

# Fin wagner's beliefs and his ideas. otto

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Fin de Siècle Vienna was a revolutionary time in every sense of the word. A time which was filled with some of the greatest minds the world has ever come to know. Containing movements that led to the evolution of practices such as art, music and architecture. Among these movements was the modern movement, influenced greatly by the Austrian architect Otto Wagner. Using his knowledge of architecture and the vision that he had for the future he would elevate the field of architecture and creativity to a whole new level.

Wagner built his second home, the "Villa Wagner II" in a way that would emulate his impacting vision. Vienna at this time was also in a state of creative development and attested to the meaning behind this home. Just with a quick glance, anyone has the ability to see that it contains key architectural aspects that are tied together to symbolize Wagner's beliefs and his ideas. Otto Wagner, an Austrian architect is responsible for a vast amount of architectural beauty in Vienna that can still be seen today. Wagner was born in July 1841 and later in his school years went on to study architecture at the Viennese Polytechnic Institute and the Royal School of Architecture in Berlin. He began his career as an architect in Vienna designing buildings in the historicist style which at the time was the traditional method. In 1893, Wagner drew up an entire plan to change the look of Vienna which was never fully executed, only his urban rail network the "Stadtbahn" was built.

This plan made for the city assisted Wagner in receiving a job as an academy professor in 1894 where he influenced young minds through his strong beliefs about the future of architecture. As a teacher, "Wagner quickly decided to scrap the Renaissance curriculum in favor of one that pledged to defining a

new style for modern times. He was the first European professor to ever make such a pedagogical change.

“ 1 In 1897, Otto Wagner joined the Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs (Union of Austrian Fine Artists) also known as the Secession. A group that came into fruition because of the conservative and traditional standpoint of the Association of Austrian Artists. 2 The association's strong beliefs made the members who were some of the brightest minds at this time such as Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich and more feel that their creative minds and abilities were suppressed by limitations set by the Association of Austrian Artists.

Among this group were painters, sculptors, architects, composers etc., that believed that they could achieve much more in their craft by exploring outside the boundaries of accepted tradition. This is made apparently clear with the phrase that is written above the entrance of the secession building which says, “ Der Zeit ihre Kunst.

Der Kunst ihre Freiheit.” (“ To every age its art. To every art its freedom.”).

Hoffmann and Moser also founded the “ Wiener Werkstätte” which was a fine-arts society with the objective of reforming the arts. This ideology is what supported Wagner in progressing to a brand-new style of architecture called Modernism.

Otto Wagner held a strong belief that the past should never be dwelled upon, life moves forward and we should constantly be looking forward. 3 This new style stood up to those standards, it was in no way an imitation or derivation

of any style from the past. In his book Wagner writes "Modern art must offer us modern forms that are created by us and that represent our abilities and actions." <sup>4</sup> Although he initially began designing buildings in the Historicist style and later designed buildings in the style of architectural realism, Wagner is known as a highly influential figure in the creation and incorporation of Modern Architecture. Wagner held strongly that the imitation of style throughout generation showed little enhancement in architecture and all types of art.

Otto Wagner being an extraordinary architect built himself and his second wife an extraordinary house in 1913 called the "Villa Wagner II". This house was built directly next door to his first house the "Villa Wagner I" and was primarily made for his wife to live in after he would die because Wagner was 20 years older than her.

Wagner used industrial materials such as concrete and steel to construct buildings and his house due to the industrialization relative to that time. Mikulas Teich writes that "during this time a surge of technological innovation swept through western Europe and the United States - innovations that reshaped existing industries and created new ones." <sup>5</sup> At this time, Vienna also incorporated a new Tram, the railway that was mentioned previously and had begun working on the Danube canal. Historians have called this time the Second Industrial Revolution. In the Villa Wagner II the materials that made the house were not hidden by coverups or art and were openly put on display. The reason for this being that Wagner had a new belief for architecture one beyond the scope of previous generations, Wagner envisioned architecture in the most practical and efficient way possible. He writes in his book "The purpose of beauty was to give artistic expression to

function.” 6By using these industrial materials, crafting them and molding them into the desired ornaments, they in themselves would become a beautiful and artistic architectural aspect.

The shape of the house itself was very simple and resembled a cubic form with a flat roof to complete the cube shape. This design would present Wagner's idea of the future of architecture, the simplest creation that could be made while displaying great functionality. While the house was made to resemble a modernistic style, Wagner had added certain components from other styles of architecture as well. Above the door that leads into the house is a stained-glass painting, the stained-glass is a component of the art-nouveau style. The painting itself Wagner had made by Koloman Moser, an Austrian artist who was also part of the Secession. The painting on the house contains different components of Klimt's painting "Pallas Athena" that possessed aspects of Greek mythology, which resembles the architectural style of classicism. Wagner chose this specific painting to be added because he believed Klimt was the greatest artist to ever step on the face of the earth. The Villa also had very tall and narrow windows that were placed in perfect rhythm in order to bring to attention and complement the simple shape of the house.

The sides of the house and around the door were filled with small rectangular glazed blue tiles that created an illusion of columns when they were placed together. The illusion of columns when in reality there is nothing there, was another detail that Wagner added that resembles the classical style of architecture. The house as a whole contained a very small number

of ornaments especially compared to his first villa which possessed a great amount of them. In fact, the second Villa some would say was a complete opposite representation of architecture. Observing the transition from the first villa to the second helps us understand the development of Otto Wagner's vision for the future of architecture. The secession and all of its members challenged everything that seemed to be accepted in the creative world. Whether it was music, art, architecture or anything else, the secession stood for exploring and extrapolating from a world beyond that which everyone was accustomed to.

They believed that in order to create "true" art an evolution of thinking and new ideas needed to occur those of which that do not stem from previous generations. Peter Vergo states in his book "Art in Vienna" that "the people of the time coming from a feeling of hopelessness later became a people that believed in progress more than they did the bible." <sup>7</sup>This raises an interesting question, if Wagner believed that architecture should be practical and efficient without extraneous ornaments and that new styles should strive for the future instead of incorporating from the past, then why does he contradict himself and add in all of these different styles of architecture in the Villa Wagner II. This brings us back to his extraordinarily symbolic Villa, a structure that in its very essence presented the transition from one form of art to another.

The reason this house is so important can be seen by comparing both of his villas. In his first villa which is flooded with ornaments and statues you can see his style of architecture, he includes many different styles and many

ornaments to make the house his own piece of art. The statues, the paintings, the columns and the vast amount of ornaments take center stage in this house. A great number of representations of classical and art-nouveaustyle architecture. Now if you look at his second villa it is very clear that it contains nowhere near the amount of extraneous detail that the first one seems to have.

Also, he created the depiction of simplicity while still uniting several facets of architecture. This decision was a key indicator to Wagner's idea of the future, by creating a simple structure and having it coexist with minimal details from other styles of architecture he was demonstrating the transition of the old architecture styles into his new one. A style that was not in any way an imitation of the previous generations. Wagner was illustrating the next step that architecture would take and at the same time showing that we were almost there by presenting a transition between styles. Wagner's second villa possesses great significance in projecting the people and the ideas of that time. The beginning to new beliefs and revolutionary ideas that would ultimately change the artistic worlds and inspire them to be a little more original and a little more creative.

1 Mallgrave, Harry Francis. *Modern Architectural Theory: a Historical Survey, 1673-1968*. Cambridge University Press, 2009  
2 Schorske, Carl E. *Fin De Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. Phoenix, 2010  
3 Vergo, Peter, et al. *Art in Vienna: Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and Their Contemporaries*. Phaidon, 2015  
4 Wagner, Otto, and Harry Francis. Mallgrave.

ModernArchitecture. Otto Wagner: a Guidebook for His Students to This Field of Art. University of Chicago Press, 1988. Teich, Mikulas. Fin De Siecle and ItsLegacy.

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