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CULTIVATED INTERIORS

The 1935 Renovation of the Prince Regent Square Apartment

Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 film Triumph of the Will glorified Adolf Hitler as the titanic leader of a great and unified nation. Whether speaking to rapt audiences from the podium, saluting SA and SS troops in the medieval streets of Nuremberg, or paying tribute to fallen soldiers at a war memorial, Hitler displayed the mastery and gravitas of a statesman. This highly ideological documentary of the Nazi Party’s 1934 Nuremberg rally helped to lift the stain of the brutal “Röhm-Putsch” that had occurred just weeks before the rally, and that had seemed to confirm in the world’s eyes Hitler’s blood lust and the chaos of political life in Germany.1 But with the approach of the 1936 Olympic Games—which Hitler hoped would be an international public relations victory for his regime—and as Hitler prepared to enter a new phase of diplomatic negotiations for expanded territorial claims, the man with a thousand faces determined to remodel his image once more in order to secure his next round of political goals, which required the respect and trust of foreign nations. Architecture would play an important role in this makeover, and not only in its most public and monumental forms, such as in the Nuremberg Rally Grounds designed by Albert Speer. On a diplomatic level, the renovations and expansions of the Old Chancellery spoke of a confident new style in the government district. And even in the ostensibly private sphere of Hitler’s home life, changes signaled a self-possessed maturation.

In 1935, the Atelier Troost renovated and redecorated Hitler’s spacious Prince Regent Square apartment in Munich at the extravagant cost of 120,000 Reichsmarks—or more than ten times the average income earned by a doctor in Germany that year.2 Unlike the Chancellery, Hitler paid for the work personally, from the account his publisher maintained for him, which by then overflowed with royalties from Mein Kampf. The high price tag bought him an apartment in which he felt confident to host world leaders such as Neville Chamberlain and Benito Mussolini. The commission to the Atelier Troost testifies to Hitler’s satisfaction with their work at the Chancellery and to his trust in their ability to give the right architectural form to his domestic needs and identity. Because this was the most private of his residences, Gerdy Troost and Leonhard Gall could work on a different, more intimate scale than at either the Chancellery or the Berghof. Nonetheless, they found other ways to communicate that this was no ordinary home.

The state of the apartment before the Atelier Troost began their work is not entirely clear. From 1929 until the renovation, the residence appears to have been occupied by a group of adults: Hitler, his niece Geli Raubal (until her death in 1931), and two couples. The first couple, Ernst and Maria Reichert, had been Hitler’s landlords for nine years on Thiersch Street, where he had lived with them and their daughter. Antonie Reichert would have been sixteen at the time of her parents’ move to Prince Regent Square, but there is no indication that she came with them. Ernst Reichert identified himself as a businessman, although his finances apparently required taking in a lodger.3 Hitler described the Thiersch Street apartment they had shared as having four to five rooms.4 Presumably, when the couple moved, they brought their furniture with them.

The other couple, recent newlyweds Georg and Anni Winter, also moved in with Hitler.5 Georg Winter had worked as a valet for General Franz Ritter von Epp, through whom he had met Hitler. In October 1929, the thirty-three-year-old Winter was hired as a packer at Eher Verlag (Hitler’s publisher), and he also helped occasionally in the apartment, including serving at dinner parties. Anni Winter, Georg Winter’s twenty-four-year-old bride, became Hitler’s cook and house manager.6 In later testimony before a denazification tribunal, Georg Winter successfully argued that Hitler had asked him to join the SS in 1930 in order to wear the uniform when serving at table or otherwise helping his wife with official functions and thus make a suitable impression on party bigwigs. Although he did not serve in the SS, promotions in rank followed, resulting in an ever-more-imposing appearance. His employer’s vanity about livery, Winter claimed, cost him a long and harsh internment at the war’s end, which he barely survived.7

It is not known whether the Winters brought their own furniture when they moved to 16 Prince Regent Square. Hitler himself seems to have had very little. In a 1948 interview, Anni Winter stated that he had brought only his bedroom furniture from Thiersch Street and then began to add new things. Gerdy Troost later recalled that the apartment had been eclectically furnished, mostly by Hitler’s friends. In 1929, Hitler’s wealthy admirer Elsa Bruckmann had purchased some furniture for the apartment from the royal cabinetmaker, Moritz Ballin. Eyewitnesses later claimed that at this time Hitler also acquired a few cherished pieces by Paul Troost from the United Workshops for Art in Handicraft. On the whole, however, Anni Winter remembers the apartment being sparsely furnished before the 1935 renovation.8

How the furniture was arranged and who lived in what rooms cannot be determined, with the possible exception of Geli Raubal’s room. After the war, Winter reported that before the 1935 renovation, she, her husband, and Hitler occupied one wing of the apartment, and Raubal and the Reicherts the other. When Raubal died, according to Winter and other witnesses, Hitler closed off her room and preserved it unchanged as a sort of shrine.9 If this is true, the one room in the apartment conspicuously not renovated in 1935—the room beside the library—can be assumed to have been hers (fig. 15). This is also the room identified as belonging to her by Hitler’s secretary, Traudl Junge.10 Moreover, its location facing Prince Regent Square matches the description given by the police who investigated Raubal’s death.11 Hitler’s bedroom after the renovation, with its own private bathroom, was located at the far end of the opposite wing, and it seems likely that he had occupied this same room before 1935. If this is the case, then Hitler and his niece did not live adjacent to one another, as some have speculated, seeing in this presumed spatial proximity evidence of other intimacies. Indeed, the door that directly connected Hitler’s room (via the bathroom) to its neighbor and that has contributed to rumors of clandestine encounters did not exist before the renovation. This neighboring room, erroneously identified as belonging to Raubal, had previously been a small maid’s chamber and was expanded into a comfortable guest room only in 1935.

In more general terms, the apartment’s appearance prior to the renovation can be reconstructed on the basis of architectural plans and of other floors in the building whose original interiors have been preserved. When he designed the building in 1907–8, the architect Franz Popp employed the Jugendstil forms that were then popular in Munich. Curvilinear, wooden moldings as well as rounded arches above doorways gave the apartments an elegant, but also historical feel (fig. 16). Hitler did not like Jugendstil, according to Gerdy Troost, which he considered “too extreme.”12 In the 1935 renovation, all such Jugendstil decoration was eliminated from the apartment and replaced with the starkly plain rectilinear forms characteristic of the interiors of Paul Troost’s party buildings on the Königsplatz and House of German Art (fig. 17). The removal or reduction of walls also increased the impression of a bright, open interior (see figs. 2, 15). The result, as it is experienced today, is strikingly modern and spare, although the relative emptiness of the apartment, now used for offices, contributes to this effect. When Lee Miller arrived here in the final days of the war and photographed the interiors of Hitler’s home, having hours earlier witnessed the starving and dead in the Dachau concentration camp, she avoided conveying any of that sense of light and modernity, which must have seemed impossibly at odds with what she had just experienced. These were not, in any case, glossy photographs for an architecture magazine spread, but images of American soldiers occupying a dictator’s lair. Most of the photographs seem to have been taken at night or with the curtains drawn. In some instances, she may have rearranged objects to heighten the sense of a claustrophobic jumble (such as in Hitler’s bedroom), even though her text described the apartment as “quite spacious” and “very simply laid out.” The resulting dark, cramped interiors published in the July 1945 issue of Vogue (UK) magazine thus do not prepare one for the airy interiors encountered in the apartment today.13

Unfortunately, almost no other images exist of the apartment. In 1935, in response to a request by the magazine die neue linie, Joseph Goebbels expressly forbade taking pictures of Hitler’s domestic spaces in the Old Chancellery (although official and public areas were permissible).14 Goebbels did not give a reason for his decision, but it reveals that even for the much-photographed Führer, some spaces were off-limits. Nonetheless, numerous surviving drawings and plans by the Atelier Troost document the transformation. A floor plan of the apartment indicating the proposed changes, signed on behalf of Gall as the architect and dated January 1935, was submitted to local building authorities in early February.15 Most of the work appears to have been carried out between February and mid-April 1935.16 Because of the extent of the renovation, the apartment’s occupants moved out; when it was completed, only Hitler and the Winters returned. On April 29, Hitler proudly showed off his new home by inviting three influential female admirers—Unity Mitford, the duchess of Brunswick (the daughter of Emperor Wilhelm II), and Winifred Wagner—to dinner.17

Similar to the work undertaken at the Chancellery, although on a smaller scale, the renovation opened up the residence’s main living spaces and reorganized its layout to consolidate functions (see figs. 2, 15). Entering the apartment and turning right, one crossed the wedge-shaped foyer and came to what had been a maid’s room and separate hall toilet. The toilet was removed in order to expand the small room, which was then connected to a bathroom that was shared with Hitler’s bedroom. Eva Braun may have used this room on overnight stays.18 Across from Hitler’s bedroom, on the southeastern end of the apartment, had been a square room and, adjacent to it, a narrower room. The wall between them was removed to create a large dining room with a marble mantelpiece (which may have been decorative or covered a radiator) and a table that could seat twelve. From the dining room one entered the largest space of the apartment, with two sets of bay windows. The bay closest to the dining room contained Hitler’s study, across from which was a seating area and a newly installed fireplace (fig. 18). The other bay contained a sitting alcove, beside which a wall had been removed to join it to a new library (fig. 19 and see plate 12). Although the space of this living area was more confined than in the Chancellery’s Reception Hall, the Atelier Troost nonetheless created a sense of an unfolding interior, with one space flowing into another. In their memoirs, Henriette von Schirach and Traudl Junge recalled the appeal of the apartment’s large rooms to Hitler. Hitler told Schirach that people needed room to flourish, a comment that would seem innocuous if it did not come from the man who justified genocide on the same grounds.19

This whole section of the apartment was now given over to Hitler, and the western wing, which one entered if one turned left from the foyer, became the service area. The last two rooms in this wing facing the square were made into an apartment for the Winters, consisting of a bedroom, living room, and bathroom. A wall in the hallway directly before their rooms separated their living space from that of Hitler. The kitchen across from their rooms, which served the entire apartment, was expanded and modernized. A maid’s room and toilet that had been located beside the pantry in the old kitchen were removed. A preexisting maid’s room located within the space of the garderobe (to the left) was slightly expanded.

The Atelier Troost designed much of the apartment’s furniture and fittings. The forms tended to be simple, albeit traditional, and minimally ornamented. Numerous elements reappear in the later National Socialist buildings on the Königsplatz and in the House of German Art, the interiors of which Gall and Gerdy Troost also created. For example, the round coffee table with a dark marble top in the nook near the library, where Hitler received his guests, closely resembles those used in the Führerbau, which housed Hitler’s office on the Königsplatz (see fig. 19). The combination of colored marbles used for Hitler’s living room fireplace—sand for the mantelpiece, and red for the floor in front—recurs in the interior of the Führerbau’s grand staircase atrium. Moreover, the grooved linear forms of the mantel (here and in the dining room) resemble the radiator covers in this same atrium and at the House of German Art. The square grid pattern used for the radiator grills in the apartment’s living room (see fig. 18) transforms into the railings of the Führerbau’s atrium and outdoor balconies, the latter already sketched out by Paul Troost. The distinctive door handles, composed of a cube attached to a cylinder, are also found at the Königsplatz buildings and the House of German Art. The dramatic rectangular opening between the library and the living room, framed in dark wood, resembles the striking treatment of doorframes in the Königsplatz buildings and the House of German Art. The Atelier Troost thus developed a versatile decorative style that encompassed both private and public buildings, and monumental and domestic scales. Within a syntax of spare classicism, the Atelier Troost employed a vocabulary of specific forms, colors, and materials that produced a distinctive visual language of power. Whether private or public, the Atelier Troost interiors were immediately recognizable as the Führer’s spaces.

The plans and drawings for the apartment reveal an attention to detail that would also characterize the firm’s later work. In addition to new furniture, the cornices, paneling, doors, handles, radiator covers, lighting fixtures, and even bathroom tiling were carefully designed. In the bathrooms and kitchen, there was an emphasis on hygiene and rationalization, which had also characterized modernist architecture in the Weimar era. Unlike the buildings on the Königsplatz or the House of German Art, the design was not as comprehensive as it might have been because of the need to incorporate existing furniture, accommodate the Winters’ taste in their own quarters (which appears to have been, from a description on an invoice of “antiqued” furniture, even more traditional), and leave one room (likely that of Geli Raubal) untouched.20 Hitler did not seem to mind this hybridity in his homes: all three of his residences were renovated or extended structures, representing a newness anchored in the past. Even in Hitler’s entirely new state buildings, the past was present in the use of classical forms. In his homes, however, it was tangible in the actual physical traces of older structures. While one can point to practical or symbolic reasons for this approach, it is nonetheless noteworthy that in his lifetime, Hitler never constructed an entirely new home for himself, but instead repeatedly chose to update and improve—and yet also remain attached to—the past. Although plans were drawn up for new residences, none were realized.21

A further defining attribute of the Atelier Troost’s designs was the quality of the materials used, above all fine German stones and woods, with a good deal of Italian silk. Nonetheless, the effect was not showy. Like Hitler, Speer highly esteemed Gerdy Troost’s design talents and largely credited her with determining Hitler’s “official tastes.” In his memoirs, he described how the materials and colors that Gerdy Troost chose for the Führerbau were “subtle and restrained, actually too understated for Hitler’s taste, which inclined toward the gaudy. But he liked what he saw. The balanced bourgeois atmosphere which was then the fashion in wealthy society had about it a muted luxury that obviously appealed to him.”22 These same qualities also characterized the apartment’s renovation, but the subdued tone could be misleading. George Ward Price, foreign correspondent for the pro-German Daily Mail (with an estimated readership in Britain of 4.5 to 6 million), wrote approvingly of the Führer’s apparent modesty: “That Hitler keeps on this unpretentious apartment shows that his modest personal tastes have not been altered by high office. It is the sort of home that a businessman with an income of £1500 a year might have.”23 But no middle-income businessman could have afforded the actual cost of this understated refinement. Take, for example, the museum-quality Persian carpet acquired by Gerdy Troost for Hitler. The dealer described it in detail in a letter he wrote to encourage her to make the purchase. Measuring over twelve by twenty-six feet, it was a Persian reproduction of a famous sixteenth-century royal carpet known as the Paradise Carpet. In naturalistic form, the weaver had represented deer, panthers, lions, and bulls, among other real and imaginary animals and birds, in a landscape with cypress, pomegranate, and flowering apple trees. The dealer noted that the estimated 15.4 million knots in the carpet would have taken a lone weaver working every single day fourteen years to complete. The price of 10,500 Reichsmarks was many times over that of an average businessman’s salary.24

Thomas Jones, a former senior civil servant and deputy secretary to the cabinet, viewed the apartment with the wealth-discerning eye of a man familiar with the British upper classes when he visited Hitler on May 17, 1936, to discuss Hitler’s invitation to Stanley Baldwin, the British prime minister, to visit Germany. In his diary, Jones wrote that he was “shown into a spacious sitting-room with an alcove at one end lined with books, many of them large illustrated quartos. The furnishing was solid and Victorian. There was a small portrait of Wagner, and a half-length of Bismarck by Lenbach. There were also pictures by Feuerbach, Cranach, Schwind, Zügel and Breughel. Nothing modern. We might have been in Park Terrace, Glasgow, in a shipowner’s drawing room in 1880.” For Jones, this home environment suggested a familiarity and stability that had nothing to do with a dangerous radical. And this was precisely the message that Hitler and his spokesmen sought to transmit. On the day before his trip to Munich, Jones had met with Joachim von Ribbentrop, soon-to-be German ambassador to Britain, who had quoted Hitler saying, “I am the most conservative of Conservatives.”25 Admittedly, Jones was predisposed toward a favorable view. He has been described by historian Gordon Alexander Craig as “one of the most ardent and naïve of those who came to be called appeasers.” Nonetheless, the visit further reassured Jones of Hitler’s respectability, and he “returned to England,” Craig writes, “resolved to persuade Baldwin to accept the invitation.”26

Although Jones explained that he had visited Hitler in Munich instead of Berlin because the German leader had returned for his chauffeur’s funeral, it is no accident that Hitler chose to open his home to him or to Ward Price. Despite the different interpretations of each visitor—Ward Price viewed the apartment as not only more modest, but also decidedly more modern than Jones—both left with overwhelmingly positive impressions. Hitler clearly wished to be seen by a foreign—and, particularly, British—audience in his domestic context. As he no doubt had hoped, the effect was to convey a sense of absolute and even boring normalcy, helping to erase any memory of the lurid rumors of moral degeneracy once associated with his private life. Indeed, it was the apartment’s very banality that so unnerved Lee Miller when she encountered it after the war.

For Hitler, convincing British diplomats and journalists that he shared their values was critical in the mid-1930s, as Germany’s rapidly expanding rearmament threatened Britain’s national interests. While he had no intention of halting his country’s militarization, he understood that a well-played diplomatic hand could help him to reach his broader goals by avoiding an arms race with Britain that he was likely to lose. Fearing another war, many in Britain dearly wanted to believe that negotiated accords could create effective arms control and achieve European security. In a major coup for Hitler, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed in June 1935 legitimately released Germany from the naval restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles and set the stage for the dictator’s desired alliance with Britain against France and Russia. Hitler’s self-professed trustworthiness had played a role in persuading the British government to hold the talks. On May 21, 1935, he had made an important “peace” speech in the Reichstag in which he advocated for talks, recognized British naval superiority, and promised his word on whatever was negotiated, provoking “a chorus of relieved comments in Britain.”27 In opening his new-and-improved Munich home to a British audience, Hitler understood how, like words of reassurance, the objects and furniture would speak for him, crafting an image of the occupant in the mind of the onlooker that the latter desperately wanted to see.

The Daily Telegraph, preferred by politically conservative middle- and upper-class readers in Britain, painted just such a picture in its pages weeks before Hitler’s Reichstag speech. On April 25, 1935, it published an article about the renovation of the Prince Regent Square apartment stating that the Führer was overseeing the work and that “all the furnishings and decorations are being carried out according to Herr Hitler’s own designs.” Since the source for the article was likely the Nazis’ own press office, the erroneous attribution of the creative work to Hitler seems deliberate. The article further reported that “the Fuehrer is a great lover of German 18th-century art,” and had recently acquired “six paintings of German 18th-century artists from an American dealer.” It also noted his passion for music, telling readers that “the decorations in his flat follow the German heroic colour scheme of blue, gold and white, made famous in Wagner’s operas, and the furnishing is all of the same style.” (The same article ran in the New York Times under the headline “Hitler’s Taste Shows Wagnerian Influence.”) Through the reinvention of his domestic spaces, Hitler was thus portrayed as an artist and composer in his own right. While the article implied his wealth, it also gave the impression of a man so devoted to art and culture that even the color of his pillows spoke to his idealism. One could argue that there is an undercurrent here of the absurd—the title of the Telegraph article was “Baroque,” which could refer to Hitler’s preferred style (according to the article) or to his elaborate decor. Nonetheless, the picture remained of the cultural refinement of the occupant as revealed through his interior.28

Such associations were strongly reinforced by the location of the building itself. Prince Regent Square is a large, dignified plaza that optically terminates Prince Regent Street, one of four royal roads in Munich. The broad avenue was developed beginning in 1891 with an emphasis on the picturesque: setback structures, curves, and green spaces. It commences at the former residence of the Bavarian prime minister, the Prince Carl Palace, and stretches diagonally east for over a mile before reaching Prince Regent Square. (After the square, the road bends southward, narrows, and continues for another three quarters of a mile.) Despite the royal name, the area was associated with the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie in the late nineteenth century—the very audience that Hitler needed to sway to his cause when he took the apartment in 1929.29

Less than two hundred yards west from 16 Prince Regent Square stands the Prince Regent Theater, which opened in 1901 as a festival hall for Wagner’s operas, designed according to ideas put forth by the composer himself. Tickets to the inaugural opera, The Mastersingers of Nuremberg (Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg), cost twenty Marks, equivalent to a worker’s average weekly wages. It was here that Hitler saw his first Munich performances of Wagner, and he regularly attended the theater’s annual Wagner festival, taking to heart the inscription above its entrance: “To German Art.” In 1932, the dire economic situation forced the theater to close its doors and dismiss its performers and staff. A few months after Hitler’s rise to power, the theater reopened for performances of Wagner’s Parsifal, and on November 9, 1933, the tenth anniversary of the failed Beer Hall Putsch, the theater’s new artistic director marked the new political era with a National Socialist play by Friedrich Forster-Burggraf, All against One—One for All (Alle gegen Einen, Einer für Alle). The following year, the theater was given to the Nazi organization Strength through Joy, which celebrated it as a “cultural center for the German worker.” Although operas continued to be performed at the renamed People’s Theater, the programming increasingly turned toward propagandistic works, whose artistic merit was questioned even by critics writing for the National Socialist press. Despite the low price of tickets, which cost only 90 cents, the theater’s seats were regularly half empty.30

Other connections to Wagner and to German art more generally pervaded the vicinity of Hitler’s residence. A massive stone memorial to Wagner, created by the sculptor Heinrich Waderé and erected in 1913, sits within a small patch of trees to the right of the theater. The marble block for the memorial, which required thirty horses to transport from the quarry to the local train station, comes from Mount Untersberg in Berchtesgaden, across from which Hitler established his mountain retreat.31 Continuing west along Prince Regent Street, one arrives shortly at the Villa Stuck, the house of the Symbolist artist Franz von Stuck, whose work Hitler prized and collected. Several of Stuck’s paintings hung in Hitler’s Munich apartment, including a version of the erotic female nude, Sünde, or Sin (another version is found today in the artist’s villa).32 In May 1936, a colossal bronze statue of an Amazon on horseback, designed by Stuck in 1913, was added to the front of the artist’s villa, which opened later that summer as a museum.33 Stuck’s home represents one of the finest architectural examples of the development in the later nineteenth century of the artist’s atelier and home as a space of broader social and intellectual discourse, which reached its apogee in Munich and Vienna. As an aspiring young artist in these two cities, Hitler must have dreamed of hosting his own salon. Many of the artists Hitler admired—Hans Makart, Franz von Lenbach, Arnold Böcklin, Franz von Stuck, and Richard Wagner—had been known in their day for the creative brilliance of their salons, and Hitler particularly respected the Viennese Makart for having worked his way up from conditions of poverty to become the reigning artist of his day, with an atelier famous in all of Europe. Some of these artistic settings also became architecturally influential. The lush bohemian interior of Makart’s atelier, for example, was widely published and helped to launch a vogue in the later nineteenth century for bourgeois domestic interiors that incorporated romantic notions of artistic informality and disorder.34

Leaving the Villa Stuck and proceeding west along Prince Regent Street for less than half a mile, one encounters the impressive neoclassical facade of the Schack Gallery (designed by Max Littmann, architect of the Prince Regent Theater), which houses the painting collection of the diplomat Adolf Friedrich von Schack. Devoted to German painters of the nineteenth century, this collection became one of Hitler’s favorite haunts in Munich before World War I, significantly shaping his artistic tastes and later art collecting. Indeed, in 1939, he pursued the possibility of a “Führermuseum” inside the Schack Gallery that would have displayed his own artistic collections.35 Less than two hundred yards from the Schack Gallery looms the vast Bavarian National Museum, with its rich collections of southern German artwork, ranging chronologically from the middle ages to the early twentieth century. Despite the building’s size, the architect Gabriel Seidl arranged its volumes so as to not dwarf the street. In 1929, across from the museum on the southern side of the street, a new building was planned for the New Collection (Neue Sammlung), a branch of the Bavarian National Museum that highlighted modern design work, such as that of the Bauhaus or German Werkbund.36 Although Hitler overtly rejected the modernist aesthetics of these institutions on ideological grounds, his regime continued to apply many of their goals in the design and production of industrial goods.37

Finally, at the point where Prince Regent Street begins, Hitler erected his House of German Art, a commission given to Paul Troost in 1933 and completed by Gerdy Troost and Leonhard Gall in 1937 (fig. 20). The monumental art gallery was to be paired with the House of German Architecture, designed by Gall in 1939, which, if realized, would have stood directly across the street.38 Adjacent to the House of German Art, the Prince Carl Palace marks the head of the street. The neoclassical mansion, designed by Karl von Fischer in 1803, was renovated in 1937 in order to serve as a guesthouse for distinguished foreign visitors, the first of whom was Mussolini.

Thus, when in 1929 Hitler finally abandoned his bohemian image for the more settled domestic life suitable to a national leader, he chose a location loaded with symbolic significance for his broader political vision. Through his residence on Prince Regent Square and building projects on Prince Regent Street, he created and positioned himself along an axis of specifically German art and culture. At one end lived the Führer, the artist-politician of the New Germany, while at the other end of the axis stood his greatest temple, the House of German Art. Along the length of the axis, one finds many of the leitmotifs—rooted in art, music, and architecture—that Hitler would employ, time and again, to compose the mythic vision of his Aryan superstate.

Violence implicitly and explicitly underlay those ideals, and its presence was visible in the street’s transformation during the Third Reich. Hitler let stand the street’s most notable monument: the Angel of Peace, erected in 1899 on the eastern side of the Luitpold Bridge, which connects Prince Regent Street over the Isar River. Unlike the similar winged monument in Berlin, which commemorated the wars leading to German unification in 1871, the Munich monument celebrated the long period of peace that followed.39 Incongruous as it may seem, even such a symbol could be woven into Hitler’s self-mythologizing. Well after he invaded Poland in 1939, Hitler continued to present himself as a man keen to avoid conflict, but provoked to act by aggressive foes. During the Third Reich, the Angel of Peace witnessed Prince Regent Street’s militarization. On Hermann Göring’s orders, an imposing, nearly 250-yard-long regional aviation headquarters (Luftgaukommando VII) was built in 1937–38 across from the Bavarian National Museum (on land once intended for the New Collection). The building was designed by German Bestelmeyer, a conservative architect who supported the Nazis. He placed representations of steel helmets within window gables and decorated gates and grills with swastikas, all of which is still visible today.40 The Luftgaukommando and the House of German Art imposed an oppressive monumentality on the street that had been assiduously avoided by its original planers and that disrupted the flow of green spaces connecting northern and southern parts of the city. On the stretch of Prince Regent Street between Wilhelm Tell and Bruckner streets, just east of Prince Regent Square and about 150 yards from Hitler’s apartment, the regime constructed between 1942 and 1944 a series of model housing blocks that incorporated air raid towers into their design. In one such model, each spacious and comfortable flat had its own private door to a centralized bunker.41 In the Nazi worldview, home sweet home came with a built-in bomb shelter.

At the end of 1939, Hitler acquired his own bunker at 16 Prince Regent Square, constructed with nearly five tons of steel, in the rear courtyard.42 It still exists today, with its oak-paneled interior intact. A year previously, on December 27, 1938, Hitler had purchased the entire building for 140,000 Reichsmarks, ending his long phase as a renter.43 Nonetheless, other tenants continued to reside there. While these neighbors, as Ward Price noted, had been thoroughly vetted by the Gestapo, their presence is surprising, given the elaborate security measures on the Obersalzberg. Ward Price, careful not to criticize the regime, thought that they had the “advantage” of sharing Hitler’s security, but one wonders how much their freedom of movement and other liberties were curtailed. Two SS guards patrolled outside the building, another SS man controlled access to the street door, and detectives occupied a flat on the ground floor around-the-clock.44 Evidently, Hitler felt sufficiently protected to relax there and even to host dignitaries and world leaders—most prominently, in 1937, Mussolini, and, the following year, Chamberlain.45

It was on the occasion of Chamberlain’s visit that Hitler consented to have his apartment photographed for publication, the only such instance during the Third Reich (see fig. 19). The image was taken by Heinrich Hoffmann on the morning of September 30, 1938, when Chamberlain had asked for a private meeting with the German leader. The previous day and night, Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, and the French prime minister, Edouard Daladier, had debated and eventually signed the Munich Accord, which had sealed Czechoslovakia’s dismemberment. The next morning, Chamberlain went to see Hitler in his apartment to ask him to sign a short joint declaration that the Munich Accord and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed in 1935 were “symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.” Chamberlain believed that if Hitler consented and then broke his word, his true character would be revealed to the world. Hitler, who was in a sullen mood, signed the paper but showed little interest in its contents. Chamberlain was delighted, convinced that he had backed Hitler into a corner.46

In the picture, Chamberlain, Hitler, and Paul Schmidt, Hitler’s translator, are shown seated in the living room alcove beside the library. Hitler, who occupies the center of the photograph, is framed by markers of his cultivation: rows of fine books to the left, art objects in the foreground, including what appears to be Richard Wagner’s death mask and a bronze of a young man’s head (possibly by Renaissance sculptor Luca della Robbia), and behind him a canvas by Eduard von Grützner, a nineteenth-century Munich painter beloved by Hitler.47 The carefully composed tableau thus identified Hitler as a man of culture, and, more specifically, as a German and Bavarian with classical leanings. During their conversation, Chamberlain had asked that, if Czechoslovakia resisted, there be “no bombardment of Prague or killing of women and children by attacks from the air,” to which Hitler had replied that “he hated the thought of little babies being killed by gas bombs.”48 The carefully chosen objects around Hitler seemed to buttress that sentiment, suggesting they were the words of a man steeped in Europe’s highest cultural values.

After the 1935 renovation, the Atelier Troost continued to maintain the apartment and to make purchases as needed. On May 19, 1942, six gold-rimmed champagne flutes were ordered for “rush” delivery to 16 Prince Regent Square.49 What was Hitler planning to celebrate? Perhaps it was the news from his generals. Having abandoned the guise of the Glasgow shipowner for that of the warrior king, Hitler had driven his armies across most of Europe. In the second battle for Kharkov, then underway, the Wehrmacht was crushing Soviet forces. On May 16, in the battle for the Kerch peninsula, the German High Command announced the seizure of the city of Kerch. Within days, the Crimean front had collapsed and 170,000 Soviet prisoners of war, along with legions of tanks and guns, were captured.50

If Hitler had planned to toast these victories, then a year later, the champagne flutes were likely in the cupboard gathering dust. In the spring and summer of 1943, Gerdy Troost ordered new suites of furniture, drapes, carpets, and other renovations costing over 24,000 Reichsmarks. The work began just after the surrender of the German army in Stalingrad and continued through the defeat of Axis forces in North Africa to the Allied invasion of Sicily.51 This concern with new decor may have been no more than a mad distraction from the shattering defeats on the battlefield, but given Hitler’s propensity to link politics and design, it is not inconceivable that something more substantial was at stake. As Germany’s military position deteriorated in 1943, Hitler’s advisors urged him to negotiate with Joseph Stalin or Winston Churchill in order to eliminate one of the war fronts.52 Despite Goebbels’s official declaration of “total war” in February 1943 and Hitler’s apparent intransigence on negotiating with his enemies, the desire to spruce up his apartment—at a time when Allied bombs had begun to rain down on Munich and the idea of redecorating would have struck most of its residents as lunacy—raises the possibility that he was, in fact, preparing for a new round of diplomatic talks. At the very least, he seems to have been expecting visitors on whom he wanted to make a good impression.