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'Le style Mucha' Abounds in Prague

LAURA B. WEISS

Czech Art Nouveau Master Alphonse Mucha helped define the style with works that adorn city interiors and museums.

INTERIOR DESIGN- AUGUST 17, 2007

In Prague, it's easy to get lost in the centuries-old past. Elegant town squares open up to stunning streetscapes of flawlessly preserved Renaissance and Baroque houses, while historic churches and castles beckon. But the Czech capital can also lay claim to being one of the centers of Art Nouveau, the naturalistic early 20th century art and design movement. There, a seminal master of the period, Alphonse Mucha, practiced his craft, and his designs and artwork remain on view in his native city.

Mucha "tried to integrate art into people's everyday lives, designing not only lavish posters, jewelry and textiles, but also simple things such as labels for soap and toothpaste," explains Andrea Liskova, a Czech tourism spokesperson. In fact, so influential was the Czech artist that Art Nouveau has often been referred to as "Le style Mucha."

For the past two years, an exhibit of Mucha's art has traveled throughout Northern Europe to destinations like Copenhagen and Stockholm, offering a glimpse of the artist's work to a broad audience. The tour ends up in Poznan, Poland, where the artist's work will be on display at the Zamek Culture Centre from August 20 to November 11.

But it is in Prague that the creations of the lithographer, painter, and designer, really come to life. Born in the Czech region of southern Moravia in 1860, Mucha traveled to Paris in 1887, where he created many of his most famous works, including posters of actress Sarah Bernhardt and the richly appointed interiors of the Parisian jewelry store, Fouquet. Returning to Prague in 1910, his work began to reflect his growing interest in Slavic history and folklore.

The 1912 Municipal House (Obecni Dum), a Prague Art Nouveau masterpiece where many Czech designers of the period contributed to its ornate architectural style and interiors, you can view Mucha's ceiling and wall frescos in the sumptuous Mayor's Hall. Flowing, naturalistic figures drawn from Czech history embellish the room, personifying human virtues, like "vigilance," "independence," and "maternal wisdom."

In another part of town, at the Mucha Museum, many of the 100 works exhibited in three adjoining small white galleries focus on Mucha's Parisian period, including the famous Bernhardt posters. The Seasons, Mucha's

slideshow



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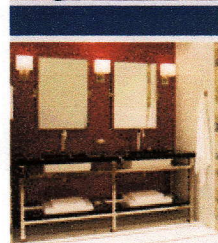


Decision makers from Interior Design Giant firms share their thoughts on the New Seven Wonders of the World.

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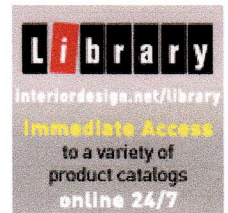


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1896 panels in which an alluring portrait of a woman depicts each period of the year, line a gallery wall. For the true Mucha aficionados, a video screened at the back of the museum covers his life in a lively and informative manner.

Wonders of the World.
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The Mucha Museum and the Municipal House are both open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.mucha.cz and www.obecnidum.cz.



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