

**Plans for the Royal Serbian Castle  
as it might have been  
but World War I. destroyed everything**

**Bosse, Hugo.**

Entwürfe für die Kgl. Hofburg Seiner Majestät König Peter von Serbien.

Belgrad. Weimar, August Bosse, 1912-1914.

Two volumes, oblong imperial folio (c. 73 x 100 cm) with c. 50 spectacular watercolour interiors and c. 65 pencil drawings, partly coloured, 6 plans and many mounted original photos; the volume with the watercolour interiors bound in grey pigskin, front cover with inlaid Serbian Royal coat-of-arms and lettered in gilt, covers surrounded by a braided border of silver, red and blue leather strips, silk paste-downs; the other volume in contemporary half-calf over gold-patterned boards; this a little rubbed; the two large albums housed in a custom-made wooden box with sliding lid and iron handles; outside of the bottom of the box a little water-damaged, internally good and clean.

— price on request —





### A Big Book for a Big Customer the Last King of Serbia

Two volumes **nearly 1 x 1 meter, a heavy weight of 80 kg** in a wooden box to transport, specially bound, like an expensive painting: made for a king. This is certainly the largest, most detailed and comprehensive documentation of an interior design project on the grand scale we have ever come across.



**King Peter I. (1844-1921)**, the last king of Serbia, commissioned August Bosse, the owner of a Weimar company for interior design, to supply designs and estimates for the about 80 rooms in the Belgrade Royal Palace (New Konak), the shell of which was completed about 1912.

The reign of Peter I, from 1903 to 1914, is remembered as the „Golden Age of Serbia“ or the „Era of Pericles in Serbia“, due to the unrestricted political freedoms, free press, and cultural ascendancy among South Slavs who finally saw in democratic Serbia a Piedmont of South Slavs. King Peter I was supportive to the movement of Yugoslav unification, hosting in Belgrade various cultural gatherings. The western- educated King attempted to liberalize Serbia with the goal of creating a Western-style constitutional monarchy. King Peter I became gradually very popular for his commitment to parliamentary democracy that, in spite of certain influence of military cliques in political life, functioned properly. In World War I. Serbia was fighting against Germany & Austria.

**The building was damaged during both World Wars** and was completely altered and the site serves now as Belgrade's town hall.

The two enormous volumes come together with files containing hundreds of pages of duplicated typescript and manuscript pages of estimates and accounting, detailing the stucco, painting, carpentry, etc. work, as well as a stack of 36 half-plate glass negatives, tanned leather samples for upholstery or wall hangings and six



blueprints of the plans of the building, lettered in Serbian and with German annotations in crayon. Included is as well a hand-written account of the project by the colleague and wife of the designer August Bosse, Else Bosse (1877-1965), written in 1947, from which we translated the most relevant passages.



## Notes

King Peter I of Serbia commissioned an aide to visit several noble families in Germany. Because of the construction of a new castle in Belgrade he was interested in interior design. During his travels in Silesia and Turingia he saw interiors which impressed him and came across the name of the Weimar company Bosse.

We are lucky to have an account of the history of the project through a memoir by Else Bosse included with the designs:-

'We were ... encouraged by an agent to participate in working on the design plans. Hugo went there and visited the half-finished building and discussed the project with the court architect. The rooms were to be furnished in French styles and in the highest quality. It was a big task; about 80 rooms. Hugo loved the challenge; however, he mistrusted the matter a bit, because Belgrade had left with him a discomforting impression. He thought that such a lavish building would not be in harmony with the bad roads with deep potholes and modest houses ...

On top of that the war [of the Ottoman Empire] with Serbia broke out in 1912, which made Hugo wait and see. He wanted to see the outcome of the war and if King Peter would still be able to have his plans carried out. In spring of 1913 the architect came to the court of Weimar, in order to see the progress of the plans. The king had already asked for a prospectus. We had to console him and promised, to resume work on the plan immediately. The war had ended favourably for Serbia. With full steam we went ahead with the work. At that time we had three daughtsmen in the studio, and in addition we involved architects from outside who participated in the execution of the designs. We established a



system, according to which the drawings were all of the same size, in watercolour or pencil, so that the different walls and views were depicted in a similar way. Many a night hour was devoted to this work, as it was most quiet then. Hugo got himself a Parlograph [a recording device] ... The other day the young girl would listen to the recordings with headphones and type [what Hugo had dictated] ...

Although we had married during the art nouveau period, we had always had an affinity to classical styles. Hugo introduced me to this world and we acquired many beautiful works on these styles which we studied together. It was beautiful to be creative together ... Both of us determined the styles for the different rooms; I prepared and executed the details. We had to harmonize the woodwork with the textiles and carpets etc. We were pleased with the success, as much as the king was impressed. [After having submitted the designs to the king in Belgrade], the king had a look at the concepts and talked in German with Hugo. He decided on materials for the various rooms and expressed his ideas and wishes. A big book with watercolours was made, in a dignifying pigskin binding with royal coat-of-arms and lettering. At the back of the volume was [and is] a leaf of recommendation [promising 'genuine German work' - 'echte deutsche Arbeit']. The designs were photographed and accompanied by text explaining the main concepts of and ideas behind the designs. Then there was an album of the same size bound in Japanese gilt paper which contained the details in pencil at a scale of 1:10. The photo album with explanatory text was sent to Belgrade for the parliament (skupchina) to be assessed. Our plans were accepted and we got the commission. Three estimates were made; one over 600,000 Mark for the skupchina, another one over 800,000 Mark and one over one million Mark. It was up to the king's choice; he would pay the excess from his private money. The detailed work on the designs went on up to 1914. Wood samples were provided, textiles and carpets designed, which had to be executed to the highest standards of the Parisian Savonnerie manufacturers. Then came the war which destroyed all hopes, work and designs. Only that it cost us 15,000 Mark! We started to demand our money; however, but to no avail. They kept the photo album and we heard that a French company carried out the commission. The war of '39 destroyed - I think - the Royal Castle. Fate! The human works are easily destroyed. Even when the work did not come to fruition, it is a document of a bygone era!

The Castle was bombed by the Germans in 1940 and the Allies in 1944 resulting in a building so heavily damaged that its appearance today is quite altered