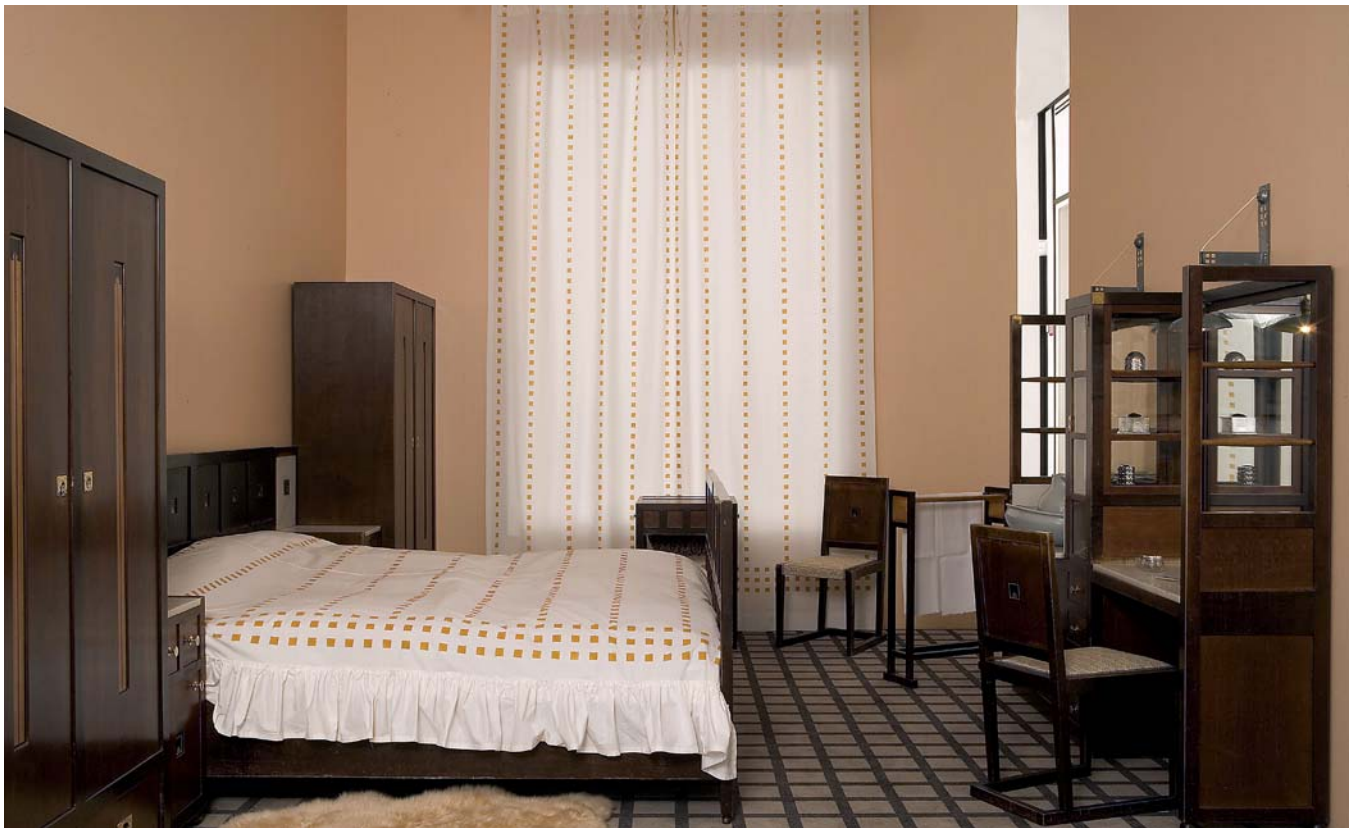
STYLE 1900

ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

COASTAL COTTAGE IN MYSTIC

VIENNESE INTERIORS
ARTS AND CRAFTS SAN DIEGO
AMERICA'S GIVERNY
NATZLER CERAMICS
BRING THE OUTDOORS IN



Top **The Biach Bedroom (1902) is a dreamy interior with a lighthearted feminine ambiance not often seen in Hoffmann's designs. Storage units that would stylishly suit a 21st century home line an entire wall of this long, narrow room. A continuous base runs through all of the cabinets, creating a unified look despite an atypical variation in their respective heights. A whimsical touch is the full-length mirror set back into a deep white frame, creating a sense of passing through the looking glass into a magical world.**

Bottom **In the Salzer Bedroom (1902) golden squares resound as the recurring motif, from drapes to bedspread to flooring. In contrast with the room's dark wooden furniture, all of its fixtures exude a golden luster—the locks on the wardrobes, the knobs on the nightstand drawers, and the delicate pendant lights illuminating the dressing table.**

The Neue Galerie Recreates a Master's Sublime Settings

Josef Hoffmann INTERIORS

By Judy Polan
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Austrian architect and designer Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956), whose elegant interiors were recently showcased in an exhibition at the Neue Galerie New York* is widely hailed as the shining star of fin-de-siècle Viennese style. A master of virtually all the decorative arts, he conjured a magnificent array of avant garde furniture, jewelry, metalwork, glassware, textiles, ceramics, and wall and floor coverings, much of it characterized by the idiosyncratic grid pattern that earned him the descriptive moniker *Quadrati-Hoffmann,* "Little-Square Hoffmann."

A product of the rigidly bureaucratic Austrian educational and arts system, Hoffmann broke free in 1897 and with his friend, Symbolist painter Gustav Klimt, co-founded the Vienna Secession, an alliance of revolutionary artists and architects. He and his colleagues were committed to reappraising the status of the applied arts and to promoting the work of living artists for the first time.

Hoffmann and the Secessionists were steadfastly committed to the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or "total work of art," the principle that every interior and exterior detail, surface, or ornament should contribute harmoniously to a building's overall expression of beauty. In this, he was guided by Belgian architect Henry van de Velde's metaphor: "Each object in a room is like an instrument in an orchestra; the architect is the composer creating the symphony." Like-minded designers in America included Frank Lloyd Wright and Greene and Greene.

The Neue Galerie Exhibition

The recent exhibition at the Neue Galerie comprised four complete room interiors, each created for a home whose entire refurbishment had been entrusted to Josef Hoffmann. Here, Hoffmann is revealed to be a fantastical explorer of the interplay between two- and three-dimensional space, incorporating design elements that simultaneously draw the eye upward and outward. He also asserts his mastery of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* orchestrating all elements of the environment into absolute harmony, so that the whole becomes much greater than the sum of its detailed parts.

Each room was meticulously furnished with numerous original Wiener Werkstätte creations: furniture, textiles, wall and floor coverings, lighting, ceramics, glass, and metalwork. The Neue Galerie's ambitious presentation, organized by Viennese arts curator Christian Witt-Dörring, was the first exhibition of Hoffmann rooms ever mounted in the United States. Music by Viennese composers wafted gently through each room, dramatizing the ambiance of the era, and underscoring the Secessionist ideal of "making music visible in three-dimensional form."

**Josef Hoffmann Interiors: 1902-1913;* November 02, 2006 through February 26, 2007.

The Hoffmann-Moser chandelier, a 1903 design for the Wiener Werkstätte, was a visual highlight of the Stonborough Dining Room recreation at the Neue Galerie exhibition.

The four featured interiors were a girl's bedroom *(Mädchenzimmer)* from the Max Biach residence (Vienna 1902), a bedroom from the Hans Salzer residence (Vienna 1902), the dining room from the residence of Jerome Stonborough and Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein (Berlin 1905), and the dining room from the residence of the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler (Geneva 1913). Approached chronologically, these rooms give the viewer a window into the evolution of Hoffmann's design vocabulary, beginning with his early career and spanning his most fertile period. They demonstrate his keen desire to achieve a melodious unity between art and architecture, as well as his self-proclaimed intention "to create a modern setting for our modern life."

Two Bedrooms

The Biach Bedroom was designed for seventeen-year-old Katharina, daughter of textile industrialist Max Biach and his wife Anna Loew-Beer. It is a white fantasia with a lighthearted feminine ambiance not often seen in Hoffmann's work. Cheerful red and blue stenciling appears throughout, accented by a quartet of pendant lights whose hangers playfully echo the pattern painted on the walls; sinuous metal panels in the washstand's glass doors reflect the womanly inspiration of Scottish Art Nouveau designer Margaret MacDonald.

Secession patron Paul Wittgenstein commissioned the second bedroom as a wedding gift for his daughter Johanna and her husband Dr. Jonas Salzer. Here, Hoffmann's signature squares assert themselves as the central motif, dominating the flooring (a dark brown grid on a warm brown background), appliquéd onto the bedspread, and integrated into the head and foot boards, nightstands, chair backs, dressing tables, and even the towel stand. Since the Salzers' home was a rented apartment, no structural alterations could be made; Hoffmann's strongly architectural design style masks the fact that this commission was in fact limited to redecorating.

Two Dining Rooms

The dining rooms, dated 1905 and 1913, were public areas within domestic spaces and were designed to showcase the wealth and status of their owners. By the time these rooms were on the drawing board, the Weiner Werkstätte was in full operation, thus able to provide Hoffmann with decorative objects, materials, and surfaces conforming to his criteria and exacting standards.

The Stonborough Dining Room décor is the ultimate statement of Viennese elegance. Designed jointly by Hoffmann and Moser for the Berlin apartment of Dr. Jerome Stonborough and his wife Margaret (daughter of industrialist Karl Wittgenstein), it subtly yet clearly proclaims the couple's refinement and high style.

This interior reaches its crescendo in a celestial chandelier suspended over a fully outfitted dining table. Other harmonious touches abound, integrating "Quadrati-Hoffmann's" favored shape. These include mirrored wall sconces encircling the room, glassware displayed on the table, and a glimmering glass-fronted cabinet.

This Hoffmann textile design (1906) combines pencil, Japan ink, and watercolor on a graph paper background. Hoffmann had a penchant for textile design and fashion; he held a professorship in these subjects at Vienna's School of Applied Arts *(Kunstgewerbeschule)* for over 35 years.

Vienna 1900 and the Wiener Werkstätte

Fin-de-siècle Vienna was unparalleled in its veneration of music, café life, and aesthetic culture. In this city of eminent philosophers, architects, and composers, intellectual and artistic sophistication were as important as wealth. The mood of the city was one of festivity and refinement. In this heady atmosphere, Josef Hoffmann succeeded in establishing himself as an arbiter of good taste, eventually becoming the favorite interior designer of society's crème de la crème.

Five years after leading the Vienna Secession, Hoffmann co-founded with preeminent decorative artist Kolomon Moser the Wiener Werkstätte ("Vienna Workshops"), a coalition of applied artists and craftsmen. Their sensibility—a precursor to the sleek stylishness of Art Deco—was a purposeful departure from the earlier ornamental excesses of *Jugendstil,* the Austrian/German form of Art Nouveau that featured a frenzy of whiplash scrolling and flowery organic motifs. In founding the Werkstätte, Hoffmann acknowledged the influence of the British Arts and Crafts movement in its commitment to fine workmanship and use of "honest materials".

The establishment of the Wiener Werkstätte was not only a philosophical but also a practical move. Hoffmann and Moser recognized that it was essential to find craftsmen who shared their beliefs and standards in order to bring their innovative designs to the marketplace.

To that end, fine artists such as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka joined forces with Hoffmann and Moser. Financial backing for the Wiener Werkstätte was enthusiastically provided by "arts manager" Fritz Wärndorfer, a Jewish cotton-processing industrialist and renowned patron of the arts. By 1902, the Wiener Werkstätte designers and artists were positioned to create a new definition for 20th-century style.

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Prof. Jos. Hoffmann
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Top **The Stonborough Dining Room (1905) is the ultimate statement of Viennese elegance. The room is a study in contrasts: deep brown furniture nestles against bright white walls, their starkness mitigated by rows of green geometric stenciling at the upper reaches. Strong verticals—ceiling-to-floor drapes, a tall cupboard, and strategically placed glass bud vases—balance the horizontal lines spanning the width of the room, created by the respective matching heights of its furniture and fixtures.**

Bottom **The Hodler Dining Room (1913) is a commanding interior, featuring stained black oak furniture and a zig-zag parquet floor. The walls are covered with gray ribbed fabric that somewhat softens the room's masculine ambiance; they are dotted at the frieze level with picture nails—wooden pegs from which Hodler could hang his own art. The central oak table shows the influence of Czech Cubism, its tapered legs creating an ambiguity between planar and 3-dimensional space.**

The Hodler Dining Room, commissioned by Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler for his apartment in the upscale section of Geneva, is the most opulent of the lot—a magnificent interior meant to impress. A dramatic oak buffet (stained black, with swirling white graining) serves as display area for a sleek silver tea set, coffee steamer, and other service pieces. A separate exhibit housed in this room included a silver cookie box, flower basket, tea strainer, and sardine tray.

The dragonfly design for the dining chairs' yellow linen upholstery was created by Wiener Werkstätte artist Dagobert Peche; the furniture was crafted by Johann Jonasch. In this interior—above all the others—Hoffmann is the reigning maestro, conducting an ensemble of honored guest soloists in his grand symphony of design.

Hoffmann and the Modern Age

Josef Hoffmann succeeded in his quest to unify art and architecture by means of a harmonious repetition of motifs, forms, and colors, resulting in a spiritually resonant experience of space. One of his era's most eminent stylists, he became one of its greatest communicators of taste. His aesthetic, which spoke to early modernists, continues to speak clearly to the current modern age, establishing him as a vital force in the continuing evolution of contemporary architecture and design.

Writer and musician Judy Polan writes about the arts for Style 1900, Modernism, Berkshire Living, *and* Pakn Treger, *the English-language magazine of the National Yiddish Book Center. Email her at JP@judypolan.com.*

FURTHER INFORMATION

Neue Galerie New York is America's premier museum devoted to early-20th-century German and Austrian art and design. The permanent collection includes works by Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, and notable artists of the Wiener Werkstätte; special exhibitions are featured throughout the year. A design store, book shop, and the deluxe Café Sabarsky round out the offerings of this splendid venue.

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Klimt's golden *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), in its original Hoffmann frame, is the crown jewel of the Neue Galerie's collection.

Jewish Patronage, Then and Now

During the era of Vienna's cultural ascendancy, the city's Jewish community occupied a position of unique stature and eminence. Its ranks included Franz Kafka, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Theodor Herzl, Arnold Schönberg, Gustav Mahler, and a number of Secessionist artists, designers, and architects.

Jewish industrial magnates provided crucial financial backing for the Vienna Secession and Weiner Werkstätte, thereby demonstrating civic pride, vision, and largesse. It also allowed them entrée to the city's aristocratic circles from which they were generally excluded. Of the four Hoffmann interiors displayed at the Neue Galerie, two were commissioned by the Wittgenstein family, whose patriarch was the industrialist Karl—father of philosopher Ludwig and celebrated concert pianist, Paul.

The Jews' notable contributions to Austrian culture did not grant them protection from the horrors of the Holocaust. Many escaped to other countries, while some met their deaths in concentration camps. Anna Biach, for whose daughter the 1902 Hoffmann white bedroom was commissioned, died at Theresienstadt in 1942.

Today, Ronald S. Lauder—businessman, philanthropist, and co-founder of Neue Galerie New York—is forthright in attributing the preeminence of Wiener Werkstätte artists to the patronage of Jewish industrialists and trendsetters.

Lauder, himself Jewish, recently purchased Klimt's portrait (above) of Jewish salon hostess Adele Bloch-Bauer. Commissioned by her husband Ferdinand, a sugar magnate, the 1907 painting was stolen by the Nazis and restored to its rightful heir only in 2006, after a lengthy legal battle that included a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision. The verdict established the right of U.S. citizens to sue in American courts to reclaim family property seized by the Nazis during World War II.