



VIENNA: VIBRANT CITY OF DESIGN

by Sharon Hudgins

For many travelers, Vienna is the sound of Mozart's music, the taste of Sachertorte, the splendor of Schönbrunn Palace, the prancing of Lippizaner stallions, and the sweeping waltzes of the Vienna Philharmonic. Yes, you can find all of that in Vienna today—but the city has much more to offer than glories from the past.

As a cultural crossroad and political center for hundred of years, Vienna once attracted residents from every corner of its empire, whose tastes and talents gave the city its own special character.

But Vienna was badly damaged during World War II, many of its monuments and grand buildings destroyed, and its housing and commercial life disrupted. For much of the remaining century, as Vienna worked its way back to postwar prosperity, it had the slightly shabby look of a Central European city that had seen better times.

Today, however, Vienna is like an aging dowager empress who finally discovered the fountain of youth. During the past ten years, Vienna has regained its former glory, albeit in more modern clothes. Run-down areas of the city have been spruced up, new museums built and older ones restored. Trendy restaurants and boutiques have popped up like mushrooms, and a new generation of young people has already put its own stamp on the city. From 2009 to 2011, Vienna topped the list of the world's cities with the best quality of life, according to two respected international research groups. And today it's one of the ten most affluent cities in the European Union.

As people did a century ago, visitors now flock to Vienna for its modern art and architecture, its cutting-edge design, and vibrant street life. World-class designers of fashion and tableware showcase their wares in ultra-modern shops, and artists exhibit their latest works in tiny galleries and major museums. For information on Vienna's latest designer outlets, as well as classic and contemporary places to eat, get a free copy of the 70-page brochure, "Vienna Now or Never: Shopping, Wining & Dining," at the tourist office in Vienna, or view the information online at www.vienna.info/en/shopping-wining-dining.

The newest addition to Vienna's cultural life is the **MuseumsQuartier** west of the central Old Town, in the 7th District, site of major museums and other exhibition spaces, a contemporary dance center, art studios, an architecture center, and a variety of arts



festivals throughout the year (www.mqw.at/). The MuseumsQuartier's many attractions include the **Leopold Museum**, an outstanding collection of Art Nouveau and Modernist Art, with the world's largest holdings of masterpieces by Egon Schiele (www.leopoldmuseum.org/), and **MUMOK**, the largest museum of contemporary art in Central Europe (www.mumok.at/). And of course the surrounding neighborhoods have coattailed on this urban success, sprouting new cafes, fashion shops, and galleries to tempt your palate, your eyes, and your wallet.



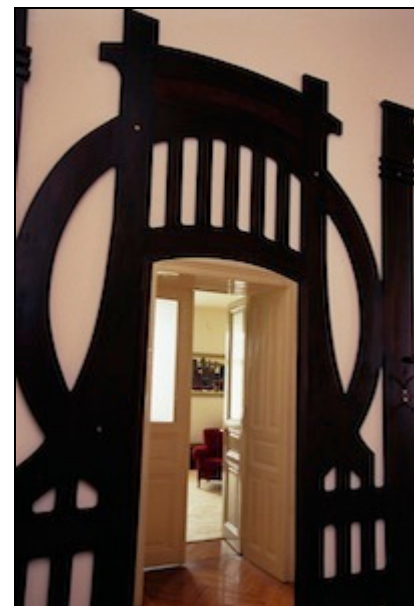
Masterpieces of 19th- and 20th-century modern art can also be seen at many other museums in Vienna, including the **Belvedere Palace** (www.belvedere.at/en), the **Albertina Museum** (www.albertina.at/en), and the **KunstHausWien** (www.kunsthauwien.com/en). Landmarks of modernist architecture include the gold-domed **Secession** building constructed in 1898 (dubbed "the cabbage" by its detractors at the time) and the **Hundertwasserhaus**, a colorful apartment complex that opened in 1985 (www.wien-vienna.com/hundertwasser.php).

Anyone who travels to Vienna for its modern design should also consider staying in one of the many new "design hotels" that dot the city. Most of them are located in older buildings whose classical facades mask the quirky but comfortable modernity inside.

Conveniently located near Vienna's new MuseumsQuartier, **Rathaus Wein und Design** (www.hotel-rathaus-wien.at) is a unique, 4-star-rated hotel constructed in 2003 inside a historic townhouse dating from 1894. Its 39 rooms and 1 large atelier are decorated in a very modern style, and each has its own individual character. Each room is also associated with a specific Austrian winery—with a large wine label from that winery on the door and photos of its vineyards on the walls. High ceilings, tall windows, and clever but comfortable décor all contribute to the particular ambience of this charmingly unusual hotel. A big breakfast buffet featuring Austrian specialties is served in the attractive breakfast room, which doubles in the evenings as a wine bar. There's also a nice garden for breakfasts in good weather, or just for sipping a glass of wine whenever.

The 4-star **Hotel Altstadt Vienna** (www.altstadt.at) is another distinctive hotel occupying five floors of a century-old house near the MuseumsQuartier. Built 20 years ago, each of the hotel's 42 rooms and suites has a different décor, in a stylish combination of the contemporary and traditional that nicely reflects Vienna's importance as a design center both today and in the past. Original modern paintings adorn the large lounge area, the wide hallways, and many of the rooms. All rooms are air-conditioned, making them especially comfortable in the heat of a Viennese summer. Tea with house-made cakes and pastries is served in the spacious salon every day between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Hotel Das Tyrol (www.das-tyrol.at) is a small luxury boutique hotel near the MuseumsQuartier. Recently renovated, it occupies a 19th-century building that



once housed a bordello. As the manager commented, "It now has a better life as an artist's model"—and indeed Das Tyrol displays a good selection of modern art in all the public areas and in its 30 tasteful, individually decorated, air-conditioned rooms. The décor combines the traditional and contemporary to create a peaceful ambience in contrast to the busyness of Vienna's street life just outside the door. The tasty breakfast buffet features Austrian meats, cheeses, and pastries.



Conveniently located in the Altstadt, the Old Town in the center of Vienna, the **Hollmann Beletage** (www.hollmann-beletage.at) is a quirky, minimalist-modern, luxury boutique hotel inside a 19th-century building. The 25 air-conditioned double rooms come in three different architectural styles and sizes, and all have comfortable sofas and chairs. The 6-course breakfast menu changes daily and is large enough to last you until dinner that evening. Complementary coffee and cakes are served in the afternoon in one of the lounges, and there's also a small movie theatre (with a popcorn machine) where you can watch three different feature films daily. Borrow a book from the little library, or practice your scales on the piano in the lounge. Amenities like these have attracted guests such as actor John Malkovich, mystery writer Donna Leon, and pianist David Helfgott.

Located in the district of Vienna's Westbahnhof (west train station), the 4-star **Falkensteiner Hotel am Schottenfeld** (www.schottenfeld.falkensteiner.com) offers 144 rooms in three categories (standard, superior, and deluxe), including five floors of "loft" rooms categorized as junior suites (standard and deluxe). Befitting the concept of "design hotels," the décor is ultra-modern, sleek and cool. Standard rooms are small and facing the street, whereas superior rooms are a bit larger and face the quieter courtyard. You'll want to linger over the especially large breakfast buffet, which offers something for everyone, from Austrian specialties to British and American breakfast foods.

For more information about Vienna, contact Tourist-Info Wien, Albertinaplatz/Maysedergasse, info@wien.info, www.vienna.info.

Photo Credit:

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Sharon Hudgins is a food and travel writer with more than 700 articles published in magazines and newspapers across the globe. She has lived in 10 countries on three continents and traveled in 60 countries around the world. She is the author of four books, including two award-winners--a cookbook about the regional cuisines of Spain and a travel

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