Remarks on Adolf Loos

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In the early 1970s, I worked for two architecture firms in Vienna. I came to know the so-called *Looshaus* very well, because I passed it twice a day while walking to and from work.

The schools of architecture I attended in the US did not study the Austrian modernists. Before arriving in Vienna, I barely knew the works of Wagner, Hoffman, and the other Secessionists. I grew to love their buildings, and I still love them, but even more I loved the seriousness of the Adolf Loos buildings, so devoid of ornament and yet so lovely and fine.

During the period of the Vietnam War, a time of turmoil and upheaval, it seemed important to embrace an austere approach to architecture and design, to reflect attitudes that were more somber than could be conveyed with decorative floral patterns, or even small elements of ornamentation. The *Looshaus* has that austerity and seriousness.

To me, the work of the early Austrian and Czech modernist architects is more refined and attractive than the work by the French and Swiss modernists who came a decade or two later. They are unmistakably "modernist," but there is not one element of the façade of the *Looshaus* or one detail of the Café Museum that is not carefully conceived—and you can see their roots in Austro-Hungarian design traditions.

In Paris, which is my home now, the wonderful Tzara studio in Montmartre remains an inspiration—a masterpiece of composition and care, an amazing exercise in space planning and the use of diverse materials, with an imposing yet welcome urban presence.

It is said that Loos was much influenced by his three years in America as a young man, and that he "knew well" the work of Louis Sullivan. Maybe so, and perhaps one can draw some parallels in stylistic and pragmatic terms, but to me Loos remains a totally original talent, with an intelligence and skill that stands out more than a century later.



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