



THE FLORHOF

A house shaped by time

FOREWORD

The Florhof has lived many lives.

What appears today as a hotel was, for centuries, a private residence — a place shaped by trade, work and family life. Merchants, silk traders, politicians and hoteliers lived and worked here, leaving their mark on the house across generations.

This small chronicle traces selected moments from that history. It follows the people who inhabited, transformed and carried the Florhof through time.

The Florhof is not a completed chapter. With its present restoration, another begins.

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Houses such as the Florhof carry time within their walls. Layers of life, transformation, fortune, loss and renewal. With every generation, the perspective on this house changes — yet its essence remains the same:

a place with a
distinct character,
shaped by the
people who continue
its story.

EARLY DAYS AT THE CITY'S EDGE

Suburban charm and monastic power

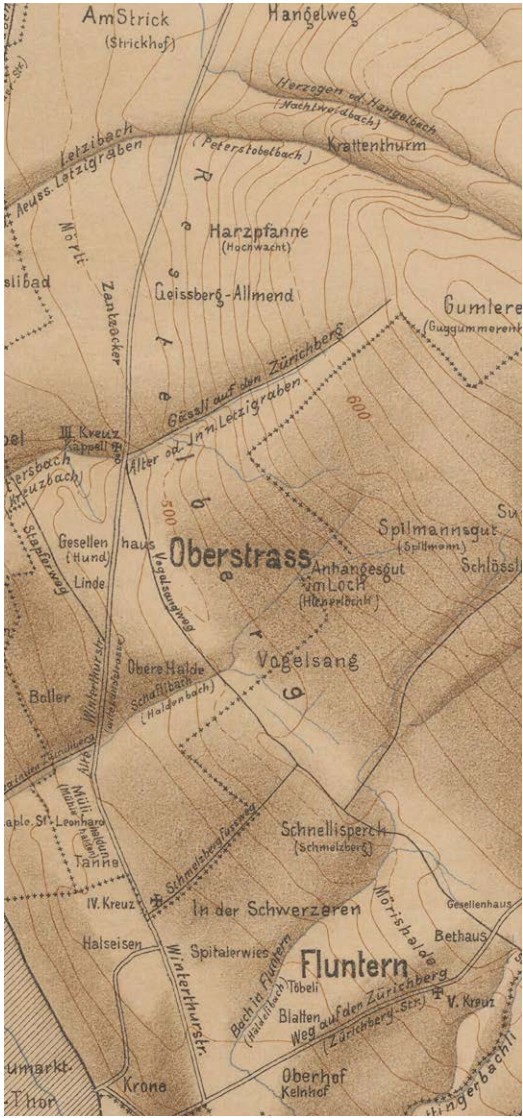
Between meadows, vineyards and a small wooded hillside above Zurich, an unassuming estate emerged during the Middle Ages: the Florhof.

By 1447, the Florhof can first be traced in historical records. It began as a modest hereditary fief belonging to the powerful Grossmünster, managed by tenants responsible for the house, gardens and surrounding land.

Here began the story of a house situated just beyond the city walls, yet deeply connected to Zurich itself — a quiet witness to the city's early structures of power.

9TH CENTURY

Map of the neighbouring communities surrounding Zurich before the construction of the city fortifications. The Florhof estate was located in the hamlet of Fluntern.





A STORM REACHES THE FLORHOF

Intrigue and uprising: the fall of Dignauer

In 1489, Zurich is thrown into turmoil. Farmers march into the city, guilds clash, and the rule of the powerful mayor Hans Waldmann collapses.

At the Florhof, his loyal supporter Hans Dignauer experiences these dramatic events firsthand. City guards arrive at the estate, he escapes through a window into the garden — yet is captured soon after. Days later, his story ends at the execution site.

The Florhof thus becomes a silent witness to one of the most significant political upheavals of its time.

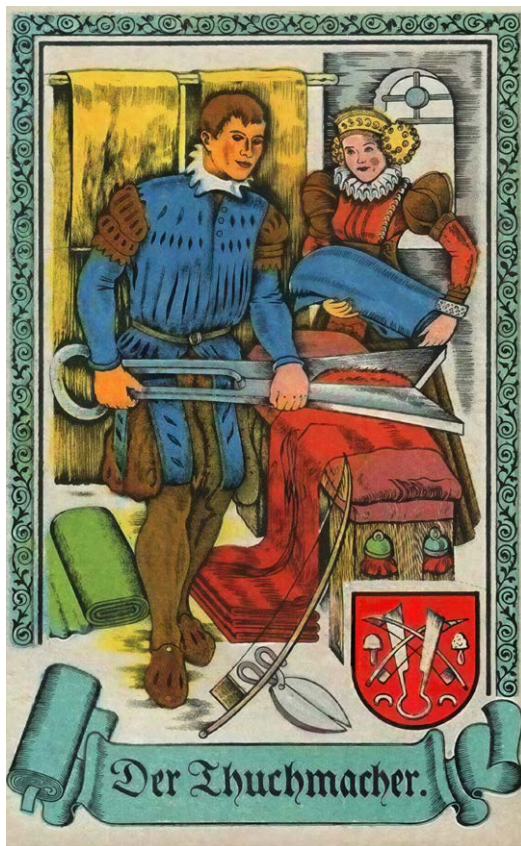
LIVES IN TRANSITION

Physicians, merchants and failed ambitions: the 16th century

Throughout the 16th century, the Florhof changes occupants almost yearly: cloth makers, bakers, canons, a physician from Milan, merchants and aspiring businessmen.

Some achieve social advancement, while others stumble under the weight of their own ambitions. Debts accumulate, inheritance disputes erupt, and lives are abruptly interrupted.

The Florhof becomes the setting for small human dramas — a reflection of everyday Zurich during the Reformation.

**1489**

Armed rural groups advance into the city. Hans Dignauer experiences the dramatic events at the side of Mayor Hans Waldmann, until his tragic end at the execution grounds.

1546

Anton Sprüngli lives at the Florhof as a cloth maker in 1546 and 1547. He is the first recorded resident active in the silk and velvet trade.



SILK TRANSFORMS THE CITY

Silk, prosperity and home industry: the economic rise

The silk trade changes Zurich — and the lives of those connected to the Florhof.

In dark rural rooms, women spin raw silk into yarn. Looms rattle within the city walls while merchants transport fabric across Alpine passes.

Raw materials from Italy, techniques from Lyon, diligence from Zurich: the economy begins to pulse. Some residents of the Florhof rise in status because they hold the right threads in their hands.

The Florhof becomes part of a network in which labour, prosperity and harsh realities are closely interwoven.

Around 1565, the silk
wheel becomes
part of Zurich's silk-
twisting industry.



16TH CENTURY

Zurich's silk production no longer serves only the local market. Through the efforts of merchants, increasingly distant trading regions are reached.

1576

The oldest known depiction of the house with the tower added by Guarnerius Castilioneus—an architectural gesture clearly influenced by southern traditions.



1642

The construction of Zurich's fortifications fundamentally transforms the area around the Florhof. The original tower disappears, new utility buildings are erected, and the estate becomes increasingly connected to the city's defensive structures.



A TOWER FROM THE SOUTH

The tower of Castilioneus: a touch of the south

With the physician Guarnerius Castilioneus from Locarno, the Florhof undergoes its first significant architectural transformation.

He adds a circular stair tower to the house—a form more commonly associated with regions south of the Alps.

The Florhof acquires a distinctive new identity. Seen from the hills surrounding Zurich, the house now stands apart from the traditional buildings nearby, bringing a subtle southern influence into the city.

War, debt and city fortifications

The Thirty Years' War also leaves its mark on Zurich. The city strengthens its defences, and political priorities begin to shift.

The owner at the time, Hans Heinrich Hoffmann, struggles under mounting debts — and ultimately loses.

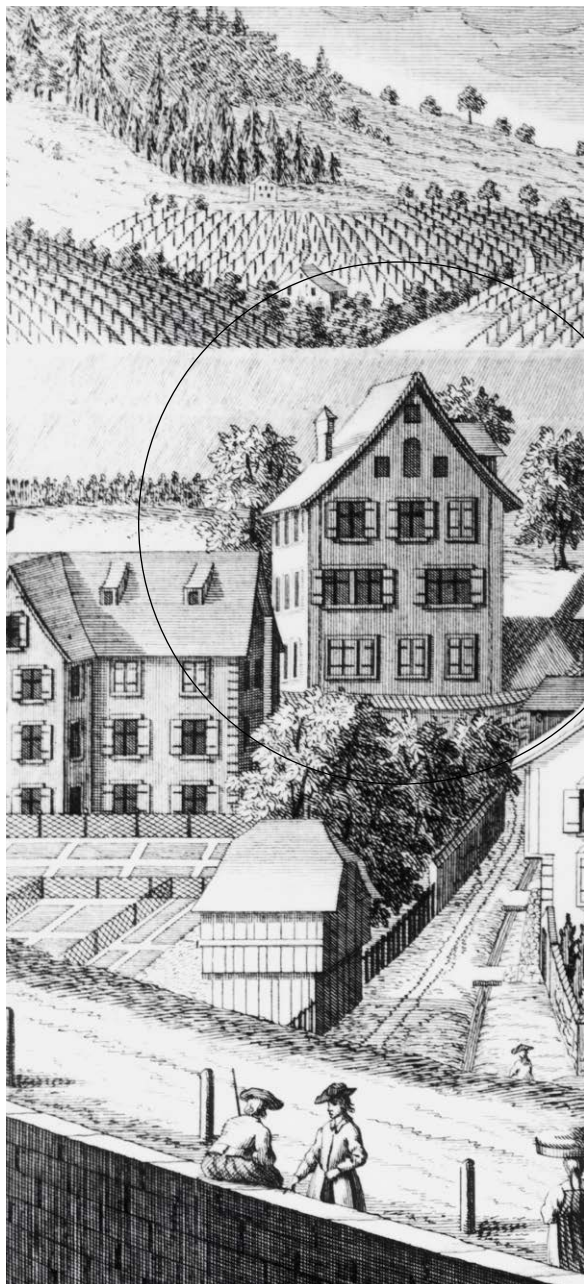
After his death, the Florhof is auctioned. The city of Zurich seizes the opportunity: the property is ideally situated for the expansion of the fortifications.

This marks the end of the Florhof's long period as a hereditary fief of the Grossmünster — and the beginning of a new chapter: closer to the city, strategic, increasingly within Zurich's field of vision.

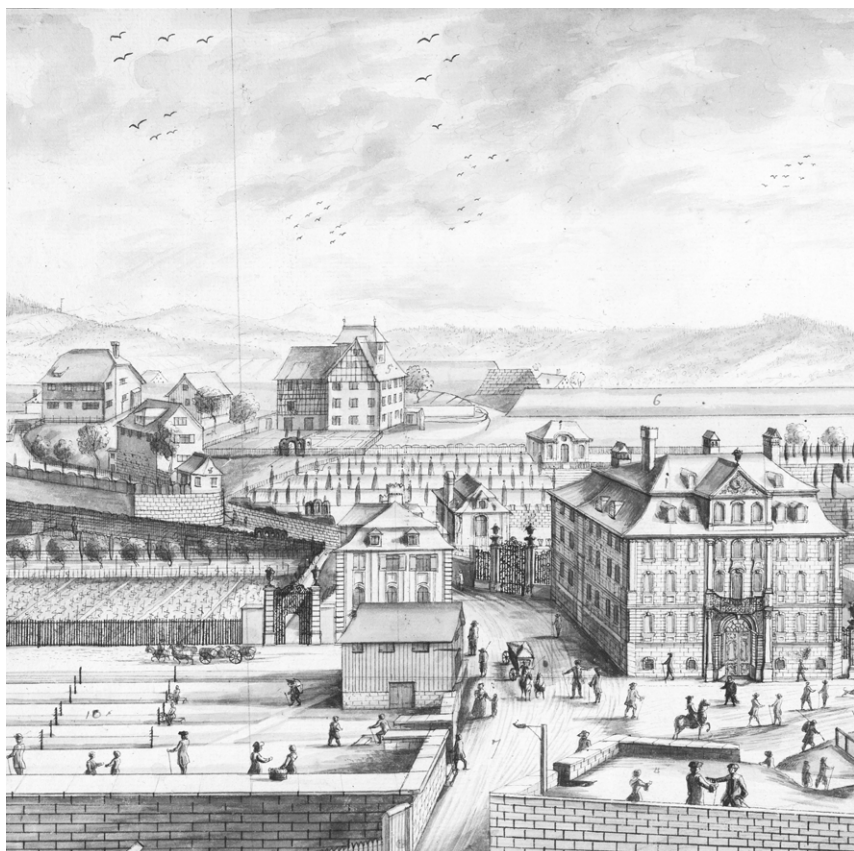


1743

One of the earliest detailed depictions of the Florhof. The house features three storeys and an attic floor, with a chimney on the left and a dormer window on the right.







Houses change.
Their history remains.

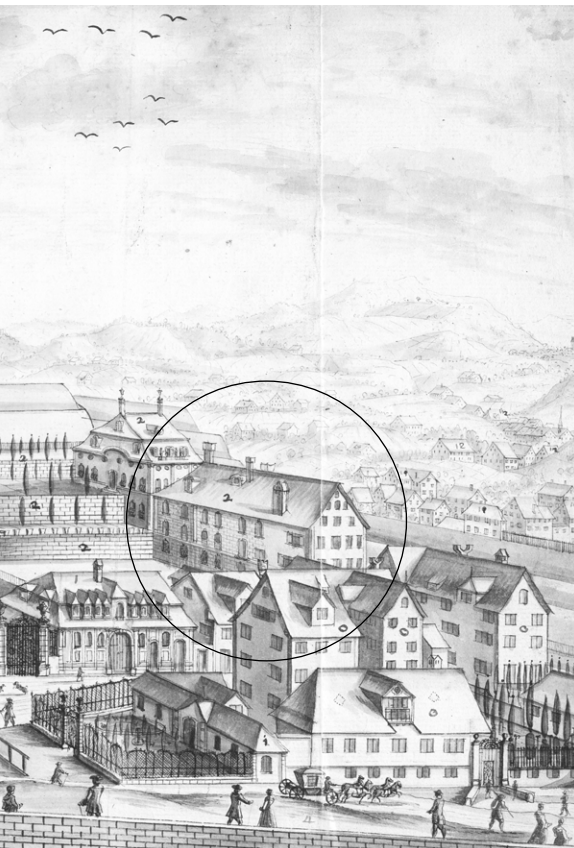
RISE OF THE VILLA

Bourgeois grandeur: the estate becomes a residence

During the 17th and 18th centuries, families such as the Heideggers and Oeris continue to develop the Florhof. They expand the building, add auxiliary structures and gradually transform it into a representative villa.

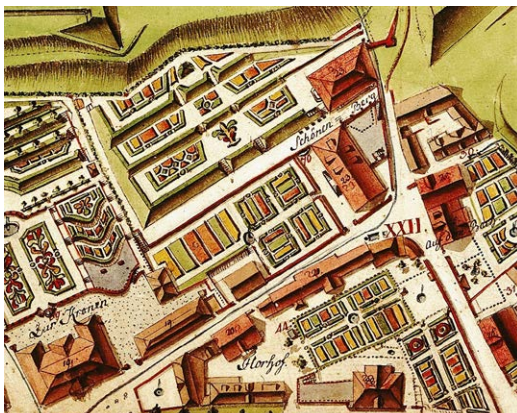
Craft industries emerge along the hillside, particularly linked to silk processing and mousseline production. At the same time, bourgeois prosperity grows — together with the self-confidence of the owners.

The Florhof now fully evolves into a distinguished villa overlooking the city.



18TH CENTURY

The Florhof has become a stately and clearly recognisable villa.



18TH CENTURY

The impressive gardens are arranged in terraced form.



FROM TOWNHOUSE TO PENSION

The Florhof becomes a pension

With the decline of Zurich's silk industry, the role of the house begins to change. The private residence gradually evolves into a place for guests.

Until the late 19th century, the Schönenberg — the former name of the Florhof — remains the residence of various Zurich patrician families.

In 1907, architect Karl Weigle acquires the property and undertakes extensive modernisation work. One year later, the pension officially receives the name Florhof.

Under changing ownership, the house develops into a discreet retreat above the city. Artists, scholars and writers find calm here, whether for a short stay or much longer.

Artists, scholars
and writers
cherish the Florhof
as a retreat.



1930

The Florhof is converted into a pension in 1907 and remains one thereafter. The house changes ownership several times.



TRANSFORMATIONS DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

The Florhof in transformation

Throughout the 20th century, the house undergoes several phases of adaptation and modernisation.

As much of the internal supporting structure consists of timber, architects decide during a major renovation to introduce reinforced concrete floor slabs in order to stabilise the building.

Parts of the historic parquet flooring are given a second life during this period: in the former restaurant, they are repurposed as timber wall panelling.

The exterior appearance is also revised. Window shutters are recreated based on historical models, and the façade receives the distinctive blue tone that characterises the house well into recent years.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION

Protected heritage

In 1973, the Florhof is placed under heritage protection in its defining parts.

This secures the architectural elements that shape the historical character of both the house and its courtyard.

Among the protected features are the north, west and south façades, the entrance portal with its door and staircase, as well as the characteristic enclosure with stone pedestals and wrought-iron gates.

Numerous interior details are also preserved under protection — including historic doors, the cheminée and the blue-green tiled tower stove that still stands in the reception area today.

In the courtyard, the Neptune fountain remains another historic focal point of the ensemble.



The blue-green tiled tower stove, still standing today in the reception area of Villa Florhof.



The Neptune fountain in the courtyard remains one of the Florhof's most distinctive historic features and continues to attract visitors with an interest in art and architecture.

2026

During the restoration, historic stucco details are carefully uncovered and restored.



THE NEXT CHAPTER

The Florhof and the silkworm moth

The silkworm moth, which today forms part of the house's emblem, represents what has shaped the Florhof for centuries: transformation.

What began as a modest building became a place of trade, later a city villa, then a pension and finally a hotel. Every generation leaves traces behind and weaves a new thread into the story of this house.

Like the moth itself, the Florhof has passed through many stages of transformation while retaining something constant throughout: its character as a place of encounter.

With the current restoration, another chapter now begins — one that preserves the history of the house while guiding it into a new era.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Over the decades, artists, writers, actors, musicians, photographers and politicians stay at the Florhof — some for a single night, others returning time and again.

Among them are personalities such as Günter Grass, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Eugène Ionesco, Michael Ende, Bruno Ganz and Christopher Lee. Their names appear in the guestbooks as quiet traces of encounters between the house and its visitors.

Perhaps it is the unique location. Perhaps the calm held within the old walls.

Or perhaps it is because the Florhof has never tried to be anything other than what it truly is:

a place with character
and heart.

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