

Counterplans

5–6 minutes



“I’ve never cooked...I designed the kitchen as an architect, not as a housewife.” —Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky

The modern kitchen is a relatively recent development; having been dreamed up by the Viennese architect Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky in 1926* it was meant to upgrade and provide ease of use for worn-out factory workers in their homes. The laboratory-

style fittings, with built-to-measure appliances, cupboards and countertops were considered revolutionary due to their reduced size, they allowed for a smaller kitchen overall, and reduced the user's step-count, and thus, fatigue.

The resounding success of the Frankfurt kitchen was quickly made evident as it became the predominant kitchen style in social housing developments all over Germany and soon, worldwide. Promises of freedom for the housewife through the "rationalization of housework" showed the influence of Taylorism and the notion that household labor was a true profession.

Some 50 years later, the intended emancipatory features of the Frankfurt kitchen began to fissure with age, their cracks showing how from the factory floor to the office, not enough had changed for women who were expected to keep up with full time employment and the upkeep of a household. In the light of feminist thinkers like Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir and many others, notions like the division of labor and Wages for Housework, it became evident that while design may have had the best of intentions, it had not managed to free women from bearing the majority of the weight of unpaid labor. As Silvia Federici points out in her essay "Counterplanning From the Kitchen" (Cox and Federici 1975), "Getting a second job has never released us from the first. Two jobs have only meant for women even less time and energy to struggle against both."

But what of the division of labor if only one single person is meant to fit into a cramped, reduced-scale space dedicated to workflows and meticulous organization? The Frankfurt kitchen

over the years has given way to a new trend—the open plan kitchen.

The stool stands in front of a window. It is an emblem of a solitary soul making plans; shopping lists, lunch menus, dinner plans. The stuff of life. In Spanish, the expression for a housewife is *ama de casa*, the soul of the home. While facing the window, this soul turns her back to the housework and continues making counterplans.

*the year Schutte-Lihotzky began working in Frankfurt with architect Ernst May

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