

## Design elements in anthological Zagreb buildings

**Cela Matan**

Independent researcher, Ph.D, [matan.cela@gmail.com](mailto:matan.cela@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The design elements which appear in the architecture of ten anthological buildings from the 1930s in Zagreb by prominent protagonists of modern architecture, besides being modern, also have a classical morphology, which marks the continuity of a traditional heritage. Adolf Loos's statement of decoration as unadjusted with the *Zeitgeist* was emphasized in the analyzed buildings by the lack of finances, which made the interior design, in spite of the representative character of the palaces, reduced to a bare minimum. The analysis reveals design elements of interior and furniture design, the architects' creations for the commissioned buildings. There are no examples of *total design* in the *representative palaces*, even though some architects applied this principle in other building typologies. In the interwar period, architects like Stjepan Planić and Juraj Denzler paid special attention to design on the basis of functionalist ideas, while the application of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept can be found in the building Dom obrtnika (Artisans' Building) by architects Aleksandar Freudenreich and Zvonimir Požgaj. Architects designed typographies for building names on the front facades and logotypes. The functionality, simplicity, and purity of lines and forms in their design can be seen on preserved plans, photos, and even in buildings for a small portion of this heritage that is still in use.

**Key words:** anthological palaces from 1930s, Zagreb, interior design, furniture design, modern architecture, modern design, *total design*, *Gesamtkunstwerk*

## Elementi dizajna u antologijskim zagrebačkim zgradama 1930-ih godina

**Sažetak:** Elementi dizajna u arhitekturi desetak analiziranih antologijskih zgrada tridesetih godina u Zagrebu prominentnih protagonista moderne arhitekture pored moderne, imaju i klasičniju morfologiju koja obilježava kontinuitet tradicionalnog nasljedstva. Adolf Loosovo poimanje dekoracije kao neusklađene s *Zeitgeistom* u analiziranim zgradama potencirano je oskudnim sredstvima financiranja radi čega se uređenje interijera unatoč reprezentativnom karakteru palača uglavnom svodi na nužni minimum. Analiza otkriva elemente dizajna unutarnjeg uređenja, namještaja i opreme: kreacije arhitekata za naručene zgrade. U *reprezentativnim palačama* nema primjera *total designa* iako su pojedini arhitekti primjenjivali ovaj koncept u drugim tipologijama zgrada. U međuratnom razdoblju posebnu pažnju dizajnu, a na tragu funkcionalističkih ideja, daju arhitekti Stjepan Planić i Juraj Denzler, dok primjenu koncepta *Gesamtkunstwerka* pronalazimo u zgradi Doma obrtnika arhitekata Aleksandra Freudenreicha i Zvonimira Požgaja. Arhitekti dizajniraju i tipografiju za nazive zgrada na glavnim pročeljima te logotipove i murale. Funkcionalnost, jednostavnost i čistoća linija i formi njihovog dizajna vidljiva je na sačuvanim nacrtima i fotografijama te u samim zgradama gdje je manji dio ove baštine još u uporabi.

**Ključne riječi:** antologijske palače 1930-ih, Zagreb, dizajn interijera, dizajn namještaja, moderna arhitektura, moderni dizajn, *total design*, *Gesamtkunstwerk*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As early as the first half of the 19th century, Karl Friedrich Shinkel and Gottfried Semper considered the revitalization of architecture through interaction with other art forms as a response to the negative aspects of the industrialization of that time. Inspired by composer Richard Wagner's mid-19th-century concept of the "total work of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), according to which different forms of art should create a unique work of art in collaboration with the central figure of the architect, a whole generation of architects designed their buildings: Bruno Taut, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Josef Hoffmann, Josef Maria Olbrich, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Hendrik Berlage, Peter Behrens, Henry van der Velde. Spaces designed in this way leave no room for user intervention, but are completely defined. [1]

According to Walter Gropius' concept of "total architecture" (*total design*), the architect should be able to design everything from the spoon to the city; this concept strongly influenced the Modern Movement in architecture and produced a rich design legacy: from the train designed by Gropius to Rudolf Schindler's airplane and washing machine. Two different responses to industrialization led to two phases of the famous Weimar School of Design. Under Henry van der Velde, the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts resisted industrialization. Later, when it was embraced under Gropius' leadership in 1919, the school was renamed Bauhaus and created a design suitable for industrial mass production. An early application of the school's philosophy can be seen in the interior of Sommerfeld House, a wooden house built in 1920-21 (according to the Sommerfeld patent with modern insulation between industrially cut wooden panels). In design and interior design, art could be related to everyday life, providing an opportunity to architecture to be an integration point of art and thus create cultural life. And the house thus becomes an art form and a formative factor of society. "The over-arching concern of the Modern Movement was to break down barriers between aesthetics, technics and society, in order that an appropriate design of the highest visual and practical quality could be produced for the mass of the population". Since design was bound up with commodity production, which in turn was the driving force behind the creation of wealth for a few, it was reasoned that it had the potential to transform the economic and social conditions of the exploited working class. "Truth as a moral value was transposed into being simultaneously an aesthetic quality." This meant the avoidance of false impressions and additional embellishments. In addition, objects designed in this way were supposed to be available to wider social strata, but mass production only began with the establishment of International Style. [1]

The search for a contemporary expression or the beginning of Modernism in Croatia, according to the historian Aleksandar Laslo, began in 1898 with Ignjat Fischer's Rado palace in Zagreb, and ended in 1928 with the redesign of the five-story residential and business corner building on the main city square according to the design of Peter Behrens. Although it was only a matter of redesigning the facade, the work of the famous architect was an encouragement for wider social acceptance of Modernism. It is interesting that Modernism in our country up until the Second World War stopped at design, without experiments and bolder extents despite the use of reinforced concrete. [2]

One of the examples of *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the Secession epoch in Croatia is the family house of the architect Aladar Baranyai on Tuškanec in Zagreb, built between 1909 and 1910 in the manner of Josef Hoffmann with traditional details of English interiors that were very popular in Viennese circles at the turn of the century. In his works, Baranyai also proved himself as an interior designer with meticulous details of furniture, decorative wall coverings and decorative details of facades. Another masterful example of *Art Nouveau Gesamtkunstwerk* is the building of the Croatian State Archives (formerly the Croatian National and University Library) built from 1911 to 1913 according to the designs of the

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architect Rudolf Lubynski, who also designed all the furniture for the library. The interior of the building is carefully designed down to the tiniest detail: coverings of walls, floors, radiator grilles, doors, windows, furniture, lighting fixtures, stained glass windows, gilded tendrils on the interior walls, etc. The influence of the Viennese scene, especially of the architect Hoffmann, is also evident in the interior designs of the architect Fischer between 1908 and 1912. Important works from that period are the private polyclinic Sanatorij in the center of Zagreb, the Apollo theater (painted walls) and the interior decoration of the masonic lodge, also in the center of Zagreb, with relief decorations on the walls and dark floors. At that time, the architect Viktor Kovačić designed interiors following the example of Adolf Loos, coating the walls of Zagreb apartments (for example, for engineer Milan Čalogović) with wallpaper or wood up to a certain height, using colorful oriental rugs, decorative metal radiator grilles, chandeliers with bamboo and textile shades, combines different styles of furniture, etc. [3]

Modernists believed that the abstraction of design allowed the universality of aesthetics, i.e. International Style. It was considered that design could transform consciousness. According to Adolf Loos, beautifying objects with decoration was inconsistent with the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times); while in 1925, Le Corbusier explained in his book *L'art Decoratif d'aujourd'hui* (Decorative Art Today) that trash is always abundantly decorated, while the luxury object is well-made, with clean forms, and its bareness reveals the quality of its manufacture. [4]

### 1.1 Representative palace

The analysis of ten anthological palaces in the center of Zagreb, prominent protagonists of modern architecture, reveals the design elements of interior decoration, furniture and equipment: creations of architects, craftsmen and artists intended precisely for these buildings. The complex typology of the buildings, predominantly for business purposes, originating at the peak of Zagreb's Modern Movement - the 1930s in Donji Grad, today's center of Zagreb, despite its representative character, has no elements of *total design*, probably due to a modest budget. In the interwar period, architects Stjepan Planić and Juraj Denzler paid special attention to design on the basis of functionalist ideas, while an example of the application of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept can be found in the building Dom obrtnika by architects Aleksandar Freudenreich and Zvonimir Požgaj. The functionality, simplicity, and purity of lines and forms in their design can be seen on preserved plans, photos, and even in buildings for a small portion of this heritage that is still in use. [5]

The aforementioned analysis includes representative offices of foreign companies (Shell, Assicurazioni Generali), public companies (Post Office, City Enterprises, Police Administration, Labor Exchange, Chamber of Labor, Chamber of Crafts) and citizens' associations (Napretkova zadruga, Gospodarska sloga). The buildings were designed and built during the 1930s. The common characteristic of the selected buildings is that they, as representative offices of companies or citizens' associations, were all built to represent their clients in accordance with contemporary architectural trends, which is why they are called "representative palaces" in the research. Since in most cases the buildings served a public interest, the investments were supported by the City of Zagreb by allocating city land. For the analyzed buildings, architects designed individual interior elements, furniture, equipment, murals, typography, logos, etc. (City Enterprises, Chamber of Labor, Labor Exchange, Napretkova zadruga, Gospodarska sloga, Dom obrtnika). [6]

Denzler's "subtle detailing" during the design of the Gradska poduzeća (City Enterprises) building (on the corner of Gundulićeva and Hebrangova streets, built in 1933) is also visible in the interior design of the main hall, furniture, lighting fixtures, etc. (Fig. 1-3). The minimalist design of the main hall with counters reveals the elegance of the strict rhythm of the load-bearing columns of the hall and the functionality of the solution without

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decoration, while the furniture is in the background. The architect also drew a sketch for the mural on the back wall of the hall, which was ultimately not realized, and the typography for the name of the building above the main entrance. The freely designed typography is reminiscent of the (probably at the time) modern Futura, (geometric sans serif typography by graphic designer Paul Renner from 1927). In the representative parts of the building, the walls are covered with marble, artificial stone is used for the staircases, and the floors are usually completed with the covering of modern linoleum, rubber, etc. [7]

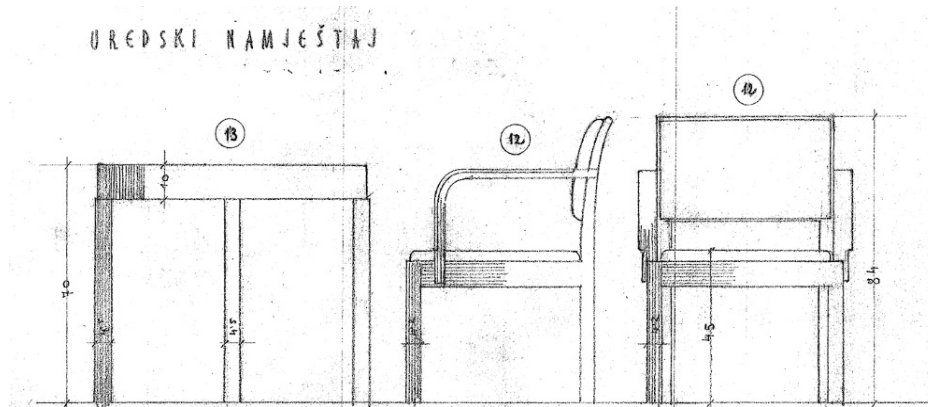


Figure 1. Views of a chair and table for the City Enterprises building.  
 Architect archive, Faculty of Architecture Zagreb



Figure 2. Photo of an aluminum wall lamp in the City Enterprises building (still in use in 2008). Author: Cela Matan



Figure 3. Photo of the wooden counter in the main hall with customer reception windows of the City Enterprises building (still in use in 2008). Author: Cela Matan

The simple forms and clean lines of Denzler's furniture still give a touch of traditionalism with the massive volumes, which can also be observed in Planić's design.

Architect Stjepan Planić designed furniture and lighting fixtures for Napretkova zadruga (Napredak's Cooperative) built in 1936-1937 in Bogovićeveva 1. He was known for the detailed design of the interior of his houses (often for friends) according to the principle of *total design*, which he "controlled" during his visits, so before his visit the owners tried to restore their apartments to the version he designed. In one of his books, Planić writes that it is precisely the architect who can create the best living conditions: "good proportions, shapes



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and sizes of space... good lighting fixtures and furniture...". While the design of the chandelier and kitchen (still in use in 2008) is minimalist and functional (the overhead light of the bathroom becomes part of the kitchen design), armchairs, chairs and tables, in addition to clean lines and forms, also give a touch of traditionalism with the massive volumes (Fig. 4, 5). Planić's special quality lies in the originality of the details, such as the solution of the indented cornice of the building inspired by the logo of Napretkova zadruga, or the facade color reminiscent of the blue vitriol color of Zagorje houses (Fig. 6). [8]



Figure 4. Photo of the chandelier in the staircase of Napretkova zadruga. Author: Cela Matan



Figure 5. Photo of a kitchen for a private apartment made according to the architect's design. Author: Cela Matan



Figure 6. Photo of the indented cornice of Napretkova zadruga. Author: Cela Matan

The Assicurazioni Generali palace was built on the main city square in 1938, and the author of the building was the famous Italian architect Marcello Piacentini. Following the wishes of the insurance company, the architect designed a building that would convey the message of solidity, progress and monumentality. The building is predominantly residential,

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and the apartments were intended for employees. At the time of construction, newspaper articles emphasized the modernity of the installation solutions in the building (central heating, telephone, washing machines and dryers, hot water, etc.). The insurance company carefully selects the location for all its buildings, and the modern installations also play a promotional role. Although the entire building was supposed to be covered with marble, the facade was eventually partially covered with Jablanica granite (like in City Enterprises), and the rest of the building was plastered. The only representative part of the interior preserved in its original form to this day is a small polygonal entrance lobby covered with yellowish marble with a centrally situated dome made of glass bricks, large-format mirrors and reliefs on the walls, as well as modern lighting fixtures of a minimalist design. Architect Piacentini wanted to enrich architecture with art, supported the work of artists and worked on many designs based on the principle of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The only work of art in the Zagreb palace is a large-format relief by an unknown author. [9]

The approach to furniture design by architects Jovan Korka, Đorđe Krekić and Georg Kiverov is just as functionalist as with building design. Radnička komora (Chamber of Labor) was built in 1938 in collaboration with the architect Vladimir Šterk at Trg Kralja Petra Krešimira IV/2, while the nearby Javna burza rada (Public Labor Exchange) by the same trio at Zvonimirova 15 was built almost simultaneously in 1937. For the Chamber of Labor, the architects designed bookshelves and ladders for the library (Fig. 7), and for the Labor Exchange, counters, desks, and filing cabinets in the hall for interviews with job seekers on the first floor. The windows, as part of the interior of this hall, accelerated the complex process of processing the searches of a large number of people (Fig. 8). In the Labor Exchange, cement floors are used in the halls, and granite terrazzo in the busiest rooms. As far as is known, the interior of the building was decorated very modestly; artificial stone is placed on the facade at ground floor level, and the rest is plastered. The main staircase in the Chamber of Labor, as a response to the semicircular corner of the building opposite the main entrance, is semicircular, which gives it an almost unintentional attractiveness and surprises in the strictness of the building solution (Fig. 9). [10]



Figure 7. Photo of bookshelves. Archive of the Chamber of Labor.

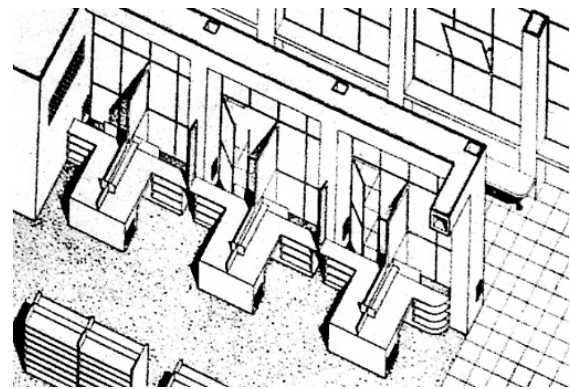


Figure 8. Axonometric view of the counters inside the hall on the first floor of the Labor Exchange. J. Korka: Nova palača Javne burze rada/ Rad ustanova koje su smještene u zgradi (The New Palace of the Public Labor Exchange / The work of the institutions located in the building), Građevinski vjesnik (Construction herald), 1936, pp. 132-135.

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Figure 9. Photo of the semicircular main staircase of the Chamber of Labor.  
 Author: Cela Matan

The building of *Gospodarska sloga* (Economic Unity) by architects Stjepan Gomboš and Mladen Kauzlarić was built in 1939 at Zvonimirova 17. In addition to the design of logos for the clients and the design of the typography of the letters for the name of the building on the facade, also similar to Futura, there are no traces of furniture and equipment design.

An exception among the analyzed buildings is *Matica hrvatskih obrtnika* (Union of Croatian Craftsmen Associations) by architects Aleksandar Freudenreich and Zvonimir Požgaj at Ilica 49, as an example of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the modern epoch that integrates all branches of art. In addition to the architects, creation of this building was also supported by numerous artists and craftsmen, both with financial contributions and by making individual elements of furniture, equipment and decorations. Some authors believe that the building belongs to the *Art Deco* style because of the decorative elements and the promotional character it had. It has a modern design and functional solution (contemporary floor coverings: large terraces on walkable flat roofs, loggia floors are covered with asphalt, and corridors with rubber). A peculiarity is the traditional earthen floors in the basement of the building intended for storing food. As the client, *Obrtnička komora* (Chamber of Crafts) wanted a representative building that would present the important role of craftsmen in the social and economic life of the city. The interiors were designed by architects Ivo Župan and Đuro Kavurić, and the furniture by architects N. Marković and Lovro Bilinić (Fig. 12), while the sketch for one of the mosaics in the building was made by architect Požgaj (Fig. 10). Compared to the other analyzed buildings, the interior decoration is rich and layered. In addition to the stone reliefs on the ground floor and in the gallery, layering can also be read in the skillfully decorated forged fence and lighting fixtures, stained glass windows, mosaics with marble inlays as well as painted murals, marble murals (Fig. 12), decorative plastic on the facade, etc. The interior of the hall was designed by architect Đuro Kavurić, while the stained glass windows were designed by Kamilo Tompa. The decorative reliefs in the corner staircases leading to the gallery from the passage on the ground floor were made in travertine in 1938 according to the designs of the sculptors Hinko Juhn and Joza Turkalj. A play of light and shadow is created by a simple contrast of different treatments of the stone surface, smooth and polished, outlining the contours of the surfaces with the contrast (Fig. 11). The decorative hand-made forged fence with spiral partitions in the interior of the passage is the work of a craftsman. The decorative plastic on the fences of the principal facade shows various craft activities. Sculptor Emil Bohutinski produced terracotta elements on the first floor, Blanka Dužinec produced ceramic elements on the second, while the copper panels on the third floor were made according to a sketch by the artist Ernest



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Tomašević (Fig. 13). This building is a museum of Zagreb craftsmen who, with their skills, helped to overcome technological underdevelopment in the period between the two wars on the way to the modernization of architecture. [11]

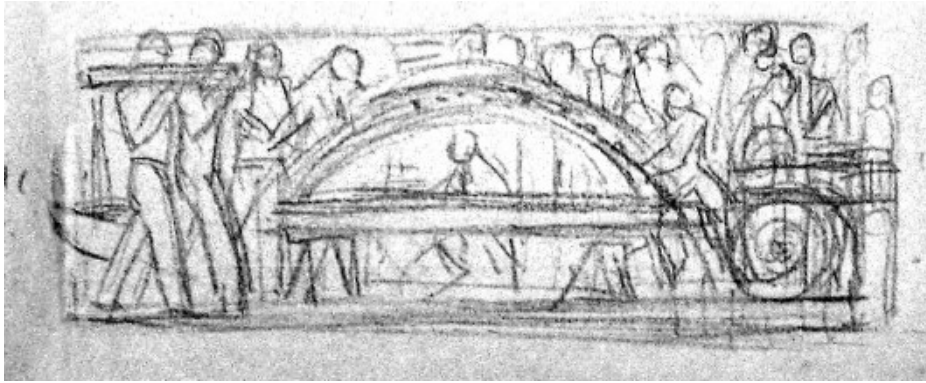


Figure 10. Sketch for one of the mosaics in the Union of Croatian Craftsmen Associations by the architect Požgaj. Archives of the Union of Croatian Craftsmen Associations



Figure 11. Photo of the decorative relief on the corner staircase leading to the gallery from the passage on the ground floor of the Union of Croatian Craftsmen Associations. Author: Cela Matan



Figure 12. Photo of the marble mural on the staircase of the street part of the building. Author: Cela Matan



Figure 13. Photo of the main facade of Union of Croatian Craftsmen Associations with fences decorated with panels. Author: Cela Matan



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### 2. CONCLUSION

The design elements which appear in the architecture of ten anthological buildings from the 1930s in Zagreb, besides being modern, also have a classical morphology, which marks the continuity of a traditional heritage. Adolf Loos's statement of decoration as unadjusted with the *Zeitgeist* was emphasized in the analyzed buildings by the lack of finances, which made the interior design, in spite of the representative character of the palaces, reduced to a bare minimum. The analysis reveals design elements of interior and furniture design, the architects' creations for the commissioned buildings. There are no examples of total design in the representative palaces, even though some architects applied this principle in other building typologies. In the interwar period, architects like Stjepan Planić and Juraj Denzler paid special attention to design on the basis of functionalist ideas, while the application of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept can be found in the building Dom obrtnika (Artisans' Building) by architects Aleksandar Freudenreich and Zvonimir Požgaj. Architects designed typographies for building names on the front facades and logotypes. The functionality, simplicity, and purity of lines and forms in their design can be seen on preserved plans, photos, and even in buildings for a small portion of this heritage that is still in use. The interior walls of the public parts of buildings are sometimes covered with travertine, marble, and are decorated with reliefs and murals. Modern materials are also used for finishing the floors in the buildings, so asphalt is used on roof terraces, and rubber, linoleum and cement floors are used in the interiors. These palaces, monuments of modern architecture, in some cases are also museums of artistic and craft work, which should be emphasized with replicas of the design of furniture and equipment that were intended for them.

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