

## Of Mies and Menswarehouse

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They call them big box stores. You've seen them sprout up around the county. They are huge retail centers with thin steel columns, lightweight steel trusses and corrugated roof decks. They are prettified on the exterior with artificial stucco (EIFS – external insulation finish systems), split face concrete block or a combination of the two. They are usually derided as architectural rice crackers, but not here.

I believe that they are the fulfillment of the modern architectural movement of minimalism. Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe coined “less is more” which is the soul of one modern movement that wanted to strip architecture of all history and artificiality.

Please note that the “modern” architecture movement is nearly one hundred years old. In the future to distinguish it from some other future architecture style, it will have another name. I suggest “Helga.”

The Helga movement caught on quickly in Europe and when Mies came to America, he brought Helga with him. (Sorry, “Helga” does not work.) Minimalism spawned the ubiquitous glass-box office building. But do not fault modernism for a beautiful idea that was copied ad nauseum by less skilled architects, builders and owners.

At the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago, Mies got to run an architecture school and design eighteen buildings that exercised his theory that a single big simple steel and glass box could be construction to house any function: classrooms, studio, offices, dining, etc.

The big box stores are not about the building but their function: to sell the contents. They are like haikus – only employing the syllables necessary to get the essential idea across. For retail buildings the essential ideas are: keep the weather and the thieves out; be a billboard.

West of the Hudson where land is flat and cheap the stores are as big as Westchester villages. In these superstores, 24 hours a day, you can buy tires and get a freshly baked cake decorated for your birthday. If you worked there, you would never have to leave; just sleep in the mattress department.

I envision superstores getting larger, so you can drive inside them. Meats: Exit 3a, 1 mile. Think of the time saved. You would not have to load up a cart, unload it at the register, reload the cart and then pack everything into your car. You just place the items in your car truck which is scanned as you exit and charged to your EZ-Pass.



*From l to r: Crown Hall, IIT, Chicago; Sam's Club, Elmsford, NY; Mens Warehouse, Greenburgh, NY*