

German *Werkkunstschulen* and the Establishment of Industrial Design Education in Turkey

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Introduction

Istanbul has been the pioneering city for product design instruction since the inception of this academic field in Turkey. The current umbrella organization, under which industrial design instruction is governed, is the State Academy of Fine Arts. In 1972, a separate division at the Academy (the “Interior Architecture and Industrial Design” division) was formed to specifically address instruction in industrial design at higher schools and universities nationwide. The precursor and inspiration for this division was the State School of Applied Fine Arts, an industrial product design school which opened in 1957.

Originally a three-year school, in 1962, the State School of Applied Fine Arts became a four-year institution and its name was changed to the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts. Following the example of the State School of Applied Fine Arts, a private school for the applied arts which opened in 1968, but was taken over by the State Academy shortly thereafter (during the period in which private universities were banned in Turkey). This second applied arts school was renamed the School of Applied Industrial Arts, and included a department of industrial design until the 1980s.

While the establishment of the State School of Applied Fine Arts, which forms the core of this article,¹ was still in progress, the rapid developments seen in the State Academy of Fine Arts were realized thanks to the personal efforts of Önder Küçükerman, who, at the time, was head of the Interior Architecture Department. At the same time, researchers in the field considered the State School of Applied Fine Arts to be the pioneering school for industrial design training in Turkey. H. Alpay Er has observed:

It can be claimed that training for industrial product design in Turkey stemmed from two main roots. One of them is the two important art schools in Istanbul: the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts and the State School of Applied Fine Arts. Although not much was written about the latter school, relatively more resources are available to study the foundation of instruction at the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts. The Istanbul root that developed from the

1 The subject of this article first was presented as “An Overview of the State Academy of Applied Arts and the Influence of German *Werkkunstschulen* during the Establishment and Development Period of Industrial Product Design in Turkey” at “Mind the Map, Third International Conference on Design History & Design Studies” (Istanbul, July 2002, organized by the Istanbul Technical University in cooperation with the Kent Institute of Art and Design).

instruction in product design in continental Europe, and especially in Germany, and its effects on contemporary Turkish product design training is an area of research all its own.²

Marmara University's Faculty of Fine Arts, initially known as the State School of Applied Fine Arts and later, after it became a four-year school, as the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts, deserves recognition for the inception and progress of industrial design in Turkey. This school was founded and developed in the style of the German *Werkkunstschulen*, a continuation of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen*, which were effective in the establishment of the Bauhaus in Weimar Germany. The staff of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* included renowned designers such as Henri van de Velde and Peter Behrens. These schools also were significant in terms of the ongoing "form value" and "economic value" of the industrial design sector of the German economy. They paved the way for this sector's later restructuring. The fact that the establishment and initial development of the system of the State School of Applied Fine Arts was modeled on these institutions clearly shows how industrial design in Turkey has its roots in, and was largely influenced by, the Bauhaus.

The Establishment Period of the State School of Applied Fine Arts

The official preparations for founding the State School of Applied Fine Arts in 1955 were aimed at removing the insufficiencies in applied arts then existing in Turkey, and creating an institution that would form the base for the future development in applied fine arts. The preparations were initiated in the Ministry of National Education by Ferit Saner, General Manager, Vocational and Technical Education, and were made official through a resolution by the Cabinet dated November 1, 1955. Prof. Dr. Ing. Adolf G. Schneck from the Stuttgart Academy of Fine Arts was assigned as the expert to determine the curriculum, and build and teach the staff. "Prof. Schneck came to Turkey and prepared the draft curriculum."³ Prof. Sabri Oran, then working in the Faculty of Architecture at Istanbul Technical University took a leave from the university and was appointed Headmaster of the school. He resumed his job at the university after the preparations were completed and instruction began. The school officially opened in October 1957,⁴ but lectures actually started in December (see figure 1).

Initially, there were sixty students, in groups of twelve, in five respective departments, with an expert teaching staff from Germany and Turkey. The school began in an historical building known as the Woodcutter's Hall in Dolmabahçe Palace.

According to Ismail Özisik, Prof. Schneck, who was a retired German lecturer, was the advisor at the time of the school's establishment. He visited the school every two weeks in the beginning,

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- 2 H. Alpay Er, "Training of Industrial Design in Turkey: Its Onset and Structure," *Arradamento Mimarlık* 100:26 (June 2000):122–123.
 - 3 Brochure of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts (History of the School Section), 1970–71 Academic Year.
 - 4 H. Alpay Er, Fatma Korkut, and Özlem Er, "U.S. Involvement in the Development of Design in the Periphery: The Case History of Industrial Design Education in Turkey, 1950–1970," *Design Issues* 19:2 (Spring 2003): 26, footnote 51: "Meanwhile, in Istanbul, the School of Applied Fine Arts (TGSYO) was founded in 1957 as an independent initiative from the ICA program. The school comprised decorative painting, graphic arts, textile arts, ceramics, and furniture-interior design departments. It was financed and administered by the Ministry of Education, and was supported by a group of German tutors. However, the industrial design program in this institution was officially started in the early-1980s."

Figure 1
The opening ceremony of the school in 1957,
in *Hayat* magazine, November 15, 1957,
no. 58, page 1.



and two times a year in the ensuing years to follow its development and results. When the State School of Applied Fine Arts was established, it was a three-year educational institute similar to the *Werkkunstschule* in Germany, where experimental workshops were very important. When Özisik started, he set up a “wood experiment workshop,”⁵ where he lectured on wood workmanship and its applications. Additionally, he taught a technical drawing course. The school was not rigidly departmentalized; all five of its departments taught both handicrafts and design for industrial purposes. Textile, Graphic Arts, Interior Architecture, Ceramics, and Decorative Arts programs were designed to train high-level experts. At that time, industrial products in Turkey were predominately handicrafts. Ateliers and little factories also had machines to produce these handicrafts. Therefore, at the State School of Applied Fine Arts, both manual and machine production was taught. The programs of the Ceramics and Decorative Arts departments, in particular, were designed to address both the training of individual craftsmen and the needs of mass production. The latter included instruction in wall cladding and wall decoration; as well as mosaics, frescoes, stained glass, sgraffito, and similar techniques. Also, there were experiments with various materials.

During the developmental phase, Özisik was sent to Germany in the fall of 1960 to gain additional experience. Besides learning about “Akademie der Bildende Künste” in Stuttgart and other German technical schools in his field, he met Prof. Eduard Levsen, Headmaster of the Kiel Muthesius Werkkunstschule and Lecturer for the Department of Interior Architecture, at an educational conference. Prof. Levsen gave Özisik reference materials concerning *Werkkunstschulen*, including a book on the subject that explained

5 Memories of Ismail Özisik, obtained by interview.

the differences between the *Fachschulen* (Vocational Schools) the *Werkkunstschulen* (Schools of Fine Arts), and the *Kunsthochschule* (Higher Schools, or Academies, of Fine Arts). The book discussed the *Werkkunstschulen* of the time—defining the structure and organization of these technical schools—and dealt with the problems of their development and provided some suggestions for their reform. Özisik used the book as a guide in developing the structure of the State School of Applied Fine Arts.

It was not by chance that the programs of the State School of Applied Fine Arts, were not arranged as an Akademie der Bildende Künste (Academy of Fine Arts), akin to the Stuttgart school where Prof. Schneck had taught, but rather according to the *Werkkunstschule* model (which also were three-year schools). This arrangement came about because there already was a State Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul at that time. The departments there predominately dealt with individual art forms such as art, sculpture, engraving, etc. The school also had a department of architecture. The need for training and education in applied arts and industrial design was evident. Therefore, the program of the State School of Applied Fine Arts looked like a combination of the department programs of the *Werkkunstschulen*, which trained students in the field of applied arts (i.e., ceramics, knitting, weaving, stylistics, lithography, mural painting, and fabric printing), and the programs of other departments which were more focused on the fields of art and architecture (i.e., interior architecture, painting, applied graphic arts, and textiles). Prof. Schneck suggested the addition of five lecturers to the staff, and brought them from Germany.

The Factors behind the Establishment of the State School of Applied Fine Arts

There is an historical background for the exclusively German, and not French or any other European, influence in the establishment of the State School of Applied Fine Arts. Prof. Dr. Horst Widmann dealt with the history of universities in Turkey in four main sections in his work, "Atatürk and University Reforms."⁶ The first, second, and third periods, which are not directly related to our subject matter, lasted from 1827 to 1950. During the fourth period (1950–1960), while the development of the State School of Applied Fine Arts was in progress, a strong collaboration with the U.S. resulted in the establishment of universities in Ankara, Izmir, and Erzurum. In 1932, A. Malche, a Swiss national who worked in Germany as a professor of pedagogy and also held a political office, received a request from the Turkish Government for his help with the changes to be made in institutions of higher education. The Turkish Government, and especially Resit Galip, the Minister of National Education at the time, thought it worthwhile to employ Malche.⁷ Among the many German immigrants, the following three people are considered particularly important in terms of product design.

6 Horst Widmann, "Atatürk ve Üniversite Reformu," *Kabalcı Yayinevi* (Istanbul, 2000): 58.

7 Jan Cremer and Horst Przytulla, *Exil Türkei —Deutschsprachige Emigranten in der Türkei 1933–45* (München: Verlag Karl M. Lipp, 1991), 20–21.

The first is Martin Wagner, a professor of city planning who had been instrumental in creating the massive housing projects in Berlin during the 1920s. The second is Hans Poelzig, the architect working at the Academy of Fine Arts. Finally, there is the architect Bruno Taut, “who upon the death of Poelzig was appointed to the Department of Architecture, Academy of Fine Arts, Istanbul, with the help of Martin Wagner.”⁸

Following WWII, Germany underwent rapid developments in techniques and technology. During this period, Turkish students were keen to go to Germany for advanced training. Sabri Oran was one of these students, and before Prof. Schneck retired, Oran had been one of his students at the Akademie der Bildende Künste in Stuttgart.

The Development of *Werkkunstschulen* and Departments of Industrial Design in Germany as the School of Applied Arts Was Being Established in Turkey

A restructuring took place in postwar Germany with the significant help of the American “Marshall Plan,” and along with this American influence, a widespread *Stromlinienform* (Streamlining) left its mark on the period. At the same time, design developments were coming into fashion that indicated a desire to reestablish ties with the “examples of good form” from the undisciplined prewar periods. This led to a renaissance in the old German tradition of product culture.

During the 1950s, “there existed *Industrielle Formgebung* (Industrial Design) departments in Germany in four *Werkkunstschulen*, which were added to some preexisting departments in two *Werkkunstschulen* especially established in Berlin.”⁹ The preparatory class, or “elementary design,” was modeled on the pedagogical model of the Bauhaus masters. *Werkkunstschulen* were established in twenty cities and *Kunsthochschulen* in nine cities in Germany by 1956. They continued their teaching “to systemize a formalized Bauhaus instruction,” where the definition of traditional art was classified as both handicrafts and industrial design, and rested upon the fundamental definitions of form developed at the Bauhaus, until the establishment of the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm in 1955, which included programs in the sciences, the theory of communication, sociology, the basic connections of shaping theory, systematical shaping experiments, and specially developed designing methodology.¹⁰

The instruction started with a preparatory class for all branches to develop perception in terms of both visual and tangible manipulation within the scope of “Elementary Design.” Immediately following the preparatory class, the term was supplemented by experiments with colors and form, and included musical training as an important part of strengthening a student’s personal training. “Experimental Product Design” was a very important course for the

8 “Bruno Taut 1880–1938,” *Ausstellungskatalog Akademie der Künste* (Berlin: Brüder Hartman Verlag, 1980), 161.

9 Werner Glasenapp, “Die Gestaltung Industrieller Erzeugnisse als neues Lehrfach” in *Werkkunstschulbuch: Handbuch der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Werkkunstschulen E. V.* (Stuttgart: Konradin Verlag, 1956), 73, 232–233.

10 Gert Selle, *Die Geschichte des Design in Deutschland von 1870 bis heute*, 2. Auflage (Köln: Dumond Buchverlag, 1978), 179 and 194.

departments, and worked in tandem with the contemporary facilities of handicraft and industrial design sectors. The course content consisted of the structure of the form (with samples and experimental parts), as well as construction work and form analyses. In the framework of this course, students practiced perceiving the whole of a given product, recognizing its multiple facets individually, and then returning to view it as a whole in order to bring it to fruition.

Direct Influences on the Establishment of the State School of Applied Fine Arts and on Industrial Product Design in Turkey

It was appropriate that the Turkish Undersecretariat of Technical Education undertook the establishment of the State School of Applied Fine Arts, since applied fine arts fell within the scope of education in the *Werkkunstschulen*, whose aim was to bring art, science, and technique together. At that time, the objectives of the Undersecretariat were to provide grounds for the reconstruction of the Art Institutes of the time, and to give talented prospective graduates the opportunity to further their education in a higher level school. Because the teaching staff of the *Werkkunstschulen* was chosen directly from among people with a strong pedagogical knowledge who had extensive work experience in the sector, the teaching staff of the State School of Applied Fine Arts was formed along similar lines.

In addition to naming the school an “applied” fine arts school, the German influence on the State School of Applied Fine Arts can be seen in the choice of product design in the subject matter of both small and large lots for the market in the fields of furniture /interior design, textiles, ceramics, graphics, and decorative mural painting, and in the application of handicrafts such as weaving, fabric printing, modeling, decorating, bookbinding, calligraphy, sgraffito, mosaics, and stained glass. This also determined the main objective of the State School of Applied Fine Arts, and addressed an important need in Turkey (see figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). The Basic Art Training course, which aimed to teach the connection between material and form by direct application on the material, was a significant part of the German model. It was a creative, object-based, and purpose-oriented education that unleashed the imagination, including even the teaching of the applied arts to the accompaniment of music.

Özisik, who was an eyewitness of this period, says that lecturers came from Germany, and graduates were sent to Germany, during the first five to six years. He further states that graduates of the departments of Art, Sculpture, etc. who received further education abroad at “training institutes” in such diverse areas as interior architecture and graphics joined the teaching staff of the State School of Applied Fine Arts upon their return to Turkey.

Many German lecturers joined the teaching staff in the preparatory class of Elementary Design in the departments of Graphics,



Figure 2
Cover image from the school brochure,
dated 1971.

Figure 3
Students' work from the academic years
1966–71, furniture-interior design department.

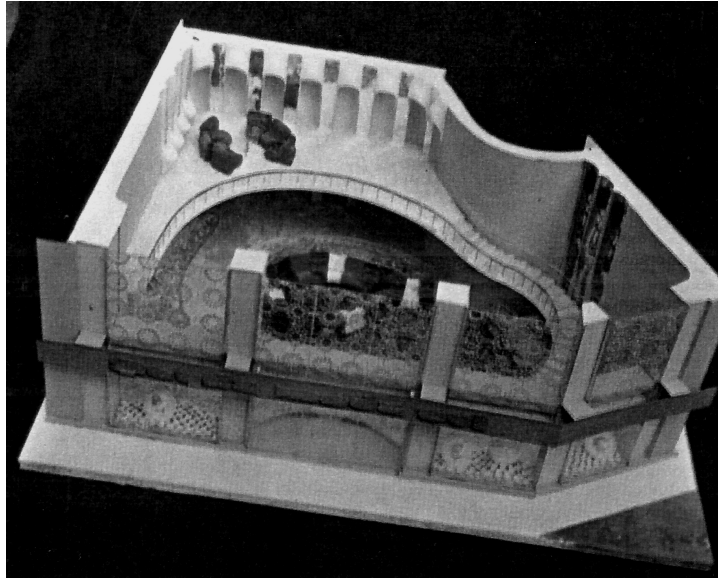


Figure 4
Students' work from the academic years
1966–71, textile department.

Figure 5
Students' work from the academic years
1966–71, ceramics department.

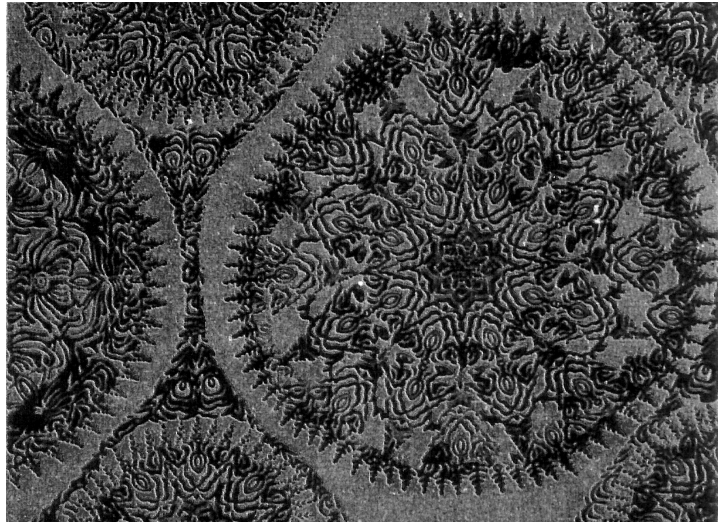
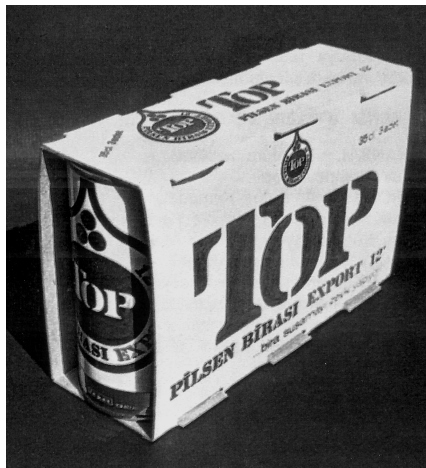


Figure 6
Students' work from the academic years
1966–71, graphic design department.

(Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are from the brochure of the *Istanbul Devlet Tatbiki Güzel Sanatlar Yüksek Okulu* printed by school, 1971 Istanbul, cover and pages 7, 10, 13,18.)



Interior Design, Textile, and Decorative Art. Three Turkish lecturers joined the Ceramics Department, and through their specialized tools, materials, and knowledge of the long history of ceramics in Anatolia, an experienced department was formed. Until the end of the 1960s, lecturers from Germany, Austria, and even Japan (for the Ceramics Department) came to the school. Some of these instructors worked for one year, while others worked longer; and a few even continued after their retirement. Harald Schmidt, instructor in the Textiles Department, served until his death, which was four years ago from today, in the design school and made invaluable contributions. The addition of competent instructors added to the quality of the education while, at the same time, underpinning the establishment of the *Werkkunstschule* model as the cornerstone of this new tradition.

Starting with the 1961–62 academic year, the State School of Applied Fine Arts was at first projected to be a “2+2-year” school. This educational system was similar to that which was adopted in Germany: the student had to pass an exam after his sophomore year to continue his education in a junior class, or he could receive a certificate of completion and leave school after his second year. But this system wasn’t successful so, within a relatively short time, the school was converted into a four-year one. The restructuring made the training more comprehensive, without changing the essence of the applied teaching model. It was supported by the continuous transfer of knowledge and experience from the foreign instructors, who continued to serve on teaching staff until the end of the 1960s. In addition, the best students were sent abroad for advanced training in their fields, and sometimes joined the faculty when they graduated.

While the number of *Industrielle Formgebung* (Industrial Design) departments was increasing, it is clear that the heads of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts believed in its future, as well as the necessity of a well-trained faculty, as early as the 1962–63 academic year. In order to be admitted to the Industrial Design Department, a student had to be talented in all aspects of art and design techniques and invention. Moreover, prospective students had to be able to effectively utilize various elements of prior training in high-pressure situations. They would quickly find themselves dealing with complex problems and production methods, and had to be able to provide solutions. Such a transfer of knowledge necessitated a staff that already had dealt with similar complex situations countless times, and would be able to guide the students through any conceivable, “real-world” scenario. The heads of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts understood this principle and accordingly refused to open a new department without a well-educated staff in place. Students were first admitted in 1965, and the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts sent İlhan Erhan to the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm in 1966 for specialized training. Unfortunately, this school closed down in 1968. Erhan had to complete his education in the Gesamthochschule Kassel (GHK). In the ensuing years, a

Figure 7

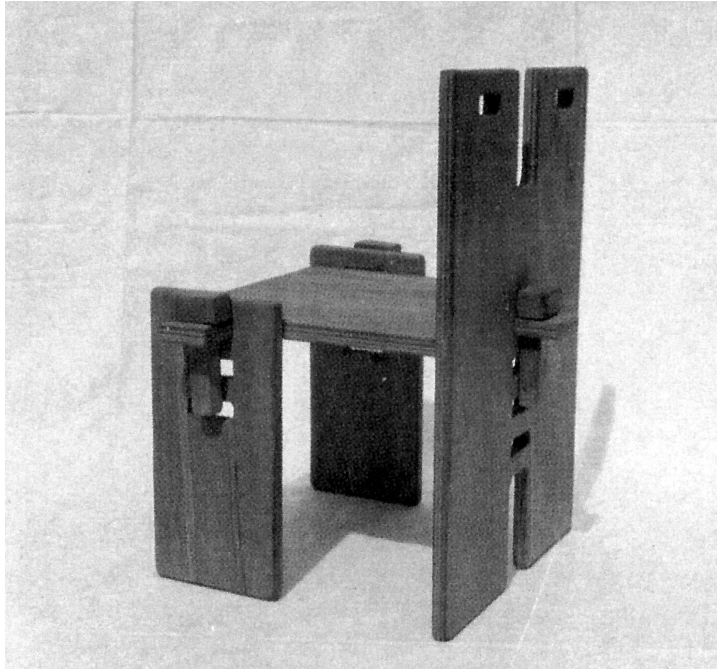
Ismail Özisik (with glasses), some lecturers and students in Professor Schlaminger's conference at the beginning of the academic year 1966–67 from the paper of school activities, September 1966, printed by school, page 1.



**mobilya - içmimarlık
bölümü**
İSTANBUL DEVLET
TATBİKİ GÜZEL SANATLAR
YÜKSEK OKULU

Figure 8

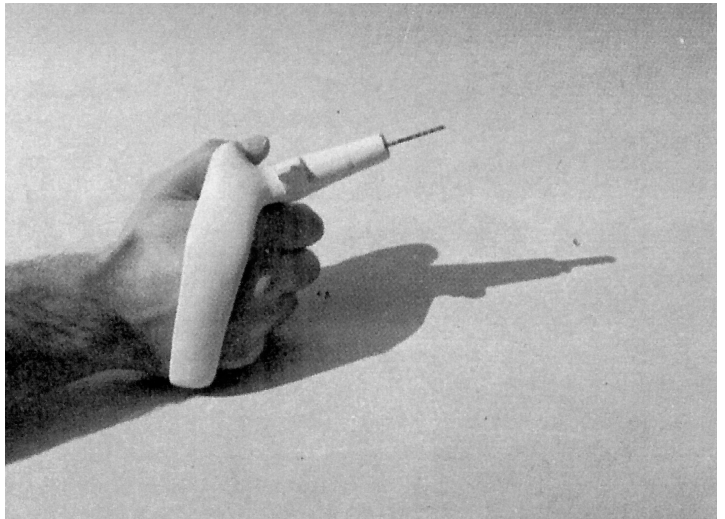
The school logo from the academic years 1972–76, furniture-interior design department.



Figures 9 and 10

Students' work for the academic years 1972–76, furniture-interior design department.

(Figures 8, 9 and 10 are from the brochure of *Istanbul Devlet Tatbiki Güzel Sanatlar Yüksek Okulu, TGSO, Mobilya İçmimarlık Bölümü*, printed by the school, 1976, İstanbul pages 1 and 5.)



yetistirme tedbirlerini almak,
öl **İçin, Dışarıya** ile ilgili olarak Türk Plastik Sanatlarının ve Türkiye'deki san-
at eğitiminin gelişmesi yönünden incelemeler, araştırmalar yapmak ve sonuç-
larını yayımlamak.
Madde 4 — Devlet Tabiiî Güzel Sanatlar Yüksek Okulu, görevlerini gör-
mekleştirmek için gündüz eğitim ve öğretiminden başka, gece ve gündüz kursları

Figure 11

Publication of the phrase “Turkish Design”
in the official newspaper, July 11, 1973, Issue
number: 1459.

small number of additional students followed in Erhan’s footsteps at the GHK for Industrial Design training. (See figure 7.)

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts in the academic year of 1967–68, M. Aslier, Headmaster, heralded the plans to open a new “Industrial Design” department in addition to the five existing departments. This news came in the midst of his comments concerning the school’s development, objectives, and future plans and programs, and had a profound effect on the author of this article, who had just started the school that very semester. The establishment of a new department entailed a long process, but the curriculum in the ensuing years included (along with interior-space design and furniture) objects of illumination, home and office accessories, hand tool design, and even hand tools for the handicapped in the term projects of the Furniture/Interior Architecture Department. (See figures 8, 9, and 10.)

It should be pointed out here that guest lecturers showed the utmost respect for the culture, lifestyle, and the knowledge of the Turkish people. For example, during a class on furniture and spatial design taught by two German instructors, the guest lecturers, while transferring their knowledge, and experience, invited students to suggest ideas from their own upbringing, environment, and sensitivity.

A brochure printed in the academic year 1970–71 for the fourteenth anniversary of the school included the term “designer,” and a school regulation in the same year included the term “design” for the first time.¹¹ It also mentioned that preparations for the new department, which would be entitled the “Industrial Design Department” had started. Furthermore, the Educational Regulations of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts (dated 1973) employed the terms “Turkish Design” and “Industrial Design.”¹² (See figure 11.)

Conclusion

It was impossible, before the 1960s, to open a fully functioning “Industrial Design” department at an institution of higher learning in Turkey because of the low level of industrialization and the still-embryonic textile arts field (due to the dominance of handmade textiles in the early part of the Twentieth Century). At the same time, the main products in the design field were handicrafts—particularly furniture and ceramics. However, Özisik, as a lecturer in the 1960s, was familiar with the industrial design departments in developed countries, and worked to bring a similar vision to life in Turkey. Since opening a department without the proper infrastructure would have led to unstable results, it was only good common sense to start at the foundation, train specialists, and progress step-by-step. Therefore, the most realistic solution was to provide applied training that would bring together handicrafts and general industrial experience, and without haste, to prepare for the establishment of a department wherein industry-specific products would be designed.

11 Brochure of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts (History of the School Section), 1970–71 Academic Year.

12 “Educational Regulations of the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts” (Official Newspaper, issue 1459, July 11, 1973): 4.

Influences:

Starting a training program equivalent to design training in Germany involved direct influences related to planning and development of the school right from its beginning. These included naming the first five departments after the most distinctive five departments in the *Werkkunstschules*, starting instruction with the Basic Art Training course, and the initiation of “experimental workshops.” Until the end of the 1960s, the dominant practice was to import lecturers and their assistants from Germany, and to train Turkish instructors there. The design training in Germany was under continuous scrutiny, and until the mid-1970s, newly graduated students were sent to Germany for postgraduate studies in order to be able to contribute to the development of the school upon their return. The familiarity with HfG Ulm Design School and the ability to send Turkish students there after graduation for further training were important. During the 1970s, many designers returned home after having completed their Industrial Product Design training in Germany. Some of them still teach in industrial product design departments in the three major universities in Istanbul. The author is one of these people: the training I received centered on design issues with ergonomic, social, economic, and ecological infrastructure. The education system of *Gesamthochschule Kassel*, where I chose to receive Industrial Product Design training, together with its multi-sided workshop infrastructure and “Alternative Technologies Group” brought a different viewpoint to design, making it possible to work on design issues which are still contemporary. We also learned to design with originality in detail, which I teach to my students.

The State School of Applied Fine Arts, later amended to include “Istanbul” before its name when it became a four-year school (the Istanbul State School of Applied Fine Arts), has made important contributions in the field of industrial design from its foundation to 1980, when it underwent yet another transformation. The original school outlived its era, and yielded its place to present developments in the pedagogy of the field. Nevertheless, it was largely influenced by educational institutions that can be traced back to the Bauhaus. Such an influence developed an international exchange of knowledge provided by a succession of talented visiting foreign design instructors. At the same time, industrial design in Turkey has a proud history similar to that which developed in the West, and continues to be closely linked to the progress of industrial design at the international level.