

The Design for the “Berceau” Room at Seehof

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART owns two corner settees, two upholstered armchairs, four side chairs, and two wall brackets from a suite of furniture created for the former summer residence of the prince bishops of Bamberg, one quite without parallel among the creations of the South German Rococo (Figure 1).¹ The most striking feature of these pieces—their carved backs imitative of latticework with intertwining foliage—would suggest that they came from a room decorated with a garden motif. And, as it happens, we know from an inventory made in 1774 of the furnishings of Schloss Seehof, in Bamberg, that they were among the appointments of the “green perceau room” (*sic*), or a room decorated to resemble an arbor.² The room in question was not in the palace itself but rather “in His Highness’s garden apartment next to the shooting-stand.”

This apartment, the original home of these unusual furnishings, is generally known as the Franckenstein Pavilion, inasmuch as it was built at the behest of Prince Bishop Johann Philipp Anton von Franckenstein (r. 1746–53). An inscription on the plan for the structure (Figure 2), signed by its architect, Michael Küchel, in 1752, fittingly describes it as a “secondary princely residence,” a kind of retreat that, though a mere two hundred meters away from the main palace, would provide the prince with a getaway when he grew weary of the strict protocol of his court. Regrettably, no record of the pavilion’s interior decoration was preserved when the building was razed between 1867 and 1870, so that heretofore nothing has been known of the original setting for the unusual design of the suite of furniture. A previ-

ously unpublished decoration drawing, however, discovered in the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg (Figure 3), would seem to provide some answers.³

The Franckenstein Pavilion⁴ formed the eastern end of the orangery wing, the main block of which still stands and whose two greenhouses doubled as concert and dining halls. A single-story sandstone structure with a cellar below and a mansarded attic floor above, the pavilion matched the surviving gardener’s house to the west, so we still have a general idea of the building’s exterior. Moreover, the Küchel drawing provides a clear picture not only of the pavilion’s facade but also of its interior, with floor plans of the three levels and a cross section through the whole. Küchel’s inscriptions even suggest the proposed function of its individual rooms. We see that the prince’s apartment occupied the ground floor above a wine cellar. Three steps up from the level of the garden, one passed through a portal adorned with a coat of arms and entered directly into the dining room. Behind the dining room lay the sitting room, living room, and bedroom, the last extending into the adjoining greenhouse structure to form part of the orangery.

The room to the left of the dining room is designated a “salon and gaming room,” and this is the space that concerns us here. The notion of it as a berceau room nine years later, when the room was called also the princely audience chamber, is nowhere prefigured in Küchel’s plan; the architect merely suggests paneled walls above a wainscoting and a porcelain stove in a niche in the back left corner.

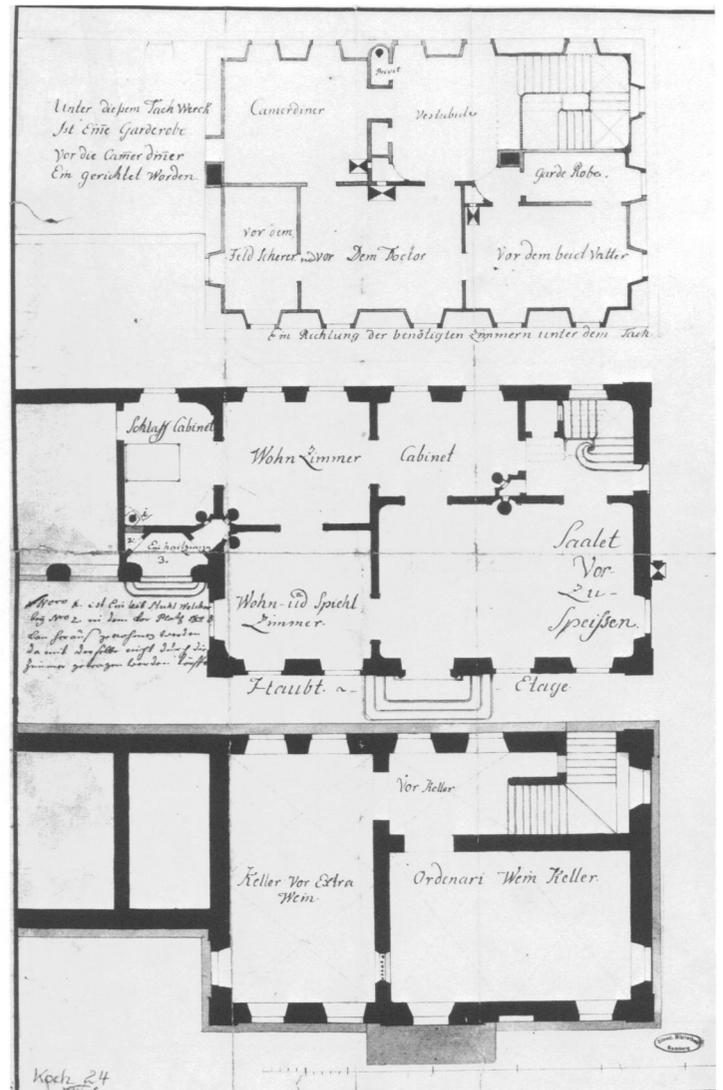
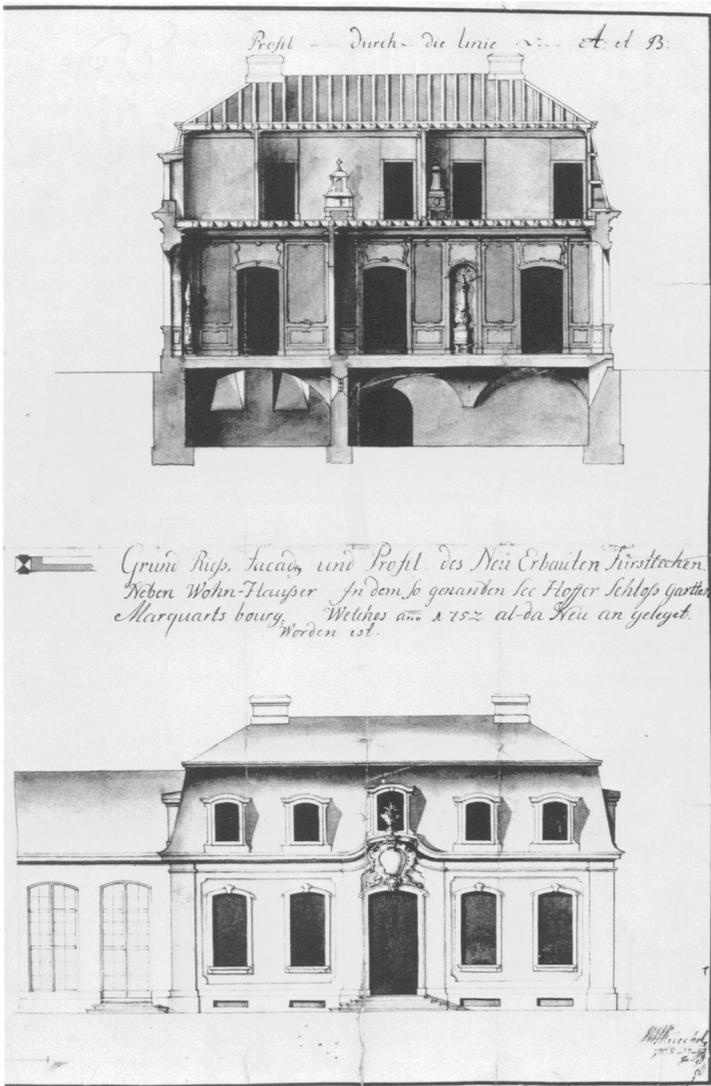


1. Armchair, one of a pair, German, ca. 1763–64. Painted and gilded lindenwood, $44 \times 26 \times 21$ in. ($111.8 \times 66 \times 53.3$ cm). Made for the garden room in the Franckenstein Pavilion, Schloss Seehof. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Lesley and Emma Sheaffer Collection, Bequest of Emma A. Sheaffer, 1973, 1974.356.119

2. Johann Jakob Michael Küchel, Facade elevation, cross section, and floor plans of the Franckenstein Pavilion, 1752(?). Pen and ink with wash. Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Koch Collection, no. VIII, C24 (photo: Staatsbibliothek Bamberg)

This stove, as well as those in the bedroom and living room, could be tended, handily enough, from a separate service room with its own entrance, and from this room too, the plan informs us, an unseen servant could also empty the princely chamberpot. Rooms for the prince's confessor, physician, and manservant were accommodated in the attic.

Construction was undertaken in 1753, after the architect, Balthasar Neumann, had made certain changes in Küchel's original plan in May of that year. It would appear, however, that the interior work was put off for a time. It is not until 1761, during the reign of Prince Bishop Adam Friedrich von Seinsheim (r. 1757–79), that we learn, both from court records and from the prince himself, something



of the progress of the pavilion's decoration. Two changes in the princely succession—not to mention the Seven Years' War—had delayed completion of the project until that time. Adornment of the garden had also been postponed. A portrait of Seinsheim from that same year, 1761, by the Würzburg court painter Nicolaus Treu, places him in front of the garden and depicts him as a frustrated patron bursting with plans for improvements (see Figure 4 in the preceding Kisluk-Grosheide article).⁵

A shortage of funds as a result of the war was reason enough, but there was an additional cause for the delay in the decoration of the Franckenstein Pavilion, namely, the poor health of the artist commissioned to do the work, the Würzburg court painter Franz Anton Ermeltraut. In a letter from Bamberg dated October 25, 1761,⁶ the prince bishop complains: "Here, too, there are various things in hand that appear to be turning out well; my Indian house in the little residence garden [in Bamberg] promises to be quite charming, as does the small house [the pavilion] at Seehof, which would be finished already if only the painter Ermeltraut didn't suffer constant fever. . . ." Only five months before, on June 1, 1761, the prince bishop had directed his chamberlain to have the pavilion's dining room decorated with frescoes and stuccowork and its audience chamber with frescoes.

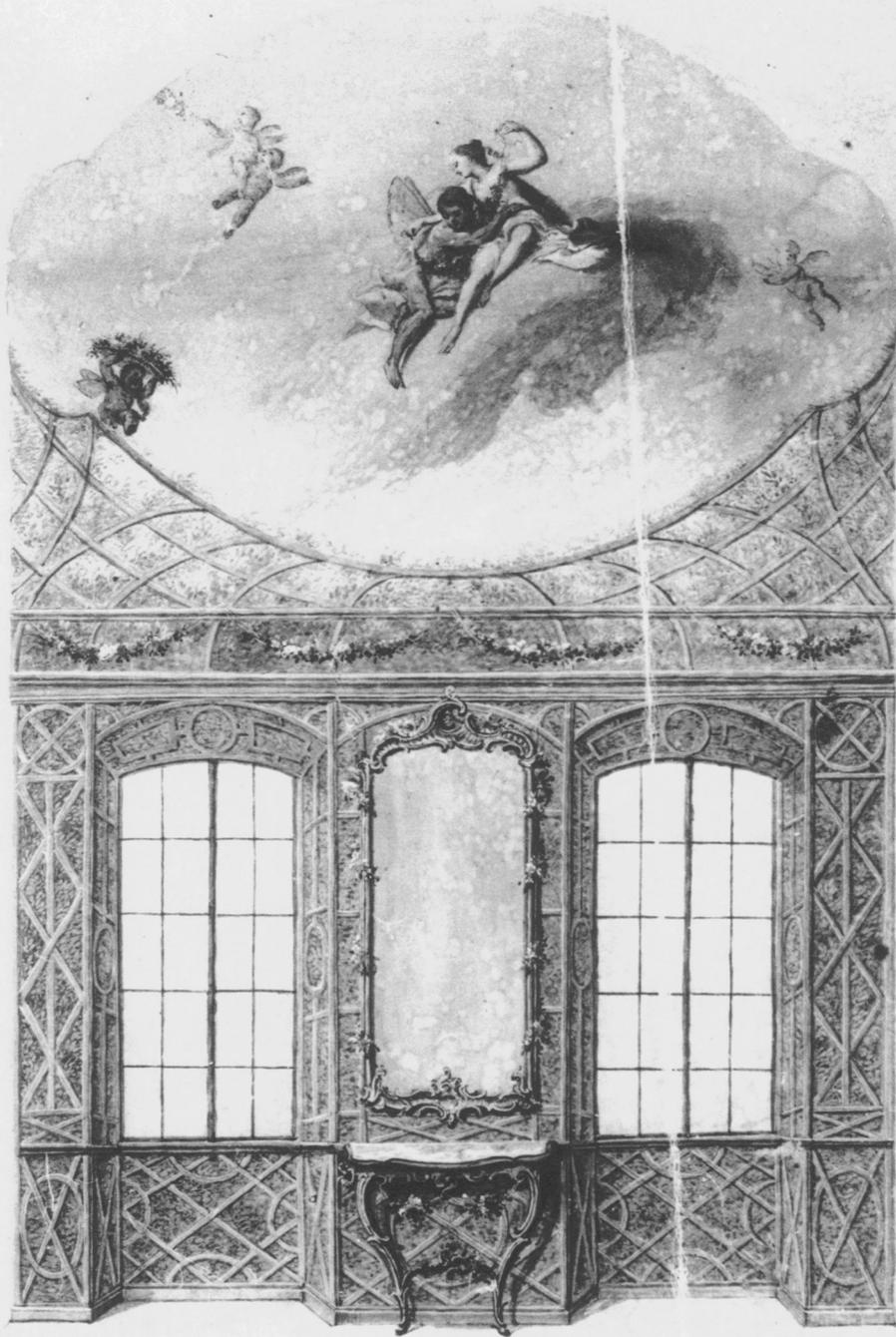
The chamberlain's notes from June 1, 1761, prove most rewarding for our investigation. They tell us that the court painter Ermeltraut was prepared to undertake the painting of the dining room and its adjacent audience chamber. Happily, they also include some indication of the style of the decoration that had been commissioned: ". . . then for the prince's audience room wholly in the form of a *perso* [*sic*], with hanging flowers above, and with an insert of painted sky on the ceiling . . ." ⁷ Although we find further mention in the chamberlain's file of the slow progress in the painting of the dining room up through the end of the year 1762, there is no indication just when the proposed painting of the audience chamber as a *berceau* room was completed. We gather that it was finally done from the mention of a "green-painted room" in the court surveyor's protocol of December 12, 1762, as well as from the more precise designation "*perceau* room" in the inventory of 1774, which lists the furniture appropriate to such a space.

The design appears on a large, unsigned sheet (Figure 3) found among the original holdings of the Martin von Wagner Museum in Würzburg, preserved in a portfolio that includes signed drawings by Ermeltraut.⁸ Unlike the other designs in the folder, the one in question has been executed with particular care. The entire sheet has been painted with a thick ground of gesso. On this there is a detailed preliminary drawing in graphite pencil, to which the colors have been added in gouache with a brush. Such a technique explains why the vertical fold across the sheet appears as a prominent flaw. The size of the design and its elaborate detail and careful draftsmanship, meant to create a distinct impression, suggest that the sheet was intended as a presentation to a patron. In all of the court art from Würzburg and Bamberg from the von Seinsheim period, this is the most imposing extant interior decoration design.

The drawing, with no indication of scale, presents a perspective view of the window wall and ceiling of a room whose painted decor counterfeits latticework panels with intertwining foliage in the manner of an arbor, or *berceau*. Furnishings are suggested with the inclusion of a pier glass and its accompanying console table between the windows. For a clearer view, the ceiling has been hinged upward at the level of the cornice, which is hung with garlands of flowers. Above these the lattice gives way to a longish oval, with rounded protuberances on each end, offering a glimpse of the sky, with Zephyr and Flora seated on a bank of clouds surrounded by four hovering cupids. While it is true that Ermeltraut painted a similar evocation of spring in the northern garden pavilion of the Würzburg summer palace, Veitshöchheim, in 1765, it is my conviction that the drawing just described dates from 1761 and represents the artist's working design for the *berceau* room of the Franckenstein Pavilion. For one thing, it conforms in detail to the commission as outlined on June 1, 1761, cited above. Ermeltraut was to paint the entire space

3. Franz Anton Ermeltraut, Decoration design for the window wall and ceiling of the garden room in the Franckenstein Pavilion, 1761. Gouache drawing over pencil on gesso ground, 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 12 in. (42.6 × 30.8 cm). Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum, Universität Würzburg, inv. no. 555/126, 20 (photo: Martin von Wagner Museum)

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as a berceau, “with flowers hanging above,” complete with a small fresco on the ceiling. Moreover, the furnishings included in the design reveal details that conform to those of the furnishings of the berceau room as listed in the inventory of 1774: they are painted green and ornamented with “intertwining lifelike flowers.” Although decorated with “foliage-work,” as the inventory listing assures us, they were nonetheless executed in pure Rococo forms.

To test my conviction, it was necessary to make the decorative design conform to the cross section and floor plan of the “salon and gaming room” from Küchel’s plan. Taking the proportions of the windows as

4. Arbor room in the Neues Schloss, Bayreuth, ca. 1757–58 (photo: Fotoverlag Gundermann, Würzburg, archive no. 3447)



a means of establishing a common scale, it is true that Ermeltraut’s design and Küchel’s plan agree on the height of the room, but there remain certain inconsistencies regarding the floor plan, because the design for the berceau room calls for a space that is wider and deeper.

Assuming that the painter did not simply make mistakes in his drawing, these could well be explained by the alterations to Küchel’s plan made by the architect, Balthasar Neumann, in 1753, of which, unfortunately, we have no record. However, there is another floor plan of the Franckenstein Pavilion dating from about 1755 (see Figure 6, Kisluk-Grosheide), the only one to survive besides Küchel’s, and from it we can see that certain changes with regard to the disposition of interior spaces were definitely made.⁹ This one shows that the berceau room had been enlarged, made both wider and deeper. Also, the disappearance of the round niche in the front corner of the room and the unequal widths of the wall surfaces on either side of the window more closely resemble the structure assumed in the design.

It is possible to trace the notion of interior spaces as gardens back to classical antiquity.¹⁰ In the second half of the eighteenth century, a change in the concept of nature occasioned a new fashion of designing interiors as natural bowers, the illusion enhanced by wall frescoes, tapestries, sometimes even wallpaper. The present design represents an early South German example of a special type of berceau, or trellis room.

One might point to two additional examples from this same early period not far from Bamberg, namely in Bayreuth, where the margravine Wilhelmine von Bayreuth, the sister of Frederick the Great and a passionate gardener, was in residence until 1758.¹¹ These examples are nonetheless quite unlike the berceau room at Seehof. The latticework room in the Neues Schloss at Bayreuth was probably created in 1757/58 (Figure 4). Executed in stucco and enhanced with paintings on leather, its arbor motif remains architectonic and stylized, a matter of applied decoration. By contrast, the garden salon in the Eremitage of the Neues Schloss near Bayreuth strives for an effect of complete illusion (Figure 5). Its decoration, completed between 1759 and 1763, employs actual wooden lattices in a rustic style with three-dimensional orange and lemon trees, grapevines,

and honeysuckle executed in plaster and wood, all of which serve to blur the boundaries between nature and art.

The craze for latticework decor also left its mark in France, witness the example of Mlle Guimard's dining room in Paris from about 1771.¹² From roughly this same period, there are two additional South German examples worthy of mention: the arbor room in the former residence of the margraves

of Baden, Schloss Karlsruhe, executed in stucco between 1771 and 1773 after designs by Philippe de la Guèpière (destroyed in World War II), and the room from Munich's Palais Tattenbach, dating from 1772–79, preserved in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich. Registering the epoch's new awareness of nature, a contemporary admiring the painted latticework decor of the latter room in 1783 remarked that "everything that Nature has to say is here at hand."

Translated from the German by Russell Stockman



5. Garden salon in the Neues Schloss Eremitage near Bayreuth, ca. 1759–63 (photo: Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Munich)

NOTES

1. Heinrich Kreisel, *Die Kunst des deutschen Möbels* II (Munich, 1970) pp. 398–399, nos. 550–553 (with illustrations); Yvonne Hackenbroch and James Parker, *The Lesley and Emma Sheaffer Collection: A Selective Presentation*, exh. cat. (MMA, New York, 1975) no. 25. The MMA suite of furniture is discussed in greater detail in two other articles in *MMJ* 25: Daniëlle O. Kisluk-Grosheide, “The Garden Room from Schloss Seehof and Its Furnishings,” and Kathryn Gill et al., “The Conservation of the Seehof Furniture.”

2. Inventory of furnishings for Schloss Seehof, 1774, fol. 159. For information regarding the inventory and sources relating to the Franckenstein Pavilion, I am deeply indebted to Ms. Gisela Masching of the Hausarchiv of Schloss Seehof.

3. Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, Graphische Sammlung, Mappe Ermeltraut, inv. no. 555/126, 20; provenance: Wagner Collection. On the 42.6 × 30.8 cm sheet, the drawing takes up 34.6 × 22.3 cm. The sheet bears the old page number 20 and the inscription “Catalogue No. 13.” In my dissertation (*Adam Friedrich von Seinsheim, Auftraggeber zwischen Rokoko und Klassizismus. Zur Würzburger und Bamberger Hofkunst anhand der Privatkorrespondenz des Fürstbischofs (1755–1779)*), Quellen und Darstellungen zur Fränkischen Kunstgeschichte, VI [Neustadt/Aisch, 1980] pp. 145–147; also n. 772), I made reference to the existence of the design, but I did not relate it to the Franckenstein Pavilion. I am grateful to the curator of the Martin von Wagner Museum, Dr. Thomas Korth, as well as to the chief restorer, Ulrich Popp, for information provided.

4. The history of the building and furnishing of the Franck-

enstein Pavilion summarized here is based, where not otherwise noted, on the standard presentation by Margarete Kämpf, “Das fürstbischöfliche Schloss Seehof bei Bamberg,” *Bericht des Historischen Vereins für die Pflege der Geschichte des ehemaligen Fürstbistums Bamberg* 93/94 (Bamberg, 1956) pp. 25–254, specifically pp. 91–96.

5. See von Roda, *Adam Friedrich von Seinsheim*, pp. 58–61.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 33 and 221, document 82.

7. See Kämpf, “Das fürstbischöfliche Schloss,” pp. 94, 226–227 Q135.

8. See note 3 above.

9. Hausarchiv of Schloss Seehof, case 1, no. 51, folder 1, p. 28. See Kämpf, “Das fürstbischöfliche Schloss,” n. 4, pp. 77 (illus.) and 88.

10. Eva Höllinger, “Der Innenraum als Garten” (dissertation, Cologne, 1963). For this particular period, see also Hella Müller, “Naturillusion in der Innenraumkunst des späteren 18. Jahrhunderts” (dissertation, Göttingen, 1957), and, especially, the same author’s shortened version of her work, from which I have taken the following examples as comparisons: Hella Arndt, “Gartenzimmer des 18. Jahrhunderts” (Darmstadt, n.d.).

11. See Lorenz Seelig, *Friedrich und Wilhelmine von Bayreuth. Die Kunst am Bayreuther Hof 1732–1763* (Munich, 1982), with more precise dating of the room decorations than that given in Arndt.

12. Illustrated in Peter Thornton, *Authentic Decor. The Domestic Interior 1620–1920* (London, 1984) p. 166.