



A Story with History: 140 Years of the Grand Hotel Wien

In 2010, a legendary Viennese luxury hotel is celebrating its 140th anniversary. The Grand Hotel Wien looks back at a remarkable history with glamorous and turbulent times, with crowned heads and dramatic affairs, with culinary and musical highlights – but above all, with hundreds of thousands of guests who filled the venerable edifice with life.

Vienna's first luxury hotel

When the Grand Hotel Wien opened its doors in 1870, it was Vienna's first luxury hotel and the first of the famous hotels on the prestigious Ringstrasse boulevard. After four years of construction, originally as a maison meublée based on a design by the architect Carl Tietz, its owner Anton Schneider converted it from a private house to a hotel as soon as it was completed. It was the Habsburg Empire's first hotel to have the word "GRAND" in its name – an attribute it rightly deserved since it set entirely new standards in the then booming city of Vienna. Offering far more than comfortable beds and well-appointed rooms, it featured restaurants, a coffee house, a bar, salons, an in-house laundry service, a carpentry workshop, and stables for guests' horses. The hotel was also situated in an exclusive location: a year before its opening, the new imperial Opera House, today the Vienna State Opera, opened only 200 meters from the hotel. The nearby Musikverein concert hall was inaugurated in 1870 as well.

An advertisement for the Grand Hotel in the magazine 'The Hotels of Europe' in 1871 proudly referred to it as a "first-class hotel" with 300 rooms and apartments and a steam-operated

elevator. Thanks to this innovation, rooms on the upper floors, previously occupied by servants only, became just as popular as rooms in the belle étage.

Artists have been affiliated with the Grand Hotel from the very outset. August Eisenmenger painted a historic ceiling fresco in the dining hall that was unfortunately destroyed in later years. A painting by Thomas Etthofer from 1913 portrays 5 o'clock tea in the Grand Hotel.

Although a stock market crash and a cholera epidemic made 1873 a difficult year for the city, some auspicious events occurred as well, such as the visit of the King of Belgium. In that same year, the Grand Hotel set a culinary milestone when Chef de Cuisine Louis Tremmel introduced refined French cuisine to Vienna for the first time. In 1876, the hotel guide 'A Holiday Tour in Austria' called the Grand Hotel and the Imperial Hotel the best houses in Vienna.

The Mayerling tragedy

In 1888/89, the Grand Hotel played a central role in the Mayerling Incident, one of the most shocking episodes of the late Habsburg Empire. Countess Marie Larisch, a niece of Empress Elisabeth, was a regular guest at the Grand Hotel whenever she was in Vienna. The countess was a close associate of Crown Prince Rudolf of Habsburg and introduced him to the young and beautiful Baroness Mary Vetsera. It was the beginning of a fatal affair that later partly took place at the Grand Hotel.

The crown prince's personal coachman picked up young Mary more than twenty times from the rear entrance of the Grand Hotel to take her to secret meetings with her beloved Rudolf. In November 1888, the emperor asked his married son to end his affair with the sixteen-year-old baroness, who at that time was already pregnant. Mary's mother found out about the pregnancy and decided to send her daughter to England. Mary then fled to the Grand Hotel to seek refuge with Countess Larisch. In the morning of January 27, 1889, Crown Prince Rudolf went to the Grand Hotel for a confidential conversation with Countess Larisch. Later that day, the heir came back for the second time. He accidentally entered the hotel's pub and was recognized by the coachmen. The following day, Rudolf had Mary transferred to his hunting lodge in Mayerling, where he met her in the evening. On January 29, 1889, the tragedy that was to change the course of the monarchy took place: Crown Prince Rudolf shot Mary Vetsera and then himself.

Countess Maria Larisch remained a regular at the Grand Hotel even after the drama. She used to stay in Suites 21, 23, and 28 on the first floor, with a view on Maximilianstrasse (now called Mahlerstrasse).

A celebration for the King of Waltz

The King of Waltz Johann Strauss was the most important superstar of his time. Among other venues, his music was regularly performed at the Grand Hotel, mostly conducted by his brother Eduard. In 1894, a festive dinner was held at the Grand Hotel in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Johann Strauss's debut as a composer. More than 200 distinguished guests attended, including the maestro himself, his wife, and the famous composer Johannes Brahms. That same night, Grand Duke Constantine of Russia was staying at the hotel. A great admirer of the maestro, he asked for permission to sit in a room next door and listen to the speeches and the music.

In 1911, the Grand Hotel expanded its premises by acquiring the adjacent buildings at Kärntnerring 11 and 13. The hotel gained 100 rooms, installed elevators, and opened additional salons and a courtyard. By that time, all guest rooms were equipped with telephones.

A book on the history of the Grand Hotel by Andreas Augustin refers to a family gala dinner celebrated there by the house of Habsburg-Lothringen, "with Backhendl (fried chicken), Tafelspitz (boiled beef), and Apfelstrudel." But the carefree times soon came to an end. The killing of the heir to the throne in Sarajevo triggered the declaration of World War I and ushered in the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.



Damen-Salon Louis XV



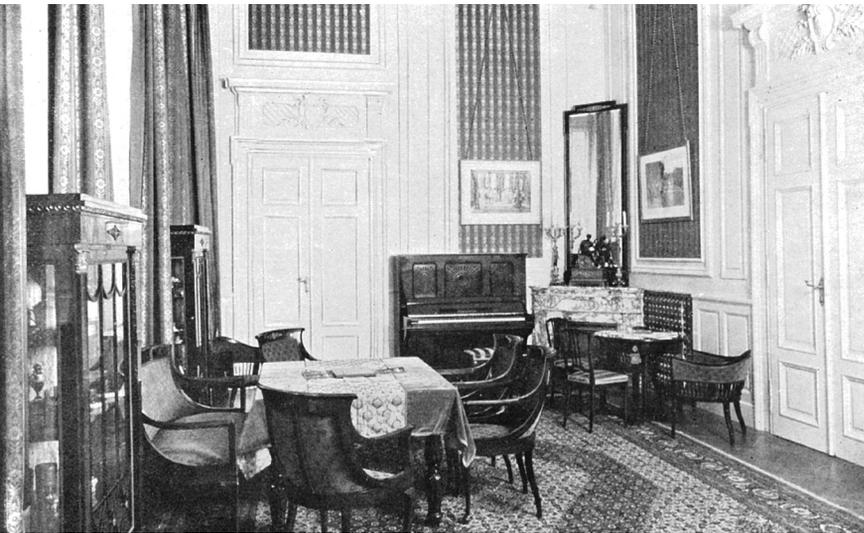
Guests in the interwar period

In the years following the First World War, Vienna soon became a cosmopolitan city again. Josephine Baker performed at the Varieté Ronacher and was a guest at the Grand Hotel. During the summer months a very popular terrace was set up in front of the hotel. The tradition lives on with today's Schanigarten (a Viennese term meaning "outdoor terrace" or "outdoor garden").

The hotel's popularity continued in the 1930s. Actors like Emil Jannings and Heinz Rühmann stayed here. The music salons were much appreciated by visiting artists performing at the opera. All of the salons were furnished with either grand or upright pianos and during the day resonated with the sounds of that night's performances at the opera.

WWII and the postwar period

Not much is known about the Grand Hotel during the years



Musik-Salon

of the Second World War. In 1939, a guide published by the German Automobile Club classified the Grand Hotel, the Bristol, and the Sacher as the only five-star hotels in Vienna. After the war, the Grand Hotel was occupied by Soviet troops until it reopened in 1957. Initially, the Austrian government considered closing the Imperial and giving its furniture to the Grand Hotel, which had been virtually stripped of its contents. Fortunately, this did not happen, and both of Vienna's traditional hotels were preserved.

One of the guests at the Grand Hotel after the Second World War was Prince Saud. While undergoing medical checks in Vienna, the Saudi heir to the throne was dissatisfied with the food served at the clinic. Every day, he would have two Rolls Royces deliver meals to him from the Grand Hotel.

In 1958, film director Anatole Litvak brought many famous guests to the Grand Hotel while shooting 'The Journey' in Vienna. Among them were actors Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr, Jason Robards Jr., Robert Morley, E.G. Marshall, and Anne Jackson. Back then, the Grand Hotel was also the base for Air France crews.

Also in 1958, Austria succeeded in bringing the International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA to Vienna, once again giving the now neutral country a presence on the diplomatic parquet. But Austria had to pay a high price in exchange: the Grand Hotel became the IAEA headquarters that same year. The IAEA stayed until 1979, when it moved to a purpose-built skyscraper in Vienna's UNO City.

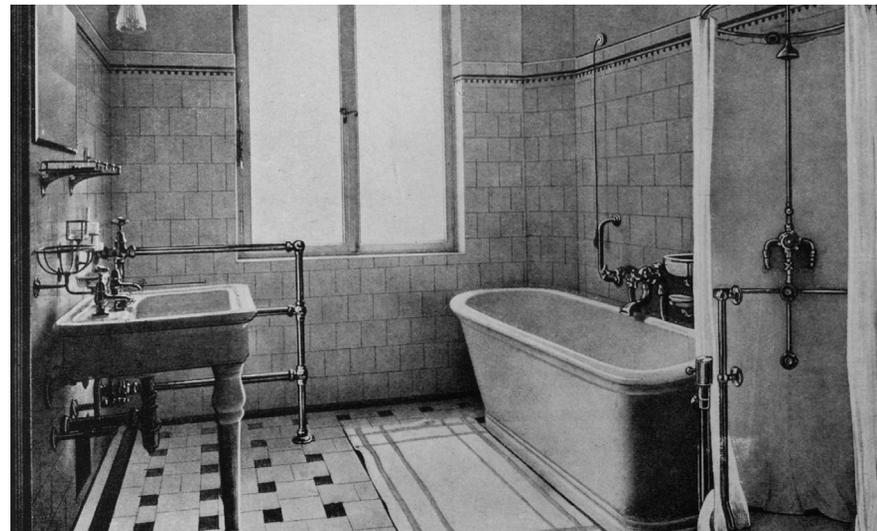
The ANA Grand Hotel

After a fire it took years until the premises of the former Grand Hotel were renovated. In 1989, the Japanese airline and hotel chain All Nippon Airways (ANA) invested in the building and had it completely renovated and reduced to its original size. Only the front façade remained. This is why (with the exception of the roof section) the hotel now looks much like it did in 1870. The interior may well have lost its patina, but the alteration made it easier to adapt the rooms to contemporary standards.

On June 15, 1994, the ANA Grand Hotel officially reopened after a four-year renovation, once again welcoming stars, politicians, and business leaders among its guests. The Three Tenors Plácido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti, and José Carreras used the Grand Hotel for a presentation with conductor James Levine. UNO Secretary Generals Boutros-Boutros Ghali and Kofi Annan were guests at the Grand Hotel, and violinist Lord Menuhin regularly stayed in the Presidential Suite. Since the ANA Grand Hotel was in Japanese possession, Nobel Prize winner Kenzaburo Oe also sojourned at the Grand Hotel, as did the Japanese royal couple.

JJW Hotels & Resorts

On August 1, 2002, the Grand Hotel Wien was acquired by JJW Hotels & Resorts, an international hotel chain founded by Saudi entrepreneur Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber. JJW Hotels still operates this historic property today under the name Grand Hotel Wien. The luxury hotel has been a member of



Badezimmer

the prestigious Leading Hotels of the World association since December 1, 2002.

Source/Copyright: Louis Gerber www.cosmopolis.ch

Bibliography:

- Brigitte Hamann, Kronprinz Rudolf, Piper TB.
- Andreas Augustin, The Grand Hotel Vienna Treasury, 2000.