



Elana Shapira. *Style and Seduction: Jewish Patrons, Architecture, and Design in Fin de Siècle Vienna*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2016. xv + 314 pp. Illustrations. \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-61168-921-1.

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Architecture, Design and Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna

Elana Shapira's book investigates the ways in which Jewish patrons, critics, salonniers, and collectors supported advanced architecture and interior design in Vienna between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War. She convincingly argues that patronage and other types of intellectual and social support for innovation in architecture and design were deployed by a wide range of Viennese Jews in order to stake a claim for cultural authority in an often hostile context. She usefully rejects pat interpretations of patronage as a tool of assimilation—as a way of blending in. She argues instead, following Hannah Arendt and the literary scholar Rhonda Garelick, that her protagonists actively reclaimed their Jewishness, accentuating their otherness as an attractive asset within an exclusive milieu that valued the disturbance of the old order.

The book begins with material from the period prior to the fin de siècle of the title, looking at models of patronage from the 1860s and 70s, with a specific focus on the Ringstrasse palaces designed by the leading Gründerzeit architects Ludwig Förster and Theophil Hansen for Eduard Todesco and Gustav Epstein. In giving close and nuanced attention to the architecture and interiors of this period and tracing continuities with the period around 1900, Shapira is part of a wider trend in scholarship, reflected also in the series of Ringstrasse exhibitions in 2015.[1]

Subsequent chapters focus on overtly innovative tendencies categorized perhaps somewhat rigidly by Shapira

as secessionist, modernist, and avant-garde. The secessionist chapter presents rich new research on the critic Ludwig Hevesi and the dynamic industrialist and art supporter Karl Wittgenstein; Shapira emphasizes their pivotal importance to the Vienna Secession and its sensational new building on the Naschmarkt designed 1898 by Joseph Maria Olbrich, while also arguing that the Secession was crucial to their own image formation as attractive outsiders. The modernists include Isidor Singer and Heinrich Kanner, who worked with Otto Wagner to craft an sophisticated modern image for their newspaper, *Die Zeit*. This chapter also revisits the well-known episode of the 1903 foundation of the Wiener Werkstätte, but with the emphasis on the role of the man who very publicly provided financial and administrative support, Fritz Waerndorfer, rather than exclusively on the designers Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. Waerndorfer's close identification with the Wiener Werkstätte (as well as the dramatic presentation of particularly shocking Gustav Klimt paintings within his and his wife Lili's house) needs to be seen, Shapira argues, in the context of Waerndorfer's performance of his Jewishness in the form of dandyism. Adolf Loos comes to the fore in the final chapter ("The Avant-Gardists")—both his invocation of Peter Altenberg as a kind of down-at-heel patron saint for his American Bar (1908), and his close friendship and architectural collaboration with father and son Michael and Leopold Goldman (owners of Goldman & Salatsch, the firm that commissioned the Looshaus in 1909) are explored. Each chapter, in addition to the main case studies,

incorporates new research into other related projects (interiors, exhibition designs, posters, and textiles, as well as buildings) which involved Jewish patrons and leading progressive designers and architects, considerably enriching our knowledge of the networks and commissioning situations of the time.

What emerges from Shapira's examples is a very usefully nuanced picture of the Jewish involvement in the advanced architecture and design of the period. She shows the importance of patronage, but also that commissions, purchases, and financial support were only some of the ways in which Jewish involvement in this area was manifested. Critics such as Hevesi, Berta Zuckerkandl, and Karl Kraus were at the center of both the textual formulation and dissemination of modern design's principles, and of the personal networks formed in coffee houses, in salons, and by marriage. The roguish figure of Peter Altenberg is threaded through the narrative; along with Kraus, he provocatively highlighted the contradictions and pitfalls of identity performance via patronage.

A particularly fascinating research finding concerns Otto Wagner's involvement with *Die Zeit*, a journal and newspaper founded by the economist (and member of the Jewish haute bourgeoisie) Singer and journalist Kanner to promote a gradualist socialism on the model of the British Fabian Society. They also embraced a federalist vision of the empire, with autonomy for national

minorities. In Wagner, who acted as artistic adviser on their distinctive modern masthead—so strikingly different from the conservative font used by their rival, *Neue Freie Presse*—they found a designer who could conjure up an aesthetic vision of the modern, rational world they campaigned for. His 1902 design for the Telegraph Office of *Die Zeit* (on the Kärntnerstrasse, now destroyed), combined technophilia with clarity, transparency, and order in a powerful statement of social and aesthetic progress. Shapira shows that the Telegraph Office was much more than a functional service—its image was used in the newspaper's self-promotion, and it contained a gallery intended “to champion the founders' socialist idea of transfers between nations, cultures, and social classes” (p. 118). It is in conjunctures like this that we see the rich results Shapira achieves by extending her scope beyond designs and designers themselves to encompass clients, patrons, their ideas, and their varying attitudes to questions of identity.

Note

[1]. The most notable in the context of this review was “Ringstrasse: ein jüdischer Boulevard,” held at the Jewish Museum Vienna. Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, ed., *Ringstrasse: ein jüdischer Boulevard = A Jewish Boulevard* (Vienna: Amalthea and the Jewish Museum Vienna, 2015).

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