Microsoft Design Style Inspirations

In order to truly understand something, it is often important to understand where it originated. This is especially true of design-related topics. Almost everything designed today has roots somewhere in the past. The Microsoft Design Style is no exception. There are three major design influences that contributed to the formation of this design language: Bauhaus (and the related Modern Design Movement), International Typographic Style (also known as Swiss Design Style), and cinematography (and the related discipline motion design). Each of these had an impact on the creation of the design language that has been used in products such as Zune, Xbox 360, Windows Phone, and now Windows 8.

In this chapter, I'll briefly introduce the three major design influences on Windows 8 design style and the Windows 8 design concepts that were based on these influences. This knowledge is the foundation you'll need to understand why certain decisions were made in Windows 8 application design and why they are so vital to the design of your application. Also, to make sure it is perfectly clear why these points are so important, I will offer you an example for each one, using the sample application “Running Total.” In Chapter 2, I will tie these concepts to the Microsoft Design Style Principles that are critical to the success of your Windows 8 application design.

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Bauhaus and the Modern Design Movement

The late 1910s were years of great artistic exploration and experimentation. Many designs of the time began to favor form over function. Designs that favor form over function feature heavy adornment and contortion of shapes for solely decorative purposes. The founder of the Bauhaus movement, Walter Gropius, had different views about design:

*Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilized society.*

The key piece of this statement is the part stating “design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life.” In essence, what Gropius is saying is that we should not be thinking really hard about how to embellish our designs. It is much more important to allow our designs to represent their content authentically and true to their intended function. Another quote from Gropius that further drives this point home is the following regarding the architecture of the time:

*A modern building should derive its architectural significance solely from the vigor and consequence of its own organic proportions. It must be true to itself, logically transparent, and virginal of lies or trivialities.*

Though this quote is about architecture, it is just as applicable to our topic if “modern software” is substituted for “modern building.” Modern designs should be true to themselves. They also shouldn’t be embellished with extraneous things that don’t really help explain the concept they intend to convey.

Applying Bauhaus to Running Total

What does this mean for your Windows 8 app? The concepts of the Bauhaus design movement are the guiding force behind a design guidance called *content before chrome*. I will discuss this concept in more detail in Chapter 3, but for now you can think of it as removing all of the buttons and tabs and navigation trees and other application chrome we have in traditional applications. If we strip away all of the chrome that normally gets in the way of our software designs, we can really begin to let the content of our applications shine.

Let’s take a look at how these concepts are applied in our Running Total application (see Figure 1-1). One thing you should notice right away is that there is no traditional application menu (File, Edit, etc.). There also are no buttons or tabs on the surface of the application. The top level of runs is grouped by month, but instead of there being a list of months to select, the runs are laid out visually. The group header for the month is a fully interactive piece of content that not only provides the total number of runs for the month but also can be tapped to navigate to that month. Functionality for filtering runs is tucked away