

**HOUSE TWO: The Red and Blue House—Schröder House, Utrecht,
The Netherlands. 1924**

Gerrit Rietveld (Dutch, 1888–1964), with Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder (Dutch,
1889–1985)



IMAGE 3: Exterior view. nd. Centraal Museum.
Photo: Manuel Kubitzka. © 2004 Centraal
Museum Utrecht



IMAGE 4: Exterior view. nd. Centraal Museum.
Photo: Manuel Kubitzka. © 2004 Centraal
Museum Utrecht

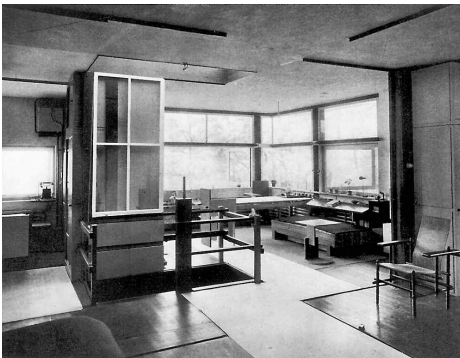


IMAGE 5: Interior view. nd. Photo courtesy
the Architecture and Design Study Center,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



IMAGE 6: Interior view. nd. Photo courtesy
the Architecture and Design Study Center,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

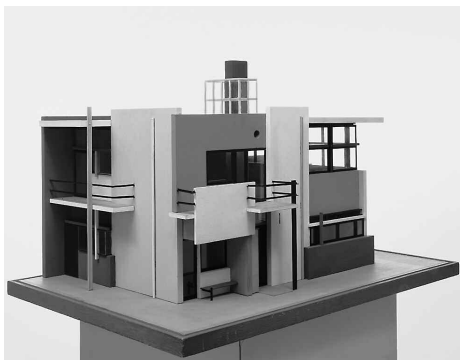


IMAGE 7: Model. 1965. Wood, 19 x 30³/₁₆ x
21¹/₁₆" (48.3 x 76.7 x 53.8 cm). Modelmaker:
Gerard van der Groenekan. The Museum of
Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Phyllis B.
Lambert. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York/Beeldrecht, Amsterdam



IMAGE 8: Gerrit Rietveld. Red Blue Chair. c. 1923.
Painted wood, 34¹/₂ x 26 x 33" (86.7 x 66 x
83.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of Philip Johnson

ABOUT THE SCHRÖDER HOUSE

Built in 1924, the Schröder House is located in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The house was named after its owner and one of the designers, Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder, who *commissioned* the architect, Gerrit Rietveld, to design a house and furnishings that would encourage her and her three children to live and think unconventionally. Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder assumed a collaborative role, working very closely with Rietveld to make decisions about the layout of the house and the functions of the rooms.

The floor space of the Schröder House measures just 21 x 30', but it has some distinctive features, including an unusual layout. When Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder lived in the house with her three children, there were a studio, a library, a workroom that doubled as a maid's room, and an eat-in kitchen on the ground floor. The second floor contained the living and dining areas, a stove, and the bedrooms. Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder and her son had their own rooms, and her two daughters shared a room. There were sliding partitions to create either large open spaces or smaller enclosed ones. Each room was equipped with its own sink, cupboard, and electrical outlet so that family members could prepare their own meals. These features were intended to encourage family members to live more independently.

Rietveld explained how he and Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder chose the site for the house:

No one had ever looked at this little lane before this house was built here. There was a dirty crumbling wall with weeds growing in front of it. Over there was a small farm. It was a very rural spot, and this sort of fitted in. It was a deserted place, [...] a real piece of no-man's-land. And we said, 'Yes, this is just right, let's build it here.' And we took this plot of ground and made it into a place with a reality of its own. It didn't matter what it was, so long as something was there, something clear. And that's what it became. And that's always been my main aim: to give to a yet unformed space, a certain meaning.¹

At the time the Schröder House was built, the entrance did not face the main street but was located on the right side of the house, facing an open meadow. However, the area around the Schröder House went through many changes. For example, a highway was built in 1963, which obstructed the house's original view.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Show your students Images 3 through 7

- **Describe the Schröder House. Notice the shapes and colors. How would you describe them? Do they repeat? If so, where? How are the colors and shapes arranged?**
- **Take a look at the setting around this house. How would you describe the other nearby homes? What kinds of comparisons can you make between the other buildings and the Schröder House?**
- **How would you compare this house to your own home or other houses you have seen? What are the similarities and differences?**
- **If you could choose a new location for the Schröder House, what would it be? Why?**

1. Lenneke Büller, Bertus Mulder, Frank den Oudsten, and Paul Overy, *The Rietveld Schröder House* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 52.

ABOUT THE RED BLUE CHAIR

Originally intended for mass-production, Rietveld's Red Blue Chair was based on an earlier, unpainted version he had made around 1918. In this 1923 version, Rietveld painted the chair with the same primary colors used on a crib he had built for his son four years earlier.

Rietveld's commission of the Schröder House included designing all of the furniture. Although Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder added her own pieces of furniture to the house when it was completed, they were painted to match the house's colors and design.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Show your students Image 8

- **How would you describe this chair?**
- **What do you think it would feel like to sit in this chair?**
- **How does this chair compare to other chairs that you have seen?**

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. What is the largest room in your house?

When Rietveld and Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder designed the Schröder House, they made the size of the rooms proportionate to the amount of time that would be spent in them.

- **Make a list of all of the rooms in your home. Start with the room in which you spend the most amount of time, and finish with the one in which you spend the least amount of time.**
- **When you are done with your list, think about the size of the rooms versus the amount of time you spend in them. How do they compare? If you could alter the size of the rooms in your home, how would they change according to the amount of time you and your family spend in them?**

2. What was it like to live in the Schröder House?

After the Schröder House was built, many critics praised it for its “break with the past [and] celebration of color and abstract form.”²

- **Write a short essay in response to the above comment. Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

3. What would it be like for you to live there?

Although the Schröder House earned critical acclaim, Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder's children were often teased by their classmates, and neighbors frequently walked past the house to stare. Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder once described what it was like for her family to live in the Schröder House: “It wasn't so nice for the children. On one occasion my daughter Hannecke came home from school quite scarlet in the face, crying her eyes out, so I asked her what was the matter. She sobbed, ‘I told a lie, because they said to me, “You live in that loony house” and I said that I didn't live in that loony house.’ Something like that was very hard for a child to cope with.”³

- **Create your own story. Consider that these comments about the Schröder House were made around the time it was built, in the 1920s. If you lived in the Schröder House today, do you think your neighbors would react the same way? Why or why not? How do you suppose your neighbors and classmates would react if the Schröder House had just been built in your town or city?**

2. Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 85.

3. *Ibid.*, 79.

ABOUT GERRIT RIETVELD AND MRS. TRUSS SCHRÖDER-SCHRÄDER

The son of a furniture-maker, Gerrit Rietveld was born in Utrecht, Holland (now The Netherlands), in 1888. When he was twelve years old, Rietveld opted to work in his father's workshop instead of attending school. Other experiences included taking architecture classes at night and working as a draftsman for a jeweler. In 1917 Rietveld opened his own furniture-making business, following in his father's footsteps. Seven years later, he turned to architecture full-time. The Schröder House represents his first building design.

Rietveld's collaboration with Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder on the Schröder House was the first of many. He collaborated with Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder on architectural and design projects throughout his life, maintaining an office in her home for several years. He also designed schools, churches, stores, furniture, and the Vincent van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, a project in collaboration with other architects.

Rietveld was also involved in a movement of Dutch artists, architects, and designers called the *De Stijl* group. *De Stijl*, which in Dutch means "the style," was the name of a fine-arts magazine published between 1917 and 1932. The *De Stijl* artists' aim was to develop a pure visual language of expression, and, as can be seen in the Schröder House, they liked to use basic forms and colors in their designs (see Image 8, Rietveld's Red Blue Chair, for another example of *De Stijl*).

Born in Deventer, Holland (now The Netherlands), in 1889, Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder originally trained to become a pharmacist. However, she also cultivated a lifelong interest in art, architecture, literature, and politics. Her older sister An, a writer, introduced her to other writers, politicians, and artists, including members of the *De Stijl* group. In 1911, Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder moved to Utrecht and married Frits Schröder, a lawyer, and in 1921 they commissioned Rietveld to design and furnish a room for her. After her husband's death, in 1923, Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder decided to have a new home built. Once the Schröder House was completed, in 1924, she lived there for sixty years.

After the death of his wife, Rietveld lived with Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder in the Schröder House until his own death, six years later, in 1964. Shortly before Mrs. Truss Schröder-Schräder's death, in 1985, she donated the Schröder House to the municipality of Utrecht. The house was restored as closely as possible to its original condition, and in 1987 it was opened to the public as a museum. The United Nations recognized the Schröder House as a World Heritage Site in 2000.

RESEARCH PROJECT

Consult books and Web sites on art and architecture (see the Selected Bibliography and Resources section in this guide) for definitions of the term "De Stijl." Find out who the artists were, what they were trying to achieve, and when and where they lived. Do you think the efforts of the *De Stijl* group still have an impact on our lives today? Present your ideas in a short paper.

GLOSSARY

De Stijl: A Dutch word meaning "the style," *De Stijl* was the name of a fine-arts magazine published in Leiden from 1917–1932. The term also refers to a group of artists and architects whose style of expression was based on the use of primary colors, rectangular shapes, and asymmetrical balance. The *De Stijl* movement was also a direct response to the chaotic and destructive events of World War I, and its members believed that developing a new artistic style represented a means of rebuilding, and of creating a harmonic order. Rietveld's Red Blue Chair (Image 8) incorporates many design principles of *De Stijl*.