

# Radical, Refined

New York's Neue Galerie respects the sensibility of its early 20th-century Austrian and German art collection without lapsing into nostalgia.

By Alan G. Brake. Photography by Adam Friedberg







Entrance hall (facing page); second-floor gallery (above)





**NEUE GALERIE, NEW YORK CITY** CLIENT: Ronald Lauder; Renee Price (director) **ARCHITECT:** Selldorf Architects, New York City—Annabelle Selldorf (principal); Randall Goya, Leander Grayson, Karen Lu, Anne Nixon, Gretchen Stoecker **ENGINEERS:** Gilsanz, Murray, Steficek (structural); Jack Green Associates (mechanical/electrical) **CONSULTANTS:** George Sexton (lighting); Art Preservation Services (environmental protection) **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Clark Construction **COST:** Withheld at owner's request





With Gustav Klimt second to Monet in number of mechanical reproductions made, it is no surprise that the Neue Galerie, a new museum dedicated to early 20th-century Austrian and German art and design, is drawing large crowds. What was once radical to the Viennese bourgeoisie has become so palatable that even Martha Stewart was recently spotted waiting in line. The Neue Galerie, however, aspires to dignity rather than consumerism.

The museum occupies a Fifth Avenue mansion designed by Carrère and Hastings in 1914, newly renovated by Annabelle Selldorf. The ground floor is discreetly devoted to commerce, with an admission desk, a tiny design shop, a bookstore, and a café. Named after museum cofounder Serge Sabarsky (the other is make-up magnate Ronald Lauder), the café features Adolf Loos-designed tables and chairs, Secession light fixtures, and newspapers hung on rattan rods. The design shop sells objects reproduced from the collection, such as sterling Josef Hoffman corn holders (\$280 a pair)—and no Klimt mouse pads.

Three galleries on the second floor show permanent installations from the magnificent collection. Selldorf left the beaux-arts interiors intact here, so the tortured anatomies of an Egon Schiele painting appear in stark contrast to the wood-paneled, marble-trimmed surroundings. In stately rooms of the same period, the works regain something of their original radicalism. Selldorf's interventions on the second floor are quiet but uncompromisingly modern, such as the geometric "halos" of light that illuminate two of the galleries. Her hand is more evident on the third floor, which she gutted and reorganized as three white box galleries for rotating exhibitions. Thick, white walls and dark, hardwood floors respect the proportion and heft of the original building, via contemporary abstraction. Sensitive modernism keeps a visit to the Neue Galerie from turning into a nostalgia trip. ■



Second-floor gallery (facing page); book store (above left); café (above right); entrance façade (right)