

# Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

## #6 The beginning of the 20th century

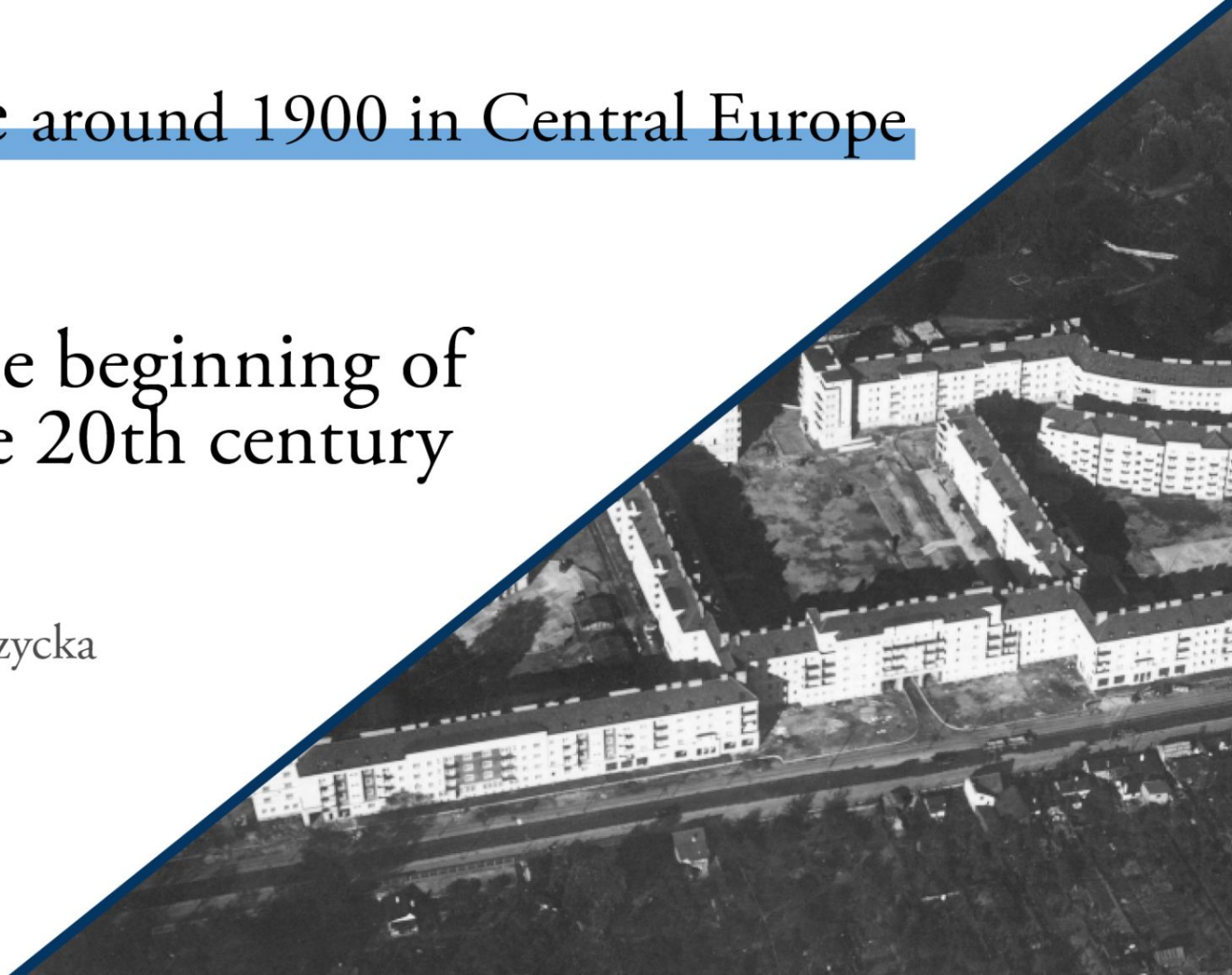
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AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES



# Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

In this series on popular culture, we will once again revisit one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was **a special period for art in Central Europe** due to various artistic trends and an increased cultural exchange between countries politically associated with Austria-Hungary.

The architecture style of this time largely dominates the face of contemporary European cities. Many important and characteristic buildings (such as train stations, museums, universities, and parliaments) were designed by then architects, while main boulevards and plazas were designed by city planners.

Similarly to our previous series, we will present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** through examples from Central European countries.



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# Architecture of the early 20th century

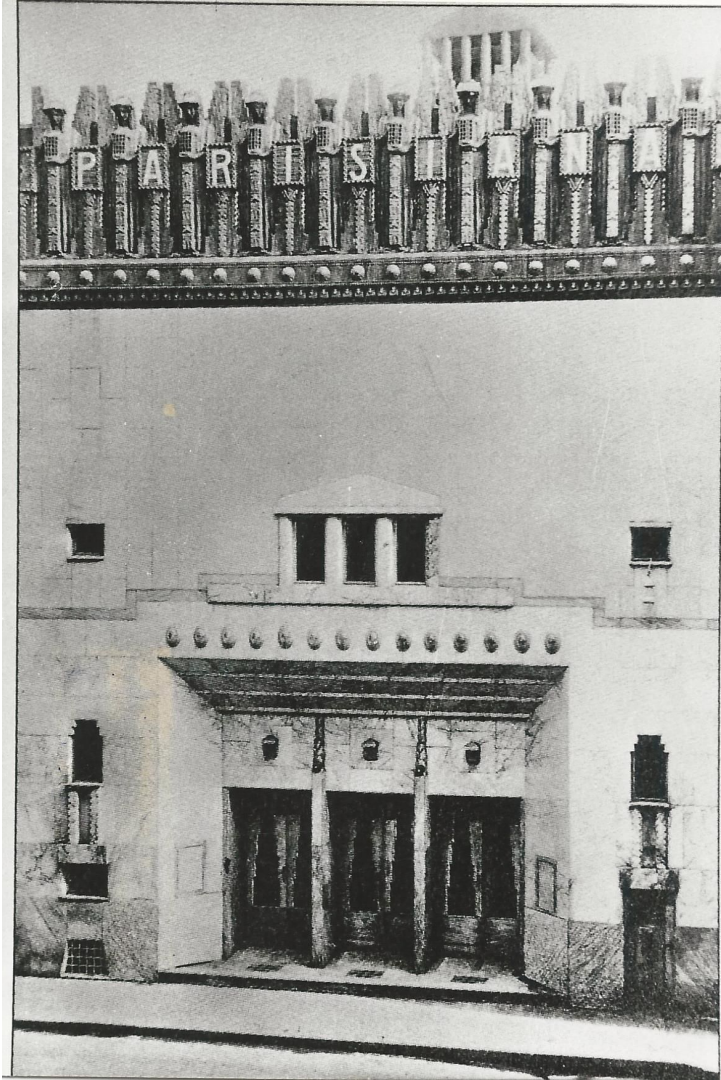
The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th – the period from 1890 to 1920 – was a time for very diverse architectural styles and currents to coexist: revivalism, Art Nouveau, modernism, and Art Deco.



Sometimes their assumptions contradicted each other, sometimes they resulted from artistic opposition. For example, modernism was a response to historical styles and partly, like Art Deco, to Art Nouveau.

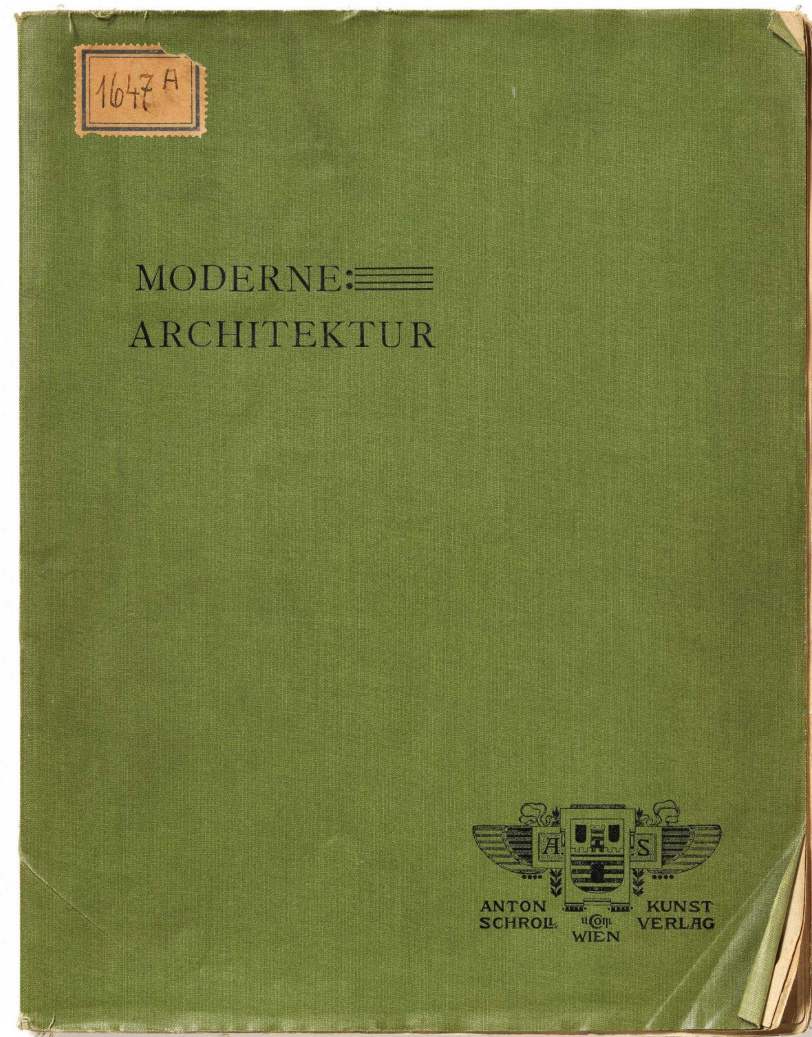
It was also a time when architects faced new tasks resulting from the rapid social and political changes following the First World War.

The Parisiana night club building in Budapest, designed by Béla Lajta (HU), circa 1910, Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism



# The origins of modernism

Modernism dates between 1918 to 1972, but its origins can be traced back to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among its precursors was the Austrian architect Otto Wagner. In his book, *Moderne Architektur von 1895* (Modern Architecture of 1895), he heralded the imminent end of the historical styles that dominated the Vienna Ring at the time.



Cover of second edition Otto Wagner's (AT)  
*Moderne Architektur*, 1898, Wien Museum

Wagner noted that art must carry modern ideas and create contemporary forms that respond to current needs and technological advances. This would never be possible if architecture merely copied and imitated the past.

This meant that architects should be looking not at historical patterns, but rather concentrating on responding to the challenges of their time with contemporary means.

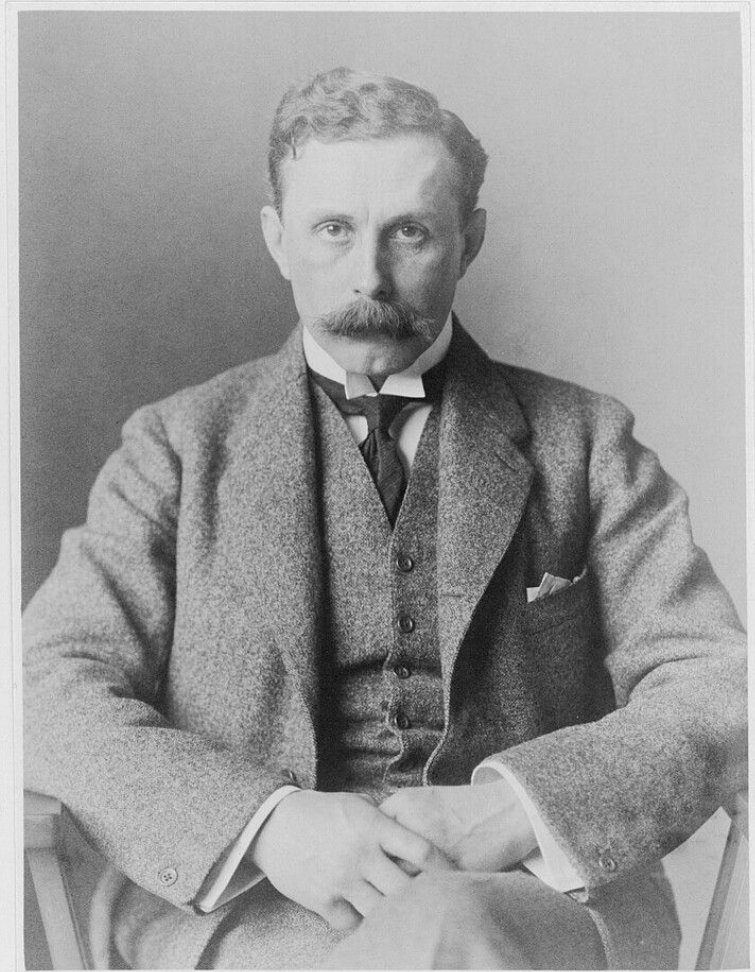


Otto Wagner (AT), 1915, Wien Museum

# Ornament and crime

Another Austrian important to the development of modernism was Adolf Loos, who in 1908 entitled his essay *Ornament und Verbrechen* (Ornament and crime).

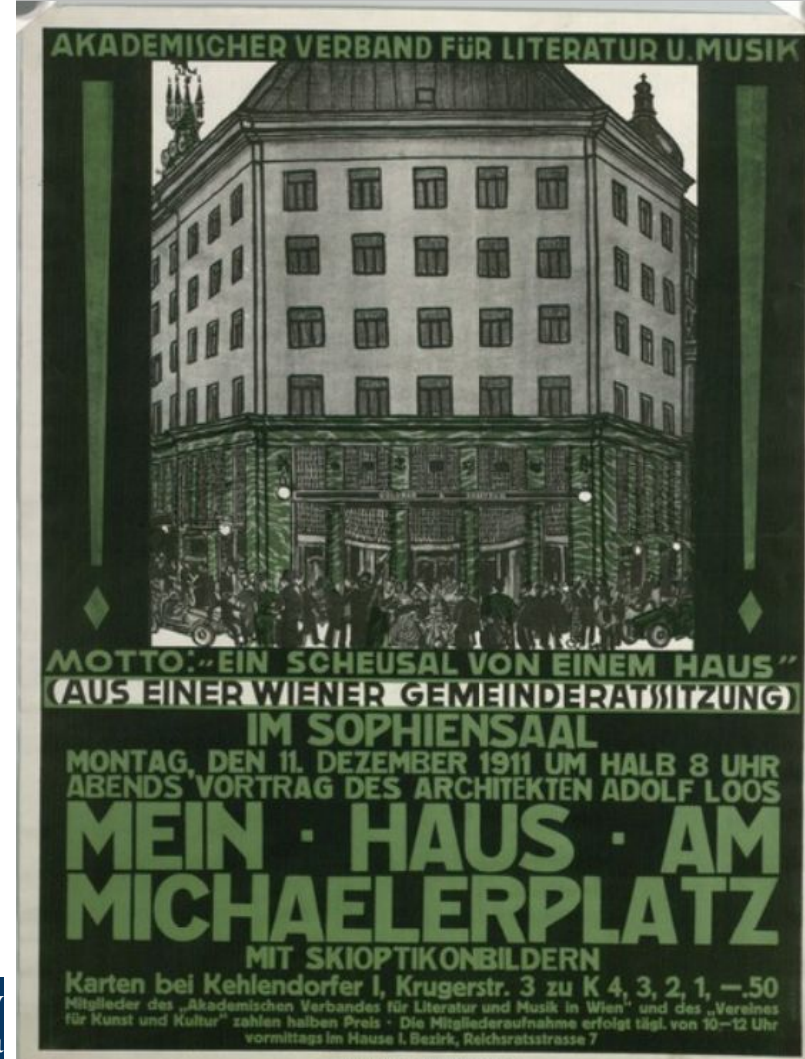
Adolf Loos (AT), photo by Wenzel Weis (CZ),  
early 20th century, Albertina in Vienna



He explicitly wrote that architectural decoration is unnecessary as its design and execution costs far exceed the benefit of results. Of course, Loos did not intend to completely reject decoration in architecture. He did, however, postulate that it should be very strongly restricted.

Other slogans of modernism included “less is more” (introduced by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe) and “form follows function” (Louis Sullivan).

Poster of Adolf Loos's lecture, designed by Urban Janke (AT), 1911, Albertina in Vienna





# The present, not the past

All these postulates were directed against the existing architectural theory and practice.

First, to abandon history as a source of inspiration and to look for it in the present.

Second, the rejection of superfluous decoration, and thus of stylistic costumes.

The Rózsavölgyi House, designed by Béla Lajta (HU),  
circa 1912, Budapest City Archives



Rózsavölgyi  
Budapest

Third, a reduction in excessively elaborate architectural forms and a preference for simplicity, which meant “extracting” and showing “pure” architecture.

Fourth, designing buildings according to the function that defined them, rather than following historical patterns imposed from above.

Over time, these became the main principles of 20th century architecture.



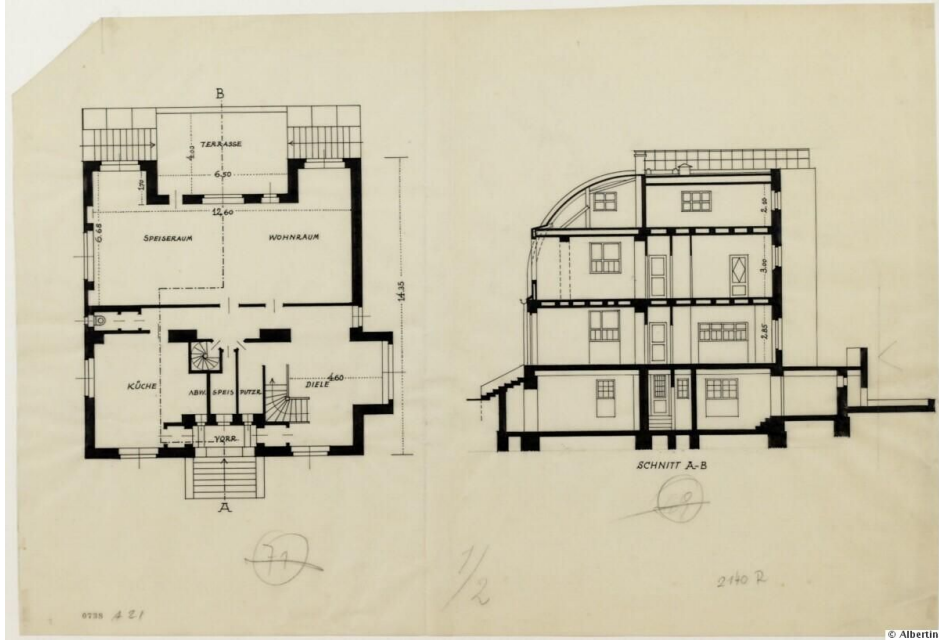
Villa in Zagreb designed by Aladar Baranyai (HR), 1909,  
Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

# Adolf Loos as architect

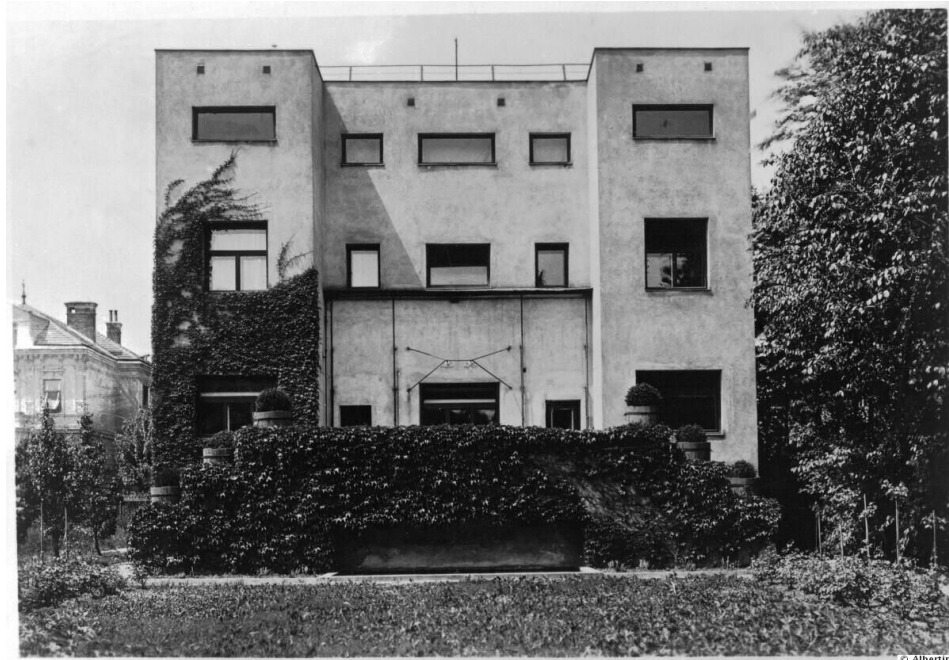
Loos was not just a theoretician of modernism. In 1910, he designed the Villa Steiner in Vienna, a building completely devoid of decoration. Photographs of this villa were reproduced many times in the trade press and became an example of modern villa architecture, which was eagerly imitated.



Steiner House in Vienna, designed by Adolf Loos (AT),  
photo by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), 1930, Albertina in Vienna



Adolf Loos (AT), *Plan of Steiner House in Vienna, 1910*, Albertina in Vienna



Steiner House in Vienna, designed by Adolf Loos (AT), photo by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), 1930, Albertina in Vienna

He also designed a department store in the centre of Vienna, known today as Looshaus (1909-1912). In its form it combined Art Nouveau aesthetics with the principles of modernism. Its uniqueness and novelty lay in the fact that the main part of the façade was virtually undecorated, distinguishing it from the surrounding buildings in historical styles.



Looshaus designed by Adolf Loos (AT) and St. Michael Church in Vienna, 1912, Wien Museum

Loos continued his work even after the First World War. He collaborated on the construction of the Villa Wittgenstein, one of the most important examples of Viennese villa architecture from the 1920s.

Villa Wittgenstein in Vienna, photo  
by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), 1936,  
Wien Museum



# The role of the Bauhaus

The Bauhaus art school in Weimar, founded in 1919 by the German architect Walter Gropius, was hugely important for the development of modernism, not only in Central Europe.

Bauhaus buildings in Dessau, photo by Johannes  
Reiher (DE), 1928, German Digital Library



Many leading modernist architectural alumni, among others, Hungarians Marcel Breuer, Farkas Molnár, Fred Forbát, and Gyula Wálder, played a role in shaping the style in their own country or made international careers (i.e., USA).

Tubular chair, designed by Marcel Breuer (HU),  
produced by Thonet factory, after 1929,  
Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest







Tubular stool, designed by Marcel Breuer (HU),  
produced by Thonet factory, after 1929,  
Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest



Complex of buildings on the Madách square in  
Budapest, designed by Gyula Wálder (HU) and  
built in 1937-1938, 1940, Fortepan / Inkey Tibor

# Housing

One of the main challenges architects of the early 20th century faced was the constant influx of people moving into cities.

Tenement houses were no longer a sufficient solution. They were non-functional and were a mix of better and worse housing conditions. They belonged to private landlords who were more interested in making a profit from rent, rather than ensuring the comfort of its inhabitants.



Estate "Am Freihof", Vienna, circa 1926, Wien Museum

*Panorama der K. K. Reichs-Haupt- und Residenzstadt Wien.*



Panoramic view of  
Vienna with dense  
development of the city  
center, 1918, Wien  
Museum

The modernists found a solution to this problem: estates built with public funds (usually municipal) established outside the city centre but well connected to it. They were designed from scratch, considered the different needs of the inhabitants (i.e., accessibility of schools and shops), and were surrounded by green areas. The aim of such projects was not for profit, but to provide comfortable and affordable housing for all.



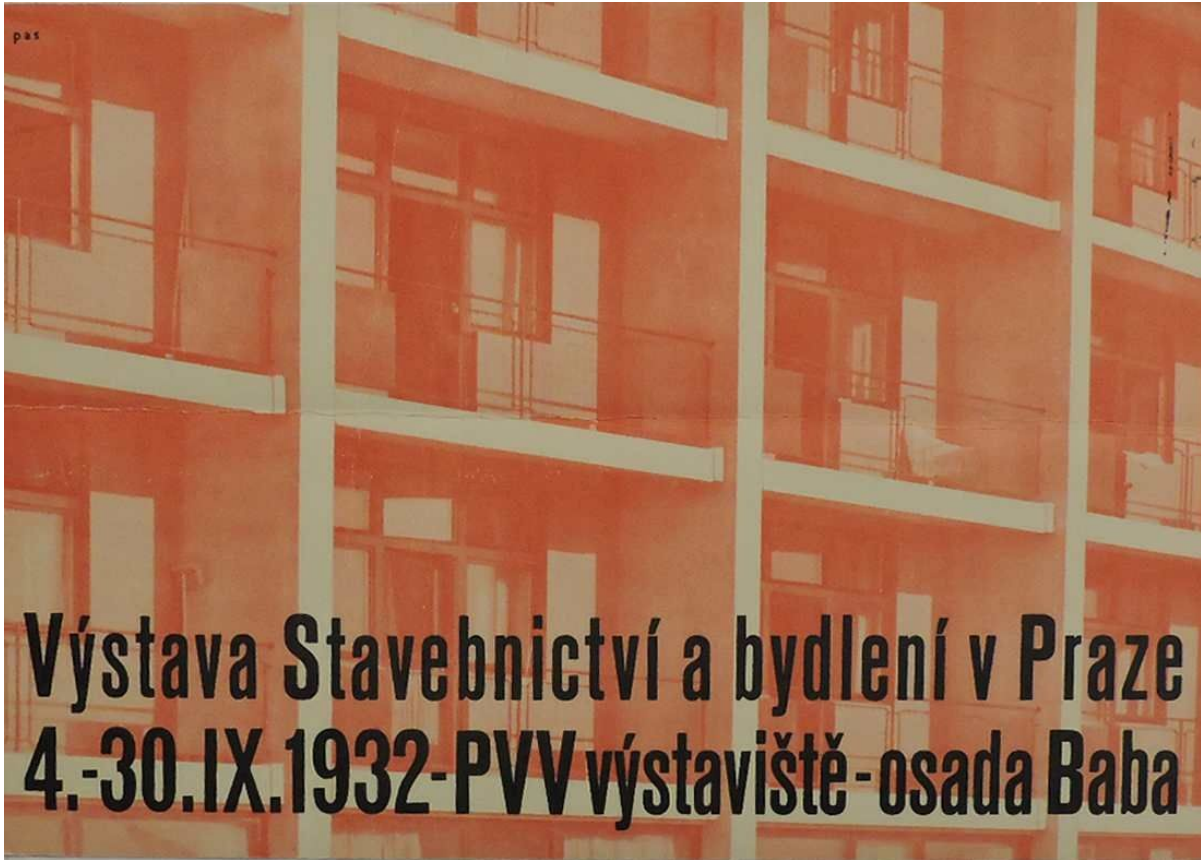
Estate "Heuberg" under construction, Vienna, circa 1926, Wien Museum

Panoramic view of estate  
“Heuberg”, Vienna, 1927,  
Wien Museum



# Model estates

One of the “themes” of modernist architecture, especially in the 1920s became the design of “model estates”. Teams of architects worked together to design model solutions for exhibitions or competitions.



Poster of the Construction and Housing Exhibition in Prague, Baba exhibition grounds, 1932, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

The individual buildings within a housing estate needed to meet the expectations of different social or professional groups. Examples of such housing estates were in Czechoslovakia – in Prague (Baba Housing Estate) and in Brno (New House).



Poster of the Exhibition of Modern Trade in Brno, designed by Ladislav Sutnar (CZ), 1929, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

# Modernist estates

Drawing on model projects, the modernists focused on the usefulness and functionality of flats, their airiness and good lighting. In contrast to tenement houses, they wanted all flats to be of the same standard. They also emphasised the social role of housing estates as a place where people live together and form social bonds with their neighbours.

Municipality building “Sandleitenhof”,  
Vienna, photo by Martin Gerlach jun.  
(AT), 1926, Wien Museum







Inner courtyard of municipality building “Fuchsenfeldhof”, Vienna, photo by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), around 1926, Wien Museum



Municipality building “Matteottihof”, Vienna, photo by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), around 1926, Wien Museum

# Vienna and its models

In Central Europe, housing construction played a special role in Vienna, ruled by the Social Democrats. In the 1920s and 30s, a bold programme of municipal housing construction was implemented. About 60,000 units were built for nearly 200,000 inhabitants, and were called “Gemeindebauten” (municipality buildings).



Municipality building “Professor-Jodl-Hof”, Vienna, photo by Martin Gerlach jun. (AT), around 1926, Wien Museum

Ceremonial address by Mayor Karl Seitz (AT), in background municipality building “Goethehof”, Vienna, photo by Stanislaus Wagner (AT), 1930, Austrian National Library



Municipality building  
“Winarskyhof” – passage with  
a monument of Ferdinand  
Lassalle, Vienna, 1933,  
Austrian National Library



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As a rule, these complexes consisted of several-storey residential buildings surrounding an inner green courtyard, which had a recreational function. Apart from housing, they contained the necessary infrastructure such as kindergartens, shops, and laundries. Such a complex could satisfy most residents' needs and build a sense of community among them.



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Municipality building “Goethehof” in Vienna, 1930,  
Austrian National Library

Municipal daycare, Vienna,  
photo by Theo Bauer (AT),  
circa 1926, Wien Museum



Chairs no. 14 designed by  
Michael Thonet (DE)

This system was emulated throughout Europe. Similar concepts were pursued, for example, by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (start of construction: 1925) or the Wekerle estate in Budapest (1908-1925).



Warsaw Housing Cooperative, photo by Henryk Poddębski (PL), before 1939, National Library in Warsaw

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# Amenities

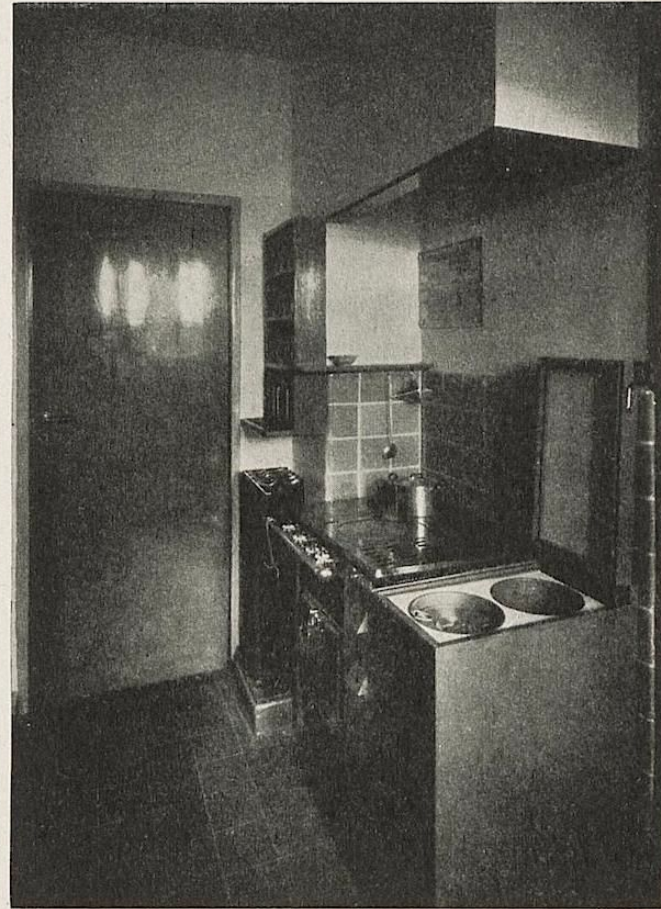
In addition to designing buildings, modernist architects were also concerned with interior design – designing mobile, multifunctional, and simple furniture. The interior of homes was also to be arranged in a practical, functional, and compact manner. Designers often used modern materials such as aluminium, Bakelite or linoleum.



Armchair (polyvinyl, beech, chrome-plated steel pipes),  
after 1927, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

Housework was to be facilitated by a well-appointed kitchen with running water and an electric cooker. The design for the model “Frankfurt kitchen” (origin of its design) was drawn up in 1926 by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, one of the first Austrian female architects.

Photo of “Frankfurt kitchen” designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (AT), published in magazine “Das neue Frankfurt”, 1926/1927, Heidelberg University Library



**Bild 34 : FRANKFURTER KÜCHE**

Kitchen in new municipality building “Fuchsenfeldhof”, Vienna, photo by Theo Bauer (AT), circa 1926, Wien Museum



It was also assumed that the flats would have their own toilets, which was a real novelty. In tenement houses, these were only found in luxury flats, while most residents had shared toilets in the corridors or courtyards.

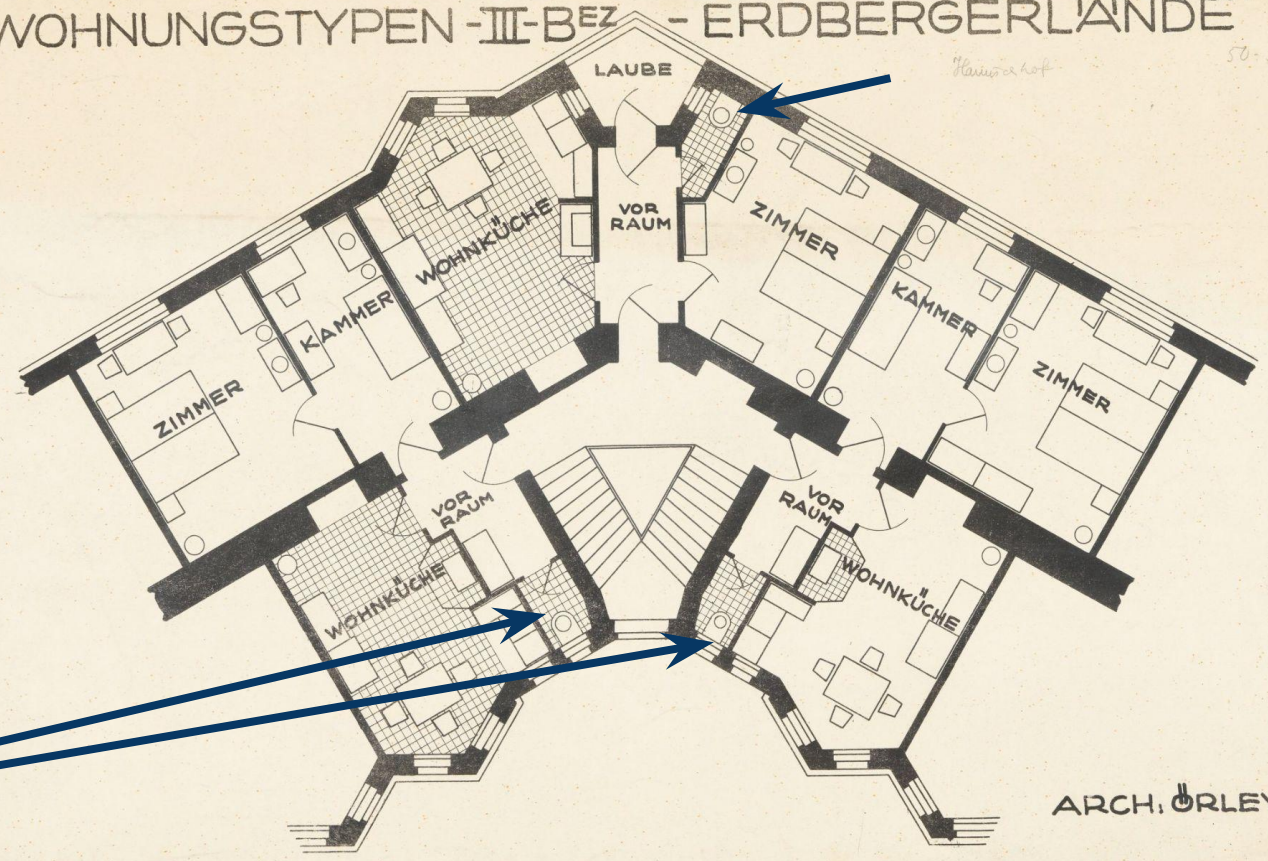


Bathroom, photo by Henryk Schabenbeck (PL), after 1906, National Library in Warsaw

# WOHNUNGSTYPEN - III-BEZ - ERDBERGERLÄNDE

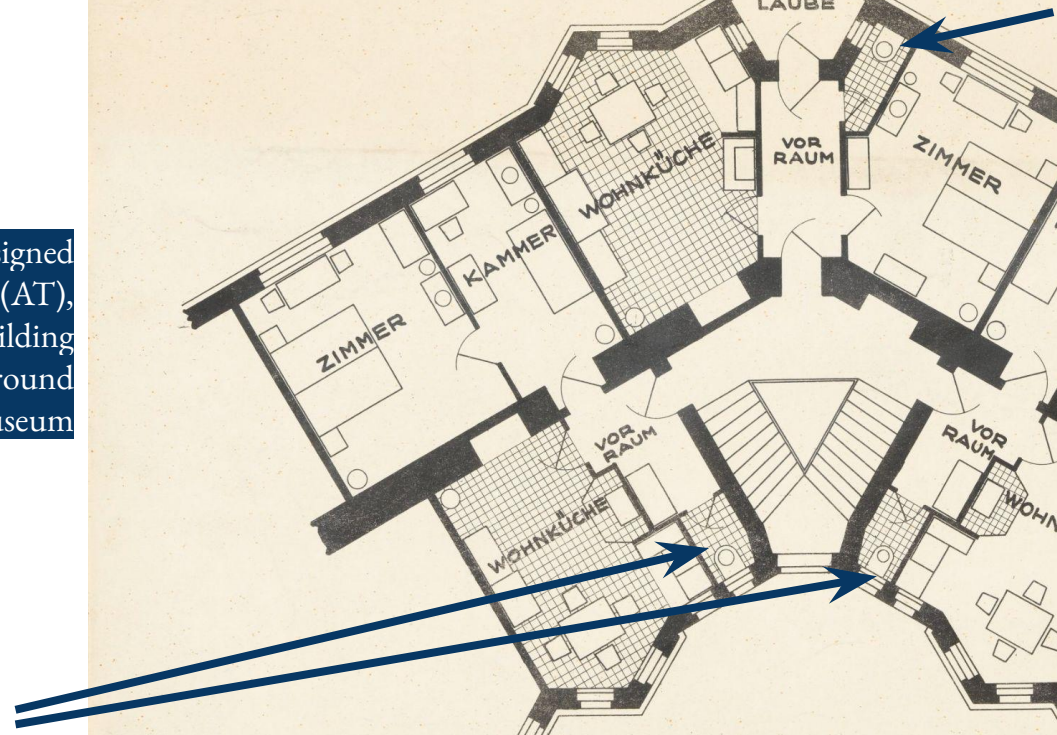
Hauschhof

50-54



Apartment type plan, designed by Robert Öerley (AT), municipality building "Hanuschhof", Vienna, around 1926, Wien Museum

Private toilets





Modern bathrooms, 1920s or 1930s,  
National Digital Archive, Poland



# After the First World War

After First World War, the Central European countries that had regained independence – Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later referred to as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) – faced the need to build new public buildings: parliaments, ministries and offices.

Previously, public buildings were dressed in neo-style costume. Now modernism was becoming the hallmark of the modern state.

Telecommunications and Telegraphic Office in  
Warsaw, designed by Julian Puterman-Sadłowski (PL),  
photo by Henryk Poddębęski (PL), 1930s, National  
Library in Warsaw



Ministry of Communication in  
Warsaw, designed by Rudolf  
Świerczyński (PL), photo by  
Henryk Poddębski (PL), 1932,  
National Library in Warsaw





The modernist housing estates started emerging alongside entire cities. In the 1920s the construction of Gdynia, a new port city on the Polish Baltic Sea, began. The city (previously a small fishermen's settlement) was created from scratch and given a coherent modernist appearance.



View of Marine Station in Gdynia, Poland, photo by Henryk Poddebski (PL), circa 1935-1939, National Library in Warsaw

Main Post Office Building in  
Gdynia, designed by Julian  
Puterman-Sadłowski (PL) and  
others architects, photo by  
Henryk Poddębski (PL), 1930s,  
National Library in Warsaw



# Art Deco

Art Deco was perfectly suited to the needs of young countries. This style became established in 1925 during the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris. It is from the abbreviated name of this exhibition that it takes its name.

Austrian Pavilion, International Exhibition of  
Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris,  
photo by Bruno Reiffenstein (AT), 1925, MAK –  
Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



Art Deco elegantly combined tradition and modernity. Inspirations from the past – historical styles or folk art – were not limited to copying motifs. Architects and designers kept in mind the achievements of modernism: geometrisation, functionality, and new materials.

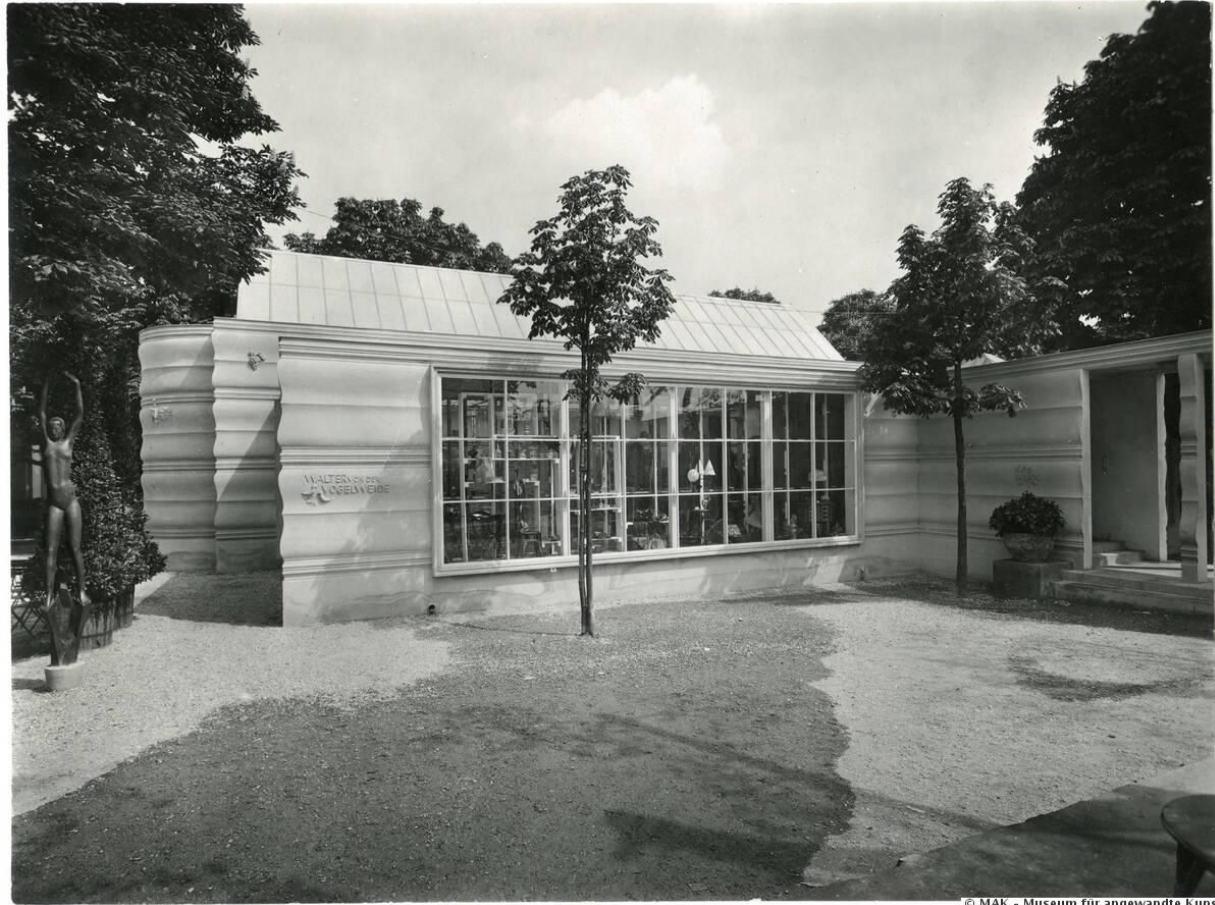


© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

Café of the Austrian Pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, photo by Bruno Reiffenstein (AT), 1925, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

The decorative mix of traditional motifs and contemporary aesthetics suited the representative procurement and the image of a modern, but historically proud state.

Part of the Austrian Pavilion, International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, photo by Bruno Reiffenstein (AT), 1925, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



The Polish Pavilion presented at the Paris exhibition is a great example. The building with an openwork tower resembling a crystal was designed by Józef Czajkowski. Inside were works by leading Polish artists of the period, including furniture by Wojciech Jastrzębowski and a tapestry by Zofia Stryjeńska.

Polish Pavilion designed by Józef Czajkowski (PL),  
International Exhibition of Modern Decorative  
and Industrial Arts in Paris, 1925, National  
Museum in Warsaw





Salon designed by Wojciech Jastrzębowski (PL), on the wall – tapestry by Zofia Stryjeńska (PL), 1925, National Museum in Warsaw



Armchair designed by Wojciech Jastrzębowski (PL), Polish Pavilion, International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, 1925, National Museum in Warsaw

# Following Second World War

After Second World War, modernism became the dominant style not only in European but also in world architecture, becoming the most widespread style of the 20th century. Even the name of one of one modernist trend refers to this fact: The International Style.

Muranów housing estate in Warsaw, erected after Second World War, photo by Zbyszko Siemaszko (PL), 1955-1962, National Digital Archive, Poland





Modernism proved particularly important in the rebuilding of cities after the Second World War. Architects trained between the wars often based their designs on the ideals developed in the early 20th century.



Muranów housing estate in Warsaw, erected after Second World War, photo by Zbyszko Siemaszko (PL), 1959, National Digital Archive, Poland



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