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FIG. 1 ADOLF LOOS, PHOTO: VIKTOR KOVAČIĆ,  
VIENNA, 1905 (UPPER LEFT);  
HUGO EHRLICH (UPPER RIGHT);  
VILLA KARMA, PHOTO: MARTIN GERLACH JUN.,  
1930 (DOWN).



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# HUGO EHRlich AND VILLA KARMA

ADOLF LOOS  
HUGO EHRlich  
VILLA KARMA

Villa Karma's authorship is as a rule ascribed to Adolf Loos. According to most accounts, the villa was formed by taking an existing structure and extending it upwards and sideways, in the period between 1903 and 1906. However, as a matter of fact, at that time the construction of the new parts and the transformation of the existing building had only just begun. The period in which the Zagreb architect Hugo Ehrlich was involved in the design and building of Karma stretched from 1908 to 1912; it was then that the villa took on its final external appearance. At the same time the grounds were landscaped, and the interior spaces were defined according to Ehrlich's designs. The hall and the

library are an exception, for Ehrlich produced them in line with Loos's approach and in part with materials already sourced. An examination of the documentation kept in three countries has shown that the claim that Ehrlich was just the contractor for the building of designs previously defined by Loos is untenable. The original style can be correlated with a series of formal motifs in the works of Hugo Ehrlich or Viktor Kovacic at the time they were working together, which was contemporaneous with the period in which Karma was undergoing its finalisation. The most telling confirmation of Ehrlich's work consists of several hundred drawings from Ehrlich's personal papers.

## INTRODUCTION

*Beautiful buildings are preserved, renovated and revitalised... Such buildings are regarded as part of the architectural history and the richness of the city; they are protected and defended against speculation. Beauty gives a building important, big, reliable value.*

(Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani in: Magnago Lampugnani, 2016: 74)

It is not a matter of indifference whether some architectural work is beautiful or not, notwithstanding all the complexity of the use and definition of the concept of architectural beauty. Works that are beautiful *enjoy a sort of immunity in the city and in history* (Magnago Lampugnani, 2016: 74). And it is not all the same who the architect is, for the work is indivisible from the author. Although all architects and architectural theorists would probably agree that authorship should not *per se* affect the perception of the beauty or architectural quality of some building, it will without doubt to a great extent influence its value and how much it is featured in critical essays and in publications in general. Authorship and authenticity are fundamental to the determination of the value of an artwork. Without getting into the issue of whether architecture is an art, we shall agree that the value of some building will depend to a great extent on the reputation and prestige of the architect. Villa Karma is a creation that belongs in the elite shortlist of the best-known pieces of architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since it is one of the key structures of its time, the issue of authorship is sensitive indeed, for it contributes to the value of the work and, conversely, the value of the work contributes to the valorisation of the architect's oeuvre.

The villa is sited in Clarens, now a district of the municipality of Montreux on Lake Gene-

va. It is primarily and almost exclusively associated with Adolf Loos<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1). It was his first real building<sup>2</sup>, which was preceded by work only on the execution of interiors. In historical surveys it is mostly dated to the years 1903 to 1906, although the construction was then not even nearly finished. This is also to ignore completely the importance of the period in which Hugo Ehrlich<sup>3</sup> was at work (Fig. 1), from 1908 to 1912. If Ehrlich is mentioned in the context of the building of the villa, his role is interpreted as a mere contractor for the works according to designs that Loos had already completed. To answer the question what was done according to the ideas and drawings of Loos and what according to those of Ehrlich, one needs to consult the archival records located in Switzerland, Austria and Croatia.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the available documentation that unequivocally proves the extent of Hugo Ehrlich's share in the authorship of Villa Karma and consequently to confirm his own description of the contribution. This paper establishes the impact of his project on the final design of the villa and places Ehrlich's contribution in the context of his architectural projects created during the same period of time.

## LOOS AND EHRLICH

Loos, one of the best-known architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, needs no introduction, for he is omnipresent in the writings of the discipline, not only because of his architectural produc-

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Loos (1870-1933)

<sup>2</sup> In the 1910 text *Mein erstes Haus*, Loos writes about his first building, meaning the Goldman and Salatsch building on Michaelerplatz known as the Looshaus. But at the beginning of this piece of writing he mentions his previous work that he calls the porter's lodge – *portierhäuschen* – thinking of Karma. (Loos, 1910 in: Loos, 1962: 293).

<sup>3</sup> Hugo Ehrlich (1879-1936) graduated from the Technical High School in Vienna as a student of Karl König. He started his architectural practice in the studio of Humbert Walcher. In 1909 he went back to Zagreb where he worked and lived for the rest of his life.

<sup>4</sup> Loos and Ehrlich took part separately in the invitational international design competition for the Esplanade Hotel. Together with Kovacic they agreed to cooperate in the event that any of them were entrusted with the construction (Bjazić Klarin, 2020: 137).

<sup>5</sup> Viktor Kovacic (1874-1924) was one of the most important Croatian architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and has been dubbed the father of Croatian modern architecture. He trained in Vienna at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he was a student of Otto Wagner; he went back to Zagreb in 1899. Often mentioned is his friendship with Loos.

<sup>6</sup> *They studied the commissions together, and one of the partners, depending on the circumstances and in agreement with the other, would take on the elaboration of details, supervising the job and finishing each individual order.* (Galović, 2015: 60)

tions but, even more, perhaps, because of his polemical texts. His views and stances, positively or negatively taken on board, did not go unnoticed even in the time of their origin, and later on attracted a great amount of interest from critics and theorists of architecture. They have been analysed down to the smallest detail countless times. Loos endeavoured to get through to the general public, and did manage to create the kind of buzz that was very important for his activity. He wrote productively on a wide range of topics.

When it came to his designs, Loos was not dogmatic. On one level he is a modernist, on another he is recognized as a traditionalist with principles that did not produce a unified language (Andrews, 2010: 440). He was primarily an architect of the intimate, smaller scale with some 56 apartment interiors executed during his lifetime. Except apartment interiors, dominant among his productions are shops and cafes interiors as well as those of dwelling places, on the whole villas, in which he affirmed the *Raumplan* principle. The Michaelerplatz building is the only large-scale built work in his oeuvre, although he did produce a number of designs for buildings with public facilities, among others a competition design for the Esplanade Hotel<sup>4</sup> in Zagreb in 1922.

As distinct from Loos, who in the broadest of senses was a public personality, Ehrlich had a restrained and introverted nature and as a rule did not make his views and opinions public. (Domljan, 1979: 226). While both talented and broadly educated, he was practical and realis-

tic. The oeuvre of Hugo Ehrlich, although extensive, considerable and properly evaluated in the context of Croatian architecture, is neither known to the global public nor mentioned in international architectural surveys. His operations were on different scales and had different purposes: interiors, town plans and buildings with public purposes. Particular importance attaches to the period in which he worked together with Viktor Kovačić<sup>5</sup>, which began in February 1910. This period gave rise to designs and built works giving evidence of the style of Ehrlich either on his own or in company with Kovačić<sup>6</sup> in the context of the completion of Karma. The business partnership of Ehrlich and Kovačić was unofficially terminated when Ehrlich went off for military service in 1914, but formally after the war. He put forward his own architectural and planning designs for the new complex of the Technical Faculty, with its very contemporary idiom, and blamed local conditions for his deferral of the implementation of modernist principles.<sup>7</sup> Ehrlich was appointed professor at the Technical Faculty in Zagreb in 1925.

During the 1920s, almost all the most talented architects of the younger generation got together in Ehrlich's independent studio.<sup>8</sup> With their own productions, in the 1930s, they were fully to affirm modern architecture in Croatia.<sup>9</sup>

It is hard to cast any doubt on Adolf Loos's share of the authorship precisely because of his international eminence.<sup>10</sup> A more considerable role of an unknown architect could seemingly diminish the potential value of the structure. Thanks to the professional authority of a number of writers who have not devoted sufficient attention to the issue of the authorship of Villa Karma, but whose claims have been accepted unconditionally, the role of Hugo Ehrlich has been neglected. Compounding this, biographers and researchers will frequently identify, consciously or unconsciously, with an author by protecting his interests. And finally, it is not unimportant that the documentation from the Hugo Ehrlich Papers is on the whole not known to international professional circles.<sup>11</sup> Most of this documentation has been deposited in the Fine Arts Archives of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, some of it in the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts Architecture Museum. It was donated by Hugo Ehrlich's niece, Marta Ehrlich Tompa. The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts Fine Arts Archives have 420 inventory sheets or drawings for the project *completion of the remodelling and extension of the Villa Karma* (Martincić, 2007: 35).

Loos is well known to have been an architect who was not fond of drawing.<sup>12</sup> He held that

<sup>7</sup> At the time he wrote the letter to Henri-Robert Von der Mühl, Ehrlich was clearly already engaged in designing the new complex of buildings of the Technical Faculty (Ehrlich, April 16, 1928, in: Von der Mühl, 1928), for which in the years to come he made two versions, neither of which, unfortunately, was built.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Albini, Branko Bon, Juraj Denzler, Drago Galic, Mladen Kauzlaric, Veljko Kauzlaric, Juraj Meniga, Josip Picman, Vladimir Potočnjak.

<sup>9</sup> Aleksander Laslo thoroughly researched the influence of Loos on Croatian architects e.g. Zlatko Neumann, Bela Auer, Ernest Weissmann, Bogdan Teodorovic and Vladimir Potočnjak (Laslo, 1984: 120-133; Laslo, 1987: 97-112; Laslo, 1991: 52-80).

<sup>10</sup> It is not unusual for the most famous member of the design team to be mentioned in architectural reviews, while the others are left out. In this case, it is not about teamwork, but about the successive and independent engagement of two authors on the same building design.

<sup>11</sup> Additional Ehrlich documentation related to the building of Karma was mentioned as part of the Vernikos-Eugenides Fonds in Montreux (Gubler, 1985: 302). About 180 drawings comprised part of the Tihomil Stahuljak bequest owned by the collector Josip Jura Gašparac. The ledgers of the Ehrlich and Kovačić office, kept from 1910 to 1918 can also be used to track the activities related to the Karma commission.

what an architect drew was an attempt to be understood by the master builder who was carrying out the works (Loos, 1924, in: Loos, 1962: 392). He always paid attention to the materials available<sup>13</sup> (Ehrlich, 1933: 174-175). The work of Loos on Karma is notable for the lack of graphic documentation, while in the Hugo Ehrlich Papers there are several hundred drawings. Ehrlich and Kovačić had remarkable visual sensibilities and their designs are accompanied by numerous perspective drawings.

Both Adolf Loos and Hugo Ehrlich considered Villa Karma to be their work. At the end of the 1920s they wanted to agree on photographing the built situation with the then owner, Regier, which he wanted to facilitate for both architects (Von der Mühl, April 17, 1928).

### VILLA KARMA: THE CLIENT AND THE ARCHITECTS

The path from idea and architectural design to a completely constructed building is sometimes intricate, and is hardly ever simple. Villa Karma is one of the many-layered and intriguing examples that can illustrate this vividly.

It is not very unusual for a client to engage several architects on the same project. Dissatisfied with collaboration with the first one, the client will seek a second or even a third. A family house is an issue to which the client will as a rule dedicate themselves in the expectation of the materialisation of their own vision of ideal living. But when there is once a clear break between architect and client, both of them turn in different directions, the designer to a new assignment and the client to a different architect, hoping for a better outcome of the new collaborative venture. Irrespective of the documentation that gives the lie to this possibility, any assumption that after the break with the client, Theodor Beer, Loos might have gone on with his work “in the shadow”, advising Ehrlich as he designed, is completely unrealistic.

The house of Dr Theodor Beer was supposed to be harmonised with his sensibility and with the physical and psychic needs of the doctor and of his wife Laura. Apart from that, it inevitably reflected his social and material standing. Theodor Beer<sup>14</sup> was not a client that architects might wish for, and plenty is known about his personality. Having an authoritative bent and a hasty temper, he supervised every detail, at the same time putting forward his critical remarks. It was hard to satisfy him and he often required modifications and the production of new, variant approaches. He gave detailed instructions about the design of the individ-

ual rooms and the use of materials and colours; he defined the brief down to the slightest details, leaving not very much scope for the, so-called, creative freedom of the actual architect (Behalova, 1974: 32-39). He had turned his attention to Loos when he already had a design of the local architect Henri Lavanchy and after he had already contracted for the making of the interior appointments with the firm of F.O. Schmidt of Vienna, an order that he later cancelled. Right at the beginning of their collaboration, Beer mentioned that only time would tell whether Loos's work was going to satisfy him (Behalova, 1974: 32-39), and his personal problems to a major extent affected the development of the project and the unfolding of the works. According to Loos, they had not been personally acquainted before the commission for Karma (Schwartz, 2012: 454), although they moved in the same Viennese intellectual circles, proponents of the ideas of Viennese Modernism, and cultivated close relations with influential contemporaries like Ernst Mach, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler, Karl Kraus, Peter Altenberg, Arnold Schönberg and Bertha Eckstein-Diener.

Ehrlich was taken on as architect after the better-known Maks Fabiani<sup>15</sup>, who had already made his name. Clearly, he did not want to, or simply could not, accommodate himself to the demanding client. In the given circumstances, Ehrlich's youth plus his enthusiasm and drive at the beginnings of his career were an advantage. The number of his different approaches and detailed drawings show the necessary patience and flexibility. It is significant that it is his unbuilt designs that

<sup>12</sup> *I have no need whatsoever to draw my designs. Good architecture, how something is to be built can be written. One can write the Parthenon.* (Adolf Loos, 1924 in: Risselada and Colomina, 1993: 175)

<sup>13</sup> While building the Goldman and Salatsch edifice on the Michaelerplatz, Loos asked the authorities not to insist on detailed drawings, for he still did not know what material was going to be available to him and he deferred the solution of the cladding of the façade until a given and available stone block should be found (Schwartz, 2011: 447).

<sup>14</sup> Theodor Beer (1866 – September 27, 1919) was a physiologist and the founder of behaviourist psychology with a wide range of other interests among which one might list photography, philosophy, Buddhism and sport. His liking for Buddhism must have contributed to the selection of the name Karma and the yin-yang symbol that is placed on both leaves of the main entry door. In 1903 he became a professor at Vienna University. But by 1904 his reputation as a scientist and his academic career had already been compromised by criminal charges and a later trial. On advice of counsel, he left for England, and then for America, where he stayed for more than a year. At the end of the trial he managed to avoid a prison sentence by paying a fine. Neither an appeal nor a pardon at the request of Franz Joseph I were of avail. Beer withdrew to Switzer-

comprise the most attractive part of his archive related to Karma (Ehrlich January 20, 1928 in: Von der Mühl, 1928).

Theodor Beer during the whole course of the construction supervised the design approaches and influenced designer decisions. His sketch for an entry portico with four Doric columns was found in one of the letters to Loos (Rukschcio and Schachel, 1982: 93). The sketch does not suit the built state, but Ehrlich solution for the entry portico nevertheless has four Doric columns.

### VILLA KARMA 1903-1906

The works on the villa will be presented in the time frames of two periods, the first marked by the work by Henri Lavanchy and Adolf Loos (1903-1906), and the second, related to the involvement of Hugo Ehrlich (1908-1912). Spatial interventions carried out after the period of Hugo Ehrlich's work refer primarily to the furnishing of the rooms on the second floor and are not the subject of this article.

The nucleus of Villa Karma consisted of a building originating in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and renovated a century later. The building lay on the site of the demolished complex of a former Benedictine monastery that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was meant for the care of lepers, hence the placename *à la Maladaire* (Gubler, 1985: 215). From the eastern, approach side, the building had a ground and a first floor with a mansard roof, but from the western, lake-facing side it had two stories and a mansard, related to the elevation differences on the site. The simply formed building<sup>16</sup> with its rectangular ground plan, dimensions about

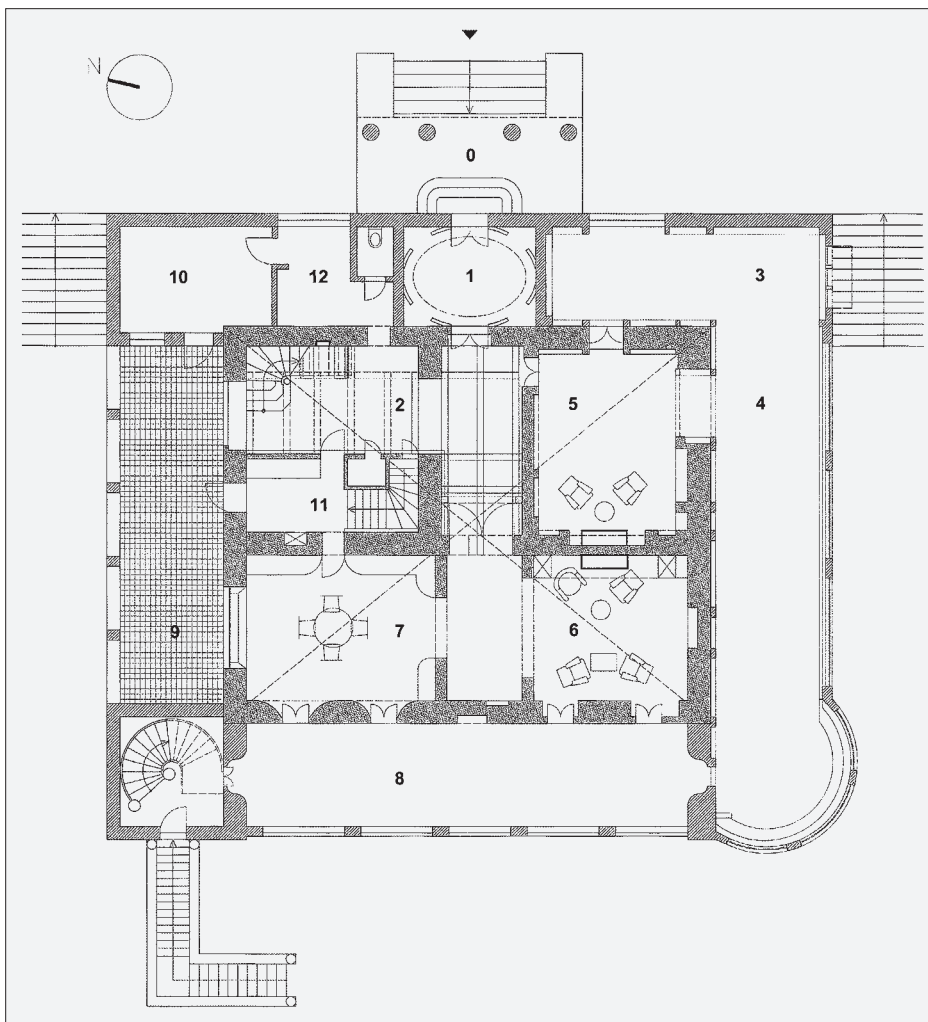


FIG. 2 VILLA KARMA, FLOOR PLAN OF THE ENTRANCE FLOOR, AUTHOR'S DRAWING. 0 ENTRANCE PORCH, 1 VESTIBULE, 2 HALL 3 STUDY, 4 LIBRARY, 5 GENTLEMEN'S ROOM, 6 SMOKING ROOM, 7 DINING ROOM, 8 VERANDA, 9 TERRACE, 10 SERVANT'S QUARTERS, 11 STAIR TO KITCHEN IN BASEMENT 12 CLOAKROOM.

land and in 1916 was called up. He committed suicide in Lucerne in 1919 after going bankrupt, on the very same day that Karma was auctioned off. (Schwartz, 2012: 437-442; Rukschcio, 1973: 33)

<sup>15</sup> Maks Fabiani (1865-1962) graduated at the Technical High School in Vienna, where for a short time he worked on Otto Wagner's designs. He was an assistant to Karl König at the Technical High School, and he must then have met Hugo Ehrlich. In the Maks Fabiani Institute Archives, Stanjel, Slovenia, there are no records related to Villa Karma. It is interesting that in 1899, Fabiani, who was already established, provided the then little-known Loos with a commission for the interior design of the Café Museum in Vienna (Rukschcio, 1973: 35).

<sup>16</sup> The drawings and perspective sketch of the existing building are in the Ehrlich Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Lavanchy (1836-1914) was born in Vevey. He did most of his work in his native city and in the surrounding towns of the Vaud canton. He studied architecture in Zurich at the recently founded Polytechnic. On graduating, he spent a year more studying in Munich at the Academy of Fine Arts, and then in 1860 returned to Vevey. He ran a firm *Lavanchy & Fils* whose stamps can be seen on the drawings made while Loos was working on the project. (Fl., 1914: 207-208)

11.8x14.5 meters with a hipped roof was located on a plot with a direct lake frontage. The position and the views onto the surrounding countryside were exceptionally picturesque. The internal space of the main floor consisted of four unequal rectangular rooms and a central communication. The division of space was followed by two load-bearing walls, longitudinal and transversal. In the later intervention, the internal loadbearing walls were retained, without a doubt because of the structural logic.

Theodor Beer called the building Villa Karma, and had already, in 1903, commissioned designs for the transformation of the original building from the local architect Henri Lavanchy.<sup>17</sup> The volume handling of the extension can be ascribed to the new owner. Theodor Beer did not only describe in detail the functions and dimensions of the space but also expressed his view of the volume – the

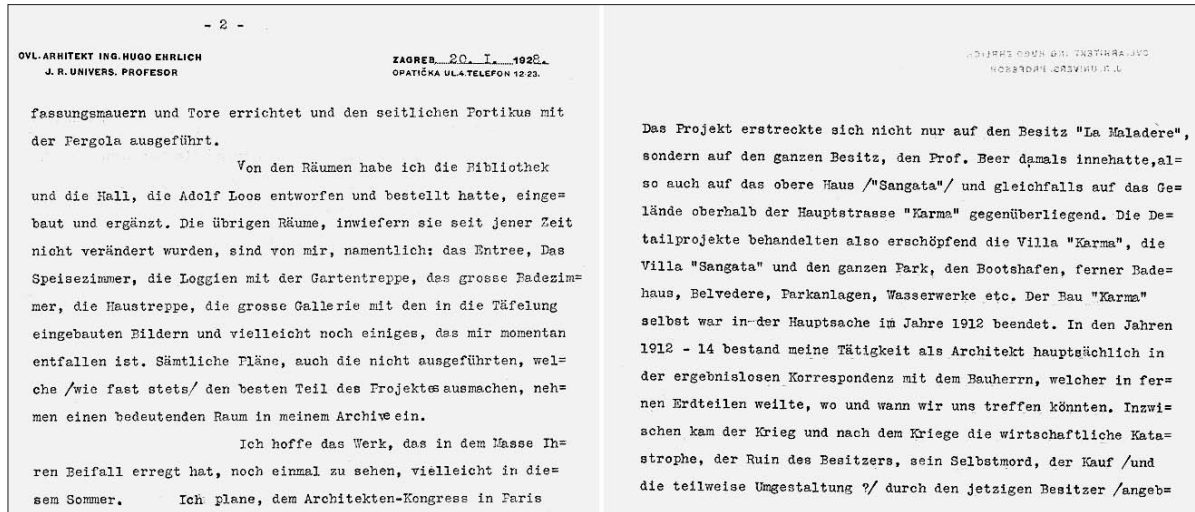


FIG. 3 LETTER FROM HUGO EHRLICH TO HENRI-ROBERT VON DER MÜHLL, JANUARY 20, 1928.

one-floor upward extension and the expansion by which new development surrounded the existing structure. Basically, he defined the principle of wrapping the existing structure around with a new volume and the building on of new storey with a flat roof. He had very precise demands concerning function, among which there was a dome or moveable roof to be used as an observatory, a laboratory and a gymnasium, not to be located in the basement but conceived as a bright and airy space linked with the master bathroom.

Henri Lavanchy was a pupil of Gottfried Semper (Fl., 1914: 207-208) and produced the first design that envisaged the extension and enlargement of the house with galleries, at first on two sides, and later on three, with a width of about three and a half meters. The apertures that in the new approach were caught inside the building were mostly formed in such a way as to be used as connections between rooms. The three facades of the existing building were incorporated into the interior of what was to become the villa.

The shape of the principal façade onto the lake had a historicist character, with a pronounced plastic richness used to articulate the vertical and horizontal elements of the façade. In a classical spirit, it was divided into three horizontal zones. Such a concept was radically changed as soon as Loos became involved in the project.

The alteration to and simplification of the façade clearly came in after February 10, 1904, when Beer and Loos had signed a contract for the *Innendekoration* and for minor interventions outside the actual house (Behalova, 1970: 12). During the Loos period, Lavanchy continued making construction drawings. Although Loos was originally put in charge of the interior design (*Inneneinrichtung*), he did

design variants of the facades, and probably to some small extent intervened in the floor plans that Lavanchy had set up in association with Beer. So, Lavanchy was basically charged with the preparation and elaboration of the construction drawings<sup>18</sup> while Loos was primarily involved with interior design. Furthermore, he occasionally made some preliminary sketches for Lavanchy by way of guidelines or subsequently made some corrections of Lavanchy's construction drawings. In general, Loos's role was of an aesthetic character. Thanks to the correspondence between Beer and Loos that can still be consulted, it is possible to track Loos's tasks as architectural designer. A clearer image of the dynamics of the works is provided by the payments of Loos's fees, although specific drawings are on the whole not in existence (Behalova, 1974: 56-89). Villa Karma does not have the characteristic Loosian *Raumplan* elements. The client required a single floor level without any delevelling.

<sup>18</sup> Since Loos never obtained his professional qualifications, the documentation for permits had to be signed and prepared by other, authorised, architects. Ernst Epstein, for example, signed the plans for the Michaelerplatz building.

<sup>19</sup> The trial was held on October 25 and 26, 1905, but the charges had by early 1904 already brought about a halt in the works and the absence of the client. Loos testified on behalf of Beer and at his request attempted to mould public opinion by engaging his friends. Later it turned out that he had taken part in the concealment of evidence and that he had borne false witness (Schwartz, 2012: 440).

<sup>20</sup> Laura Beer (1883-1906) took her own life on March 23, 1906, in Clarens.

<sup>21</sup> Henri-Robert Von der Mühll (1898-1980), a champion of the international avant-garde, was the co-founder of *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (CIAM) and thanks to him Ehrlich was invited to the first conference in 1928 in La Sarraz Palace. In letters sent to Von der Mühll he confirmed his coming with enthusiasm; in the end, however, he did not take part in this meeting of 28 European architects.



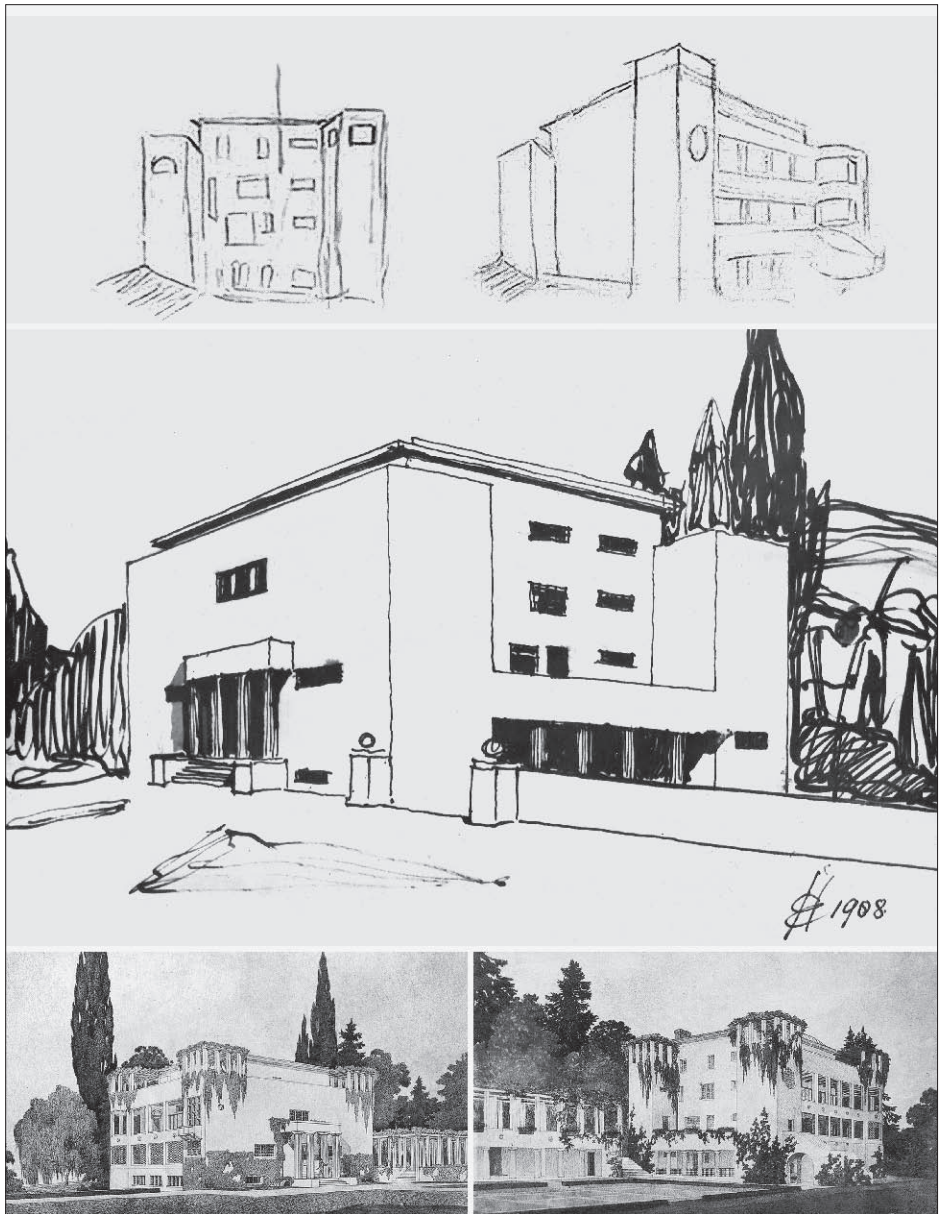
Loos's work on the villa was interrupted at the very outset because of the indictment and trial<sup>19</sup> of Theodor Beer. Not quite a month after the signing of the contract, on March 6, 1904, Laura Beer wrote to Loos that the work on Karma had to be stopped, and on May 6, 1904 declared that Karma would perhaps not be able to be finished (Laura Beer, 1904 in: Schwartz, 2012: 453). In the same light, in July of the same year, Beer wrote to Loos from San Francisco that the building should be built with the cheapest materials for it to be able to be used, let or sold (Behalova, 1974: 39; Rukschcio, 1973: 34). Who would live in it Beer did not know any more; he simply emphasised the need to give up on anything that was not necessary for the basic function. He was thinking of wood panelling, marble, brass, built-in furniture, and multiple times stressed the need for simplification to the nth degree in order to achieve a usable, hygienic and practical space, furnished with the existing furniture. At the end he wrote that his dogs were to be sold, because they ate too much. (Behalova, 1974: 41)

On a reduced scale the work was taken up again in June 1905. At the end of the year Beer was dissatisfied with Loos's work and required greater assiduity from him in the interest of the architect's own good name (Behalova, 1974: 43). For the sake of furnishing Karma, Loos left for London in early 1906, but the situation was strained. Beer forbade him any purchases. After the death of Laura Beer<sup>20</sup> in March 1906 there was another hold up and the client and architect finally parted ways; their collaboration had lasted a bit more than two years with many interruptions. Beer and Lavanchy wanted the drawings Loos had had from them back so as to be able to carry on the renovation without him.

At the moment of the break with Loos, the main body of the building was defined in outline and in part built, but not completed, while parts of the interior were designed, but not built. The work was extremely discontinuous and design solutions were created partially and with numerous variant solutions according to the requests of the client. From the available sources it can be inferred that at the beginning of 1909 Karma was still uninhabited (Behalova, 1974: 47).

### VILLA KARMA 1908-1912

Ehrlich took over Karma as an abandoned and dilapidated building site in 1908, probably at the recommendation of Humbert Walcher, in whose studio he had started his professional career (Domljan, 1979: 29). In the same year, he was introduced to Loos by Viktor Kovacic (Ehrlich, 1933: 174). The most dy-



namic tempo period of his work came between 1909 and 1912. Still in existence are hundreds of drawings, documents of the time in which Ehrlich produced an *extremely large number of detailed designs* (Ehrlich January 20, 1928, in: Von der Mühl, 1928). Swiss architect Henri-Robert Von der Mühl<sup>21</sup> tried to specify the authorship of Karma. For help, he turned to his older colleague Alphonse Laverrière, who named Josef Hoffmann from Vienna or Hugo Ehrlich from Zagreb as possible authors (Laverrière December 30, 1927, in: Von der Mühl, 1927). Thanks to this information, Von der Mühl contacted both of them and the role of Hugo Ehrlich has been to a great extent explicated. At last he had the

FIG. 4 ADOLF LOOS, VILLA KARMA, SKETCHES, AROUND 1904 (UP); HUGO EHRLICH: VILLA KARMA, DRAWING, 1908 (MIDDLE); HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, SOUTHEAST VIEW (DOWN LEFT) AND NORTHWEST VIEW (DOWN RIGHT), DRAWINGS, 1908.

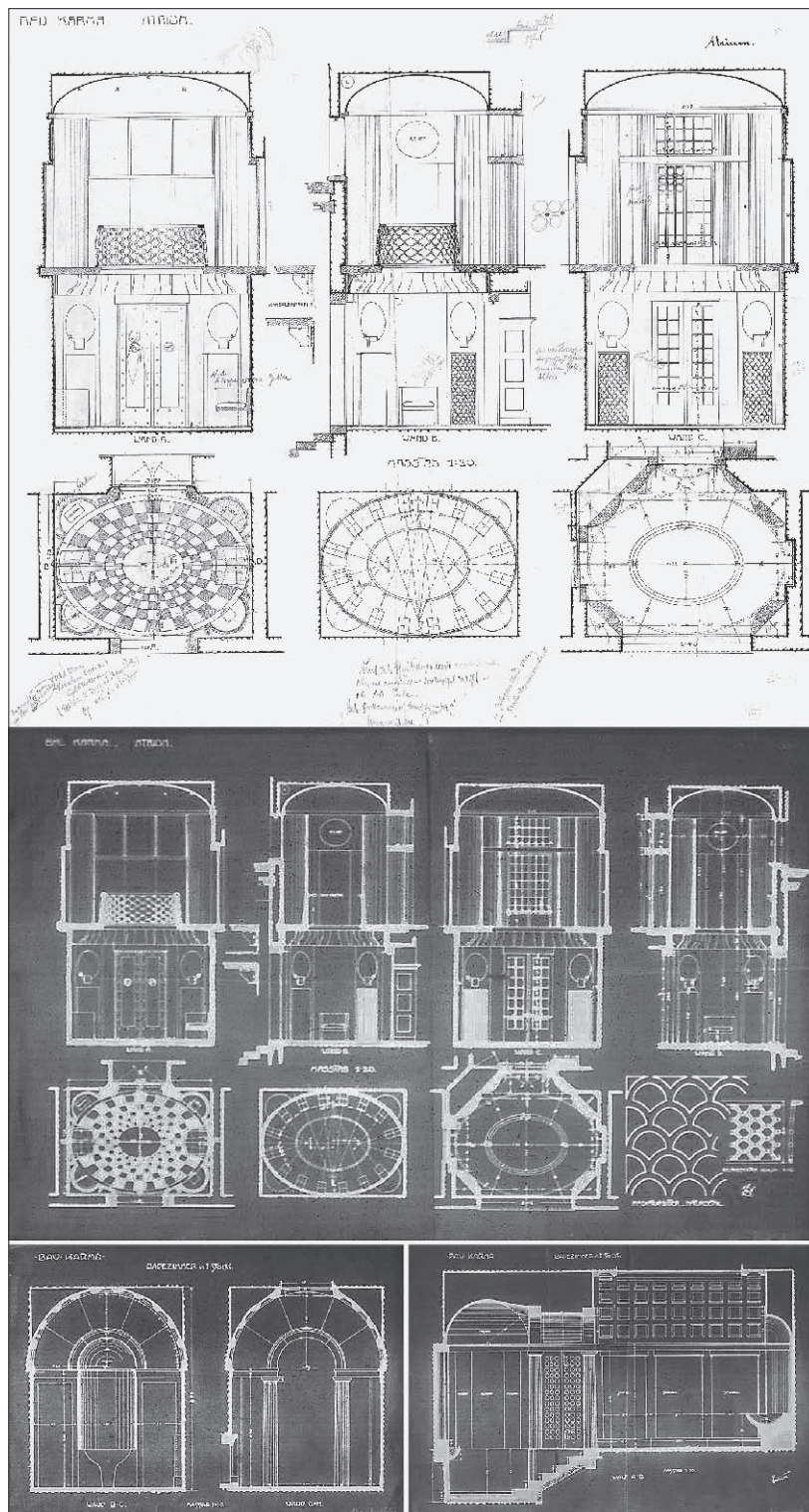


FIG. 5 HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, VESTIBULE (Atrium), DRAWING (UP) AND HELIOGRAPHIC COPY WITH EHRLICH'S INITIALS (MIDDLE), AROUND 1909; HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, MASTER BATHROOM, DRAWING WITH EHRLICH'S SIGNATURE, AROUND 1909 (DOWN).

The gallery railing and the metal niche guards were not done according to this variant approach. It can also be seen that the drawing does not include a central lightwell in the form of a pyramidal glazed volume.

chance to describe his work and come out of the shadow of Adolf Loos (Fig. 3). Ehrlich sent an identical letter with a detailed explanation of his work to Von der Mühl and to Loos at the same time, which tells that he wrote what he considered to be the truth.

In his monograph published in Vienna in 1932 we find: *Ehrlich built the exterior of the building using Loos's upward and lateral extensions in terms of his own drawings and his own supervision. Also coming from Ehrlich was the landscaping of the grounds, the boundary walls and the preponderant part of the interior decoration.* But later this first-hand testimony was forgotten. The topic of the authorship of the second phase of the construction of Karma was affirmed by Jacques Gubler (Gubler and Barbey, 1969: 215-216; Gubler, 1985: 214-229) and Vera Behalova (Behalova, 1974). It was Behalova who studied the documentation related to the period of the work of Hugo Ehrlich in most detail. This documentation takes up the major part of the graphic appendices of her dissertation. Žarko Domljan in his monograph also cited several guidelines, referring to possible sources (Domljan, 1979).

What did Ehrlich exactly do regarding the exterior of the building? In his own words he *constructed a flat roof, partly walled up Loos's terraces, partly glazed and fitted it with bars, fixed the pergolas, closed the window openings, installed sanitary facilities, designed the garden, built the porticoes and façades, put up the enclosing walls and gates and erected the side portico with a pergola* (Ehrlich, January 20, 1928, in: Von der Mühl, 1928).

Loos's radical formal austerity and striving for reduction were the occasion for the halting of the works, with the explanation that this was *an attempt at the assassination of the beauty of Geneva's lake* (Loos, 1910 in: Loos, 1962: 293-294). With his intervention, Ehrlich toned down this impression by bringing in the motifs of a pergola, greenery, arches, porticoes and sculptural elements – mascarons used as wa-

**22** The hall is the space entered from the oval vestibule. In Ehrlich's drawings the vestibule is called the atrium. One of Loos's sketches for the hall is kept in the Viktor Kovacic Papers in the plan collection of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia.

**23** At the time of the beginning of the works on Karma, Wilhelm Beer (1832-1905), Theodor's father, was owner of Sangata and the land on which it was built.

**24** The project encompassed the „La Maladere” estate as well as the entire estate Prof. Beer was working on, that is, also the upper house („Sangata”) and the building plot beyond the main road opposite „Karma”. The detailed designs provided in-depth data on the villa „Karma” and the villa „Sangata”, the entire park, the boathouse, bathhouse, Belvedere, parks, waterworks etc. (Ehrlich, January 20, 1928, in: Von der Mühl, 1928).

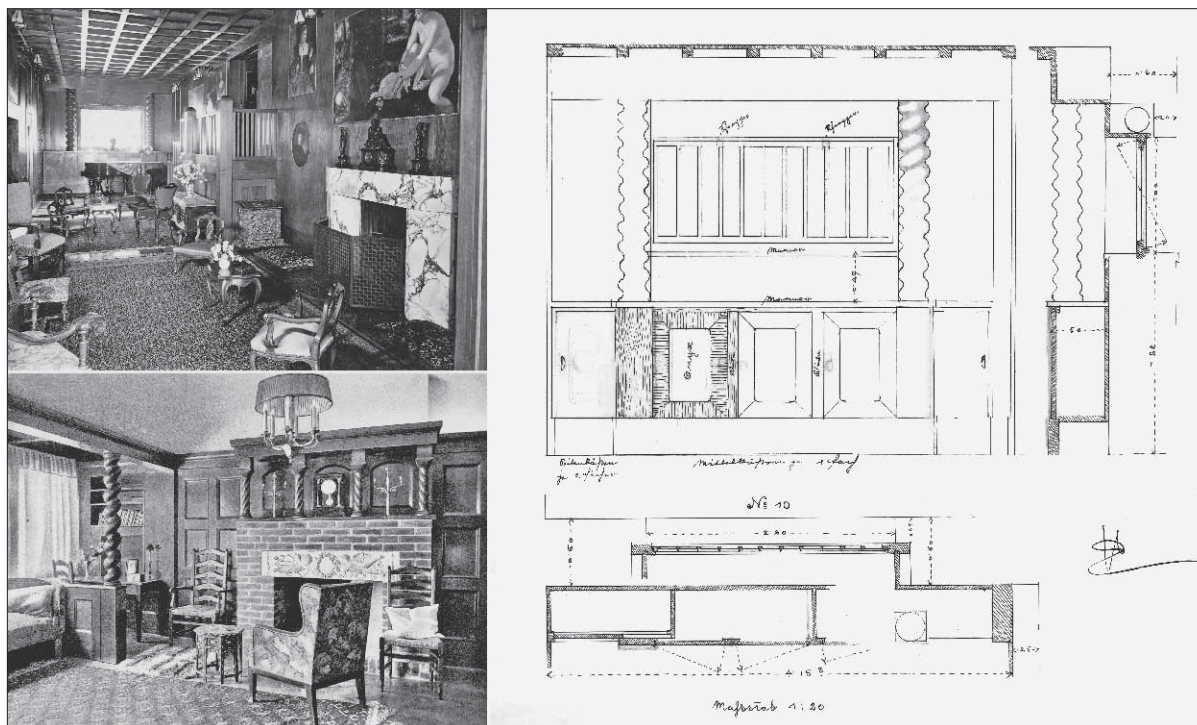


FIG. 6 HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, MUSIC ROOM (UPPER LEFT); EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ, VILLA VRBANIĆ, DEN, 1910-1911 (DOWN LEFT); HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, MUSIC ROOM, DRAWING, DETAIL, AROUND 1909 (RIGHT). Large or small twisted columns are frequent motifs in Ehrlich and Kovacic interiors and are also present in the Villa Karma.

ter spouts. All this combined with his architectural and horticultural treatment of the plot gave it a certain picturesqueness that bore the mark of its maker (Fig. 4).

What did Ehrlich exactly do regarding the interior of the building? In his own words he *integrated and extended the library and the hall designed and ordered by Adolf Loos*. He himself designed the rest of the rooms, *in particular: the hallway, dining room, the loggias with the garden stairs, the big bathroom, the staircase, the large gallery with pictures built into the panelling*. Furthermore, he had designed a *few more things* which he was unable to recall at the moment. (Ehrlich, January 20, 1928, in: Von der Mühl, 1928).

Loos's ideas and the material already supplied went into the interior of the hall<sup>22</sup> (*Vorraum*) with the exposed wooden beams on the ceiling and the characteristic niche for sitting as well as the interior of the library, in which there was the main writing table, also made according to a Loos design. All the other rooms that in a design sense characterised the interior of Karma were done from Ehrlich's designs and in the period of his work – the vestibule, dining room, stairs, smoking room, gentlemen's room, the master bedroom and the music room with paintings from the rich collection of Wilhelm Beer built into the wooden wall panelling. An exception is the furnishing in the spaces on the second floor, which were designed when Karma changed hands.

In parallel with his work on Karma, Ehrlich was engaged on the remodelling of Villa Sangata<sup>23</sup> with a detailed landscaping of the grounds that according to the drawings was to have been linked by an underpass with the grounds of Karma. Villa Sangata was sited on an estate much larger than the parcel occupied by Karma; between the two ran a road.<sup>24</sup>

Ehrlich's work on the villa is indicated not only by the extant drawings but also, very tellingly, by the designs and details characteristic of the period of the joint work of Ehrlich and Kovacic in parallel with the works on the Villa Karma. Kovacic's signature can actually be found on the drawing for the Karma bathing pavilion (Domljan, 1974: 30). During the same period, Hugo Ehrlich was associated in design terms with Viktor Kovacic, and both were working on designs for Zagreb villas, apartment buildings and redevelopment plans for Zagreb squares and promenades. Some of the architectural approaches and details done for Zagreb projects indicate the authorial contributions of Ehrlich, and perhaps even of Kovacic, to the design of Villa Karma. The following can be picked out (among others): Villa Vrbanic; the Ehrlich rental apartment building in Kumičićeva 2; the Lustig-Perok rental apartment building at Kumičićeva 10; the mausoleum of the Marquis de Piennes in Vrbovec. Town planning proposals for Jezuitski trg, Strossmayerovo šetaliste and Vrazovo šeta-

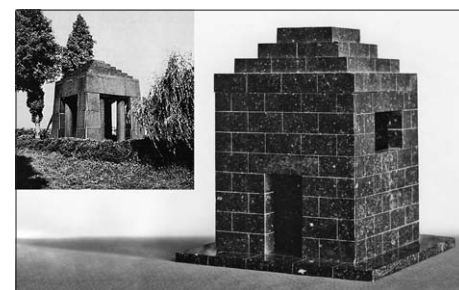


FIG. 7 EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ, MAUSOLEUM OF THE MARQUIS DE PIENNES, VRBOVEC, 1910-1912 (UPPER LEFT); ADOLF LOOS, MAX DVOŘÁK MAUSOLEUM, MODEL, 1921 (RIGHT).

The shape of Loos's design for a mausoleum of 1921 is clearly similar to the mausoleum of the Marquis de Piennes built ten years earlier to a design of the Ehrlich & Kovacic Studio. The simple shape of black Swedish granite has a roof in the form of a stepped pyramid. On three sides there are pairs of fluted columns, while the interior space is vaulted over with a calotte featuring a gold mosaic. A golden mosaic is placed on the soffit of the gallery with its oval floor plan in the vestibule of Karma. The soft, segmented transition between the oval rim of the central void and the vertical peripheral walls of the ground floor give the impression of a zenithally lit vaulted space.

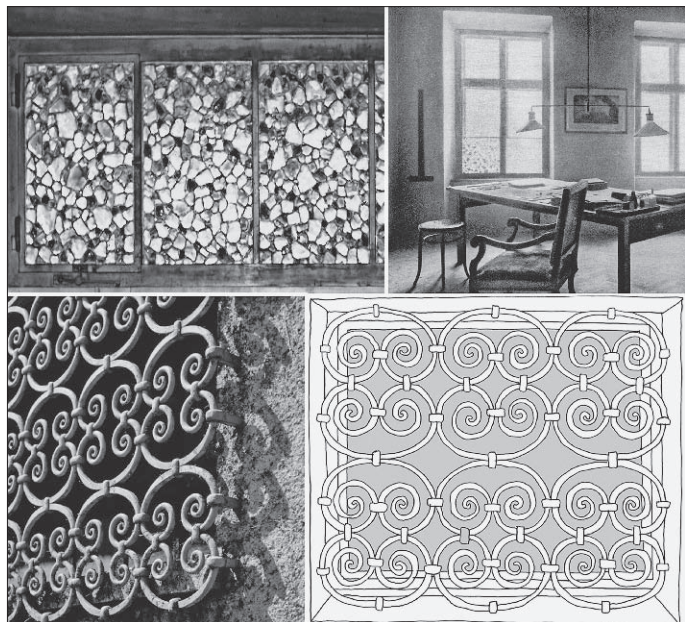


FIG. 8 VILLA KARMA, DINING ROOM, STAINED GLASS, PHOTO: JACQUES GUBLER, 1967 (UPPER LEFT); THE EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ STUDIO, SUBSEQUENTLY THE STUDIO OF VIKTOR KOVAČIĆ, RADIĆEVA 32 (UPPER RIGHT); VILLA KARMA, WROUGHT IRON GRATING ON A KARMA WINDOW, PHOTO: JACQUES GUBLER, 1966 (DOWN LEFT); EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ, VILLA VRBANIĆ, WROUGHT IRON GRATING ON THE WINDOWS, AUTHOR'S DRAWING (DOWN RIGHT).

The pattern of the stained glass in the dining room, vestibule and the staircase of Villa Karma corresponds completely to that incorporated in the window of the Ehrlich & Kovacic studio. There is an identical piece of stained glass in the den of the Villa Vrbanic. The wrought-iron gratings on the windows of the entrance facade of Villa Karma have the characteristic spiral pattern that Viktor Kovacic had used in 1903-1904 on the door of the Villa Auer. They also appear contemporaneously with the works on Karma in the windows of the entry porch of the Villa Vrbanic.

liste can be correlated with the architectural and horticultural designs for the grounds of Karma and Sangata. Although not all the Zagreb designs were built in their entirety, the carefully considered and adroit handling of tasks of various scales can be spotted, simple means being used to achieve ambiances in which elements of architecture, sculpture and landscape created attractive spatial units.

Zagreb's villas and interiors are on a more modest scale and correspond to the local conditions of the time; they cannot be directly compared with the approaches possible and applied at Karma. Nevertheless, there are links. The twisted columns of the music room of Karma are identical to the column in the den of Villa Vrbanic (Fig. 6); the fluted columns of the porticoes and the bathroom have associations with the mausoleum of the Marquis de Piennes (Fig. 7); the gold mosaic in the vestibule is used in the interior of the same mausoleum roofed with a calotte; the stained glass in the vestibule, dining room and staircase in Karma

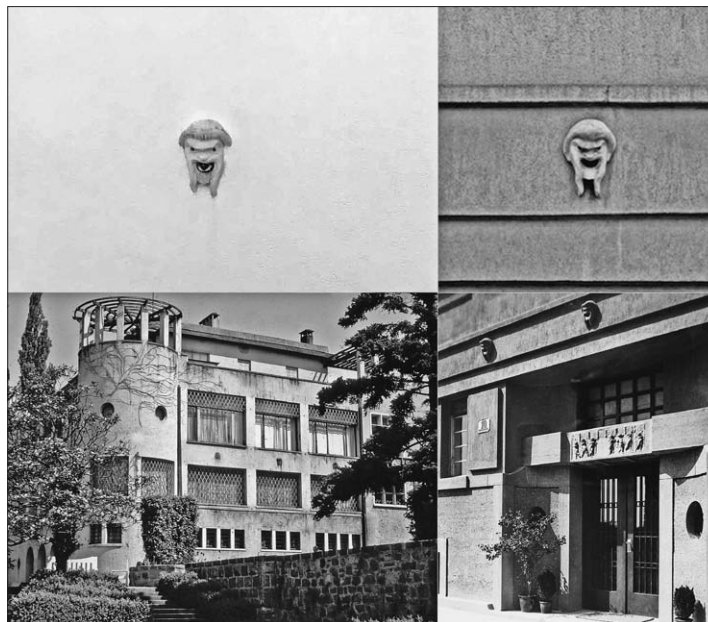


FIG. 9 VILLA KARMA, FACADE, MASCARON (UPPER LEFT), 2021; EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ, LUSTIG-PEROK APARTMENT BUILDING, FACADE, MASCARON (UPPER RIGHT); VILLA KARMA, SOUTHWEST VIEW, PHOTO: JACQUES GUBLER, 1966 (DOWN LEFT); EHRLICH & KOVAČIĆ, LUSTIG-PEROK APARTMENT BUILDING, FACADE, DETAIL (DOWN RIGHT).

Among the variously shaped mascarons used as water spouts on the facades of the Villa Karma there are some models that are identical to the mascarons on the facades of the Lustig-Perok Building (1910-1911). Mascarons of different shapes are to be found on the facade of the Ehrlich Apartment Building (1910) designed by the Ehrlich & Kovacic Studio.

have the same pattern as in the Villa Vrbanic and the studio of Ehrlich and Kovacic; the pattern of the wrought iron grating on the Karma windows is the same as that on the windows of Villa Vrbanic (Fig. 8); the same mascarons are to be found on the facade of Karma and on that of the Lustig-Perok apartment building (Fig. 9); the climbers at the bottom of the walls and the greenery that cascades over the edges of the terraces is suggestive of Ehrlich's greening of the walls of Zagreb promenades.

Apart from the obvious similarity of stylistic details, mistakes can be found in places on the unsigned drawings that suggest crotophony<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 10).

## CONCLUSION

Drawings and other documentation that would enable easier tracking of the emergence of Villa Karma cannot be found as part of the same archival unit. Accordingly, the

<sup>25</sup> For example, *mozaik* and *bronce* instead of *Mosaik* and *Bronze*, which would be correct German.

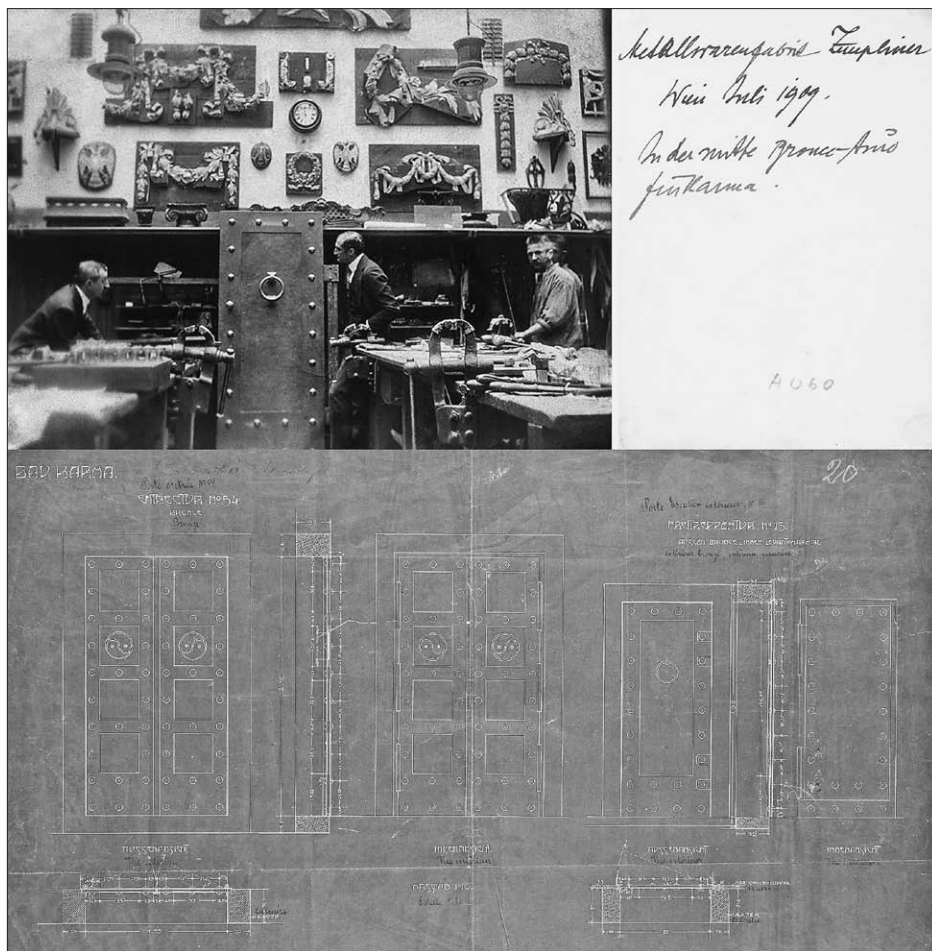


FIG. 10 HUGO EHRLICH IN THE ALFRED ZEMPLINER WORKSHOP IN VIENNA WITH BRONZE DOOR FOR VILLA KARMA, 1909 (UPPER LEFT); THE BACK OF THE SAME PHOTO (UPPER RIGHT); HUGO EHRLICH, VILLA KARMA, BRONZE DOORS, DRAWING, AROUND 1909 (DOWN).

On the back of a photo taken in the metal workshop there is a note in Ehrlich's hand giving information as to the time the bronze door was made. The same language usage mistake as on the unsigned drawing can be found – *Bronce-türe* instead of *Bronze-türe*. This error reveals someone whose native language is Croatian. Door drawing no. 15 (stair door) and door drawing no. 54 (main entry door) were clearly made by Hugo Ehrlich, who oversaw the making of it in the Zempliner workshop in summer 1909. The drawing was offered for sale at auction by Dorotheum, without any details of the provenance or the author of the drawing. As finally produced, the entry door was simplified, the moulding by which each leaf was divided into 4 square panels being abandoned. The actually made version of entry door is in the drawing of the variant of the vestibule.

dispersion of archival materials could be one of the causes of the improper attribution of authorship. The other might be the failure to recognise the importance of the working period during which the Croatian architect Hugo Ehrlich was involved, meaning the period from 1908 to 1912. However, the most probable reason is that it is very easy for the name of a world-famous architect simply to overshadow the work of a colleague whose significance is recognized exclusively within his national domain.

Thanks to the architect Henri-Robert Von der Mühl we are today able to read how Ehrlich himself described his involvement. Von der Mühl was well aware that Villa Karma was not exclusively Loos's work and tried to find out who continued the construction after him. The Ehrlich Papers, mainly deposited in the Fine Arts Archives of Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb, fully confirm Ehrlich's authorship and his own description presented in the letters to Von der Mühl. Furthermore, it can be asserted with certainty that his authorship ab-

solutely dominates the interior, that it is evident on the exterior of the building and exclusive regarding the landscaping of the grounds, the boundary walls and all the other design interventions outside the building.

The conclusion arises that in the reviews related to Villa Karma in general, necessarily and inevitably both authors should be specified as equal. In reviews of the interior design of specific spaces, excluding the hall, the library and the rooms on the second floor, Ehrlich should be mentioned as the only author. Most important parts of his interior design are: the vestibule, dining room, stairs, smoking room, gentlemen's room, the master bedroom and the music room. Therefore, Hugo Ehrlich clearly did not merely handle final completion of the Villa Karma as is usually claimed. As author, he is at least as important as Loos. The role of Henri Lavanchy should not be forgotten either and has yet to be fully researched, however, that topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

[Translated by Graham McMaster]

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## ILLUSTRATION SOURCES

- FIG. 1 Zagreb City Museum (upper left); Digital Collection and Catalogue. Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA) (upper right); Albertina, Austria – Public Domain, via Europeana. Available at: <https://www.europeana.eu/hr/item/15508/ALA3156> [Accessed: 15 January 2024] (down).
- FIG. 2 Author's drawing
- FIG. 3 Archives of Modern Construction – EPFL, fund Von der Mühl, Henri – Robert.
- FIG. 4 Albertina, Austria – Public Domain, via Europeana. Available at: <https://www.europeana.eu/item/15508/ALA779> [Accessed: 15 January 2024] (up); Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections (middle); Archives of Modern Construction – EPFL, fund Von der Mühl, Henri-Robert (down).
- FIG. 5 Croatian Museum of Architecture. Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA): Personal archival collection of Hugo Ehrlich (up); Fine Arts Archives, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA) (middle and down).
- FIG. 6 © Albertina, Vienna (upper left); ŠEN, 1927: Tab. XVII (down left); Croatian Museum of Architecture. Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA): Personal archival collection of Hugo Ehrlich (right).
- FIG. 7 DOMLJAN, 1979: 98 (upper left); Albertina, Austria – Public Domain, via Europeana. Available at: <https://www.europeana.eu/hr/item/15508/ALA2184> [Accessed: 15 January 2024] (right).
- FIG. 8 Private archive of Jacques Gubler (upper left and down left); ŠEN, 1927: Tab. XIX (upper right); Author's drawing (down right).
- FIG. 9 Private archive of Jacques Gubler (upper left and down left); Author's photo (upper right); Architecture Collection. Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb (down right).
- FIG. 10 Digital Collection and Catalogue. Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA) (upper left and right); Jugendstil and 20<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts – Online catalogue, via Dorotheum. Available at: <https://www.dorotheum.com/en/l/8561434/> [Accessed: 15 August 2023] (down).

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