

BRUXELLES-BRUSSEL - XII 2010

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**REAWAKENING ART NOUVEAU HERITAGE THROUGH PRIVATE INITIATIVE  
IN BAD NAUHEIM**

**Abstract:**

The fountain court, Sprudelhof, of the once world-famous spa town Bad Nauheim lay idle and neglected for many years. The thesis of art historian Britta Spranger drew attention to its fine Art Nouveau architecture and decoration in the 1980ies.

The aims of the Art Nouveau association, Jugendstilverein Bad Nauheim, founded in 1997, are to maintain the cultural heritage and make it known to a wider public.

In the lecture, examples of restoring Art Nouveau elements by voluntary work, private publicity activities as well as organizing public protest are explained. Finally the most ambitious project, establishing an Art Nouveau centre in spa house 4 is mentioned.



Figure 1: Aerial View of Sprudelhof Bad Nauheim

**Introduction:**

I would like to speak about the spa complex of Bad Nauheim, a small German town of nearly 30,000 inhabitants near Frankfurt. After a short look at the history the main focus will be on the perception of art nouveau since the 1990ies. A private group founded the association named Jugendstilverein Bad Nauheim. Its aims are to maintain the art nouveau heritage and to make it known to a wider public.

The main part of my lecture deals with the activities of the voluntary members, i.e. you can experience how they go ahead practically with restoring different parts of the spa complex.

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Another aspect is the publicity, which steps are taken to inform about the Bad Nauheim art nouveau heritage. One important way is being a member of Réseau Art nouveau Network and spread the knowledge of the spa complex of Bad Nauheim among the partner cities or to you, my audience.

There is an example of political action to protest against selling the spa complex to a private investor.

Finally I want to mention the latest and most ambitious project: establishing an art nouveau centre in one of the spa houses.

A series of picture - which are amateur photos I apologise for – may illustrate my lecture.

### **1. Sprudelhof, the spa complex**

The spa complex Sprudelhof together with technical facilities were built between 1905 and 11 by the young architect Wilhelm Jost, selected by Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hessen who had established the artists' colony at Darmstadt.

The fountains or springs are in the centre of the courtyard, arcades line around and open to six spa houses. Each of the six spa houses has a decorative waiting hall and a charming open court surrounded by corridors with the bath cells.

### **2. Spa Life**

Patients from all over the world came to Bad Nauheim to take the waters in order to cure heart diseases or rheumatism. They belonged to the upper classes, stayed for weeks and also enjoyed the variety of social life.

### **3. Medical progress and end of the spa cures**

Due to the development of medical research and chemistry doctors preferred to prescribe pills instead of taking waters so that gradually the vast spa houses were not longer needed. The social security system developed in a way that patients got the treatment in special clinics. By and by the spa houses remained idle. The owner, the state of Hessen, neglected the spa complex.

### **4. Britta Spranger's Thesis on the art nouveau heritage**

About 1985 the art historian Britta Spranger published her thesis on the spa complex of Bad Nauheim with the art nouveau architecture. She arranged guided tours through Sprudelhof. For the very first time it became possible for the ordinary public to enter the spa houses and appreciate the art nouveau decorations. Before this time only the patients and the employed persons had come into the spa houses. From then on the inhabitants and friends of art could visit the art nouveau complex and cultural heritage on organised tours.



Figure 2: Britta Spranger: Der Sprudelhof Bad Nauheim (book cover)

##### 5. Jugendstilverein founded in 1997

Friends of the local art treasure met, talked a lot and finally founded the private association “Jugendstilverein Bad Nauheim” in 1997. The constitution states the aims of the club: that is

to maintain the art nouveau spa complex and to make it better known. The beauty of the Sprudelhof was a secret and worth being famous.

In this sense the members started to organise the heritage day in Bad Nauheim from 1998 on and also offered study tours to places with art nouveau exhibitions.

## 6. Examples of restoring

### 1. Rose garden in spa house:

In the court of spa house 3 soon English roses were planted. From the year 2001 on a team of six members voluntarily cared for the rose garden. They spend 9 months and about 450 working hours per year: watering, cutting, fertilizing the flowers and mowing the lawn. A gardener instructed them how to treat the flowers professionally. In 2008 an expert gardener was hired to cut the rapidly growing branches. The beautiful rose garden has become a special attraction.



Figure 3: bath house 3, courtyard "Rosegarden"

### 2. Fountain and lawn in spa house 5:

The financial means allowed the association in 2004 to restore the fountain in spa house 5. A team of about ten members covered the shell limestone columns and sculptures, cleaned the wall and painted it. An expert, a stone restorer had recommended to cover the columns with cotton and water them to weaken the black spots. So patience was needed, but it worked.

The rotten wooden parts were renewed by a carpenter.

In 2005 a gardener received the order of Jugendstilverein to renew the lawn, hedge and paths. All together I think about only German marks were invested thanks to the voluntary engagement of the members. The court of spa house 5 has become admirable – thanks to the engagement of Jugendstilverein.



Figure 4: bath house 5, restoring the fountain

### **7. Coordination of the Heritage Day in Bad Nauheim**

Since 1998 Jugendstilverein has coordinated all the activities on the heritage day in Bad Nauheim. Jugendstilverein itself organizes this historical cultural day for the art nouveau buildings.

Some members are qualified guides who take visitors round the spa complex and through the spa houses. Visitors get information and art nouveau articles, posters, postcard etc. at the book stand. Very important is the opening of a café in spa house 4. All members are asked to bring home-made cakes along so that a long counter offers all kinds of tarts and pastry at a reasonable price. So visitors can relax after the guided tours. The income is spent on restoring work or publishing activities.



Figure 5: heritage day, guided tour through bath house 5

### **8. Educational activities**

Every year in June children and school classes are invited to the spa complex. With quizzes or rallies the children learn about the art nouveau architecture. It is hoped that they will develop respect for cultural heritage instead of demolishing it like hooligans. Perhaps they come again with their parents one day.



Figure 6: guided tour for school children

### **9. Hiltrud Hölzinger and Christina Uslular-Thiele: “Jugendstil in Bad Nauheim”**

The German/English edition of the book “Jugendstil in Bad Nauheim” with photos and graphic design by the photographer Hiltrud Hölzinger and text of the art historian Christina Uslular-Thiele in 2006 was an essential step to present the spa complex of Bad Nauheim to a greater Public. The first edition of 5.000 copies was soon sold, the second edition of 2010 printed with the financial support of Jugendstilverein contains 3.000 copies.

### **10. Ruta Europea del Modernisme**

When Bad Nauheim was invited to join the European Art Nouveau Route in 2007 Jugendstilverein was very proud to present the spa complex in the excellent book on European art nouveau cities. The book is really a phantastic catalogue of art nouveau in Europe, and gives Bad Nauheim the opportunity to demonstrate its cultural heritage next to Barcelona and other famous towns like Brussels, Lubljana, Riga or Nancy.

### **11. 100-years anniversary of the spa complex in 2006**

A committee of Jugendstilverein prepared three events for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the art nouveau spa complex in 2006: the exhibition of RANN: “Art Nouveau in Progress”, second an exhibition of photos “Building for a new life” and third an international symposium. Of course fundraising played an important role. Members of the club, companies and institutions of Bad Nauheim were asked for financial support. About 120.000 Euros were collected, and the sites for the exhibitions and the symposium were let/given by the town without rent.

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So the Rann exhibition “Art Nouveau in Progress” could be shown. The Prime Minister of Hessen, Roland Koch came to open up the exhibitions –it was a sunny September day. All the photos of the show “Building for a new life” had been taken during the construction of the spa complex 1905 – 1911. There the building site, spa houses and workers were presented.

At the end of September the symposium took place. “Building for a new life – Art Nouveau cities in Europe”. Lecturers of 9 European countries came to Bad Nauheim presenting results of their research.

The press, radio and TV reported of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the successful events and presented the spa complex in art nouveau style in different features.



Figure 7: photo exhibition "building for a new life" 2006

### **12. Catalogue: “Building for a new life”**

As Jugendstilverein still had some money left a catalogue could be printed of the photo exhibition. It shows the photos of the construction of the spa complex together with two interesting articles on art nouveau architecture and on restoring work in Bad Nauheim.

### **13. Exhibition “Building for a new Life” in Goethe Institute in Brussels in 2007**

When the Goethe Institute in Brussels agreed to present this photo exhibition it was realised in cooperation with Réseau Art Nouveau Network. Elisabeth Horth helped a lot. The vernissage in the Goethe Institute was really a big event with several hundred participants. What a wonderful success for the art nouveau heritage of Bad Nauheim!



#### **14. State Award for voluntary engagement in heritage protection in 2007**

In 2007 Jugendstilverein was honoured with the state Award for “voluntary engagement in heritage protection.” The board and members of the association felt proud to receive this prize in a ceremony which not only included a document but also a cheque of 5,000 Euros – followed by interviews and press reports.

#### **15. Political protest with human chain**

In 2007 news stated that the owner of the spa complex Sprudelhof, the state of Hessen, wanted to sell the spa complex to a private investor. Jugendstilverein and many citizens feared the art nouveau heritage might get lost. Together with four associations Jugendstilverein started a protest campaign: in meetings, demonstrations, press talks with flyers, posters they looked for supporters. Finally a human chain was organised from the spa complex to the town hall of Bad Nauheim, This manifestation protested against selling the spa complex to a private investor and demanded establishing a foundation. Thousands of signatures were handed over to the mayor. After a lot of talks and negotiations finally a foundation “Stiftung Sprudelhof” was founded in 2009. The state, the region and the town of Bad Nauheim gave 2 mill. Euro each into this foundation which now tries to find new uses for the spa houses.



Figure 8: human chain from Sprudelhof to town hall

#### **16. Restoring ceramics/terracottas in spa house 7 – sea horse project**

The ceramics in the court of spa house 7 are in bad condition. Another restoring project was started by a team of Jugendstilverein. The idea was to copy the ceramic relief of a sea horse and sell 100 copies at a price of 100 Euros each. The campaign started, and soon 100 copies were ordered. The team worked hard and with perseverance. The process required tools and several operations. Quite a number broke during the burning process. At last 99 sea horses

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were handed over to their new owners. 10.000 Euros were spent on restoring ceramics in the spa court. The 100<sup>th</sup> sea horse was sold in an auction at the Jugendstilverein summer party. Over 1300 Euros were paid for it.



Figure 9: terracotta sea horse of bath house 7

### 17. Plenary meeting in Bad Nauheim in 2008

Planning and organising the plenary meeting of Réseau Art Nouveau Network in Bad Nauheim in 2008 was a real challenge for the association of Jugendstilverein. It is not an official institution with employed persons, institutions with disposal of conference rooms and a financial budget. The coordination office helped a lot so that eventually everything went smoothly, and the town of Bad Nauheim as well as Jugendstilverein were proud to receive our partner cities.

Our office was used by the board of RANN. The Multimedia programme “Art Nouveau and Society” was launched in spa house 7, an event to which also the public and politicians had been invited.

11 amateur cooks prepared a dinner for the international guests. A group of members formed the service team and welcomed the participants of the plenary meeting. The dinner in the old laundry of 1905 was a splendid event for everyone. At last even the mayor of Bad Nauheim received the network participants. So the plenary meeting was a chance for Bad Nauheim to receive guests in the cultural heritage and make it known to foreign art nouveau friends.



Figure 10: the participants of the plenary meeting in Bad Nauheim with the mayor in 2008

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### **18. Beneficial concert in 2010**

One member of the association is not only a friend of art nouveau but also an artist at the flute. He arranged a beneficial concert together with four artists in favour of Jugendstilverein. They played music of the time of 1900 in a precious hall and the audience was full of enthusiasm.

### **19. Art Nouveau Centre in spa house 4**

One of the committees of Jugendstilverein in planning an art nouveau centre in spa house 4 of Sprudelhof. The Board of the foundation, Stiftung Sprudelhof, has agreed to this project which will preserve a spa house in its original existence and remain open for the public. A conception has been developed which was presented officially and to the general public. Apart from the original bath cells, waiting hall and charming courtyard the future centre in spa house 4 should contain models, multimedia shows and interactive presentation. Jugendstilverein has organised study tours to the Jugendstilsenteret in Alesund Norway where many of these aspects are realised in a modern way, so Alesund is an ideal for the project. Another model is the Gaudí Centre in Reus which is filled with models and an interactive information centre for the great Catalan architect.

If Jugendstilverein wants to realise such a project professional and financial support are requested. And you can wish us good luck for this ambitious project.