

Portois & Fix

An exhibition in Otto Wagner's Post Office Savings bank in Vienna has brought back to mind an unusual Viennese enterprise: in the heyday of the Viennese modern movement around 1900 Portois & Fix made design history.

In Vienna in the years before 1900 a profound renewal of architecture and art was under way. In the place of imitations of historical styles, as was customary at the time when the Ring boulevard was being constructed, a new and contemporary style was introduced. This style embraced architecture, painting and the graphic arts as well as all the various crafts. Thus, the designs for furniture reveal the same constructive elements as architecture.

The time was ripe for the two interior designers August Portois and Anton Fix. In 1881 they came together and formed Portois & Fix which was soon in a position to design and supply complete interiors. The young enterprise was successful at Austrian and international exhibitions too – and in addition August Portois had important contacts with the Vienna court and in France.

And so the new enterprise made its first high-level appearance at the Electrical Exhibition in 1883. This was opened by Crown Prince Rudolf and showed a series of modern interiors that were illuminated by electric light. These interiors were then published in a catalogue.



Josef Hoffmann, Desk, 1901



Robert Fix, Big Sideboard, 1906



Max Fabiani, company headquarters of Portois & Fix

Detail: Hofburg, Vienna



Koloman Moser, Sideboard „The rich fishing haul“, 1900



Firmenarchiv Brigitte Engländer

Advertisement for the 25th anniversary of the company

But of particular importance was their work with the masters of Viennese Jugendstil. The 8th Secession Exhibition in autumn 1900 presented works by representatives of the international modern movement alongside designs by Josef Hoffmann, Leopold Bauer and the painter Koloman Moser. Their furniture designs were brilliantly realized by Portois & Fix.

REVOLUTIONARY ARCHITECTURE FOR THE COMPANY'S HEADQUARTERS

It is hardly surprising that Anton Fix chose as his architect Otto Wagner's associate Max Fabiani (1865-1962) when, in 1902, he was planning a new company headquarter at 59-61 Ungar Gasse. The young architect's first work had been concerned with the choice of material for Wagner's façade on the Majolica House on Wienzeile. This new building contained spacious sales areas and numerous specialized workshops under one roof. The Viennese had hardly got used to Otto Wagner's idea of covering the fronts of residential buildings with tiles and forming these tiles into a Jugendstil design covering the whole façade when Fabiani shocked them with an even more radical solution. He clad the whole front of the main floors with identical tiles without any ornamental grouping – and wholly without decoration. The façade was to be the company's visiting card expressed as architecture and represent its contemporary production and it was indeed a pioneering example of tasteful corporate identity.