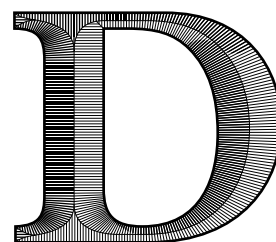


REPORT
Adolf Loos



MASTER OF MODERN —*Pilsen*

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Preface

Adolf Loos was a key figure in architecture but his legacy has had to endure turbulent times in his Czech homeland. Now that restorations of his most dazzling interiors are underway, his designs are set to be revealed in all their glory once more.

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In 2014, architect Ludvík Grym spent a night in a sleeping bag on the floor of a flat in Pilsen, Czech Republic. Located at 10 Bendova Street, the apartment's interior was designed by a legend of modern 20th-century architecture: Adolf Loos. Grym, who is based in Brno – where Loos was born – was the architect selected to design and supervise its restoration.

“That was part of my process of getting in touch with the atmosphere,” says Grym. In addition to a flat at Klatovská 12 and Brummel House at Husova 58,

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- 02 Apartment curtain

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- 04 Varnishing original wood in the bedroom at Brummel House
- 05 Radiator's play a key role in Loos's interiors

the interior of Bendova 10 is one of the first of eight Loos interiors to be restored by the city of Pilsen. In the early 20th century, Loos designed 13 apartments in the vicinity of Klatovská Street, a main thoroughfare running through Pilsen. His patrons were mostly wealthy Jewish families who, along with their homes, suffered a variety of tribulations during the Second World War.

This year Pilsen celebrates its status as European Capital of Culture 2015 and the project will attempt to show the world the contribution of the city – and the Czech Republic as a whole – to 20th-century design. “It was recognised that Loos was a treasure,” says architectural preservationist Karel Zoch who, as part of the Pilsen City Hall heritage department, advised on the project. With that recognition came an awareness of how important it was to restore this collection of interiors that had managed to endure the country's profound past. “It's a way to save our history,” says Grym.

Loos designed the interior of the five-room flat at Bendova 10 for Vilém and Gertruda Kraus in 1930 and 1931. In 1939, Vilém escaped to England with the intention of finding a home for his wife and children. They never joined him and died in a concentration camp. Vilém briefly returned to the flat after the German occupation ended only to have it taken from him by the Communists in the 1950s. The space was finally acquired in the 1990s by the city of Pilsen.

Despite its turbulent history, plenty of original features remained at Bendova 10, all of which have undergone major conservation cleaning. The dining room



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It's important to save the sound of the floor and to preserve the authentic smell of the apartment

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and salon were well preserved, as were their mahogany-tiled ceilings, mirrored walls, built-in furniture and green-and-white Cipollino marble details. The original hat hooks were all in place inside the wardrobe in the bedroom.

The most exciting discovery of the Bendova 10 restoration was when workers found a fragment of the original blue wallpaper used in what was Vilém's studio, located next to the bedroom. The restoration team made an exact replica to meet their foremost priority: to preserve the original atmosphere. “It is important to save the sound of the floor, the authentic smell,” says Grym. A request to make the floor more level was denied for the same reason. Original switches were kept (with a modern solution created by Grym to avoid a potential fire hazard) and nicks and cracks were left in the Cipollini marble and tiles in the original bathroom.

“The main challenge was finding a balance between restoring and maintaining authenticity: to not restore too much,” says Zoch. The second part of



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All natural

Adolf Loos was born in 1870 in Brno, today the Czech Republic's second-largest city but then the capital of Moravia within the Austro-Hungarian empire. His work extended beyond his home city to Vienna – with which he is most associated – Paris, Prague and Pilsen. Loos was profoundly influenced by his stay in the US between 1893 and 1896.

Loos' essay *Ornament and Crime*, in which he attacked the decoration of Viennese Secessionism, was the basis for a lecture he gave in 1910 that came to define his influential role in modernism. His work promoted the use of luxurious natural materials, employing internal organisation – adjoining rooms, mirrored walls on opposite ends to create the illusion of infinite space and columns – to emphasise function. Practical use of the apartment was paramount, giving rise to features such as built-in furniture and, above all, a consistent preference for clean lines and simple forms over ornament.

the apartment, where the children's room was located, is being restored and is set to be finished in summer.

Prague-based architect Václav Girska led the restoration of Klatovská 12 and the Brummel House. These projects follow the award-winning conservation work that his firm Girska AT did on Loos' Villa Müller in Prague. An expert hand was needed, especially for the complicated job at Klatovská 12.

Loos first designed the apartment interior there in 1908 for Otto Beck, whose daughter, Klára, the architect later married. In 1928, after the Beck family moved out, Loos redesigned the interior for Dr Josef Vogl, adding a consulting room. After the Vogls fled to Canada, the building was confiscated by the Germans and transformed into an employment office. By the time it fell into the hands of the city of Pilsen, only two rooms remained preserved.

Today they are part of Pilsen's City Hall and quite a contrast to the sterile offices through which you reach the remains of Loos' remarkable interior.



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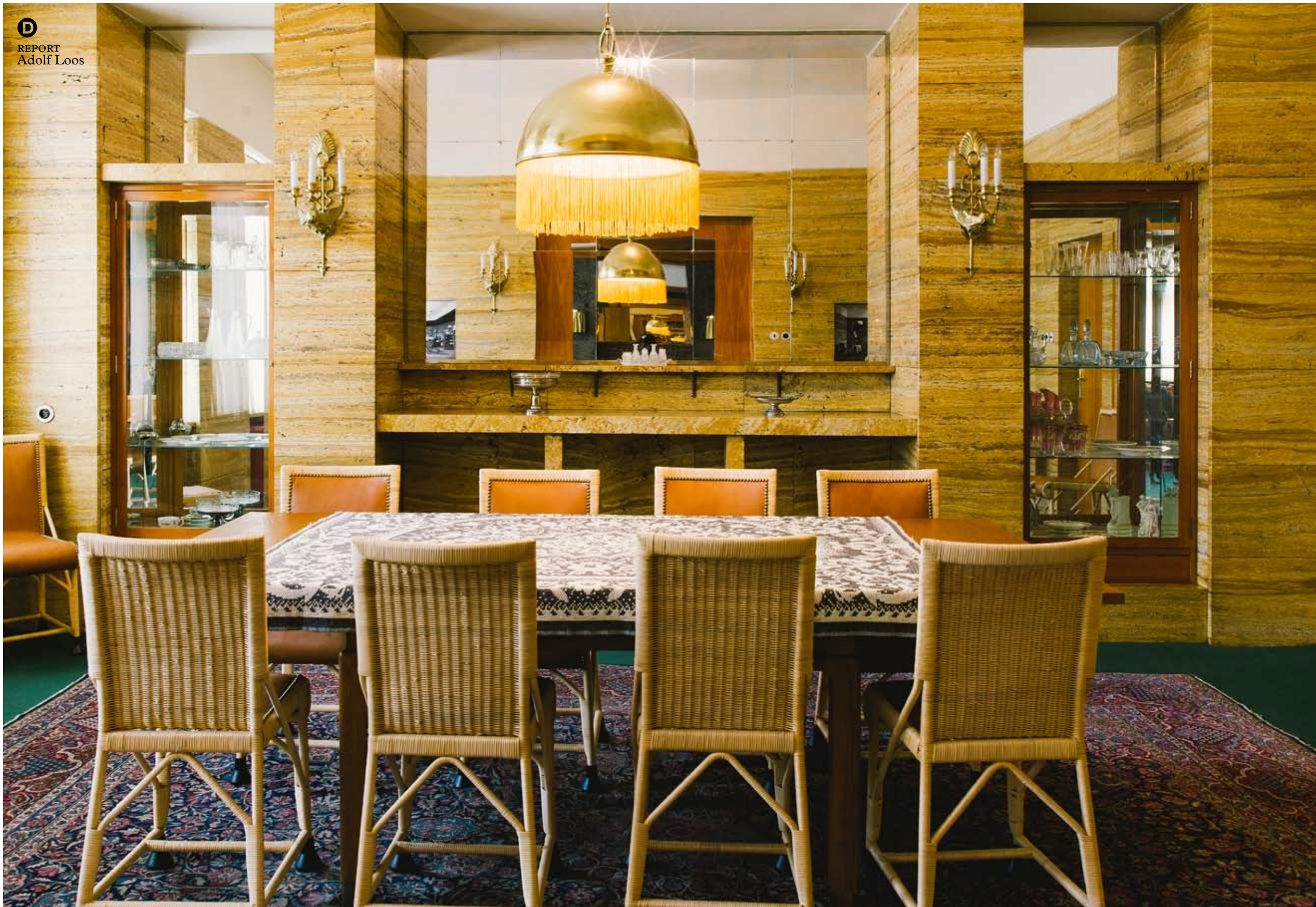
- 01 Preserved window-pulley system at Klatovská 12
- 02 Living room at Klatovská 12 with cherry-wood panelling

“The two rooms were in completely different states,” says Girsá. In the dining room the travertine walls were intact but some vitrines were destroyed and the ceiling had been lowered. The living room, which features cherry-wood panelling, a fireplace bordered in marble and built-in furniture, was hardly damaged. In attempting to restore the atmosphere, one of Girsá’s first tasks was replacing the radiators – he tried to find originals in the other flats – as they play an important role in a Loos interior. Because all of the original furniture was lost, it had to be replaced with exact replicas. Girsá credits Prague-based restorer Bok Art for its impeccable recreations.

Along with historical photos of the rooms and the furniture at Villa Müller, the team relied on the original Loos chairs at Brummel House as a source of inspiration. That the majority of the original elements at that property were preserved – from the furniture to paintings and lights – makes it the most exceptional among the restorations. Not only did the interior survive the bombing of the



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More Loos works in the Czech Republic

Klatovská 110

Next in line for restoration among the Pilsen interiors, this villa is the only one in the city that employs Loos' *Raumplan* approach, by which he sought to free his architecture from 2D strictures. Designed for Oskar and Jana Semler in 1932 and 1933, the property and interior is maintained today by Pilsen's West Bohemia Gallery, which will open a portion of the house to the public after work finishes.

Richard Hirsch apartment interior

Between 1907 and 1920, Loos designed interiors at Pilsen's Plachého Street 6 for Martha and Wilhem Hirsch, as well as their son Richard, whose flat was located in the same building as his parents' property. The interior of Martha and Wilhem's apartment did not survive but in the 1980s, elements of Richard's flat – a bedroom with built-in furniture and some wall tiles – were transported to Prague and placed inside a property of approximately the same size. The interior is part of the Adolf Loos Apartment and Gallery in Prague's Jewish quarter.

Villa Müller

Loos' functionalism meets a classic English-style villa and interior in this Prague space that is considered his masterpiece. Designed with the assistance of architect Karel Lhota, the striking cube-shaped home was constructed between 1928 and 1930 for Milada and František Müller. The interior is one of the best examples of Loos' *Raumplan* style. Following Villa Müller's restoration from 1997 to 2000, the building was declared a national cultural monument.



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Škoda factory across the street towards the end of the war, it was also saved from demolition in the 1980s.

Loos designed the interior and created an addition to the 19th-century building for Jan and Jana Brummel, between 1927 and 1929. The spacious flat's two back rooms were occupied by Hedvika Liebstein, Jana's mother.

The Brummel family fought for its preservation and the home was returned to them in the 1990s. Jan and Jana's nephew, octogenarian Michal Brummel, has been instrumental in the restoration: he remembers many of the details first hand, having resided in the apartment between 1945 and 1962.

The restoration has been both expensive and time-consuming. Restoring the flat room by room, Girsá and Brummel have worked together for more than 10 years on the project. Although the city of Pilsen has provided some grant money, part of the building was rented out to fund the project. The team of restorers (again, Bok Art) and craftsmen, including glass, metal and wood-workers from small Prague-based companies, has played a major role in the success of the project.

"Having a team of people who are able to see the value of these interiors and therefore understand the importance of restoring them to the highest quality is

- 01 Poplar walls at Brummel House
- 02 Wallpaper at Bendova 10 inspired by an original fragment
- 03 Replica wall lamp at Klatovská 12
- 04 Hedvika Liebstein's room at Brummel House
- 05 Mahogany-tiled ceiling at Bendova 10
- 06 Brummel House fireplace
- 07 Replica furnishings replace lost originals



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a victory," says Girsá. "Money may be difficult but it eventually comes."

Along with areas functioning as space for cultural events, the goal of the restoration has been to open up an exceptional collection of interiors to the public. They are intended to provide a glimpse of how the former inhabitants lived and to pass on their stories, as well as the approach and philosophy of Loos. "These interiors are our history, a historical footprint of this world-renowned architect," says Grym. "They are like a handbook." — (M)

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Having a team that can see the value of these interiors is a victory – money may be difficult but it comes

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