



# Moving into an architectural jewel

## Wallnerstrasse no. 6 comes alive

By Philip Hatton

It all started with a decision by the participating States at their Ministerial Council meeting in Porto in 2002 “to give the OSCE a face”. The Government of Austria, the Organization’s host, felt the time had come to transfer the Secretariat from its location in a shopping mall to its own, more dignified premises.

The designated address: the elegant but unpretentious Palais Pálffy-Erdödy on Wallnerstrasse, right in the heart of Vienna’s historic centre and only a stone’s throw from the Hofburg, where the Permanent Council meets weekly.

Massive renovation of the two-century-old building got under way in late 2004, under the watchful eye of the Federal Office of Historical Monuments. Led by the Department of Management and Finance, planning for the move began in earnest in mid-2006 to ensure that every detail of the intricate matrix of issues related to the relocation was in place.

Asking people to change their way of working was perhaps the biggest challenge of the whole venture. The Secretariat had been at Kärntnerringhof, on Vienna’s famous Ringstrasse, for more than ten years. Staff had become attached to their offices and to the “culture” that had been created around that environment.

To keep staff fully apprised of developments, we formed a steering group comprising representatives of all units and departments. We considered everything from bicycle racks to coffee machines and from room layouts to the colour of furniture.

As the handover date approached, the IT project team under Christian Ruehrig, the cleaners and facilities staff under Uli Schmidt, and security planning led by Chris Jones — the true stars of the move — started tackling increasingly complex matters.

Considerable time was also spent in discussion with Austrian authorities on the user agreement under which the OSCE’s tenancy would be managed.

Finally, true to their word, the architects, Ablinger, Vedral & Partner ZTGmbH completed the Wallnerstrasse project at the end of November.

The move, from 12 to 16 December, was carefully choreographed with the help of a company that had won the tender for room design, furniture and moving services. Staff were asked to work from home or from the Hofburg while moving vans pulled up to gradually empty the Kärntner Ring offices and steadily fill up Wallnerstrasse no. 6.

At 9.00 a.m. on 17 December 2007, more than 300 staff members of the Secretariat and the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media reported for work at a light and airy, fully functioning five-storey headquarters that gracefully blends the traditional with the contemporary.

As with any change of residence, a settling-in period is necessary as people discover what the new premises can (and cannot) offer. Clearly, though, the wide range of facilities and the combination of administrative and representational features under one roof is giving rise to a new spirit of collegiality.

“We all dream of — and we are all working for — a better world,” said architect Herbert Ablinger, at an open house for OSCE staff. “I hope we have succeeded in designing a good dreaming-thinking-talking-working place for all of you.”

The Secretariat finally has a face.

**Philip Hatton, Deputy Director for Management and Finance, served as Manager of the Wallnerstrasse Project.**





Many of the offices in the contemporary wing look out into the Asian-inspired courtyard. Photos: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev

"These new premises will open a new space for commitment and responsibility, designed to meet the increasing demands of the Organization and the renewed importance of its missions. The essence of the OSCE is symbolized by this historic palace: a joint programme for security and co-operation, working for peace, prosperity and democracy all over our continent."

**King Juan Carlos I of Spain, inaugurating the OSCE's new headquarters, 21 November 2007**



King Juan Carlos I and Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut at the Hofburg before the inaugural ceremony at Wallnerstrasse.

"The OSCE has always been more of a project than an institution. From its earliest days at the 1975 Helsinki Conference, its purpose has been to build a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace with itself and the rest of the world. Today, thanks to the generosity and farsightedness of the people of Austria, this project has a home and it has a face, in the heart of greater Europe. The OSCE is proud to be in Vienna and grateful to the Viennese for their warm welcome. All 56 participating States, spread across Europe, Eurasia and North America but linked by a common history and a core set of values, are honoured by this prestigious venue which will inspire them to ever greater co-operation. It is impossible to give adequate thanks to all those who have made this moment possible. Thank you for this object of beauty; it will remind us of the lofty values that guide us."

**OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut**

"The meticulous renovation of the façade using original materials marked the end of the extensive restoration and maintenance work, ensuring that Palais Pálffy will provide a worthy setting for the OSCE and emphasizing Vienna's status as home and seat of many international organizations."

**Website of Austria's Federal Office of Historical Monuments (Bundesdenkmalamt): [www.bda.at](http://www.bda.at)**

*The Wallnerstrasse Project was initiated by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour through the Burghauptmannschaft Österreich (Office of the Imperial Hofburg Vienna).*

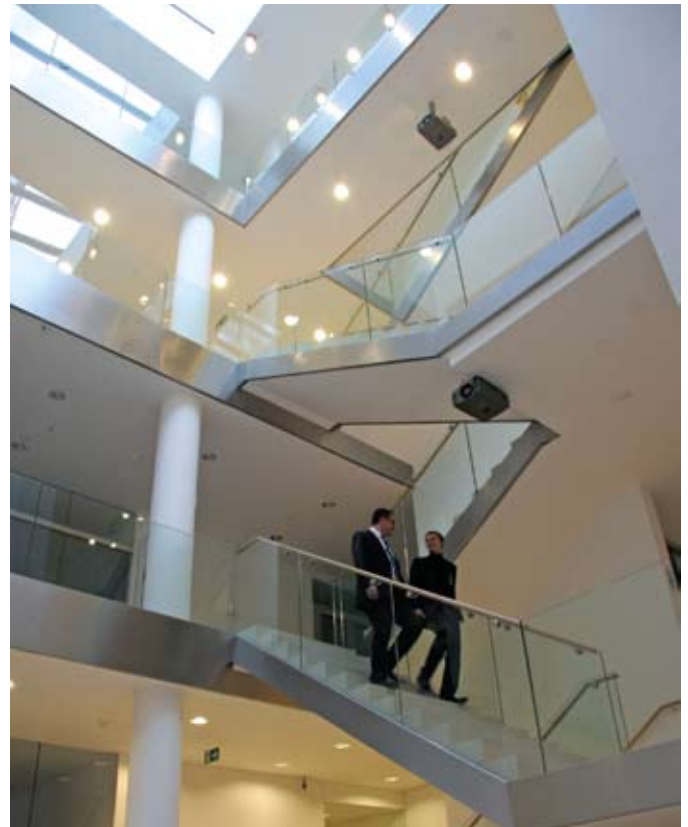
The classical-style façade features relief-decorated lunette windows.





"The Palais Pálffy was for a long time just an inaccessible grey block and for a good ten years it was simply a building site ... On 22 November 2007, there was general satisfaction on the part of all the parties involved: the architects, who had kept strictly within their costs and met their deadlines; the Federal Office of Historical Monuments, which had proudly declared the Palais Pálffy-Erdödy "Monument of the Month" (for November); and King Juan Carlos I, who inaugurated the new building on behalf of Spain, which held the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2007. And even Wallnerstrasse had once again begun to look a little more fashionable, if not quite on centre stage."

**Judith Eiblmayr, "Modern, mondaine, classical", *Die Presse*, 29 December 2007**



"The first time I came here and saw the book repository in the courtyard that has since been torn down to make way for light and space, I was shocked — it was like a grave, a dark labyrinth. I hope that we have succeeded in designing a good dreaming-thinking-talking-working-place for all of you."

**Architect Herbert Ablinger at the open house for OSCE staff, 21 November 2007**



Making way for light and space. Photos: OSCE/Velimir Alic





Inauguration of Wallnerstrasse no. 6, 21 November 2007: King Juan Carlos I of Spain is flanked by Austrian President Heinz Fischer and Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik. Photo courtesy of Holzner/Hopi-Media



The grand foyer.

"Austria has faith in the OSCE's values, its soft security approach, its ability to adapt to new challenges and its capacity to react rapidly in situations of crisis — in short, we strongly believe in the OSCE and its future. So long as the Organization stays flexible and maintains its capability to adjust and react swiftly to new phenomena endangering our security environment, the OSCE will always be a vital instrument in the European security structure and will remain relevant to countering threats and ensuring security for generations to come. I would like to congratulate the two architects who designed and realized this stunning project, turning the Palais Pálffy into a state-of-the-art office building while at the same time preserving its historic substance. Austria takes its responsibility as a host country for important international organizations very seriously. We are aware of the fact that all of you, through your initiatives and activities, contribute to making this world a safer place."

**President of the Republic of Austria, Heinz Fischer**

"Spain, whose recent history has been closely linked with that of the OSCE, has always underlined the Organization's special value. Indeed, our transition to becoming a fully democratic society took place in parallel with the birth and development of the OSCE. Upon assuming the Chairmanship of the Organization in 2007, Spain aimed to enrich its legacy and strengthen its political foundations. The OSCE's success, and the challenges before us, show that the Organization is just as necessary today as when it was born."

**King Juan Carlos I of Spain**



"The ties between the OSCE and Vienna as its headquarters have grown over the years. The OSCE's new building provides further visible expression of this fact and underscores our strong support for this leading regional security organization, whose mandate extends from Vancouver to Vladivostok."

**Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik**

About 450 square metres of inlaid wooden floors were painstakingly restored.