

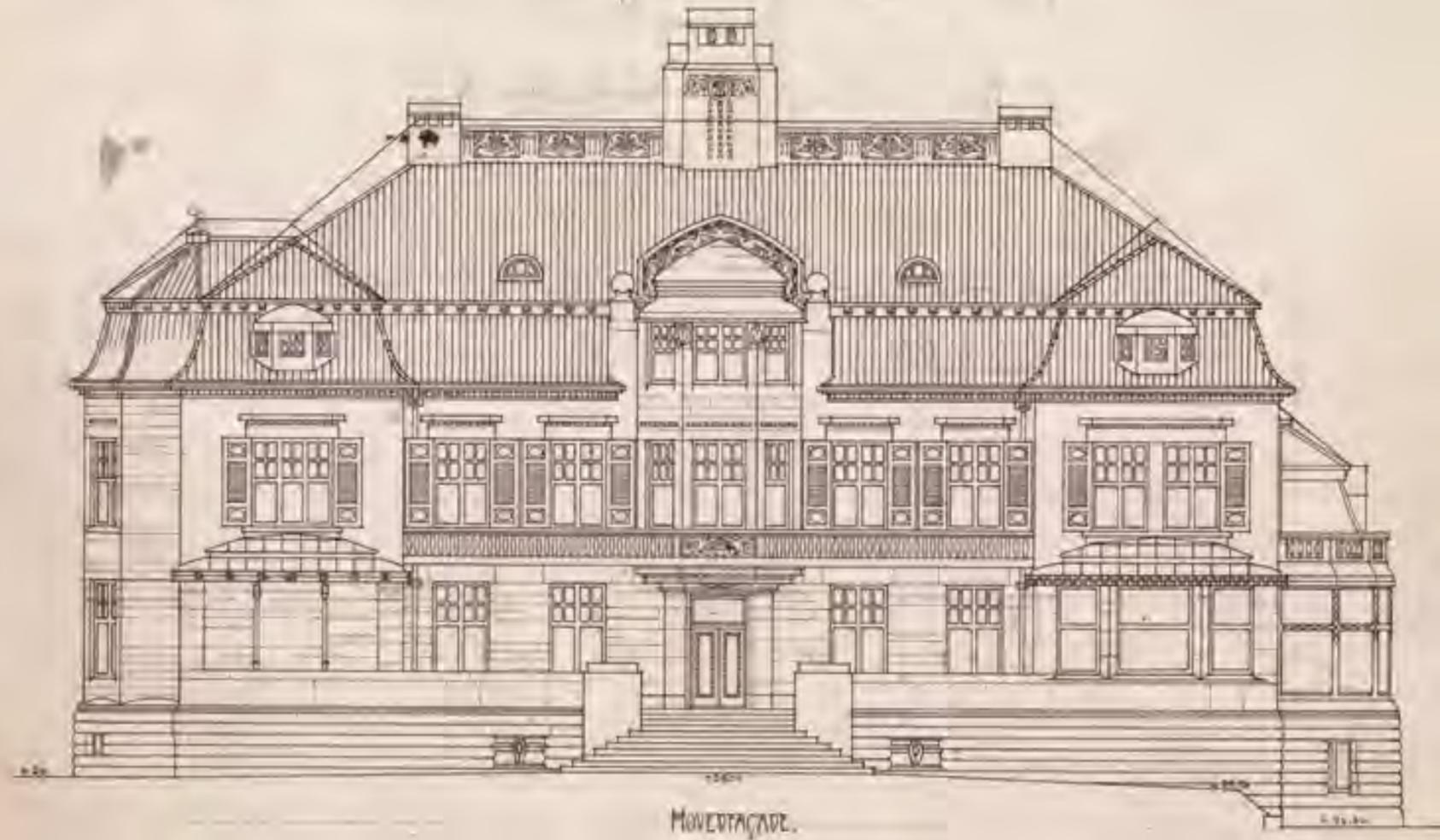


*Villa Otium*

A Diplomatic Home

Original drawing of garden façade by architect Henrik Bull, 1910.

EMBEDDING FOR MR. GENERALKONSUL M. OLSEN.  
NOBELS GAVE NO 28.



*Villa Otium*  
A Diplomatic Home

Published by the Embassy of the United States of America, Oslo  
ISBN 9781622397891

## Foreword

For most of its hundred-year history, Villa Otium has been one of the single most important meeting places for Norwegians and Americans. It has hosted thousands of receptions, many thousands of meals, and an unknowable number of small, informal meetings. It is a landmark in Oslo and a cultural icon as well, since it was designed by one of Norway's leading architects for one of Norway's leading industrialists of the early 1900s.

My wife Eleanor and I have appreciated the legacy of the building's history, and the responsibility for preserving this landmark, but we also have been able to enjoy Villa Otium as a family home. Our sons have visited, as have many other family members, friends, and official visitors from the United States. That the building succeeds at both functions so well, as a public showcase and as a place offering peace and privacy, is a testament to the building's design. As you will read, prominent Norwegian architect Henrik Bull and client Olsen did not always see eye-to-eye, but perhaps their "fruitful friction" contributed something essential to the success of the final design.

We thought the 100th anniversary was worth noting, so we have asked several experts to contribute to this book covering their specialties. Architectural historian Jane C. Loeffler, author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, has written the basic history and described how the United States Government has used its diplomatic buildings to project the core American values of openness, generosity, and democracy. Director of the Norwegian Art Nouveau Center, Nils Anker, has written about the architect, and the cultural currents that are represented in the design of the

building. Hans Christian Erlandsen has written about the man who commissioned the building, a Norwegian businessman and diplomat who, together with his wife—the niece of Alfred Nobel—moved to Oslo after many years abroad and wanted a showplace. Landscape architect Kari Bergo, of Østengen & Bergo AS Landskapsarkitekter MNLA, has written about the villa's garden, a critical part of the original design.

A book like this requires a great deal of work, so we would like to thank the authors, Public Affairs Officer Tim Moore and the Public Affairs staff at the U.S. Embassy, and our Residence Manager at Villa Otium, Kristina Boraas. We would also like to thank all of those who have contributed by providing private pictures, sharing their memories, and looking through archives for us: Mette Margrethe Bjørum, May-Britt Ivarson, Lars Mjærum, the Swiss Embassy in Oslo, the British Embassy in Oslo, the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, the William J. Clinton Presidential Library, and former U.S. Ambassador to Norway, Robert D. Stuart, Jr.

We hope this book will entertain and inform, re-ignite memories, and start conversations, much as Villa Otium itself has done for these hundred years. Living in this magnificent home has been a rare privilege for my wife and me; it will be the centerpiece of our memories of our years in Oslo.

**Ambassador Barry B. and Eleanor G. White**

*Oslo, sommer 2012*

## Forord

For det meste av sin hundre år lange historie har Villa Otium vært et av de viktigste møtestedene for nordmenn og amerikanere i Norge. Det har vært vertskap for tusenvis av mottakelser og måltider og et ukjent antall mindre, uformelle møter. Huset er et landemerke i Oslo og også et kulturelt ikon, ettersom det ble tegnet av en av Norges ledende arkitekter for en av Norges ledende industrialister tidlig på 1900-tallet.

Min kone Eleanor og jeg har verdsatt bygningens historie og ansvaret for å ivareta dette landemerket, men vi har også satt pris på Villa Otium som vårt hjem. Våre sønner har besøkt oss her, det har også mange andre familiemedlemmer, i tillegg til offisielt besøkende fra USA. At bygget fungerer så godt ved både offisielle og private anledninger, som et utstillingsvindu ved offisielle anledninger og også som et sted som gir fred og privatliv, er et testament til byggets utforming. Som du kan lese i denne publikasjonen, var ikke den prominente norske arkitekten Henrik Bull og byggherren Hans Olsen alltid enige om ting, men kanskje bidro deres "fruktbare friksjon" med noe essensielt til den endelige utformingens suksess.

Vi synes at et 100-årsjubileum er verdt en markering, og har bedt flere eksperter bidra til denne publikasjonen. Arkitekturhistoriker Jane C. Loeffler, forfatter av boken *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, har forfattet den grunnleggende historien og skildrer hvordan den amerikanske stat har brukt sine diplomatiske bygninger for å overføre amerikanske kjerneverdier som åpenhet, generøsitet og demokrati. Direktør for Jugendstilsenteret, Nils Anker, har skrevet om arkitekten og de kulturelle strømningene som

er representert i husets design. Hans Christian Erlandsen har skrevet om mannen som fikk huset bygget, en norsk forretningsmann og diplomat som, sammen med sin kone—Alfred Nobels niese—flyttet til Oslo etter mange år utenlands og ville ha en presentabel herregård. Landskapsarkitekt Kari Bergo fra Østengen & Bergo AS Landskapsarkitekter MNLA har forfattet kapittelet om villaens hage, en viktig del av den opprinnelige utforming.

En publikasjon som denne krever en god del arbeid, og vi vil gjerne få takke forfatterne, staben ved avdeling for presse, kultur og utdanning ved USAs ambassade ledet av Public Affairs Officer Tim Moore, og vår Residence Manager ved Villa Otium, Kristina Boraas. Vi vil også få takke alle de som har bidratt ved å låne oss sine private bilder, delt sine minner og sett gjennom sine arkiv for oss: Mette Margrethe Bjørum, May-Britt Ivarson, Lars Mjærum, Den sveitsiske ambassade i Oslo, Den britiske ambassade i Oslo, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, og tidligere ambassadør til Norge, Robert D. Stuart Jr.

Vi håper denne boken vil både underholde og opplyse, nøre opp om gamle minner og starte nye samtaler, slik Villa Otium selv har gjort disse hundre årene. Å få bo i dette praktfulle hjemmet har vært et privilegium for min kone og meg, huset vil utgjøre kjernen av minnene våre om årene i Oslo.

**Ambassadør Barry B. og Eleanor G. White**

*Oslo, sommer 2012*

## The American Ambassador's Residence in Oslo: A Short Diplomatic History

By Jane C. Loeffler, MCP, PhD

Known as Villa Otium, the American ambassador's residence in Oslo is among the most prized of U.S. properties overseas. It is remarkable not only as an architectural landmark, the most significant residential work by leading Norwegian architect Henrik

Bull (1911), but also as a diplomatic asset that has defined America's presence in Norway since its purchase by the U.S. government in 1923. The history of how that presence has evolved over the years mirrors efforts by the United States to establish and maintain representation in a rapidly chang-



Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

Villa Otium, U.S. Ambassador's Residence, Oslo, south façade.

ing global landscape. Thus the story of one Norwegian house turns out to provide fascinating insight in to a little-studied chapter in American diplomatic history.

### U.S. Envoy establishes Legation in Oslo

This story does not begin in 1908 when Norwegian Consul General Hans Olsen returned from St. Petersburg to create Villa Otium as a bucolic retreat for his family in the most fashionable part of Oslo (or Kristiania, as it was known until 1925). It begins before that in 1906, a year after Norway declared its independence from Sweden. It was then that Herbert H. D. Pierce presented his credentials to the Norwegian foreign minister and became America's first Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to take up residence in the Norwegian capital.

Pierce lived and worked in two furnished rooms at the Victoria Hotel until he rented a small house at Kronprinsens gate 17 and then the adjacent house at Kronprinsens gate 19. Records show that on March 27, 1909 he signed a one-year lease establishing the American Legation at that location.<sup>1</sup> The one-acre property consisted of two plastered brick houses (built c. 1880) and a modest garden. One house became his residence and the other provided office space for the tiny chancery. The biggest advantage to the site was its location directly opposite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its proximity to other government offices and the Royal Palace. Another asset was its access to four streetcar lines. But the houses were small and ill suited for representational purposes. There was only one bathroom in the main house, for example, and both houses lacked modern amenities, including electric lighting, modern plumbing, and good central heating. Even the location was not optimal. The area was no longer residential, "the poorer part of the city" abutted the rear of the property in the direction of the harbor, and large office buildings almost entirely blocked its view of the fjord.<sup>2</sup> With a

landlord who refused to make needed improvements to the property, the premises quickly fell into disrepair.



U.S. Embassy (Palazzo Corpi), Istanbul. Photo from *Homes for Ambassadors*, published by the American Embassy Association, 1910.

For the next fourteen years, American envoys Laurits S. Swenson and Albert G. Schmedeman failed to secure the funds needed to improve the rental property, buy it, or move elsewhere. Instead, they managed only to extend a short-term lease with a reluctant landlord who eventually sold the entire property to a developer, who threatened the Legation with eviction. All the while, the local rental market evaporated and housing prices soared. As other nations purchased distinguished properties in more fashionable neighborhoods of the capital, the American Legation continued to operate out of a run-down rental property.

## Congress heeds call for better U.S. embassies

The situation in Oslo was not unique, but rather a symptom of a larger problem that Congress had not yet addressed—how the United States should be represented overseas and how to support that representation. The U.S. government provided little support for its representatives overseas at that time. Many envoys rented or purchased houses or apartments (including office space) at their own expense, and nearly all had to supplement meager allowances with funds of their own.

In 1909, for example, the United States owned only five properties overseas—in Tangier, Seoul, Tahiti, Peiping (Beijing), and Constantinople (Istanbul), all acquired under exceptional circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Of those, the only property owned in (or near) Europe was the Palazzo Corpi in Constantinople, acquired for \$125,331 in 1907. At that time, there was no policy guiding the acquisition of diplomatic properties and no program supporting it. Each acquisition or construction project was funded individually by a special congressional appropriation.

Decrying the inadequate wages paid to U.S. diplomats and the embarrassing and undignified quarters in which they were forced to live and work, U.S. businessmen and civic leaders joined forces in 1910 to form the American Embassy Association (AEA). They urged Congress to buy and own its foreign buildings as a way of bettering America's status among "the greatest of world powers." Writing in the AEA publication *Homes for Ambassadors*, James B. Townsend lamented: "With the exception of Constantinople, the United States does not own a single embassy or legation building nor a square inch of ground over which the Stars and Stripes can float as American soil anywhere in Europe." Townsend noted that all across Europe other nations, including Great Britain, first and foremost, but also France, Austria, Germany, Russia, Italy,

Spain, Belgium, China, Japan, and "even Norway, Holland and Mexico" had purchased the "largest, handsomest and best buildings obtainable, generally with surrounding gardens," and that the United States suffered by comparison as "the only nation which has almost entirely neglected the matter of even the proper housing of its diplomatic representatives in foreign countries."<sup>4</sup>



*Bryde House, Kristiania, drawing from Tidens Tegn, July 10, 1920.*

Within months of arriving in Oslo in 1905, for example, British Minister Sir Arthur Herbert had purchased a six-acre property known as Villa Frognaes as a home for the British Legation. Built in 1859 for the banker Thomas Heftye, the villa was recognized as one of the finest private residences in the city. Although the British Foreign Office strongly recommended a rental property, Herbert argued that buying the villa would strengthen Great Britain's ties to Norway, and the British Treasury approved the purchase early in 1906.<sup>5</sup>

Heeding concerns raised by the AEA, in 1911 Congress passed the first legislation funding the government purchase of land and buildings for diplomatic purposes.

Known as the Lowden Act, after its key sponsor Rep. Frank O. Lowden, the bill authorized a maximum of \$500,000 to be spent annually and limited the amount that could be spent in any one place to \$150,000. The first appropriations under the act were in 1914 for acquisitions in Mexico City and Tokyo.

## Legation searches for new quarters in Oslo

In 1916, Minister Schmedeman learned that his landlord was willing to sell the leased Oslo Legation property to the U.S. government. When the State Department failed to respond to his alert, the landlord sold it to Norwegian shipping magnate A. F. Klaveness, who gave the Legation a year to vacate.

Schmedeman searched in vain for a place to rent or buy. "I am endeavoring to find another suitable locality, but it seems to be almost impossible at present," he wrote in 1917, "as there is not even a room vacant in this city." Reporting that the influx of war refugees had further strained an already tight real estate market, creating a shortage of some 4,000 houses in Oslo, he noted that it was no longer possible to rent without buying an interest in a property and that property values had more than tripled in two years.<sup>6</sup> Still, he suggested that for a sum between \$100,000 and \$150,000, the U.S. government might still find a decent home for its Legation.

As it turned out, wartime shortages provided the Legation with a reprieve. Klaveness could not obtain building materials for the concert hall and hotel that he sought to build on his property, and his plans were further thwarted when he learned of plans to build a municipal concert hall and theater that would imperil his own proposed development. So he extended the Legation's lease into 1920 and raised the rent. He made it clear, however, that he would refuse to sign another lease.

Pointing out that all accredited representatives to Norway, except for Cuba, Romania, Poland, Germany, and the United States, already owned their own legations in Oslo, Schmedeman continued to appeal to the Department for funds. He even suggested in 1919 that the Legation might be forced to turn to the Foreign Office for rent relief under a wartime measure designed to protect residential tenants from eviction.<sup>7</sup> Hoping to avoid that humiliating option, he wanted it understood that he could not continue to operate the Legation without a roof over his head.



Photo by Kjell Ree (2009)

*Bryde House at Kristinelundveien 22.*

## Bryde offers "freakish" house as Legation

Seeing an opportunity to unload a costly folly, Norwegian ship owner G. M. Bryde contacted the State Department in 1919 offering to sell his newly completed house in Oslo to the U.S. government.<sup>8</sup> Represented by American lawyers, Bryde began a hard-sell lobbying effort to interest the Department and key members of Congress in his property. Located at Kristinelundveien 22, the Bryde

house was directly across the street from the new Frogner Park in the city's finest residential neighborhood and boasted the most up-to-date amenities, including electric light and hot water and steam heat. Bryde offered to sell it for \$280,000.<sup>9</sup>

Notified by Bryde's lawyer of his plans to visit him in Washington, Willbur J. Carr, Director of the Consular Service, asked diplomats Hugh Gibson and Robert Woods Bliss to examine photos and plans of the Oslo property and report back to him. Both were unimpressed. Gibson, who was then Minister to Poland, replied: "The builder of this house was evidently a man with a great deal of taste, most of it bad... If he gave it to us, I should be opposed to letting our flag fly from any such monstrosity as this." He went on to say, "I should think that one of the first things we ought to try to do is to at least give the impression of having some taste in choosing places for our representatives to live, and I would rather wait a little longer and get something worthwhile."<sup>10</sup> Bliss, chief of the Division of Western European Affairs, concurred, adding: "After looking at the photographs of Mr. Bryde's house, I can readily understand why he wants to sell it (even to such an easy mark as a foreign government) at a loss of nearly 50% and his furniture at a sacrifice of over 60%. I think that any minister who might be obliged to live under such a roof, surrounded by such examples of 'taste', would soon become a dippy diplomat."<sup>11</sup>

As the State Department prepared to decline Bryde's offer, Oslo newspaper *Tidens Tegn* announced the sale as a *fait accompli*. Schmedeman denied the claim, blamed Bryde for the false rumor, and sent a letter to Washington with the clipping and a published drawing that depicted Bryde's house as a walled fortress—which it resembled. In



*Villa Otium garden c. 1912, when property extended south to Bygdøy allé.*

his letter, Schmedeman also noted that as a result of subsequent denials published in the newspapers other available properties had come to his attention. One such property was Hans Olsen's villa, which he described as "one of the most attractive homes in this city." Olsen, he said, was a very wealthy man who did not need to sell his house to anyone. "As it was built before the war," he added, "I believe the price to us would be very reasonable."<sup>12</sup>

On March 2, 1921, Congress passed an Act making appropriations for the Diplomatic and Consular Service and enabling the State Department to proceed with long-awaited purchases in cities including: Athens, Belgrade, Brussels, Bucharest, Budapest, Monrovia, Oslo, Prague, Rome, Vienna, and also Canton, Hankow, and Amoy. The Act reiterated a maximum of \$150,000 to be spent at any one post and created a Commission to oversee expenditures.<sup>13</sup> This was the green light Schmedeman had been waiting for. By that time, prices had fallen considerably in

Oslo, so it was actually a favorable time to buy. He submitted a list of five options for the new Commission's consideration, including the Olsen property at Nobels gate 28.<sup>14</sup>

### **Legation weighs its options, including Olsen villa**

On ten acres of wooded parkland, the Olsen villa was among the largest and most beautiful in Oslo. Built by Consul General Olsen in 1911 and first occupied in 1912, it was made of white plastered brick trimmed with granite and copper and topped with an impressive black tile roof.

According to Schmedeman's reckoning, it featured two halls and two salons, reception room and sitting room, dining room, library, office, fifteen bedrooms, three bathrooms, servants' quarters, a modern kitchen and pantry, laundry, and storage space. An adjacent annex, built of the same materials, had space for two cars on the first floor and six small rooms and a bathroom above—suitable for chancery offices plus a small apartment. The property also featured a splendid garden, a wooded park, and three "hot houses". Adjacent to the Bryde house and Frogner Park, the Olsen estate was also somewhat removed from the



*Tidemand property, Kristiania, 1921.*

city center but only a short ride away by streetcar. While Schmedeman said it would provide the United States with the “finest and best Legation property of any foreign government” in Oslo, he worried that upkeep of the expansive grounds might prove expensive. This was a concern to him and to his successor, Laurits Swenson, who feared paying out of pocket to maintain the extensive grounds. It is most likely the main reason why both were initially so cautious about the property. Also, the original asking price for the entire property was approximately \$180,000, well above the budget allowance.

Another option was the Mathiesen house at Parkveien 43, across from the official residence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Palace Park. The house was built in 1896 (but modernized to include central heating) and included a half-acre of grounds and a garage. Its asking price, at \$80,000, was reasonable, but it was not well configured for use as a legation—the minister would have to live on the upper two floors above a first floor chancery. A third option was the Rustad residence, home to the King’s Chamberlain who entertained there on a grand scale. Located at Wergelandsveien 25 opposite the Palace Park, the house and its annex were built around 1890 on a half-acre lot. The asking price was \$145,000, but the property needed significant improvements, including a new heating system and repairs to walls cracked from subway construction. Given the estimated cost of repairs, the Legation figured that it might be purchased at around \$115,000.

The existing Legation on Kronprinsensgaten was another choice. Its pros and cons were already well known, but its



Plan of Olsen property, Kristiania, 1921.

NARA, RG 59, File 124.571/31

disadvantages had mounted in the years since it was first rented. The asking price was around \$86,000, which the Legation considered to be excessive given the cost of needed repairs. Furthermore, its urban milieu was no longer the asset that it had once been with smoke and dust already cited as a nuisance.<sup>15</sup> And although he objected to its design that reminded him of a ship, Schmedeman also included the Bryde house at the reduced price of \$130,000, a fraction of the \$450,000 Bryde claimed it had cost to build and furnish two years earlier.<sup>16</sup>

Before the Commission could act on these recommendations, Laurits Swenson took over as the American Minister in Oslo. Swenson had served in that position between 1911 and 1913 and returned in November 1921 to replace Schmedeman. Swenson quickly deemed his living situation “embarrassing” and decried the uncertainty of having no permanent accommodations. As his predecessor had noted, only the landlord’s personal goodwill had forestalled an eviction.<sup>17</sup>

To the list of possible options, Swenson added the home of Otto Tidemand, a prominent businessman who had built his house in 1919 only to find that it was already too large for his needs. Located across from Olsen’s at Hafersjordgata and Bygdøy allé, it was built of stone and plastered brick and had been praised by the city building inspector as

the “best constructed residence in Christiania.” It boasted nine large rooms, a spacious hall, an art glass window, and solid mahogany woodwork throughout. The house was accompanied by a small walled garden. The owner wanted about \$90,000 for the house plus \$8,000 for the furnishings. Swenson suspected that he would take less.

Oddly enough, Swenson ranked the Bryde property as his first choice. He acknowledged initial doubts about the architecture, which his predecessor had described as “freakish,” but said that “practicalities” had persuaded him to select that house because the owner was offering to make necessary modifications and also because he figured that the cost of upkeep of the tiny yard would not place undue demands upon him as Minister. Moreover, in worse financial straits and ever more anxious to sell, Bryde had again reduced his asking price to something around \$115,000, including all the furniture.<sup>18</sup> Swenson also added yet another option, ship owner Ivar An. Christensen’s “French chateau” at Frederik Stangsgate 22.

As the State Department evaluated each of the numerous options, more than a year passed. During that time, Swenson finally dropped the Bryde house from consideration after learning of leaks and other structural problems from its unhappy tenant, the Brazilian Minister; he also dropped the Tidemand property after deciding that it could not accommodate a chancery. By early in 1922, he was convinced that the Olsen offer was the best of all.

At that time, the Olsen property consisted of an entire city block bounded by Bygdøy allé, Nobels gate, Solheimgata and Kristinelundveien, with no internal cross streets. Although Olsen balked at subdividing his property, he subsequently agreed to offer a parcel consisting of the house and about a third of the grounds (11,280 sq. m) for the reduced price of approximately \$129,000. That still left the house with what Swenson described as plenty

of wooded grounds and views of the fjord to the south and the highland country to the north. Swenson reported that Olsen had assured him that the remaining portion of the property would eventually be sold only for “high class residences.”<sup>19</sup> Olsen informed him, too, that other buyers (including the French Government) were interested, although he much preferred to sell to the United States.

### Legation buys Olsen villa in 1923

At its 1923 meeting, the Commission finally approved purchase of a Legation property (unspecified) in Oslo and asked Robert Woods Bliss to inspect the options.<sup>20</sup> En route to Stockholm to become Minister to Sweden, Bliss stopped in Oslo. After seeing all of the houses with Swenson, he declared the Olsen property the only one worth owning. “From what I learned,” he wrote, “I believe that if the house and grounds could be purchased for \$125,000 the Government would obtain a bargain.”<sup>21</sup> He sent his message by telegram rather than by despatch to speed up action because Olsen had announced plans to leave for an extended vacation in Algiers and it was urgent to act prior to his departure. Replying two days later, the Department authorized Swenson to offer a contract.

After securing legal approval from the Norwegian Government and from his own legal advisors, Swenson executed the purchase contract on September 20, 1923 to buy the Olsen house and a 13,854 sq. m. portion of the grounds (about 3.5 acres, slightly more than earlier proposed) for the sum of \$125,000.<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Olsen, the legal owner, retained the rest of the property for lots to be sold later. Swenson also entered into a supplementary agreement with Mrs. Olsen concerning the eventual opening of city streets within the parcel. That agreement, accompanied by a map showing new roadways at Eckersbergs gate and Hafersjordgata, stipulated that the U.S. Government would not have to pay costs associated with the opening of those streets.<sup>23</sup>

Local newspapers celebrated the purchase, and Swenson proudly reported to Washington:

*We have acquired the finest place in Christiania at a very reasonable figure. I have received many compliments on our having been fortunate enough to secure so suitable and handsome a Legation home. It will give us added prestige in Norway. The press, which has given prominent space to the purchase, speaks of it as a special courtesy towards Norway, stressing the view that it is evidence of the importance which the United States attaches to this mission and of its sincere desire to cultivate and preserve the friendly relations subsisting between the two countries.<sup>24</sup>*

When the Legation moved to its new home on January 29, 1924, the house became Swenson's residence—except for one room on the first floor that was used as his official office. Offices for the chancery were established in the rooms over the adjacent garage. Already, the Legation was hard at work trying to furnish the nearly empty house with furniture, fixtures, china, silverware, linen, and other necessities.<sup>25</sup> Citing the very high prices in Norway, Swenson was urged to order supplies from Paris or London. At Bliss's suggestion, he contacted Geoffrey Dodge, of the Paris firm of Jacques Bodart, Inc., for estimates. Dodge had recently furnished the Stockholm Legation and Bliss was pleased with the results. Swenson estimated that it would cost about \$25,000 to provide the new Legation with all its needs, about \$15,000 to make it "presentable."

For the large salon alone, the list of items included: a large sofa and a small one, four arm chairs, four bergeres (upholstered chairs), eight additional chairs, one large table, two chests of drawers, and four tables. For the dining room, the list included a dining table and chairs for thirty-six.

With the Department's approval, the Legation entered into a contract for \$15,753 with the Bodart firm. An additional contract for approximately \$3,000 covered the cost of draperies and sash curtains (for thirty-six windows) and carpeting cut to measure. Items began arriving at the Legation by mid-spring of 1924. Even with a delay caused by the need to return some items that were deemed inferior and the wait for replacements, some of the new furniture was in place by September 1924. The job was complete when draperies were hung, carpets laid, china and



Photos by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

*Left: Villa Otium, Annex and Garage, formerly used also for chancery offices. Right: Southern façade of U.S. Ambassador's Residence looking west towards apartments added after purchase.*

glassware unpacked, and new kitchen appliances finally installed in May 1926. The total amount spent on furnishings amounted to \$22,734.38.

Although the Legation had hoped that maintenance of the property would not require a large staff, upkeep of the house and grounds did pose problems for the Minister. First, Swenson requested funds for an additional gardener. Then after informing the Department that he was paying wages for the entire household staff out of his own pocket, he asked for funding for an additional janitor/custodian, doorman, housekeeper, and laborer. The Government, he said, "should contribute something towards the daily attention required by the large halls, reception rooms, terraces, the numerous windows, and the considerable spaces that are not occupied as living rooms."<sup>26</sup> The Department approved additional funds for upkeep and repairs.

But the Department was less cooperative when the Legation learned of alarming plans to open streets delineated on the deed and proceed with apartment construction on the adjacent property. Olsen, who still owned the land that had been part of his estate, proposed to open the street lying south of the house and running east to west (Eckersbergs gate) and to sell lots for apartment buildings—not the "high-class residences" that he had earlier mentioned.<sup>27</sup> What concerned the Legation even more was the prospect that he would open Hafrsfjordgata, the proposed street to the west of the residence, and permit the construction of apartment buildings on lots there.

Foreign Service Inspector Matthew Hanna visited the Legation in 1927 and described the prospect of nearby apartment development as a "really serious menace."<sup>28</sup> "We have been very fortunate in acquiring here at a very reasonable price a property fitting the wealth and greatness of the United States, and in keeping with the properties owned by other nations represented here," he wrote. To

protect the value of that property and to forestall plans that would "mar the neighborhood," he urged the Department to purchase the portion to the west.<sup>28</sup> Writing in support of Hanna's proposal, Swenson praised the wooded parcel for its "beautiful trees" and listed other assets, including an orchard, a lily pond with fountain, and good tennis courts. He was keen to retain the open land, which he had apparently been renting personally from Olsen.<sup>29</sup>

Nearly two years passed, and with building activity already proceeding to the south, Swenson requested \$75,000 to buy the adjoining property to the west. A new street to the west would pass within twenty-four feet of the house, he warned, and the proposed new buildings might "cheapen our property." He indicated, too, that the only reason he had not bought all of the Olsen estate in 1923 was because the asking price for the entire property had exceeded the legal limit of \$150,000 set by Congress.

Keith Merrill, Executive Secretary of the newly created Foreign Service Buildings Commission, denied Swenson's initial request saying that Oslo "cannot be said to be such an important post as to demand further immediate attention." Merrill's reasons were more practical than political. "Oslo is not an unhealthy post with snow for nine months of the year and cool summers," he wrote, "there are not the problems of dust and noise from the traffic which in hot countries necessitate a fairly large holding of land on every side of our buildings in order that the windows may be kept open throughout the year for the comfort of our officers."<sup>30</sup>

When Mrs. Olsen died in May 1929, her heirs notified the Legation of their intention to dispose of the remaining land immediately. Swenson again appealed for funds. But the Foreign Service Buildings Commission refused to spend more for purchases in Western Europe, arguing again that its priorities were to provide first for "the more



*U.S. Embassy (Chancery), Paris, by Delano & Aldrich, 1929-32. One of first U.S.-built embassies.*

unhealthy posts in the tropics and the Far East.<sup>31</sup> So the Legation property did not expand in size...but fortunately neither did the eventual construction of apartments "cheapen" the neighborhood, nor did it decrease the long-term value of America's investment.

Among the finest and most impressive of the purchases under the Appropriations Act of 1921, the Olsen villa represented a landmark in terms of America's efforts to better the living and working conditions for its diplomats overseas. The Government did own other important properties at that time, but most were acquired as gifts, including Paris (1917), Bangkok (1920), and London (1921). The Legation in Oslo and the Legation in Prague (the former Schoenborn

Palace, purchased in 1925) were among the few distinguished buildings purchased outright under the first enabling legislation.

### **Buildings herald expanded U.S. presence abroad**

America's overseas presence changed significantly in 1926 when Congress enacted the Foreign Service Buildings Act, known as the Porter Act after its chief sponsor Rep. Stephen G. Porter. The new act authorized the sizable sum of \$10 million for the purchase, alteration, and—for the first time—construction of diplomatic and consular buildings overseas. It limited the expenditure of funds to not more than \$2 million in one year, an amount that far exceeded any prior limit. It also established a Foreign Service Buildings Commission to oversee expenditures and an office to supervise and assist the work of the new Commission. This did not just expand an existing program—it created a program for

the first time, because as Rep. Porter noted, all currently owned properties "were acquired piecemeal and not as a part of a broad, general policy to provide the Government with Government-owned buildings wherever our officials abroad are located."<sup>32</sup>

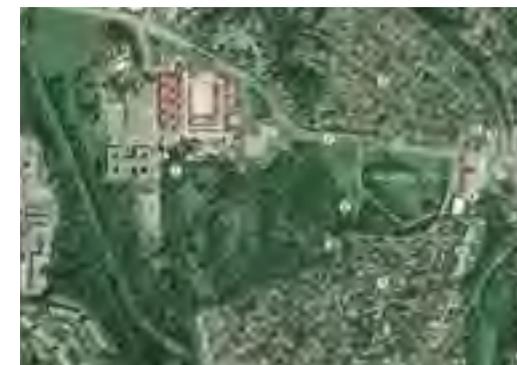
The Foreign Service Buildings Commission's first major projects were in Tokyo, Paris, and Ottawa and all shared three notable attributes: all were designed by American architects and purpose-built for use by American diplomats; each significantly raised the profile of America's presence in a major capital; and each introduced a new building type—the chancery as a designated office building entirely separate from the residence. This was a sig-

nificant departure from past practice because most diplomatic activity until that time had centered on residences.

In 1931, President Roosevelt introduced a plan for government reorganization that moved the Foreign Service Buildings Commission and its operations to the State Department. Frederick "Fritz" Larkin was named to head the small Foreign Service Buildings Office, and the Commission became his advisory body. In 1937, Leland W. King moved over from the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury to become Larkin's field construction supervisor.

By that year, projects funded under the Foreign Service Buildings Act (1926) included: the purchase of residences in Buenos Aires, Ottawa, Paris, and Rome, and residence/office properties in Penang, Nagasaki, and Tangier; major remodeling of properties in London, Ottawa, and Paris; purchase of land and construction of new office buildings in Ottawa and Paris; and purchase of land and construction of new residences and offices in Tirana and Yokohama.

In part because of Norway's leading role in granting voting rights to women, President Roosevelt appointed suffrag-



*Aerial view of new embassy site in Oslo.*



*New American Embassy, Oslo, arrival court (2010).*



*New American Embassy, Oslo, entry pavilion (2010).*

ist and social reformer Florence Jaffray “Daisy” Harriman as Minister to Norway in 1937. Mrs. Harriman’s memoir of her stay in Oslo describes her pleasure with the Legation house and also some of its problems, including a heating system that often left her without hot water. She was relieved when the State Department sent Leland King, on one of his first overseas assignments, to supervise major renovations and remodeling at the Legation.<sup>33</sup>

Those renovations were not to be enjoyed for some time, however, because Mrs. Harriman hastily departed Oslo on April 22, 1940 and escaped to Sweden as the Nazis invaded and occupied Norway. The Norwegian Government had departed two weeks earlier—eventually setting up temporary operations in London. The American Legation did the same, closing its property in Oslo on July 15, 1940 and re-opening in London a month later. Mrs. Harriman returned to Washington. In 1941, Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr. took over once again as the American Minister to Norway, based in London. A year later, he was reappointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary when the mission to Norway was elevated from the status of Legation to Embassy. He left London in 1943 and was succeeded in 1944 by Lithgow Osborne, who moved back to Oslo on May 31, 1945 after the war ended. But a palatial residence with a tiny office annex no longer met the needs of the Embassy. In his very first outline of post-war priorities, Larkin recommended a new embassy office building for Oslo.<sup>34</sup>

### The post-war embassy boom

After WWII, America’s need for overseas office space soared because of its expanded world role. Not just the State Department, but many other government offices and departments sought space in embassies abroad. As the list of tenants grew, so, too, did the need for quasi-public spaces devoted to libraries, auditoriums, and galleries—all



Photo courtesy of Ralph Rapson

*Design for Oslo embassy by Ralph Rapson and John van der Meulen, 1951 (never built).*

designed to further embassy outreach in foreign countries. Under the aegis of the Department’s newly reorganized Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO), the building program widened its scope and focused on the design and construction of government-owned office buildings. At the same time, those buildings grew in size and complexity. As chief architect and later as director of FBO, King was largely responsible for the new architectural outlook that embraced modern architecture and its openness as an apt metaphor for democracy at the height of the cold war.

The first postwar projects included embassy office buildings in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Rio de Janeiro, and Havana. King hired young American architects Ralph Rapson and John van der Meulen to design the three Scandinavian projects in 1951. They designed a six-story transparent glass cube raised on pilotis (stilts) for the prominently located Oslo site at Drammensveien 18 (since designated Henrik Ibsens gate 48). Not only was the site near key government buildings and directly across from

the gardens of the royal palace, but also it was just a block from the site of the first American Legation.

Embassies in Stockholm and Copenhagen were well underway, but initial plans for Oslo were tabled when King lost his job over political and design differences in 1953. A year later FBO, with a renewed design directive, commissioned celebrated modernist Eero Saarinen to design the embassy office building in Oslo. Instead of a cube, Saarinen chose to design a four-story triangular-shaped building that mirrored the sharply angled site. He chose a green-black granite chip aggregate for the exteriors and called attention to the main entrance with a projecting marquee. With two additional corner entrances that led to consular offices on one side and the United States Information Service offices and library on the other, the conveniently accessible chancery welcomed the public and gave the United States a prominent presence when it opened in 1959. The historic Olsen villa, only ten minutes to the west, remained the residence of the Ambassador—a traditional complement to the modern office building downtown.

### Security becomes top priority

When Saarinen designed the Oslo Embassy, security was not a major design constraint. The only real threats to U.S. embassies at that time were fire, theft, and espionage. But the situation changed rapidly as angry mobs targeted embassies in the late 1960s and 1970s. FBO responded to the growing need for security by adding perimeter planters, bollards, and fences to existing embassies and by finding ways to delay and curtail access to vulnerable buildings. In Oslo, side entrances were closed and all visitors passed through screening at the main entrance. It was difficult to retrofit the building for security, however, because it was bounded on three sides by busy streets and sidewalks.

Terrorist attacks on U.S. facilities in Beirut in 1983 prompted an overhaul of FBO design policy and the introduction of the “Inman standards” for embassy architecture. Not only did new embassies have to avoid the stilts, wide expanses of glass, and screens that



Photo by Jane Loeffler (1989)



FBO

*Top, U.S. Embassy, Oslo and bottom, interior courtyard designed by Eero Saarinen, 1955-59.*

typified earlier designs, but all were also supposed to provide a 100-foot setback from vehicular traffic, high perimeter walls, and far fewer windows. For new projects, this led to the acquisition of much larger sites often located much farther from city centers. It also meant that most existing embassies could no longer meet security requirements.

In the aftermath of terrorist bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, Congress earmarked \$17.5 billion for the construction of 150 new embassy compounds by 2018. Responding to a congressional mandate that ranked security above all other priorities, the State Department again reorganized its building program in 2001, created the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), and embraced standardization as a way to control costs and speed production of urgently needed facilities. The new Standard Embassy Design (SED) prototype allowed OBO to produce scores of sprawling new embassy compounds in less than ten years. In capitals from Antananarivo, Bamako, and Conakry, to Ouagadougou, Panama City, and Yaoundé, the Department was able to move more than 20,000 people into safe and more secure workplaces, a huge accomplishment by any reckoning. But the downside of the SED was its imposing presence and remote location. Diplomats found it increasingly difficult to conduct business when isolated in fortified facilities. Critics also questioned the look-alike designs and argued that standardization did not always save money nor did it necessarily project a good image for the United States—particularly in places where design excellence is demanded—such as Oslo.

**New Oslo embassy reflects focus on “design excellence”**

Fortunately, OBO had begun to transform the SED into something better adapted to locale soon after plans were announced to replace the obsolete and insecure embas-

sy office building in Oslo. In 2008, under new leadership, OBO took the first step in that direction by announcing a design competition for a new embassy in London to be built on a five-acre urban site. The second step was choosing a winning design by KieranTimberlake that is open, visually accessible, sustainable and energy-efficient.



*U.S. Embassy, Bamako, Mali by Integrus, Architects (2006). This is example of Standard Embassy Design (SED) developed in aftermath of terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in 1998.*

Encouraged by the London process and prodded by a report from outside experts who called for better embassy architecture, OBO announced a new Design Excellence Program in April 2010.<sup>35</sup> The initiative aims to improve America’s overseas presence and promote goodwill through designs that are not only secure, but also thoughtful, attractive, and environmentally responsible. The goal is to locate embassies in urban areas, where possible, and to select materials and equipment for easy maintenance and long-term dependability. Sustainability is also now a top priority, as is preservation.

As it turns out, the new embassy compound in Oslo is among the first designed to meet new Design Excellence

goals. Unlike the standard SEDs that were design/build projects that minimized architectural input, the new American embassy (NAE) in Oslo features the work of prominent American architects—Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture and Engineering (EYP) and Carol R. Johnson Associates, landscape architects. The design team also includes local Oslo architects, Spor Arkitekter. And unlike so many recent projects, this one is well located in Huseby not far from central Oslo.

Under the leadership of Ambassador Barry B. White, both the Embassy and the architects have worked closely with local planners to ensure a smooth transition. The primary goals have been to maintain the park-like setting of the site and to tailor the architecture to its context. The program calls for construction of a chancery office building, a Marine Guard residence building, three entry pavilions, and an underground support annex covered with a green roof complete with trees. The low-profile buildings will utilize local building materials, including slate fieldstone, white granite, and copper, and they will occupy only 14% of a ten-acre site that features a meadow, stream, rocks and trees—most of which will be retained and even enhanced. To further the “green” initiative, architects will restore the seasonal stream and use it for storm water management. New plants will require no irrigation once established. And more than forty deep wells will supply renewable energy to meet more than 45% of the heating needs of the Embassy. Together these features, including access to public transportation, will meet Norway’s strict standards for energy efficiency and make this a state-of-the-art facility, now scheduled to open in 2015.

**Villa Otium still plays key role**

Ironically, as security has increasingly prevented the existing embassy office building from hosting events that bring Americans together with Norwegians, the ambas-



Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

*Ambassador’s Residence, Oslo, entrance façade and parking courtyard with recently improved landscaping and resurfacing.*



OBO

*Ambassador’s Residence, Oslo, entrance façade and parking courtyard prior to recent renovations.*

sador's residence, like other residences worldwide, has become even more active as a venue for the exchange of ideas and information. With a steady array of political discussions, diplomatic meetings, and cultural programs, the residence has taken on added importance in recent years. To make the house and its grounds more accessible and attractive to visitors, the Embassy commissioned a study of its historic landscape in 2007.

With support from former Ambassador Benson K. Whitney, local landscape architects Østengen & Bergo surveyed the property and devised a master plan for restoration and preservation of the grounds. The resulting plan also recommended innovations aimed at improving the use and appearance of the property. As a result of the new plan, the asphalt expanse in front of the house already has been reduced and groups of trees have been added—a small modification that greatly improves the courtyard, complements the historic villa, and makes the approach to the house more welcoming. The goals of the landscape

plan dovetail nicely with the sustainability and preservation guidelines of the Design Excellence Program. Over time, as funds become available, more of its recommendations will be implemented.

Not only is the Villa Otium an important landmark to Norwegians, but as this history reveals, it is also a prized diplomatic property to Americans. For that reason it was named to the recently created Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property, an honor bestowed on only twenty out of more than 3,500 U.S. properties worldwide. America's overseas presence has changed in ways that could never have been anticipated when it was acquired in 1923. The Bryde house, with its fortified stance and menacing façade, is a more apt metaphor for contemporary embassy architecture. Fortunately, our diplomats chose the Olsen house instead—in a gesture of good taste and goodwill that still underscores the close relationship between the United States and Norway in 2012 as the historic house celebrates its centennial.



Ambassador Barry B. White with Norway Cup participants from Norway, USA and Afghanistan, summer 2011.

Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

1. Memorandum of Agreement of March 27, 1909 (Despatch no. 1604) enclosed in Schmedeman to Secretary of State, March 24, 1920, File 124.571/23. This and all State Department records to follow are from RG 59, Department of State Central Files, National Archives, unless otherwise noted. Also, all of Schmedeman's correspondence is with the Secretary of State, unless otherwise noted.
2. Schmedeman, June 3, 1916, File 124.571/5. For additional information on the diplomatic ties between the United States and Norway, see Wayne S. Cole, *Norway and the United States, 1905-1955*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
3. *The Legation in Tangier was a gift from the Sultan of Morocco in 1821. Lucius Foote purchased his own quarters in Seoul in 1884, and Congress appropriated funds enabling the Government to purchase the Seoul residence from him in 1887. Under a special appropriation, the United States built a legation in Peiping (Peking) in 1905. Property in Tahiti was received as a gift from the Queen of the Society Islands in 1896, and the U.S. Consul built himself a house there at his own expense. When it was destroyed by a cyclone, the Government paid for its reconstruction in 1907. Also in 1907, a special appropriation of Congress paid for the acquisition of the Palazzo Corpi in Constantinople (Istanbul).*
4. James B. Townsend, "The Condition of American Embassies and Legations in Europe" in *Homes for Ambassadors* (New York: American Embassy Association, 1910), 22.
5. Mark Bertram, *Room for Diplomacy*, (London: Spire Books, 2011) 142. See also "The History of the British Ambassador's Residence in Oslo" @ <http://ukinnorway.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/our-embassy/our-ambassador/residencehist>. With the new Norwegian king, Haakon VII, married to a British princess, Herbert said, it was all the more imperative for Britain to establish a first-class legation there.
6. Schmedeman, June 3, 1916, Oct. 25, 1916, March 26, 1917, May 28, 1917, Dec. 23, 1918, and May 29, 1919, Files 124.571/5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 13.
7. Schmedeman, Nov. 6, 1919, File 124.571/16.
8. George Gordon Battle to Hon. Breckenridge Long, April 30, 1919, File 124.571/10. See also Battle to Hon. Frank Polk, May 29, 1919, File 124.571/12. Bryde's attorneys at that time were O'Gorman, Battle & Vandiver of New York City. His Oslo house was started in 1915 and completed in 1919.
9. Schmedeman, Jan. 19, 1920, File 124.571/18.
10. Hugh Gibson to Wilbur J. Carr, undated, probably July 19, 1920, File 124.571/24. Bryde's attorney at that time was Alfred F. Britton of Brooklyn, NY.
11. Robert Woods Bliss to Carr, July 19, 1920, File 124.571/24.
12. Gibson to Alfred F. Britton, July 22, 1920, File 124.571/24; and Schmedeman, July 13, 1920, File 124.571/25 pertaining to article that appeared on July 10, 1920 in Tidens Tegn.
13. The Act of March 2, 1921 established a commission composed of the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee of Foreign Relations of the Senate, the chairman and ranking minority member of the committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of the Treasury.
14. Schmedeman, June 17, 1921, File 124.571/31.
15. Swenson, Jan 30, 1923, File 124.571/39.
16. Bryde telegram to State Department (Phillips), Sept. 29, 1923, File 124.571/48. Bryde lowered the price again to \$100,000 on Sept 29, 1923, owing to his "personal circumstances" but that letter was received after the Olsen purchase was made.
17. Schmedeman, July 13, 1920, File 124.571/25.
18. Britton to Bliss, Sept. 19, 1921 and Oct. 24, 1921, File 124.571/33-34. See also Swenson, Jan. 4, 1922, File 124.571.35.
19. Swenson, Jan 23, 1922, File 124.571/35.
20. Bliss to Secretary of State (Confidential for Phillips), Sept 12, 1923, File 124.571/45. Robert J. Phillips was First Assistant Secretary of State.
21. See additional correspondence in File 124.571/45 Bliss report to Secretary of State, Sept. 12, 1923, File 124.571/47.
22. Mrs. Ester Wilhelmina (Mina) Olsen was the daughter of Ludwig Nobel and niece of his younger brother, Alfred Nobel. Ludwig Nobel was founder of St. Petersburg-based Branobel, one of the world's largest oil companies in the late 19th century. Pursuant to a marriage settlement of September 29, 1914 with her husband Hans Olsen, Mrs. Olsen owned the Oslo villa and its grounds. Thus, she sold the property to the U.S. Government and signed the contract herself. The agreed upon price (less than 800,000 kr.) was less than Olsen had previously agreed to (900,000 kr.).
23. See deed documents included in File 124. 571/55.
24. Swenson, Oct. 10, 1923, File 124.571//49.
25. 124.571/49 Nov. 28, 1923 Swenson was not sure if the appropriation that funded the purchase of the house (up to \$150,000) could also be used to purchase furnishings. Although the Act under which the new Legation was purchased did not provide for such expenditures, the State Department determined that the Lowden Act of 1911 did provide for the furnishing of buildings so acquired.
26. Swenson, April 25, 1928, Files 124.571/76.
27. Swenson, Jan. 24, 1928, File 124.571/81.
28. Matthew E. Hanna report of July 1927 cited in Swenson, Feb. 25, 1928, File 124.571/72.
29. Merrill to Stephen G. Porter, March 13, 1929, File 124.571/82.
30. Merrill to Porter, March 13, 1929, 82.
31. Aug. 6, 1929 W H Castle, Jr. to Swenson, Aug 6, 1929, 85
32. Porter in Report to accompany HR 10166, 2/2/28. Robert J. Phillips was named Acting Chief of the Foreign Buildings Office in 1926. For a more detailed history of all aspects of America's overseas building program from its earliest years to the present, see Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.
33. King and his family actually lived in the house with Mrs. Harriman during their stay in Oslo. See Harriman, *Mission to the North*, NYC: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1941, 50-1. See also Sheryl Neely to Loeffler, correspondence pertaining to King's work in Oslo. Neely is King's daughter and custodian of his papers.
34. Frederick Larkin letter, March 3, 1945, Records of the Foreign Service Buildings Office, Records Regarding Appropriations for Foreign Service Buildings, 1900-48, Entry 408, Box. No. 9, RG 59, Department of State Central Files, National Archives.
35. American Institute of Architects, "Design for Diplomacy: New Embassies for the 21st Century," 2009.

## Villa Otium, Art Nouveau, and Architect Henrik Bull

By Nils Anker, Director of the Norwegian Art Nouveau Center

The street name Nobels gate is linked to the noted Nobel family industrial dynasty. The street was called Frognergate until it was renamed in 1901 in honor of Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), the Swedish industrialist who created the Nobel Prizes. Probably by chance, Nobel's niece Ester Wilhelmina Nobel and her husband Hans Olsen bought the property at Nobels gate 28 and built a stately villa there a few years later. Location must have been important: the lot was in one of Oslo's best neighborhoods and extended to the area's main street, Bygdøy allé. The property was called Otium, after an old summer house built when it was still a rural area.

### The homeowner

Hans Andreas Nikolai Olsen (1859-1951) bought the property and announced an architectural competition in 1909. It was unusual for a private person to call such a competition for the design of his own home, something that underscores his level of ambition. He wanted a variety of proposals to choose from to assure that the villa would be one worthy of his position and stature. Olsen was a businessman whose background included being Vice President in charge of Russian/Azerbaijan operations of one of the world's largest oil companies in the early



Picture courtesy of The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design

Henrik Bull's first prize draft for Hans Olsen's villa, Villa Otium.

## Villa Otium, Art Nouveau og arkitekt Henrik Bull

Av Nils Anker, direktør, Jugendstilsenteret



Photo by Robert H. Loeffler

Roof ridge topped by pairs of battling mountain goats crafted in copper.

Nobels gate 28 knyttes til det kjente industridy-nastiet Nobelfamilien. Gaten het opprinnelig Frognergate, men den fikk nytt navn i 1901. Den ble oppkalt etter den kjente svenske legatstifteren Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-96). Det var nok tilfeldig at hans niese Ester Wilhelmina Nobel Olsen og hennes mann Hans Olsen noen år senere skulle kjøpe seg eiendom i denne gaten og bygge sin store herskapelige villa her. Eiendommens beliggenhet må likevel ha vært viktig for dem. Den lå i byens bedre strøk og tomten strakte seg helt ned til Bygdøy allé. Tomten het Otium etter den gamle løkkebygningen som lå på den tidligere så landlige eiendommen.

### Byggherren

Hans Andreas Nikolai Olsen (1859-1951) kjøpte eiendommen og utlyste arkitektkonkurranse i 1909. Det var ikke helt vanlig for private byggherrer å utlyse konkurranse for utforming av egen bolig, men dette uttrykker byggherrens ambisjoner. Han ville kunne velge mellom ulike utkast som kunne sikre ham en verdig villa, som et uttrykk for hans posisjon og status. Olsen var forretningsmann med bakgrunn som direktør for blant annet verdens fjerde største oljeproducent i Russland/Aserbadjan på begynnelsen av 1900-tallet. Selskapet Naftaproduktions AB Brødrerna Nobel var eid

av Nobelfamilien, og han ble senere gift med Ester Wilhelmina (Mina) Nobel (1873-1929), niese av Alfred Nobel. Olsen ble også generalkonsul i St. Petersburg for Norge i 1906. Etter flere år i Russland fryktet han for samfunnsutviklingen med streiker og terrorisme og vendte hjem til Norge og Kristiania. (Oslo het Kristiania frem til 1925, for ordens skyld benytter jeg heretter Oslo som byens navn.) Olsen og hans kone solgte seg ut av familiens eierinteresser i Russland. De hadde derfor rikelig med frigjort kapital til å bygge herskapelig. Olsen inntok raskt nye samfunnsposisjoner i Norge og i hovedstaden. Blant annet satt han i bystyret en kort periode, men hans industrielle posisjoner med styreverv i Norsk Hydro og i Wallenbergsystemet var nok viktigere.

Eiendommens beliggenhet var gjerne avgjørende. Frognerområdet var under rask utvikling med intensiv utbygging av bygårder og villaer med trikk fra Vika og ferge til Hengsengen. Olsen kjøpte det gamle lyststedet Otium med en gammel trevilla som ble revet for å gi plass til det nye hovedbygget. Arealet hadde rikelig med plass til både herskkelig villa og et representativt hageanlegg. Olsen utlyste arkitektkonkurranse for å få en verdig bolig for familien. Dette var litt uvanlig da arkitektkonkurranser som regel kun forekom innen offentlig byggevirksomhet, men dette kan bekrefte at Olsen ønsket seg det aller beste.

1900s. This oil company, Naftaproduktions AB Bröderna Nobel, was owned by the Nobel family, and Olsen later married Ester Wilhelmina (Mina) Nobel (1873- 1929), who was Alfred Nobel's niece. Olsen was also named Norway's Consul General in St. Petersburg, in 1906. After a number of years in Russia, he became concerned about growing civil unrest, with strikes and terrorism, and returned home to Norway and Kristiania, later called Oslo. (This text uses the name Oslo even though the change was not official until 1925). Olsen and his wife sold off their interests in the family businesses in Russia, so they had ample means for a grand building project. Olsen quickly assumed new duties in Norway and the capital. He briefly served on the Oslo city council, but his business-related posts on the boards of the Norwegian industrial group Norsk Hydro and in the Swedish Wallenberg sphere were probably of greater importance.



Main entrance with original glass canopy, copper decorative trim and copper lanterns. (Carved "USA" motif added after house became U.S. Legation.)

Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

The location of the property was decisive. Oslo's Frogner neighborhood was developing quickly, with intense construction of apartment buildings and villas, a trolley to the downtown Vika neighborhood and a ferry to the Hengsengen area. Olsen bought the country retreat Otium, and

tore down its old wooden house to make room for a new residence, with enough space for both a formal garden and a park.

Nobels gate 28 has great historical significance in Norwegian terms, and it is important for cultural heritage and as an example of the Art Nouveau, or "Jugendstil" in Norway.

### Early 20th century architecture

The Art Nouveau style arose as a reaction to Historicism, which had dominated the second half of the 19th century. The foundation of the new style was laid by the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 1870-80s, led, among others, by William Morris in England, who wanted to fill people's daily lives with quality products made by craftsmen as a way of preventing mass-produced, industrialized products from taking over completely and wiping out esthetic values.

The Art Nouveau style spread quickly through Europe and the rest of the world, taking on regional character. It originated largely in Nancy and Paris in France and in Brussels in Belgium. Architect Victor Horta's "Maison Tassel," completed in Brussels in 1893, with its organic forms, is regarded as the first true Art Nouveau building. The style had many names, such as Jugendstil in Germany and the Nordic countries, after the German periodical Jugend (Youth) which was established in 1894. In the United States, architects Louis Henry Sullivan (1856-1924) and designer and glass artist Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) are among the best known exponents of the style.

The style's regional character differed sharply between southern and northern Europe. The northern European style was distinguishable by a more geometric expression, while southern Europe's version was better known for its organic forms and plant ornamentation. Despite differences, common traits are discernible.

Nobels gate 28 har høy verneverdi i norsk målestokk og den er et viktig kulturminne og representant for jugendstilarkitekturen i Norge.

### Arkitekturen på begynnelsen av 1900-tallet

Art Nouveau-stilen oppsto som en reaksjon på historismen som hadde dominert siste halvdel av 1800-tallet. Forutsetningene for stilarten ble lagt i 1870-80 årene gjennom Arts and Crafts Movement og blant andre William Morris i England. De ønsket å fylle menneskets daglige tilværelse med kvalitetsprodukter som var håndverksmessig utført. På den måten skulle man hindre at de industrielt masseproduserte varene tok overhånd og utslettet de estetiske verdier.

Art Nouveau-stilen bredte seg raskt ut over hele Europa og resten av verden med regionale særpreg. Utgangspunktet regnes gjerne ut fra Nancy og Paris i Frankrike og Brussel i Belgia med arkitekt Victor Hortas organiske byggverk, "Maison Tassel", som stod ferdig i Brussel i 1893. Stilretningen fikk mange navn som f.eks. jugendstil i Tyskland og Norden etter det tyske tidsskriftet Jugend (Ungdom) som ble opprettet i 1894. I USA er arkitekten Louis Henry Sullivan (1856-1924) og interiørarkitekten og glasskunstneren Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) kjente eksponenter for stilarten.

Stilens regionale særpreg varierer sterkt fra Syd- til Nord-Europa. I Nord-Europa finner vi et mer geometrisk uttrykk, mens Syd-Europa er mer kjent for organiske former og svungen planteornamentikk. Til tross for sine variasjoner kan den likevel gjenkjennes gjennom flere fellestrekk.

For noen designere og arkitekter var stilen en konvensjon eller en trend som de kastet seg over. For andre var det et klart ønske om å formidle skjønnhet og troen på at våre omgivelser kan påvirke menneskets sinn. Kunsten og arki-



Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

Drawing room radiator grille featuring birds. One of several Art Nouveau-inspired brass radiator covers designed by Bull for the house.

tekturen skulle gi livskvalitet til menneskene ut fra ideen om at vakre omgivelser kunne skape harmoniske mennesker.

Det er karakteristisk for stilretningen at bygning, interiører og innredningsdetaljer ble formgitt av arkitekten selv. Innen design- og arkitekturhistorie kalles dette for Gesamtkunstwerk eller Total Art. Alt fra en bygnings eksteriørmessige utforming, til møbler, lysarmatur og ned til den minste lille interiørdetalj skulle danne en helhet. Arkitekten skulle også være fortrolig med ethvert materiale som sten og tekstil, metall og tre. I de mest særpregete eksemplene finner vi en helhetlig tilnærming til volum, romdannelse og funksjon, kombinert med tradisjonelle og nye materialer som ofte er anvendt eksperimentelt gjennom nye bygningsteknikker. Det organiske uttrykket er gjennomgående med svungne linjer i fasader og interiør. Den dekorative ornamentikken bestod gjerne av naturformer, hovedsakelig dyr og planter som inspirasjon, og ofte med tilknytning til historiske motiver, legender og myter, folkekunst og nasjonal/regional

Many designers and architects immediately embraced the style, seeing it as a clear expression of a wish to create beauty. They believed that the human mind is influenced by its surroundings and that the beauty of art and architecture could enhance people's quality of life.

expression is seen in the curved lines of the exterior façades and interiors. The decorative ornamentation techniques were likely to consist of shapes derived from nature: Animals and plants served as inspiration, often linked to historical motifs, myths and legends, folk art and national or regional architecture. Light was another key component that created translucency based on the era's latest technological breakthroughs. Windows featured small panes and the widespread use of stained glass with both ornamental and figurative themes.



Detail of the black tile roof with ornamentation designed by Bull.

One characteristic of the style was that the architects themselves shaped the entire building, including its interior and décor elements. This is called Gesamtkunstwerk or Total Work of Art in the history of design and architecture. Everything about the building—from interior design, furniture, lighting fixtures, down to the smallest interior detail—creates a 'whole.' Architects also had to be fully conversant with all materials, such as stone or textiles, metal or wood. The style's most distinctive examples are characterized by a unified approach to volume, space creation and function, combined with traditional and new materials often used in experimental ways through new building techniques. The organic

father were both pharmacists in the west coast city of Bergen, while his father was the respected architect Georg Andreas Bull (1829-1917) and his uncle was the world-famous violinist Ole Bull. His mother's family included Supreme Court justices and was part of the capital's upper class. He grew up in comfortable circumstances, with a father who had a prominent architectural office.

Bull is known for a long list of public projects, such as the national Government Building (1898-1906) and the Historical Museum (1897-1902), both in Oslo. Both buildings were done as 'Gesamtkunstwerk' or 'Total Art' projects influenced by nation-building to bolster the identity of

### Architect Henrik Bull

Henrik Bull (1864-1953) is regarded as one of Norway's most significant architects. He was from an upper middle class family of senior government officials. His paternal grandfather and great-grand-

byggekunst. Lyset som virkemiddel var viktig for å gi gjennomskinnelighet basert på tidens nye tekniske muligheter. Vindusutformingene er karakteristisk med småruter, ofte i øvre del, samt utstrakt bruk av glassmaleri med både ornamentale og figurative motiver.

### Arkitekt Henrik Bull

Henrik Bull (1864-1953) blir regnet som en av Norges viktigste arkitekter. Han kom fra en kjent embetsmannsfamilie forankret i det høyere borgerskap. Hans farfar og oldefar var begge apotekere i Bergen, mens hans far var den anerkjente arkitekten Georg Andreas Bull (1829-1917). Den verdensberømte fiolinisten Ole Bull var hans onkel. Hans mors familie besto blant annet av høyesterettsdommere og tilhørte hovedstadens høyere sosiale lag. Hans oppvekst var preget av et ressurssterkt miljø og en far som hadde et fremtredende arkitektkontor.

Henrik Bull er blitt kjent for en rekke viktige offentlige oppdrag som Regjeringsbygget (1898-1906) og Historisk museum (1897-1902) i Oslo. Begge bygningene ble gjennomført som Gesamtkunstwerk preget av ideen om nasjonsbygging for å styrke den unge nasjonens identitet. Fasader og interiør er utsmykket med referanser til den norske historien, men gjerne kombinert med mer abstrakte organiske former. Henrik Bull studerte først ved Kristiania Tekniske Skole og deretter arkitektstudiet ved Den Kongelige Tegneskole. Etter endt studium i Norge dro han videre til nye studier i Tyskland ved Königl. Technische Hochschule i Berlin (1884-87). Året før han reiste hjem vant han 1. premie i konkurransen om Pauluskirken på Grünerløkka i Oslo, ferdig i



Decorative panels featuring animal motifs in entrance foyer.

1892. Allerede i 1888 etablerte han eget kontor i Oslo hvor han raskt ble en av hovedstadens ledende arkitekter. Han fikk snart en rekke oppdrag med både villaer og større offentlige bygg. Som arkitekt var han rask til å tilpasse seg de hurtige endringene i tidens stilretninger. I 1899 sto Nationaltheatret ferdig som et av landets viktigste eksempler på teglstensarkitektur i nyrenessansestil. Veien fra teater til utstillingsarkitektur var kort. Han fikk oppdraget med å tegne Norges portal og utstillingsinventar til verdensutstillingen i Paris i 1900. Om han ikke hadde gjort det før, så kom han her i kontakt med den franske Art Nouveau-stilen. Bull ble imidlertid begeistret for og inspirert av den Østerrikske fortolkningen av stilarten. Han kombinerte de nye moderne strømningene og strenge enkle former fra den klassiske arkitekturen. Dette ser vi også i ambassadørresidensen. Henrik Bull lot seg gjerne inspirere av byggets funksjon og kunne gjerne "stjele" elementer fra dets funksjon til utsmykningene. Historisk museum er et eksempel på at han lånte ornamenter og dekorasjoner fra oldtiden og middelalderen, gjentolket dem og brukte dem i utsmykningene på museet.

Norway as it was gaining independence from Sweden, which was a hot topic at the time. Façades and interiors were decorated with references to Norwegian history, often combined with more abstract, organic shapes. Bull first studied at the Christiania Tekniske Skole, a technical college in Oslo, and then studied architecture at the National Academy of Craft and Art Industry. After com-



Southern façade with glass-enclosed “winter garden” room that links dining room to rear garden.

pleting his studies in Norway, he went on to study at the Royal Technical College in Berlin (1884-1887). A year before he returned home, he won the design contest for the Paulus Church, which was completed in 1892 in the Grünerløkka neighborhood of Oslo. In 1888, he set up his own office in the Norwegian capital and quickly became a leading architect, with many commissions to design villas and public buildings. As an architect, he was also quick to adapt to the rapidly changing styles

of the era. In 1899, his National Theater was completed and became Norway’s most important example of brick architecture in Neo-Renaissance style. He went on to design exhibitions for Norway, including Norway’s pavilion and exhibition fixtures for the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris. Had he not been exposed to it earlier, Bull certainly then came into contact with the French Art Nouveau style in

Paris. He was especially excited and inspired by the Austrian interpretation of the style. He sought to combine the new, modern trends with the strict simple forms of classical architecture, something clearly seen at Villa Otium. He was inspired by a building’s function, and was happy to ‘steal’ elements of that function for its decoration. At the Historical Museum, for example, he borrowed ornamentation and decoration from ancient and medieval times, reinterpreted them, and used them to decorate the museum. He was eager to show off the treasure chest Norwegian cultural heritage offered for building up the young nation’s identity after the union with Sweden was dissolved in 1905.

Around the turn of the century, Bull participated in a variety of competitions, won numerous large, important projects, and designed everything from grave memorials to coins. He even designed the candy bar Lohengrin, still on sale in Norway today. He also designed a large number of stately homes for wealthy families in the Oslo area. He participated in designing Norway’s 1914 Jubilee Exhibition in Oslo, which marked the 100th anniversary of the end of the Norwegian-Danish union. The exhibition may have been as important to building Norwegian identity and self-confidence as the polar expedition triumphs of national heroes Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen.

Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

*Han var opptatt av å vise hvilke skattekister den norske kulturarven inneholdt for å styrke den unge nasjonens identitet etter unionsoppløsningen fra Sverige i 1905.*

*I tiden rundt århundreskiftet deltok han i en rekke konkurranser og vant flere større viktige oppdrag. Han designet alt fra gravminner til mynter, og til og med sjokoladen Lohengrin som fortsatt selges i Norge i dag. Han tegnet også en hel del villaeer for vel bemidlede familier i Oslo og på Østlandet, og han deltok i utformingen av Norges Jubileumsutstilling på Frogner i 1914. Utstillingen markerte først og fremst Norge som selvstendig nasjon og at det var 100 år siden unionen med Danmark ble oppløst. Jubileumsutstillingen var antagelig like viktig for nasjonen som Fridtjof Nansen og Roald Amundsens polekspedisjoner var for bygging av den norske identitet og selvtilitt.*

### Arkitektkonkurranse

*I 1909 innbød Hans Olsen til arkitektkonkurranse blant byens ledende arkitekter. Henrik Bulls utkast lå antagelig nærmest Olsens ønsker og ambisjoner, men det måtte justeres en del. Bulls utkast var det mest moderne av forslagene. Det var noe kompakt i formen med innslag av nybarokke stiltrekk.*

*Tomten var som nevnt stor og bygget kunne legges på tomtens høydedrag, noe som ville gi maksimalt med sollys, god utsikt, aksial plassering og terrasser helt ned til Bygdøy allé. Bull var opptatt av at bygget skulle forstås i sammenheng med hageanlegget slik at det skulle bli en helhetlig opplevelse mellom arkitektur og natur. Han lot hus, have, tak og trær smelte sammen til en helhet. I prosessen frem til realisering gjorde Bull en del forenklinger.*



Photo by Robert H. Loeffler (2011)

Chimney detail.

*Blant annet ved å fremheve hovedkroppen på bygget som i utgangspunktet var noe lettere i formen.*

### Eksteriøret

*Bygningens sydside er preget av symmetri mot haven. Den løses opp med karnapper, balkonger, terrassen og en loggia. Hver fløy har fått overdekkete terrasser. Dette var nok av praktiske hensyn, men kanskje kan det også tolkes som et uttrykk for hylling av naturen. Mot nord er fasaden langt enklere og strengere formet med store vindusfelt.*

*Hovedfasaden er mer symmetrisk men asymmetri er likevel benyttet, noe jugendstilen gjorde bruk av for å skape liv og variasjoner. De grunne karnappene og fasadeutspringene forsterker bygningskroppens sluttete form. Hovedinngangen ligger på bygningens nordside og danner dens hovedmotiv. Den ligger asymmetrisk plassert, innrammet av granittsøyler og overdekket av en flott for-*

## Architect competition

Olsen invited the city's leading architects to enter a design competition for his new house. Bull's proposal was probably closest to Olsen's wishes and ambitions, but still required adjustment. Bull's draft was the most modern of the proposals, somewhat compact in form and with touches of Neo-Baroque style.

The building was to be placed on a rise on the large property, offering maximum sunlight, a good view, axial placing and terraces extending to Bygdøy allé. Bull wanted



Facing pair of buck goats.

Photo by Kristina Borås (2012)

the building to be understood in connection with its gardens, to give a complete interplay between architecture and nature. He blended the house, gardens, rooflines, and trees into a unified whole. In the design process, Bull made numerous simplifications, including giving more emphasis to the main body of the building.

## The exterior

The building's southern exterior is characterized by its symmetry with the garden. It is split up by bay windows, balconies and a loggia. Each wing has covered terraces, a practical solution that can also be seen as a nod to nature. The northern façade is much simpler and stricter in design, with big windows.

The main façade uses the asymmetry associated with the Art Nouveau style to make the design more alive and varied. The shallow bay windows and protrusions from the façade underscore the closed shape of the body of the building. The front door is placed asymmetrically, framed by granite columns and covered by a beautifully shaped glass canopy, creating a gracious entrance.

The roof is exceptionally beautiful, with gently curved shapes and flat, glazed black roofing tiles. It is two stories high, which is typical for a mansard, sometimes called a French Roof, with a narrower roof surface on top and a broader angle on the lower section to allow greater use of the loft area. The roof type was named after the French architect François Mansard (1598-1666).

Three chimneys rise from the roof, which is topped with an ornately decorated copper roof ridge cap. This is a continuation of 19th century wrought iron ornamentation, but in Art Nouveau style. As decoration, pairs of buck goats face off against each other to test their strength. Goats are a traditional symbol of fertility and wealth.

met glassbaldakin. Her overlates det ingenting til tilfeldighetene og enhver gjest vil forstå hvor entreen er.

Taket er et kapittel for seg. Det er usedvanlig flott med lette buete former og sortglasserte flate taksten. Taket er i to etasjer slik som er typisk for mansardtaket hvor øvre del har en slakere takflate og nedre tak har en brattere vinkel slik at loftetasjen kunne utnyttes bedre. Denne taktypen er oppkalt etter den franske arkitekten François Mansard (1598- 1666).

Helt øverst på taket troner det tre piper med en flott dekorert mønekam i kopper. Dette er en videreføring av 1800-tallets smijernsornamentikk, men i jugendstil. Som dekorasjon stanger parvise geitebukker mot hverandre og måler krefter. Geitene har tradisjonelt blitt brukt som symbol for fruktbarhet og rikdom. Men i denne sammenheng er det mer fristende å tolke dem som et uttrykk for styrke og mot. Hvilket også kunne komme godt med for byggherrens fremtidige engasjementer og prosjekter. Geitene er brukt som dekorative motiver flere steder på fasadene også. For øvrig har Henrik Bull benyttet parstilte dyremotiver som fisk, duer og påfugler med mer flere andre steder i bygningen.

Midt på taket troner den største pipen med et timeglass som blir holdt av to engler eller asketer. Dette kan være ment som en påminnelse om livets forgjengelighet og om måtehold. Måtehold er et puritansk uttrykk for at den tiden som er tildelt mennesket ikke skal skusles bort på utsvelvelser og fjas.

I midtpartiet på fasaden mot hagen er det plassert et flott relieff i granitt med to puttier som holder hver sin rosegren og med en stor vase med roser midt i mellom. Puttiene er ofte brukt som symbol for uskyld og renhet, mens rosenes betydning kan kanskje hentyde til kjærlighet, respekt og trofasthet. Henrik Bull har for øvrig også lagt inn flere referanser til den klassiske arkitekturen ved

bruk av kuleformer eller sfærer som bilde på det fullkomne og evigvarende.



Photo by Kristina Borås (2012)

Putti holding roses.

Bruken av symboler var typisk for jugendstilen, de var ofte ment som noe mer enn rene dekorasjoner. De kunne gjerne knyttes til byggets funksjon og byggherrens yrke og ambisjoner.

Vindusutformingen er også vanlig for perioden. I fasaden mot haven har vinduene småruter i toppen og store rektangulære hovedfelt under. Vindusfeltet mot nord har mer preg av vertikalitet. De binder interiørene sammen til et hele og forsyner både trapperom og hallen med lys. Lyset ble brukt til å skape gjennomskinnelighet og atmosfære i interiørene.

## Interiørene

Interiørene er et kapittel for seg, og bærer preg av gjennomtenkte løsninger og stor variasjon. De speiler Henrik Bull

In this case, it might be tempting to interpret them as a symbol of strength and courage when looking at the owner's future projects. Goats are also used in decoration on parts of the façade, as are other animals in pairs, including fish, pigeons and peacocks.

The largest chimney towers over the middle of the roof. It is decorated by an hourglass held by two angels or ascetics. This could be intended as a reminder of a life's transience and of moderation. 'Moderation' is a puritanical expression for not squandering one's allotted time on debauchery and frivolity.

The rear exterior wall facing the garden features a wonderful carved granite relief with two putti, sometimes confused with cherubs, each holding a rose stem, with a large vase of roses between them. The putti are often used as a symbol of innocence and purity, while roses can represent love, respect and faithfulness. Bull also included references to classical architecture by using ball or sphere forms as images of perfection and the eternal. The use of symbols was typical of Art Nouveau, and was often intended as more than simple decoration, such as by being linked to the building's function and its owner's profession and ambitions.

The window design is also typical of the period. In the facade facing the garden, the windows have small panes at the top and large, rectangular panes at the bottom. The windows facing north have a more vertical character, and tie the whole interior together, providing both the stairway and the hall with light. That light was also used to create an air of transparency and ambiance in the interior.

## The interior

The interior is a story in itself, reflecting Bull's wide and diverse experience as an architect. The main hall is the focus of the building. In a draft design painted as a watercolor, Bull showed the hall as a high-ceilinged room with a large fireplace, wainscot panel walls and delightful Art Nouveau details. Bull was an award-winning furniture designer, but the interior featured not only pieces that he designed but also Baroque pieces that Olsen and his wife may have brought home from Russia to use in their new home. The hall was intended as a welcoming area, and possibly a smoking lounge. The initial design was subsequently revised. The final design gave the room a more severe character, without the clear Art Nouveau expression of the earlier drafts. The entire ground floor of Villa Otium was primarily devoted to entertaining, with dining room, salons, men's lounges and a library. The second floor was designed with bedrooms and private areas, as was the norm for great houses of the time.

According to the late Norwegian Art Nouveau specialist Stephan Tschudi-Madsen (1923-2007), who once interviewed Bull, the architect designed features of the interior decor. The ceiling in the main salon has organic patterns associated with the Art Nouveau, while the dining room ceiling has a much more geometrical pattern. Despite variations within, the building represents a complete Art Nouveau work, with evident international roots linked to the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Scotland and the German and Austrian Jugendstil.

In 1923, Olsen and his wife sold the property to the United States government and in 1924 they moved to Stockholm.

The residence has been in the best of hands since, and practically all the key interior and exterior details are intact. The 100-year-old is in good shape, and, with its current owner, it is ready for another hundred years.



Petit salon ceiling details

Photo by Phillip Stattery (2012)

som en erfaren arkitekt hvor hallen har en sentral funksjon i bygningen. I et utkast som er malt som en akvarell viser han hallen som et høyloftet rom med en stor peis, kassettformede brystningspaneler og flotte jugendstildetaljer i interiørene. Bull var en prisbelønnet møbeldesigner, men her kan det se ut som at han kombinerte eget design og barokke møbler. Det kan hende Hans Olsen og konen brakte med seg møbler fra deres tidligere hjem i Russland som de også ønsket å møblere med. Hallen var nok ment som et velkomstrom og mulig røkeværelse. Den endelige løsningen ga hallen en langt strengere karakter, uten det klare jugendstiluttrykket som utkastet viser. Hele Villa Otiums første etasje var i hovedsak tilrettelagt for representative funksjoner med spisestue, salonger, herreværelse og bibliotek. I annen etasje ble det tilrettelagt med soveværelser og private rom, på mange måter slik konvensjonene var for de gamle herregårder og slott.

Interiørene i villaen speiler arkitektens bredde og erfaringer hvor han kombinerer jugendstilen med andre stilarter som f. eks i takstukkaturene i hovedsalongen. Her er det mer organiske jugendinnslag, mens vi i spisestuen finner en langt mer geometrisk takstukkatur. Bygningen kan til tross for variasjoner betegnes som et helhetlig stykke ju-

gendarkitektur med internasjonale røtter, hvor arkitekten har høstet inspirasjon fra både Charles Rennie Mackintosh i Skottland og tysk og østerriksk jugendstil. I henhold til den norske Art Nouveau-eksperten Stephan Tschudi-Madsen (1923-2007) som intervjuet Henrik Bull, skal arkitekten også ha tegnet deler av inventaret til bygningen.

I 1923 solgte Olsen og hans kone eiendommen til den amerikanske regjering og i 1924 flyttet de til Stockholm.

Eiendommen har vært i de beste hender siden, og tilnærmet alle viktige detaljer er intakte så vel i eksteriører som i interiører. 100-åringen er i god form og med dagens eier er den klar for hundre nye år.



Dining room ceiling details.

Photo by Phillip Stattery (2012)



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Petit salon.



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Façade detail.



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Detail from the "winter garden".



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Top of the stairway railing, in the private quarters on 3rd floor.



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Detail over door in the 2nd floor private quarters.



Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)

Main entrance glass canopy, view from below.



*Dentil molding under roof (from terrace).*

*Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)*



*Detail of roof with attic window.*

*Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)*



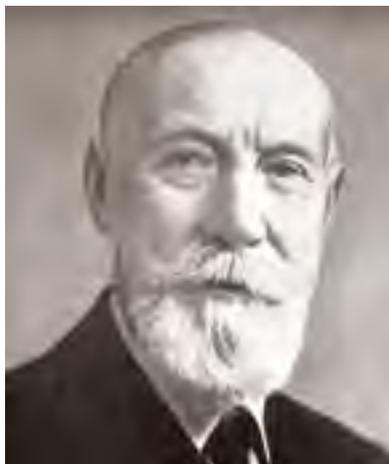
*View of northern windows. Main entrance to the right, kitchen entrance to the left.*

*Photo by Phillip Slattery (2012)*

## Rich on Russian oil, and powerfully engaged: Mina and Hans Olsen, builders of Villa Otium

By Hans Christian Erlandsen

“Villa Otium” at Nobels gate 28 is owned by the United States as the residence for the country’s ambassador to Norway. But it was Hans Olsen, born in Drammen, Norway, who built the home with a fortune he amassed selling Russian oil. Business ties and his marriage to Ester Wilhelmina (“Mina”) Nobel brought him close to the renowned Nobel family. Hans Olsen was given major diplomatic tasks for the young nation, and played a prominent role in Norwegian business life.<sup>1</sup>



Courtesy of Hydro

spending his free time among the Scandinavians in St. Petersburg, Olsen got to know Carl Nobel, who took him home to the family. Carl’s father, Ludvig Nobel, headed a fast-growing company that produced, transported and traded oil and oil products from Baku on the Caspian Sea. Dynamite king Alfred Nobel was Ludvig’s brother and a crucial adviser when his nephews, led by Carl’s big brother Emanuel, took over the company after Ludvig Nobel’s death.

In 1893 Hans Olsen accepted a board seat in the Nobel Brothers oil firm, known in Russia as *Tovarischestvo Brat’ev Nobel*. After serving as alternate director for the company directors one summer in 1895, it was expected that Hans Olsen would join permanently and run all the sales, both domestic and international. He accepted that, too. The Nobel firm was a key player in the oil markets of Russia and Europe as a whole. It built oil tankers before anyone else and owned storage facilities and thousands of railroad cars in addition to producing oil. Russia was industrializing rapidly and needed huge amounts of energy.

In the world of European oil, Hans Olsen quickly achieved a central position. He had talent and a winning personality. Others knew that they could trust the Norwegian, even as an opponent.

By the turn of the century the world’s leading oil company was the Rockefeller family’s Standard Oil, but the next tier featured the Nobel Brothers. As the head of sales, Hans

Hans Andreas Nikolai Olsen was born on October 23, 1859. His father, Ole Olsen, was a busy furrier in Drammen with both work ethic and a systematic nature, both qualities Hans Olsen believed he had inherited. The boy’s mother died when he was only six, the father when he was 15. After graduating from business secondary school in Kristiania—as Oslo was then called—Hans Olsen became assistant to a shipping agent in Kronstadt, a port near St. Petersburg, Russia. This was in 1880, when most Norwegians with wanderlust looked to America. Hans Olsen belonged to the minority that went the opposite way.

### Into the oil industry

Energetic as he was, Russia suited the young man well. In 1888 (with capital from Drammens Sparebank) he set up his own firm in the lumber business, importing among other goods oak barrels from the United States. While

## Rike på russisk olje og med et sterkt engasjement: Mina og Hans Olsen bygget Villa Otium

Av Hans Christian Erlandsen

“Villa Otium” i Nobels gate 28 eies av USA og er bolig for landets ambassadør til Norge. Men det var Hans Olsen, født i Drammen og med en formue bygget på salg av russisk olje, som fikk bygget boligen. Økonomisk og gjennom sin hustru Ester Wilhelmina “Mina” var han tett knyttet til Nobel-familien. Hans Olsen fikk vesentlige diplomatiske oppgaver for det unge Norge og var i sin tid en sentral aktør i norsk næringsliv.<sup>1</sup>

Hans Andreas Nikolai ble født 23. oktober 1859. Faren Ole Olsen var en energisk, flittig buntmaker i Drammen, et arbeidsjern og ordensmenneske Hans Olsen mente han hadde arvet mye fra. Moren døde da Hans bare var seks, faren gikk bort da han var 15. Etter eksamen fra Handelsgymnasiet i Kristiania fikk han i 1880 arbeid hos en skipsagent i Kronstadt, havnebyen utenfor St. Petersburg i Russland. På den tiden dro de fleste nordmenn med utferdstrang til Amerika. Hans Olsen tilhørte mindretallet som dro motsatt vei.

### Inn i oljeindustrien

Som den arbeidsomme mannen han var gikk det ham godt i Russland. I 1888 kunne han (med kapital fra Drammens Sparebank) etablere eget firma i trelastbransjen. Blant annet importerte han tønner fra USA. Fritiden tilbrakte han i St. Petersburgs skandinaviske miljø. Der ble han kjent med Carl Nobel, som trakk ham hjem til familien. Carls far Ludvig Nobel ledet et sterkt voksende selskap som produserte, transporterte og forhandlet olje og oljeprodukter utvunnet i Baku ved det Kaspiske hav. Dynamittkongen Alfred Nobel var bror av Ludvig og en sentral rådgiver da nevøene, ledet av eldstebror Emmanuel, overtok selskapet etter farens død.

Hans Olsen aksepterte i 1893 en stilling som styremedlem i oljeselskapet *Brødrene Nobe*—på russisk *Tovarisjtjevstvo Bratiev Nobel*. Etter noen måneder som sommervikar for direktørene i 1895, ved siden av egen forretning, ble det forventet at Hans Olsen gikk inn i selskapet i fast stilling med ansvar for alt salg, innenlands som utenlands. Han aksepterte. Nobel-selskapet var nå en av de sentrale aktører i oljemarkedet, både i Russland og Europa ellers. Selskapet bygget oljetankere før noen annen og eide en lang rekke oljelagre og tusenvis av jernbanevogner. Dette var en periode med en enorm industrialisering i Russland, dette krevde energi.

Hans Olsen opparbeidet seg raskt en sentral posisjon i den europeiske oljeverden. Nordmannen var svært dyktig og hadde en vinnende personlighet. Olsen kunne man stole på, enten man var med-eller motspiller.

Ved århundreskiftet var Rockefeller-familiens Standard Oil bransjens verdensledende, men på neste nivå fant man Brødrene Nobel. Som ansvarlig for salg reiste Hans Olsen ustoppelig og forhandlet allianser, sloss i priskriger og bygget distribusjonsselskaper. Blant annet sto han i 1905 bak etableringen av British Petroleum (BP), som utviklet seg til den nest største distributøren på de britiske øyer, etter Standard Oil.

### Love story

Emmanuels eldre søster Mina (Ester Wilhelmina) fant raskt tonen med Hans Olsen, alt før han forretningsmessig ble involvert med familien. Hans syntes kjærligheten til henne var vanskelig å håndtere, men en dag i 1896 skrev

Olsen was unstoppable; he negotiated alliances, fought price wars and built distribution companies. In 1905 he was behind the establishment of British Petroleum (BP), which would become the second largest distributor in the British Isles, after Standard Oil.

### Love story

Emanuel's older sister Mina (Ester Wilhelmina) hit it off with Hans Olsen, even before he became involved in the family business. In 1896 he wrote a letter to her mother, Edla, and explained his feelings—which had been plain enough to all—and wondered if he might ask for Mina's hand in marriage. Edla wrote quickly back: Come and pick up your answer! The wedding took place in 1897.

### Diplomat for Norway

Hans Olsen did not support Norwegian independence from Sweden, but the two countries dissolved their union in 1905. The next year he was called on to be Norway's Consul General in St. Petersburg. He hesitated, believing that he had neither time nor energy for the position. But eventually he gave in and accepted the prestigious, unpaid posting.

The Swedish consulate handed over to him the tasks it had performed for Norwegian interests in Russia. To fulfil his consular duties, Olsen hired a man at his own expense and provided him with an office and residence. Norway's new consulate opened well before the spring shipping traffic to St. Petersburg resumed in 1906. For the rest of his life, he would be addressed as "Consul General H. Olsen."

### Oil diplomat

In the extensive negotiations over oil sales to Europe at this time, Hans Olsen bargained alone while the other companies often fielded delegations of 30 to 40. Emanuel

received two daily reports from his brother-in-law, one written before lunch and one after.

One daring idea Hans Olsen had was to merge Nobel Brothers with Standard Oil. In 1903 he took the initiative and opened talks, and a valuation of the Russian company followed. Payment was to be made in Standard Oil shares in the event of a deal. But the talks came undone when the appraisal showed the Nobels would end up owning too much of the American company.

All the work and travel wore Hans Olsen out, in part because he suffered from difficulty sleeping. The solution as he saw it was to step back and wind down. In the summer of 1908 he moved from St. Petersburg to Kristiania with Mina and their three children: Alf, Edla and Leif.

### To Kristiania

They hired a cargo vessel, the *Aegir*, to carry their household goods between the two capitals. The most basic items were delivered straight to Drammensveien 49, where the family was to stay at first. The rest went to the newly purchased Otium property on Nobels gate. At Otium stood a group of run-down structures—a one-and-a-half-story main house and two outbuildings. To the north was Solheimgata, with Nobels gate to the east, Bygdøy allé to the south and Kristinelundveien to the west. Old photos show the lot being used for vegetable production before the sale. Olsen himself declared that the property had been bought for seven Norwegian kroner a square meter. Ester Wilhelmina Nobel Olsen was formally identified as its owner. Mina had cashed in Nobel shares for a million Norwegian kroner, and the couple's estate was worth nearly five million in the currency of the day.

We do not know if the family saw irony in its ultimate destination: Nobels gate. In Kristiania, Hans Olsen went by the nickname "Nobel-Olsen."<sup>2</sup>

*han et brev til Minas mor Edla, der han fortalte om sine følelser (alle visste om forholdet) og om han kunne be om Minas hånd? Edla skrev kjapt tilbake: Kom og hent svaret! Bryllupet sto i 1897.*

### Diplomat for Norge

*Hans Olsen var ingen tilhenger av å oppløse unionen mellom Norge og Sverige i 1905. I 1906 ble han kalt til vervet som norsk generalkonsul i St. Petersburg. Den utpekte vegret seg, han følte at han hverken hadde tid eller krefter. Tilslutt ga han opp og aksepterte det ærefulle men ulønnede vervet.*

*De oppgaver det svenske konsulatet hadde utført for norske interesser ble skilt ut og overført. Konsulatoppgavene medførte at Hans Olsen for egen regning ansatte en mann til dette, samt sørget for kontor og bolig. Det nye norske konsulatet ble åpnet i god tid før skipstrafikken til St. Petersburg kom i gang våren 1906. Fra da av og resten av livet var han "generalkonsul H. Olsen."*

### Oljediplomat

*I de omfattende forhandlingene om oljesalg til Europa på denne tiden forhandlet Hans Olsen alene, mens de andre selskapene gjerne hadde delegasjoner på 30—40 mann. Emmanuel fikk hver dag to rapporter fra sin svoger, en skrevet før lunch og en etter.*

*En kongstanke Hans Olsen hadde var å forene Nobel-selskapet med Standard Oil. I 1903 tok han initiativ til forhandlinger. De medførte at det russiske selskapet skulle verdsettes og betalingen eventuelt skje med aksjer i Standard Oil. Men da verdvurderingen forelå falt det hele på at Nobel-familien ville blitt en for stor eier i det amerikanske selskapet.*

*Alt arbeidet og alle reisene slet Hans Olsen ut, ikke minst fordi han fikk søvnproblemer. Løsningen var å trappe ned. Hans Olsen og familien flyttet sommeren 1908 fra St Petersburg til Kristiania. Med var—foruten Mina—barna Alf, Edla og Leif.*

### Til Kristiania



Photo before 1908 courtesy of Oslo Museum

*Before the Olsen family bought the property, a large part of the Otium land was used for vegetable production.*

*En egen fraktebåt, Ægir, var innleid for ta flyttelasset mellom de to hovedstedene. Vel fremme ble det familien umiddelbart hadde behov for fraktet til Drammensveien 49, der man skulle bo den første tiden. Resten ble sendt til den nyinnkjøpte eiendommen Otium i Nobels gate. På Otium sto en gruppe slitne bygninger, et hovedhus på en og halv etasje og to uthus. Eiendommen lå mellom Solheimgaten i nord, Nobels gate i øst, Bygdøy allé i syd og Kristinelundveien i vest. Gamle bilder viser at den store tomten helt oppunder salget ble brukt til grønnsakproduksjon. Olsen oppgir selv at eiendommen ble kjøpt for*

Hans Olsen deeply enjoyed being away from the Nobel company's daily operations, but he was no idler. In addition to managing his own family's money he looked after the Nobel family's interests in foreign companies.

Living in Kristiania was more expensive than in St. Petersburg. In Russia everything was tax free. In Norway the Olsen family paid the tax collector a goodly sum—40,000 Norwegian kroner those first years. Hans Olsen claimed later that if he had known what it would cost to live in Norway he would never have left Russia. The family quickly became part of the capital's "Upper Ten," as he called the elite. While preparing for the move during a visit to Kristiania in 1906, he was invited to talks with Prime Minister Christian Michelsen and Foreign Minister Jørgen Løvland. On September 26, 1906, King Haakon VII received Olsen at the Royal Palace.

Enrollment in the "Upper Ten" came with obligations. The young nation needed money for just about everything. Often it was raised by way of subscriptions, with the most prosperous citizens contributing large sums. Hans Olsen sat on the collection committee for the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, so there was no avoiding a 10,000 Norwegian kroner gift to that cause. Then there was the University of Oslo's Aula auditorium, which Edvard Munch would later decorate. That meant another 10,000 Norwegian kroner, with new subscriptions always in the making. But when he was asked to provide a large amount toward a new City Hall, he said no. A wise move, perhaps, considering it took decades to realize the project.

A neighbour on Drammensveien turned out to be Norsk Hydro founder Sam Eyde and his Swedish wife. The two families spent lots of private time together in those early days. The men joined business forces in 1910 after Marcus Wallenberg picked Olsen for the Norsk Hydro board. He and Eyde invested large amounts in Hydro and other enterprises.

## Otium rising

"The Otium project cost a great deal of frustration and hard work," Hans Olsen said later. It caused him to fall out with the architect, Henrik Bull.

The budget was shattered, too—850,000 Norwegian kroner was more than the Olsens had intended to spend, though that price included a park with a water-lily pond and tennis court. According to the National Registry, the family moved in on April 29, 1912.

Did Villa Otium echo with laughter as Hans Olsen frolicked with the children? Did he play soccer with his sons in the vast yard? According to Edla, his daughter, that's not the way it was. In 1980 she recalled that the father did play with her when she was small. But as she and her brothers grew, Hans Olsen considered it his duty to be strict. No play, no expressions of loving care. Walking home from school, Edla would go out of her way to avoid streets where she might meet him, since she didn't fancy his interrogations about her day at school.<sup>3</sup>

## Mina Nobel

It was the children's mother, for the most part, who took care of them. Mina Nobel Olsen was an active woman with wide-ranging enthusiasm.

In the summer of 1912, right after the move, she arranged gardening courses for children, hers included. Every afternoon but Saturday, young friends of the family and other children from the city's public and private schools were welcome to tend their own "good-sized" patches of earth at Villa Otium with skilled guidance. The children dug and fertilized, planted and weeded. All they had to bring was a big work apron.

*syv kroner per kvadratmeter. Formelt sto Ester Wilhelmina Nobel Olsen som eier. Det var en formuende familie som flyttet til Norge. Mina hadde realisert Nobel-aksjer for en million kroner. Tilsammen hadde ekteparet en formue på nærmere fem millioner, i datidens kroneverdi.*

*Vi vet ikke om familien så ironien i at de etter en byggeperiode skulle flytte til Nobels gate. I Kristiania gikk Hans Olsen gjerne under navnet Nobel-Olsen.<sup>2</sup>*

*Hans Olsen nøt i lange drag ikke å være involvert i Nobel-selskapets daglige drift. Arbeidsledig var han likevel ikke. Foruten å forvalte familiens penger hadde han som oppgave å se etter Nobel-familiens interesser i utenlandske selskaper.*

*Å bo i Kristiania var dyrere enn i St Petersburg. I Russland var alt skattefritt. I Norge betalte Olsen-familien årlig en klekkelig sum til skattefuten, de første årene etter ankomsten 40 000 kroner. Hans Olsen hevdet senere at hadde han visst hva det ville koste å bo i Norge, hadde han ikke flyttet. Familien ble raskt inkludert i byens "upper ten", som han selv formulerte det; da han i 1906 forberedte flyttingen med et besøk i Kristiania, ble han invitert til samtaler med statsminister Chr. Michelsen og utenriksminister Jørgen Løvland. Kong Haakon VII tok 26. september 1906 imot på slottet.*

*Å være blant "upper ten" forpliktet. Den unge nasjonen hadde behov for penger til det meste. Ofte ble midlene innsamlet ved bruk av lister, der de mest velhavende bidro med store summer. Hans Olsen satt i innsamlingskomiteen for Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, og kunne ikke godt unnså seg å gi 10 000 kroner. Så var det Universitetets Aula, som Edvard Munch senere dekorerte. Nye 10 000, og stadig nye lister. Men da han også ble bedt om å gi et større beløp til et nytt rådhus i Oslo, sa han nei. Kanskje ikke så dumt, for det prosjektet tok det tiår å få realisert.*

*En nabo i Drammensveien viste seg å være Norsk Hydro-grunnlegger Sam Eyde og hans daværende svenske kone. De to familiene hadde den første tiden mye privat omgang. Forretningsmessig ble Hans Olsen sterkt involvert med Eyde da Marcus Wallenberg i 1910 fikk ham inn i styret for Norsk Hydro. Her og i andre industriprosjekter investerte Eyde og Olsen store summer.*

## Otium bygges

*– Arbeidet med Otium kostet mange ergrelser og mye arbeid, fortalte Hans Olsen senere. Han røk uklar med arkitekten, Henrik Bull.*

*Budsjettet ble også sprengt, 850 000 kroner var mer enn ekteparet hadde tenkt seg. Selv om summen inkluderte parkanlegget, med liljedam og tennisbane. Familien flyttet inn 29. april, 1912.*

*Gjenlød Villa Otium av glad barnelatter når Hans Olsen lekte med barna? Spilte han fotball med sine sønner i den store hagen? Ifølge datteren Edla var det ikke slik den gang. Hun fortalte i 1980 at faren lekte med henne når hun var liten. Men da hun og brødrene vokste til, så Hans Olsen det som en plikt å oppdra sine barn strengt. Ingen lek, ingen uttrykk for kjærlig omsorg. Når hun var på vei hjem etter skolen tok hun andre gater enn faren, om hun ante at hun kunne treffe på ham. Hun ville helst slippe de strenge eksaminasjonene om hvordan skoledagen hadde vært.<sup>3</sup>*

## Mina Nobel

*Det var helst moren som tok seg av barna. Mina Nobel Olsen var en aktiv dame som engasjerte seg bredt.*

*Sommeren 1912, rett etter innflyttingen, arrangerte hun hagebrukskurs for barn, sine egne inkludert. Venner og venninner, samt barn fra byens skoler, folkeskoler som*

Then came the harvest. As newspaper *Aftenposten* reported in September 1912: “It is during these days that the children return home loaded with a rich harvest of delightful flowers, large cabbage heads and vegetables of all kinds.”<sup>4</sup>

The major flower show at Frogner in the summer of 1914 featured only two private exhibitors. There was the stately Skaugum farm, later a royal estate, and there was Mina Olsen. She showed off “beautiful collections of cut Georginas and perennials.”<sup>5</sup> Otium had its own gardener. That year his name was Carlsson. At a different garden show in the autumn, at Sangerhallen, he drew praise for “well developed” chrysanthemums.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the gardening, Mina Olsen bred dachshunds.

She also threw herself into “good works in grand style”, as *Aftenposten* wrote on the occasion of her death. Two of her passions were orphanages and homes for the elderly. After the Russian revolution she made provision for its refugees, especially the young. Mrs. Olsen also chaired the board of a “children’s crèche” on Fosseveien, east of the Aker River. It had room for 12 infants, but in 1913 the board worked to expand its capacity to 20. One money-raising effort was a garden party at Villa Otium. For four Norwegian kroner, the “delightful garden on Nobels gate” could be visited from 5 to 7 p.m. on Saturday, May 31. Tea and other refreshments were served to orchestra music. For weeks in advance, Mrs. Olsen answered the door between 10 a.m. and noon to sell tickets.

### Hans Olsen

After the homecoming Hans Olsen was elected to Kristiania’s city council, for the Conservatives. However, he preferred to make up his own mind on issues, unbound by party views. As a result he had little patience for the long debates that he considered a bore.

“When the matter was ripe to be voted on and settled, that’s when the political organ grinding started up, far and wide,” he complained. At such times he found serving on the sanitary and port authority boards more rewarding. He stuck with them even after turning down re-election to the council after one term.

The rise of the socialists in politics frightened him, but he respected and got on well with the Labour Party’s council representatives.

### World war and negotiations

The year 1914 was supposed to be celebratory for Norway, marking a century since the signing of the constitution and the tenth year as an independent nation. A jubilee on the banks of Frogner Creek, just north of the Villa Otium gate, reminded Norwegians of what their country was all about. The grand exhibition symbolized the optimism then prevalent, and the eagerness to take on big new ideas. Norway’s economy was beginning to take off after difficult years of stagnation and crisis.

Alas, World War I soon arrived. In 1915, Foreign Minister Nils Claus Ihlen asked Hans Olsen to negotiate a supply agreement with the British government for the import of strategic industrial goods to Norway. By then, the government in London had seized BP as enemy property, even though the Nobel family and the Rothschilds of Paris owned respectively 30 percent and 20 percent of it. The other half was owned by Deutsche Bank. On a seven-week trip to London, Hans Olsen spent some of his time trying to negotiate compensation for his family’s BP stake.

Though he achieved a preliminary supply agreement, the British government later rejected it. On the BP matter Olsen got nowhere. The company was transferred to Anglo Persian, which had discovered oil in Iran and needed a

*private, fikk hver ettermiddag (unntatt lørdag) komme til Villa Otium og under kyndig veiledning stelle hvert sitt “temmelig store” stykke jord. Barna spadde og gjødslet, plantet og lukte. Det eneste de måtte ha med var et stort arbeidsforklede, resten fikk de. Så ble det høstningstid:*

*– Nu i disse dager vender børnene hver ettermiddag hjem belæsset med en rig høst af deilige blomster, vældige kaalhoder og grøntsager af alle mulige slags, ifølge Aftenposten.<sup>4</sup>*

*På den store blomsterutstillingen på Frogner i september 1914 var det bare to private utstillere. Foruten fra Skaugum gård var det Mina Nobel Olsen, som viste frem “pene samlinger med avskårne georginer og stauder”<sup>5</sup> Otium hadde en egen gartner. I 1914 het han Carlsson. På en annen hagebruksutstilling høsten 1914, i Sangerhallen, vakte han oppmerksomhet med “vel utviklede” krysantemumer.<sup>6</sup> I tillegg til hagen drev Mina Olsens oppdrett av dachshunder.*

*Mina Nobel Olsen engasjerte seg også i “godgjørenhet i stor stil”, som Aftenposten skrev da hun døde. Spesielt gamlehjem og barnehjem. Etter revolusjonen sørget hun også for flyktninger fra Russland, spesielt barna. Fru Olsen var formann i bestyrelsen for en “barnekrybbe” i Fossveien, øst for Akerselven. Her var det plass for 12 spedbarn, men i 1913 arbeidet styret for å utvide kapasiteten til 20. Et ledd i innsamlingen var en hagefest i Villa Otium. For fire kroner kunne man komme inn i “den deilige have i Nobelsgate” mellom klokken 5 og 7 lørdag 31. mai. Serveringen var te og forfriskninger, til orkestermusikk. Interesserte kunne i ukene forut ringe på hos fru Nobel-Olsen mellom 10 og 12, så kunne man hos henne kjøpe billetter.*

### Hans Olsen

*Hans Olsen ble etter hjemkomsten valgt inn i kommunestyret, for Høyre. Men han ville helst vurdere sakene selv,*

*ikke være bundet av et partisyn. Derfor hadde han lite til overs for de lange, og etter hans oppfatning, kjedelige debattene.*

*– Når saken var moden for votering og kunne avgjøres, så satte den politiske lirekassen i gang, vidt og bredt, ifølge ham. Da var det mer givende å delta i styrene for Renholdsvesenet og Havnevesenet. Her fortsatte han, også etter at han etter en periode frasa seg gjenvalg.*

*Sosialistenes fremmarsj på den politiske arena skremte ham, men han kom godt overens med og hadde respekt for Arbeiderpartiets representanter i kommunestyret.*

### Verdenskrig og forhandlinger

*1914 skulle være året hvor Norge var i fest. Det var 100 år siden Grunnloven ble innført og landet gikk inn i sitt 10. år som selvstendig nasjon. En storslagen jubileumsutstilling langs Frognerbekken markerte hva landet var godt for. Rett nord for portene til Villa Otium lå symbolet på at optimismen rådet i landet, at man var villig til å ta nye og store løft. Økonomien var kommet i gang, etter vanskelige år med stagnasjon og krise. Men så kom verdenskrigen.*

*I 1915 ble Hans Olsen av utenriksminister Nils Claus Ihlen bedt om å forhandle med den britiske regjering om en leveringsavtale for innsatsvarer til Norge, på vegne av norsk industri. Da hadde regjeringen i London beslaglagt BP som fiendtlig eiendom, selv om Nobel-familien og Rothschild-familien i Paris eide henholdsvis 30 og 20 prosent av selskapet. Den siste halvparten var eid av Deutsche Bank. På vegne av sin familie forsøkte Hans Olsen under et syv ukers opphold i London også å forhandle en kompensasjon for eierandelen i BP.*

*Det ble enighet om en leveringsavtale, men den ble senere ikke godtatt av den britiske regjering. I BP-spørsmålet*

distribution arm. Hans Olsen felt thoroughly cheated by the heads of Anglo Persian, who had told him they would be able to work out an agreement. The transfer gave their company access to BP's 520 sales outlets, 535 railroad cars, 1,102 vehicles, four barges and 650 horses.

### Sale to the United States

In the autumn of 1923 the Olsen family agreed to sell Villa Otium to the American Legation in Norway. As the registered owner, it was Ester Wilhelmina Nobel Olsen who made the sale. The children had moved out and the villa was too big for two. The \$125,000 sale price meant that Mina received (at the existing exchange rate of 7.50 to 1) 937,500 Norwegian kroner—about the same amount the

Olsens had invested in the property and buildings more than a decade earlier.<sup>7</sup>

After the sale Hans Olsen investigated tax policies in Sweden, and was surprised to find them advantageous. In August 1924 he and Mina moved to a large apartment on Strandvägen in Stockholm. Mina died in May 1929 at the age of 56, bringing a happy marriage to a close. Hans Olsen was 92 when he died in March 1951.

On his 60th birthday, the newspaper *Tidens Tegn* wrote of Hans Olsen:

“Herr Olsen had the good fortune as a young businessman to find outlets for his talent and energy in large arenas.”

*møtte Olsen veggen, ingen avtale. Selskapet ble overført til Anglo Persian, som hadde funnet olje i Iran og trengte et distribusjonsselskap. Hans Olsen mente seg grundig lurt av ledelsen i Anglo Persian, som overfor ham hevdet å kunne hjelpe til å få en avtale. Slik fikk dette selskapet tilgang til BPs 520 utsalgssteder, 535 jernbanevogner, 1 102 kjøretøy, fire lektere og 650 hester.*

### Salg og flytting

*Høsten 1923 inngikk familien en avtale med Den amerikanske legasjon om å selge Otium. Mina Nobel Olsen var den formelle eieren og den som solgte. Barna hadde flyttet hjemmefra, villaen var for stor for to. 125 000 dollar med en vekslingskurs den gang på kroner 7,50 innebar*

*at Ester Wilhelmina Olsen fikk tilsvarende 937 500 kroner. Omtrent i kroner hva de hadde investert i tomt og bygg vel 10 år tidligere.*<sup>7</sup>

*Etter salget undersøkte Hans Olsen skattebetingelsene i Sverige, og var overrasket da han fant dem fordelaktige. I august 1924 flyttet Mina og Hans Nobel til Stockholm, til en stor leilighet på Strandvägen. I mai 1929 døde Mina, 56 år gammel. Et lykkelig ekteskap var over. Hans Olsen var 92 år da han døde i mars 1951.*

*Tidens Tegn skrev da Hans Olsen fylte 60 år:*

*– Hr. Olsen hadde det hell som ung forretningsmann å få råderom for sin dyktighet og energi under store forhold.*

1. This article relies on a book-length manuscript about Hans Olsen written by Hans Christian Erlandsen. A central source for that work was Hans Olsen's own "recollections," an account he wrote for his family.

2. The legendary Oslo Mayor Rolf Stranger had once been the secretary of a national committee led by Hans Olsen. When Stranger in later years was asked by this author if he remembered "Hans Olsen," he first replied in the negative, but on receiving additional information said, "Ah, you mean Nobel-Olsen! Yes, of course I knew him well."

3. Hans Olsen could also show kindness and affection. One example: Peter Nobel is Hans Olsen's grandson, son of Leif Nobel. Peter lost his father in 1938, barely seven years old. He and his mother then moved in with Hans Olsen. Right after his father's death Peter wanted to write him a Christmas letter. Hans Olsen took the letter, put it in an envelope and wrote on the outside: "To Leif Nobel in heaven". With a stamp on he then put the letter in a blazing stove: "Now he gets your letter," said Hans Olsen.

4. *Aftenposten aften*, Sept. 9, 1912.

5. *Aftenposten aften*, Sept. 3, 1914.

6. *Aftenposten aften*, Oct. 7, 1914

7. A major part of the garden was not included. On the sale of Villa Otium, see article by architectural historian Jane C. Loeffler.

1. Denne artikkelen bygger på manuskript i boklengde om Hans Olsens liv, skrevet av Hans Christian Erlandsen. En sentral kilde her var Hans Olsens egne "livserindringer", en beretning han skrev for familien.

2. Den legendariske Oslo-ordfører Rolf Stranger var i sin tid sekretær for en nasjonal komité Hans Olsen ledet. Da Stranger på sine eldre dager ble spurt om han husket "Hans Olsen" svarte han benektende, men etter å ha fått flere opplysninger slo han fast "Ah, De mener Nobel-Olsen! Ja, ham kjente jeg godt."

3. "Hans Olsen hadde også kjærlig omsorg. Et eksempel: Peter Nobel er Hans Olsens barnebarn, sønn av Leif Nobel. Peter mistet sin far i 1938, knapt syv år gammel. Han og moren flyttet da inn hos Hans Olsen. Lille Peter ønsket rett etter farens død å skrive et julebrev til ham. Hans Olsen tok brevet, la det i en konvolutt og skrev utenpå: "Til Leif Nobel i himmelen". Så satte han frimerke på og la brevet i en flammende kakkelovn. "Nå får han ditt brev", sa Hans Olsen.

4. *Aftenposten aften*, 9. september 1912.

5. *Aftenposten aften*, 3. september 1914.

6. *Aftenposten aften*, 7. oktober 1914.

7. En større del av hagen var ikke inkludert i salget. Om salget av Villa Otium, se Jane C. Loefflers artikkel.

## Villa Otium – Grounded in Nature

By Kari Bergo, Østengen & Bergo AS Landskapsarkitekter MNLA

The garden around Villa Otium was designed to link the building with nature, to provide a tasteful, integrated background for the building's architecture. The overall aim was to create a property evoking the ancient otium, or "park meant for pleasure."

### The garden from 1911-1924



Plan 1912, Østengen & Bergo AS

Villa Otium was built in 1911 by Hans Andreas Olsen, a Norwegian Consul General in St. Petersburg, and his wife Ester, the niece of Alfred Nobel. Due to Olsen's business success and marriage, the family was able to settle down in one of the nicest neighborhoods of the city. They invited the city's leading architects to take part in an architectural competition for a new residence. Henrik Bull won the 1st prize and was commissioned to design the house and the garden

around it, with instructions to meld them into one unit. Together, the house and garden were a majestic sight, each strengthening the other.

The original site was much larger than what you see today. The formal garden was almost double the current size, and in addition, there was an English-style landscaped park to the west. The garden was botanically rich, with many exotic plants visiting the formal garden from the greenhouse. The formal garden was terraced, and close to the house there was a beautiful curved wall and slope as a major feature in the design. The square centerpiece in the lawn, as shown on the plan, was never built, however.

No proper detailed plan of the original garden has been found, but early photos show us the greenhouse, a well-maintained garden with exotic plants and a well-developed system of pathways. The whole park measured 38,479 m<sup>2</sup>.



The formal garden, approx. 1912. Note the exotic plants.



Photograph overlooking the formal garden towards the greenhouse. Approx. 1912.

### The garden from 1924-1941



Plan 1924, Østengen & Bergo AS.

In 1923, the Olsen family sold the property to the United States government. In order to lower the asking price, the Department of State acquired only a portion of the entire

park area. The garden was thus reduced to 13,854 m<sup>2</sup>, the same size as it is today. The Olsens later sold the remaining parkland for apartment development.

Historically, the garden was a counterpoise to the wilder landscape surrounding it, but today the building and the formal garden lack an English park for contrast. The greenhouse, located where the apartment buildings in Eckersbergs gate stand today, used to be the focal point of the formal garden. Cutting it off removed the focal point and diminished the artistic effect of the garden. In addition, several of the pathways turned into blind alleys, removing a logical reason to walk along them and also reducing the artistic impact.



Plan 1941, Østengen & Bergo AS.

### The garden today

The plan from 1941 shows the brutal way Eckersbergs street cut off the original design. Some pathways end up at a fence and much of the garden's botanical richness had disappeared, with the removal of the greenhouse. The beautiful but simple curved wall from Bull's design was

changed into a dull, more rectangular terrace wall in 1970, and the driveway in front of the house was expanded at some point to make room for more and larger cars.

Even though several of the original and most significant design elements have disappeared from the garden, the basic outline of Henrik Bull's landscape can be seen today. Villa Otium is a distinguished and majestic residence surrounded by mature trees and spacious garden areas, unusual in a dense urban area like Oslo, eminently worth preserving.



Site Survey shows existing situation 2007, illustrated by Østengen & Bergo AS

### Use of the garden today

Throughout the year, U.S. ambassadors host many events to bring Norwegians and Americans together. Everyone who visits the residence gets a good view of the garden from the house. When the weather is good the door to the terrace that leads out to the formal garden is open and the important connection between the house and garden becomes obvious to the visitor. It is difficult not to be impressed by the place as a whole.

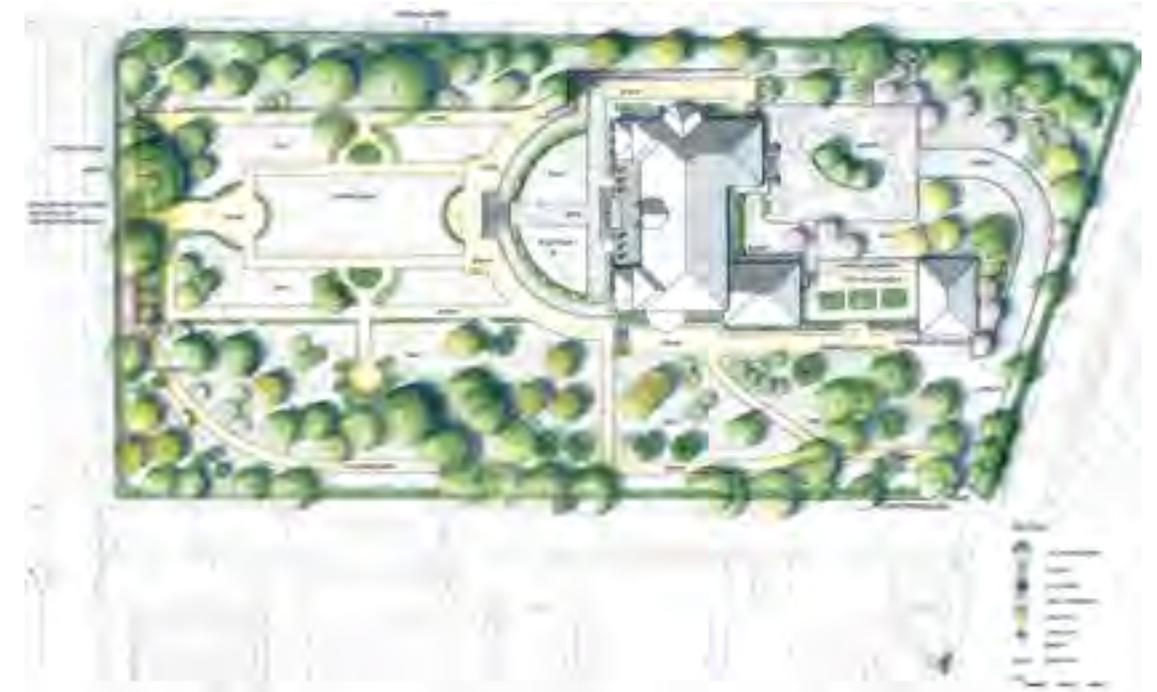
Today the garden's main event is usually the annual Independence Day celebration, to mark the 4th of July. More than a thousand people attend this event each year, filling the terrace and the formal garden with tents, food stands, conversations and warm feelings. This is the moment when the garden proves its worth, and repays all the care that has gone into it.

### The garden in the future

A new master plan for the site was created in 2008. The plan assessed the existing vegetation and measured it against the land use projected for the future. It called for extensive restoration and more functional land use, and it introduced an updated design for the formal garden, to make it more attractive again.

This plan is sensitive to the original landscape, but seeks to maximize the garden's functionality. It restores plants and paths where possible and incorporates new elements to reflect the new shape of the property and its use as the American ambassador's residence. The plan suggests that the formal garden could culminate in a green sculptural element- a pergola- with various subtly lit climbing plants, and sculptures and vistas to both sides. The plan makes the central axis appear less intrusive—more subtle and elegant. Restoring the garden will bring an interesting change to the area at the rear. There the intention is to give the garden a new focal point and better possibilities for circulation, so that the garden will be more attractive and interesting for visitors.

Ambassador Benson K. Whitney and his wife Mary initiated the project in 2007 and the plan was designed by the Norwegian landscape architects Østengen & Bergo AS in 2008.



The Master plan by Østengen & Bergo 2008

In 2009, the Courtyard in the front was restored in accordance with the master plan, marking an important step towards a modernized and carefully restored property. Trees have been planted on the property for Arbor Day since 2008, also in accordance with the plan, and the Embassy is committed to following the plan as funds allow and nature requires.

The landscape architects who drew up the new master plan determined that the garden needed a central feature with strong aesthetic character, that could act as a focal point for those experiencing the garden. By creating new, connected walking paths, removing barriers and introducing surprising elements, the garden's intensity could be reinforced, partially taking over the function of the rural park that surrounded the property earlier.



Perspective by Østengen & Bergo AS



*The Villa Otium garden in full bloom, summer 2011.*

*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*



*Winter, 1985.*

*Picture courtesy of May-Britt Ivarson.*



*Garden path.*

*Photo courtesy Bureau of Overseas Building Operations*



*Villa Otium garden before improvements.*

*Photo courtesy Bureau of Overseas Building Operations*



Photo courtesy William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

Ambassador David B. Hermelin invited then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, President Bill Clinton and Yasir Arafat over for kosher hot dogs. They were all in Oslo for a commemoration ceremony of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in 1999.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Former Vice President Al Gore, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2007, at a luncheon at the Ambassador's residence honoring the Nobel Peace Prize winners.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Ambassador Benson K. Whitney and Mrs. Mary Whitney with three of their four children, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the residence in 2007.



Photo courtesy of George Bush Presidential Library and Museum.

*Then Vice President and Mrs. Bush hosted a dinner at the residence in June 1983. Here Vice President Bush with then Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the late Svenn Stray.*



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

*Former President Jimmy Carter with then Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik and then Norwegian Ambassador to the United States Knut Vollebæk at a reception in 2005.*



Photo by Kristina Bornaas

*Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with Ambassador Barry B. White and Mrs. Eleanor G. White, at the residence on June 1, 2012.*



Photo by NTB scampix.

Then Prince Harald honored by a group of Native Americans at Villa Otium in 1953.



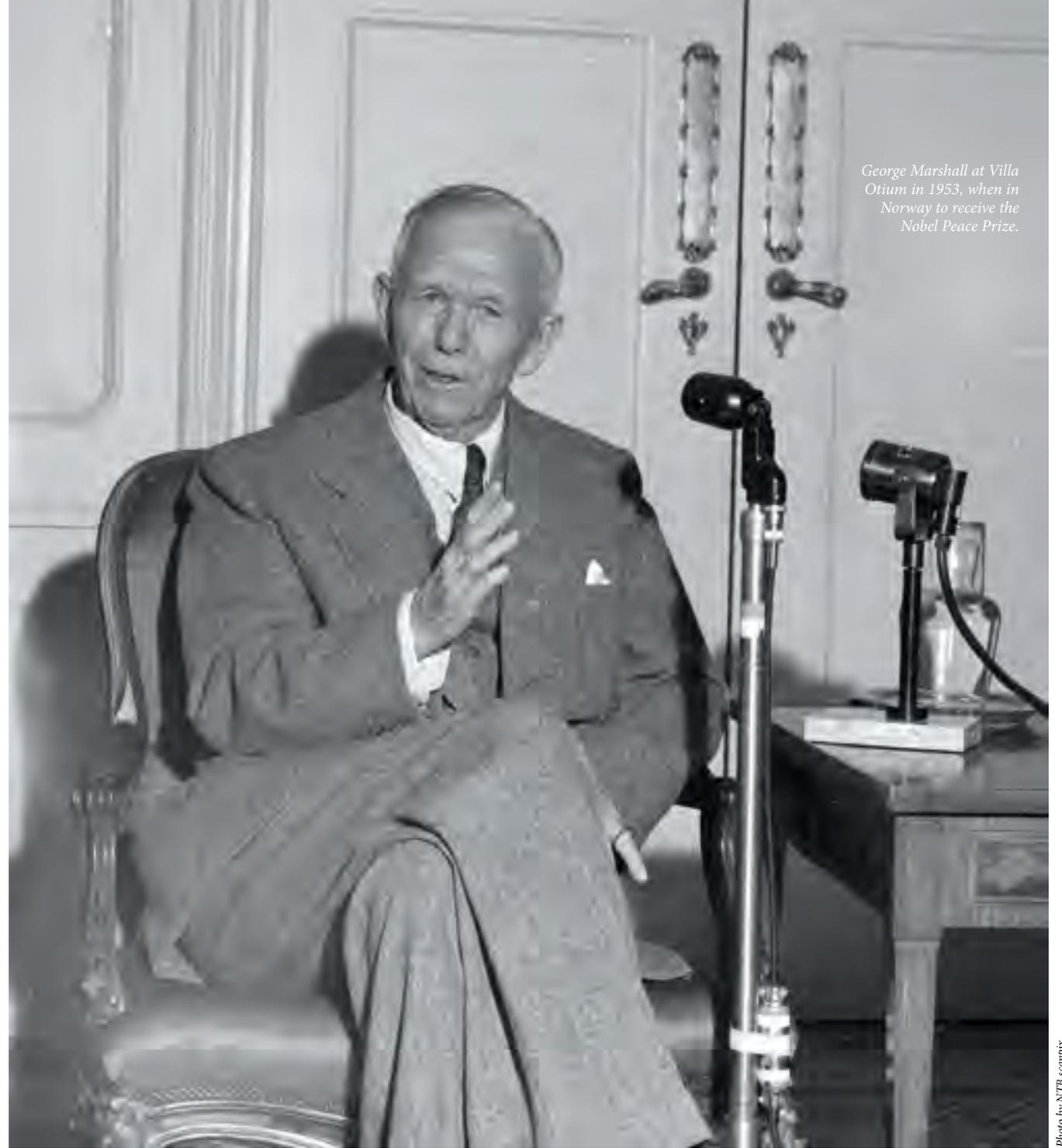
Photo courtesy of May-Britt Ivarson.

Ambassador Mark Evans Austad with Sammy Davis Jr. (hugging a fan), 1982.



Photo courtesy of Lars Mjærum.

Ambassador Louis A. Lerner (left) with actor Richard Kiel in the Villa Otium garden, approx. 1978.



George Marshall at Villa Otium in 1953, when in Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Photo by NTB scampix.

*The annual Independence Day garden party at Villa Otium gathers the U.S. Embassy's contacts and friends for an afternoon of barbeque and socializing, here from 2011.*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*

*Jack Waitz receiving the first annual Ambassador's Award from Ambassador Barry B. White at the Independence Day celebration in 2011 on behalf of Jack and Grete Waitz (the noted marathoner who passed away in April of 2011). The Ambassador's Award is given to people whose work promotes closer bonds between Norway and the United States.*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*

*Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg having a hamburger with Ambassador Benson K. Whitney at the Independence Day party in 2006.*

*The annual Independence Day celebration fills the garden. The Marine Corps presenting the colors in 2012.*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

The Ambassador's Award 2012 went to Norwegian businessman Kjell Inge Røkke, who went to the U.S. as a young man and credits that experience with setting him on the path to success.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Mrs. Eleanor G. White speaking to the guests attending the 2012 Independence Day celebration at Villa Otium.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Director General Merete Fjeld Brattested, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Secretary General Bente Angell-Hansen, (MFA), Ambassador Barry B. White, Minister of Defense Espen Barth Eide, and Deputy Director General Unni Kløvstad, (MFA), at the Independence Day celebration, 2012.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Ambassador Barry B. White and Mrs. Anne-Karin Sønsteby, widow of Norwegian World War II hero Gunnar Sønsteby. Ambassador White and Mrs. Sønsteby planted a tree at Villa Otium in the memory of Gunnar Sønsteby at the Independence Day celebration, 2012.

Young Ferdinand eyeing the popcorn, Independence Day 2012.



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Former Ambassador John Doyle Ong (2002-2005) and Mrs. Mary Lee Ong with Ambassador Barry B. White at the Independence Day celebration, 2012.



Photo by Charlotte Berrefjord Bergøff



*A group of students helping gardener Per Otto Stray plant a tree in celebration of Arbor Day, 2009.*

*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*

*Norway Cup participants from Norway, Afghanistan and USA, summer 2011.*



*Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo*

*Minister of Environment Erik Solheim talking to students at an event honoring the Will Steger Foundation, 2008.*



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Culinary professional Scott Givot cooking with students as part of the Embassy's Language for Leaders program in the Villa Otium kitchen, 2010



Photo by U.S. Embassy Oslo

Astronaut Buzz Aldrin talking to students at Villa Otium in 2007.

## Residents of Villa Otium



### 1912 – 1924 **Hans Andreas Olsen**

Builder of Villa Otium. Industrialist and Norwegian Consul General in St. Petersburg, Russia. Native of Drammen, Norway.



### 1924 – 1930 **Laurits Selmer Swenson**

A native of Minnesota. Professor and son of Norwegian immigrants. He served as the U.S. Minister to Norway twice. He was first appointed by President Taft, serving from 1911 to 1913. He served a second time from 1924-1930 after being appointed by President Calvin Coolidge. First U.S. Ambassador to reside at Villa Otium.



### 1930 – 1935 **Hoffman Philip**

A New York native and career Foreign Service Officer. Appointed by President Herbert Hoover to serve as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Norway. He also served this same role in Colombia, Uruguay and Iran. Following his time in Norway he served as Ambassador to Chile.



### 1935 – 1937 **Anthony J.D. Biddle, Jr.**

A native of Pennsylvania. Appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 to serve as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Norway. He remained in Norway until 1937, when he was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Poland. He escaped Poland after the German invasion and made his way to London where he served as the U.S. Ambassador to several European governments in exile, including Norway.



### 1937 – 1940 **Florence Jaffray Harriman**

A native of New York. Suffragist and social reformer. Known throughout her life as "Daisy." Appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937 to serve as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Norway. Credited with arranging the escape of numerous Americans and several members of the Norwegian royal family after the Germans invaded Norway.

## Residents of Villa Otium



### 1945 – 1946 **Lithgow Osborne**

A native of New York and career Foreign Service Officer. Appointed Ambassador in 1944 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Resident first in London near the Norwegian government in exile. When the government of Norway returned to Oslo, Osborne transferred the Embassy to Oslo in May 1945.



### 1946 – 1953 **Charles Ulrick Bay**

A resident of New York. Founded Bay Petroleum in the 1930s before becoming a high-ranking intelligence official in the Office of Strategic Services. He was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Norway by President Harry Truman.



### 1953 – 1957 **Lester Corrin Strong**

Native of Washington, D.C. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Dwight Eisenhower. Served as president of the National Cultural Center, forerunner to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.



### 1957 – 1961 **Frances Elizabeth Willis**

A native of California and career Foreign Service Officer. She was the third woman to enter the U.S. Foreign Service and was appointed by President Dwight Eisenhower to serve as Ambassador to Norway. She also served as Ambassador to Switzerland and Sri Lanka.



### 1961 – 1964 **Clifton Reginald Wharton, Sr.**

A native of Maryland and career Foreign Service Officer. First African-American diplomat to become an ambassador by rising through the ranks of the Foreign Service rather than by political appointment. When appointed as Ambassador to Norway by President Kennedy, he also became the first African-American Foreign Service Officer to become chief of a diplomatic mission.

## Residents of Villa Otium



**1964 -1969 Margaret Joy Tibbetts**

A native of Maine and a career Foreign Service Officer. Appointed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Norway. In 1964 she hosted Martin Luther King's visit to Norway when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



**1969 – 1973 Philip Kingsland Crowe**

A native of Maryland. Former newspaper reporter. Appointed by President Richard M. Nixon to serve as Ambassador to Norway. He also served as Ambassador to Sri Lanka, South Africa and Denmark.



**1973 – 1976 Thomas Ryan Byrne**

A native of Pennsylvania and career Foreign Service Officer. Appointed U.S. Ambassador to Norway by President Nixon. Later served as U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia.



**1976 – 1977 William Allison Anders**

A resident of Virginia. Former U.S. Air Force officer, NASA Astronaut, businessman and engineer. He is, along with his two Apollo 8 crewmates, one of the first three persons to have left Earth's orbit and traveled to the Moon. Appointed U.S. Ambassador to Norway by President Gerald Ford.



**1977 – 1980 Louis Abraham Lerner**

A native of Illinois. Newspaper publisher and active in Democratic politics. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Jimmy Carter.

## Residents of Villa Otium



**1980 – 1981 Sidney Anders Rand**

A native of Minnesota. Ordained Lutheran minister and President of St. Olaf College. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Jimmy Carter.



**1982 – 1984 Mark Evans Austad**

A native of Utah. Broadcaster and United States delegate to the United Nations. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Ronald Reagan.



**1984 – 1989 Robert D. Stuart, Jr.**

A native of Illinois. Businessman and civic leader. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Ronald Reagan.



**1989 – 1993 Loret Miller Ruppe**

A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Volunteer and civic leader, who was the longest-serving Director of the Peace Corps. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President George H.W. Bush.



**1993 – 1997 Thomas A. Loftus**

A native of Wisconsin. Politician, consultant on developing democracies and professor. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Bill Clinton.

## Residents of Villa Otium



1998 – 2000 **David B. Hermelin**

A native of Michigan. Philanthropist and entrepreneur. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Bill Clinton.



2000 – 2001 **Robin Chandler Duke**

A New York native. Journalist, stock broker, women's health advocate and co-founder of the United States-Japan Foundation. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Bill Clinton.



2002 – 2005 **John D. Ong**

A native of Ohio and business leader. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President George W. Bush.



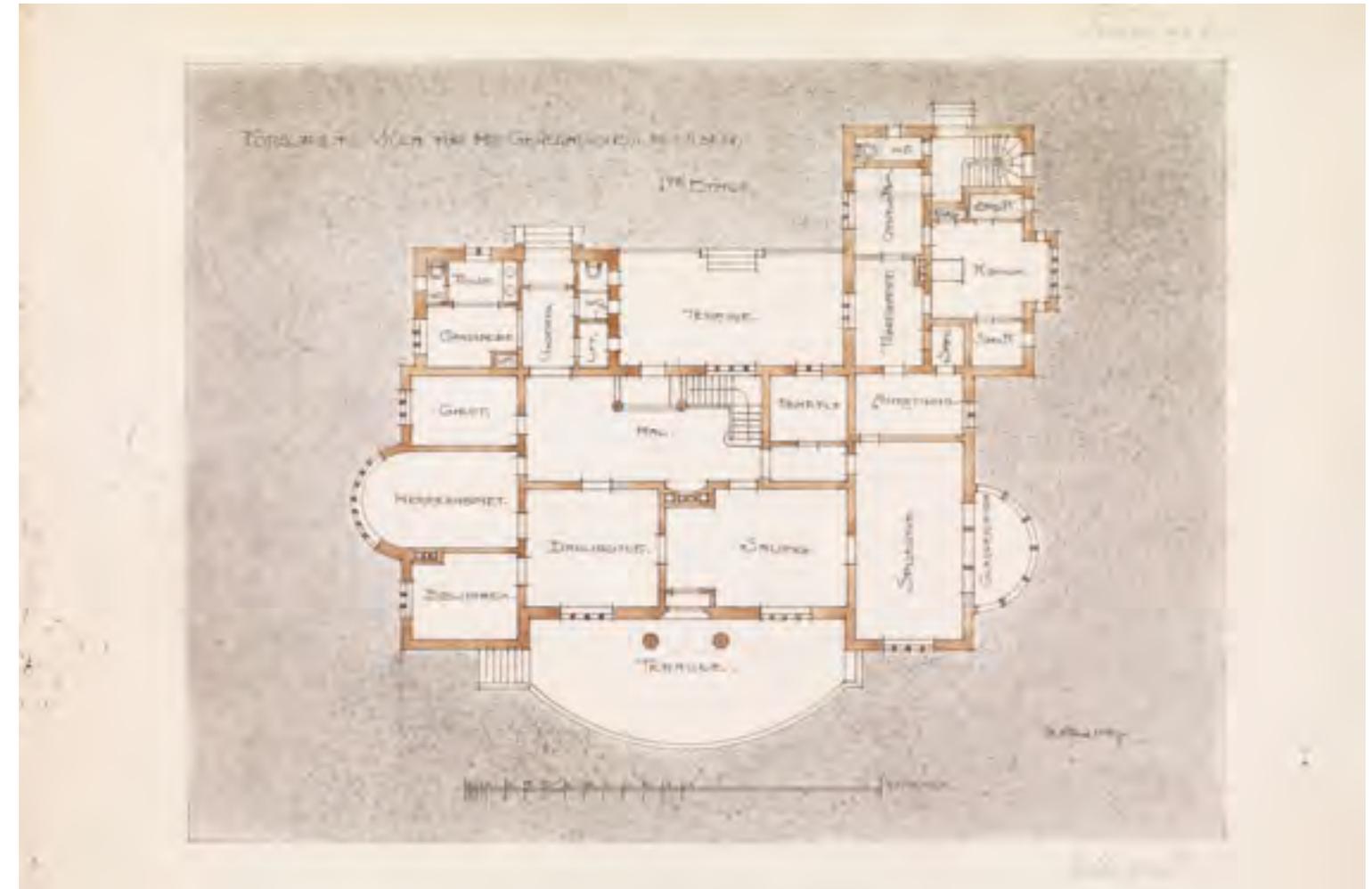
2006 – 2009 **Benson K. Whitney**

A native of Minnesota. Jurist and businessman. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President George W. Bush.



2009 - **Barry B. White**

A native of Massachusetts. Jurist, businessman and active in community organizations. Appointed Ambassador to Norway by President Barack Obama.



*This floor plan from 1909 is a draft copy, titled "Suggestion number one". There is no record of how many versions were considered during the design process, but this plan is very close to the final arrangement. The simplicity and artistry of the plan suggest that it was intended to convey the aesthetics of the house, rather than serve as an actual blueprint, although what would become the final design has incorporated nearly all of the elements shown here. Certain interior walls have been displaced by a few feet, doorways added or hallways lengthened, but the dimensions and the overall layout appear to be nearly identical. This floor plan also reflects Norwegian society in the early 1900s. Not only was spelling different in 1911 (e.g., Bull used the French "ç" where modern Norwegian would call for an "s", and words like "tjener" and "gjest" here are spelled with an "i" rather than the modern "j"), but so were the names and functions of the rooms. The main entry, as it is known today, was literally then the "wind catcher". And Bull included in the design scheme both a men's retiring room and an entire room exclusively at guests' disposal. Even the Art Nouveau style associated with this time period is reflected in the writing on this plan.*

– Kristina Boraas, Residence Manager, Oslo, 2012

## Villa Otium – Acknowledgements

Cultural Affairs Adviser **Line-Anne Hovdenakk**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For the lead responsibility in communicating with our authors and the research, editing, proof reading and follow-up necessary to produce this volume.

Information Assistant **Siri Brockmeier**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For her invaluable assistance in research, locating and selecting photos, and the initial editing of large portions of the book.

Public Affairs Advisers **Kjersti Ofstad** and **Ingrid Shields**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For proof reading.

Assistant Public Affairs Officer **Patrick C. Geraghty**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For ambassadorial biographies.

Office Manager **Claire With**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For keeping us on the right track.

Media Adviser **Marit Andersen**, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For organizing various media coverage of the 100th anniversary of Villa Otium.

Residence Manager **Kristina Boraas**. For photos, text and proof reading. And also for making sure numerous events held every year at Villa Otium are carried out with perfection.

Purchasing Agent **Johanna Dawson**, GSO Office, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For procuring the various photos and illustrations for this book.

Consul General **Phillip T. Slattery**, U.S. Embassy Oslo. For supplementary photos of Villa Otium.

The Embassy Oslo **maintenance crew** and the **residence staff** for their assistance in setting up, organizing and

carrying out a great number of events at Villa Otium every year.

The Villa Otium gardener, **Per Otto Stray**.

**Robert H. Loeffler**. For use of photos of Villa Otium.

Writer Editor **Marcia V. Mayo**, Office of Overseas Buildings Operations. For assistance with the book project.

**Doug Mellgren**, for translating the chapter by Nils Anker.

**Walter Gibbs**, for translating the chapter by Hans Christian Erlandsen.

**Charlotte Berrefjord Bergløff**. For use of photo of her son Ferdinand.

Senior Curator **Eva Madshus**, Department of Architecture, at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design. For assisting us in procuring a copy of some of architect Henrik Bull's original drawings for the house.

**National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design**, for photos.

**Oslo Museum**, for photos.

**Scanpix**, for photos.

Project coordinator **Marie Stephen**, Global Publishing Solutions (GPS), Vienna.

Book designer **Nathalie Mayer**, Global Publishing Solutions (GPS), Vienna.

And a special thanks to the many nameless Norwegians and Americans who have found common ground at Villa Otium.

## Index

Albright, Madeleine, Secretary of State 1997-2001 **54**

Aldrin, Buzz, Astronaut **67**

Anders, William Allison, Ambassador 1976-1977 **70**

Anker, Nils, Director of the Norwegian Art Nouveau Center **2, 22, 44**

Arafat, Yasir, Palestinian leader **54**

Arbor Day **51, 64**

Art Nouveau Style **24, 30, 32**

Austad, Mark Evans, Ambassador 1982-1984 **58, 71**

Barak, Ehud, Israeli Prime Minister 1999-2001 **54**

Bay, Charles Ulrick, Ambassador 1946-1953 **69**

Biddle, Jr., Anthony J. Drexel, Minister to Norway 1935-1937, 1941-1943 **16, 68**

Bliss, Robert Woods, U.S. Diplomat **8, 11, 12**

Bondevik, Kjell Magne, Prime Minister 1997-2000 and 2001-2005 **56, 58**

Bryde, G. M. **7, 8, 9, 10, 11**

Bull, Henrik, architect **2, 4, 16, 25, 26, 28, 30, 32, 42, 48, 50**

Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) **18**

Bush, George, Vice President 1981-1989, President 1989-1993 **56**

Byrne, Thomas Ryan, Ambassador 1973-1976 **70**

Carol R. Johnson Associates, landscape architects **19**

Carr, Wilbur J., Director of the Consular Service **8**

Carter, Jimmy, President 1977-1981 **56, 70, 71**

Clinton, Bill, President 1993-2001 **54**

Clinton, Hillary, Secretary of State 2009-present **57**

Crowe, Philip Kingsland, Ambassador 1969-1973 **70**

Crown Prince Harald **58**

Davis, Jr., Sammy **58**

Design Excellence Program **18, 20**

Duke, Robin Chandler, Ambassador 2000-2001 **72**

Eide, Espen Barth, Minister of Defense 2011-present **62**

Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture and Engineering (EYP) **1, 9**

Eyde, Sam, founder of Norsk-Hydro **42**

Foreign Service Buildings Act **14, 15**

Foreign Service Buildings Commission **13, 14, 15**

Garden party at Villa Otium **44**

Gibson, Hugh, U.S. Diplomat **8**

Givot, Scott, culinary educator and author **66**

Gore, Albert, Vice President 1993-2001 **55**

Hanna, Matthew, Foreign Service Inspector **13**

Harriman, Florence Jaffray "Daisy", Minister to Norway 1937-1940 **16, 68**

Hermelin, David B., Ambassador 1998-2000 **54, 72**

Historical Museum (1897-1902) **24**

Homes for Ambassadors, AEA publication **6**

Horta, Victor, architect of "Maison Tassel" **24**

Ihlen, Nils Claus, Foreign Minister 1913-1920 **44**

Independence Day **60, 61, 62, 63**

"Inman standards" (for embassy architecture) **17**

Jacques Bodart, Inc. **12**

KieranTimberlake, architecture firm **18**

King, Leland W., construction supervisor **15, 16, 17**

Kristiania **5, 6, 9, 10, 24, 38, 40, 42, 44**

Larkin, Frederick "Fritz", Head of the Foreign Service Building Office **15, 16**

Lerner, Louis Abraham, Ambassador 1977-1980 **58, 70**

Loftus, Thomas A., Ambassador 1993-1997 **71**

Lowden Act **7**

Marshall, George, Secretary of State 1947-1949 **59**

Merrill, Keith **13**

Nobel, Alfred **22**

Nobel, Ester Wilhelmina "Mina" **24, 40, 42**

Mackintosh, Charles Rennie **32**

Mansard, François, architect **30**

Nobel Brothers, oil firm **38**

Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO) **16**

## Index

- Olsen, Hans Andreas Nikolai 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 22, 24, 30, 32, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 48, 49, 68
- Ong, John Doyle, Ambassador 2002-2005 63, 72
- Osborne, Lithgow, Ambassador 1944-1946 16, 69
- Østengen & Bergo AS, Norwegian landscape architects 2, 20, 48, 49, 50, 51
- Palazzo Corpi, Constantinople 6
- Paulus Church 28
- Philip, Hoffman, Minister to Norway 1930-1935 68
- Pierce, Herbert H. D., Ambassador 1906-1911 5
- Porter, Stephen G., Congressman (R-PA), Chairman Foreign Service Buildings Commission 1926-1930 14
- Rand, Sidney Anders, Ambassador 1980-1981 71
- Rapson, Ralph, architect 16
- Rice, Condoleezza, Secretary of State 2005-2009 55
- Røkke, Kjell Inge 62
- Ruppe, Loret Miller, Ambassador 1989-1993 71
- Saarinen, Eero, architect and industrial designer 17
- Schmedeman, Albert G. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
- Solheim, Erik, Minister of Environment 2007-2012 65
- Sønsteby, Gunnar, Norwegian World War II hero 63
- Standard Embassy Design (SED) 18
- Stoltenberg, Jens, Prime Minister 2000-2001 and 2005-present 61
- Strong, Lester Corrin, Ambassador 1953-1957 69
- Stuart, Jr., Robert D., Ambassador 1984-1989 2, 71
- Sullivan, Louis Henry 24
- Swenson, Laurits Selmer, Minister to Norway 1911-1913, 1921-1930 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 68
- Terrorist attacks on U.S. facilities in Beirut in 1983 17
- Tiffany, Louis Comfort 24
- Tschudi-Madsen, Stephan, Art Nouveau specialist 32
- Tibbetts, Margaret Joy, Ambassador 1964-1969 70
- van der Meulen, John, architect 16
- Waitz, Jack and Grete 61
- Wharton, Sr., Clifton Reginald, Ambassador 1961-1964 69
- White, Barry B., Ambassador, Ambassador 2009-present 2, 19, 57, 62, 72
- White, Eleanor G. 2, 57, 62
- Whitney, Benson K., Ambassador 2006-2009 20, 50, 55, 62, 72
- Willis, Frances Elizabeth, Ambassador 1957-1961 69



Original drawing of entrance façade by architect Henrik Bull, 1910.

