



The “Ringstrasse of the proletariat”

Vienna’s imperial Ringstrasse boulevard is both a unique *Gesamtkunstwerk* and an expression of bourgeois representation. Its magnificent edifices were built of hundreds of millions of bricks manufactured by the so-called “*Ziegelbehm*” – migrants from Bohemia and Moravia, who lived in unthinkable conditions, working seven days a week, 15 hours a day.

A political alternative

The construction of healthy and decent flats was therefore one of the key demands of the young Social Democrats. On February 1st 1923 the Viennese city council, which, by now, was predominantly Social Democratic, levied an earmarked housing tax and in the same year passed the first communal housing scheme. Between 1919 and 1933 “Red Vienna” built a total of 382 communal residential buildings with almost 65,000 flats. The highest concentration of such council buildings can be found along Margaretengürtel, on what is known as the “Ringstrasse of the proletariat”. Around Reumannhof rose 24 buildings, some of them monumental architectural statements reflecting Vienna’s new balance of power.

CHILDREN’S BATH ON MARGARETENGÜRTEL

Public open-air baths for children were supposed to prevent lung diseases and rickets. Vienna opened 23 such facilities during the the First Republic. Admission was free.

Left Side

Eisenbahnerheim – RAILWAY WORKERS' HOME

Address: 5., Margaretenstrasse 166

Architect: Hubert Gessner

Built in: 1912/13, badly damaged in 1944, the home was rebuilt after the war with a new design.

It offered offices, assembly halls, conference rooms and a "hostel" for railway workers visiting Vienna with their wives.

FRANZ-DOMES-HOF

Address: 5., Margaretengürtel 126–134

Architect: Peter Behrens

Built in: 1928–1930

Units: 174

Infrastructure: kindergarten, several business premises

A portrait relief by Alfons Riedel commemorates Franz Domes (1863–1930), former president of the Chamber of Labour.

REUMANNHOF

Address: 5., Margaretengürtel 100–110

Architect: Hubert Gessner

Built in: 1924–1926

Units: 480

Infrastructure: washhouse, kindergarten, pub, studios, workshops, business premises, dairy

The cour d'honneur, a three-sided courtyard, is sheltered from the street by pergolas with pavilions and the central water basin. It is clearly reminiscent of monumental ruling-class architecture.

METZLEINSTALERHOF

Address: 5., Margaretengürtel 90–95

Architects: Robert Kalesa | Hubert Gessner

Built in: 1919/20 | 1923–1925

Units: 101 | 143

Infrastructure: washhouse, central bath, kindergarten and day-care centre, youth welfare office and mothers' support centre, library, workshops, business premises, tuberculosis care centre

In 1916 architect Robert Kalesa designed the Matzleinstalerhof unit whose entrances face the Vienna Gürtel ring road. Starting in 1923, another unit was constructed according to plans by Hubert Gessner. The Matzleinstalerhof served as a model for many Viennese residential buildings to come.

HERWEGGHOF

Address: 5., Margaretengürtel 82–88

Architects: Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger

Built in: 1926/27

Units: 220

Infrastructure: district youth welfare office, business premises, club facilities

Georg Herwegh (1817–1875), a German poet of liberty and friend of Heinrich Heine and Karl Marx, spent many years in exile in France and Switzerland on grounds of his political activity.

BÄRENBRUNNEN

Designed by Hanna Gärtner in 1928 and officially named "Signs of the Zodiac", the fountain was the first artwork of a female sculptor to go on public display in Vienna.

BRANDMAYERGASSE 24

Architects: Egon Riss and Fritz Judtman

Built in: 1928/29

Units: 76

Infrastructure: youth day-care centre

With its corner balconies and the cubic glass loggias structuring the facade vertically, the building still looks very modern today.

Typical of *Gründerzeit* residential buildings is the pompous design of their facades. However, the elaborate stucco decoration concealed sheer misery. Towards the end of the war, 73 per cent of all flats in Vienna consisted of a room and closet; their facilities were – even by the standards of the time – very humble. 92 per cent of Vienna's flats had no lavatory of their own, and 95 per cent had no water tap: the "privy" and water supply – a small metal sink known as the *Bassena*, were in the shared hallway. Gas was available in 14 per cent of Vienna's flats, electric lighting in just 7 per cent. Many flats were overcrowded. 22 per cent of workers' apartments in Vienna housed lodgers or day roomers; more than half of the people had no bed of their own.

The two floorplans demonstrate the differences between a pre-war Viennese residential building and a Vienna Council residential building, where every room was designed to have natural light and air.

Red Vienna created decent and healthy flats: whereas the old construction had permitted a building density of 85 per cent, now only 30 per cent of lots could be used, in densely built-up areas a maximum of 40 per cent.

In addition to this, the new council apartments were not simply sleeping quarters, but had their own, more or less autonomous infrastructure, with central laundry facilities, bath facilities, kindergartens, training workshops, public libraries, tuberculosis welfare centres, mothers' support centres, dental clinics, consumers' cooperatives, health insurance offices and much more.

So just as the magnificent Ringstrasse boulevard marks the beginning of a liberal, bourgeois era, the "Ringstrasse of the proletariat" indicates the transition to the age of proletarian rule.

Hubert Gessner (1871–1943) was a pupil of Otto Wagner and one of the leading architects of Red Vienna. In 1938 the avowed Social Democrat was issued with a professional ban by the National Socialists.

Fritz Judtman (1899–1968) and Egon Riss (1901–1964) formed a working team in the mid-1920s. Judtman, who also worked as a set designer – from 1945 he was the leading stage designer at the Vienna Burgtheater – was involved in post-war reconstruction. Due to his "Jewish ancestry", his colleague Riss emigrated to England in 1938 and after the war moved to Scotland, where he worked mainly as an industrial architect.

Peter Behrens (1868–1940) was an academic painter and self-taught architect. In 1899 he joined the newly founded artists' colony in Darmstadt. As chief planner and designer for AEG he designed factories, administrative and residential buildings in and around Berlin, but also lamps, fans, etc. From 1934 onwards he worked with Albert Speer on the redesign of the Reich capital Berlin.

MARGARETENGÜRTEL 122–124

Architect: Adolf Jelletz

Built in: 1928/29

Units: 116

Infrastructure: Austrian workers' radio association (ARABÖ)

In 2013 the estate was named after the late author and former long-time resident Ernst Hinterberger (1931–2012).

MATTEOTTIHOFF

Address: 5., Siebenbrunnfeldgasse 26–30

Architects: Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger

Built in: 1926/27

Units: 452

Infrastructure: washhouse and bath, business premises, workshops

Named after the general secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, who was killed by Italian Fascists, the Matteottihof forms an urbanistic unit with the neighbouring Herwegghof and the later Julius-Popp-Hof.

JULIUS-POPP-HOF

Address: 5., Margaretengürtel 76–80

Architects: Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger

Built in: 1925/26

Units: 402

Infrastructure: business premises, day-care centre of the Kinderfreunde (Friends of Children Association)

Named in 1929 after Julius Popp (1849–1902), former administrator of the Arbeiter-Zeitung newspaper, who had worked closely with Victor Adler.

Arbeitsamt der Metall- und Holzindustriearbeiter – EMPLOYMENT CENTRE FOR JOINERS AND METAL WORKERS

Address: 5., Embelgasse 2–4
Architects: Hermann Stiegholzer and Herbert Kastinger
Built in: 1928–1930

The two departments of the employment centre originally housed offices, workshops, lecture rooms and studios for extra tuition and professional retraining.

Right Side

HAYDNHOF

Address: 12., Gaudenzdorfer Gürtel 15
Architect: August Hauser
Built in: 1928/29
Units: 304
Infrastructure: kindergarten, washhouse

Named after the Austrian composer Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), who lay buried at the nearby Hundsturm cemetery until it was closed and turned into Haydnpark in 1926.

LEOPOLDINE-GLÖCKEL-HOF

Address: 12., Steinbauergasse 1–7
Architect: Josef Frank
Built in: 1931/32
Units: 318

Named in 1949 after the educationalist and politician Leopoldine Glöckel (1871–1937), the school reformer Otto Glöckel's wife. Frank waived any type of ornamentation other than a subtle colour concept accentuating the individual sections.

HAYDNPARK

Address: 12., Gaudenzdorfer Gürtel
Architect: Josef Joachim Mayer
Built in: 1926
Infrastructure: playground and outdoor gym, dairy

Little remains of the original facilities. Joseph Haydn's original gravestone stands near the exit onto Flurschützstrasse.

LIEBKNECHTHOF

Address: 12., Böckhgasse 2–4
Architect: Karl Alois Krist
Built in: 1926/27
Units: 416
Infrastructure: washhouse and bath, library, kindergarten, health insurance office, pub, business premises

Named after the German workers' leader Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900) and his son Karl Liebknecht, who was killed in 1919.

REISMANNHOF

Address: 12., Am Fuchsenfeld 1–3
Architects: Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger
Built in: 1924/25
Units: 609
Infrastructure: washhouse, bath, kindergarten and recreation room for children, mothers' support centre, gym, business premises, studios, workshops, chemist's

Initially called "Am Fuchsenfeld" and constructed at almost the same time as the Fuchsenfeldhof, the building was renamed in 1949 after the social democratic local councillor and Member of the Landtag Edmund Reismann (1881–1942), who would later be killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

FRÖHLICHHOF

Address: 12., Malfattigasse 1–5
Architect: Engelbert Mang
Built in: 1928/29
Units: 149

Named in 1930 after Katharina Fröhlich (1800–1879), a manufacturer's daughter and the poet Franz Grillparzer's "eternal bride". The "Globe Fountain" in the interior courtyard was designed by Stanislaus Plihal in 1929.

"In old Vienna we do indeed have beautiful streets, the loveliest of which is the Ringstrasse. However, there are no proletarians living in the palaces here – they were condemned to the edge of the city. These ostentatious buildings – representatives of the bourgeoisie – gaze down on the other buildings, cold, proud and haughty. The people who live in them usually have no grasp of the new age and its demands, or have no wish to. Yet outside, in this part of Gürtelstrasse, there are also palaces. Palaces without any unnecessary frills. The people who live here are the carriers of the new age. They must have light, air and sun, so that they can produce a strong, joyous and courageous generation." *Die Unzufriedene*, 30.08.1930

"Austromarxism was not just the promise of a better future, but rather an activity that embraced the whole of life. From the residential buildings to the workers' symphony concerts, from school reforms to skiing, from children's vacation camps to rabbit breeding, really from the cradle to the grave, the movement enriched the lives of hundreds of thousands." Marie Jahoda, 1981

Heinrich Schmid (1885–1949) and Hermann Aichinger (1885–1962), pupils of Otto Wagner, formed an office partnership together in 1912 and were commissioned in "Red Vienna" to plan several prestigious "superblocks".

Karl Ehn (1884–1959), also a pupil of Otto Wagner, worked at the Vienna municipal building office from 1909 until his retirement, throughout all of the political changes. From 1924 onwards he served as head of the office.

Josef Frank (1885–1967) was an advocate of housing estates and a determined opponent of "superblocks". He nonetheless built several residential buildings for the Vienna Council and took a leading role in creating the Viennese Werkbund housing project (1932). In 1934 Josef Frank emigrated to Sweden.

Following his studies at the Vienna University of Technology and the Academy of Fine Arts, **Karl Alois Krist** (1883–1941) took up a position with the City of Vienna, but also maintained a private office. Involved in housing development from 1921 on, Karl Krist was one of "Red Vienna's" most prolific architects. In 1938 he was forced to retire by the Nazis.

Otto Prutscher (1880–1949) studied at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts and, following stays in France and England, went on to work at Josef Hoffmann's office. Prutscher first made a name for himself as a designer. His interior designs, ceramics, jewellery and lamps were strongly influenced by the Wiener Werkstätte. In 1939 Otto Prutscher was forced to retire and banned from his profession.

LORENSHOF

Address: 12., Längenfeldgasse 14–18
Architect: Otto Prutscher
Built in: 1927/28
Units: 146
Infrastructure: washhouse, day nursery, business premises

Named in 1930 after the popular singer, composer and poet Carl Lorens (1851–1909), it has a particularly rich figural ornamentation.

BEBELHOF

Address: 12., Steinbauergasse 36
Architect: Karl Ehn
Built in: 1925–1927
Units: 301
Infrastructure: business premises and workshops, tuberculosis care centre, street-cleaning facilities

Named after August Bebel (1840–1913), co-founder of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party.

Städtische Werkstätten – MUNICIPAL WORKSHOPS

Address: 12., Steinbauergasse / Malfattigasse

The workshops maintained the furnaces, central heating installations, bathing and laundry facilities. Today the premises house the Hans Mandl vocational school, an adult education college and the Meidling district museum.

Erster Niederösterreichischer Arbeiter-Konsum-Verein FIRST LOWER AUSTRIAN WORKERS' CONSUMER COOPERATIVE

Address: 12., Wolfganggasse 58–60

Architect: Hubert Gessner

Built in: 1905

Extension: 12., Karl-Löwe-Gasse / Fockygasse, 1908/09

The facility offered a bakery, coffee roastery, and winery, later also a dairy and butcher's shop, and soon became the Consumer Cooperative's production and distribution centre.

FUCHSENFELDHOF

Address: 12., Längenfeldgasse 68

Architects: Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger

Built in: 1922–1925

Units: 480

Infrastructure: washhouse, bath, kindergarten, library, shops, apprenticeship workshops

The housing complex was one of "Red Vienna's" first projects, designed by the same architect team – and almost at the same time – as the estate Am Fuchsenfeld (later Reismannhof).