

The Other Modern Dwelling: Josef Frank and *Haus & Garten*

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In an article published in *Der Architekt* in 1921, the year when the economic and political fortunes of Austria finally began to revive, Josef Frank took time out to reflect on what the new realities of the postwar era would mean for the future of the arts and crafts in Vienna. “The Viennese arts and crafts,” he lamented, “have lost their foundation.” Frank was not only referring to the loss of the empire’s outlying provinces, from which, as he noted, the city had traditionally drawn much of its artistic stimulus as well as many of its most talented craftsmen. Rather, what had been taken away by the war and its aftermath was “the possibility of quietude and the pleasure one may gain from things that serve no particular purpose (*Freude an Zwecklosem*).”¹ In the harsh new atmosphere of postwar poverty and deprivation, the arts and crafts in Vienna—which Frank declared had been fundamentally bound up with “that which extends beyond what is merely necessary”—had been replaced by a new practicality that allowed little opportunity for quality handwork or contemplation.²

As both a decorative artist and an off-spring of the city’s *haute bourgeoisie*, Frank was especially well-positioned to feel the disruptions of the war and political revolution. Born in 1885, the son of a well-to-do Jewish textile manufacturer and wholesaler, Frank had studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna. Upon graduation in 1910, he embarked on a career as an independent architect and designer, joining an informal practice started by two of his former classmates, Oskar Strnad and Oskar Wlach. Although his early work still drew from the ideas and formal language of the Viennese *Jugendstil*, within a short time he began to develop his own distinctive style, an eclectic idiom that combined both old and new, the elegant and the prosaic.³ Yet Frank, like most of the city’s other modernists, continued to believe in the role of art as a means to elevate the crafts above mere utility.

Frank’s jeremiad was directed not only at the declining state of Vienna’s arts and crafts industries; it was also a recognition that the idea of the arts and crafts as a path to reform was itself under assault. Unlike England, where Ruskin and Morris had taken the lead in reviving a moribund artisan and craft culture, in backward Austria those traditions had survived—albeit grievously threatened—up to the time of the war. By the early 1920s, however, it was becoming evident even in Vienna that the machine would soon render artisanal craft dead. While Frank acknowledged that it had become necessary to rethink the arts and crafts and

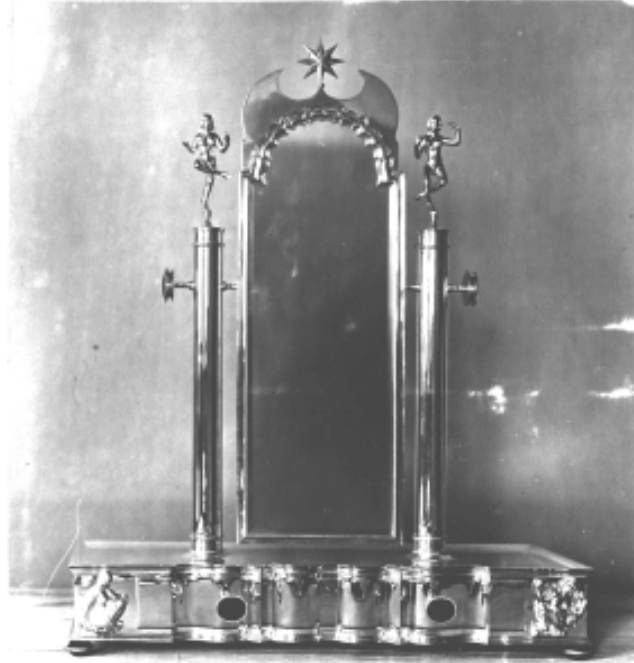


Figure 1. Silver mirror for the Wiener Werkstätte, c. 1919. Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.

their production—“we will have to begin anew in everything,” he wrote—he remained unwilling to abandon the old notion of the arts and crafts as a “continuation of work beyond the merely necessary.”⁴

Frank’s designs of the immediate postwar period clearly evince this commitment to an already outdated notion of craft and expression. The silver mirror (fig. 1) he produced for the Wiener Werkstätte in 1919 had more in common with the ebullient spirit of the Baroque than the new functionality of the Machine Age—a seemingly frivolous gesture, glaringly out of step with a time of severe food shortages and political and economic turmoil.⁵ But Frank was by no means alone. The majority of the Viennese artists and designers who prior to 1914 had established the city as one of the fertile centers of European decorative arts clung to their faith in a modernism rooted in the traditional crafts.

Frank, however, pursued a different design strategy. While Josef Hoffmann and most of the other leading prewar designers sought to adapt Cubism and Expressionism to a new decorative language, Frank continued to find inspiration in older forms, which he sought to interpret in new ways.⁶ A tea table he designed for his wife’s sister Signhild Sebenius (later, Claëson) in 1919 (fig. 2) provides a particularly instructive demonstration of his attempt to

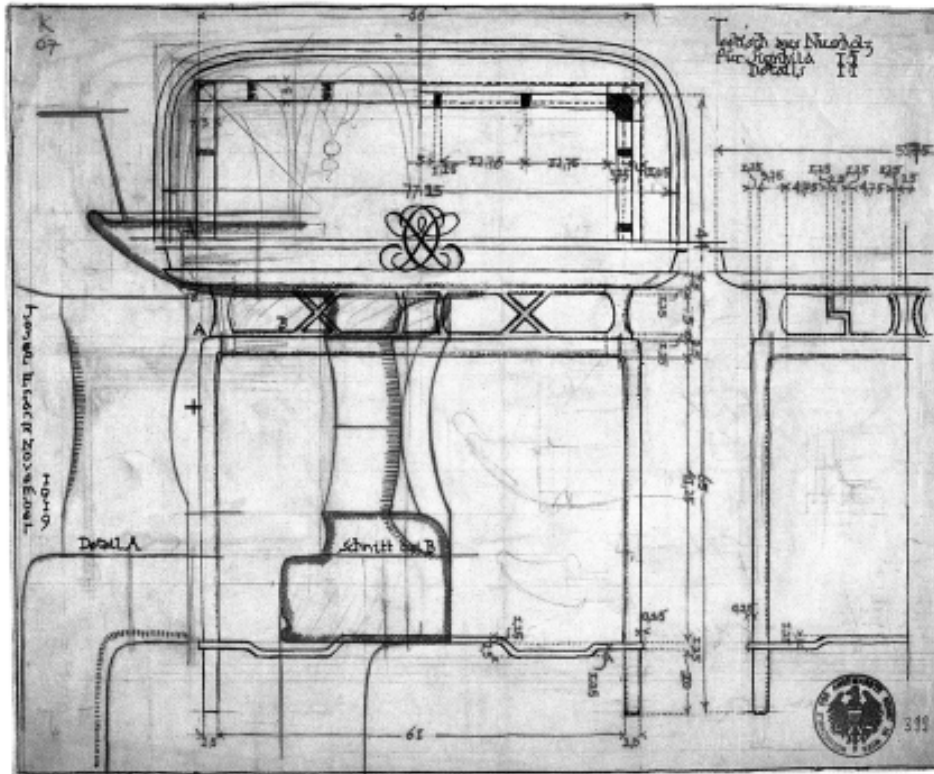


Figure 2. Design for a tea table for Signhild Claëson, 1919; elevations, plan, section 1:5; details 1:1. Pen and ink, pencil on paper, 22.5 x 27 cm. Hochschule für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.

readjust his historically based approach to the postwar spirit. Although a variety of past ideas and motifs are readily discernible—the Chinese-inspired openwork on the apron of the table’s base, for example, or the mirror-image monogram, which is based on seventeenth-century English, Scandinavian, and Dutch precedents⁷—the table nonetheless reveals a noticeable move toward simplification and further abstraction.

Both of these processes are also at work in the side chair (fig. 3) Frank designed for the Lundberg family in Djursholm, Sweden, around 1921. The slender profiles of the legs, crest rail, and stiles recall the Viennese Biedermeier furniture of the early nineteenth century, while the woven rattan seat alludes to Chinese and Far Eastern traditions; but these constituent parts have been both recast and reduced so that the piece clearly reflects the postwar emphasis on clean lines and practicality.

A drawing of an idealized *Siedlung* house living room (fig. 4) that Frank published in *Innen-Dekoration* in 1923⁸ also displays this same attempt to meld the traditional with the new language of *Sachlichkeit*. The individual furnishings borrow from a wide array of sources,



Figure 3. Side chair for the Lundberg house, c. 1921. Collection Camilla Lundberg, Sweden.



Figure 4. Living room for a *Siedlung* house; perspective. From *Innen-Dekoration* 34 (1923).

including seventeenth and eighteenth-century English and American Windsor models, but the contours and construction have been simplified to produce a determinedly modern look. The reductive handling of the room's framing surfaces—walls, ceilings, floors, and windows—and Frank's casual arrangement of the various elements similarly reinforces this appearance of austerity. What is especially striking about the room is the apparent lightness of the furnishings themselves, which almost seem to float within the space. In an accompanying article, Frank explained that he had conceived of the furnishings independently of the architecture. "The word *Möbel* (furniture) derives from 'mobile,' which means movable," he wrote. "That should be taken literally. An armoire is not movable, it forms a 'room within a room.' . . . It destroys the clarity of a space."⁹ Instead, Frank argued, such "representational" pieces should be replaced by light, movable tables and chairs "that assert no [architectonic] influence of any sort." These should be placed in the room "as if by chance," "with no assigned place." Each piece should be "independent of the others," should not "conceal anything," and "constitute a 'grouping' only in so far as they are placed in relation to each other." "Therefore, we no longer have use for matched 'sets,'" he declared. Our concern is no longer with "installations" (*Einrichtungen*), but "only individual furnishings" (*Einzel-Möbel*).¹⁰

Frank acknowledged that the profound changes wrought by industrialization and modernization necessitated new furniture types and forms. "The furniture of our new 'Machine Age' will stand apart from any attempt to be merely 'decorative'"; instead, it will "represent a minimum of material, space, form, and weight," while at the same time "requiring a minimum of care and upkeep." Such new standard types, he claimed, could not be invented: "they arise on their own."¹¹ Frank noted, however, that designers could contribute to this process by offering new forms and ideas that would eventually evolve into standard types—like the Windsor chair—which might be used as "ready-mades." This notion of an evolutionary path to modernism, aided by the designer-architect, occupied a middle position between Adolf Loos's insistence that new forms would issue forth as products of cultural and social change, and the growing conviction of the avant-garde (which had already emerged in Werkbund debates before the war) that designers could and should take the lead in creating new types.

Frank's affirmation of the need for developing new standard types, however, stopped short of a complete endorsement of industrial production of furnishings and other objects of

daily use. While he conceded that the trend toward machine-made household articles was not to be halted, he insisted that traditional hand-crafted furnishings and other items still had a place in the modern dwelling because they offered qualities that could not be replicated by industrial products. “The mechanized factory can only have one aim, to make its products as useful as possible. It can never go beyond its actual task, to produce objects in the sparest and most precise form possible.” Hand-crafted articles, by contrast, because they could be more elaborate and provided evidence of the time and care taken by their maker, offered a sense of luxury and calm that was otherwise lacking in industrially manufactured goods. More important for Frank, as for Ruskin and Morris, handicraft also left room for the “healthy aspiration” of the working man to “find joy” and “heightened intellectual engagement,”¹² and “to express something.”¹³ Such qualities had allowed the arts and crafts to survive and even prosper in an era that saw increasing competition from the machine. To maintain a living artisanal tradition, however, Frank recognized that it would be necessary to alter the nature of handwork, at once limiting it to objects not intended to be merely functional,¹⁴ and, at the same time, using machines to relieve the craftsman of “worthless labor.”¹⁵

Yet these changes alone, Frank insisted, would not be enough. A new formal language for handicraft was needed, one that reflected—or at least acknowledged—the realities of machine production. A first step toward this end was to free objects of “mere decoration” (*bloßen Aufputz*), whether traditional or “modern”: “a chest painted with cubistic motifs is no more modern than one with Renaissance-style decoration.” Needed, too, was a new “eye for the beauties of natural and artificial materials.”¹⁶

In spite of such efforts, Frank believed, considerable differences would remain, making a “unified style” as had existed in former times “impossible.” Instead, the modern home or apartment “required a flexibility” and “variety” that would allow room for these different impulses and forms.¹⁷ In keeping with this notion, Frank’s model *Siedlung* room presents a new austerity while retaining unmistakable vestiges of his earlier, prewar design aesthetic. Indeed, the airy spaces, grand pianos, and genteel settings belong more to the world of his *Großbürgerlich* clients than those of the working class for whom the flats were actually intended. On the one hand, this was clearly a result of Frank’s belief in preserving the nineteenth-century ideal of the home as a place of peaceful affluence—an idea that would continue to mark his work in the coming decades. But it derived also from his fervent

belief—evident as well in his designs for the later *Siedlungen* themselves—in the importance of providing for the lower classes the comforts and opportunities for leisure once only the privileged domain of the well-to-do—a position fully in accord with the Austrian Socialist party’s program of gradually ameliorating the status of their proletarian constituency.

Frank’s sketch of the room points to another trend in Viennese design that was beginning to assert itself in the early 1920s: a turn away from the formality of the prewar era toward a more relaxed, freely conceived environment. Among the leaders of this movement, not surprisingly, were several of Frank’s former collaborators, including Strnad, Wlach, and Hugo Gorge. While Frank in the immediate postwar period had focused on the *Siedlung* movement, Strnad, Wlach, and Gorge had devoted much of their time and effort to furniture design, in the process both continuing and refining the anti-*Gesamtkunstwerk* ideals of their pre-1914 work. Their designs, even more than Frank’s, expressed the cultural ideals and conventions of the city’s *haute bourgeoisie*—a deluxe austerity that constituted an apparent effort to stay in step with the times without sacrificing comfort or richness.¹⁸

THE FOUNDING OF HAUS & GARTEN

After 1924, Frank, too, began to focus more on designing furnishings and other household objects. One reason for his renewed interest in the arts and crafts was the decline of the *Siedlung* program. Even more important, however, was the gradual improvement of the economy. After more than five years of tumult and instability, the financial health of the Austrian Republic finally begun to show faint signs of recovery, and for the next several years—until the worldwide depression set in at the end of the decade—the country experienced a period of brief if shaky prosperity.

Encouraged by the upturn, Frank and Wlach launched their own home furnishings business in the early summer of 1925.¹⁹ They were joined in the enterprise by Walter Sobotka, a close friend of Frank’s who had also been former classmate from the Technische Hochschule.²⁰ They registered the company as “Haus und Garten & Co.”—an apparent homage to Baillie Scott’s *Houses and Gardens*. But after Sobotka withdrew from the partnership the following year, Frank and Wlach renamed it simply “Haus & Garten.”²¹

Frank and his partners opened a sales outlet on the Bösendorferstraße, a block from the Opera. They chose the site not only because of its proximity to the fashionable shops along



Figure 5. Haus & Garten showroom, c. 1926. From *Innen-Dekoration* 37 (1926).

the nearby Kärtnerstraße, but also because it was adjacent to the main downtown stop of the tram which ran out to the spa resort of Baden, a line many of Vienna's well-to-do regularly rode to take the waters or see the horse races. The small showroom featured samples of the company's product line, which included sofas, chairs, tables, beds, and desks, as well as lamps, pillows, and printed textiles (fig. 5). Most of the pieces, however, were available on a custom-order basis only. Clients could select from among the models on display, or pick out pieces or patterns from a series of sample books, specifying particular finishes, sizes, colors, and coverings.

During the early years of the firm's existence Frank and Wlach produced their own individual designs. But increasingly, after 1926, Frank took over the role of the firm's principal designer, and Wlach assumed the position of office manager, overseeing the day-to-day operation of the shop and supervising the remodeling jobs and the execution of larger commissions.²² This arrangement left Frank free to pursue other projects while ensuring that Wlach would attend to the details of the business.

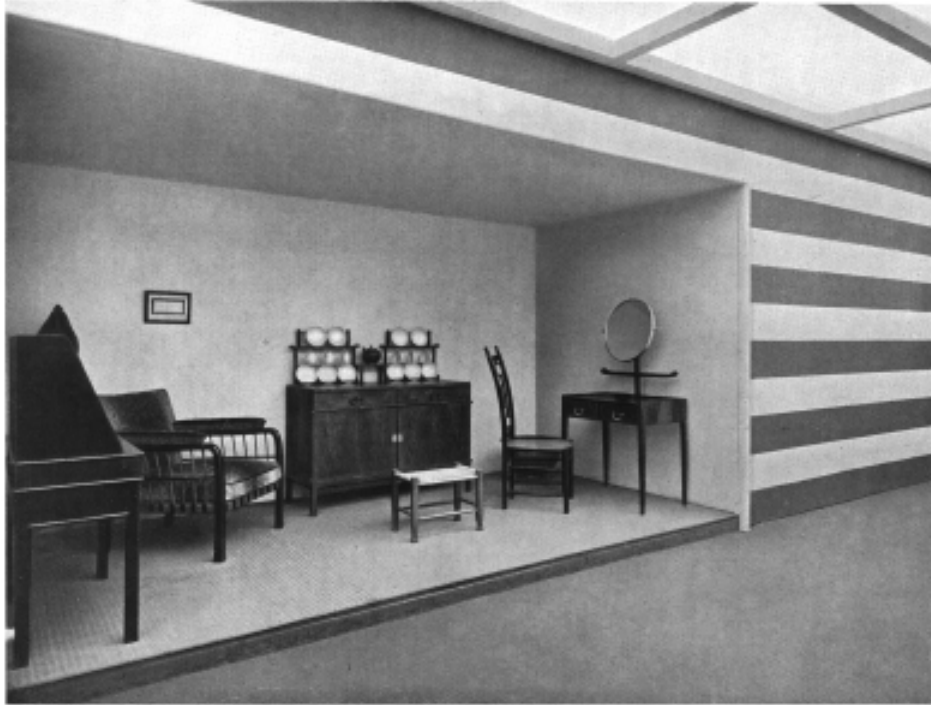


Figure 6. Haus & Garten furniture in the Austrian Pavilion at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, 1925. From *Moderne Bauformen* 24 (1925).

THE 1925 PARIS EXHIBITION

The first public demonstration of Frank's design ideas for Haus & Garten came at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. The Austrian pavilion, supervised and designed by Hoffmann, included two displays by Frank. One was a selection of practical furnishings or *Nutzmöbel* (fig. 6). The small space allotted, however, precluded any display of his principles for free and casual arrangement. The exhibit nevertheless attracted the attention of a number of visitors, among them the young Swedish designer Uno Åhrén, who praised Frank's works for their "freshness," "vigour," and "practical habitability."²³

These same qualities were also evident in Frank's other display, an outdoor "Café viennois" (fig. 7). Wedged in a courtyard framed by Peter Behren's iron and glass pavilion and an organ tower by Strnad, it proved to be one of the most popular exhibits at the exposition, eliciting the praise of a number of critics.²⁴ As in Frank's domestic interiors, the concept relied on the juxtaposition of an understated architectural backdrop with the relaxed informality of the furnishings to produce a sense of unharried ease.



Figure 7. Outdoor coffee house (Café viennois) for the Austrian Pavilion, Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, 1925. From *Innen-Dekoration* 37 (1926).

The lightness and unaffected quality of the rattan chairs, stools, and tables imparted a casual air, one that stood in notable contrast with the other displays at the exhibition, most of which reflected either the decorative opulence of the French or the stark formal language of Le Corbusier and other radical modernists. The special character of Frank's design, however, was not only tied to its particular expression but also its underlying message. While Le Corbusier had selected each element of the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau to demonstrate his faith in new materials, standardization, and industrial production,²⁵ Frank made a plea for a new freedom, one that articulated modernity but which left room for comfort and sentimentality. Yet, at the same time, he pointedly rejected the position of the more conservative French designers, such as Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann or Georges Djo-Bourgeois, who remained wedded to traditional notions of luxury and style. What he offered instead was an attempt to rephrase material pleasure without resorting either to outmoded forms or new industrial products. It was in this spirit that Frank developed his furnishings and interiors for Haus & Garten over the next decade.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Haus & Garten proved from the start to be a commercial success, and in the summer of 1926 Frank resigned from his teaching position at the Kunstgewerbeschule to devote more of his energy to the undertaking.²⁶ Although he and Wlach opened a separate architectural and design office at the corner of Neustiftgasse and Museumstraße in the city's seventh district,²⁷ he spent a considerable portion of his time in the later 1920s at the shop.²⁸

The basic design principles Frank developed for Haus & Garten had their anchorage in the eclectic idiom that he and Strnad, working in concert with Wlach, Gorge, and others, had developed before the war. It was Strnad, in fact, in an article published in *Innen-Dekoration* in 1922, who first articulated the basic principles of this new design direction. Home furnishings, Strnad wrote, should be light, moveable, and carefully scaled to human dimensions. They should be placed independently of the room and arrayed so that the walls, ceiling, corners, and floor be left visible: "One should never attempt to make 'architecture' with furniture," he maintained, nor should it be used to divide or organize the room. The walls should be treated simply—in most instances merely painted white, which, he argued, would increase the feeling of spaciousness by heightening a sense of the walls' immateriality. Brightly colored Oriental rugs and fabrics could be added to "dress" (*ver-kleiden*) and accent the room, Strnad asserted, but industrially produced articles should be avoided because they engendered a sense of "unease."²⁹

These precepts not only came to define Frank and Wlach's Haus & Garten interiors, but in the later 1920s also those of a whole range of younger Austrian designers—among them Felix Augenfeld, Arthur Berger, Fritz Groß, Karl Hoffmann, Julius Jirasek, Otto Niedermoser, and Armand Weiser—whose works were sometimes lumped together in the German-speaking world under the name *Wiener Wohnkultur* (literally, the "Viennese dwelling culture").³⁰ Neither a movement nor a coherent ideology, the *Wiener Wohnkultur* represented instead a mitigated, cozy modernism, an attempt to wrest some degree of comfort from the mounting drive toward wholesale "purification" and "invention" that characterized the design scene of the later 1920s. In seeking alternatives, Frank and the other younger Viennese sought inspiration not only from the past—from the Biedermeier and other historical periods—but also from the attempts of fin-de-siècle designers to promote the betterment of private life through an alliance of design and craft.

Indeed, both in terms of its product line and client base, Haus & Garten was patterned

after the Wiener Werkstätte. Most of the pieces were expensively produced, incorporating exotic woods or other costly components. Frank and Wlach also insisted on the highest standards of craftsmanship—effectively placing most of the pieces out of the range of all but the well-to-do. As a consequence, the shop’s clientele was drawn almost exclusively from the upper middle class, which put it in more or less direct competition with the Wiener Werkstätte, a situation that in fact would later cause mounting friction between Frank and Hoffmann.

In contrast to the Wiener Werkstätte, however, Haus & Garten had no production facilities of its own; instead, the various designs were sent out to local artisans, who produced them according to the clients’ specifications. Frank and Wlach also adopted a decidedly different sales strategy. While customers at the Werkstätte’s sales outlets were offered groupings or suites of furnishings, Frank and Wlach encouraged their clients to choose and match objects at will and to arrange them piecemeal in their rooms. This emphasis on casual arrangement represented a clear departure from the Werkstätte’s philosophy, which continued to promote carefully coordinated room designs and discouraged the purchase of individual pieces.³¹

In spurning such en suite arrangements, Frank and Wlach were rejecting not only the idea of unity that had been at the center of Viennese design since the turn of the century but also the whole notion of the home as a work of art. “A modern living space,” Frank wrote in the early 1930s, “is not an art work, it is neither conspicuous, nor effective, nor exciting.” Rather, he continued, “it is comfortable, without one being able to say why, and the less reason that one can provide the better it is.”³² The desire to make a living space into a work of art, “comes from a [previous] time when one could not recognize the difference between art and an object of daily use (*Gebrauchsgegenstand*).”³³ In contrast to public rooms, which by necessity require a certain formality and monumentality, the dwelling space has no other purpose than to provide a pleasant setting for its occupants. To engender a sense of rest and pleasure, the home must be free of any pretension, any striving for theatrical or artistic impact. “In the modern dwelling, disorder reigns, which is to say that there are no furnishings that are intended for particular places and that would destroy the harmony of the room if they were moved. One should place each piece of furniture . . . where one needs it at a particular moment.”³⁴

Frank argued, however, that it was not only the placement of the furnishings, but also

their individual forms that would contribute to this sense of deliberate “disorder.” Repudiating regular, rectangular shapes (“which demand that they be placed parallel to the walls”), he advocated instead that the various pieces of furniture be “as unprismatic as possible” so that they would exist wholly independently of the room. He cited the example of “a round table with three legs and rounded chairs,” which “can be placed wherever one might choose” and “in any desired pattern,” in contrast to a square table and chairs, which, he asserted, offered limited possibilities.³⁵

Frank was fully aware that his call for deliberate disorder ran counter to the design mainstream. But he contended that the trend in the postwar years “to force a geometric-cubic (*geometrisch-kubische*) form on every object” was fundamentally “*unmodern*.” The longing for unity, which had become central to the Viennese Secession’s program and was now manifesting itself once again in the work of the avant-garde, Frank insisted, was a vestige of late nineteenth-century historicism, which was founded upon the search for a unified style “in which even the furnishings were given the same expression as the house façades.” Although in the postwar era this striving for a consistent language had taken a different form, the “spirit was the same.” In modern times, Frank declared, such a craving for unity was neither possible nor desirable.³⁶

Underlying Frank’s advocacy of an intentional “disorder” was not only a commitment to a more relaxed design idiom, but also his belief in the importance of adapting interiors to the real needs of users. In promoting his notion of a new functionality, however, Frank was also sharply critical of what he perceived as the shortcomings of the functionalism. He pointed to the handles developed by the Bauhaus designers (fig. 8), which, he noted, were indeed “‘simple,’ but poorly adapted to be grasped by the hand.” By contrast, those “produced by industry” fulfill their function but were not conventionally regarded as “functionalistic.” The evident shortcomings of the “Bauhaus approach” were a result of “confusing the geometrically simplest form with the most functional form.” This search for the most “primitive” expression was, in turn, a matter of “fashion”—a desire for decorative effect in no way different from that found in historical period rooms (*Stilzimmer*).³⁷

The new reductiveness of the avant-garde, Frank asserted, was also problematic in other respects. Although it was undoubtedly tasteful, it was at the same time “unmercifully dull.” By confining themselves to a “bloodless asceticism,” the “purists” could avoid any suggestion of bad taste, but such an approach also precluded any real personal expression. The attempt of

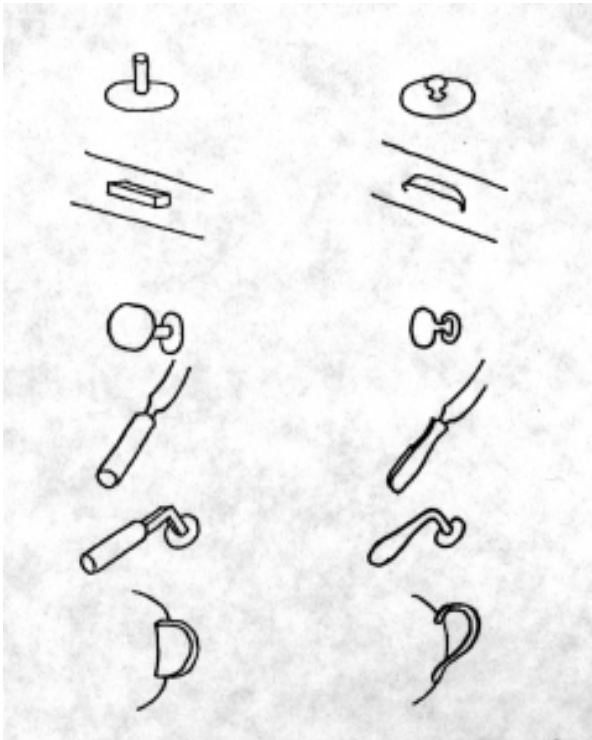


Figure 8. “Bauhaus” handles vs. “organic” handles. From *Form 30* (1934).

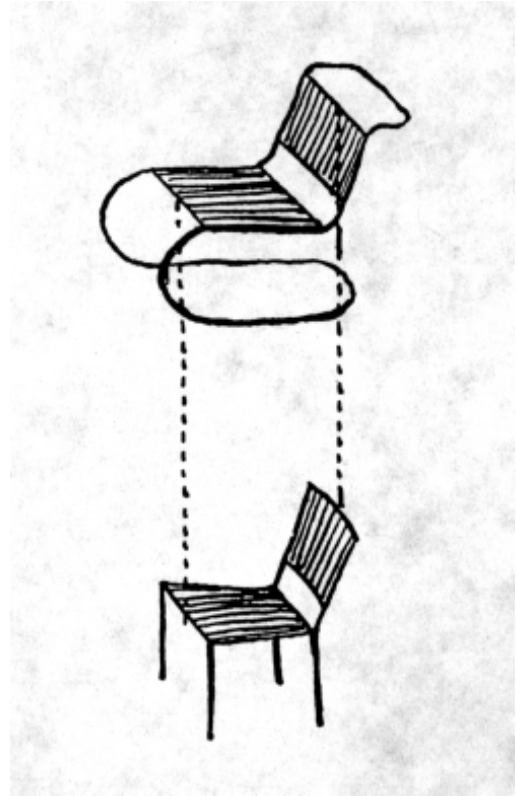


Figure 9. “Bauhaus” chair vs. an “organic” chair. From *Form 30* (1934).

architects and designers to develop new standard types along these lines had also failed, he argued. Frank was especially critical of the bent tubular steel chairs that had been developed by Marcel Breuer and others: “Who would, without a preconceived notion of form (*Formwille*) arrive at the idea of forcing a prismatic shape on a chair and making its surfaces square? The form of a chair must be adapted to the shape of the human body . . . and that has nothing to do with any [regular] geometry.” Moreover, Frank continued, the desire to mimic the flat, clean surfaces of the modern house had resulted in a chair much larger and heavier than was necessary (fig. 9), which “destroys the scale of the room.” The basic form of the chair had been established long before, and it made little sense to fundamentally alter it. ³⁸

In extolling comfort and common sense in design, Frank echoed Loos’s earlier attacks on the Secessionists and the Werkbund; his notion of a fundamental distinction between the work of art and the object of daily use also undoubtedly derived from Loos.³⁹ Frank, however, parted from Loos on the issue of ornament. While Loos equated the reduction of ornament with cultural progress, Frank maintained that ornament provided a sense of joy and relaxation

that was necessary in a time of increasing stress and mental demands. “Every form of ornament is an expression of play (*Spielerei*), to which is devoted both time for their making and their enjoyment, and which one may reflect on without disruption. For that reason, all ornament of the past has such a remarkably soothing effect (one thinks, for example, of Oriental rugs), whereas all plain industrial products, can immediately be perceived [and] carry over to us a sense of the haste with which they were produced.”⁴⁰

Frank acknowledged that it had become increasingly difficult to generate new forms of ornament in the modern age. His alternative was to borrow from the past: “Because our time is no longer in the position to make decoration and ornament, modern man is compelled to use old fabrics and patterns.” The appropriation of older objects and models was not mere nostalgia, but a recognition that the modern age did not preclude the past, and that “numerous household objects” represented “perfected types” that had been developed over many years.⁴¹ “Furnishings are among the most long-lived objects, often outlasting clothes, machines and houses by centuries.” Yet too often architects and designers had lost sight of this truth, and interior design as a consequence was becoming more and more a matter of fashion (*Modesache*).⁴²

For Frank, the way to apply these lessons was not through mimesis or the use of reproductions (as Loos often did in his interiors), but to discern their essence and rephrase it in a new spirit. Most of Frank’s designs for Haus & Garten thus drew more or less directly on historical models. The German critic Leopold Greiner, who wrote the first review of Haus & Garten, immediately recognized this debt to the past: The basis of Haus & Garten, he observed, is that “applied forms do not necessarily have to be thoroughly ‘new.’” For Frank and Wlach, contemporary designs “do not have to be free of every connection with the inheritance of past cultures”; historical forms do not have to be rejected “as long as [they are] creatively alive” (*schöpferisch-lebendig*).⁴³

Yet it was not only Frank’s continuing allegiance to history that set his designs apart from those of the modernist mainstream. Even in his simplest, most radically pared-down pieces (in which the historical models are barely, if at all, discernible) he treated both the surfaces and materials quite differently. In place of squared corners and sharply canted edges, Frank specified smoothed, often undulating lines; and he frequently articulated flat surfaces or ornamented them in some manner. He was especially attentive to any area one might touch or grasp: “The closer one comes into contact with a piece of furniture, if one takes it into

one's hand, the more ungeometric and organic it should be constituted, so that it will fit readily into the hand.”⁴⁴

This concern with the haptic qualities of surfaces also underlies Frank's preference for wood over metal for furnishings other than lamps. Indeed, Frank's Haus & Garten designs constitute an extended essay on the possibilities of forming and finishing woods, both ordinary and exotic. This preference for wood stemmed in part from Frank's commitment to preserving the nineteenth-century bourgeois ideal of the home as a site of refinement and refuge. Yet, as Greiner recognized, it was also a conscious attempt to maintain a connection with the pre-industrial world, and, with it, to a simpler and less harried life.⁴⁵ In this, Frank anticipated the anti-technological message of later critics of the modern. His aim, however, was not to deny the realities of the Machine Age or to urge a return to an idealized past (which he realized was not possible anyway), but to leave room for other possibilities.

The will to divide and categorize, to denote what is appropriate and what is not, runs through all of Frank's thought, as it does that of Loos. For Frank, the principal line of division extends between the realms of public and private, between the home and workplace. And it was the home, the place of living, that Frank regarded as the central architectural concern of modern times. This fixation on the domestic sphere grew out of his belief that conditions and meanings of the home had changed with industrialization: “Modern man, increasingly harried in the workplace, requires a dwelling that is much more cozy and comfortable than in former times, because he has to concentrate his rest in a shorter period of time.” Because of these new requirements, Frank contended, the home demanded its own form: “The dwelling . . . is the absolute opposite of the workplace. This relates not only to the comfort of the sitting and resting places, but also to everything visible, because the eye, too, has to recuperate, which is why all objects present in the factory, office, and similar places should be avoided.”⁴⁶ By appropriating objects of use associated with the workplace, the radical modernists in Germany and elsewhere had blurred the boundaries between the home and office and in so doing they had confused the rituals of living with those of work. “What the purpose of the house is,” Frank countered, “can surely not be expressed in words.” It is “not there for cooking, eating, working, and sleeping, but for living. Between the concepts of cooking, eating, sleeping, working, and living lies that which we call architecture.”⁴⁷

The ideas of utility and practicality also assume other meanings for Frank. The purpose of a particular object is determined not only by what one may do with it, but also by what

impact it has on its user: “It is not ‘practical’ to employ an object for various purposes, even when these purposes are little different from one another, as is the case, for example, with work lights and reading lamps, but they should be made as characteristic and be as well adapted as possible for each specific use.” A reading lamp for the home not only illuminates, but through its design, materials, and construction also brings joy and solace. Similarly, Frank’s notion of utility admitted the prospect of change. “Since through the course of a lifetime, one collects a multitude of ideas, experiences, and objects, the dwelling must offer the capacity to accommodate them all, which is why any striving for unity, consistent color scheme (*Farbharmonie*), or style, even a modern one, should be avoided.”⁴⁸

To allow for the greatest flexibility, Frank, as Strnad had suggested, treated the rooms themselves as more or less neutral containers. Unless a client insisted otherwise, he left the walls white, introducing color principally through the use of Oriental rugs and printed fabrics. In the earliest Haus & Garten interiors, Frank sometimes employed textiles from other designers, but by the end of 1925 he had begun to develop a full line of his own patterns.⁴⁹

Frank was no stranger to textile design. Through visits to his father’s textile shop⁵⁰ and by observing his mother, Jenny Frank, who was a highly skilled embroiderer,⁵¹ Frank, in his early years, had developed a strong knowledge of the techniques and practices of textile manufacturing. Nor was his interest in textiles unique among his Viennese contemporaries: Hoffmann, Dagobert Peche, Koloman Moser, and many other leading artists and designers produced patterns for the Wiener Werkstätte, Backhausen, and other firms. Frank’s textiles, however, broke with the prevailing Viennese trends. In place of the heavy stylization that characterized the works of the leading Wiener Werkstätte artists, he substituted a much more freely conceived language of loosely drawn floral or other figurative motifs. Many of the patterns were modeled after the Persian and Indian calicos that had been imported to Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or the later floriferous designs of Morris and the other British arts and crafts designers.⁵² Frank, however, reconceived these originals, reducing the number of elements while simplifying or otherwise modifying the color schemes. The resulting patterns, such as “Frühling” (fig. 10), retained the decorative qualities of the originals but in a recognizably modernized form. With some of the textiles, for example, “Labyrinth” (fig. 11) and “Seegrass” (fig. 12), Frank also explored the possibilities of complex geometric patterning based on vegetal models; in others, like “Tang,” he opted for fully



Figure 10. “Frühling” fabric sample; printed on linen for Haus & Garten; designed c. 1925-30. Repeat: 38 x 46 cm. Svenskt Tenn Archive, Stockholm.

abstracted designs vaguely reminiscent of the form language of contemporary artists such as Klee or Miró.

Although Frank had first begun experimenting with designing his own textiles during his student years, he had produced only a handful of patterns prior to the founding of Haus & Garten. Between 1925 and 1930, however, he devised no fewer than twenty-five new designs, many of them available in several alternative color schemes. The patterns were block-printed on linen or heavy cotton by local craftsmen,⁵³ a laborious process that involved cutting the design in relief into thick blocks of linden or pear wood, one for each color, and then applying the dye to the cloth with the separate blocks.

Frank generally confined his use of the textiles to curtains or upholstery, but occasionally, especially in his early years, he also employed them as wall hangings. Following English precedent, he also applied the fabrics to some of the case pieces as surface decoration. In contrast to the Wiener Werkstätte designers, however, he refrained from using the textiles as wall-covering, regarding them instead as a means to accent rather than to clad large surfaces. As with other Haus & Garten designs, he and Wlach mixed and matched the patterns freely (and also encouraged their customers to follow their lead), not infrequently employing several quite dissimilar designs in a single space.

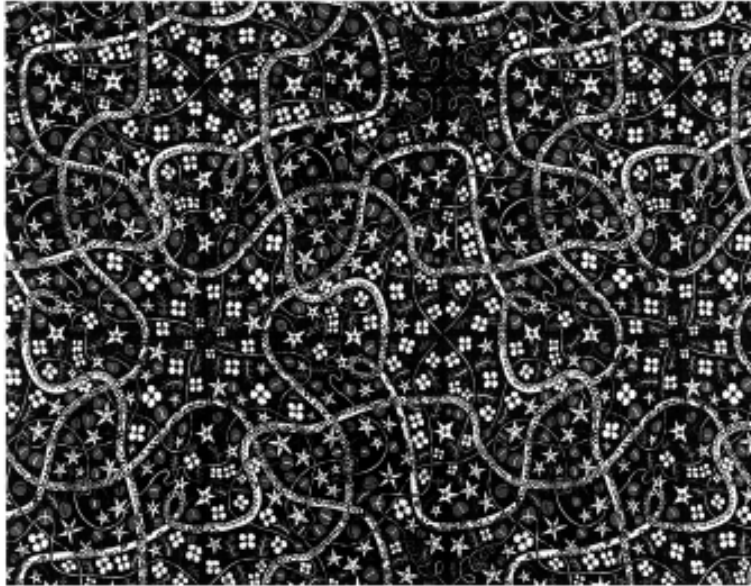


Figure 11. "Labyrinth" fabric sample; printed on linen for Haus & Garten; designed c. 1925-30. Repeat: 30 x 30 cm. Svenskt Tenn Archive, Stockholm.

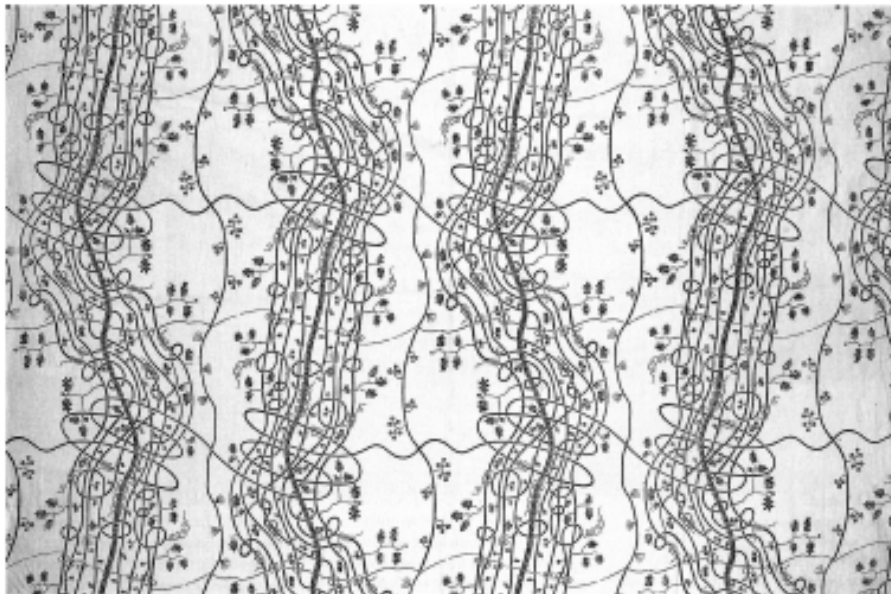


Figure 12. "Seegras" fabric sample; printed on chintzed cotton for Haus & Garten; designed c. 1925-30. Repeat: 36.5 x 27.5 cm. Courtesy Galerie 16, Vienna.

He was also fond of combining them with Oriental rugs, woven fabrics, or animal skins. The surface liveliness resulting from the welter of forms, patterns and colors established a powerful contrast to the clean simple lines of the furnishings and spaces, yielding a dynamic tension and producing the distinctive Haus & Garten look.

THE EVOLUTION OF HAUS & GARTEN, 1926-1933

Frank's earliest Haus & Garten interiors still retained some of the rigid formality and decorative richness that characterized Viennese houses and apartments of the early postwar years. But increasingly after 1926, he began to investigate a more elemental and less ordered approach. The living room of the Bunzl apartment, which probably dates from late 1925 or early 1926, marks a transition in his designs of the mid-1920s. While several of the pieces—especially the ample, overstuffed sofas—still had the weightiness of late nineteenth-century rooms, the free arrangement of the furnishings and lamps (which were adjustable to different heights) implied a different ordering concept, one in which the objects existed more or less independently of the space. The architectonic features, in keeping with Frank's precepts, were treated very simply. A dark, narrow molding framed the walls near their junction with the ceiling; otherwise, they were undifferentiated, and—aside from the built-in book niche, lamps, and the corner fireplace—the furnishings did not engage them. Instead, the pieces retained their autonomy—from the walls and from each other.

This move away from conventional ordering is even more pronounced in Frank's rooms of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Among the most striking exemplars of this new design strategy is the living room he designed for the L. R. S. House (fig. 13). Executed around 1933, it reflected a new spareness, one that had already become a distinguishing feature of the interiors of the more radical modernists.

Despite this impulse toward formal reduction, Frank continued to show a decided attraction to the fusion of varying forms, patterns, materials, and hues. His interest in material richness is apparent even in his designs for individual furnishings. Works such as the upholstered mahogany chair he designed in the later 1920s (fig. 14) speak not only about his continuing allegiance to past models, but also of his love for the physical properties of woods and textiles—and how they are joined and finished. Every aspect of its design—from the bamboo staves to the tapering, gently curving stiles—celebrates these qualities of material and fabrication.



Figure 13. Living room, L. R. S. House, Vienna, c. 1933. From *Innen-Dekoration* 44 (1933).

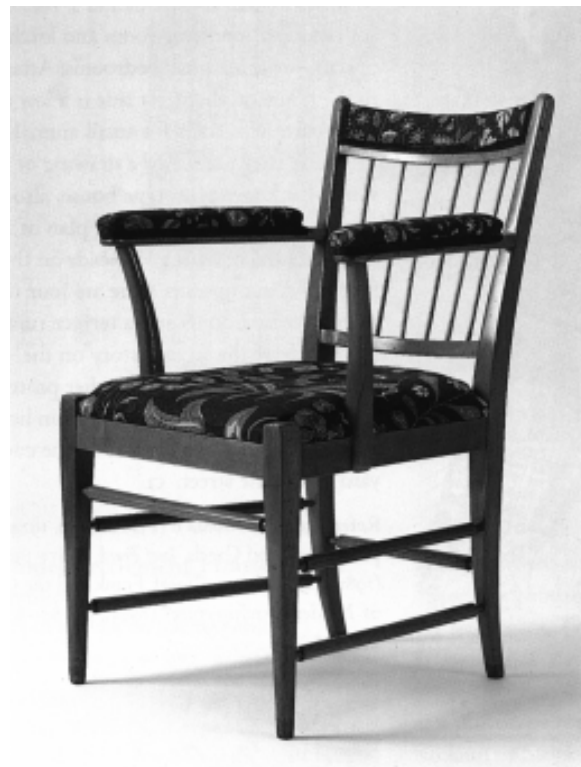


Figure 14. Armchair for Haus & Garten, c. 1930; mahogany and linen ("Mirakel" pattern). Private collection, Vienna.



Figure 15. Bedroom, Steiner House, Vienna, c. 1933. From *Innen-Dekoration* 44 (1933).

The full effect of Frank's interiors, however, derives from the juxtaposition of different objects and accessories, each playing off the others. In the interiors of the Steiner House, one of Haus & Garten's most important and fully realized commissions of the early 1930s (figs. 15, 16), Frank and Wlach combined an astonishing array of forms, materials, and patterns. Traditional designs, such as the Egyptian-inspired three-legged stool⁵⁴ in the bedroom, were counterposed with a colorful abstract-patterned rug, and these in turn were combined with a rectilinear plant stand, a fabric-covered cabinet and a Shaker-inspired bed. The tables, chairs, and chests of drawers were not only formally varied, but they were also constructed of a diverse range of woods, and sported different finishes.



Figure 16. Son's room, Steiner House, Vienna, c. 1933. From *Innen-Dekoration* 44 (1933).

Yet it was not only the profusion of elements that set Frank and Wlach's interiors apart from other contemporary designs. Underlying the evident appeal to the senses was a vital humanism, an attempt to foster an image that was up-to-date, but that was also adapted to the circumstances of real life. The chair, sofas, and tables were carefully scaled to accommodate their users, and the gently curving lines, bright color palette, and medley of forms and patterns represented a concerted effort to please the eye and soothe the psyche.

After 1930, this attempt to forge a "mitigated" and responsive modernism played an ever greater role in Frank's designs. Although he did not abandon his commitment to formal variety, he nevertheless began to explore a softer, more subdued look. This is especially evident in the sitting corner of the W. House (fig. 17), which he designed around 1933. Although the arrangement preserved the spirit of his earlier Haus & Garten aesthetic, the individual elements were muted and blended. The result was a much more organic conception, one that pointed firmly in the direction of the modernism of the 1950s.

This move toward an integrated design language is also apparent in Frank's garden



Figure 17. Sitting corner, W. House, Vienna, c. 1933. From *Innen-Dekoration* 44 (1933).

furniture of the same period. As the name of the firm suggests, both garden design and garden furniture occupied a central place in the Haus & Garten program. Frank regarded the garden as an extension of the interior living space, and over the years he produced a variety of designs for small landscapes, garden houses, and outdoor furnishings. The theme of these schemes, however, was almost invariably the same: a *Wohninsel* framed to provide an intimate, private setting. In his unrealized project for a garden pavilion of around 1926 (fig. 18), the furniture mimicked his indoor designs, only slightly modified for outdoor use. The effect of the entire ensemble (including the trees trained to espalier along the back wall, which evoke the vegetal designs of his textiles) was intended to produce an impression of fresh-air domesticity.

If Frank transferred the notion of dwelling to the garden, he sought similarly to break down the distinction between inside and outside. The central place of the garden in Frank's design ideal is reflected, as Greiner had observed early on, in his attempt to use wood and other living materials "to bring a piece of 'nature' into our rooms."⁵⁵ It was developed as well in his repeated use of floral patterns, and perhaps most importantly, in his emphasis on

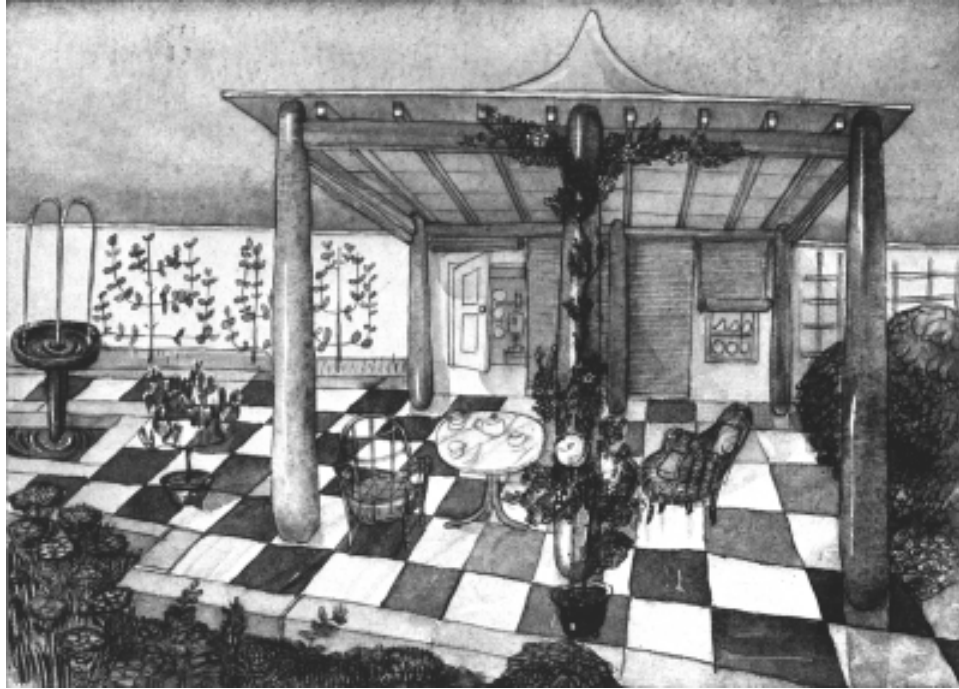


Figure 18. Project for a garden pavilion, c. 1926. From Alexander Koch, *1000 Ideen zur künstlerischen Ausgestaltung der Wohnung* (Darmstadt, 1926)

establishing direct links—by means of doors, windows, terraces, and balconies—with the outdoors.

Whether for the inside or the outside, Frank's designs for Haus & Garten constituted an extended investigation of the possibilities of dwelling in the modern age. Unlike the works of the more radical modernists of the time, they were founded not on a new asceticism but a redefinition of material pleasure. Frank's objects were objects of enjoyment, not statements of a new purism or of a Machine Age aestheticism. Understood in this way, the rich sensuality of the Haus & Garten line connotes an alternative form of modern dwelling, one that acknowledged the bourgeois interiors of the past, but purified of the vulgarity of late nineteenth-century taste.

This essay is a modified version of a chapter from the author's forthcoming book on Josef Frank.

NOTES

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Kristina Wängberg-Eriksson, Stockholm, Dr. Erika Patka, Director of the Archive at the Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Vienna, Dr. Gabriele Fabiankowitz at the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, and Mag. Claus Jesina at Galerie 16 in Vienna for their assistance in helping me assemble the photographs. I would also like to thank Dan Roush at the University of Texas at Austin for his help in scanning the images.

1. Frank, "Über die Zukunft des Wiener Kunstgewerbes," *Der Architekt* 24 (1921-22), 42.

2. *Ibid.*, 37.

3. See Christopher Long, "Wiener Wohnkultur: Interior Design in Vienna, 1910- 1938," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 5 (Fall-Winter 1997-1998), esp. 30-34.

4. Frank, "Über die Zukunft des Wiener Kunstgewerbes," 42.

5. Frank's silver mirror was among the objects illustrated in the catalogue of the New York branch of the Wiener Werkstätte operated by Josef Urban. A surviving copy of the catalogue (which incorrectly identifies the mirror as a work of Strnad's) with handwritten prices lists the mirror at \$1200, a considerable sum at the time. Urban opened the shop in June 1922, in part to help his fellow architects and designers in Vienna. But it seems unlikely, given the considerable gap between the time Frank designed the piece in 1919 and Urban launched the New York showroom, that it was originally intended for the American market. See Jane Kallir, *Viennese Design and the Wiener Werkstätte*; exhib. cat. (New York: Galerie St. Etienne/George Braziller, 1986), 31.

6. Frank particularly was critical of what he viewed as a growing tendency on the part of many Viennese designers to divorce their work from the new reality. In a 1923 essay, he singled out the young Dagobert Peche, who in the period after the war had emerged as the most innovative form-giver among the Wiener Werkstätte's artists and designers. Although Frank acknowledged Peche's consummate skill as a draftsman and his "magnificent imagination," he complained that Peche "had almost lost sight of the organic relationship that exists between material and its treatment." As a result, he continued, the works of Peche and his followers "are exercises of the imagination comparable to the boldest experiments in painting, the Cubist and Expressionist tendencies, but no longer have any relation to the more ordered art of architecture." Frank, "Le Métier d'Art," *L'Amour de l'Art* 4 (August 1923), 652.

7. See the Christian Witt-Döring's description of the table in Nina Stritzler-Levine, ed., *Josef Frank, Architect and Designer: An Alternative Vision of the Modern Home*; exhib. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 168.

8. Frank published this and two other similar renderings of interiors along with several drawings of his Klosterneuburg project of 1923 in *Innen-Dekoration* 34 (November 1923). It is clear, however, from the plans that the rooms are not of the complex, but represent idealized, future *Siedlung* houses.

9. Frank, "Einzelmöbel und Kunsthandwerk," *Innen-Dekoration* 34 (November 1923), 337.

10. *Ibid.*, 338. Oskar Wlach also advocated this new emphasis on individual furnishings in his work and writings in this period. See, for example, Wlach's essay, "Einheit und Lebendigkeit," *Innen-Dekoration* 33 (January-February 1922), 59-65.

11. *Ibid.*, 337.

12. Frank, "Handwerks- und Maschinen-Erzeugnis. Die Abgrenzung Beider Gebiete," *Innen-Dekoration* 34 (August 1923), 243.

13. *Ibid.*, 241.

14. Frank, "Kunst, Kunsthandwerk und Maschine," *Die Ware* 1 (1923), 70.

15. See Frank, *Architektur als Symbol: Elemente deutschen neuen Bauens* (Vienna: Verlag Anton Schroll & Co., 1931; rpt. Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1981), 110-14.

16. Frank, "Kunst, Kunsthandwerk und Maschine," 70.

17. Ibid.

18. For illustrations and discussions of the works of Strnad, Wlach, and Gorge in this period see Max Eisler, "L'Architecture, la Décoration intérieure et l'Ameublement," in *L'Amour de l'Art* 4 (August 1923), 633-45; idem, "Die schöne Wohnung," *Das Zeit* 1 (March 1924), 106-10; and Oskar Wlach, "Einheit und Lebendigkeit," 59-65.

19. As Astrid Gmeiner and Gottfried Pirhofer note, the decision on the part of Frank and his partners to launch the business was "a calculated response" to the changing marketplace. While most middle-class families still lacked the savings to build new housing, many were able to afford to replace or augment their old prewar furnishings, providing a demand that Frank and his partners hoped to fill. Astrid Gmeiner and Gottfried Pirhofer, *Der Österreichische Werkbund: Alternative zur klassischen Moderne in Architektur, Raum- und Produktgestaltung* (Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1985), 111.

20. Sobotka (1888-1972) had entered the Technische Hochschule in 1907, the year before. Frank left for Berlin After the war, he worked as an architect and designer for Karl Korn and others and later operated his own architecture and interior design firm. In 1938, he fled to New York, where he found work as a designer with the American branch of the Thonet company. Later, he taught interior design at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh. He and Frank carried on a correspondence into the early 1960s. See Maria Welzig, "Entwurzelt: Sobotka, Wlach und Frank in Pittsburgh und New York," in Matthias Boeckl, ed., *Visionäre und Vertriebene: Österreichische Spuren in der modernen amerikanischen Architektur*; exhib. cat. (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1995), 203-11, and the biography of Sobotka in the same work, 344-45.

21. The company was officially registered on June 6, 1925. It was renamed "Haus & Garten, Frank und Wlach" on January 22, 1926, after Sobotka's departure. Central registration archives of the City of Vienna (MA 63).

22. Interview with Ernst Plischke, Vienna, November 17, 1986.

23. Quoted in Kristina Wängberg-Eriksson, "The Interior Designer," in Monica Boman, ed., *Estrid Ericson: Founder of Svenskt Tenn*, trans. Roger G. Tanner (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 1989), 102.

24. English critic H C. Bradshaw, for example, wrote that the "design of the teahouse and garden was one of the best in the Exhibition and cleverly combined a sheltered garden and terraces overlooking the river with the Pavilion itself." Bradshaw, "The Architecture of the Paris Exhibition, 1925," in *Report on the Present Position and Tendencies of the Industrial Arts as Indicated at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paris, 1925* (London: Department of Overseas Trade, 1927), 45.

25. See Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 220-26.

26. Personnel records, Hochschule für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.

27. From about 1926/27 to 1928/29, the address of their atelier was listed as Museumstraße 5a. After 1929, it was given as Neustiftgasse 3. *Lehmanns Wohnungsanzeiger für Wien*, 1925-30. This shift is also reflected on Frank's drawings, providing some indication of the design dates for his furnishings and buildings of the period.

28. Interview with Ernst Plischke, Vienna, November 28, 1986.

29. Strnad, "Neue Wege in der Wohnraum-Einrichtung," *Innen-Dekoration* 33 (October 1922), 323-24.

30. On the origins and development of the *Wiener Wohnkultur*, see Christopher Long, "Wiener Wohnkultur: Interior Design in Vienna, 1910-1938," 29-51; and Christian Witt-Döring, Eva Mang, and Karl Mang, eds., *Neues Wohnen. Wiener Innenraumgestaltung 1918-1938*; exhib. cat. (Vienna: Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, 1980).

31. See Witt-Döring, "Steel is not a Material; Steel is a Weltanschauung," 110-14.

32. Frank, "Rum och inredning," *Form* 30 (1934); German trans., "Raum und Einrichtung," in Spalt and Czech, eds., *Josef Frank 1885-1967*; exhib. cat. (Vienna: Hochschule für angewandte Kunst, 1981), 97.

33. Ibid., 101.

34. Ibid., 97.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 99-101.
38. Ibid., 100.
39. See Eva B. Ottillinger, *Adolf Loos: Wohnkonzepte und Möbelentwürfe* (Salzburg and Vienna: Residenz Verlag, 1994), esp. 24-28, 90, 120-21, 124, and 132.
40. Frank, *Architektur als Symbol*, 150.
41. Frank, "Die moderne Einrichtung des Wohnhauses," in Werner Gräff, ed., *Innenräume. Räume und Inneneinrichtungsgegenstände aus der Werkbundausstellung 'Die Wohnung.'* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Dr. Fr. Wedekind & Co., 1928), 126.
42. Ibid., 127.
43. Leopold Greiner, "Möbel und Einrichtung der Neuzeit Arbeiten der Werkstätten 'Haus & Garten'-Wien," *Innen-Dekoration* 37 (October 1926), 355.
44. Frank, "Raum und Einrichtung," 97.
45. Greiner, "Möbel und Einrichtung der Neuzeit," 355.
46. Frank, "Die moderne Einrichtung des Wohnhauses," 126.
47. Frank, *Architektur als Symbol*, 150.
48. Frank, "Die moderne Einrichtung des Wohnhauses," 126.
49. On Frank's early development as a textile designer, see Kristina Wängberg-Eriksson, "Geometry in Disguise: A Modernist's Vision of Textile Design," in Stritzler-Levine, ed., *Josef Frank, Architect and Designer*, 140-44; and idem, *Pepis Flora: Josef Frank som mönsterkonstnär* (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 1998), 9-58.
50. Interview with Stephanie Feilendorf, New York, July 15, 1987.
51. Jenny Frank crafted many of the pieces for family and friends. Frank occasionally made use of her works in exhibitions and works for clients, and he evidently arranged to have some of her pieces exhibited in the Austrian pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition. *L'Autriche à L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes Paris 1925, Guide; exhib. cat.* (Vienna: Commission Exécutive Instituée pour la Participation de L'Autriche à L'Exposition, 1925), 41.
52. Wängberg-Eriksson, *Pepis Flora: Josef Frank som mönsterkonstnär*, 35-45.
53. Around 1930, Frank began having the textiles printed by the English firm of G P. and J. Baker, from whom he also purchased traditional English cretonnes for resale. See Wängberg-Eriksson, *Pepis Flora: Josef Frank som mönsterkonstnär*, 59-62.
54. Frank produced several different versions of this Egyptian stool, which is based on a surviving example from circa 1300 BC. Reproductions of the stool were sold by Liberty's in London from 1884 on, and it was introduced into Vienna by Adolf Loos around the turn of the century. A few years later, Loos designed his own variant of the stool, which can be seen in photographs of many of his domestic interiors in the 1920s and early 1930s. Frank's version, which he also used in a number of his interiors during this period, has a somewhat thinner saddle seat with a carrying hole in the center. The edges are also more rounded, and the legs, rather than angling away from the seat, continue straight-downward, similar to the legs of a table. On the history of the stool and Loos's and Frank's models, see Eva Ottillinger, *Adolf Loos: Wohnkonzepte und Möbelentwürfe*, 124-26.
55. Greiner, "Möbel und Einrichtung der Neuzeit," 355.