

MAY 2019 £4.99

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS



## VICTOR HUGO IN EXILE

Magpie villa of the man behind Les Mis



9 770264 083194





# DOUBLE DEUTSCH

Unlike its better-known French counterpart, German Art Deco had a dual aspect, embracing contemporary expressionism but also looking back to Biedermeier and the Baroque. Folk-art touches further muddy the waters. Indeed, as collector Markus Winter tells Timothy Brittain-Catlin, it's a design language unintelligible to some critics blind to all but the Bauhaus. Photography: Don Freeman



This walnut-and-marble console table dating from c1920 is the work of Max Wiederanders. From the relatively conservative city of Munich, he was part of the Stillkunst movement that aimed to revive decorative tradition, from paper-cutting to hand-engraved *cartes de visites*



Left: this side chair by Lajos Kozma was crafted in Budapest around 1927. Its decorative forms characteristically infuse the Baroque with folk-art elements. Below: a chandelier, c1925, by Franz Haegele of Berlin combines Deco with Jugendstil forms



Above: Markus believes this expressionist tabernacle mirror alludes to the idea that one must open doors to see one's true self. Right: this early 1920s gilt-and-lacquered chinoiserie armchair is thought to have been made for the Berchtesgaden royal castle



Below: this mid-1920s dining chair, probably rosewood, gestures towards the past, nodding to the work of the Biedermeier artist Josef Danhauser. Right: an unusual birch chest of drawers, c1917, is possibly by Karl Pullich for a Stuttgart furniture works



Left: this carved-walnut mirror by Max Wiederanders dates from c1920. Above: in designing the armrests of this carved-mahogany lounge chair, the Austrian Oskar Strnad looked back to early Chinese furniture and 18th-century English models





**WHEN** Markus Winter talks about his many years of collecting German Art Deco furniture, it feels as if we have entered into the realms of psychology rather than of design history. For the early decades of the 20th century produced some exceptionally fine and unusual work of this type, which fell off the radar for design historians because they did not want to see what was before their eyes. When he first talked to experts about his discoveries, all they could see was the Bauhaus, a kind of white sheet hanging over everything. There was for a long time a cognitive dissonance about the offbeat or otherwise out-of-favour periods of 20th-century German design that has cast a long shadow.

Furthermore, the German Art Deco period that had its roots in the years before World War I is a wider and more provocative concept than the French version we know from the Paris Exhibition of 1925. The former is a large category of work, of cabinets and sideboards, lamps and mirrors, which can slide into highly personalised folklore revivalism and contemporary expressionism. So Winter has found lacquered mirrors with steep gabled tops, decorated with zigzag lines like cartoon thunderbolts. In preparation for a new book on his collection, he has had his pieces photographed against a backdrop he himself designed, with stripes and arcs inspired by the most alarming of German expressionist films, all from 1920: *The Golem*, the Jewish tale of a shapeless clay monster; *From Morn to Midnight*, a bizarre allegory about death and money; and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, about a terrifyingly mad carnival hypnotist. In each of these, grotesque shadowy grey figures fly or creep across smeary monochrome landscapes or towns wearing masks or rags. There is a sense – intentional, of course – that one is never clear whether they are real or imagined, or whether the plot is actually happening, or indeed whether the directors and designers were somehow playing with dreams and fears rather than telling a story at all.

Today Winter is in New York. He studied art history in Düsseldorf in the 1990s and began to specialise in antique rugs. In 2002 he travelled to New York and was taken on by Doris Leslie Blau, the rug specialist; then between 2005 and 2010 he had his own gallery in Berlin, before returning to the United States. Nowadays he runs the Lampedo gallery in Brooklyn. His Art Deco epiphany occurred in the early 2000s. He was finding pieces in random places – in Italy, in Paris, on Ebay – yet there did not seem to be any one body of expertise on the subject.

The politics behind the style were always difficult. In 1910 a group of Munich craftsmen exhibited in Brussels and Paris, and local designers began to respond to it. But, says Winter, while the latter were happy to take ideas from their visitors, it was not a happy period in German/French relations – and it was about to get a great deal worse – so contemporary commentary tended to be suspicious or sarcastic. In Edwardian Britain, German expressionist design was greeted in exactly the same way: it was ‘unhealthy’ and

Top: two white lacquered chairs by Paolo Buffa and Giovanni Gariboldi, Milan, 1940s, demonstrate how Italian design was influenced by contemporary German work. Above: a detail of a Baroque armrest from a chair by Heinrich Pössenbacher, Munich, c1918, soon to be on display at Schloss Wernigerode. Opposite: this armoire, c1925, after a design of Lajos Kozma, was painted with bold expressionistic ‘thunderbolt’ stripes. Photographed at Markus’s house in Germany, the piece is now in Werner Löffler’s collection







it had 'gone mad'. So that was the first hurdle. Then, during the 1930s, the more 'Biedermeier' end of German Art Deco, with its highly polished woods and slightly jazzy curves, became adopted as a national furnishing style by Nazi leaders; in fact Paul Troost, who excelled at it, was Adolf Hitler's favourite architect. By the late 1940s, the upmarket, good-taste furniture that had filled many pages of the prestigious magazine *Innen-Dekoration* in the period before World War II had become tainted by association. Walter Gropius then came up with the wheeze of establishing a retrospective history of the Bauhaus that not only made himself the hero of a story about the conquest of the world with clean lines and white walls, but also the idea that anyone who resiled from it was a reactionary threat.

All this was nonsense: Bauhaus hero Mies van der Rohe had trained with Bruno Paul, one of the founders of the United Workshops for Art in Handicrafts in Munich, the leading Jugendstil and Art Deco studio. But, as a result, it was hard to find anyone who could talk and write both knowledgeably and rationally about the style. Moreover, expressionism often has a nationalistic streak, where wild energy collides with imagery drawn from folkloristic atavism. The particular combination of Art Deco with expressionism that Winter specialises in has mostly been too hot to handle, and the fact that some of it owes its inspiration to Jewish filmmakers and furniture designers has been overlooked.

*Innen-Dekoration* was also the publication in which the best critics wrote about new trends in design. Winter points to an article of 1919 by Paul Zucker entitled 'The Ornament of Our Time' in which the author speaks about a current wave of fashionable, rational purism in design, and how craftsmen from the opposite camp were reacting furiously to it. It was hard to define this latest style, Zucker wrote, referring to its 'zigzag, hasty turbulent rhythm of single shapes'. Yet when a whole room was created from these objects the effect was lush and comforting. One of the great setpieces was the interior designed by the architect Oskar Kaufmann with the painter César Klein for the Breslau (now Wrocław) villa of the textile manufacturer and art patron Leo Lewin. Other expressionists, including the sculptors Ernst Barlach and Georg Kolbe, worked on the project too. Kaufmann is best known for the theatres he designed before fleeing the Nazis, and Lewin's rooms had that twinkling 'expressionist rococo' stage-set feeling that millionaires dream of.

Winter owns a set of Lewin's dining-room chairs, and they form part of a major exhibition on German Art Deco design at Schloss Wernigerode in Saxony-Anhalt this summer. He is proud to have helped reopen so important a debate in German design history ■

*'Art Deco: Eine Kunst des Historismus?'* runs at the Schloss Wernigerode Museum, Zentrum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, 1 Am Schloss, 38855 Wernigerode, Germany (00 49 39 4355 3030; schloss-wernigerode.de), 29 June-3 Nov. Lampedo. Ring 001 212 380 8906, or visit lampedo.com

Top: an early 1920s demilune cabinet in lacquered wood and gilt gesso from the Rhineland. Above: attributed to Fritz August Breuhaus de Groot, this walnut floor lamp was carved by Willy Höselmann. Opposite: Bruno Paul, perhaps the most influential of Markus's designers, produced this stained-birchwood sideboard for the Zoo-Werkstätten of Berlin in 1928. The base is ancient and Asian in inspiration, but the refined silvered-brass hardware is contrastingly modern. The sconce is by Paul Huwald of Kiel, c1910



