

ATHENS, GREECE

U.S. EMBASSY CHANCERY

The Athens Chancery, by architect Walter Gropius, one of the most celebrated representatives of the famed Bauhaus School, is a modern tribute to ancient Greek architecture. The architect designed the building as a metaphor for democracy in the country to which modern democracy owes so much.

Completed on July 4, 1961, the three-story edifice is markedly open. The landscaped courtyard provides a place for discussion and meeting. The white columns and brilliant reflective surfaces of the exterior façade are clad with Pentelic marble, the famous stone used in the Parthenon, other buildings on the Acropolis, and throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Black marble from Saint Peter, Peloponnesus, gray marble from Marathon, and other native Greek marbles are used throughout the building. The beautifully-turned wood stair railing was made with Greek pearwood by Greek artisans.

Contemporary architecture magazines described the chancery as “a symbol of democracy at the fountainhead of many old democratic and architectural traditions” by “one of modern architecture’s Olympian figures,” Walter Gropius, and his associates at The Architects Collaborative (TAC). Gropius said that he sought “to find the spirit of [the] Greek approach without imitating any classical means.” The podium, quadrilateral plan, interior patio, exterior columns, and formal landscaping were all handled in a thoroughly modern way. Pericles Sakellarios was the consulting architect. Paul Weidlinger and Mario Salvadori were the structural engineers.

The building’s climatic response includes ceramic sunscreens, wide overhangs, free flowing air at continuously slotted overhangs, and a bipartite roof. Upper floors hang from the roof structure. Gropius placed a reflecting pool at the main entrance and fountains in the landscape to create serene settings and cooling from the Greek sun. The floor plan is arranged in a sweeping crescent that embraces a large formal terrace descending to a lawn and garden.

On the lawn facing the city is a bronze statue of American soldier/statesman George C. Marshall, whose aid program helped turn the Greek Civil War away from Communism and supported a return to prosperity in Greece at the end of World War II.

The Athens Chancery remains a fresh and optimistic bow to the classical ideal and one of the most prominent Bauhaus buildings in Greece.

In 2013, The Department selected a design firm for a major rehabilitation of the chancery facility and campus at the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

