

# New design era began as a quiet revolution

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Photos: DICK KELLEY

For a group of designers, architects and artists in Vienna at the turn of the century, the Victorian style of design in home furnishings had simply gone too far. It was like the dinosaurs of old: too heavy, too cumbersome and barely functional.

The new movement to replace emphasis on ornament with good, clean line design, surfaced in a number of countries at roughly the same time — Henri Van de Velde (considered the father of Art Nouveau) in Belgium and Charles Rennie Mackintosh of Scotland, to name two.

Today's young people might call it

"cleaning up the act," but however it is referred to, the change was dramatic and quite abrupt.

Instead of seeing how many rose buds could be carved on the back of a chair, the new breed moved to wed form, function, flowing line and the beauty of natural materials into a unified whole. The furniture was devoid of the overabundance of ornamentation which their forebearers had favored.

One of those in the forefront of the relatively short-lived movement in Vienna was Josef Hoffmann, designer of the Wiener Werkstatte, an organization he founded with designer Koloman Moser in 1903.

IT WAS Hoffmann who was com-

missioned to do the furnishings, tiles and furniture for the Fledermaus cafe in Vienna. This was a popular salon and meeting place for the city's intellectual leaders in all aspects of the arts.

Not only was this new breed of designers rebelling against the heavy ornateness of Victorian design, they were fighting the advancement of the Industrial Age, which threatened to turn the once-proud craftsman into not much more than an assembly line machine operator.

Hoffmann, but not all of the new designers, favored hand workmanship, thus increasing his costs. Hoffmann and his contemporaries were the first true avant garde.

Their philosophy of design

reappeared applied to music (Schoenberg, an Austrian compatriot of Hoffmann's), psychology (Freud and Jung), architecture (Frank Lloyd Wright), and dance, (Isadora Duncan and later Martha Graham). In fact, this approach to design touched all fields from science and philosophy to painting.

AFTER QUIETLY running parallel to mass production in the United States for many years, the appreciation of handmade, well-designed furnishings of quality appears to have surged forward in this country in the last decade.

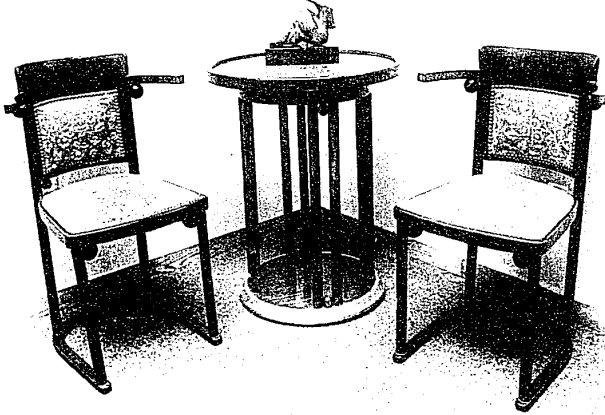
Now, originality and quality are two elements that American buyers look for in greater numbers than ever before.

The roots of contemporary furnishings predate World War I. They were created in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

And still they defy time by looking as

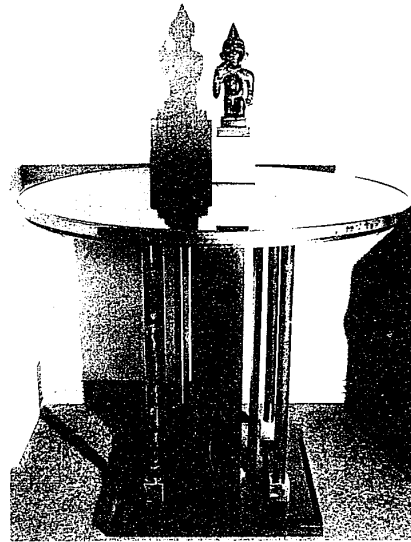
sleek and contemporary as anything produced today.

Call it a test of time or a test of line, whatever, they set the stage for how we look at home furnishings today.

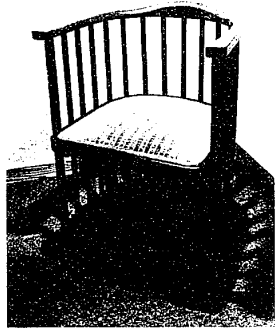


Fledermaus chairs and table, designed by Josef Hoffmann of Vienna, are similar to the ones he originally did

for the famous Fledermaus cafe. The bronze, "Bird," by Henry Moore was done in 1927.



Round table was designed in 1901 by Koloman Moser. It is mahogany. The top is covered with glass with a beveled edge. Its purity of form was a dramatic departure from the commonly seen Victorian of that period. The design incorporates the cube, the square and a refreshing combination of strength and balance while appearing light and open.



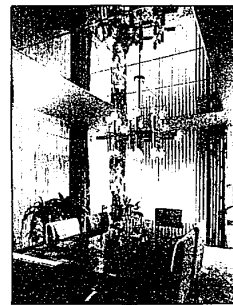
Part of a solarium set designed by Josef Hoffmann, this chair shows his concern with the pure geometric form, fine craftsmanship and function.

Staff photos by Dick Kelley were taken in the Donald Morris Gallery of Birmingham. The Henry Moore sculpture is also from that gallery.

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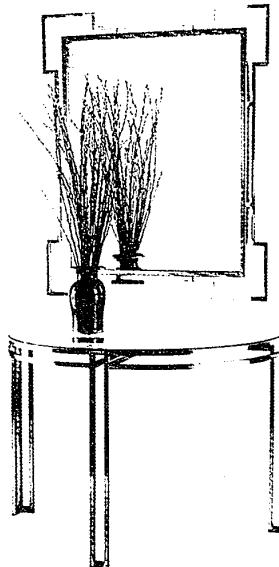
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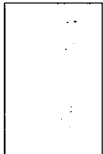
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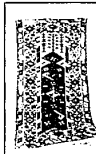
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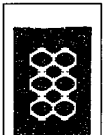
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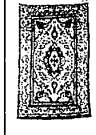
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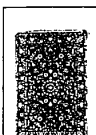
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