



## BOOK

Otto Wagner  
By August Sarnitz.  
Taschen, 2005. 96pp. £4.95

*Complex* as a series of well-told, colourful tales of how architects built banal and bombastic monuments for some of the most terrifying monsters of the past century.

But the glare of celebrity should not blind us to the fact that most of those who shape the world are bureaucrats, local politicians and bean-counters of anonymous corporations. It is in their offices that the battle for architecture's soul is being fought.

*Robert Cowan is director of the Urban Design Group and author of the Dictionary of Urbanism*

Maybe the erotica in Taschen's catalogue sells so well that it supports the architecture books. This series of monographs at just £4.95 is especially good value, with volumes on Wright, Loos, Aalto, Scharoun and Schinkel (among others) joined now by one on Otto Wagner. It is all the more useful because no other book on him is readily available at present. The key works are here – the Steinhof Church, the Postal Savings Bank, the canal and railway buildings – with brief but serviceable texts from architectural historian August Sarnitz, and many well-reproduced images: photos old and new, (tiny) plans, and a generous selection of Wagner's drawings, including this maid with her state-of-the-art vacuum cleaner in an unbuilt hotel scheme from 1913.

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