



Haus eines Kunstfreundes

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In 1902 the Darmstadt publisher Alexander Koch issued a series of three large-format portfolios after an editorial competition on the subject of »An Art-Lover's House«. These are among the most exquisite examples of the model collections that architects and designers used to develop their skills from the 19th century onwards.

This lavishly conceived art-lover's villa was intended to be in the »new style«, a high-quality alternative to Art Nouveau, which had become over-popularized and formulaic. Interior and exterior had to be matched to each other in terms of design. For this reason, particular attention was paid to the decoration of the rooms, which were presented in subtle water-colour tones. All three suggestions show a strikingly personal approach, while at the same time addressing new tendencies that were emerging around 1900. These portfolios became famous because of the artists involved, especially the Scot Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret Macdonald. In fact the two had been eliminated from the competition for formal reasons, but their designs were published because the quality was so high, along with the work of the two winners, Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, a representative of the English Arts-and-Crafts movement, and Leopold Bauer, a pupil of Otto Wagner.

One particularly interesting feature of the story of these portfolios is that the three artists were hardly known at the time of the competition. They were more or less discoveries based on the publisher's expertise, Hermann Muthesius's skills as a mediator on the European art scene, and the patronage of the Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig von Hessen und bei Rhein, who founded the artists' colony on the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt. The designs were never realized, but the participants made a whole series of contacts afterwards, leading to other buildings and interior decoration projects.

Gerda Breuer is Professor of Art and Design History at the University of Wuppertal. One of the main thrusts of her research is aimed at the reform movements between Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Deutscher Werkbund and Bauhaus.

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