

A Century of Austrian Design 1900–2005

Tulga Beyerle / Karin Hirschberger

A Century of Austrian Design

1900–2005

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On the Design and Visualization Concept

Book design in the era of medial self reflection

8

Walter Pamminger

Our individual and collective actions are increasingly subjected to technical monitoring devices, that confront us with selective feedback. How can a book be designed that corresponds with this reality? And how can we expand this medium's potential without bursting proven, classical typology? Starting points can be found at the edges: in the table of contents and the index. Along with their conventional function as navigational tools, these can be grasped as "monitors" through which the book observes itself, as it were.

Based on a metaphorical "design landscape," which gives the book its name in German, I further developed these unnoticed aspects of self-reference and self-observation, depicting the linear succession of pages as a grid. The table of contents thus becomes a cartographic map of the book.

This representational model or "thematic book map" allows the reader to follow a "chronological path" along the lines of selected aspects. The lexical entries correspond with the module of book pages, thus allowing them to function as statistical building blocks in these thematic diagrams. The chronological arrangement of the lexicon clarifies historical aspects of the thematic diagrams.

The page references along the "chronological paths" are oriented on the book plan: the index, normally found at the end of a book, acts as an immediate reference to the designer or firm and indicates the chapters in which they appear, thus visualizing their relevance in the book.

The book maintains a touch of irony in the seriousness of its own reality and internal truth: the various recursive diagrams reveal hidden content. The editors and the authors were privy to my concept. I consciously accounted for the fact that they could revert to "name dropping" without knowing what the final result of the diverse levels of "monitoring" would produce. The book's readers are the first to assume this privileged position: they are given "the opportunity for second-order observation" (Niklas Luhman), in that they not only observe observing, but are additionally given insight into Austria's "design landscape," as filtered through the eyes of the editors. And in this, book design emancipates itself as an analytical and knowledge-generating practice.

Tulga Beyerle, Karin Hirschberger

We were inspired to publish this reference work by the fact that the appreciation of design remains underdeveloped in Austria. The country's design achievements are underrated both nationally and internationally for want of a compelling design policy and an accompanying, self-confident communication policy, but also due to meager scholarly work on the topic.

A Century of Austrian Design 1900–2005 offers an initial overview focusing on Austrian design against a backdrop of the country's turbulent industrial history and the ever-present tension between tradition and eruptive, radically creative acts of liberation. Although the work focuses on industrial, furniture, and product design, to offer a more comprehensive picture of the country's visual and material culture, important achievements in graphic, fashion, and interior design, as well as popular culture are examined through examples of specific phenomena and remarkable personalities working in these fields. Graphic design is examined through a reflection on poster culture; fashion, as it is displayed in dress codes; interior design in coffeehouse culture; and popular culture as expressed by the object language of common products including the foods and drinks that are typical for Austria. We have consciously excluded the topics of packaging design, crafts, jewelry, and accessories.

The reference section works its way chronologically through Austrian design history. Brief entries introduce selected designers as well as companies working in design, but also institutions and interdisciplinary designers and those who have had or still have an enduring effect on Austria's design language. The oeuvres of several architects are also examined, concentrating especially on design aspects. The individual lexical entries are arranged chronologically based on the date of the depicted product photos. The publication's own, specially developed reference system offers readers easy access to related information within the book. In the terminology of modern information culture, it enables "zapping" and "zooming" through.

In closing, it is important to note that we were unable to include an adequate reference for a few firms that have been crucial to the history of Austrian design, as their archives have been lost or are no longer accessible. Also, in the reference section, we were not able to portray everyone who actively represents Austrian design. We attempted to remedy this, at least rudimentarily, with complete entries in the "Yellow Pages" in those cases where it was possible and sensible.

Creative Ambivalence

Austrian design mentality?

10

Christian Witt-Döring

The effort to establish an independent, Austrian approach to design processes is closely related to the question of whether there is a specifically Austrian form of everyday life and what characterizes its material object world. The realization of an object, as we know, relies on a multitude of factors. Discovering which factors influence design's creative process—from function to material to processing techniques—and are thus decisive or have an equal part in an object's final gestalt, lends insight into the procedures that create value, which in turn can offer information about prevalent ways of thinking within a cultural space.

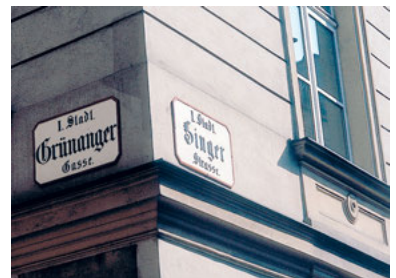
Within our current, modern understanding of culture, a key role is granted an object's function. Redefining the concept "function" is always directly linked with major social transformations. The struggle to implement new definitions and their actual social acceptance act as gauges that measure a culture's values: Is a culture willing to keep an open mind about progressive thought, or does it remain stuck in inherited behavioral patterns? Are an object's structural elements analyzed, explored, and decisive for its outer appearance or is the content dominated by the surface? Does the design process occur from the inside outward or vice versa? In the end, what role models give rise to an ideal and how are they handled? Are ideas adopted as a whole or are only certain aspects actually implemented?

A culture's distinctive features can first be consciously ascertained in comparison with other cultures. The absence of certain themes says more than their presence. For example, how can we explain that there has never been a positivist historical review of Austrian arts and crafts and design? Admittedly, only extremely rudimentary information is available about designers, craftsmen, and consumers prior to the eighteen fifties and sixties. Art history has therefore approached the theme almost exclusively from a stylistic rather than cultural history angle. Austrian arts and crafts are rarely signed or dated. What does this reveal about the creative individual's role in society? The individual accomplishes something, yet allows that achievement to disappear in anonymity, as though it were a matter of course. Our society treats the estates left by designers and company archives in a similar way. Neither creators nor subsequent generations take their total complexity seriously, let alone preserve them for posterity.

It was not until the Napoleonic Wars at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries that an awareness of unique formal expression, independent of other cultures, first arose in German-

speaking areas, including the region of Austria. After the French Revolution, people began to identify themselves by their affiliation with a nation rather than by their ruler. In Austria, it was at this time that the first autonomous design solutions, independent of other countries, were consciously sought and found, primarily for commercial reasons. The Austrian Empire style had, however, emancipated itself from its creators, the French Empire, only under the shell of its adopted French ornamentation. In Austria, this ornamentation was released from the monumental propagandistic language of the new French Empire and fixed on a delicate, still entirely eighteenth-century body. For this reason, it was the surface alone that carried fashion information in Austria; the basic carrying structure remained trapped in tradition. Exterior and interior mediated two different messages. This attitude would become a leitmotif in Austria for dealing with modernity. Content was not questioned, but simply given a new outfit. From that point on, those who created culture and fought for its fundamental reform were pushed into the defensive. Only generations later were their contributions appropriated by the state-run public realm as unambiguously Austrian achievements and used to feign a progressive spirit.

Both the conservative and the progressive camps in Austria work from a defensive position. They implement the values that they represent as weapons. Their methods of persuasion are not based on a love of humanity, but on aggression. Rather than speaking to the consuming public—the society—their dialogue partner is their opponent whom they aim to conquer rather than convince. “Those who are not for me are against me,” becomes the battle cry. Trapped in an emotional unconsciousness, neither the values of the one nor the other can introduce positive aspects into a fruitful discourse. The art of discussion, whereby one party recognizes the other’s values and examines them based on its own, which leads to conclusions helpful for the matter at hand, remain undeveloped. Rooted in thought adhering to opposing “sides,” facts are not made use of, but instead,



Top, traces of a nineteenth-century Viennese street sign, with a street sign from ca. 1960 placed over it.

Bottom, reproduction of a nineteenth-century Viennese street sign put up in the 1980s.

taken advantage of to support a supposed conviction. Torn from their original contexts, they become tools that can be used at will. This serves neither historical nor progressive thinking. No well-grounded awareness emerges for either side. This has a particularly fatal effect on Austria's own, visual, omnipresent history. Both sides make the greatest effort to institute this history in their attempts at persuasion, but it is never a theme in its own right. It is used in a way similar to a quarry: whenever an opportune moment arises, individual themes are excavated and made topical. Because this history is considered a burden, it conditions the unconscious. Conservative and progressive thought are consumed akin to luxury goods, as non-essential for bare survival. Neither approach arrives at a status of conscious self-evidence.

When facts have been misused to such an extent that they lose their credibility within a persuasion process, and society's universal need for harmony diametrically opposes a necessary transformation process, the innovator turns to the device of exaggeration as a final resource in a hopeless situation. In the midst of the island of the blessed, this is the only way he or she can muster attention for necessary changes. Thinking through something in a new way that simultaneously questions the ways that society has hitherto functioned, is always a threat to a complacent, well-situated general public and is therefore also bound up with fear. No one takes this path voluntarily. Vienna seems particularly tough terrain in this respect. As early as the eighteenth century, the city was already characterized by visitors as a center of Phaeacian manners. In their concern for society's further development, actors responsible for humanity's aesthetic appearance were compelled to reach for radical means of expression to gain any notice at all. Typical examples are the two internationally recognized and pursued Viennese reform movements: the first, a fin-de-siècle occurrence, and the second in 1960. Because society did not change in a gradual, consistent way, these transformations erupted volcanically



MAK—information flyer, 2004

with no prior warning after long periods of political stagnation. Like sparks, they not only burned everything in their surroundings, but also extinguished quickly.

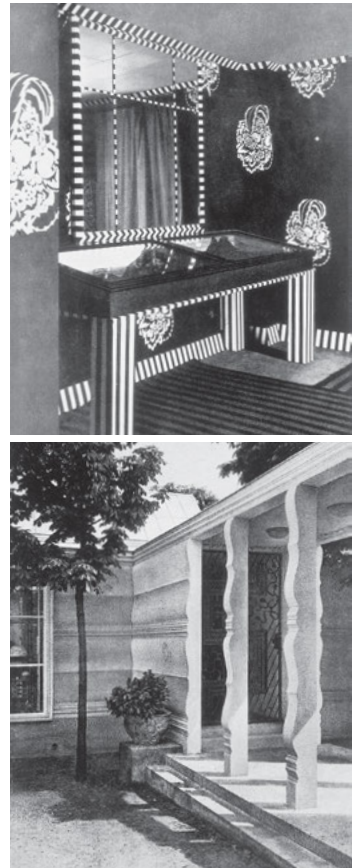
In this way, important directions for international development were established in Austria; however, their consistent further development and general public acceptance happened outside of the country. Two situations are most likely responsible for this: first, Austrian society harbors a poorly developed democratic attitude, in which there is no tradition of mutual support through cooperation. Second, in the progressive architecture and design scene, particularly closely affiliated with the fine arts, work is done in isolation, in a type of inner migration, withdrawn from the reality of everyday life. Both situations result from the individual's low status in a traditionally Catholic culture. Since the Enlightenment, those in power have mistrusted the strength of acting on one's own initiative. They alone know what is correct and reasonable. There is no coming of age. The creative individual, on the contrary, overreacts from a defensive position, overemphasizing individualistic, artistic solutions in an effort to simply become recognized as a party capable of contributing. The enormous effort required of the individual to simply enter as a valid party in an opinion-gathering process goes first and foremost into establishing the necessary breeding grounds for discussion. The matter itself becomes a secondary theme and remains unresolved. This results in perpetuating cultural struggle and produces remarkably meager conditions for allowing a Modern culture to emerge, one that places people and their needs at the center of its deliberations. This also blocks the path forged by the democratic societies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; the possibilities of industrially manufactured artifacts are recognized only peripherally. There are clear reasons why Austria never succeeded in bringing forth a culture of multiply valuable artifacts.¹ Nonetheless, nowadays, this is a necessary prerequisite for presence as a distinct



Top, Gold Fassl advertisement, 1995;
bottom, real estate advertisement in
Die Presse, 1996

design nation in the international market. The Austrian situation is paradoxical; here is a culture that concedes so little room to the individual, yet it can trigger developments that arise from thoughts centered on the individual, such as Riegl's *Kunstwollen* (desire to create art), Freud's psychoanalysis, ↑Wagner's architectural theory, ↑Loos's cultural critique, and Viennese Actionism.

On the other hand, a closer inspection of the aesthetic ideology represented by the ↑Wiener Werkstätte reveals a result apposite for Austrian mentality. As one of Austrian product culture's most well-known representatives, official Austria clearly markets it, with good reason, in an identity-endowing way. In searching for a modern formal expression appropriate for a twentieth-century democratic society, it develops a "modern" shell that it pulls over old content. Content, as such, is never questioned. It continues to comply with the old, aristocratic representational needs adopted by the upper classes, which required the assistance of artifacts for self-representation. ↑Loos's path to modernity, which was taken at the same time, did not comprise primarily a new formal solution, but instead, a new attitude towards people's needs. He redefined these needs and created a new awareness, enabling people to lead a modern life of their own initiative, without the detour across a dictated aesthetic shell. In contrast to the ↑Wiener Werkstätte, ↑Loos was concerned with giving people a tool, an attitude that facilitated a life of self-discretion. By freeing modernity from a form, he created the conditions necessary for a democratic, international modernity in which the person can develop unconditioned by a constructed individuality. The goal of modernity is the ultimate disappearance of the artifact, which is first brought to life through use, but otherwise remains in the background. Austrian design never reached this



Top, Dagobert Peche, fashion exhibition at the Imperial and Royal Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (today's MAK), Vienna 1915/16;
bottom, Josef Hoffmann, Austrian pavilion at the Intl. Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Paris, 1925

stage, whether because of the deeply rooted need to disguise reality with high-quality aesthetics or the few modern Austrian designers' failure to confront the possibilities of industrial fabrication in the nineteen twenties and thirties.

The aestheticizing of everyday life thus remains Austria's greatest strength and at the same time, weakness. Equipped with a primary aesthetic-sensory approach to developmental processes, the question of material is granted an essentially superior position as opposed to function. Also in cases where the choice of material should be inferior to the function, such as for ↑ Otto Wagner, material was used in a sensory-psychological way as a hierarchically ordering element. Material thereby contains no inherent value, such as Anglo-Saxon Puritan culture recognized it as having. It acquired its eloquence first through the process of aesthetic-artistic transformation. For this reason, the ideals of the internationally influential Anglo-Saxon Arts and Crafts movement were only partially implemented in Austria. The struggle to be "true to the material" as well as socially involved succumbed to the artist's compulsive need for expression in Austria, yet the postulate of uniting the arts fell on fertile ground. ↑ Adolf Loos alone contradicted the dictate of the artist over the material and its processing. Characteristic in this context is Austria's flagrantly absent verbal expression, its inarticulateness in the area of design and architectural theory. Other than ↑ Wagner and ↑ Loos, who were both exposed to Puritan Protestant culture during their formative years, the compulsion or need for persuasive writing was secondary to pure design and gestalt. Confrontations with contemporary theory may well have taken place, but they degenerated, as it were, to vagueness. The result is a product that obstructs and defuses development, yet is nonetheless aesthetically convincing with its supreme achievements. This attitude, oriented on mood or feeling, allows for greater adaptability, which, if subjected to modern dictates, leads to individual achievements. ↑ Josef Frank's designs are an eloquent example of this ambivalent attitude toward modernity. Allotted to neither modernity nor eclecticism, he arrives at a typical Austrian mode of expression that only partially ascribes to the modern era's credo. He may have renounced the handed-down focus on ornamentation, but continued to believe in the seduction that emanates from material, diverse detail, and skilled production. With his outcry directed against an international modernity, "Steel is not material, steel is a *Weltanschauung*," he defended a position of declared individuality. It is therefore no surprise that even today he is still denied proper international recognition. For Austria, his

works played an exemplary role until the nineteen sixties, interrupted only by the seven-year Nazi takeover.²

In a postmodern world, that which carries negative connotations within a modern world picture—namely, an unclear disposition that fails to follow a straight, one-dimensional goal—becomes a positive posture. It is part of a world in which all basic assumptions are questioned, whose most extremely diverse individual components can be put back together to form a whole in any way desired. Juxtaposed as equals, they confirm the wealth of human expressive power. Attributes such as good or bad taste lose their validity. No longer is the supposed safety of a purported good form meant to mediate security; instead, the diversity of individual human emotional worlds becomes both a source of inspiration and a gauge. The subjective value or feeling is attributed a functional status. History is no longer there to be conquered; instead, as an inspirational collection of material it becomes a common reference point. As early as the nineteen seventies, Oswald Oberhuber confronted themes of the Viennese fin-de-siècle arts and crafts at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan. His appointment as the new rector at the University of Applied Arts Vienna in 1979, and the establishment of a separate area for archives and collection led the way to reevaluating the relationship to Austria's own history and with that an enormous rethinking. The ambivalent Viennese approach was able to develop positively under these conditions and with such diverse talents as † Hans Hollein and † Hermann Czech, Austria was once again regarded throughout the world as a predominant creative center. In the late nineteen seventies, not only Vienna's turn-of-the-century historical achievements, but also Austria's contemporary architecture and design scene became important in an international context.

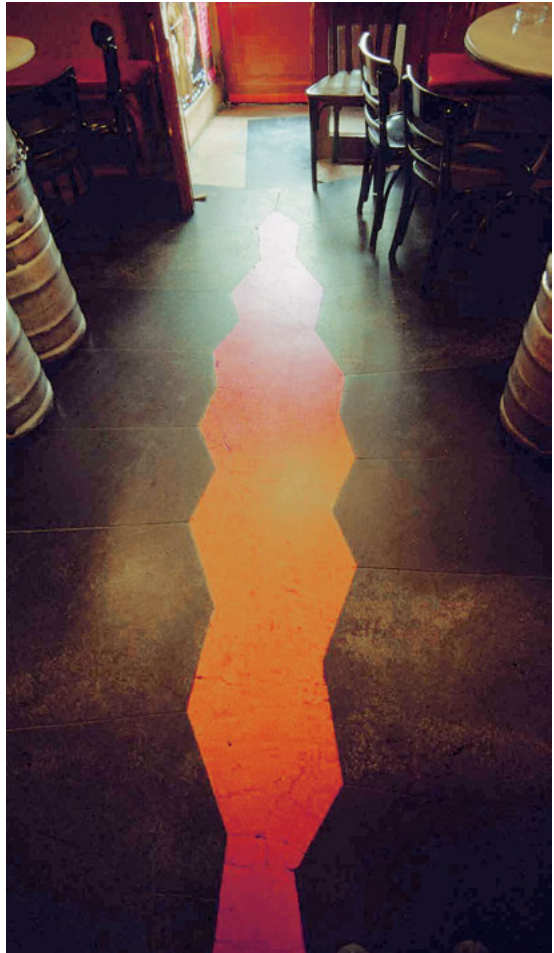
Social conditions for an artistic career thereby improved fundamentally. During the economic depression of the interwar period and following World War II, Austria was fully occupied with fulfilling basic human needs (food, clothing, shelter), and even after the nineteen sixties, it failed to exhaust its creative potential. The reassessment of subjective and individual needs thereby also ushered in a new understanding of democracy to an extent previously unknown in Austria. This was expressed, among other ways, in the successful occupation of the Hainburger Au wetlands. The hitherto closed-minded and conservative attitude towards creative and cultural elements had compelled most product designers to concentrate on industrial design. Product design, generally not considered a basic



Vanity, vanity table, Hans Hollein for MID, 1981

necessity, was forced to step into the background.

In the nineteen eighties, however, the employment of foreign guest professors and students' greater mobility opened Austria to the outside at the level of education. A young new generation of architects and designers was directly exposed to international events in diverse shapes and forms. Through their enlarged, global sphere of action, they were no longer confined solely to domestic values, but instead, had outgrown them. Equipped with a basic, sensory attitude and prepared for the true challenges of their field, their works meet with international demands and can be integrated within them. Their best works excel through a tense unity of functionality and sensuousness and are difficult to identify as typically Austrian in form. A regional or individual design language remains barely perceptible for several reasons, including a project and commission work mode that is demanded now more than ever before in the course of neoliberalism, and a corresponding reluctance to critically confront economic and socio-political issues. Theory discourse has nearly disappeared from design's everyday world. However, similar to an emerging new historicism, a nostalgic formal language bor-



*Kleines Café, lower room with floor made from old grave slabs,
Hermann Czech, 1970*

rowing from the nineteen fifties and sixties once again has a say. Likewise, the extreme appreciation for creative potential professed by politics and the economy crassly contradicts the de facto disposition toward the arts. Yet before a future-oriented exploitation of this potential can even be broached, due to contemplations of boosting economics or image, an open atmosphere must be present—an atmosphere that does not measure cultural matters based on economic standards, but instead, recognizes them as basic human necessities for achieving a quality of life. Attitude is not quantifiable; it requires a grand scale. The buzz word “creative industries” seen in terms of an input-output calculation has exactly the opposite effect.

¹ Oswald Oberhuber in: Gabriele Koller, *Die Radikalisierung der Phantasie. Design aus Österreich*, Salzburg, Vienna 1987, p. 8.

² The book edited by Erich Boltenstern in 1934, *Wiener Möbel in Lichtbildern und massstäblichen Rissen*, was published unchanged in its third edition in 1949 and therefore acted as a continuum for the Viennese contributions of the interwar period.

Beloved Institution

20

The Viennese coffeehouse is a saloon

Ute Woltron

As we all know, the Viennese coffeehouse is a much-loved institution in the Austrian capital. A great deal would work differently in Vienna if it weren't for coffeehouses, these wonderful meeting points that function as quasi-extended living rooms with links to city life. Here is where people go to talk, carry out business deals; here is where the city's interpersonal gears run at different speeds—and since it is all accompanied by cake and coffee, it also sweetens life a bit, too.

Despite the great variety of styles, from kitsch to cool, the fine coffeehouses of Vienna all work according to one and the same scheme, and that is why they can most aptly be compared with the perished saloons of the so-called Wild West. In fact, the typical Viennese coffeehouse tradition, as we know it today, stems from the same period as the saloon. Perhaps it is just a coincidence, or maybe not, but both have the same basic principle: those who frequent such an establishment are given a comprehensive view of local and international events. While stirring their *Mélanges* (coffee with steamed milk) and *Einspänner* (black coffee with whipped cream), people look around to see who is coming and going, and what constellations are momentarily shaping city life. And while doing so, the daily papers provide a great cover to hide behind—these, too, are an essential element of the coffeehouse, which ultimately turns out to be a kind of informal news exchange.

The coffeehouse is neither bar, nor restaurant, nor cake shop. Café proprietors intent on honoring tradition serve, at most, elegant, open-faced sandwiches with ham or chives in addition to their strudel and bunt cake, and at midday, typical Viennese meals are served on white starched tablecloths.

In order for such an establishment to function, spacious, high rooms are required, as are clear visual channels and uniform, serene furniture—what people refer to as composed and unobtrusive design—and seats suitable for the anatomies of those who linger. The coffeehouse is, additionally, an extension of Viennese civility: here one can guiltlessly keep business partners or friends waiting a few minutes longer than in the office or a restaurant—after all, people are meeting here “for a coffee.”

Of Vienna's approximately 650 coffeehouses, around one hundred can be classified as “classical,” whereby it must be noted that the classical Viennese coffeehouses cannot be reproduced, for all intents and purposes, without looking embarrassingly retrograde, and new ones just aren't classical. Unfortunately, recent years have seen the disappearance of many traditional cafés. Like ↑ Oswald Haerdtl's *Arabia Café* on Kohlmarkt street, they have made way for chic boutiques or were desecrated by fast

food chains as was the case with *Café Haag* on Schottengasse, or restored to death like *Café Museum*, designed by ↑ Adolf Loos, on Karlsplatz.

Of those fortunate enough to hold their ground, we can site only the most exceptional and will also mention a few examples of newly designed coffeehouses that display a strictly contemporary design based on a modern formal canon, yet function along traditional lines.

To begin with, the traditional cafés have, in most cases, lost track of their designers or architects. Often it was the coffeehouse owners themselves who commissioned craftsmen to custom build their establishments. That is the case, for example, with well-known and splendid coffeehouses such as *Café Landtmann* (opened in 1873, Dr.-Karl-Lueger-Ring 4), *Café Diglas* (opened 1923, Wollzeile 10), *Café Eiles* (Josefstädter Strasse 2), and *Café Bräunerhof* (Stallburggasse 2). All display a subdued charm with their plush upholstery and wood paneling surrounding petite marble tables, which still characterize the old Viennese coffeehouses.

Café Prückel on Stubenring (opened 1904), however, was re-designed by the prominent architect ↑ Oswald Haerdtl. As a regular in the nineteen fifties, ↑ Haerdtl pointed out the establishment's steadily declining state to the coffeehouse proprietor and subsequently took on the renovations himself, turning it into a bright, minimalist café. *Prückel* is among the few true nineteen-fifties ensembles in Vienna and, thanks to those who run it—the establishment is now, as before, family-owned—all details could be preserved, from the upholstered seats and striking, pink-striped painted ceiling, to the coat racks and ceiling and wall lights.



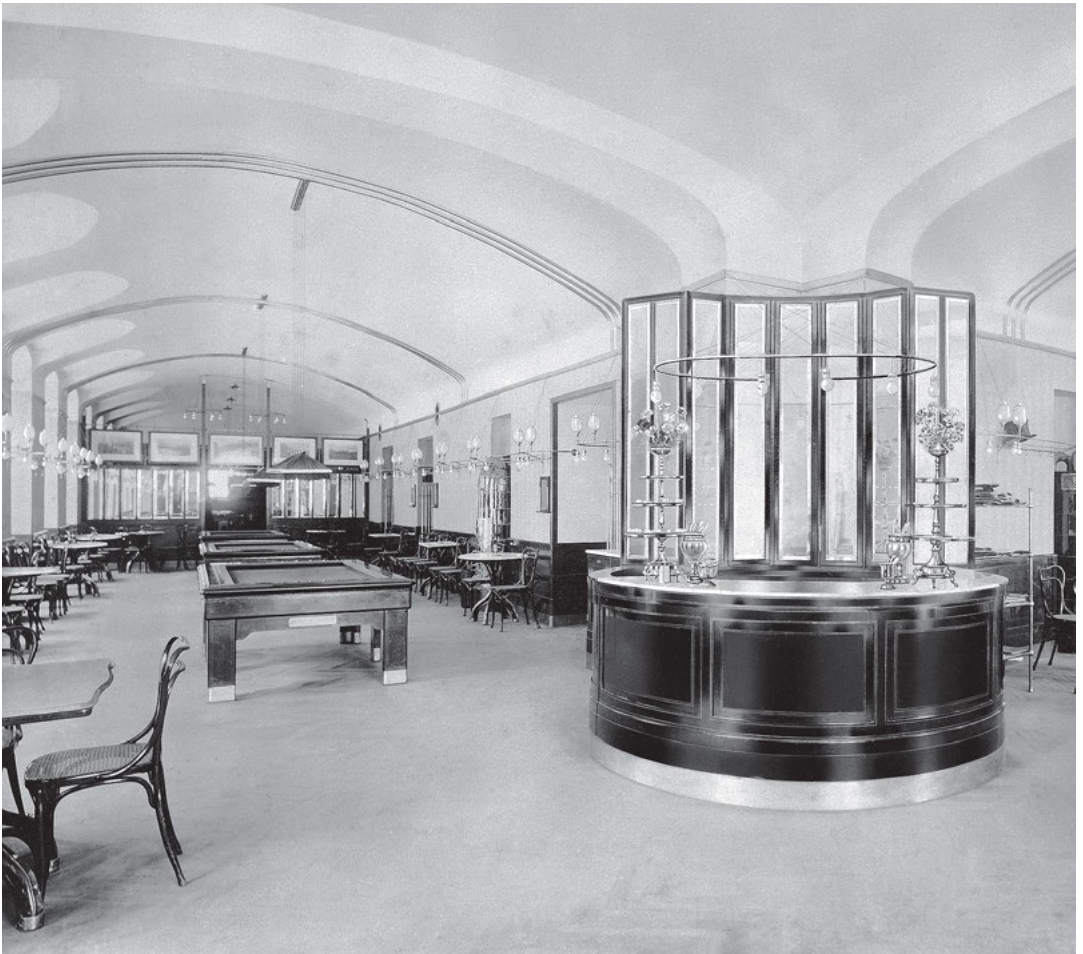
A Kleiner Schwarzer at Café Tirolerhof

On the contrary, Vienna's most famous coffeehouse in architectural terms, *Café Museum*, designed by ↑ Adolf Loos in an extremely minimalist style in 1899 and adapted in the nineteen thirties, not only lost its regular guests, but also its flair in the course of recent renovation work. Although the renovations were meant to supposedly restore it to its original state, and the state office for historical monuments eagerly offered assistance, the brass applications, new chairs, and marzipan-green wallpaper fail to mediate all that which constitutes a coffeehouse.

Despite the catastrophic coffeehouse demise in the nineteen seventies and eighties, a select few new coffeehouses were able to find footing in the fragile market dictated by coffeehouse regulars sensitive to each and every change. ↑ Hermann Czech is certainly the most important among the new generation of coffeehouse architects. He bestowed Vienna's city center with *Kleines Café* (completion 1974, Franziskaner Platz 3), a minute establishment, which once again is neither bar, nor restaurant, nor cake shop, but instead: a coffeehouse. *Kleines Café* achieves absolute timelessness, an utterly rare feat. ↑ Czech gave the old vaults an ageless patina that is just as modern today as it was thirty years ago; using old, glazed tiles and grave slabs set into the floor, upholstered sofas and bentwood coffeehouse seats with optimally subdued lighting and cleverly arranged mirrors.

Along with the many new coffee shops that have moved in, such as those imported franchises with strict non-smoking rules, absolutely inappropriate for a Viennese coffeehouse, or the chic brasseries and espresso bars that comprise their own local genres, a further, relatively young establishment deserves the noble name of coffeehouse: *Café Stein* (Währinger Strasse 6–8) opened in 1984 and, despite multiple expansions and adaptations by its original architects Gregor Eichinger and Christian Knechtel (eichinger oder knechtel), still works as well as it did in its early stages.

The two-story establishment is furnished in a contemporary translation of the traditional coffeehouse language: lucidity plays the main role, garden chairs transport a leisurely and light atmosphere, mirrored lamps reflect fragmented views of coffeehouse guests and newspaper covers across the wavelengths of the crowd. Unconventional materials such as concrete acoustic panels, which premiered in *Stein* as an element of interior design, nonetheless remained unassumingly reserved, subordinate to the overall ensemble.



Café Museum, Adolf Loos, 1899

† Hermann Czech's credo "architecture should not disturb," is probably more relevant in the task of constructing the coffeehouse than any other building task. In an orderly Viennese café, the *Mélange*, *Kleiner Schwarzer* (strong black coffee), and the whole palette of coffees are to be served on quite specific trays, in precisely defined arrangements in which the water glass is placed at an exact angle to the coffee cup's handle and the spoon: this is a design detail of its own, about which the Viennese waiter could hold prolonged monologues. But they would confide in their regular guests only, since after all, the regulars are part of the furnishings.



Café Stein, interior view of the stairway, eichinger oder knechtl, Vienna, 1984



Kleines Café, Hermann Czech, 1970, addition 1973–74

Finding Refuge and Annexing Home Terrain

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The athletic conquest of the alps

Wolfgang Pauser

In any inquiry into the development and design of Austrian products in the twentieth century, the athletic conquest of the Alps, especially via skis, deserves emphasis. There are three reasons for this: First, downhill skiing as a sport, in a narrow sense, begins and ends concurrent with the twentieth century. Carving and snowboarding, as the most important successors, signal a new paradigm: “fun sports.” Second, among the increasingly specialized and meanwhile countless sport varieties that combine novel equipment with the mountain—that obstacle to movement—in new body-training kits, skiing remains unprecedented in shaping the alpine landscape, economy, and social structure. Third, Austria has always played a central international role in skiing: it is where ski products come from and ski tourists flock to. Yet beyond its function as a sport, skiing also contributed to reformulating an identity after World War II, which generated considerable motivation and energy that flowed into developing ski equipment. Skiing advanced to a national sport and Austria became a skiing nation.

It is rather surprising that a country would have such a technically and materially costly sport in the form of an annual, one-week ski course as a nearly mandatory component of the general school curriculum. It is also difficult to imagine a sport—unless it is a national sport—being granted the right to restructure such an extensive landscape as the Alps—to actually transform its entire appearance—a change that can be clearly seen in satellite photos and on village façades. The forested mountainous area is veined with a zebra-stripe pattern of lifts and downhill runs. The reshaping of the Alps themselves, their functional and aesthetic adaptation to skiing, is one of ski design’s utterly fundamental elements. A retrospective look at how the mountains have been developed for skiing reveals the role that the mountain plays within the sport’s technical arrangement. Originally, the mountain was considered the environment of the skier, a natural opponent, a piece of nature, even a wild adversary requiring technical conquest. The fact that the slope had always been an integral part of the sports equipment became obvious only after the most inhospitable terrain had been successfully groomed for downhill skiing. The fully developed ski landscape proved *ex post* to be one element within a much larger machine, which only resulted in the macro sports equipment, the ski circus, in mechanical teamwork with the entire technical infrastructure and equipment.

In the following, we will intellectually traverse this circus to explain the developmental logic of other alpine sports and gear. They followed the pioneer and ultimately, along with it, left behind the pioneering