

The 'Ornament Grammar' of Neoclassicism in Late Art Nouveau Interiors of Rīga

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A Paradigm Shift in Ornament Research

In recent decades, ornament studies have been on the rise in Western art history. This is evidenced by a number of significant publications examining ornament from various perspectives¹. Also noteworthy are conference materials that deal with ornament² in terms of analysis and reinterpretation of earlier theories in this field. One has to agree with leading Dutch researcher of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, Ethan Matt Kavaler, who notes that the situation of ornament studies today is much as it was at the end of the nineteenth century (Kavaler 2019: 1275), where the matter of ornament 'has become so important as to occupy center stage in the debates about art practice and art history' (Vandi 2018: 40). At that time, the industrial revolution and mass production of richly decorated items had urged a reassessment of the principles on which the creation and use of ornament were based. With the publication of Owen Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament*³ in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by numerous other editions in the second half of the nineteenth century, ornament had become not only the object of research in the context of historical styles, but also a catalyst for cultural belonging, a sign of social and intellectual difference, as 'ornamented artefacts were understood to reveal the DNA of cultures' (Necipoğlu, Payne 2016: 2). This 'revision,' along with in-depth studies of nature that flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, proved useful quite soon when, at the turn of the twentieth century, masters of Art Nouveau turned to motifs from several historical styles (Gothic and Rococo) alongside stylized natural forms, thus creating a specific ornamental Art Nouveau world. Ornament permeated all kinds of

- 1 Alongside classical works (Gombrich, Ernst (1979). *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), one should mention collected articles from recent years: *Ornament and European Modernism. From Art Practice to Art History* (2018). Ed. by Loretta Vandi. New York: Routledge; *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local* (2016). Ed. by Gülru Necipoğlu, Alina Payne. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 2 Among specialised periodicals prepared by professionals of various countries, one can mention *La revue de l'INHA*, (2010-1), *Ornement/Ornemental*; *Revista de História da Arte* (2019), *The Art of Ornament: Senses, Archetypes, Shapes and Functions*, etc.
- 3 Jones, Owen (1856). *The Grammar of Ornament*. London: Day and Son, 1856 (later editions: (2001). A Dorling Kindersley Book; (1972). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, etc.). For more information on this subject, see: Frank, Isabelle J. (2018). Owen Jones's Theory of Ornament. *Ornament and European Modernism. From Art Practice to Art History*. Ed. by Loretta Vandi. New York: Routledge, pp. 56–148.

art and was very important in the architecture of the era. However, the overabundance of ornamental décor inspired the famous 1908 essay *Ornament and Crime* (*Ornament und Verbrechen*) by Adolf Loos, which is seen as one of the points of reference for modernist architecture (Payne 2010: 79) and also marks a paradigm shift in the assessment of historical styles and especially Renaissance architecture. This approach, groundlessly ignoring the role of ornament, discarded the balance between the aspect of spatial-technical solution and the overall aesthetic conception. ‘In the wake of contemporary art’s rejection of ornament, historical scholarship also abandoned this topic by the mid-twentieth century, by which time it had been practically excised from scholars’ repertoire of interests’ (Necipoglu, Payne 2016: 2).

Publications dealing with ornament as well as studies published in the last decades in the West about industrial design, including ceramic tile⁴, have inspired the subject choice for this article. While exploring ornament as a catalyst for stylistic trends in Late Art Nouveau interior décor of apartment house vestibules in Rīga, the authors of this article pay attention also to the terminology of ornamental motifs. Industrially produced ceramic wall tile and panels thereof are examined, and information on producers is provided.

Neoclassicism in the Late Art Nouveau Architecture of Rīga

Neoclassicism was the third major stylistic trend in Rīga during the early twentieth century, alongside Nordic National Romanticism and Art Nouveau. Neoclassicism was also flourishing in European architecture of the time, indicating that coherent Historicism had been overcome and previous manifestations of Art Nouveau had become outdated as well. Neoclassicism also appeared in the largest centers of the Russian Empire back then, first of all in St. Petersburg, and the capital became the main center from which Neoclassicism spread throughout the Empire. The emergence of Neoclassicism in the architecture of St. Petersburg was fostered not only by general artistic trends in Europe but to a great extent also by Aleksandr Benua’s (1870–1960) articles in a series of publications in the journal *Mir Iskusstva*, where he criticized the city’s new buildings and praised its outstanding early-nineteenth-century architecture (Bass 2018). Neoclassicism in St. Petersburg was expressed by and large in universally abstract forms, leaning towards an Empire-style tradition. This orthodox version of Neoclassicism did not prevail in early-twentieth-century Rīga, as the period’s Neoclassicism in Europe and Rīga also was characterized by merging classical heritage and regional traditions. This factor was crucial in Rīga architects showing interest in the so-called ‘Burgher Classicism’ and its main representative Christoph Haberland’s (1750–1803) works with their typical freely interpreted classical tradition (Brūģis 1996: 197–200). This liberal approach to classical tradition was typical for early-twentieth-century architecture

4 Baeck, Mario, Hamburg, Ulrich, Rabenau, Thomas, Verbrugge, Bart, Kamermans, Johan, van Lemmen, Hans (eds.) (2004). *Industrial tiles 1840–1940*. Otterlo: Nederlands tegelmuseum.



Figure 1. Building of Embassy of Germany in Saint Petersburg. Architect Peter Behrens, author of Dioskouroi sculptural group Eberhard Enke. 1912. From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Botschaft_Petersburg_Fassade.jpg

in Rīga and its décor. Greatly different from St. Petersburg's was also the attitude towards décor in Rīga regarding modernized versions of classical tradition. Innovations in German artistic centers were followed, as evidenced by architectural examples in Rīga; noteworthy is the description in local German press (*Die neue deutsche Botschaft in Petersburg* 1913) of the German Embassy in St. Petersburg (1911–1913), designed by Peter Behrens (1868–1913). The building was later recognized as one of the first examples of the so-called 'stripped Classicism' in European history of architecture (Anderson 1991). Intellectual circles in the Empire's capital were critical of the completed building, while the *Rigasche Zeitung* article described it excitedly and extolled as a masterpiece the building's architectural sculpture — the five-meter-high Dioscuri sculptural group, centered in the attic and crafted by German sculptor Eberhard Enke (1881–1936), who created the work as a generalized interpretation of Greek masters' subjects from the Classical era. The composition was destroyed in 1914 when the German Embassy was demolished at the beginning of World War I (*Dom German-skogo posolstva* 2007–2021) (Figure 1).

Although information about artistic processes not only in Europe but the entire world was widely available in Rīga, Germany was the most important center of ideas for Rīga architects. This is indirectly confirmed by the critical publications of Jūlijs Madernieks (1909) and the fact that Germany was among the main suppliers of those modern decorative finishing materials that were either not produced in Rīga or produced in small amounts (such as wallpaper (Lūse 2016) or ceramic wall tile⁵), despite the fact that Rīga was one of the major industrial centers of the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

Looking back at Rīga's historical architecture and décor in older periods, one can notice the important role of freely interpreted classical decorative motifs as well as an interest in lavish décor. Among major examples are the splendid Reutern and Dannenstern houses built in the so-called Dutch Classicist style. According to architectural researcher Anna Ancāne, their façades 'differ from Dutch examples.... Greater attention is paid to decorative details, acanthus ornament, especially in the finish of portals' (Ancāne 2010). She continues: 'It is noteworthy that the artist has achieved maximum harmony between the reserved tone of the façade and some of its parts where the rich décor and details are concentrated. This can be considered the local specificity of Rīga's Baroque' (Ancāne 2010). This specificity was somewhat taken over in the mid-nineteenth century when the fortifications of the city were removed and it underwent rapid growth and transformation into an industrialized locale whose presentable, newly constructed public building façades featured plastic décor, allegorical figures and groups thereof which displayed buildings' functions by using the imagery of classical antiquity.

During the last years of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, characterized by the so-called 'ornate' Historicism and Early Art Nouveau, rich architectural sculpture became very trendy not just for public but also for residential and commercial buildings. Their façades and interior solutions became the owners' signs of prestige, revealing historical parallels with the aforementioned Reutern and Dannenstern houses. The process was fostered by increasing technical possibilities, accessible specialized workshops, and craftsmen, as still-present Symbolist trends prompting house owners and commissioners to convey their perspective on the order of things (Grosa 2019: 193–235). The Neoclassicist period that followed the rise of Art Nouveau was suitable for such purposes. Along decorative finishing with traditional, classical ornamental motifs on public and apartment buildings, Renaissance and Baroque-inspired allegorical narrative compositions still appeared on some façades (Grosa 2021).

Motifs of classical antiquity already were favored in Rīga façade décor in the Historicism period and were retained during Early and High Art Nouveau as well — Rīga Art Nouveau

5 Historian Inta Štamgute carried out partial inventory of wall tile in residential buildings of Rīga in the last years of the twentieth century. In her dissertation *Wall and Floor Tile Finish in the Architecture of Rīga at the Turn of and Early Twentieth Century*, started in 2020 (AAL, supervisor Silvija Grosa), Agnese Tāmbaka has now examined vestibules and stairwells of 182 apartment buildings in Rīga with either fully or partly preserved ceramic wall tile. She has attributed them as far as possible and also inspected vestibules and stairwells of 451 apartment houses with either fully or partly preserved ceramic or cement floor tile.

did not emerge as an anti-classical style or an ‘opposite to Historicism’ (Brancis 1994: 25). However, the interpretation of traditional motifs changed in the early twentieth century. Their scale increased, and the compositional arrangement on the plane was different, abandoning minute details in favor of the aesthetic value of solid surfaces. Material explored thus far demonstrates that a similar approach was used also in decorative interior finishing, including vestibules and stairwells of apartment buildings. Considering the large number of such buildings (according to architect Jānis Krastiņš, about 600 masonry buildings were constructed from 1910 to 1914 (Krastiņš 2018: 15)) and the fact that a visual inspection of private apartment buildings and even their vestibules is somewhat complicated, this material still provides further opportunities for in-depth and specialized studies.

Industrial production — wall and floor tile, ready-to-use plaster casts for walls and ceilings — were utilized for the interior finishing in apartment buildings. However, even despite favoring mass-produced materials and stenciled wall paintings, architects and decorative finishing firms searched and, surprisingly, also found solutions that were artistically as unique as possible. Ideas of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or a synthesis of all arts of the period, were implemented through combinations of various finishing materials. Even with the use of the same materials, variations of arrangement or colors allowed for distinct results, and no two vestibules in Rīga are identical. Combinations of materials and stylistic solutions in the Late Art Nouveau period demonstrate that, while following modern European, especially German, trends, architects and decorators retained a free approach to the classical tradition typical of Rīga. In choosing appropriate ornamentation, vestibules and stairwells were created, keeping in mind the famous English saying, ‘My house is my castle’; its realization, of course, depended on the commissioner’s financial resources.

Ornamental Motifs of Classical Antiquity in the Apartment Building Vestibules of Rīga

At the turn of the twentieth century, rapid growth of construction and mastery of new technologies introduced new finishing materials throughout the Western world. Rīga was no exception, and tile floors appeared in vestibules and stairwell landings as early as the late nineteenth century. The main sources of inspiration for the decorative solutions for floor tile were Hellenistic and Roman mosaic floors. Similar to classical antiquity, vestibule floors in the examined period were covered in ornamentally arranged tiles, combining and repeating one or several motifs (such as rosettes). Perimeter were framed by band ornaments. Although there are Art Nouveau-inspired motifs on the period’s floor tile, more commonly used were different variations of geometric band motifs appropriated from classical art (meander, wave motif or the so-called Vitruvian Scroll, also known as the running dog motif⁶

6 The motif, known in German as *Vitruvianische Veloute*, refers to the Roman architecture historian Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, active in the 1st century BCE.



Figure 2. Fragment of floor tiles produced by the Polish company “Marywil” in the vestibule in a building at Rīga, Kalēju Street 14 (arch. Max von Osmidoff). Photo: Agnese Tambaka

(Levis, Darley 1986: 318), palmette bands, guilloche, etc.) (Figure 2). Sometimes, the main motif would even be emphasized in the center of the floor (the so-called *emblema*). Such motifs in high-quality color illustrations were included in the aforementioned *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones, and they were most likely examples later followed in numerous industrial floor tile designs as late as the early twentieth century. Floor tile was both imported to and produced in Rīga; one of the main local producers was the cement factory *Carl Ullmann Rīga*. This firm was founded in 1899 and operated until its bankruptcy in 1931 (Grosa 2019: 92). Though tile was the most common type of floor finishing throughout the Art Nouveau period, the spread, diversity, and compositional and ornamental solutions of this material are yet to be studied in depth.

Although the original decorative finishing of apartment building vestibules in Rīga is often only partly preserved, the material inspected thus far demonstrates that, regarding decorative wall finishing and ceramic tile panels in particular, interest in ornamental motifs of classical antiquity emerged as early as the beginning of Late Art Nouveau (no later than 1906/1907). The earliest examples are vestibules in apartment buildings at 5 Peitavas Street (1906,

architect Paul Mandelstamm, 1872–1941) and 13 Stabu Street (1907, architect Wilhelm Hofmann). By the end of the Late Art Nouveau period, freely interpreted classical tradition began to prevail in vestibule styles. Parallel to this mainstream trend, Late Art Nouveau vestibule interiors featured other trends, including modifications of the geometric Art Nouveau and vernacular motifs such as the vestibule of Aleksandrs Freijs' apartment and shop building at 37 Brīvības Street (1909, architect Eižens Laube); interpretations of older artistic periods were present as well. Perhaps the most prominent example of these is the vestibule of 64 Aleksandra Čaka Street (1909), designed by architect Aleksandrs Vanags (1873–1919). Here, the space is enclosed by monumental clustered-papyrus pilasters joined by a narrow ceramic tile band to create an atmosphere reminiscent of an Ancient Egyptian temple.

One of decorative finishing examples where a favorite classical motif was emphasized is the vestibule of the building contractor Jānis Virsis' house at 62 Brīvības Street (1908, architect Eižens Laube (1880–1967)). Here, wall finishing consists of wooden panels alternating with a frieze of plaster garlands (the finishing is only partly preserved today).

Garlands (Italian *ghirlanda*, French *guirlande*), festoons (Latin *festa* — celebration), and wreaths are decorative motifs that date back to ancient times. According to archaeological findings, flower garlands were used in religious rituals in Ancient Egypt. Yet, the main source of these motifs was the Greco-Roman tradition of adorning spaces with garlands of flowers, foliage, and fruits bound by ribbons and attached to walls, placed over doors or between columns during festivities and religious rituals. One needed special skill to make these complex braids, which were created in a specific way (Smith 1875). The garland motif was taken over in decorative arts already in antiquity and represented in the most varied materials, including plastic décor. A festoon as well as garland could be subject to multiple variations and used in the frieze in turns with other elements, for example, putti, cornucopias, wreaths, and bucrania (Latin *bucranium* — skull of an ox sacrificed in a religious ritual). In other cases, the festoon was enriched with imitated draperies or made entirely as an imitation of fabric. Garlands and festoons were much favored in Renaissance-era Italy, gradually joining the spectrum of the most popular ornamental motifs in architecture and decorative arts. They retained their role over the next centuries, including in ceramic tile panels in the vestibules of Rīga. One of the most splendid and chronologically earlier examples of combined festoons and wreaths has survived in Miķelis Teters' apartment building vestibule at 60 Ģertrūdes Street (1908), designed by architect Rudolf Dohnberg (Figure 3). Motifs are arranged on a relief frieze, turquoise blue against a dark blue background with yellowish accents, therefore standing out on a background of smooth white tile. The upper panel is decorated with a band harmonized in color with the frieze motif. This is the only known interior in Rīga where festooned wall tiles have such coloring. It is noteworthy that floor tile in the vestibule of Teters' building features arrangements of red flower motifs with green accents on a lighter background, framed by a stylized and rhythmically arranged tulip frieze in line with Art Nouveau.

Tile panels were also used in vestibules of later buildings designed by Rudolf Dohnberg, demonstrating his enthusiasm for this finishing material that had not been adequately

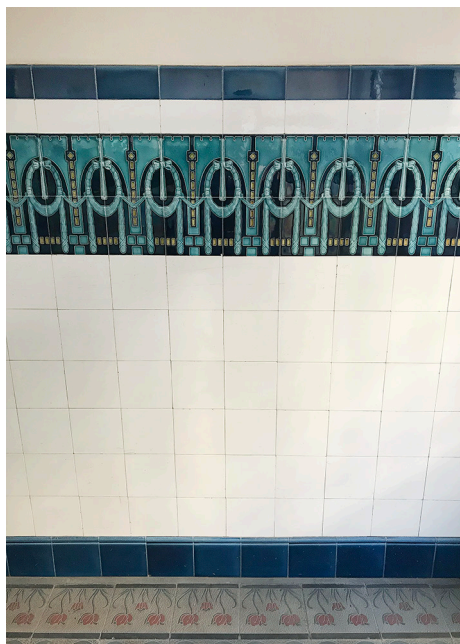


Figure 3. Vestibule at Miķelis Teters' apartment building at Ģertrūdes Street 60 (arch. Rudolf Dohnberg, 1908). Wall tiles: NSTG, floor tiles: Carl Nevermann & Co Riga. Photo: Agnese Tāmbaka

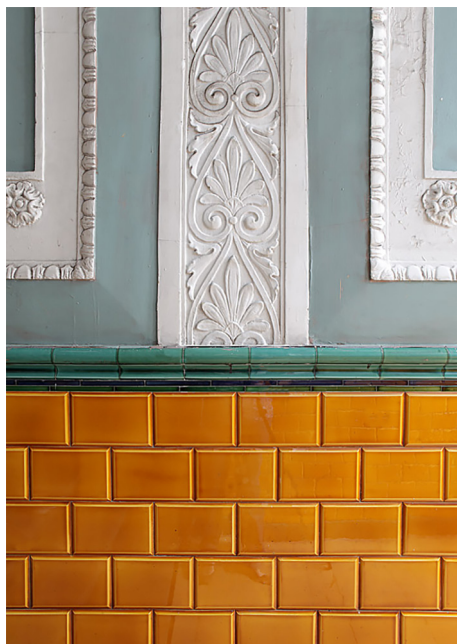


Figure 4. Vestibule at Rūpniecības Street 3 (arch. Konstantīns Pēkšēns, 1908). Photo: Margarita Fedina

considered before. In several vestibules of Dohnberg's buildings, decorative solutions are based on classical antiquity; tile panels were oftentimes thematically enhanced with corresponding motifs in plastic décor, using industrially produced elements for the decoration of upper interior walls. An example of such a combination is the vestibule of the apartment building at 19/21 Ģertrūdes Street (1909), where, above ceramic tile panels with festoons and wreaths, there are wall-dividing frames in the shape of classical palmette friezes (Figure 4). Identical cast panels of plastic décor were used by architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns for apartment building vestibules at 4 Vīlandes Street and 3 Rūpniecības Street (both in 1908), choosing ceramic tile panels for both buildings that are monochromatic but differ in detail coloring, thus giving each premise a different overall spirit.

Freely interpreted art of classical antiquity (with modifications of later centuries as well) was a rather safe and universal resource for decorators of apartment buildings in Rīga, as evidenced by the variations on traditional ornamental motifs in vestibules. There could be sculptural acanthus garlands on wall planes as well as motifs derived from classical orders — dentils, egg-and-dart friezes, bands of guttae or palmettes, coffered ceilings. Such motifs were also repeated

on tile panels in the most diverse combinations, even including stylized bucrania (such as the wall panel frieze of the vestibule at 30 Aleksandra Čaka Street, 1911, architect Aleksandrs Vagnags). Variations of the aforementioned motifs and color selections created different images of the spaces, even if the tiles used were identical. For instance, the vestibule finishing in the apartment building at 62 Stabu Street (1909), designed by Solomon Nudelmann (1877–?), has retained a tile panel with a stylized festoon and laurel wreath motif, given an Art Nouveau accent by a series of small squares. The overall impression of a space oriented towards eighteenth-century Classicism is achieved through plastic finishing of the upper wall — a division into frames with rhythmically arranged vases, acanthus garlands and strings of pearls in the centre as well as a guilloche motif in the upper wall plane. Analogical tile panels are present in the apartment building vestibule designed by Eižens Laube at 119 Dzirnau Street (1912). Here, the walls above the tile are decorated with a plastic festoon frieze, and the plafond edges are coffered, while its center, marked by a wide oval egg-and-dart moulding, is left vacant, thus creating an Empire-style atmosphere for the space. It is noteworthy that the first-floor vestibule of the same building has its walls painted in the so-called marbleization technique, which imitates marble panels in line with First Pompeian Style paintings. These examples point to the fact that architects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were skilled in artistic expressions of historical styles.⁷ Therefore, they could masterfully handle themes of classical ornament, as evidenced by the choices and diverse combinations of ceramic tile panels.

The Attribution Problem of Wall Tile of the Vestibules of Rīga Apartment Buildings

Ceramic wall tile appeared in the interior décor of Rīga's vestibules no later than 1901 and became a very popular type of finishing within a few years, especially during the Late Art Nouveau period. Not much attention has been paid to ceramic tile panels in previous publications dealing with Rīga Art Nouveau architecture and interiors, as ceramic wall tile was mainly imported to Rīga.

In the last two decades, significant research on the turn-of-the-twentieth-century tile in Europe has been carried out. It helps in the attribution of previously little-known producers of Rīga's interior tile and allows one to view this material in a wider context and in correlation with the production history in Western European factories.

Industrial production of tile began in Europe around 1850, mainly in already operating factories of ceramic items. Factories specializing in tile production emerged only later in England, Germany, Belgium, and elsewhere, as demand for architectural ceramics was on the rise in the

7 Mastering artistic styles and their ornament is evidenced not only by practice but also in architects' publications. One of the most important: Laube, Eižens (1921). *Krāsu un formu loģika*. Rīga: Ekonomists.

late nineteenth and especially early twentieth centuries. This demand was related to architects' interest in polychromatic accents in façades (numerous examples are found in Rīga as well) and in bright colors and a richness of ornamental motifs created by wall tile panels in interiors. Thanks to technical innovations and modern production methods, wall tile could be manufactured in large quantities and be moderately priced, thus affordable to broad social circles.

It has been assumed that all tile factories published catalogues presenting various tile motifs and also recommending arrangements. Today, such catalogues are rarities, and cooperation among researchers in different countries is necessary to specify producers. It is known that, during the Art Nouveau period from 1890 to 1914, ceramic tile was produced in large factories as well as in small workshops, creating in all about 8,000 variations of various wall-tile motifs. Themes of Art Nouveau and other historical styles were used (Simermacher 2000); however, typical Art Nouveau motifs appeared much more rarely than ornamental themes influenced by historical styles⁸.

In comparison to wallpaper and other types of decorative finishing, wall tile had many advantages, including hygienic considerations — tile is easy to clean, thus it is often used not only in apartment building vestibules, kitchens, and bathrooms but also in public buildings such as train stations, hospitals, schools, etc.

Tile is a type of industrial production whose attribution is hampered by the fact that turn-of-the-century tile design examples were commonly used for a long time (often even after World War I) because production required serious financial investments in the preparation of metal moulds, stencils, etc. Thus, typical Art Nouveau motifs remained on the market even when the style itself was no longer seen as 'avant-garde' (Baeck 2013).

To date, wall tiles of nine German factories have been found in Rīga⁹. On the eve of the World War I in 1914, thirty-five factories in Germany specialized in tile production. German tile factories played an important role in the artistic and technical development of the field in Europe (Patrino 2017: 141).

The largest number of preserved tiles in Rīga come from the Northern German Faience Factory in Grohn (near modern Bremen), *Norddeutsche Steingutfabrik Grohn*

8 Belgian art historian Dr. Mario Baeck has studied early-twentieth-century wall and floor tile for many years and inspected over 100 catalogues of different producers from various collections. He has concluded that only a few dozen tile motifs were typical of Art Nouveau even in the golden age of the style. Most (several hundred) motifs comply with the neo-styles of Historicism. See: Baeck, Mario (2013). *The Flourishing of Belgian Ornamental Tiles and Tile Panels in the Art Nouveau Period*. Available: <https://www.academia.edu/3768750> [Accessed 10.08.2021].

9 Boizenburg, Ernst Teichert G.m.b.H., Grohner Wandplatten Fabrik, Meißner Ofen- und Porzellanfabrik, NSTG Actiengesellschaft Norddeutsche Steingutfabrik Grohn bei Bremen, Sächsische Ofen- und Chamottwaarenfabrik SOF/SOMAG, Tonwarenfabrik Müggeln GmbH - Bezirk Leipzig, Villeroy & Boch Mettlach, Wessel Bonn.

(hereinafter — NSTG¹⁰). The joint-stock company NSTG was founded in 1869 and produced various ceramic goods. Wall tile production was launched here only twenty years later, in 1889 (Weisser 1978). A substantial number of tiles have also survived from the Grohn Wall Tile Factory (*Grohner Wandplatten Fabrik*). It was founded in 1906 and produced various ceramic items, including floor tile (Weisser 2012).

It is possible to conclude now that wall tile produced by NSTG is the most widespread in Rīga. To establish the tile producer, it is important to determine their distributors in Rīga, who delivered ceramic wall tile to their commissioners. Inspected materials suggest that the trade company *Velten-Berlin*, located at 21 Great Maskavas Street in Rīga, was a significant market player. This firm is believed to have distributed NSTG tiles and possibly also tiles from other German factories in Rīga (Štamgute [1986]). However, information gathered¹¹ about *Velten-Berlin* thus far is scarce and does not allow one to establish all potential tile producers that cooperated with the company.

Regarding the wall tile panels of Rīga's apartment building vestibules inspected so far, ornamental motifs are compositionally most often arranged in bands. Motifs are diverse, including typical Art Nouveau floral stylizations alongside abstract motifs whose origins are related to historical styles. Often repeated are chevrons, egg-and-dart motifs, palmette friezes, stylized antefixes, the running dog motif, and others in different combinations, sizes, and color ranges (Figure 5).

Among the favorites are variations on the classical festoon and garland, thirteen in total and six of them found repeatedly. In most cases, the festoon motif in tile panels is combined with the wreath motif.

At least nine vestibules¹² have retained wall tile produced by NSTG with a festoon motif from model No. 869¹³. The festoon is a low relief depicting not only laurel leaves but also laurel

10 NSTG is the abbreviation used in specialized literature to refer to the Northern German Faience Factory in Grohn near Bremen (*Aktiengesellschaft Norddeutsche Steingutfabrik Grohn bei Bremen*).

11 Advertisements in early-twentieth century press, including *Jahrbuch für Bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen* [6 Jg.], (1912). 7 Jg., (1913), *Rigasche Zeitung*, Nr. 103 (1912), as well as the informative advertisement with the company address on apartment building vestibule panels in Rīga.

12 Such tiles are discovered in vestibules at 34 Aleksandra Čaka Street (architect Eizēns Laube, 1911), 114 Brīvības Street (architect Nikolai Nord, 1912), 43 Cēsu Street (architect Edmund von Trompowsky, 1910), 66 A Dzirnavu Street (architect unknown), 23 Marijas Street (architect Jānis Frīdrihs Baumanis, Aleksandrs Vanags, 1910–1911), 6 Raiņa Boulevard (architect Karl Ehmcke, 1881), 71 Stabu Street (architect Rudolf Dohnberg, 1910), 15 Strēlnieku Street (architect unknown) and 59 Tallinas Street (architect Paul Mandelstamm, 1910). Three different colors are seen in Rīga — green-blue, blue and hazy violet. According to Inta Štamgute (Štamgute [2001]: 76), tiles of this design also existed at 77 Tallinas Street (architect Jānis Gailis, 1911) and 73 Stabu Street (architect V. Štams, 1913) but they have been lost.

13 Here and below, production numbers of tile models are established thanks to a collaboration between Agnese Tambaka and Dr. Mario Baeck. Tile model numbers are found in historical catalogues of factories, sample sheets, often on the tile verso, etc.



Figure 5. Tiled panel detail in the vestibule at Miera Street 101 (arch. Eizēns Laube, 1910). Photo: Margarita Fedina

drupes arranged in consecutive straight lines. The festoon looks attached to the wall by large square buttons. The upper edge of the two-tile composition is decorated with a two-tile long string of twelve dots and one centered dot below. The tile composition is enclosed by a frame.

One of the two vestibules of the building at 45 Baznīcas Street, designed by Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928), features wall tiles produced by NSTG. The panel is high and consists of eighteen rows of tiles. Four types of shiny glazed tiles are used, with a monochromatic bluish tile block above the base, topped with a small band of dark tiles. Below it is an ornamental band with alternating two types of tiles in two rows. Smooth, almost black tile alternates with a tile harmonized with the overall arrangement, featuring a relief, lighter festoon framing an oval laurel wreath. It must be noted that a similar oval laurel wreath is rhythmically repeated in the plastic décor of the façade between windows.

In some of Rīga apartment building vestibules, wall tile features only the wreath motif in its décor. A laurel wreath is used most often; rose wreaths can also be found, and sometimes the motif is so stylized that a specific plant is undeterminable (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Façade décor of the apartment building at Baznīcas Street 45 (arch. Konstanīns Pēkšēns, 1909). Photo: Margarita Fedina

Large wreaths on wall tiles at 8 Mednieku Street (architect Aleksandrs Vanags, 1908) and 32 Krišjāņa Barona Street (architect Solomon Nudermann, 1910) create a reserved, elegant impression (Figure 7). The motif consists of laurel leaves and drupes; it is round, and its lower part is tied with a decorative ribbon. The wreath is a relief consisting of eight tiles. In the vestibule at Mednieku Street, eight such laurel wreaths are composed of wall tiles (one has been partially lost today). One wreath contains an advertisement tile with an inscription that these are NSTG tiles distributed in Rīga by the firm *Velten-Berlin*. An identical inscription has survived also in the vestibule at 32 Krišjāņa Barona Street. In some examples inspected thus far (such tile panels are found at 5 Hospitāļu Street (architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns, 1910) (Figure 8), 15 Strēlnieku Street (architect unknown) etc.), *Velten-Berlin* advertisement tiles reveal information about the producer in Germany, which is NSTG.

Advertisement tiles are among the sources allowing one to answer questions about the producers and distributors of wall tile in Rīga, even though such examples are rare (Štamgute [2001]).¹⁴ One can only speculate about the conditions for placing advertisement tiles in private vestibules; possibly, this gave the owner some material benefits, such as a discount for tile purchases.

14 Advertisement tiles are exceptions in tile panels, according to the material inspected during this research as well as to an earlier survey by Inta Štamgute (Štamgute [2001]). Out of 166 vestibules, eight featured advertisement tiles.

The attribution of NSTG tile is complicated by the fact that identical tile designs were used by the Belgian *Célestin Joseph Helman* factory. It is known that the *C. J. Helman* factory combined forces with NSTG in around 1910; they had a cooperation agreement on tile production as Germany produced wall tile for Belgian customers as well.¹⁵ In such cases, tiles of identical design can be made by different producers; therefore, the verso of the tile is particularly important, as it may contain the company's seal. Sometimes, a missing tile provides the opportunity of establishing its producer if the verso has left an imprint on the wall. Such an example is found in one of Riga's vestibules at 131 Dzirnau Street (architect unknown), allowing one to confirm a German producer. Conversely, a small detail in the tile panel indicating the producer is located in three vestibules — at 119 Dzirnau Street (architect Eižens Laube, 1912), 10 Vilandes Street (architect Kontantīns Pēkšēns, 1908) (Figure 9), and 5 Peitavas Street (architect Paul Mandelstamm, 1906). This is a small horizontal tile with a garland, designated as the C model in NSTG sample sheets.¹⁶ It confirms that tiles in the vestibules at 62 Stabu Street (architect Solomon Nudelmann, 1909) and 60 Ģertrūdes Street (architect Rudolf Dohnberg, 1908) were manufactured by this producer. As the small horizontal NSTG tile is found also in four other vestibules — buildings at 19/21 Ģertrūdes Street and 54 Miera Street, designed by Rudolf Dohnberg in 1909, at 30 Hospitāļu Street, designed by Eižens Laube in 1914, and at 3 Blaumaņa Street, designed by Jānis Alksnis in 1912 — one can assume that these panels are related to the same producer. Their tiles demonstrate variations of a single motif featured on tile panels of different heights. Thanks to varying plafond finishing and floor tile, the vestibules are different. Three of them feature dark green tile with relief laurel festoons bound with contrasting light ribbons and enhanced with rose wreaths. To create such a composition, four different types of tile were needed. In the apartment building at 54 Miera Street, the vestibule panel consists of twelve rows of ceramic tile. A distributor's advertisement tile has also survived here¹⁷. In the vestibule at 19/21 Ģertrūdes Street, tiles are installed in fifteen rows, and at 30 Hospitāļu Street, in eleven rows, while at 3 Blaumaņa Street, there are tiles with an analogous motif in a different lettuce-green color, arranged in ten rows.

Three buildings — at 129 Brīvības Street (architect Jānis Alksnis, 1911, both vestibules), at 10 Krišjāņa Barona Street (architect Jānis Baumanis (1834–1891)), 1879, vestibule finished around 1911) and at 59/61 Tērbatas Street (architect Bernhard Bielenstein (1877–1959), 1911) — feature wall tile from the Grohn Wall Tile Factory (model Nos. 2592 and 2593). Various compositions are arranged in these vestibules by applying wall tiles with laurel festoons and wreaths, illusively mounted on the wall with two decorative ribbons. The festoon tiles are compositionally similar to NSTG model No. 869, as two tiles are needed for a motif. The festoon is bound with ribbons in the middle. Stylized laurel leaves are placed in separate layers alternating with laurel drupes. The tile décor is relief, thus enhancing the decorative effect.

15 Correspondence between Agnese Tambaka and Mario Baeck. [04.03.2021.]. See also: Baeck, Mario (2015). *La Maison Helman Céramique un Demi-siècle D'histoire de L'entreprise. Bruxelles Patrimoines*, No. 15–16, pp. 63–77.

16 Attributed by Mario Baeck. [21.05.2021.]

17 Text on the tile: Sklad kafel i plitok Felten-Berlin Rīga Bolsh. Moskovskaja ulica nomer 21 Telefon nomer. 1852. [Wall and stove tile warehouse *Felten-Berlin Rīga* at 21 Lielā Maskavas Street, phone number 1852.]

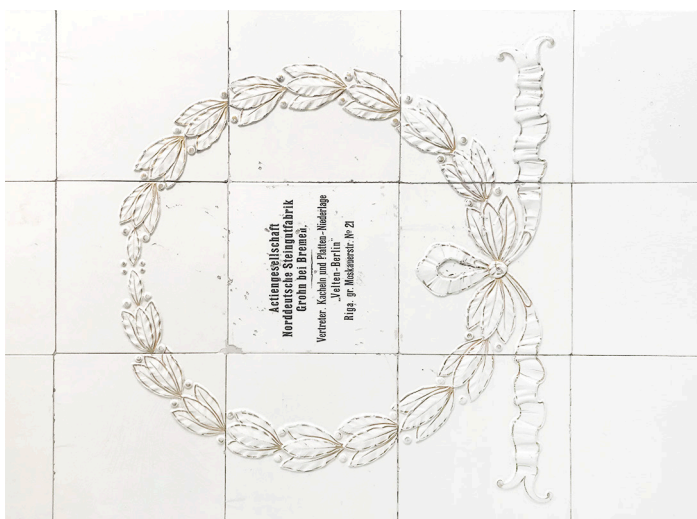


Figure 7. Signature tile “Velten-Berlin” on tiled panel in the vestibule at Mednieku Street 8 (arch. Aleksandrs Vanags, 1908). Wall tiles: NSTG. Photo: Agnese Tambaka



Figure 8. Signature tile “Velten-Berlin” on tiled panel in the vestibule at Hospitāļu Street 5 (arch. Konstantīns Pēksēns, 1910). Wall tiles: NSTG. Photo: Margarita Fedina

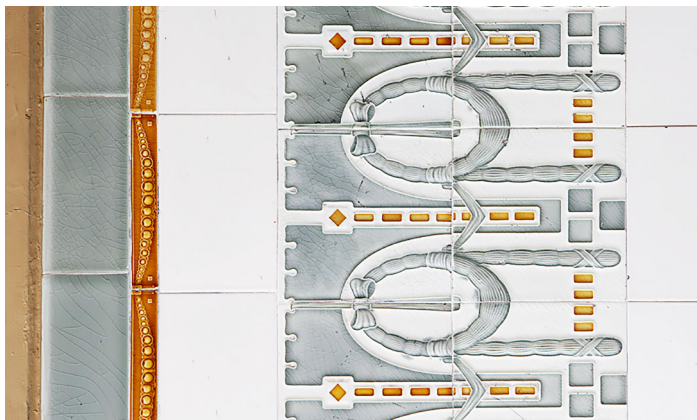


Figure 9. Fragment of wall tile panel produced by German NSTG at Rīga Vilandes Street 10 (arch. Konstantīns Pēksēns, 1908). Photo: Margarita Fedina

Twenty-two vestibules are known in Rīga where wall tile has come from the Meissen Stove Tile and Porcelain Factory (*Meißner Ofen und Porzellanfabrik*). The factory was founded in 1863. In 1879, it was renamed *Meißner Ofen- und Porzellanfabrik v. Carl Teichert Meissen*, and, in 1891, it began the production of wall tile (Weisser 2012). Among the most spectacular examples in Rīga, there are wall tile panels with relief oak garlands decorated with ribbons¹⁸ preserved in the vestibule at 39 Krīšjāņa Valdemāra Street (architect Friedrich Scheffel (1865–1913)), where the motif is accentuated with white glaze on a red background. In the vestibule of the apartment building at 17 Miera Street (architect Jānis Alksnis, 1911), the same garland is white on a blue background.

Tile from the Meissen Factory could be purchased in Rīga from the warehouse of *Carl Nevermann & Co Rīga*, as is known from an advertisement sign in the apartment building vestibule at 76 Brīvības Street (architect Jānis Alksnis, 1908–1910) (Štamgute [2001]: 108–109)¹⁹ as well as from advertisement in the 1909 yearbook *Bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen*. Advertisement of the sculpture and decorative finish workshop *Lotze & Stoll* in the 1911 edition of the same yearbook indicates that the workshop distributed Meissen Factory²⁰ products in the Baltic Provinces. This would suggest that tile produced by *Meißner Ofen- und Porzellanfabrik v. Carl Teichert Meissen* was installed in the interiors of buildings whose finishing was carried out by *Lotze & Stoll*. However, while this firm was responsible for the façades of the Neoclassical Craftsmen's Mutual Credit building at 3 Krīšjāņa Barona Street (1911) designed by Jānis Alksnis, one of its two vestibules features tile panels that, according to Belgian tile researcher Mario Baeck, were produced by NSTG, thus indicating the complexity of attributing tile manufacturers.

Industrially made wall tile is often the single evidence of the original interior finishing in early-twentieth-century vestibule and stairwell décor. Although all decorative elements need to be considered to comprehensively describe the interior's stylistics, tile often becomes a very important reference point. At the same time, the study of tiles and establishing their manufacturers is often complicated.

Although catalogues of several early-twentieth-century producers have survived until modern times, they are bibliographical rarities in private collections; only in some lucky cases can individual researchers can access, enabling the study of these materials. However, one has to consider that the decorative motif of a wall tile alone, even in the factories' original catalogues of tile supply, is not sufficient proof of a particular producer; the verso of the tile and the producer's seal have to be seen as well. As tiles are installed on walls, this is possible only on very rare occasions. Therefore, information about the tiles used in the buildings of Rīga can be enriched through collaboration with foreign specialists as well as through searching materials in archives. Consequently, the material inspected up to now remains open for further studies.

18 Model No. 141 a-f.

19 The advertisement sign in the vestibule at 76 Brīvības Street mentioned by Ina Štamgute has been lost today.

20 *Meissner Fussboden- und glasierten Wandpatten und Ofen*.

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Neoklasicisma “ornamenta gramatika” Rīgas vēlā jūgendstila perioda interjeros

Silvija Grosa, Agnese Tambaka

Atslēgvārdi: 19. un 20. gadsimta mija, arhitektūra, neoklasicisms, antīkās mākslas motīvi, keramikas sienas flīzes

Pēdējās desmitgadēs rietumu mākslas vēsturē tapuši nozīmīgi pētījumi par ornamenta lomu arhitektūras dekorā, pieaugusi arī interese par 19. un 20. gadsimta mijas rūpnieciski ražoto produkciju, tai skaitā par keramikajām sienu flīzēm, kas bija viens no iecienītākajiem apdares materiāliem Rīgas 19. un 20. gs. mijas dzīvojamo namu vestibilos. Latvijas industriālā dizaina vēstures kontekstā keramikajām sienu flīzēm kā apdares materiālam līdz šim nav veltīti būtiski pētījumi. Šajā publikācijā, pamatojoties uz tipoloģisko, kā arī ikonogrāfisko metodi, meklētas atbildes uz jautājumiem par keramisko flīžu ražotājiem Vācijā, jo pēdējo gadu laikā jauna informācija ir papildinājusi Rīgas namu vestibilos izmantoto keramisko sienu flīžu klasifikāciju un to ražotāju sarakstu. Šajā rakstā materiāls skatīts saistībā ar vēlā jūgendstila periodā iecienītajiem, no antīkās mākslas pārmantotajiem ornamentālajiem motīviem. Veiktā salīdzinošā un stilistiskā analīze parāda, ka flīžu dizaina motīvi visbiežāk balstīti klasiskās mākslas mantojumā un apstiprina pieņēmumu, ka vēlā jūgendstila perioda īres namu vestibilu dekoratīvā apdare galvenokārt iekļaujas brīvi interpretēta neoklasicisma stilistikā.