





# Is there an autochthonous “Tyrolean Modernism”?

This article examines, on the basis of two residential buildings by Franz Baumann, the status of the postulate of an autochthonous “Tyrolean Modernism”.

Often mentioned together, five architects are among the main representatives of classical modernism in the Austrian province of Tyrol: Clemens Holzmeister, Lois Welzenbacher, Theodor Prachensky, Franz Baumann and Sigfried Mazagg.

Even if they did not form a close circle because of their life paths, there is a strong link between them, mostly in their artistic background and their way of representing architecture. Architecture was a *detour* from a first aim to pursue an artistic career for all of them, with the exception of Welzenbacher.

Architects like Franz Baumann not only “modernized” well-known typologies, but also regionalized elementary components of internationally widespread building traditions.

The “Tyrolean Modernism” was repeatedly regarded as an “autochthonous” movement, even if the regional scene was not detached at all from the international development. The alpine environment, in particular, offered a framework of conditions that challenged the architects to top performance. They were able to plan for locations that were uncharted territory in many respects: exposed in the mountains or high mountain areas.

In this context, the architects of “Tyrolean Modernism” benefited from their painterly-trained eye for the morphology of Alpine landscapes.

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## **Keywords**

*Tyrol, Modernity, regionalism, landscape, building culture.*

«What modern culture has in mind is to construct dialects that are essentially normative and founded on a set of laws... embodied in the “mystical experience of autochthony...”» (Dal Co, 1989).

On the basis of two residential buildings by Franz Baumann, the present article examines if the postulate of an autochthonous “Tyrolean Modernity” is justified.

Five architects are among the main representatives of classical modernism in the Austrian province of Tyrol, Clemens Holzmeister (1886-1983), Lois Welzenbacher (1889-1955), Theodor Prachensky (1888-1970), Franz Baumann (1892-1974) and Siegfried Mazagg (1902-1932). They are often mentioned together, although they did not form a closed circle due to their life paths; only Holzmeister and Welzenbacher studied architecture, the others were trained master builders who called themselves architects.

Baumann was awarded the professional title of architect in 1937 after having graduated as a civil engineer and after he had realised his main works, including the Nordkettenbahn in Innsbruck, the Hotel Monte Pana in Santa Cristina Valgardena and other important public buildings (Schlorhauser, 1998: 38).

Holzmeister and Welzenbacher left Tyrol early and both later became Professors at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Prachensky worked mainly for the City of Innsbruck. Baumann and Mazagg had their own offices and realised main works in both provinces, North and South Tyrol (Italy), especially in the tourism architecture sector. While Baumann was professionally active until long after the Second World War, the talented Mazagg, at only thirty years old, was the victim of one of the first fatal car accidents in Innsbruck.

A strong link between the architects, however, was painting and (artistic) architectural representation. With the exception of Welzenbacher – who in general was one of the architects who was a master of the dynamic black streak – all the others wanted to follow the career of an artist first and it was through this detour, so to say, they came to building. They also took part in exhibitions and still today there are

a few pictures that can be bought e.g., by Prachensky or Holzmeister. Baumann painted watercolours of his buildings, even long after they were completed, which he often provided as perfect illustrations for his projects in architectural journals. Among the talented “architectural artists”, however, it is Mazagg that should be mentioned above all. His architectural drawings, especially his interior perspectives and humorous caricatures, deserve special recognition (Moroder, Schlorhauser, 2012).

Urban housing offered these interwar architects a wide field of activity. A closer look at “Tyrolean Modernism”, which was repeatedly regarded as an



#### Opening image

House Mittermaier.  
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“autochthonous” movement, reveals however that the regional scene did not design domestic architecture detached from international development (Kuz, Chramosta, Frampton, 1992).

This is particularly evident in residential building, occasionally in terraced housing settlements and projects in villa quarters. The most important sources of information for the architects were architectural journals; whereas under the economic and political conditions in Austria during the 1920s and 1930s study trips only were limited (Hambrusch, Moroder, Schlorhauser, 1998: 162; Boeckl, Schlorhauser, 2006: 187; Moroder, Schlorhauser, 2012: 287).

In contrast to the construction requirements in urban areas, the architects also had to solve the question how to build on the outskirts of cities and in the countryside. It seems that the alpine environment offered a framework of conditions that challenged the architects to top performance. They were able to plan for locations that were uncharted territory in many respects: exposed in the mountains or high mountain areas, in the context of villages, in areas that were to be developed for tourism and new

sports such as skiing. Last but not least, they also established projects for the semi-urban boundaries of settlements at the transition to agricultural zones (Schlorhauser, 2017: 45, 172).

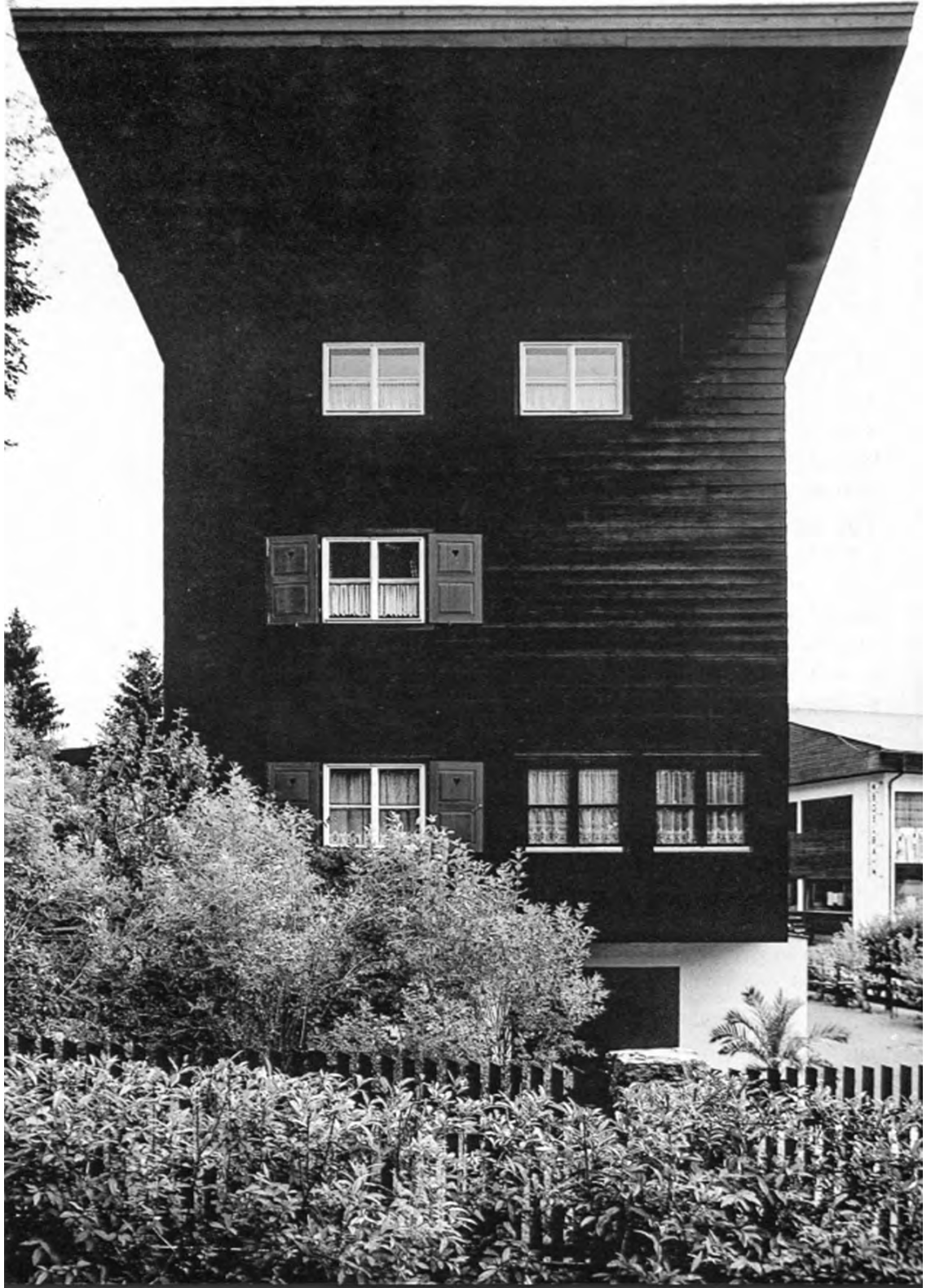
In this context, the architects of “Tyrolean Modernism” benefited from their painterly-trained eye for the morphology of alpine landscapes. In addition, they also profited from their ideological origins in the *Heimatschutz* (International Homeland Security Movement), of which most of them were close. The *Heimatschutz* was an anti-movement in many respects. The protectors – in Tyrol ironically sometimes called “*Heimat-Jammerer*” (“Heimat-sniveller”) – were against urbanization, against the increasing overbuilding in landscape and often against modernization in general. At the same time, however, *Heimatschutz* was also popular because the movement was on the side of preserving that which stood for Tyrolean identity in its broadest sense. This included, for example, the preservation of closed building ensembles in villages with their farmhouses, functional buildings and small monuments (wells, ovens, sacred monuments, etc.) – even though it was known that the increasing mechanisation of agriculture required urgent structural modernisation. Against this

**Fig. 1**

Hochfirst Hotel,  
brochure, built in  
1932.

All the archive  
images: Collection  
Joachim Moroder.





**Fig. 2**  
House Mittermaier,  
front.

background, it becomes clear that the *Heimatschutz* was dependent on communication with architects – and vice versa because, for a time in Tyrol, the *Heimatschutz* held the rank of a sort of building author-

ity to which new projects had to be submitted for appraisal. Many components of the conservative spirit of the *Heimatschutz* were later absorbed by National Socialism (Schlorhauser, 2010: 99).



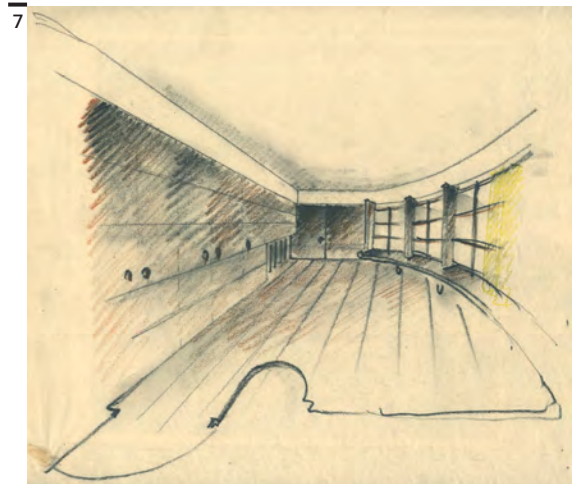
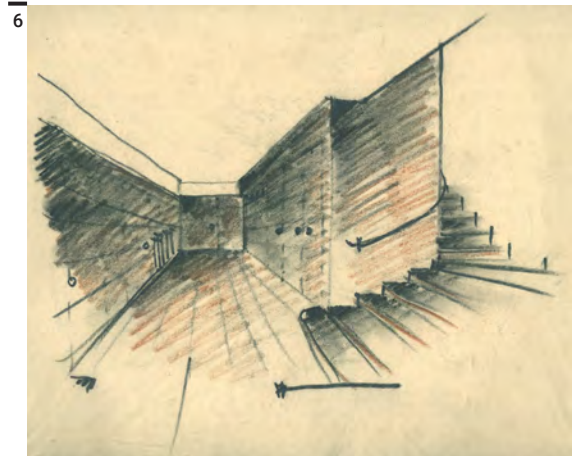
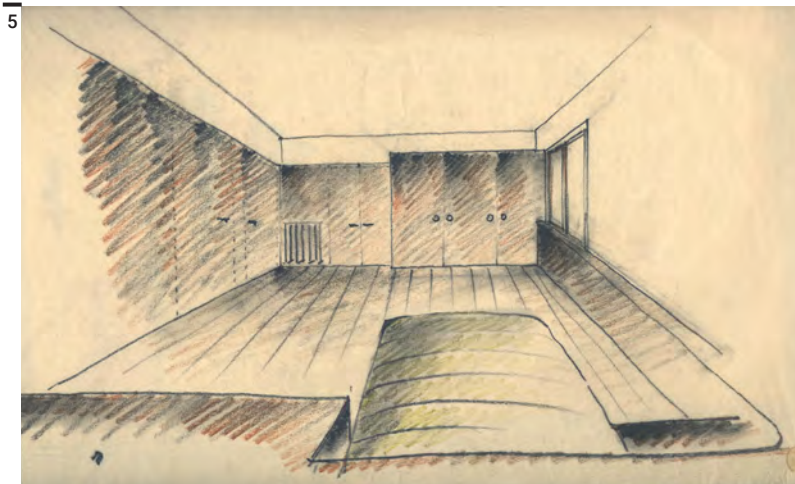
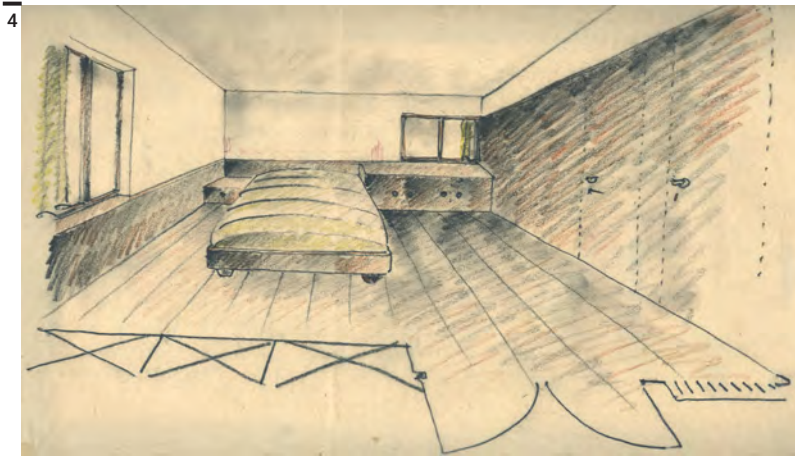


**Fig. 3**  
Side front.

**Fig. 4-5**  
Perspective of the  
bedroom.

**Fig. 6**  
Perspective of the  
hallway.

**Fig. 7**  
Perspective of the  
lounge (*Stube*).



Since an architect like Franz Baumann was connected or had to subordinate himself to both antipodes of Modernity and Heimatschutz, it was necessary for him to invent quasi new typologies for some of the building tasks assigned to him. With the *Landhaus Zach* in Reith near Seefeld in Tyrol (1932), for example, a weekend and holiday house was created which, enters into a symbiotic coexistence with the tall larch trees and mountain meadows of its surroundings. This is done not only in terms of design and colour; the building is designed to specifically show a connection with the village in its vicinity. Baumann created a kind of cottage that was neither a villa nor a farmhouse. According to a study carried out subsequently by Joachim Moroder, all the rooms in the house develop around a mason floor slab and a chimney. Here, Baumann used the rules of modern space production to generate a country house, starting from the traditional viewing habits of the rural house with pitched roof, but transferring it into an organically “grown” building. *Landhaus Zach* is one of the key works of regional modernism in Tyrol primarily because it cautiously leads its owners from the city to the countryside. The interior design, also by Baumann, leaves no doubt that the residents of the house only want to “breathe the country air”, but from a certain distance; the external panorama is rural milieu, the interior ambience is urban-cultivated (Hambrusch, Moroder, Schlorhauser, 1998: 146-149).

Architects like Franz Baumann not only “modernized” well-known typologies, but also regionalized elementary components of internationally widespread building traditions. In the small village of Kössen near Kitzbühel, in *Haus Mittermaier* (1933/1934) Baumann built a residence for a medical doctor which has a Tyrolean Alpine appearance but with some of its components deriving from further afield. This elongated building was carried out on a masoned and wood frame construction. A block-like staircase forms the end of the brick section. At the transition from the “hard” core of the building to the “softer” made from wood, Baumann arranged rounded architectural elements (terrace, panorama window, balcony). He chose a single pitch roof, which was also rounded on its lowest side parallel to the building components below. It’s a residential building with an overall sculptural-expressive appearance, which is visually accentuated by horizontal inverted clapboard walls (Hambrusch, Moroder, Schlorhauser, 1998: 150-153).

**Fig. 8**  
Zach country house,  
exterior view.

**Fig. 9**  
Interior view.

Clapboard walls (lap siding or weatherboard) may give the impression they were adopted from regional building traditions. Actually, though, they

came from the rural building culture of the Netherlands and Great Britain, from there making their way to the US. Lap siding, or more specifically, clapboard walls, was probably brought overseas by the Puritans, where it henceforth dominated the entire North American timber construction sector, from sheds to grand country homes. The ties between Puritanism and lap siding are noteworthy in particular because, clapboard walls in the building culture of this devout movement also stands as a form of refusal to ornament. In “Space, Time and Architecture”, Sigfried Giedion discusses the architectural motif in a small passage which he most likely wrote with reference to vernacular architecture in the US. He writes that lap





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**Fig. 10**  
Monte Pana Hotel,  
side front.

siding, «unintentionally leads to a simple and balanced» design of the walls (Giedion, 1976: 238; Schlorhauser, 2017: 158).

Clapboard walls gave architects like Baumann the possibility to design façades that seemed simple, natural and rustic at the same time. To be clear, lap siding has no relation to the construction method of a local “Tyrolean” barn. Unlike the North American approach of applying clapboards to even walls, in North and South Tyrol they were mostly used in order to enhance the visual expression of portions of the façade that were curved (inward or outward). This gave the buildings dynamism and expression.

Today, the buildings from the 1920s and 1930s with their rounded and lap sided parts are counted among the key works of Alpine architecture. Clapboard walls are thus a stylistic method that was regionalized especially successfully.

A masterly implementation of the architectural motif imported into the Alps, however, did not take place in housing projects, but in tourism architecture. The Hotel Monte Pana in Santa Cristina Valgardena by Franz Baumann and the Hotel Berghof in Seefeld in Tyrol by Siegfried Mazagg are today among the “icons” of a “Tyrolean Modernism” that can be regarded as independent in some areas. ■

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