



The undulating facade of Berlin's Shell-Haus, unique in 1932 for its curved corners and windows

# BREAK WITH TRADITION

It's been 100 years since the birth of modernism and its new way of looking at the world. Celebrate with a city break and see some of the best architecture of the era

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**M**id-century (with or without the addition of 'modern') remains one of the most striking design styles of the 20th century – and its vision can be admired as much in sleek architecture as covetable furniture. Sometimes also known as international style or functionalism depending on location, this forward-looking architectural movement emerged in the

1920s/30s Europe in response to the cataclysm of World War I. Its vision of clean modernity included bountiful use of glass, a dash of industrial utilitarianism, strongly geometric looks and a love of split levels.

We pick out some of the best cities to check out the finest mid-century architectural wonders – and imagine living a life of international style!

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Bellavista housing estate was part of Arne Jacobsen's architectural designs in Klampenborg



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## COPENHAGEN COAST

If you prefer Scandi cool to the 'cosy' schtick of *hygge*, then the Danish capital provides a base to explore distinctive mid-century architectural beacons along a coastal strip stretching north of Copenhagen along the beach-fringed shores of the Øresund.

Strandvejen ('the shore road') and train lines thread along this lovely Danske littoral, and a great place to start is the gorgeous Louisiana Art Gallery ([louisiana.dk](http://louisiana.dk)), a short walk from Humlebaek station and beside the ocean, about 20 miles north of Copenhagen. Elegant 1950s modernism meets nature as Louisiana's restrained horizontal lines merge with gardens and woods by a 19th-century shoreline villa that provided the gallery's name (it's to do with the original owner and a trio of wives all named Louise...). Designed by architects Jørgen Bo and Wilhelm Wohlert and opened in 1958, Louisiana began as three pared-back pavilions linked by glass corridors providing bosky and watery views, though it has since expanded to increase its fantastic contemporary art offering.

## Where to shop

### Dansk Møbelkunst Gallery

Back in Copenhagen, this gallery specialises in rare, original works of Danish furniture from 1920 to 1970, including seating by Finn Juhl and lighting by Poul Henningsen.

○ [Bredgade 5, Copenhagen; dmk.dk](#)

### Klassik

One of Denmark's leading providers of vintage original Nordic-design classic furniture, with each piece expertly refurbished to maintain its history while sprucing up the quality. Plenty of Arne Jacobsen classics, but also fine alternatives such as Borge Mogensen's classic low- and high-backed armchairs.

○ [Bredgade 3, Copenhagen; klassik.dk](#)

Skovshoved Filling Station, built in 1936, is still serving customers at its petrol pumps



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One of the iconic striped lifeguard towers at Bellevue Beach, designed by Arne Jacobsen

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For a very different experience of Danish seaside mid-century architecture, head down the coast to Bellevue Beach Park, close to Klampenborg train station. This charming little hideaway provided a breezy canvas for Arne Jacobsen to fashion a mid-century townscape as a large-scale complement to his iconic designer chairs, such as the Egg, the Swan and the Tulip. Opened in 1932, Bellevue Beach Park featured Jacobsen's imprint right down to its stunning blue-striped lifeguard towers that have become style icons to Danes. Jacobsen, in fact, designed everything hereabouts, including beachside kiosks, changing rooms and a pier – as well as ice-cream parlours and even the ice-cream packaging!

Sadly, the kiosks and pier have disappeared, but Jacobsen's Bellavista housing estate still remains by the beach estate, providing an example of social housing considered the finest manifestation of Bauhaus style in Denmark. Nearby, there's also the Bellevue Theatre and Restaurant Jacobsen, which now operates as a small Arne Jacobsen museum.

Just over a mile north of the town, meanwhile, Jacobsen created perhaps the world's most eye-catching petrol station in 1936 – the Skovshoved Filling Station, guarded by a unique mushroom-like canopy.

After World War II, Jacobsen designed the Soholm terraced houses a stone's throw south of the Bellavista estate, and he lived and worked in the house closest to the sea (Strandvejen 413) from 1951 until his death 20 years later.

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Visitors can take a guided tour inside Villa Winternitz and learn about its turbulent history

## PRAGUE

The interwar years of the 1920s and 30s saw Czechoslovakia leap into the vanguard of mid-century architectural style, sprinkling the streets of Prague with stunning examples of what was locally dubbed functionalism. You can even buy a specialist Modern Prague Map – created by Adam Stech – which pinpoints 50 of the most significant examples of 20th-century architecture in a capital city which isn't short of architectural glories going back centuries.

Villa Winternitz ([loosovavila.cz](http://loosovavila.cz)) is a white cubic masterpiece designed by Adolf Loos and Karel Lhota in the early 1930s for the family of a wealthy local lawyer and featuring the mid-century love of multilevel living. Seized by the Nazis during World War II, it was then taken over by the Czech state to host a nursery school until the 1990s and has now been restored as a beautiful museum featuring art and architecture exhibitions.

Before designing Villa Winternitz, Loos built a gorgeous near-identical twin near Prague Castle in the late 1920s in the shape of Villa Müller ([adolfloos.cz/en/villa-muller](http://adolfloos.cz/en/villa-muller)). It's also now a glorious museum, which benefits hugely from original furniture and artwork from its 1930s heyday. Completing a



Another of Adolf Loos's creations, Villa Müller is now a museum styled with furniture from its heyday



Villa Winternitz was designed in the 1930s by architects Adolf Loos and Karel Lhota

trio of Prague's grand functionalist villas is Villa Rothmayer ([muzeumprahy.cz](http://muzeumprahy.cz)). Built by architect Otto Rothmayer in the late 1920s as his family house, it's now open to visitors to explore, featuring furniture from the 1950s and 60s.

If you want to worship in style, thank the god of architecture for a clutch of stunning modernist churches scattered around Prague. In the Vinohrady district, the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord (Kostel Nejsvětějšího Srdce Páně) is a Roman Catholic church built between 1929 and 1932 by Slovene architect Jože Plečnik.

Keeping it blessed modernist company is the Church of Saint Wenceslas (Kostel svatého Václava) on Vršovice in the Prague 10 neighbourhood – completed in 1930 to commemorate the 1,000th anniversary of the death of the eponymous saint. Also in Prague 10 (on Dykova Street), complete your holy architectural triumverate at the Hus Congregational House (Husův Sbor), which was completed in 1935 as part of a development by architect Pavel Janák.

Janák was also involved in the eye-catching Baba estate ([baba1932.com/en/osada-baba-en](http://baba1932.com/en/osada-baba-en)), featuring around 30 beautiful villas and family houses created by key Czech architects of the time – other names including Ladislav Žák and Josef Gočár.

The ballroom at the Palais am Funkturm was featured in the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*



## BERLIN

The seeds of Berlin's modernist DNA owe much to an architecture practice run by Peter Behrens just before World War I, which for several years employed three seminal figures in the history of the international style: Walter Gropius, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (aka Le Corbusier) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Le Corbusier went off to make awesome buildings across France, while Mies van der Rohe and Gropius left to found the illustrious Bauhaus School in the city of Weimar. The school

Film buffs can catch a movie in the modernist surroundings of Kino International cinema



Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation provides colourful apartments in the city's Westend district

moved to Dessau in 1925, then on to Berlin – where it was shut down in 1933 after the Nazis came to power and branded its output 'degenerate art'.

Yet the Bauhaus influence – sometimes called New Objectivity – did not die. Heavily bombed during World War II, Germany's capital turned to architects informed by its modernist ideals. Mies van der Rohe created the Neue Nationalgalerie (opened in 1968), while the Bauhaus Archive was one of the last buildings designed by Gropius. Another 1960s modernist masterpiece you must see is Kino International, a shining white 1963 jewel designed by Josef Kaiser and Heinz Aus.

The years just before the Nazi takeover saw the appearance of buildings such as the Shell-Haus, whose distinctive wave-like high-rise facade rises over the Landwehr Canal. It was designed by Emil Fahrenkamp and finished in 1932.

Other modernist Berliner wonders include the Kulturforum Berliner Philharmonie, Gropiusstadt, Märkisches Viertel, and the Hansaviertel. The ravishing mid-century cool of the Palais am Funkturm event space, meanwhile, featured in the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*.

Le Corbusier also gave Berlin an architectural present with the multicoloured apartment block known as the Unité d'Habitation of Berlin in the city's Westend district, based on a template of modernist housing-estate style whose most famous example is in Marseille.

## Where to shop

### Original in Berlin

Here you can eye up offerings from legendary European mid-century designers such as Charlotte Perriand, Hans Wegner and Gio Ponti. And if you fall in love with something they are happy to ship to the UK.

○ [Karl-Marx-Allee 83, Berlin; originalinberlin.com](http://Karl-Marx-Allee 83, Berlin; originalinberlin.com)

### Faible Furnishings

Based in Kreuzberg, this store majors on lovingly curated mid-century pieces from Scandinavia, with a particular focus on Danish items from 1940 to the 1960s – perfect to discover the work of people like Ole Wanscher, Kai Kristiansen, Arne Wahl Inversen, Peter Hvidt, Orla Mølgård-Nielsen and Niels Otto Møller.

○ [Blücherstraße 21, Berlin; faiblefurnishings.com](http://Blücherstraße 21, Berlin; faiblefurnishings.com)

The Isokon Building has had many famous residents, including Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius



Bexhill's De La Warr Pavilion adds modernist style to the town's seaside promenade



## LONDON

London's mish-mash of architectural styles includes quite a lot of mid-century houses, some of which are open for viewing during the annual Open House event ([openhouselondon.open-city.org.uk](http://openhouselondon.open-city.org.uk)).

However, there are two famous examples you can visit anytime, starting with 2 Willow Road in Hampstead – a simple horizontal building in brick and concrete, now in the care of the National Trust ([nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)). It came into being to provide a family home for the wonderfully named Hungarian émigré architect Ernő Goldfinger, built in 1939, long before his famous London brutalist masterpiece, Trellick Towers. Step inside to enjoy a space flooded with light from a wall of windows on the first floor, featuring pioneering use of timber floors along with podiums, screens and an elegant slender spiral staircase.



2 Willow Road in Hampstead was the home of brutalist architect Ernő Goldfinger

From here it's just a short hop over to the Isokon Building in Belsize Park. This glorious 1934 apparition of white cement-washed reinforced concrete boasts epic horizontal lines alongside striking cantilevered exterior landings and stairs. Originally called the Lawn Road Flats, the Isokon was built by British architect Wells Coates, who was deeply influenced by Le Corbusier. The adjacent Isokon Gallery ([isokongallery.org](http://isokongallery.org)) provides a free deep-dive into its history and style.

Sitting closer to central London, the Golden Lane Estate ([barbicanliving.co.uk/golden-lane-estate](http://barbicanliving.co.uk/golden-lane-estate)) offers contrast and complement to the Isokon. Complement, in that it also takes cues from Le Corbusier, but contrasting in its deployment of bright colours. Built in the 1960s, it provides an intriguing Grade II-listed companion to the nearby Barbican Estate.

If you fancy a day trip from London, the National Trust offers another modernist beauty in a leafy bit of Esher in Surrey. The Homewood was designed by Patrick Gwynne for his family and completed in 1938. It takes cues from both Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe: an elevated house perched on pillars, with spacious interiors uncluttered by internal supports, while floor-to-ceiling windows provide sweeping views.

For a coastal encounter with mid-century style, head to the ravishing De La Warr Pavilion ([dlwp.com](http://dlwp.com)) at Bexhill in East Sussex. Commanding the beachside promenade, this sinuous jewel was built as a cultural centre in 1935 by architects Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, and still offers a programme of exhibitions and concerts, plus a café with glorious sun terrace. 📍

## Where to shop

### Ferro Velho London

Located between Old Street and Angel, this shop showcases original mid-century European furniture, homeware and curios, combining well-known names with a selection of intriguing offerings from off-radar makers from the 1940s onwards.

📍 285 City Road, London; [ferrovelholondon.co.uk](http://ferrovelholondon.co.uk)

### Retro Living

The fantastic range of interior design at this Marylebone mid-century hotspot includes eye-catching items from Italy and France – such as a 1950s Roger Feraud coat stand – alongside more classic offerings such as sexy Scandi sofas or a 1960s wall unit by Paul Cadovius.

📍 7A Church Street, London NW8 8EE; [retroliving.co.uk](http://retroliving.co.uk)