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FROM HAUS WACHENFELD TO THE BERGHOF

The Domestic Face of Empire

The chalet in the Alps that the head of a fringe political group had rented in October 1928 had grown too small, four years later, for the leader of Germany’s largest parliamentary party. Hitler’s rising political fortunes and the increasing number of people who traveled with him taxed the capacities of the house. In the fall of 1932, he commissioned what would be the first of several renovations that, over time, would transform the mountain cottage into a citadel.

The original design, from 1916–17, was a simple two-story structure. The ground floor contained a living room entered through a wooden porch, a kitchen with a pantry, a maid’s room, and a toilet; the upper floor held two large bedrooms at the front of the house, two small bedrooms at the back, and a full bathroom. In the spring of 1933, based on drawings completed the previous September, a garage was built on the sloping land just below the house, creating a terrace above it; a conservatory, which projected onto the terrace, replaced the old porch; above the conservatory, the two front bedrooms acquired a larger balcony; a long annex for personnel and guards was constructed to the right of chalet; and the driveway was relocated and enlarged (fig. 21).1 Although Otto Dietrich, Hitler’s press chief, credited his employer with the designs, the plans were signed by Munich architect Josef Neumaier, an early member of the National Socialist Party well known to Hitler.2

Already when he had rented Haus Wachenfeld in 1928, Hitler had secured the right of first refusal from its owner, Margarete Winter. The elderly widow, then living in Buxtehude, hesitated to sell the house, but a personal visit from Hitler convinced her. On September 17, 1932, she signed an agreement setting a price of 40,000 Goldmarks (equivalent to about 175,000 Reichsmarks), and on June 26, 1933, nearly five months after becoming chancellor, Hitler bought it with all of its contents. Winter had insisted on guaranteeing the price against a gold value as well as the American dollar and other European currencies to protect against Germany’s economic instability in the wake of the Great Depression, which would soon sweep Hitler into power.3

Even with these additions, the increasing number of visitors meant that a lack of space and amenities at Haus Wachenfeld continued to be felt. Looking back on conditions that had existed during this period, a New York Times Magazine article claimed that “when guests stayed overnight, even such prominent guests as Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy party leader, they had to sleep in tents outside or over the garage.”4 In his memoirs, Heinz Linge, Hitler’s valet, recalled that the conservatory, “where the meals were served, was so cramped that guests had to stack up the crockery after eating to help the orderlies because of the lack of space.”5

After Hitler was sworn in as chancellor on January 30, 1933, Angela Raubal endeavored to meet the new demands put on the household. In a thick file of invoices preserved from that spring and summer, we see her expanding the domestic inventory with new dishes, glassware, cooking and serving utensils, bakeware, lamps, and decorative objects. (The numerous dessert-making items attest to Hitler’s sweet tooth, including his love of a good bombe.) Curiously, in June, she also purchased five chamber pots, perhaps for the recently completed annex, which had one shared toilet and bath among the five rooms. Purchases of flowers, vines, and shrubs as well as lawn and gardening equipment bespeak a greater attention to landscaping. The receipts thus reveal not only a need to better outfit the house to accommodate the chancellor’s new influx of visitors, but also a heightened awareness of his domestic image.6

In the summer of 1935, Hitler decided on a radical expansion of Haus Wachenfeld, and after its completion in July 1936, he rechristened his home the Berghof. Albert Speer, recalling its genesis in his memoir, claimed that the design was undermined from the outset by the impulsive and overconfident nature of its creator: “Hitler did not just sketch the plans for the Berghof. He borrowed drawing board, T-square, and other implements from me to draw the ground plan, renderings, and cross sections of his building to scale, refusing any help with the matter.” Although Speer noted that Hitler lavished great care on the design, he lacked the corrective habits Speer attributed to a trained architect: “Most architects will put a variety of ideas down on paper, and see which lends itself best to further development. It was characteristic of Hitler that he regarded his first inspiration as intuitively right and drew it with little hesitation.” Speer described the numerous failings of the “impractical” ground plan, arguing that it “would have been graded D by any professor at an institute of technology. On the other hand, these very clumsinesses gave the Berghof a strongly personal note. The place was still geared to the simple activities of a former weekend cottage, merely expanded to vast proportions.”7

Speer’s account makes no mention of an architect named Alois Degano, but it is his signature that is on the Berghof drawings and plans preserved in state archives (figs. 22–24). Degano, an architect based in the Bavarian town of Gmund am Tegernsee, was known for designing in a modernized Alpine style that rejected the kitschiness that had come to be associated with it. He met Hitler in June 1933, after the chancellor admired the house he had recently built for Franz Xaver Schwarz, the national treasurer of the Nazi Party, in St. Quirin am Tegernsee. Later that year, Degano designed Hermann Göring’s home on the Obersalzberg and renovated the nearby Türken Inn (to serve as SS quarters) as well as the Platterhof Hotel. Degano subsequently designed homes for Philipp Bouhler, Heinrich Himmler, and Max Amann as well as the Berchtesgaden branch of the Chancellery and two elite schools: the SS officers’ school in Bad Tölz and the Nazi Party cadre school in Feldafing. It seems unlikely that a well-respected architect with a large firm and over two decades of experience would simply sign off on an amateur’s designs in order for them to be submitted to the building authorities, even if that amateur were Adolf Hitler.8 According to contemporary press reports, Hitler had provided the preliminary ideas, on the basis of which Degano elaborated and completed the plans. Still, there is evidence that Hitler was as much designer as client. In September 1936, Adolf Wagner, the Gauleiter for Munich and Upper Bavaria, wrote a letter to Reich Chancellery Chief Hans Lammers discussing Degano’s plans for the Berchtesgaden Chancellery. He warned that the architect needed closer supervision, describing Hitler’s influence on past designs that he had commissioned from Degano as “decisive.” Indeed, he went so far as to state that “the plans are practically those of the Führer himself and Degano was more or less only the executor of the Führer’s ideas.”9 The degree of influence is visible in a sketch of the Berghof’s new main section that Speer included in his memoirs and identified as having been drawn by Hitler. Although it differs in some aspects from the finished building, it nonetheless captures its proportions and basic features: the retention of the old chalet, incorporated under a long, sloping roofline; the monumental window on the first floor; three windows and a large balcony on the second floor; and a loggia under the roof.10

The original Haus Wachenfeld stylistically imitated local farmhouses, and Hitler attempted to continue in this vernacular tradition, despite the change in scale. With notable exceptions, such as the massive window, the expansion roughly approximated regional forms or practices. For example, the low-pitched roof, with its overhanging eaves, is customary in this area and protects against the rainy Alpine climate (see fig. 22). A balcony on the upper floor and loggia under the roof are often found in Upper Bavarian farmhouses. While the extension was built largely of industrial materials, its exterior cladding evoked traditional timber and plaster construction. The low wing built to the eastern side of the house also has precedents in the livestock stalls that were typically attached to a farmer’s living quarters. Moreover, the retention of Haus Wachenfeld recalls the not uncommon practice in the region of absorbing a smaller structure into an expansion, although it is usually done for economic reasons.11 Presumably, Hitler was fond of the old house and wanted to retain it for sentimental reasons; he did not need to do so financially. But there were also ideological motives for keeping it. By 1935, the house had become iconic and beloved by many Germans, and Hitler wanted to retain its powerful associations and avoid the appearance of having grown distant from his own past.

A file of invoices for book purchases made by Hitler in 1933 and 1934, as he began to renovate Haus Wachenfeld, reveals several works on domestic and vernacular architecture, including a book on German farmhouses, which suggests that he was looking not only at farm buildings in the Berchtesgaden area, but was also reading more generally on the architectural and cultural history of the type.12 That Hitler renamed his residence the Berghof, meaning “Mountain Farm,” also indicates his desire to associate it with agricultural models. Politically, this was a strategic choice, for it suggested humble origins and associations with productivity and German folk ethnicity. In its coverage of the Führer’s new house, the contemporary German press took up and propagated the image of “an authentic mountain farm, rooted to the native soil.”13

Once inside the house, such allusions quickly vanished, although even here, some rooms evoked traditional regional forms or functions. The Atelier Troost, commissioned to decorate the interiors, began their work in the late fall of 1935, when the building was under construction. While Degano concentrated on the structure, the Atelier Troost was responsible for designing complete interiors, from the finishing of ceilings, walls, doors, and floors to lighting, furniture, ceramic ovens, fireplaces, curtains, carpeting, decorative objects, and artwork. Nonetheless, boundaries between the two firms sometimes blurred, and on at least one occasion, Gerdy Troost attempted to intervene in the architectural design itself.

In the original residence, the Atelier Troost confronted a rather gaudy interior, conforming to an industrialist’s stereotypical image of a rustic mountain home (plate 2). Onto this layer of kitschiness, Hitler and his followers had added yet another with all sorts of gifts of Nazi paraphernalia from the Führer’s admirers. It is striking to see in images of Haus Wachenfeld how much of this stuff lay about the place—a figure of a saluting SA man perched on top of a lamp, swastika-embroidered cushions, even a swastika woven into the sides of a wicker chair. The Atelier Troost discarded these tokens of National Socialism and instead made the entire house a symbol of the new Reich. Convincing Hitler to part with these objects could not have been easy. When Speer visited Haus Wachenfeld and saw the profusion of such items, he noted, “Hitler commented to me with some embarrassment: ‘I know these are not beautiful things, but many of them are presents. I shouldn’t like to part with them.’”14 It might have helped, however, that after 1933, Hitler’s own government had outlawed the inappropriate use of such “national” symbols, including the swastika. Hitler did not always follow his own laws, but having these objects appear in public images of the house at the same time that National Socialist authorities were campaigning to eradicate Nazi kitsch clearly would have been problematic.

Before-and-after images of the original rustic Stube, or living room, in Haus Wachenfeld demonstrate how the Atelier Troost modernized the interiors, while nonetheless evoking a regional tone (see plates 2, 3). The renovation retained the original Bavarian corner nook, but replaced the painted spindly furniture with heavier and simpler straight-edged forms. The traditional dark-green ceramic stove, or Kachelofen, with surrounding benches gave way to one in celadon tones with painted relief tiles by the Munich artist Sofie Stork depicting people in traditional regional costumes. The painted wooden door surmounted by a shelf with knickknacks was replaced by a simple windowed door with a rounded arch. The painted wooden moldings were similarly removed and plain, dark wood was substituted. The fussy hanging lamp with the saluting SA soldier disappeared in place of a simpler fixture. The color scheme was reduced to a few strong elements (red, green, cream), and geometric rather than floral patterns dominated. Nonetheless, the room did not lack visual richness and, with its warm oven, made for an inviting space. The room now served as an antechamber, where guests waited to enter the adjacent Great Hall or for the Führer to emerge from within.

The intimate feel and dimensions of the Stube reinforced, in the movement from a compressed to open space, the vastness of the Great Hall, an oversized rectangle of a room with a floor on two levels that presented the Atelier Troost with its greatest design challenge (plate 4 and see fig. 23). It measured over forty-two feet wide by seventy-four feet long and eighteen feet high, the size of a small gymnasium, and was intended as a multifunctional representational space where Hitler would receive foreign and domestic guests, hold meetings with his ministers and generals, host official functions, entertain, and socialize. On the southern end of the room was a grand marble fireplace, and opposite it was a panoramic window measuring over twenty-eight feet long by twelve feet high (plate 5 and fig. 25). Hitler, it has been said, pioneered the work-from-home movement, and the Great Hall was at the center of his intention to rule an empire from the comfort of his living room sofa.15

Precedents for such a room can be found in medieval great halls. These multipurpose communal spaces displayed, through design elements such as the length of the room, height of the ceiling, or size of the central hearth, their lord’s status. Hitler may have drawn on this domestic model, associated with feudal power, to reinforce his connection to a local legend: folk tales about Mount Untersberg, framed by the Great Hall’s majestic window, claimed that the court of Emperor Charlemagne (or, sometimes, Barbarossa) slept within the mountain, awaiting the sign that would awaken the king and his knights to fight a cataclysmic battle that would usher in a glorious new Reich. As Hitler told Speer, “You see the Untersberg over there. It is no accident that I have my residence opposite it.”16 The view of the mountain brought the medieval warrior-king’s symbolic presence into the room, but perhaps the Great Hall itself was meant to mirror his imagined court buried deep within the mountain. In this context, the name that Hitler gave his house takes on a different significance: the word “Berghof,” although usually understood to refer to a mountain farm, also denotes a mountain court.

At the same time, Hitler may have had another, more modern, architectural precedent in mind for his Great Hall, in keeping with his vision of himself as an artist-politician. Namely, he may have looked to the great artists’ ateliers of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: large spaces that encompassed professional, domestic, and social activities. Hitler admired Hans Makart’s famous Viennese studio and its accumulated layers of “memories,” although he himself sought to instantly fabricate self-mythologizing spaces.17 A celebrated 1885 painting of Makart’s studio before its sale, created by [Rudolf von Alt](http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Rudolf-Ritter-Von-Alt/Rudolf-Ritter-Von-Alt-oil-paintings.html), depicts one of the huge historical canvases at which the artist excelled. Believing that politics was art, Hitler may have conceived the large window in the Great Hall, which pictured “German” nature at its most eternal and invincible, as his own canvas, and beneath it, the fourteen-foot-long Untersberg marble and oak table, where he studied maps with his generals, as his easel.18 (This piece of furniture also evokes the high table of medieval great halls, at which the lord took his meals, conducted business, and dispensed justice.)

The difficulties that the Atelier Troost faced in bringing some kind of harmony to the ungainly Great Hall are perhaps best appreciated in images of the room under construction, preserved in the Heinrich Hoffmann photographic collection at the U.S. National Archives. In them, we see how the cavernous room dwarfs the occupants and even the oversized furniture created especially for its spaces, an effect heightened by the scale of the window.19 Around Christmas 1935, Hitler visited the construction site with his designers (fig. 26). It was likely that Troost then attempted to talk Hitler out of the gargantuan window. She later said that she had not seen architectural plans prior to this visit with Hitler, when the building had reached the stage of frame construction. Hitler told Unity Mitford, a fanatical English follower, about the incident when she visited him at the Berghof in July 1938. In a letter to her sister Diana, wife of Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Unity described the house in rapturous terms, saving her greatest praise for the huge expanse of window in the Great Hall: “The effect is simply extraordinary. The window—the largest piece of glass ever made—can be wound down like a motor window, as it was yesterday, leaving it quite open. Through it one just sees this huge chain of mountains, and it looks more like an enormous cinema screen than like reality. Needless to say the génial [brilliant] idea was the Führer’s own, & he said Frau Troost wanted to insist on having three windows.”20 In later years, Gerdy Troost claimed that Hitler usually took her design advice, but in this case, the window remained a single unit rather than being divided into three smaller sections.21

Hitler clearly relished having bested his designer, since he was still telling the story years later. The anecdote also reveals their conflicting agendas: whereas Gerdy Troost sought to impress with tasteful reserve, Hitler designed for grandstanding effect. As Mitford’s letter revealed, the disappearance of the window contributed just as much as the window itself to the awe experienced by visitors. Thomas Jones, who had been invited to Hitler’s Munich apartment in May 1936, accompanied former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, an admirer of Hitler, on an ostensibly private visit to the Berghof the following September, not long after the renovation had been completed. As Jones reports, the Great Hall made a strong impression, “but what fascinated us all was the vast window at the north end, or rather the absence of it, for it had been wound up or let down out of sight into a groove and there was nothing between us and the open air and sky and mountains and a view of Salzburg in the distance.”22 Indeed, it inspired Lloyd George to tear out a wall in the library of his country house at Churt in Surrey and replace it with a similar panoramic window.23 (A more damaging outcome of the visit was Lloyd George’s effusive praise in the British press of Hitler, whom he described as “the George Washington of Germany” and “a born leader of men” who had brought freedom and prosperity to a peace-loving country.24)

Hitler expected his visitors to be dazzled by this architectural feat of commanding nature, no matter the circumstances. In November 1937, Lord Halifax, then lord president of the council in Neville Chamberlain’s administration, visited Hitler at the Berghof to address Anglo-German relations, which had deteriorated as Hitler’s hopes for a British alliance faded and Germany’s expansionist rumblings pushed the limits of British tolerance for the Nazi regime. Amid the tense discussions, Hitler “insisted” on a performance of his window’s vanishing act for the British delegation. Ivone Kirkpatrick, the head of chancery at the British embassy in Berlin, who was present at the talks, later recalled that “a couple of stalwart S.S. men doubled into the room, fixed things like motor-car starting-handles into the sockets and wound violently. The whole structure sank noiselessly into the floor, giving the room the appearance of a covered terrace.” Kirkpatrick was unmoved and left the Berghof with the memory of Hitler having behaved like a sullen, spoiled child.25

Having lost the confrontation with Hitler over the window, Gerdy Troost seems to have embraced the idea of the panorama as the defining experience of the Great Hall. Writer Matthew Stadler has argued that “Hitler loved panoramas” and “his favorite rooms were organized around their panoramic views. . . . Where there was no view out, Hitler organized interior views—the rooms became stage sets for the dramas of the Führer. Their vastness compelled guests to watch rather than touch or feel the closeness of sociality. This spectative logic was the only one Hitler understood.” The elevations of the Great Hall interior drawn by the Atelier Troost as well as contemporary photographs suggest how the long walls became their own kind of panoramas (see plates 4, 6). Furniture was arranged along or near the walls so as to create elongated views with nothing to block (or draw) the eye at the center of the room. The intended effect was not a concentration of attention, but its dispersal as the eye roamed over the broad scenes, whether of the mountain peaks seen through the window or the interior vistas of furniture and art. Even some of the furniture specially created for the room could be said to be panoramic, such as the sixteen-and-a-half-foot-long sofa designed by the Atelier Troost and placed in front of the Gobelin tapestry near the window (fig. 27). Stadler contends that Hitler’s elongated tables “also served to bring the panorama indoors. Hitler laid his maps on them and stood over, gazing down at the great expanse.”26

The room’s emphasis on visuality, what Stadler describes as a “spectative logic,” was also present in its multiplicity of screens and canvases, real or allegorical. The above-mentioned Gobelin, itself a woven canvas, hid the openings of an external projection booth, and on the opposite side of the room, another tapestry concealed the screen. Before the war started, Hitler would watch films here nightly with his guests and house staff, an activity that often must have frustrated the viewers, “for if Hitler did not like a film he used to clap his hands and order it to be replaced by one he did like.”27 The panoramic window could itself be experienced as a movie screen, as captured in Mitford’s description of the cinematic unreality of the open-air view. The paintings and sculpture that filled the southern end of the room similarly encouraged a museal gaze in the Führer’s “best” room, characterized by an attentive and reverential form of looking.

As is often the case in traditional art museums, the Great Hall’s privileging of vision resulted in a lack of attention to the corporeal. Indeed, a number of memoirs comment on the body’s unease in its spaces. Jones described how when Hitler received Lloyd George at the Berghof, “Hitler sat on an easy chair and L. G. uncomfortably on a couch which had no back.”28 In fact, the couches in the Great Hall did have backs, but the seats were so deep that guests were forced to perch on their edges. Speer, too, criticized the uncomfortable sofas and the “inept arrangement of the furniture,” which discouraged a common conversation and reduced each person to talking “in low voices with his neighbor.” He also noted how gasoline fumes blew into the Great Hall when the window, which was situated directly above the garage, was open. While Speer blamed Hitler’s poor design skills for assaulting his visitors’ noses, it also testifies to the dictator’s focus on visual effects.29 Other public parts of the house displayed a similar emphasis, including the external and internal vistas incorporated in the long and narrow dining room (see fig. 30), and the outdoor terrace, on which Hitler installed a telescope.

Comfort in the Great Hall was, in any case, secondary to its main purpose: to impress. In this room, Hitler greeted kings and princes, prime ministers and marshals, religious leaders, secretaries of state, and ambassadors.30 It was where he negotiated with the powers of Europe that stood between him and his vision of a greater German Reich. Like the renovation itself, the Great Hall was meant to convey the “new” Hitler—not the ex-corporal who roused rebels in beer halls or the dictator who cut down his opponents in cold blood, but rather a powerful, cultivated, and, above all, trustworthy statesman. It was the stage on which he performed this new role and invited others to respond to him accordingly. Jones, describing the meeting between Lloyd George and Hitler, conveyed the intended effect of the room when he noted in his diary how it “made a great impression at once upon the visitors and gave a sense of dignity to the proceedings.”31

Beyond the Great Hall’s impressive proportions and striking panoramic views, its contents also reinforced the image of a man of power, vision, and substance. The increased scale of the furniture in comparison with Hitler’s other residences is notable and cannot be attributed solely to the size of the room alone. Building a vast space did not simply require comparably large furnishings, but also made them possible. On the southern end of the hall, a fireplace almost tall enough for a man to stand inside evoked a luxurious version of a medieval hearth. The mantel was made of red marble from Thuringia and measured seven-and-a-half feet high by eight-and-a-half feet long.32 On the eastern wall stood a massive cupboard over fifteen feet long and ten feet high designed by Leonhard Gall to hold Hitler’s certificates of honorary citizenship—a prominent symbol in the room of the German people’s devotion to their leader.33 How that “devotion” had been won was suggested by the cupboard’s most unique feature: five large bronze knobs, sculpted by Eugen Henke, in the shape of heads, representing (from left to right) a Wehrmacht soldier, a girl in the League of German Girls, the Führer himself, a boy in the Hitler Youth, and an SA man (fig. 28). The knob heads embodied the ideal types of Hitler’s Aryan nation, with the Führer at their center. Troost compared them to the tradition of Italian Renaissance bronzes, such as the projecting heads by Luca della Robbia on the north sacristy doors of the Florence Cathedral.34

Standing beside the map table near the window was an oversized globe famously parodied in Charlie Chaplin’s 1940 film, The Great Dictator (plate 7). While Troost had wanted to downsize the Great Hall’s window, in the case of the globe, she was responsible for its enlargement, thus assuring its iconic power. Troost had the globe, produced by the Columbus-Erdglobus Company in Berlin, made twice as large as the commercial standard. The base itself was designed by Gall. The globe stood five feet and three inches high, some four inches shorter than Hitler himself (to have been physically dominated by the globe, which Hitler planned to conquer, would have been unacceptable). It was reputedly on this globe that Hitler drew the Arkhangelsk–Astrakhan line as the goal of the military campaign Operation Barbarossa, the name itself inspired by the medieval emperor said to be sleeping in the Untersberg. The globe clearly pleased the Führer, who had similar versions placed in the Nazi buildings on the Königsplatz and in the Chancellery in Berlin.35

Hoping paradoxically to achieve both grandness and intimacy in the Great Hall, Hitler ordered it built on two levels in order to create the impression, reinforced by the separate seating areas, of “rooms within rooms.” The walnut wainscoting installed at a uniform height around the Great Hall served to visually unify these different levels from below, while the walnut ceiling, with its large and deep coffers, did the same from above, also lending further gravitas to the room (see plate 4).36 Writing about it after the war, Troost took credit for the ceiling, saying she suggested the idea to Hitler because of the dimensions of the room. She had been inspired, she claimed, by her late husband’s work (for example, the white-coffered ceiling in the Brown House in Munich).37 The ceiling, reminiscent of Italian Renaissance palaces, also recalls the pine ceilings in the library and Smoking Room of the Old Chancellery in Berlin, which had been installed in the early twentieth century (see figs. 6, 10). Realized on a smaller scale, these ceilings gave dignity and warmth to the rooms, which were also used to socialize. The size of the Great Hall, however, rendered the vast coffered ceiling more imposing than inviting in its effect.

Gerdy Troost’s use of color repetitions and harmonies added a further dimension of visual unity to the Great Hall. As was her habit in rooms with tapestries, she based her color scheme on the two large Flemish Gobelins that hung on either side of the window and that concealed the film equipment. Or rather, she based it on the one that hung above the long sofa, The March, which was the only genuinely old tapestry of the two, dating from the seventeenth century. Troost commissioned a specialist to evaluate the tapestries because the garish colors of the one that hung near the piano, The Battle, disturbed her. He revealed that it was a modern copy and recommended laying it in the sun to fade its jarring tones.38

The colors and fabrics that Gerdy Troost used for the Great Hall, as well as for other rooms in the Berghof, can be studied with unusual immediacy because her fabric sample book survives among her papers in the Bavarian State Library (plate 8).39 While many are missing, the fabric swatches in the book are well preserved, and their freshness comes as something of a revelation, particularly when compared to the color postcards sold to tourists in Berchtesgaden after the war. In a 1973 letter, Troost complained about the distorted impression these created: “they are not only loud and hideous, but truly have nothing in common with my color scheme at the time.”40

The velour and brocade used for the Great Hall mixed Tuscan and strawberry reds, terra-cotta, silvery blue, pale and dark moss greens, and gold highlights. The effect was rich, but also formal. The fabrics used in the small living room and guest rooms were simpler and more modern in feel, with stylized botanical or folkish motifs. One color among the samples that is conspicuous by its near absence is brown. It is found only as a subtle element in two of the samples for the Great Hall; otherwise, the closest is a copper tone in the copper-, cream-, and egg yolk–colored fabric used for some of the pillows in the living room. An unpublished postwar interview with Gerdy Troost conducted by the Arizona artist Karen Kuykendall offers an explanation. Asked what kinds of colors Hitler preferred, Troost replied that he liked warm, earthy tones. She then continued, “He was not fond of brown.”41 This astonishing claim—Hitler was, after all, the instigator of the Brown Revolution, builder of the Brown House in Munich, and leader of the Brown Shirts—is supported by color photographs of his interior spaces in Berlin and Munich, in which brown is little in evidence, beyond the woodwork. In his biography of Hitler, John Toland wrote that the brown color of the SA uniform was “purely accidental; a large consignment of brown shirts, originally intended for German troops in East Africa, was available at wholesale.”42 Thus, while Hitler may have led the “brown movement” and identified with the color for symbolic and pragmatic reasons, it does not mean that he actually liked it.

True to their other projects for the Führer, the Atelier Troost used only the finest materials in designing the Berghof interiors. Transposing a Nazi motto intended for the German worker, one historian has stated that when it came to his home, for Hitler, the best was good enough.43 German design journals writing at the time about the Berghof emphasized the native materials used, such as the red Untersberg and Thuringian marbles, or walnut and oak.44 In fact, much of the house was constructed of industrial materials, although these were disguised with meticulous natural detailing. This quality came at a price and “cost estimates were exceeded by far.” Hitler claimed to have paid for the renovation himself from Mein Kampf income, and complained to Speer that it had all but bankrupted him, forcing him to ask his publisher for a large advance on future royalties.45 But surviving financial records, while admittedly incomplete, contain no evidence of Eher Verlag’s involvement (in contrast with the renovation of Hitler’s Munich apartment). The private “Adolf Hitler Fund,” to which industrialists made “voluntary” contributions, may have paid for some, if not all, of the renovation. From 1933 to 1945, deposits totaled more than 700 million Reichsmarks, equivalent to well over $3 billion today.46 The assets were administered with a free hand by Martin Bormann, who also oversaw building on the Obersalzberg. Gerdy Troost, who naively believed Hitler’s pleas of poverty and remarked after the war that “he never had spent much money on himself,” successfully sought out donors to purchase Berghof furnishings as gifts for the Führer, including a Sung dynasty bowl priced at 600 Reichsmarks—half a year’s wages in 1936 for an Autobahn construction worker.47

Despite the visual dominance of traditional materials and craftsmanship, Hitler expected his house to have the latest technological comforts and conveniences. The film equipment in the Great Hall was installed by Ufa, the principal film studio in Germany. The eleven-foot-long sideboard beneath the movie screen, adorned with a bust of Richard Wagner, concealed built-in speakers with stereophonic sound, a radio, and Hitler’s collection of record albums (see plate 4).48 Having the latest technologies, however, did not guarantee their smooth functioning. On Degano’s recommendation, Hitler ordered the same American-style oil heating system for the Berghof that Degano had installed at Göring’s Obersalzberg home. As the architect explained, the system did not produce ash that could settle on the house and was regulated by thermostat, which allowed for an even temperature throughout the house and avoided the overheated rooms that Hitler found so unpleasant. The boiler, however, chronically broke down, and the contractor was slow to respond to repair calls. As winter approached in 1936, a shivering Hitler vented his frustration on his architect, telling him to “rip out the whole damn thing.”49

Disagreements with designers, cost overruns, and absentee contractors are hardly unusual in a renovation project of this size. They are worth mentioning, however, to dispel the myths of superhuman feats and snag-free productions spread at the time about Hitler’s architectural projects—most famously, the claim that the new Chancellery was built in less than a year—that still linger today. Nazi propagandists presented the Führer’s buildings as a pure translation of his will, and their seemingly magical construction (no labor disputes, no cost overruns, no shortage of supplies, and no delays) as a manifestation of what was possible when Germans worked together toward that will. Images of mountains dramatically filling the Great Hall’s open window or white-gloved SS men arranging the dining room table with minute precision, among others, are still published today with little or no critical commentary in books about the Berghof meant to evoke nostalgia for a bygone era defined by its supposed technological wonders and orderliness rather than its blood.50

This aura of perfection also operated at the level of distinguished visitors, unfolding in a careful choreography that brought them from the driveway to the Great Hall. They arrived by car on the northern side of the house, where they were greeted on the stairs by its master. Together, to the accompaniment of a rolling drum, they climbed a broad flight of steps to a terrace (all paved with red marble from Mount Untersberg), where they walked past Hitler’s black-uniformed SS honor guard, who presented arms; turned right under a covered walkway; and then entered a vestibule through a heavy oak door (see fig. 23). The low-ceilinged and dimly lit lobby area featured Thuringian red marble columns and vaulted arches that reminded one visitor of “a cathedral crypt.”51 Toilets and coat racks were located here as well. From the garderobe, the Great Hall could be approached in two ways. Continuing to the end of the vestibule, visitors could have turned right, proceeded down a corridor, and come to another small lobby, from which they would have entered the living room. A large rectangular opening covered with a heavy curtain reminiscent of a theater, and foreshadowing the performance of the statesman within, admitted the visitor to the Great Hall (see fig. 27). Alternately, by retracing their steps, they could have entered the Great Hall more directly, through a door immediately to the right as one entered the house. In each case, and as noted above, the progression from low-ceiled, more compact, and darker spaces to the vast, window-lit expanse of the Great Hall made the psychological impact of the room all that much greater.

In inclement weather, tea, if offered, was served in the Great Hall, as it was to Chamberlain on September 15, 1938. The British prime minister had traveled to the Obersalzberg to discuss terms that would diffuse Hitler’s threat to invade Czechoslovakia, leading two weeks later to the concessions of the Munich Accord. Anglo-German Review, a British journal devoted to fostering “good understanding and co-operation between Great Britain and Germany” and to delivering the message that the Nazi government desired peace, featured the historic refreshments “in the Führer’s famous chalet” on the cover of its September 1938 issue, making a choice thereby to emphasize Hitler’s hospitality over his bullying tactics, which had forced the sixty-nine-year-old Chamberlain to the Alps in a desperate bid to avoid war (fig. 29).52

If invited to join the Führer for lunch, the visitor reentered the vestibule and turned east into the dining room, which was located in the new wing attached to the main section of the house (fig. 30 and see fig. 23). The long and narrow room, perpendicularly positioned to the Great Hall, could seat eighteen at the main table and six in the semicircular alcove, the latter a cozy spot where early risers could breakfast (Hitler had his breakfast in his study). The room was clad entirely in Swiss pine. Despite the dominance of stone in his public works, Hitler’s favorite material, according to Gerdy Troost, was wood. The chairs were covered in terra-cotta–colored leather, continuing the color theme from the Great Hall. Beyond a built-in display cabinet and vase of flowers, there was no decoration, the abundantly knotted wood creating its own strongly graphic effect. Hitler sat in the middle of the table with a view of the Untersberg, and he and his guests were served by SS men in white uniforms, which added to the formal effect. According to Speer, “the dining room was a mixture of artistic rusticity and urban elegance of a sort which was often characteristic of country houses of the wealthy.”53 Meals were prepared in the kitchen located on the eastern end of the new wing, adjacent to the dining room.

Now and then, official visitors would climb the stairs in the lobby to the second floor, walk down an impressive, art-lined corridor that measured seventeen feet in width, and enter Hitler’s private study for more confidential discussions (plate 9 and see fig. 24). The spacious room, with three French windows leading onto a balcony and built-in bookshelves on either end, was located directly above the Great Hall. At the center of the room was Hitler’s desk, behind which hung oil portraits of his parents (based on photographs). Across from it was a cream-colored tile stove, painted with monochromatic green figures by Sofie Stork. On the western side of the room, a sitting area was arranged in front of a fireplace, over which hung a painting of a young Frederick the Great by Antoine Pesne.54 The walls were clad in sanded spruce, and Gerdy Troost used what was described as a green-gray base tone for the curtains, carpet, and upholstery, with terra-cotta and beige accents, again picking up elements of the Great Hall’s color palette. (Terra-cotta, a dominant color throughout the house, was also a favorite of Paul Troost, establishing continuity with his work. Terra-cotta was central to the color scheme of the Europa, the ship interiors that Hitler most admired.55) A contemporary German design journal described “the impression of warm domesticity” conveyed by this room, although it must not have felt that way to Kurt Schuschnigg, the Austrian chancellor, who was browbeaten here by his host for hours on February 12, 1938, in an effort to make him agree to violate his own country’s sovereignty.56

Significantly, all three of the public or semipublic spaces in the Berghof used for important visitors—the Great Hall, dining room, and study—were those most closely associated in traditional domestic architecture with masculinity. These were typically the representational spaces of the house, where business was conducted or the owner’s wealth and power were displayed. When the Berghof was completed in early July 1936, it had only been two years since the “Röhm-Putsch,” or Night of the Long Knives (June 30 to July 2, 1934), when Hitler had political adversaries and old enemies murdered, including many SA leaders and its chief, Ernst Röhm, whom Hitler accused of planning a coup. Röhm’s homosexuality was also repeatedly alluded to as a justification, and on June 28, 1935, the first anniversary of the purge, the regime broadened the legal definition of punishable homosexual offenses and intensified its persecutions of so-called sexual degenerates. These actions helped to alleviate suspicions that Hitler shared Röhm’s sexual orientation, although whispered rumors persisted.57 In the rooms that Hitler chose to display himself to those he most wished to impress, he thus communicated not only his power and cultivation, but also his “correct” masculinity, an important part of the appearance of “normality” that he performed in the mid-1930s. In the apparent absence of a flesh-and-blood female companion, sensual representations of women in the Great Hall, placed prominently near the fireplace and often visible in published photographs—such as the reclining nude goddess in Venus and Cupid by the Italian Renaissance painter and Titian pupil Paris Bordone, and Anselm Feuerbach’s 1862 portrait of his model and muse Nanna, said to have been Hitler’s favorite painting—further reinforced Hitler’s heterosexual bachelor domesticity as well as his cultural sophistication.58

Beyond the Great Hall, the best-known area of the Berghof was its outdoor terrace with the spectacular backdrop of the Alps. On the terrace, a less formal space bedecked with tables and parasols in bright colors, Hitler met with party officials, youth groups, members of his inner circle, and others with whom he might wish to have a more casual encounter. Hitler’s staff preferred gathering in the informal spaces of the house to the Great Hall. Traudl Junge, Hitler’s young secretary, recalled the impression of comfort made by the small living room, with its warm tile stove, the conservatory’s inviting flowers and soft armchairs, and the exciting vistas of the terrace, but remembered the Great Hall as “cold, in spite of the thick carpets, the magnificent tapestries and all the precious things adorning the walls and the furnishings.”59 In the evenings, the staff might bowl in the alley built in the basement of the new east wing. Hitler himself “loved bowling,” according to his valet, Heinz Linge, who said it was his only form of exercise, “except for the expander under his bed.” A photograph of Hitler in Heinrich Hoffmann’s albums at the U.S. National Archives captures him in mid-throw.60

The second and third floors of the Berghof were used exclusively by residents and guests (see fig. 24). Hitler’s bedroom was located beside his office on the second floor. Either for security or privacy (or both), it did not have a doorway opening directly onto the main hallway, but could be accessed only through an adjacent vestibule or from his office. Eva Braun’s bedroom was adjacent to his, and their rooms were connected by the vestibule and a balcony. Each room had its own private bathroom. Across from their bedrooms, a flight of stairs led down to the second floor of the old Haus Wachenfeld, which now had three rooms and a shared bathroom. These were used by the on-duty valet and chauffeur.61 The second floor of the east wing and the third floor of the main building held bedrooms for guests and staff, a strict separation not being maintained between the spaces of the two. Speer was critical of the layout, saying that the location of the staircases hampered the freedom of movement of guests on the upper floors when official meetings were taking place downstairs by forcing them to traverse public space.62

The offices of the secretaries and adjutants remained in the old wing to the west of the house. The different status of the staff was reflected in their spaces. Junge recalled that the chief adjutant’s office was “a charming apartment in the rustic style.” By contrast, the secretaries’ office was a dark, “plain, ugly room, only sparsely furnished.” As she noted, “I never did find out just why this room had been given such perfunctory treatment. Perhaps because Hitler himself had never set foot in it.” Beside the secretaries’ office was a fully equipped dentist’s office, where Professor Hugo Blaschke from Berlin would set up practice with a dental nurse and assistants when needed. (After the war, Blaschke’s reconstructed dental records would be used to identify the corpses of the high-profile Nazis he had once treated.) The wing also contained a barber’s shop and a dormitory for security personnel.63

Beyond being a place to host dignitaries and conduct government business, the Berghof was also a private residence. Due to the widespread publicity about the house, the growth of Hitler tourism in Berchtesgaden, and the presence of high-profile guests, it became necessary to state that not all visitors were welcome. On October 5, 1938, Martin Bormann issued a circular ordering people, in polite terms, to stay away: “The Berghof is the private dwelling and private household of the Führer, where he stays primarily to be able to work undisturbed and in peace. For this reason, the Führer desires that any and all visits be withheld so long as no clearly stated invitation exists from the Führer.”64 It is typical of the regime’s propaganda of a self-sacrificing leader that Bormann used work to justify Hitler’s need for privacy. The fact that he now shared his home with a woman who was not his sister was kept secret from the German people. Because of Angela Raubal’s antipathy to Braun, the latter remained only an infrequent guest on the Obersalzberg until Hitler unceremoniously evicted his sister in 1935, opening the way for Braun to take up residence.65 The enforced secrecy about Braun during the Third Reich and the destruction of Hitler’s private documents at the war’s end have left large gaps in our understanding of her life at the Berghof and with Hitler more generally. In his memoirs, Linge recalled how the Berghof staff referred to Braun as the “girl in a gilded cage,” but Heike Görtemaker’s biography suggests that she was not without power as mistress of the house.66

After the war, in response to a comment made by Kuykendall about the Berghof images in Braun’s photographic albums, which Kuykendall had seen in the U.S. National Archives, Troost remarked that Braun had never been present when she and the Führer met to discuss work.67 Nonetheless, in Troost’s fabric sample book, on the page facing swatches marked “guest room,” she noted in handwriting the initials “E. B.,” revealing that she knew for whom the room was intended. The fabrics were printed with stylized bird and animal patterns and colored terra-cotta and cream as well as terra-cotta, cream, and forest green. A black-and-white photograph in one of Braun’s albums shows a room with a sofa bed covered in the bird fabric.68 Above the sofa bed hangs a sensual painting of a female nude. Beneath the photograph, Braun had attached a label stating: “Turkish Room—my room.”The name’s meaning and whether it was Braun’s invention remains a mystery—despite the musings of her biographers, which range from dreams of “harem nights” to the pattern of the room’s carpet.69

Also mysterious is the appearance in the albums of a different set of rooms marked with the label “Eva’s new rooms at the Berghof.” The spaces and furnishings of these rooms are notably different from the so-called Turkish Room. Prints and labels identify these rooms as a living room and a bedroom. This matches the memoirs of Julius Schaub, Hitler’s chief adjutant, in which he noted that Braun, unlike other guests, had a small apartment consisting of a living room, bedroom, and bath, but did not mention its location.70 The 1936 plan submitted to the building authorities, however, indicates that there was only one room adjacent to Hitler’s bedroom (presumably the one identified in the albums as the Turkish Room). Its accuracy is confirmed by an article that Linge wrote in 1955, in which he described Hitler’s study and bedroom as well as the one room that Braun occupied directly beside it. His explanation of the layout of the rooms and the connecting spaces between them conforms exactly to the 1936 plan.71 It is nonetheless possible that Braun had, in addition to the one room beside Hitler, another suite of rooms elsewhere in the Berghof. On the third floor, immediately above Hitler’s office, was a comfortable apartment containing a living room that opened onto the loggia, a bedroom leading to a private bathroom, and a walk-in closet that also doubled as the entrance; perhaps these were Braun’s rooms as well. A stairwell near this apartment led to the foyer outside Hitler’s bedroom, which would have made movement between the rooms fairly discreet.72

In one of the album prints, which Braun labeled as a detail of her living room, we see a chest of drawers over which she placed a framed portrait of Hitler (fig. 31). The image used was from a 1932 campaign poster and showed Hitler’s face isolated and hovering on a pitch-black field. He does not smile, and the picture conveys an intense, almost otherworldly power—it may, in fact, have been inspired by images of death masks.73 In another album print, we see hanging above her desk a small framed photograph of an official portrait of Hitler standing in his SA uniform—the same image that hung in German offices across the country.74 These official images appear to be the only ones of her lover in the room. Whether she was compelled to maintain the illusion of a platonic relationship even in her private spaces or she actually saw him foremost as the Führer, we cannot know.

Braun photographed the interior and exterior spaces of the completed Berghof, appropriating her new home through the camera lens. Her images suggest both the alienation and intimacy of her domestic experience. For example, a set of photographs depicts an unoccupied, cavernous-looking Great Hall, the low angle of some of the images giving the oversized furniture an intimidating force. These views of the Great Hall, which imitated official publicity photographs, communicated that this was the Führer’s domain. In others, however, Hitler is photographed from close-up playing with Braun’s dogs or the young children of her friend Herta Schneider, transforming the Great Hall into a family room. Many of the photographs depict outdoor scenes on the terrace, a space that Braun clearly enjoyed. Beyond socializing with friends and sunning herself, it was also the stage on which she filmed Hitler and his cronies. Her color film footage of social gatherings on the terrace, discovered by American soldiers and first shown publicly at Cannes in 1973, has become firmly embedded in the postwar cultural imagination of the Berghof as the perpetually sunny playground of the monstrous.75

The convivial side of Berghof life is further depicted in Braun’s images of afternoon outings to the teahouse on the Mooslahnerkopf, a hill overlooking the Berchtesgaden valley about a mile from the Berghof. Constructed in 1937 by another of Hitler’s favored architects, Roderich Fick, the central round form of the teahouse was simple and severe. The walk to the teahouse with Braun and intimate guests was a regular part of Hitler’s daily routine. Within this traditionally feminine architectural type, placed at a remove from the main house, Braun presided as mistress. The idea of a teahouse may have been inspired by the mid-eighteenth-century round “Chinese” teahouse that Frederick the Great had erected near his summer palace, Sanssouci, in Potsdam. The dining room designed by Paul Troost in 1933 for Hitler’s renovations of the Old Chancellery had drawn on precedents at Sanssouci in its form and imagery. But in this case, the architecture and spirit of the two buildings could not have been more different. The Chinese Pavilion at Sanssouci is an architectural fantasy, ornately decorated with a mixture of Orientalizing and Rococo features and with gilded life-size sculptures of eating, music-making, and tea-drinking “Chinese” men and women meant to evoke the geographical source of the tea, and to make the visitor feel that he or she has been transported to the mythical East. Hitler’s teahouse inspired no such reveries, although it was a place where he often napped after having finished his cake.

If the terrace and teahouse images captured Braun in her element, her albums also offer glimpses of the restrictions on her domestic life at the Berghof. An arresting set of images from August 1939 depict the Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, arriving and being greeted by Hitler on the front steps. As was the case when other official visitors were present, Braun was required to remain hidden upstairs. Linge claimed that Braun admired the stylishness of the handsome Ciano and had wistfully exclaimed, “If only the Führer could be a snappy dresser like Count Ciano.” Forbidden to meet him, she rebelled through her camera, capturing the event from a second-floor window (fig. 32). The images explicitly include the frame and muntins of the window itself, emphasizing the constrained position of the photographer, as if she were a prisoner in a tower. A typed label she included below the images defiantly states: “. . . through the window you can see all kinds of things!” She then boldly opened the window and continued to photograph. Ciano noticed, and in one of the images he looks up curiously, to which Braun appended the label: “Up above there is something forbidden to see . . . me!” Hitler sent an SS man to order Braun to stop, which she also noted in a label.76

When the Berghof was completed in 1936, it contained more than thirty rooms, at least twenty of which were furnished as bedrooms. When Hitler was in residence, the rooms were occupied by his staff, Braun, occasional guests, and thirty domestic employees, some of whom lived there.77 Hitler, however, did not seem to think the house was large or impressive enough. In 1939, he commissioned an expansion of the new wing that stretched it further eastward and added a new bay window as well as a separate driveway and entrance for deliveries.78 But it appears that originally he had had a far grander scheme in mind, which would have added a second, massive wing to the eastern side of the house. A little-known and largely unpublished portfolio of drawings in the Bavarian Central State Archive in Munich contains unrealized designs for the proposed addition.79 While these remained paper schemes, they provide important insights into how Hitler imagined his domestic self and how he wished it to be perceived by others.

The collection of unbuilt designs contains numerous elevations, sections, and floor plans representing different versions of the proposed new wing (figs. 33–35). Although unsigned and undated, they were likely created around 1939, when Hitler extended the eastern wing of the house. The quantity and quality of the work reveal that the idea of an expansion on a grand scale was not a mere passing whimsy, but a carefully considered project, with considerable resources expended on its conceptualization and planning. If completed, it would have significantly transformed the architectural form and experience of the house.

Envisioned was a second wing that would have projected eastward from the Berghof’s main building, but would have been flush with its facade (see fig. 33). It would have stood parallel to and directly in front of the eastern wing that was completed in 1936, blocking its views of the mountain and creating a courtyard, in keeping with the second meaning of the name “Berghof”: “Mountain Court.” This layout also would have restructured the visitor’s experience of arrival by creating a grand new entrance, with a circular roundabout or plaza for cars, at the far eastern end of the wing.80 In one version, visitors climbed a flight of broad steps to enter a large entrance hall (see fig. 34). Turning right, they passed through a room with an intricately arched ceiling into a cloakroom with adjacent bathrooms. From here, visitors walked the length of the wing before arriving at the Great Hall, which they would have entered through a new door located directly beside the large window. (Although vague on the plan, residents presumably had the option of turning left from the entrance hall to reach the staircase leading to the private second floor, while servants and delivery personnel could easily access the kitchen.) This extended door-to-Führer path, intended perhaps to build suspense, recalls the processional route that Speer created in the New Chancellery, although without the same type of architectural splendor along the way. Instead, visitors would have walked past a long panorama of mountain views, glimpsed through a series of windows, before entering the Great Hall and experiencing the largest panorama of all. Adjacent to the hallway would have been five enfilade rooms (creating another interior panorama), intended for the use of the visitors’ entourage. Thus the ground floor of the second wing would have been devoted to visitors, and especially to shaping a more dramatic journey of arrival. It also would have isolated them from the rest of the house, largely resolving the circulation problems noted by Speer.81

But the portfolio of unbuilt drawings contains a bigger surprise. Given the attention lavished on the Great Hall in the prewar press about the Berghof, it is astonishing to discover that Hitler had planned a showpiece that might have overshadowed it: namely, a monumental library on the second floor (see fig. 35). As marked on the unbuilt plans, the library would have been a grand chamber—far longer than the Great Hall—on two levels, with a capacity to hold a remarkable sixty-one thousand books, comparable to some public and college libraries. The entrance to the library would have been from the eastern end of Hitler’s study. A door would have opened onto the upper level of the library, from which a monumental staircase would have led to the floor below (a smaller staircase was planned for the opposite side of the room as well).82 The centrality of the library in this conception of domestic identity suggests Richard Wagner’s home, Wahnfried, and his prized book collections as a possible model.83 Typically associated with masculine power and creativity, the library would have reinforced Hitler’s masculine image. But above all, it would have presented him not only as a powerful leader, but also as a cultivated individual. While this was similarly achieved through the attention to artwork and music in the Great Hall, the inclusion of a major library in the house would have strongly reinforced the image of the Führer as a learned man.

Unfortunately, the portfolio does not contain any conclusive evidence as to why Hitler abandoned the idea of a second eastern wing. The multiple versions drawn of the northern facade reveal the designer struggling to balance the forms and proportions of the extension. One proposed solution would have built a house-like facade and terrace on the eastern end of the wing to mirror those same structures on its western side.84 Other versions tried to distract from the massiveness of the wing by adding balconies, bay windows, or Bavarian-style painted decoration to the facade.85 But no matter how many variations were created, it was clearly difficult to avoid a bastion-like effect, and Hitler surely would not have wanted to evoke the nearby Salzburg castle, which represented all too clearly autocratic rule. Looking back in 1942 on the construction of the Berghof, Hitler confessed that when he visited the building site in 1935, “the dimensions of the house made me somewhat afraid it would clash with the landscape. I was very glad to notice that, on the contrary, it fitted it very well. I had already restricted myself for that reason—for, to my taste, it should have been still bigger.”86 Perhaps Hitler later regretted his initial caution, only to again decide, when expanding the house in 1939, in favor of a less grandiose option. The slope of the mountainside also may have been a factor in deciding to scrap the plans.87 In any case, the existence of these unbuilt drawings reveals that, contrary to Speer’s story about the genesis of the Berghof, Hitler struggled with how to best present his domestic self to the world.

By the time the war started on September 1, 1939, Hitler’s habit of spending long periods of time on the Obersalzberg and away from Berlin was deeply entrenched. In the mid-1930s, he was spending more than a third of the year in the mountains—in 1937, clearly enjoying the fruits of the renovation, it was closer to half. A war did not seem reason enough to give up those comforts, and the Berghof became a military headquarters from which he conducted battles and planned strategy. While his presence on the mountain did decrease during the war years, Hitler was notably absent only for two years—in 1942, as the front was pushed deeper eastward, and in 1945, when it came home.88 Hitler hated leaving the Berghof. In early 1942, ensconced at the Wolf’s Lair, the Führer Headquarters in East Prussia, the man who had driven millions from their homes could not stop talking about his own. “How I’d like to be up there! It will be a glorious moment when we can climb up there again. But how far away it is, terribly far!”89

In 1944, Hitler managed to spend over a third of the year at the Berghof; he left for good on July 14, 1944. Before doing so, he seems to have issued a “do not touch my stuff while I am gone” order. On February 4, 1945, Gerda Bormann, Martin Bormann’s wife, wrote to her husband in Berlin to report that “Frau Troost rang up yesterday and today; she can go on talking for hours, and everything one answers gives her a fresh theme for conversations! She thinks that the great hall in the Berghof should be repainted in the same colour as that with which time and light have endowed it—otherwise, she says, when the pictures are taken down, it will look frightful. She knew, she said, that the Fuehrer had said that nothing was to be done. But the walls would be spoilt if they were not repainted, and it was only a little job which could be done in a few days, and the Fuehrer probably wouldn’t even notice it.”90 (Bormann refused the request.) That Troost could worry about faded paint when half of the nation had been bombed out of their homes is almost beyond belief. But no more so, perhaps, than Hitler’s apparent faith that, despite the catastrophe unfolding all around him, he could return to an unchanged house.