

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky on Modern Kitchen Design in the 1920s (retrospective account, 1992)

Abstract

In this excerpt from a 1992 conversation, the pioneering Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897-2000) described her innovations to kitchen design in the 1920s that took advantage of new urban utilities—first gas, then electricity—and culminated in the influential 1926 “Frankfurt Kitchen.” That kitchen provided the prototype for the ones installed in over 12,000 affordable apartments that the Frankfurt city council built in the late 1920s as part of its ambitious “New Frankfurt” program, under the direction of chief architect Ernst May. May tasked Schütte-Lihotzky with planning a kitchen that could fit efficiently into those apartments’ compact floor plans. Referring to the kitchen as a “housewife’s laboratory,” Schütte-Lihotzky focused on hygiene and ergonomics. She made all of the cabinets flush with the ceiling and the floor, for instance, to minimize dusting and cleaning, and she placed the dish drainer to the left of the sink, since most people are right-handed, and this enabled a natural washing-rinsing-placing action. The metal plate under the dish drainer sat at an angle, so that water ran off directly into the sink. Built-in aluminum canisters for bulk foods allowed the cook to grab the handled canister with one hand and measure ingredients directly into the pot, without having to open a cabinet. Schütte-Lihotzky drew inspiration from the layout of kitchens on railroad cars as well as from the time-motion studies conducted by industrial engineers, and her groundbreaking ideas have shaped the arrangement of built-in kitchens to this day.

Source

Source: Clip from the educational program “Das Portrait: Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky,” ORF Radio Österreich, November 30, 1992. Österreichische Mediathek, 6-27160_a_b01_k02

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