



68 Baker Bridge Road

Ati Gropius Johansen is the daughter of Walter and Ise Gropius. The family moved into the Lincoln house that Gropius and his friend Marcel Breuer designed in 1938, when she was 12.

ABOVE Walter, Ise, and Ati Gropius at their Lincoln rental house, where they lived during the construction of the Gropius House. Courtesy Historic New England, from the Ati Gropius Johansen collection.

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In 1937, plans for our home were already in the making. Weekends were spent walking over the site, a former apple orchard. We selected the trees that were to be transplanted and discussed, endlessly, how the rooms should be arranged. I was included in the planning and found no difficulty in asking for the moon. Walls of glass, rooms of light—these I already took for granted as the only way to live. But I always wanted more glass and more light than was feasible.

When we moved into the house in the fall of 1938, it was into an existence of such elegance and beauty as I had never known before. Here, I was part of a way of life where attention to the visual was an ethic and had an almost moral meaning. I understood early and instinctively that this was not a focus on superficial appearances, but rather on observing and valuing form as an expression of function and material. It was this principle of design that mattered.

I don't recall my parents ever specifically talking about the Bauhaus, but its ideas and design principles were an automatic and natural part of our daily lives. I absorbed them along with the air I breathed, and I paid little attention to the fact that other households were different. Being different was nothing different.

During the war years, our house became a way station for all our émigré friends just arriving in the States. There was a close inner circle: the artists Herbert Bayer, Josef Albers, Lyonel Feininger, and Xanti Schawinsky, and our neighbor Marcel Breuer. They all called my father "Pius" and my mother "Pia," as they had done at the Bauhaus. German architect Konrad Wachsmann, who had been held in a concentration camp, came and stayed for three years. He delighted Walter with the gift of a Ping-Pong table, installed on the porch, and a source of my most cherished memories.

During these years, the spirit of economizing was much in evidence. Light was religiously turned off; running hot water, frowned upon; heat and fuel, always rationed. When the north wind blew, I can remember my parents huddled in shawls in the living room.

But there were always parties: big New Year's Eve parties in Lincoln and the traditional Fete Charrette balls at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. For the fetes, we all wore costumes, though Walter often appeared in a tuxedo. But Ise was unimaginably beautiful in colorful silks. The modern design philosophy showed in every visual detail. The guests at the New Year's Eve parties, many of them Walter's partners in The Architects Collaborative (TAC), made toasts, sounded gongs, and sang songs. At midnight, each guest poured a ladleful of hot melted lead into a bucket of cold water, producing an elaborate casting to predict that person's upcoming year.

My father was no disciplinarian; he was a gentle and charming man. I was never taken to task for any failure or pressured to perform at school. Instead, there was warmth, attention, and support given to any small project of mine. I believe the architecture students who crowded into his office encountered the same vital responsiveness and enthusiasm for their ideas. Walter was, above all, an educator with a profound commitment to the development of the individual.

After Walter retired from Harvard and joined TAC, life was easier for my parents. There was more money, and there were accolades; prizes and medals became commonplace. Walter and Ise traveled extensively and were greatly enamored with Japan, returning home to install a Japanese garden outside our dining room window.

The 1960s were the last decade of Walter's life, illuminated by gala events and commissions of magnitude and importance. Friends at TAC always celebrated his birthdays, but for his 85th, Harvard Yard around the architecture school was alive with celebrants, balloons, banners, tents, speeches, flowers, and drinks. "Grove for President" appeared on hundreds of buttons pinned on to hundreds of cheering fans.

Walter, deeply touched, said to me, smiling, "The trick is to stay alive long enough. At the end, everyone likes you." ■