

Dear Otto, what a building we have built!

By Matteo Caccia

Imagined correspondence between Eugenio Geiringer and the architect Otto Thienemann who built the Generali office in Vienna together

Trieste, autumn 1879

Dear Architect Thienemann,

I learned today that we will be working together on the new Viennese building.

I know that together we will construct the building of the future.

I rejoice in this.

Eugenio Geiringer

Vienna, November 1879

Most esteemed Engineer Geiringer,

It is an honour for me to be able to work with someone who is doing so much for the company and transforming the appearance of cities with such innovative skill. I am sure Vienna will be the next.

Kind regards

Otto Thienemann

Trieste, spring 1880

Dear Otto,

I venture a modicum of familiarity in our correspondence on the basis of our now frequent attendance at the Bauernmarkt 2 construction site.

Going back and forth from Trieste to Vienna has now become a habit for me, a pleasing habit because it allows me to compare these two cities, both of which I love deeply, and study their vices and virtues, strengths and weaknesses.

Cities are the beating heart of a country's economy but also, and above all, of the society that inhabits them. It is a privilege for me to be able to participate in the improvement of cities through the redevelopment of their urban and architectural fabric.

It will not be an easy job – time is tight, and the company's ambitions are always high – but I am sure that we will succeed.

Yours sincerely,

Eugenio Geiringer

Vienna, August 1880

Dear Engineer Geiringer,

The work is proceeding at speed and I am sure that the building will be completed by next spring at the latest.

I am writing to tell you about a discovery I made today. A professor of urban planning history whom I had consulted for information on the origin of this neighbourhood of the city – famous for the magnificent Ankeruhr music box and the ancient farmer's market from which the street takes its name – told me, to my great surprise, that the land on which we are building this futuristic building was the scene of a great court intrigue in the last century, which appears to have involved none other than the husband of the Empress Maria Teresa!

Perhaps I am gullible of mind, but information like this leaves me stunned and I hope it is not a harbinger of bad news for our building.

See you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Otto Thienemann

Trieste, September 1880

Dear Otto,

I read the history recounted in your last letter with amazement and a hint of glee.

We are men of science and technology and will certainly not be taken in by stories like this.

I have just this moment come from a board meeting in which I presented the final stages of the Viennese project, and all those present were amazed by the beauty and innovation present in a single building. We will make way for modernity!

I am packing my suitcases; tomorrow, I leave for Vienna.

Eugenio

Vienna, 20th February 1881

Dear Eugenio,

Tomorrow is the big day. The company's offices are now completed; with the support of new techniques, we have set up a futuristic workspace that looks straight to the future.

All the craftsmen who worked there were astonished and almost bewildered by the modernity of the materials and the technical skill that we were able to achieve.

I am sure that the Bauernmarkt 2 building will become the jewel in the crown of Generali's real estate.

With affection and esteem,

Otto

Trieste, spring 1881

Dear Otto,

what a building we have built!

The whole city, the citizens, and the company will benefit from the advantages for a long time to come.

Constructing buildings like this is a form of social responsibility, and it is wonderful to be a part of it.

I thank you once again for your precious collaboration.

Great projects require great visions.

With immense esteem,

Eugenio Geiringer

HISTORY

At the instigation of Marco Besso, Generali worked from the end of the nineteenth century onwards to acquire offices in major European and non-European cities. Not only places of work and of representation but also residential buildings: a heritage that changed over time, always consolidating excellent standards of size and quality.

Investments that contributed to the modernisation, development, redevelopment, or simply the beautification of various urban areas, adopting the most advanced technological solutions of the time.

A vision that still continues today in the name of sustainability, symbolised by the new spaces of CityLife in Milan and the restoration of the Procuratie Vecchie in Venice.