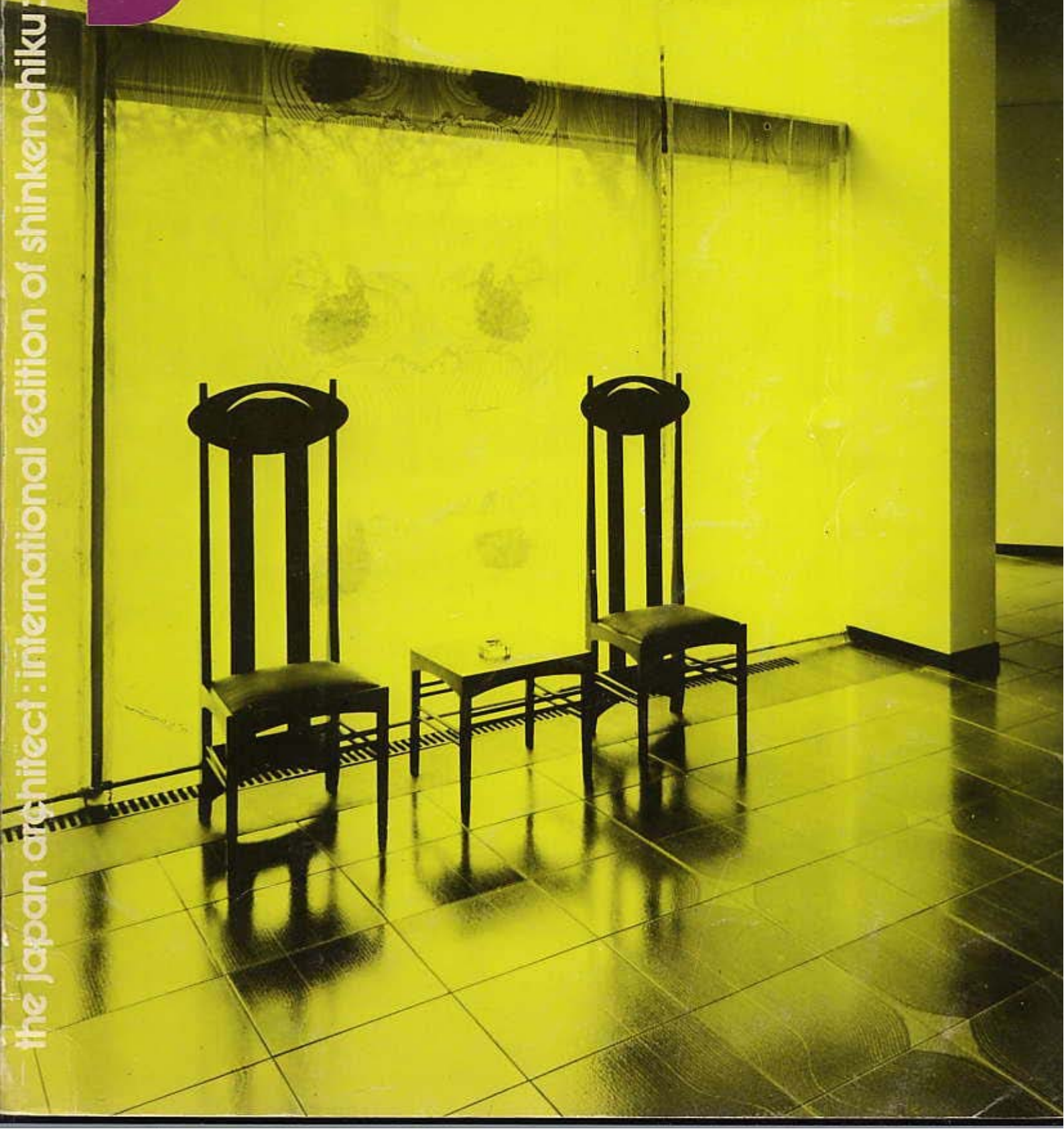


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## JAPONISM AND THE JUGENDSTIL

Historical connections that influenced the interior decoration of the new Austrian Embassy residential quarters

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When Japan decided in 1853 to step out of its self-chosen isolation, gradually a flourishing trade developed with Europe and the United States. The Meiji Revolution of 1867/68 finally gave rise to a regular "cultural revolution," and, if in Japan all Western imports were suddenly sought after, the Japanese color prints, unknown in Europe and America until the middle of the nineteenth century, were enthusiastically acclaimed by a public used only to the suffocating nineteenth-century historicism with its over-estimation and imitation of classical forms. The effect on the artists, especially the painters who quickly recognized the geniality of the "ukiyo-e school", was enormous.

The first Gallery of Asiatic Arts was opened in Paris in 1862. In the same year the London International Exhibition opened, and in 1873 the Vienna World Exhibition helped to make this art accessible to the broad public that was soon seized by a fancy for all things Japanese and consequently subjected to a complete change of taste in the applied arts.

Lacquered works with inlay of mother of pearl, cork pictures, and bamboo furniture became the craze of the years around 1900. Japanese motives were found on glassware and dainty ceramics, and the Japanese preference for the ornamental use of plant motifs and swinging lines was yet another stimulus for the birth of the *Jugendstil*, which was almost equivalent to the French Art Nouveau and the English Modern Style. It owes its name to the movement of a Munich art magazine called *Jugend* (Youth), founded in 1896. The term itself proclaimed a provocation to refute the dogmas of a petrified artistic tradition. The *Jugendstil* was to pump new life into all ranges of fine arts, applied arts, and even furniture and fashion.

Artists and artisans took joint actions, and even formed guilds in order to give utterance to their common belief in what were the main characteristics of their new school: functional adjustment to and simplification of shape, ornament, and decoration, hyperrefinement of design and the weaving of a symbolic meaning into the objects of their creation.

The men who brought this art to its finest bloom were all-around talents in the true sense of the word, often executing their theoretical ideas themselves by hand from start to finish.

In practically every field of the arts the *Jugendstil* influence showed its traces: in architecture names like Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Josef Hoffmann are closely connected with it; in painting Gustav Klimt,

Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele owe a lot to it, and in the applied arts the famous *Wiener Werkstaetten*, founded in 1903, formed a regular factory to realize the manifold ideas of the artists of the day.

Their principals, their inventions, and their theoretical treatises were to influence scores of young designers and craftsmen within the next decade. In multifarious variation *Jugendstil* creations sprang up like flowers in a desert after an unexpected tropical rain. Yet, the German speaking countries showed in their conception one remarkable common feature which the French and American versions of this style did not have: the two-dimensional linear language that bespoke the original Japanese source.



(above) Salon with the lounge in the background. (right) Entrance hall and the dining hall.



Photo: Kaneaki Monma