who cries out "But he isn't wearing anything at all."⁶⁹ Thank you.

POSTSCRIPT

A member of the audience asked a very good question following my delivery of this paper: If Dr. Farnsworth so disliked her country house, why did she continue to own and use it for 20 years? I wondered the same thing as I did my research. It is interesting that in her memoirs about the House, written near the end of her life from the quiet of her villa near Florence, Dr. Farnsworth covers in great detail events which occurred during the eight-year period from 1946 through 1953, beginning with her acquisition of the Plano property and engagement of Mies and ending with the dispute and lawsuit between her and Mies and the many problems she initially encountered living in the House. It also appears that nearly all of the interviews she granted to the press occurred during this period.

She makes almost no mention of the House after 1953 in her memoirs; and it show up in news stories only rarely after 1953. The only exceptions are entries in the memoirs and several articles in the *Chicago Tribune*, each of which discuss the 1968 Fox River Bridge relocation project and the taking by Kendall County of some of her land for it – which she fought tooth and nail. One could argue that such determined opposition was an indication of her love of the House and her privacy and her desire to protect them at all cost, especially since when all else failed she offered to give the House and all of her 60 acres of surrounding property to the County, reserving a life estate for herself, if the County would abandon the project and agree not to seek to build on any of her property during the remainder of her life. This offer was declined.

For whatever reason, Dr. Farnsworth drew a veil of public silence over the House upon the conclusion of the litigation with Mies. Of course, after so much unpleasantness, it would be understandable if what she wanted most was to protect her privacy and to be left alone. It is also possible, alternatively or in addition, that the settlement agreement between her and Mies included provisions requiring her to grant no further press interviews and not to write or speak publicly about the House. This latter theory gains some support from the Schulze-Windhorst Chapter on the Farnsworth House (see footnote 1), in which they state, referring to the litigation, that “Mies suggested to his attorneys that he was willing to settle for nothing ‘if she would just stop slandering us’” (quoting from a note to the file written by one of Mies’ lawyers). Undoubtedly, she made her peace with the House and its faults and chose to live with them. But, in the final analysis, that fact does not excuse them.

¹ I am indebted to two individuals and one institution for important contributions to my research on this paper. Whitney French is the Executive Director of Farnsworth House, a position she has held since shortly after the acquisition of the House by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in December 2003, and whose office is housed in the Visitor's Center at the site. I am certain that Ms. French knows the House better than anyone else today. She is single minded in her devotion to its maintenance and preservation and to making it accessible to all who wish to see it and to understand its historical and architectural significance. Aware that my paper would address the weakness of the House as a place to live, Ms. French nevertheless sat for a lengthy interview with me on November 11, 2010, during which she answered all of my questions fully and frankly. She responded in a similar fashion to a number of follow-up questions put to her in subsequent e-mails. She also sent me copies of several documents which were very helpful in bringing me up the learning curve regarding the House. How fortunate the National Trust is to have such an energetic and committed guardian of the House who is at the same time charming and welcoming to its visitors! Information in this paper derived from the interview and e-mail exchanges with Ms. French are cited herein as "Whitney French communication."

Edward Windhorst is a Chicago architect and student of the work of Mies van der Rohe. He was a partner at De Stefano and Partners, Ltd., a major Chicago architectural firm, until 2004, when he formed his own firm with James Gorski, a colleague for seven years at the De Stefano firm. Mr. Windhorst and Franz Schulze, now Professor of Art Emeritus at Lake Forest College who in 1985 authored the definitive biography of Mies van der Rohe, have collaborated on a revised edition of Professor Schulze's biography to be published in 2011 by the University of Chicago Press. A few years ago, Professor Schulze and Mr. Windhorst tracked down, in the files of the successor to the law firm which represented Mies in his litigation with Edith Farnsworth, what is believed to be the only extant copy of the complete 3,500-page transcript of the 25 day hearing before the Special Master in Kendall County, together with the depositions of Mies, Edith and Myron Goldsmith and related correspondence and other documents. They also interviewed the last surviving attorney who participated in the case and the descendants of other attorneys who were involved in it. They have distilled all of this into a fascinating 17,000-word chapter in their forthcoming book which constitutes, in Mr. Windhorst's words, "a complete reinterpretation" not only of the litigation but of the House itself. Mr. Windhorst, in an act of great generosity, sent me an advance copy of that chapter (Chapter Ten – "The Farnsworth Saga 1946-55"). Not only does it make for compelling reading, but it includes much new and more complete information regarding the creation of the House and the dispute and litigation between Mies and Edith. I have frequently relied in this paper on information contained in that chapter. Whenever I have done so, I have used the citation "Schulze-Windhorst" together with the appropriate page number from the typescript of the chapter sent to me by Mr. Windhorst. I am extremely grateful to him and to Professor Schulze for giving me access to it.

When I embarked on this project, I had no idea that Edith Farnsworth kept a series of journals during her later years in Italy in which among many other things she wrote extensively regarding her recollections of the events leading up to the design and construction of the House, her relationship with Mies and others in Chicago during that period and of the litigation between the two of them. However, an internet search soon led me to those journals, which turned out to be housed at the Newberry Library in Chicago, a few blocks from my home. Although frequently "mined" by many scholars and others before me, these handwritten memoirs provided invaluable information regarding and insight into the relationship between Mies and Edith as well as Edith's interaction with the House. The staff of the Library was without exception helpful and prompt in

responding to my repeated requests for access to them. It was a thrill to hold in my hands the very pages from Edith's hand! Since the chapters in her memoirs are numbered but not paginated, wherever in this paper I have drawn on them I have used the citation "Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter ___."

2 See, in Wikipedia, the entry for "The Emperor's New Clothes."

3 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 3.

4 See The Inflation Calculator on the internet.

5 The \$14,000 figure is given in Vandenberg, Maritz, ed., *The Farnsworth House: Architecture in Detail* (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2003) at p. 17 (hereinafter "Vandenberg"); the \$2,500 figure is given in Schulze-Windhorst, p. 30.

6 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 3.

7 Schulze-Windhorst, p.4.

8 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapters 11 and 12.

9 Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1988), at p. 134 (hereinafter "Friedman").

10 See, e.g., Paul Goldberger, "Sex and Real Estate," *The New Yorker*, April 30, 1997 (reviewing a play by June Finfer entitled "The Glass House").

11 Vandenberg, p. 17

12 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 33 They go on to state that "Palumbo may have made other payments to Farnsworth. . . ." The \$120,000 equates to approximately \$628,000 in 2009 dollars (see The Inflation Calculator on the internet).

13 Blair Kamin, "A Mies Revival: Farnsworth House recovers from flood and opens for tours," *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1997 (hereinafter, Kamin, "A Mies Revival"); see also Patricia Leigh Brown, "Old Houses, Just Gotta Have 'Em," *New York Times*, December 19, 1996.

14 Kamin, "A Mies Revival"; see also interview of Peter Palumbo by Paul Goldberger in the Sotheby's Catalogue for its 20th Century Design Sale in New York on December 12, 2003, Lot 800, p. 237 (hereinafter, "Sotheby's Catalogue").

15 Kamin, "A Mies Revival".

16 Franz Schulze, *The Farnsworth House* (Chicago: Lohan Associates, 1997), pp. 23-26 (hereinafter, "Schulze").

17 Kamin, "A Mies Revival".

18 Schulze-Windorst, pp. 34-36. See also: Press release dated October 14, 2003 of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois entitled "Marvel of 20th Century Design Threatened"; Blair Kamin,

“Wanted: One wealthy ‘angel’ to purchase precedent-setting Farnsworth House,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 2003; Blair Kamin, “In preservation issues: Location, location, location,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 2003; William L. Hamilton, “A ’51 Mies Classic Comes Down to the Wire,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2003; and Sotheby’s Catalogue, pp. 213-252.

- 19 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 6 (quoting from the Hearing Transcript).
- 20 Schulze, p. 5.
- 21 Whitney French communication.
- 22 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 7 (quoting from a letter to Mies dated June 8, 1945 from the Illinois Division of Waterways held by the Mies Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York).
- 23 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 13.
- 24 Whitney French communication.
- 25 Whitney French communication; see also Schulze, p. 25.
- 26 Schulze, pp. 25-26.
- 27 Whitney French communication.
- 28 Schulze, p. 26.
- 29 Schulze, p. 26; see also Kamin, “A Mies Revival.”
- 30 Schulze, p. 25.
- 31 Whitney French communication.
- 32 Whitney French communication (this furniture can be seen in early photographs of the House).
- 33 Whitney French communication.
- 34 Whitney French communication.
- 35 Whitney French communication.
- 36 Schulze-Windhorst, pp. 31-32.
- 37 Schulze, p. 28.
- 38 Vandenberg, p. 21.
- 39 Joseph A. Barry, “Report on the American Battle between Good and Bad Modern Houses,” *House Beautiful*, May 1953, p. 270 (hereinafter, Barry “Report on the American Battle . . .”)
- 40 Vandenberg, pp. 21-22.

-
- 41 Barry, "Report on the American Battle . . . ," pp. 266 and 270.
- 42 Vandenberg, p. 22.
- 43 David W. Dunlap, "In a Glass Box, Secrets Are Hard to Keep," *New York Times*, June 24, 1999; see also Schulze, op. cit., p. 17.
- 44 Schulze, p. 24.
- 45 Schulze, p. 14.
- 46 Schulze, p. 14.
- 47 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 11.
- 48 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 12.
- 49 Barry, "Report on the American Battle . . . ," p. 266.
- 50 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 13.
- 51 Christopher Palmeri, "Philip Johnson's Glass House Compound Needs Millions in Repair," *Bloomberg*, September 14, 2010.
- 52 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 11.
- 53 The 20% estimate appears in Schultze-Windhorst, p. 25. I have been unable to locate the source of the one-third estimate, but I know that I read it during the course of my research.
- 54 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapters 12 and 13.
- 55 Barry, "Report on the American Battle . . . ,"p. 270.
- 56 Friedman, p. 140.
- 57 Vandenberg, p. 23.
- 58 Vandenberg, p. 23.
- 59 Schulze-Windhorst, p. 19.
- 60 Blair Kamin, "Wanted: One wealthy 'angel' to purchase precedent-setting Farnsworth House," *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 2003.
- 61 Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 12.
- 62 Karen M. Martin, "Building the Drawing." I found this article on the internet (<http://www.prusikloop.org/mrwatson/?p=47>), posted May 29, 2007, in which Ms. Martin summarizes a talk by Professor Jonathan Hill entitled "Building the Drawing." Professor Hill is (or was at the time he gave the talk) Professor of Architecture and Visual Theory at The Bartlett School

of Architecture, University College London (England). It appears that the ideas expressed in the article were actually those of Professor Hill, rather than Ms. Martin.

- ⁶³ Vincent Scully, "Archetype and Order in Recent American Architecture," *Art in America* (December 1954, pp. 250-61), as reprinted in Scully, *Modern Architecture And Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), at p. 68.
- ⁶⁴ Peter Palumbo, "Farnsworth Impressions," *Inland Architect* (March/April 1986, p. 43).
- ⁶⁵ Donald von Fennig Wroblewski, "A Little House in the Country," paper delivered at The Chicago Literary Club on February 23, 2009, p. 3 (copy available on the Club's website, www.chilit.org).
- ⁶⁶ Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 12.
- ⁶⁷ Interview of Dirk Lohan, believed to be from 2003, found on the internet at <http://www.farnsworthhousefriends.org>.
- ⁶⁸ Farnsworth Memoirs, Chapter 12.
- ⁶⁹ As many of my friends know, I have long harbored the concerns about the Farnsworth House which are expressed in this paper. The tradition of the Chicago Literary Club is that the titles of any paper delivered by a member should mask the paper's subject matter. Also, in order that it can be printed in the annual directory of the Club, each member giving a paper that season must furnish its title to the Chair of the Club's Committee on Arrangements and Exercises long before the beginning of the season. I selected my topic and provided its title to the Chair by e-mail on August 11, 2010. Shortly before being asked for the title to my paper, I had been reading "The Emperor's New Clothes" to my four year old grandson. It was then that it occurred to me that the story was a good fit for my view of the Farnsworth House and that I should use it in the title to my paper. During the course of my research for the paper in the Fall of 2010, I saw reference to the article by Joseph Barry in the May 1953 issue of *House Beautiful*, (see footnote 39). The Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago houses an extensive run of *House Beautiful* in heavy bound volumes. After reading and copying the Barry article at Regenstein and while preparing to send it back to the stacks, my eye settled on the title of a *second* article by Barry in the same issue of the magazine, which I had not seen cited in any of the secondary sources I had previously consulted. Its title: "Fable for our Times – The Emperor's New Palace" (*House Beautiful* 95 (May 1953) pp. 274-275). In it Barry uses the same Andersen fairy tale analogy, although somewhat differently than I did, to slam the Farnsworth House (and the International Style in general). While noting this in the interest of full disclosure, I want the record to show that I had no knowledge of this Barry article or of his having made the same analogy as I subsequently did when I came up with the title of this paper. Nor do I associate myself in any way with Barry's attack on the International Style in his other article in the same issue of *House Beautiful* (which I cited in several of the footnotes above) or with the much more sweeping and vitriolic attack on that style of architecture and on the Farnsworth House in the widely cited (by others) article written by Elizabeth Gordon, then the powerful editor of *House Beautiful*, which appeared in the April 1953 issue of that magazine (entitled "The Threat to the Next America"). For a much more civilized, rational and witty attack on both modern and postmodern architecture, including the work of Mies, I would direct the reader to Tom Wolfe's engaging and breezy but knowledgeable book entitled *From the Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1981). Wolfe skewers the postmodernists and most of their contemporaries, and I found myself agreeing with much of what he has to say about them.