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A rosebush behind the hedge: Josef Hoffmann's Villa Henneberg as a total work of art

Lucie Lollková

The domestic interior provided an important ground for the emerging modernist aesthetics of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. This article attempts to broaden the discourse on the nature of the interior as a total work of art by analysing the interplay of elements such as exterior spaces, gardens, and cultural revival of the Biedermeier, in relation to Josef Hoffmann's commission of the Villa Henneberg (1900–1901). This architectural project puts forward a unique visualisation of modernist thought where the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is embodied on multiple levels, and in which boundaries between exterior and interior become blurred. The villa thus comes to represent not only a synthesis of varied art forms but also a space in which its inhabitants subject themselves to becoming a part of the total work of art.

The idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or the total work of art, represented an integral part of the Secessionist movement of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. This concept, stemming from the Wagnerian notion of an ideal hierarchy of the arts, was transformed into a new vision under the development of domestic spaces for the nouveau riche and Jewish patrons of the upper class, who became the key supporters of modernist architecture and design. This article will discuss the concept of the total work of art in relation to a specific commission to show how the unique artistic, cultural, and political conditions of this time period enabled architects like Josef Hoffmann to refine their designs and achieve a total interior. Projects exemplified by the Villa Henneberg blurred the distinctions between interiors, architecture, and nature, while establishing a sense of shared aesthetic experience. The construction of these spaces thus paved the way for a period of modernist aesthetic innovation, which strove to attain a synthetic resolution to the ever present dialogue between modernity and memory.[55]

Beginning with the Ringstrasse project in the 1860s, Vienna saw the rise of a new class of patrons commissioning art, furnishings, and architecture for their apartment residences in the city, thus laying down the foundations for the emerging aesthetics of the domestic interior.[56] However, it was the Secession group's establishment in 1897 which provided, through its abandonment of the historicist style promoted by the Academy, an ideal ground for the artistic experimentation of modernist architecture.[57] At the heart of this new aesthetic programme of the Secession lay the struggle for attainment of pure and all-encompassing art forms, the ultimate of which was represented by the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[58] Coined by the composer Richard Wagner in his *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* to promote the synthesis of the arts, the concept of the total work of art underwent an ideological shift in the

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[55] Iain B. Whyte, "Vienna Around 1900," in *Shaping the Great City: Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937*, ed. by Eve Blau and Monika Platzer (London: Prestel, 1999), 125.

[56] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 54.

[57] Agnes Husslein-Arco and Alfred Weidinger, *Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann: Pioneers of Modernism* (London: Prestel, 2011), 19.

[58] Elana Shapira, *Style & Seduction: Jewish Patrons, Architecture, and Design in Fin-De-Siècle Vienna* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2016), 59; Ingrid Macmillan, "Gesamtkunstwerk," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online,* Oxford University Press, last accessed 27 November 2017, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T031798?q=gesamtkunstwerk&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit.

works of the Secession. As such, it came to encompass more nuanced principles focusing on the narrative and utopian potential of the artwork.[59] Its application onto the domestic interior culminated in projects led by Josef Hoffmann, and later on in the commissions of the Wiener Werkstätte, who strove to articulate a new luxurious ideal for clients repelled by the designs of the historicist Ringstrasse.[60] Their working programme, published in 1905, addressed many of the ideas regarding the importance of discourse between the architect-designer and the patron, but most importantly, it promoted the belief in achieving a sense of cultural completion through furnishing one's life with beautiful handcrafted objects.[61] The development of these objectives can be traced to the domestic interiors in the Viennese outskirts, created as a collaboration of Hoffmann and the Secession members, where this progress towards a unified and total interior was first realised.

An early example of Hoffmann's work, in which this set of aesthetic principles was fully integrated, can be found in the villa of Dr Hugo and Maria Henneberg on Wollergasse 8 in the Döbling area of suburban Vienna. Built between the years 1900–01, this project was conceived by Hoffmann as one part of an architectural unit of four villas, forming the Artist's Colony at Hohe Warte.[62] The house was designed to accommodate the couple, as well as Hugo Henneberg's studio, corresponding to the plan of the neighbouring Moser-Moll residence constructed earlier. As a photographer and an art collector, Henneberg represented the ideal customer for such a commission. To illustrate this factor, the interiors of the residence were designed not only as a decorative scheme, but were furthermore conceptualised around the photographic works of the patron and his art collection. Spatially, the building was planned in four floors; with a cellar, ground floor, and a first floor, in order to copy the natural steep slope of the terrain and therefore provide access from both the garden and street levels (Fig. 1 and 2). This gradation of space also coincided with the delineation of the social context of the building, from the servants' quarters and kitchens at the lowest floor, through the living quarters on the first floor, and finally to the studio under the roof as a self-sufficient component.[63] Using principles not dissimilar to those of monumental architecture, Hoffmann's plan would lead the visitors through an unusual side entrance and vestibule, before opening into a bright and imposing space of the hall.[64]

Containing Klimt's portrait of Marie Henneberg, the main hall was the central and focal point of the architectural composition and also the most public space, neighbouring the dining room and a boudoir (Fig. 3 and 4). As in Hoffmann's other Hohe Warte villas, the ceiling of the hall stretched monumentally across two stories near the fireplace area, but included a lowered section over the in-built seating niches on the left side. The positioning of the hall, extending along the full length of the house, enabled Hoffmann to provide multiple sources of natural lighting, filtering from the seating area of the hall through a set of large windows, and from the balcony illuminating the space from the staircase and the upper level.[65] The door which divides the main hall is inlaid with glass panels, which not only provides another source of light, but also interestingly features triangular shapes reminiscent of features sketched by Hoffman in the proposed plan for the building, as opposed to the usual

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[59] David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 1; Wolf Gerhard Schmidt, "Was Ist Ein „Gesamtkunstwerk"?", *Archiv Für Musikwissenschaft* 68, no. 2 (2011): 157.

[60] Kirk Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture & Design* (New York: MoMA, 1986), 47.

[61] Werner J. Schweiger, *Wiener Werkstätte: Design in Vienna* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 42.

[62] Eduard F. Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann: The Architectural Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 269.

[63] Ibid, 46.

[64] Anette Freytag, "Josef Hoffmann's Unknown Masterpiece," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 30, no. 4 (2010): 349.

[65] Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 49.

motifs.[66] Despite the monumental height of the space, the clear focus would have been the portrait itself, as it is framed by the fireplace and the characteristically lowered wainscoting, in contrast to the rough mortar stuccoed walls.[67] Although quite unusually located on the side wall, rather than the primary end of the hall like in the neighbouring Spitzer residence, the fireplace arrangement is in relative position to the furniture and the entrance, and thus naturally attracts the visitor's attention upon entering the room.

Klimt's portrait provides the basis for the complex layers of interrelationships within this space, as it represents the cooperation and exchange of ideas of both artists, and furthermore combines different art forms according to the idea of the Secessionist *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The square frame corresponds to the shape adapted as a motif by Hoffmann, while the greys, blues, and violets mirror the grey and black marble slabs used to furnish the fireplace.[68] The colour scheme set by the portrait then continues in the grey marble table-tops and the wooden panelling, creating a unified sense of harmony.[69] This is further amplified by the arrangement of the seating area positioned on the other side of the hall, which was designed around Henneberg's famous gum prints of landscapes (Fig. 5). The muted greenish black tones of the photographs are translated into the colour of the leather upholstery, creating a harmony with the sparse green brushstrokes in Klimt's portrait.[70] As the painting was still considered unfinished in 1902, it is unclear whether it was the architecture which would have influenced Klimt, or whether the interior was designed with this portrait in mind. Nonetheless, the main hall of the Henneberg villa represents a synthesis of visual arts in the form of painting, photography, and the applied arts, all of which can be collectively seen in Carl Schorske's terms to serve as a form of portraiture in architecture.[71] Hoffmann thus utilises the subtleties of these relationships woven into his architectural programme to successfully present an image of the Henneberg couple through the interior design.

The interior would also have served as a complicated interplay of private and public space, as it was designed to be multi-functional and would have been the primary space for both entertaining guests and for artistic practice.[72] This is reflected in Juliet Koss's definition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the collaboration of all form of arts, but "just as significantly – its effect on the audience. It presents a model of artistic production and aesthetic reception that is active, communal, political, and fundamentally utopian."[73] In Henneberg's atelier, the art created in the house is ingeniously integrated into the walls of the hall and interacted with by the house guests. Likewise, the portrait of Marie Henneberg creates a sense of her greeting these visitors but simultaneously a notion of her blending into the composition of the interior, reminiscent of Carl Moll's paintings of his wife in her study.[74] Through this "shared aesthetic experience" the inhabitants become a part of the total work of art

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[66] Ritter F. Feldegg, ed., *Der Architekt: Wiener Monatshefte für Bauwesen und Decorative Kunst VII,* (Vienna: A. Schroll & Co, 1901), 51. http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/annoplus?aid=arc&datum=1901&page=107&size=45.

[67] Amelia S. Levetus, "The Vienna Artist's Colony," *The Studio* 32, no. 136 (1904): 126.

[68] Ibid, 126.

[69] Ibid, 127–128.

[70] Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 269.

[71] Tag Gronberg, *Vienna: City of Modernity* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 43.

[72] Josef Lux, "Villenkolonie Hohe Warte," in *Das Interieur: Wiener Monatshefte für Angewandte Kunst IV* (Vienna: A. Schroll & Co, 1903), 128. https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_jWU6AQAAMAAJ#page/n123/mode/2up.

[73] Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), quoted in Shapira, *Style & Seduction*, 59.

[74] Gronberg, *Vienna*, 44.

themselves, a concept much criticised by Adolf Loos in his contemporaneous writings.[75]

This notion of artistic collaboration resulting to a certain extent in a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is present throughout the residence in a similar manner. The smoking salon on the first floor was designed by Hoffmann to incorporate a cabinet made by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, thus showcasing not only his own skill as the architect-designer but also the status of Henneberg as an accomplished art collector. The influence of Mackintosh's designs on Hoffmann has been a centre of discussion in connection to the Hohe Warte colony, following the display of the Scottish Room at the Secession in 1900.[76] However, it has now been widely accepted that Hoffmann's artistic expression would not have altered markedly as a response, with a few exceptions such as the famous Mackintosh high-back chair.[77] This design was a source of inspiration for Hoffmann's furniture design, and a piece modelled after it can be found in the photographic atelier on the top floor (Fig. 7).[78] Furthermore, the residence was furnished not only with works by Hoffmann and Mackintosh, but also with furniture and textiles designed by Koloman Moser and other artists, anticipating the large scale collaboration of the Wiener Werkstätte in the following years.

However, in order to fully analyse the interior of the Henneberg residence as a total work of art, it is important to also consider its relationship with the exterior, and the setting of the Hohe Warte itself. This notion of interconnectedness parallels one of the alternative definitions of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where it is represented in the blurred distinctions between two spheres—the exterior and the interior.[79] As is common for Hoffmann's early work at the Hohe Warte, the façade showcases influences of the Biedermeier country house and aspects of the Arts and Crafts movement, which were thought to stem from more "sincere" and "organic" historical traditions.[80] Josef Lux's article in *Das Interieur* aptly uses the allegory of "rosebushes which sprung up wildly behind the hedge" to describe the villas' rustic positioning within the landscape. [81] This strengthens the idea that Hoffmann's aesthetic programme as a whole has to be considered embedded within its setting, in this case closely connected to the memory of simple country life exemplified by the early nineteenth century Biedermeier style. His interest in the simple forms of vernacular architecture of rural cottages, and the rejection of the decorative shapes of the *Jugendstil* culminated in the radical geometric approach which began emerging in these early projects.[82] The dialogue between tradition and modernity is apparent in the contrast between the gradation of decorative elements within the levels of the façade, and is furthermore translated into the interior.[83] Although streamlined and geometric, Hoffmann's adaptation of the square as a central motif in the Henneberg residence has been interpreted by Tag Gronberg as a reflection of a "geometricised representation of nature," connecting the subtle designs of the interior with the exterior.[84] Hoffman's emphasis on this "aesthetic unity" thus permeates all levels of the struc-

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[75] Shapira, *Style & Seduction*, 59; Adolf Loos, "Poor Little Rich Man," in *Adolf Loos, 1870–1933: Architecture, Cultural Critic, Dandy* by August Sarnitz (Cologne: Tarschen, 2003) 18–21; Adolf Loos's theories of architecture and design heavily criticised the idea of ornament, and his vision of modernism therefore diverged markedly from that of Josef Hoffmann and the members of the Secession. In the "Poor Little Rich Man" essay, he makes a direct reference to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* interior in portraying it as an uninhabitable work of art to which the patron has to subject his life and freedom.

[76] Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 40.

[77] Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 40.

[78] Lux, "Hohe Warte", 128.

[79] Gronberg, *Vienna*, 134.

[80] Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 46.

[81] Lux, "Hohe Warte", 129; my translation.

[82] Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 40; Arco & Weidinger," *Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann*, 160.

[83] Eve Blau and Monika Platzer, *Shaping the Great City* (London: Prestel, 1999), 125; Whyte, "Vienna Around 1900," 125.

[84] Gronberg, *Vienna*, 134.

ture from windows and furniture to prints on curtains.[85]

However, it could also be argued that nature in this case is not completely geometricised, as is apparent from Hoffmann's later works.[86] In the Henneberg villa, the architect retains some of the organic elements of the garden, most obviously in the rose themed border running underneath the eaves of the structure (Fig. 9). This motif is then repeated in several of the rooms, either as a border, decorative feature, or furniture (Fig. 6). There seems to be a certain gendering aspect to the presence of these more organic motifs, as they appear within the rooms largely associated with feminine activities. This is especially true for the toilette of the lady of the house, which is furnished with rosewood red panelling, matching Biedermeier polka dots, and a prominent floral border.[87] The furniture in this room, although retaining clean shapes, appears to undulate in curves, a feature which Hoffmann amplifies by dulling the sharp corners and transforming them into quadrants (Fig. 6). Although floral motifs do appear elsewhere in the residence, this space, since it is aimed to be used singularly by Marie Henneberg, presents a sharp contrast to the angular design of the top floor atelier. This perhaps recalls the fundamental associations of the feminine with the organic, but contrasts sharply with the commanding gaze of Marie's portrait in the main hall.[88]

Hoffmann's use of windows and doors as transitional spaces within the interior of the villa provides yet another connection with the natural world. Contemporary architectural magazines such as *The Studio* have often remarked on his "arrangement of the windows" and their pleasing effect.[89] Furthermore, the provincial area of Döbling was highly acclaimed for retaining some of its romantic front gardens of the Biedermeier period.[90] It is therefore important to consider not only the vistas of these windows and the framing of the landscape of the Vienna Woods, but also the elevated gaze aimed at the industrial cityscape.[91] The physical setting of the villa in the liminal space between the city and the country, together with its historical charm, resulted in a sense of material agency of the surrounding nature and the rural landscape. Thus, rather than the garden being seen as a reflection of the interior, it was perhaps the complex relationships between the natural and the domestic which influenced Hoffmann's aesthetic choices for the interior space. His skilful use of framing these views and manipulating natural light manifests itself at its utmost in the hall. Here it is channelled through large windows, and further through a complex system of transparent glass surfaces and sequences of doors, windows, and mirrors. These are a prominent feature in the hall's seating niche, where the mirror represents a counterpart to Henneberg's photographs, while also reflecting nature from the window. Hoffmann's attention to the smallest of details can additionally be seen in the way the semi-lunar ornament placed above the façade windows repeats itself in the garden paths, and further in the main entrance where it forms an arch (Fig. 9). The decorative elements of the carpets and upholstering, also continue this semi-lunar motif (Fig. 8). Although very little information about the gardens survive, the further addition of sculptural settings visible in period photographs can be related back to the original conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a collaboration of the arts, foreshadowing Hoffmann's intricate projects such as the Palais Stoclet and the Skywa-Primavesi residence.[92] It is through this interconnectedness in which the interior and the exterior merge into one, together with the discourse between the patron and the architecture, that they become a representation of a total architectural programme.

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[85] Varnedoe, *Vienna 1900*, 119.

[86] Freytag, "Josef Hoffmann's Unknown Masterpiece."

[87] Lux, "Hohe Warte", 144.

[88] Gronberg, *Vienna*, 126.

[89] Levetus, "Artist's Colony," 126.

[90] Ibid.; Lux, "Hohe Warte", 128.

[91] Gronberg, *Vienna*, 132.

[92] Freytag, "Josef Hoffmann's Unknown Masterpiece"; Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 369.

Josef Hoffmann's Henneberg residence therefore masterfully represents the multiplicity of the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Although not displaying the extensive and lavish detailing which has come to symbolise Hoffmann's later projects, the architectural programme of the villa contains much subtler yet complex interrelationships extending between the exterior and the interior. By creating contrasts between the urban and the rural, as well as the historic and the modern, the Henneberg residence blends into its setting while representing a sense of community, resulting in an almost utopian vision of artistic creation on the edge of the city and the countryside. When considered collectively with its fusion of the arts in the form of painting, photography, as well as garden sculpture and furnishings, the villa creates a unified form of total aesthetic control of the designer, where the inhabitants contribute by subjecting themselves to becoming a part of the total work of art. ■

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Appendices

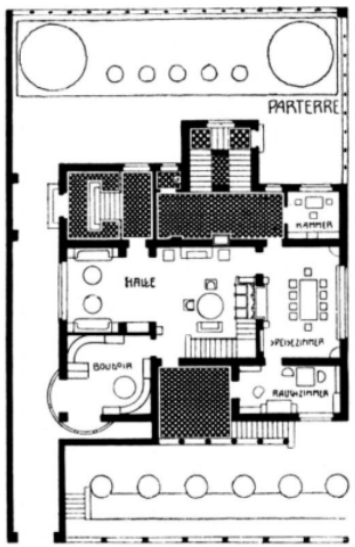


Figure 1: Floorplan of the ground floor of the Villa Henneberg (in *Das Interieur IV*, 152).

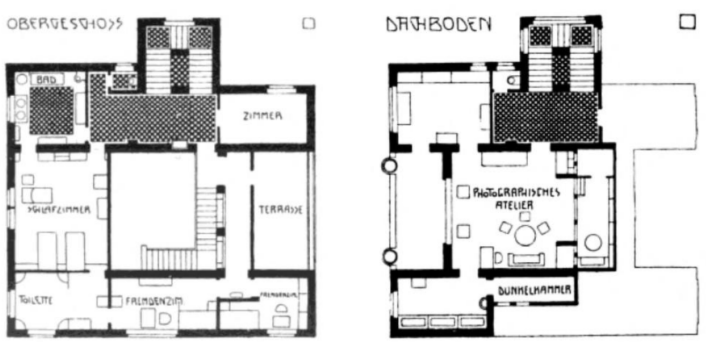


Figure 2: Floorplans of the first floor and the loft of the Villa Henneberg (in *Das Interieur IV*, 152).

Figure 3: View of the main hall of the Henneberg residence, showing Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Marie Henneberg* (in *Das Interieur IV*, 137).

Figure 4: Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Marie Henneberg*, 1901-02. Oil on canvas. 140 x 140 cm. Stiftung Moritzburg, Kunstmuseum des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt. (in Husslein-Arco and Weidinger, *Gustav Klimt, Josef Hoffmann*, 25).

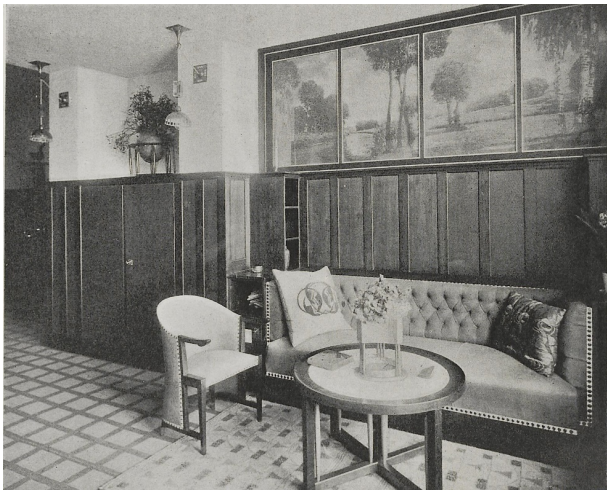
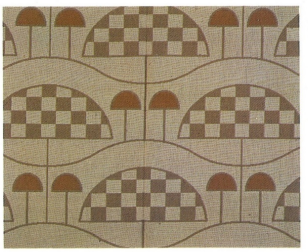


Figure 5: View of the seating niche in the hall of the Henneberg residence, showing photograph*s* by Hugo Henneberg (in *The Studio VII*, 126).



Josef Hoffmann. "Mushrooms" Fabric Sample (detail). 1902.
Fabric, 36 × 46½" (91.5 × 118.2 cm) overall.
Collection Joh. Backhausen & Söhne, Vienna.
Copyright Joh. Backhausen & Söhne

Figure 6: Photograph of the toilette of Marie Henneberg with floral decoration (in *Das Interieur IV*, 145).

Figure 7: Photograph of a high-back chair in the atelier of Villa Henneberg (in *Das Interieur IV*, 128).

Figure 9*:* Watercolour of the Villa Henneberg shortly after completion (R. Völker in Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann*, 47).