

## Josef Hoffmann – Designer

Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and studied architecture under Otto Wagner (one of Vienna's most celebrated architects who bridged the old style of architecture and the new, modern forms).

As a designer, Hoffmann was creative and prolific. His design portfolio encompassed commissions for buildings and interiors but extended to things as diverse as textiles, umbrella knobs, walking stick handles, tea pots, caskets and book covers as well as glass and ceramics.

In 1903, with Koloman Moser and financier Fritz Waerndorfer, Hoffmann founded the Wiener Werkstätte. The collaboration of artists, designer architects and artisans enabled the realisation of the 'total artwork'. Hoffmann's designs were based on simple and clear proportions and employed rich, high-quality materials. Everyday objects were conceived as part of a whole living environment and were considered works of art.

*Our middle class is far from having fulfilled its duty to the arts. Its turn has come to do full justice to the course of progress. It cannot be enough for us to buy paintings, however beautiful they may be. As long as our cities, our houses, our rooms, our cupboards, our everyday appliances, our clothes our jewels, as long as our language and feelings do not represent the spirit of our age in a purer, simpler and more beautiful way, we shall remain infinitely backward compared to our ancestors ...<sup>1</sup>*

*We want to establish intimate contact between the public, designer and craftsman and to produce good, simple household utensils. We start from purpose, utility is our first condition.<sup>2</sup>*

Initially, Hoffmann showed his affinity for Jugendstil. Later, his work followed the trend to minimal, geometric forms, reduced to their most elementary state. This was evident in one of his largest commissions – the



Above: **Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **WIENER WERKSTÄTTE, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria 1903–32 *Tea service* (c. 1909–1911). Silver-gilt, wood. (1.A-E) 21.5 x 29.0 x 26.8 cm (overall) (kettle, stand and burner). (2) 10.8 x 15.4 x 20.2 cm (teapot). (3.A-B) 8.7 x 8.8 x 6.8 cm (overall) (sugar basin and lid). (4) 4.8 x 8.5 x 15.6 cm (milk jug). (5) 3.4 x 36.3 x 29.9 cm (tray). National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased, 1985

Left: *Josef Hoffmann*



The Sitzmaschine chair was designed by Josef Hoffmann as part of his commission for the Purkersdorf Sanatorium in 1904/5. This chair had an adjustable back that could be reclined by moving the position of a rod between a series of protruding knobs on the frame. The chair combined the use of bentwood and plywood, and in some versions padded cushions added greater comfort. The chair design was based on the repetition of simple shapes and lines. The rectangular forms of the seat, sides and back contrasted with the thin, curved line of the armrests, which also formed the base. Rectangular perforations on the solid side and back panels added an industrial, decorative element. The spherical shape of the knobs that supported the reclining function of the chair was repeated in balls on the chair frame that performed a structural role as well as a visual one.

Hoffmann's design showed the influence of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a Scottish designer who had exhibited at the Vienna Secession in 1900.

Purkersdorf Sanatorium, which was one of the first buildings at the time to be created with a view only to functionality and hygiene, with no elements or details for purely decorative purposes. From 1910 onwards his work turned in the direction of Neo-Classicism, while maintaining its geometric outline.

The square was the basis for many of Hoffmann's designs. As a shape it stood for unity, perfection, solidity and stillness. Even in drawing his designs Hoffmann liked to use grid paper. Borders of alternating black and white squares became decorative elements in his architectural designs as well as in furniture. The industrial square metal grid was used to manufacture objects as diverse as garden planters and fruit baskets. Hoffmann's fabric designs for the Wiener Werkstätte were also based on squares. His use of squares was so pronounced that he earned the nickname *Quadrat!* (little square) Hoffmann.

Another motif that appeared frequently in Hoffmann's design was that of straight parallel lines to emphasise the vertical or the horizontal. Proportion and the relation of shapes were important. Along with other artists and designers of the period, Hoffmann was influenced by Japanese art and design – the Sixth Secessionist Exhibition in 1900 was devoted to Japanese art and in Vienna, in 1901, the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry exhibited the woodcuts of Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai. The influence of Japanese design was reflected in Hoffmann's use of the relationships between shape and space to create a sense of simplicity and serenity.

**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956  
**J. & J. KOHN, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria est. 1850  
*Adjustable-back chair* (c. 1905). Ebonised Beech (Fagus sp.), plywood, steel, (a-b) 110.8 x 68.1 x 83.7 cm (overall). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Jardine Matheson Australia, Fellow, 1983

## DID YOU KNOW?

The 'Rundes' cutlery designed by Josef Hoffmann and used in the Café Fledermaus is still in production today, made by the Italian design company Alessi.



Hoffmann Brooches: As well as textiles, wallpaper, furniture, fashion glass and metal work, Josef Hoffmann also designed many jewellery pieces that were made by the Wiener Werkstätte craftsmen. These were stamped with the monogram of the craftsman, as well as with that of the designer of the work, in the spirit of the workshop's aim to give both equal status.

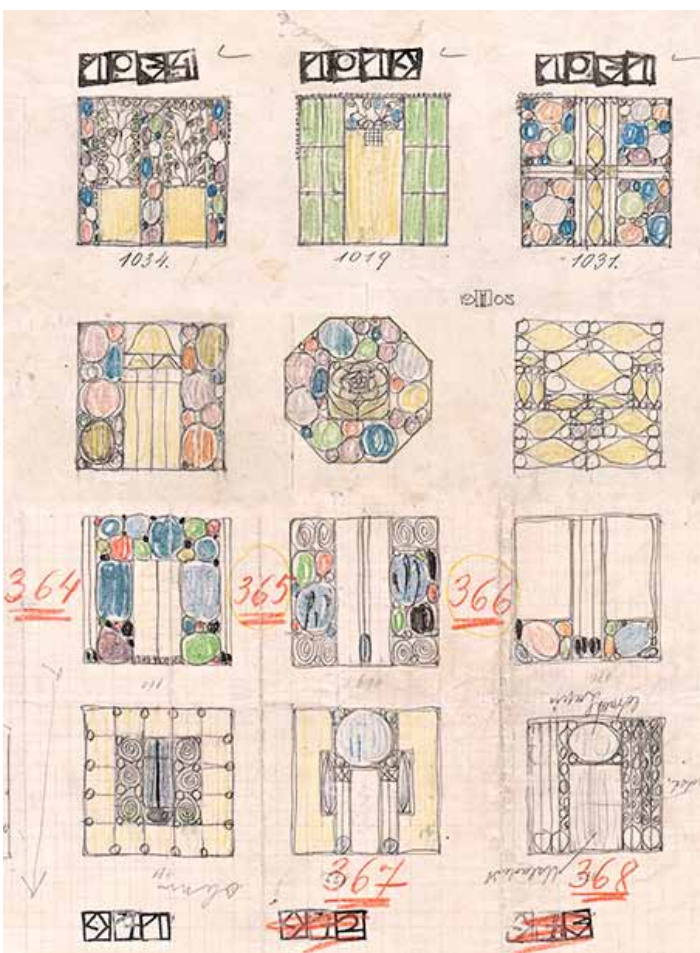
Many of Hoffmann's early brooch designs were square. The compositions employed symmetry and vertical lines or columns which, combined with the simple forms used, gave them a sense of monumentality in spite of their scale. Hoffmann favoured the use of semi-precious stones such as opal, coral, moonstone and lapis lazuli. He carefully balanced elements of colour and shape, emphasising the properties of the materials he employed. Werkstätte jewellery was presented in a box, hand-made for each individual piece. Each piece was intended to convey the unique character and personality of the wearer, rather than wealth and status, although in reality these exclusive designs would have been out of the reach of the ordinary person.

Clockwise from top left:

Bottom:

**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **WIENER WERKSTÄTTE, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria 1903–32 **Eugen PFLAUMER** (goldsmith) Austria active c. 1908) *Brooch (Model no. G 362)* 1905 designed, 1911 manufactured. Silver, gold, carnelian, coral, hematite, jelly opal, lapis lazuli, moonstone, sapphire (5.1 x 5.1 x 1.4 cm). Asenbaum Collection, London. Photo: © Asenbaum Photo Archive

**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 *Sketches for brooches (including model no G 368)* 1904. Pencil. MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna



**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **WIENER WERKSTÄTTE, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria 1903–32 **Karl PONOCNY** (goldsmith) Austria active c. 1904–10 *Brooch (Model no. G 368)* 1905. Silver, coral, lapis lazuli, malachite moonstone, (4.6 x 4.6 x 1.4 cm). Galerie bei der Albertina-Zetter, Vienna. Photo: © Wien Museum

**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **WIENER WERKSTÄTTE, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria 1903–32 **Karl PONOCNY** (goldsmith) Austria active c. 1904–10 *Brooch (Model no. G 366)* 1905. Silver, gold, opal, (5.0 x 5.1 x 1.4 cm). Asenbaum Collection, London. Photo: © Asenbaum Photo Archive

**Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **WIENER WERKSTÄTTE, Vienna** (manufacturer) Vienna 1903–1932 **Eugen PFLAUMER** (goldsmith) Austria active c.1908 *Brooch (Model no. G 1034)* 1908 designed, 1910 manufactured. Silver, gold, agate, amethyst, bloodstone, coral, jasper, lapis lazuli, moonstone, opal, tourmaline, (5.4 x 5.4 x 1.4 cm). Asenbaum Collection, London. Photo: © Asenbaum Photo Archive

## The Gallia Apartment – a total artwork



The Gallias – Moriz and Hermine – were wealthy Viennese landowners and entrepreneurs. Like many wealthy Jewish families, they were patrons of the arts and supporters of new movements in Art and Design, such as the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte. (Moriz became chairman of the Wiener Werkstätte board in 1915).

In 1910, Moriz Gallia acquired a building that was to be the site for his future family home. He demolished the existing building and in its place constructed a new building with five storeys, an attic and a basement. The family's apartment was located on the first floor mezzanine. The remainder of the floors were let, with the hope that the children would one day occupy them.

The Gallia art collection included many works by painter Carl Moll, one of the Secession's founders, as well as a number of paintings by Klimt, including a portrait of Hermine Gallia. The Gallias were also supporters of the Wiener Werkstätte. In 1913 Moriz Gallia commissioned Hoffmann to design five rooms for the family's new apartment – the hall, the salon, the smoking room, the dining room and the boudoir.

The boudoir was the room in which Hermine Gallia held social gatherings and entertained her female friends. Recitals and musical evenings were held in the salon.

The smoking room served as a study and family room. It was in this room that Ferdinand Andri's portrait of the Gallia family hung above the sofa.



Top left: **Ferdinand ANDRI** Austria 1871–1956 *The Gallia children* 1901. Oil on canvas, 100.4 x 130.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Presented by the family of Moriz and Hermine Gallia, 1976

Top right: **Bruno REIFFENSTEIN** Austrian 1868–1951 *The Gallia family* c.1903 (Back row: Hermine Gallia, Moriz Gallia, Henrietta (Henry) Hamburger, Otto Hamburger, Guido Hamburger. Middle row: Ernst Gallia, Josephine Hamburger, Robert Hamburger, Nathan Hamburger, Maragrete Gallia. Front row: Lene and Käthe Gallia). Gelatin silver print. Private Collection



Middle right: **Josef HOFFMANN** Austria 1870–1956 *Design for the smoking room of the Gallia Apartment* From *Das Interieur XIV* 1913, pl. 40. Private Collection



Bottom right: **Bruno REIFFENSTEIN** Austrian 1868–1951 *The boudoir of the Gallia apartment* c. 1916. Gelatin silver print. Private Collection

The dining room was the most formal of those in the Gallia apartment, used only for entertaining guests and for important family occasions. The hall was less formal than the dining room.

Hoffmann's designs included the furniture, both built-in and free-standing, the plasterwork, the woodwork, light fittings, wall coverings and floor coverings. He also supervised the making of all aspects of his designs by specially selected craftspeople.

When Hoffmann undertook work on the Gallia apartment he was already a well-known designer, having completed commissions for both the Purkersdorf Sanatorium in Vienna and the Palais Stoclet in Brussels. His work at this time had entered a Neo-Classical phase – combining the influence of Classical building and design with a contemporary aesthetic.

The Gallia family members were frequent entertainers, well known in music and artistic circles for their musical recitals and soirees. Their apartment became famous in Vienna and also featured in interior design journals of the time.



The boudoir of the Gallia apartment was the room in which Hermine Gallia entertained her friends. White painted wood, gilded detail and tapered legs gave the boudoir furniture a sense of lightness and refinement. The clean forms were emphasised by the gold lines that traced their contour. Red silk upholstery trimmed with crisp black and white braid on the chairs added verve and movement, and lent a contemporary edge. The proportion and subtle decoration of the furniture reflected Hoffmann's exploration of Classical elements.

Left: **Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **J. SOULEK, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria active (early 20th century) *Work table and chairs, from the Gallia apartment boudoir* c. 1912. Painted wood, gilt, brass, (other materials), Table: 75.3 x 45.5 x 35.0 cm (closed), Chairs: (1) 91.1 x 48.3 x 49.5 cm; (2) 91.3 x 47.9 x 49.8 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1976

Right: **Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **J. SOULEK, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria active (early 20th century) *Bureau, from the Gallia apartment boudoir* 1913. Painted wood, gilt, glass, silk, brass, (a-m) 179.4 x 110.9 x 64.6 cm (overall). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1976

The Gallia family lived in the apartment for 23 years. Moriz Gallia died in 1918 and by the time Hermine died in 1936 the children had all moved into their own apartments, in different parts of Vienna. The contents of the Hoffmann rooms were divided between them. Before the Second World War, like many Jewish families, the Gallias were forced to flee Austria. They emigrated to Australia, taking their furniture and paintings with them. The furniture was eventually acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria. The Klimt portrait of Hermine Gallia was purchased by the National Gallery in London and the Andri portrait of the Gallia children by the NGV.

### → DISCUSS

VCD DT

How does the **relationship between client and designer** affect the final product?

How has Hoffmann adapted the interior design to suit the **function** of different rooms in the Gallia apartment?

What **feeling** is created for each room and how has this been achieved?

What **characteristic elements of Hoffmann's style** are evident in his Gallia apartment designs?

Research the furniture design that preceded this period. Why was this apartment design seen as progressive for the time?

### → ANALYSE

VCD DT

Look at the different chairs in the exhibition Vienna: Art and Design and visit the chair display at NGV International. Investigate how the designs reflect the **materials and technology** available at the time.

How do they reflect the designer's **style or philosophy**?

For what **environment or purpose** are the chairs designed? How is this evident?

What might the chairs tell us about the **time in which they were made**?

Do the designs have relevance today?

Have these designs influenced any other designers?

Which designs do you find the most appealing? Why?

### → DESIGN

VCD DT

Imagine that **you have been commissioned to design the Gallia family's new apartment**. Write the **design brief** for each room (salon, boudoir, smoking room, dining room and hall). From the exhibition Vienna: Art and Design, **choose three objects** (furniture, fittings or decorative arts objects like cutlery, vases etc.). **Write a report** analysing how well these products meet the requirements of your design brief. If you were designing these products, what modifications would you make to improve them?



Left: **Bruno REIFFENSTEIN** Austrian 1868–1951 *The hall of the Gallia apartment* c. 1916. Gelatin silver print. Private Collection

Below: **Josef HOFFMANN** (designer) Austria 1870–1956 **J. SOULEK**, Vienna (manufacturer) Austria active (early 20th century) *Sideboard, table and chairs, from the Gallia apartment hall* 1913. Ebonised wood, glass, marble, brass. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1976



The furniture for the hall of the Gallia apartment was made from ebonised (black-stained) wood. The darkness of the wood, the solid, square design, and the vertical fluting reminiscent of Classical pillars, gave the furniture a monumental quality. Curved and undulating lines, such as those of the chair armrests, softened the rigid vertical and horizontal lines of the design. The stiff burgundy leather upholstery added an element of colour to the chairs, while maintaining the formality of the setting.

Your team has been commissioned to **design a café/nightclub**. The design brief includes seating, floor and wall coverings, occasional tables and lighting as well as utensils and dishes for food service. You have also been asked to **design a logo and signage** for the club. The overall brief is to make the space **contemporary and visually exciting**. Your proposal must be innovative, imaginative and use a range of materials, while still maintaining an overall theme. Your design proposal should **include a 3D model of your design**.

## → ANALYSE AND COMPARE

VCD DT

Choose a **decorative arts object** from the exhibition Vienna: Art and Design. Investigate the style and philosophy of the object's designer. **Produce designs for three different products** in the style of your chosen designer.

In Vienna: Art and Design, find three examples of products that you consider to embody the qualities of **good design**. In a presentation to your class, **explain the reasons** for your choice.

**Choose two similar products** from the exhibition Vienna: Art and Design (chairs, cutlery, drinking vessels etc). **Prepare a report** that compares how well each performs its function, suggests how each object would appeal to the user and discusses the overall quality of the objects.

Left: **Alexander ALBERT** (manufacturer) Austria-Hungary active c.1904 *Chair for Dr Karl Lueger* 1904. Rosewood (Dalbergia sp.), mother-of-pearl, leather, 98.5 x 63 x 59.5 cm. Wien Museum, Vienna Estate of Karl Lueger, 1910

Right: **Koloman MOSER** (designer) Austria-Hungary 1868-1918 **PRAG-RUDNIKER KORBWAREN-FABRIKATION, Vienna** (manufacturer) Austria-Hungary 1886-1965 *Armchair* 1903. Painted Beech (*Fagus sp.*), cane, 72.5 x 66.0 x 66.5 cm Leopold Museum, Vienna. Leopold Collection. Acquired through the Leopold Museum Private Foundation, 1994. Photo: © Leopold Museum / Manfred Thumberger



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Hoffmann and Koloman Moser *Das Arbeitsprogramm der Wiener Werkstätte Hohe Warte I* (1904-1905), p.263

<sup>2</sup> From a lecture given by Hoffmann 22 Feb 1911. Published in Eduard Seckler, *Josef Hoffmann - The Architectural Work*, 1985, Princeton University.