



Design

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JOSEPH HOFFMANN:

A FOUNDER OF MODERN DESIGN

By
LEOPOLD KLEINER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leopold Kleiner, of Vienna, studied architecture with the famous Austrian architect, Professor Josef Hoffmann, known as the founder of Modern Design in Europe. He collaborated with him for many years on designs for homes and industrial buildings, as well as in the joint teaching activities at the Vienna School of Applied Art.

SOMETHING very singular happened to Art at the beginning of the 19th Century. The steady development of Architecture and related Arts came to a gradual end. The innate knowledge and feeling for design, possessed for hundreds of years, seemed to be lost. Architects and craftsmen had to look at examples of the past in order to approach new tasks. Designing had ceased to be a creative problem and had developed into a selective one. Artists and the public were mainly interested in choosing from old styles that were agreeable to their personal tastes. For the first time in history, the architects worked consciously with forms foreign to themselves and their times. They had discovered the uncreative art of adaptation and imitation. The only necessary preparation for a prospective architect was the painstaking knowledge of all the exterior surface details of past architectural work. Designing meant the copying of columns, capitals and profiles taken from pictures in books on Architecture. These details were either subject to straight reproduction or even worse, were freely interchanged.

Houses and homes of that era looked like people at a costume ball. A new design approach seemed necessary and overdue.

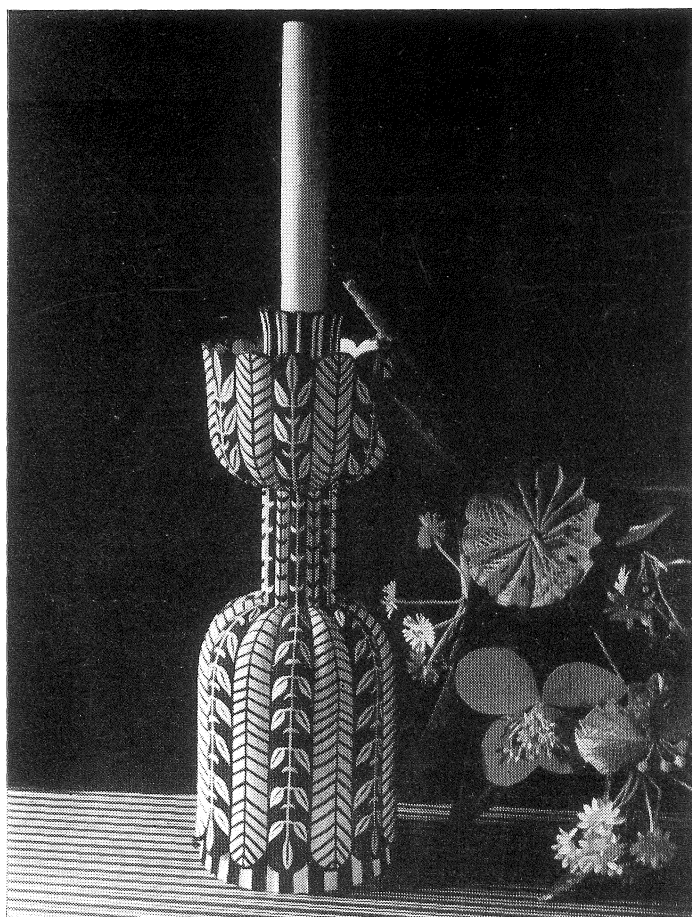
As the Century drew to a weary close, young architects attempted to work out methods simplifying exterior details. They finally realized that nothing can be achieved through mere exterior changes. A more profound source, responsible for the manifestation of Form, had to be rediscovered; that very force which crystalizes into those objects we call "Architecture."

The answer was obvious, but had been overlooked: Where else could this source be found but *within the individuality of the artist himself*? Nothing beyond his personal abilities is responsible for the process of creative designing. The rediscovery of this basic truth was first evidenced through the work of a few Viennese artists guided and directed by *Josef Hoffmann*. Hoffmann knew that greater progress could be achieved by collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Together with his friends and co-fighters, Joseph Olbrich, Gustav Klimt, and Koloman Moser, he founded an organization in 1898 called "*Viennese Secession*." Their aim was the rebuttal of the old and a reliance on their own personality. The battle cry of this fighting organization was "Down with copying, up with creating." The artist became the initial design source. A new freedom was born giving rise to an overflow of youth-

ful ideas. To prevent an aimless play of too free a fantasy, limitations had to be found, strong enough to form a basic structure and yet, still allow a free creative development. The "Viennese Secession" created a philosophy of design with the ethical and moral principles every designer now follows to achieve results of value. There were three main prerequisites:

1. Development of an active relationship to objects of everyday surrounding and the understanding of the meaning of their service.

(Please turn to page 24)



PAINTED WOODEN CANDLESTICK: Application of Hoffman's principles to an everyday functional object. DESIGN is integrated, rather than merely decorative.

FOUNDER OF MODERN DESIGN:

(Continued from page 9)

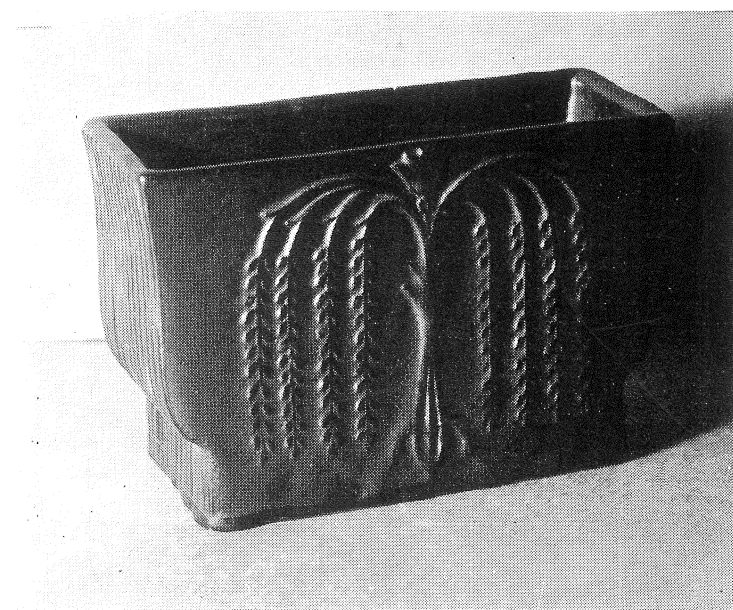
2. Preservation of the *integrity of materials* used as design expression. (I.E., The material used shall only express its natural appearance and shall never try to imitate that of another material.)

3. The form should only be dictated out of purpose.

These three limitations proved stimulating and fruitful, and gave a new meaning to design. The plan of the house for instance, and not the facade, became the architect's main concern. The layout of the rooms had to fit the lives and activities of the owners. Therefore, windows, doors and wall-space were placed according to necessity and found their appearance on the outdoor walls as natural results and not due to a preconsidered artificial concept. Choice of materials to be used, scaled in right proportions according to individual conception, were the additional guiding ideas. This same principle holds true when it comes to the shaping of smaller objects for everyday use, such as a piece of furniture, or even a teapot. Since all these have to be designed with the same artistic capacity, neither dimensions nor the actual cost of material are the decisive factors of artistic evaluation. The quality of a perfectly designed teapot is equal to that of a well designed building.

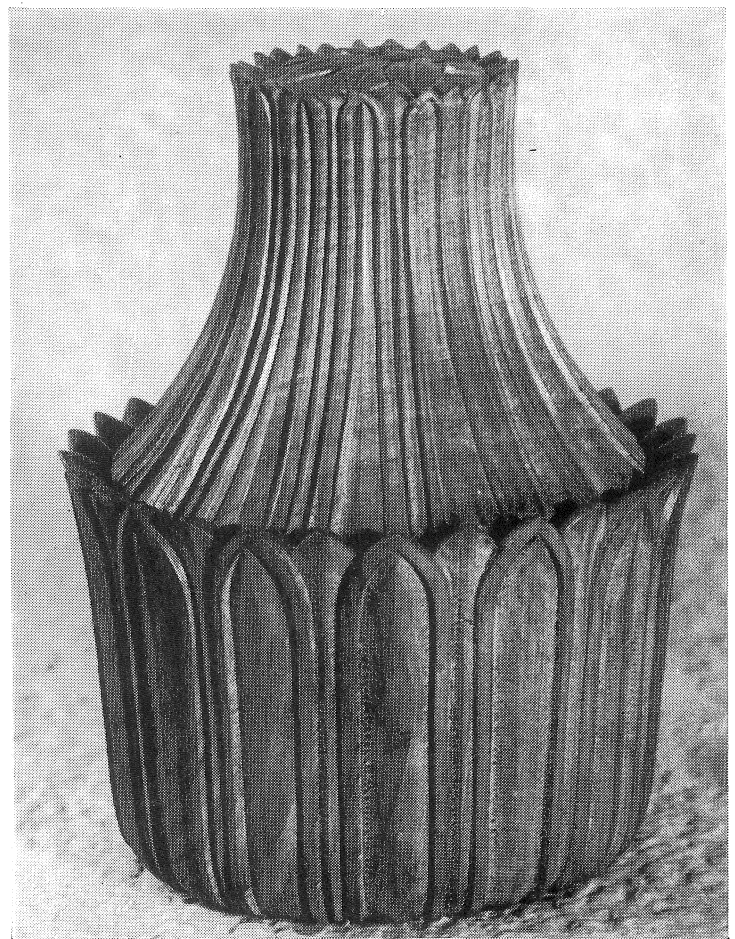
To confine the term *architecture* only to the designing and construction of a building would be very wrong. The true meaning of architecture encompasses the all-embracing idea of order and arrangement. Every kind of design has to follow this precept.

During the many years of my collaboration with Josef Hoffmann in his personal work, as well as in the joint teaching activities at the Vienna School of Applied Art, our main concern



FLOWER CONTAINER: Note how design motif is suggestive of object's ultimate use.

was to bring this unification of design-principle into being. Our Special Class of Architecture was known for its universal character. There, our students had a unique opportunity to become acquainted with the requirements of every branch of design. To plan houses (together with the designing of furniture for the interiors) was only part of it. They also learned to design wall-papers, textiles, lighting fixtures, etc. Anything connected with human life, dress design, stage and costume design was included in their curriculum, taking its rightful place in connection with architectural arrangement. ●



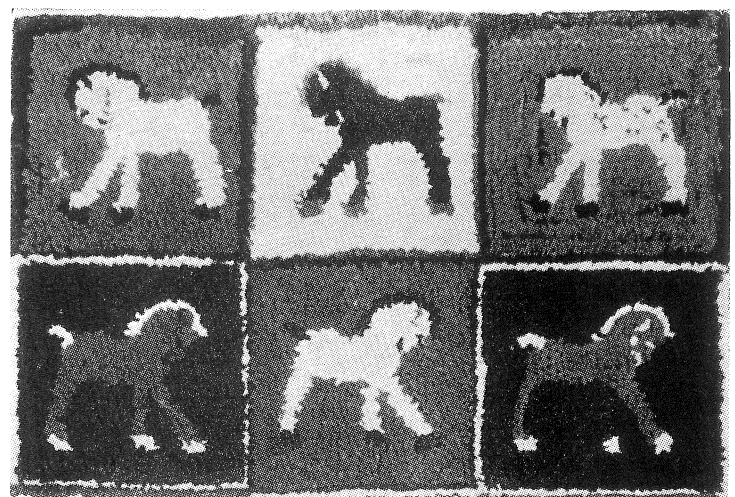
CARVED WOODEN CONTAINER: *Vienna School of Applied Art*

HOOKED RUGS:

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6. Dye the material, being sure to work over old newspapers.

7. Now you are ready to do the hooking. The hook may be purchased at an art shop, department store, or made without much difficulty. A bent nail, fastened to a wood handle will do admirably. Draw the loops through the meshes in the foundation with the hook. Place the strips as closely together as possible for your particular design. When the strips are inserted, hem the edges and line with ticking. Leave the loops sticking out, for a decorated edge, or scissor them off. And finally, brush off the waste scraps and press. You have now created an heirloom. ●



Animal forms in a hooked rug design.