

Architektur im Ringturm



Theophil Hansen

Classical Elegance in Everyday Life

From 18 April until 14 June 2013

Curator: Adolph Stiller

Venue: Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30

Opening hours: Monday to Friday: 9 am to 6 pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)

Press tour: Wednesday, 17 April 2013, 11 am

Speakers: Boris Podrecca, Jan Sapák, Adolph Stiller

Official opening: Wednesday, 17 March 2013, 6.30 pm (by invitation only)

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Theophil Hansen – Classical Elegance in Everyday Life

To mark the 200th anniversary of his birth, the exhibition in the “Architecture in the Ringtum” series by Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein is a solo exhibition devoted to probably the most significant architect of Vienna’s Ringstraße era - Theophil Hansen.

Hansen’s legacy includes not only his fine buildings on the Vienna Ringstraße but also the significant impact of his work on the development of International Modernism. He influenced architects like Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos right through to the contemporary discourse on key issues such as reductionism, appropriateness and materiality. As well as selected examples of Hansen’s buildings in Vienna, the exhibition also features some of his lesser known works in Central and Eastern Europe.

The young Theophil Hansen – architectural beginnings

Theophil Hansen was born in Copenhagen in 1813, the son of the Norwegian violinist and insurance clerk Rasmusen Hansen and Elisabeth Jensen, a Dane. After studying architecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, he travelled across Europe, notably from Berlin via Innsbruck, Trento and Verona to Venice. It was while travelling through Munich that he met the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, a key figure in bringing the Classical style to Prussia.

In around 1837/1838, Hansen moved to Athens to pursue his interest in Greek architecture. Here he began making sketches of buildings in the Classical style and it was these draft designs which impressed Athens town planner Eduard Schaubert - so much so that he recommended Hansen for building projects in the city. Theophil Hansen’s first commission was to build the Athens observatory. This was followed by other projects and his architectural skills were much in demand. While in Greece, Hansen spent much of his time studying antiquity, taking part in excavations and reconstruction work on the acropolis and on building the new Athens University. In all, he was to spend a total of eight years in Athens.

Hansen and his impact on Vienna

Having admired Theophil Hansen’s work in Athens, the Greek-Austrian entrepreneur and banker Georg Simon von Sina invited the architect to Vienna to help him introduce elements of Greek style to his designs for various building projects. Hansen moved to Vienna in 1846 where he worked first as an assistant and later in partnership with Ludwig Förster, one of the planners involved in creating the Vienna Ringstraße. He also married Förster’s daughter Sophie. Throughout their collaboration, Hansen was able to put his amassed experience, particularly his knowledge of different architectural styles, to good use and he was to have a significant influence on the cityscape. During the construction of the Vienna Ringstraße, Hansen also received numerous other commissions in which he was able to incorporate elements of the Hellenistic, Byzantine and Italian Renaissance styles. He is credited with creating what became known as the “Viennese” or, as it’s more often known, the “Ringstraße” style of architecture. In his work, Hansen focused not only on the external design of a building but was also greatly interested in its functionality.

Theophil Hansen went on to design Vienna’s Parliament building, the Alte Börse (Old Stock Exchange), the Musikverein concert hall, the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum (Museum of Military History) in the city’s arsenal and several city palaces – among them the Palais Ephrussi and Epstein as well as the Palais Hansen on Schottenring.

Theophil Hansen taught for 15 years at Vienna’s Academy of Fine Arts where he worked with figures such as Otto Wagner. In 1868, two years after being granted Austrian citizenship, Hansen was appointed chief architect. In 1863 Theophil Hansen was awarded honorary citizenship of Vienna.

He died in 1891 and is buried in a memorial grave in Vienna's famous central cemetery - an honour accorded to him as a mark of his impact on the city.

The Parliament Building – Hansen's magnum opus (1871-1883)

Theophil Hansen's most famous work is the Parliament Building on Vienna's historic Ringstraße. Hansen put forward plans for his first project (based on his competition entry of 1865) in May 1871. Almost a decade passed from the start of construction works in 1874 to completion of this landmark structure in 1883. It was the first building in Vienna for which the new metric measurement system was used – until then, all measurements had to be converted from Viennese linear fathoms into their metric equivalents. Hansen took his inspiration from the Classical style of the Greeks – a clear reflection of his many years spent in Athens – to establish a link between his building and the place where democracy had its origins.

Theophil Hansen was not only interested in the outside of the building, he also designed the whole interior, right down to choosing the furnishings. For the Hall of Pillars, 40 metres long and 23 metres wide, Hansen chose different types of marble for the columns, floor and walls. Always meticulous in his attention to even the smallest details, Hansen's aim was to achieve a harmonious blend of the various different elements.

The Musikverein – a prestigious acoustic venue (1863-1870)

Situated on the homonymous Musikvereinsplatz in the centre of Vienna, the Vienna Musikverein concert hall is a building steeped in tradition. The Great Hall, better known as Golden Hall, is familiar to many from the Vienna New Year concerts televised worldwide every year and is one of the world's finest concert venues. The hall's acoustic, generally considered to be outstanding, is still copied even today in the construction of new concert halls all over the world.

In 1863 a musical society, known as the "Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde des österreichischen Kaiserstaates", approached Emperor Franz Joseph to ask for some land on which to erect a new venue. They were rewarded with the gift of a piece of land, measuring approx. 3,015 m², on which to build. It was conceived originally as a venue for staging musical productions as well as a centre for music teaching. Hansen's design for the project was selected in a competition. By December 1864 and after some alterations requested by the Committee, plans for the building were completed. The contract was finalised in 1867 and, with a few minor alterations, the building was completed by 1869. The emperor himself was present on 5 January 1870 as the final stone was laid and the following day a concert was held to celebrate the Musikverein's official inauguration.

The Palais Hansen Kempinski – luxury hotel on Schottenring (1869-1873), re-opened 2013

The Palais Hansen on Vienna's Schottenring was built to designs by Theophil Hansen and Heinrich Förster. In 1873, the palace's eight blocks, with a shared façade, were converted into a hotel as part of the Vienna World Exhibition held that year. Two years later, in 1875, the Palais became the headquarters of the Vienna police department. For over 50 years, from 1941 to 1997, the building was used as administrative offices for the city of Vienna.

Following extensive renovation work, the building re-opened in March 2013 as the "Palais Hansen Kempinski", the name a tribute to Theophil Hansen's importance in the history of Viennese architecture. The conversion of the building complex was carried out by Boris Podrecca (Dieter Hayde).

The Palais Hansen Kempinski occupies a total area of 4,850 m². It has 17 owner-occupied apartments on the fourth floor and top storey, (measuring between 130 and 340 m²), while the lower floors are occupied by 152 hotel rooms and suites, two restaurants, a coffee house and a spa and fitness facility with a swimming pool.

Hansen's artistic oeuvre in Eastern Europe

Theophil Hansen also worked in Central and Eastern Europe, producing some of his lesser known works there, and many buildings in – what is now – the Czech Republic and in the Ukraine bear Hansen's signature. Hansen not only played a major part in the construction of the Vienna Ringstraße, he was also involved in the building of the Ringstraße in Brno, the capital of Moravia. Hansen designed many important buildings which played a key role in the cultural life of the city.

Significant Hansen buildings on the Brno Ringstraße include the double palace (club house and Palais Pražák) with its own terrace; the architect was summoned specially from Vienna to Brno in order to draw up plans for this building. The club house is still in use today as a venue for major orchestral performances, while the Palais Pražák now houses the city's Museum of Applied Arts. Hansen also designed the Palais Klein and the district hospital with its adjoining chapel.

The Invalidenhaus, a former hospital in Lviv, is one of the largest of Hansen's buildings in Central and Eastern Europe and today houses the University of Defence.

Exhibition

With a wealth of explanatory material, sample photos, articles and graphics, the exhibition "Theophil Hansen: Classical Elegance in Everyday Life", part of the "*Architecture in the Ringturm*" series, underlines Theophil Hansen's position as one of Austria's leading figures in architecture. Loans, especially from the renowned Austrian glass company J.L. Lobmeyer for which Hansen designed many objects, give a further insight into his work. A series of photographic essays gives visitors an inside view of Hansen's most important buildings.

The exhibition offers a detailed exposition of the buildings which formed Theophil Hansen's vision for Viennese architecture: the Palais Archduke Wilhelm, Epstein and Ephrussi, the Palais Hansen/Hotel Kempinski, the Alte Börse, the Wiener Musikverein, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Parliament building. It also examines some of Hansen's less well-known works in the former crown lands of the Habsburg monarchy, including five landmark buildings in the Czech city of Brno and the Invalidenhaus in Lviv, then the capital of Galicia (now part of the Ukraine).

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm XXXII, Theophil Hansen – Architekt 1813-1891. Featuring contributions from Otto Kapfinger, Jan Sapák, Johann J. Böker, Diego Caltana and Adolph Stiller, approx. 200 pages; German/English; fully illustrated