

Hector Guimard: Recognition of Art Nouveau Pioneer's Work

By LISA HAMMEL

MANY museum-goers know Hector Guimard only as the creator of the sinuous ironwork Métro entrance that stands among the sculpture in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art.

But Guimard has long been considered by certain scholars to be the major architect-designer to work in the art nouveau style in France. Today the Museum of Modern Art opens an extensive exhibition of the work of this remarkably versatile creator, who died in New York in 1942.

The show runs the gamut of Guimard's creations: from excellent photographs of some of the 50-odd houses and public buildings he designed and built in France from the late 19th century into the first few decades of the 20th, to all the fittings of the interiors he worked on.

The latter category includes furniture, decorative accessories, fabrics wall designs and papers, stained glass, stair rails and even door pulls and nailheads.

Reasons for Exhibition

Why has the museum chosen at this time to exhibit the prodigious outpouring of a designer whose works had fallen into such disrepute that it required a five-year search to find many of them?

On the one hand, said F. Lanier Graham, the associate curator at the museum who directed the exhibition, Guimard is under-appreciated. On the other hand, Mr. Graham pointed out, Guimard's work has relevance to some of the things architects and designers are trying to do today.

Guimard was interested in controlling and integrating the environment of his structures, as are many contemporary architects and designers. Consequently, he became a master of every medium he worked with, from building materials to textiles (he even designed the fabric of his wife's wedding gown when he married in 1909).

Guimard, Mr. Graham points out, was

also a true modern in his desire to push beyond the frontiers of technological achievement.

The flowering of these attempts devolved into the style that Mr. Graham calls "abstract naturalism."

"What is relevant to the most advanced technical investigations of today," Mr. Graham writes in his introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition, "is Guimard's unrestrained sense of form."

Guimard wished, Mr. Graham explained in an interview, to express in concrete form the dynamic of the material itself. Thus, working in cast iron, as he did for the 150 entrances he created for the Paris Métro, he was concerned with expressing the weight and mass of the material and even the sinuous forms of metal bubbling in its molten state.

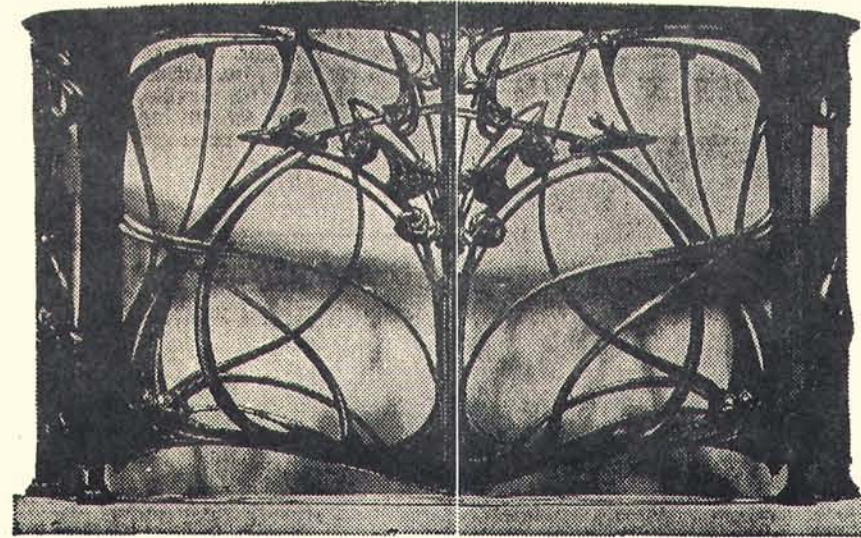
The show, which is in the museum's East Wing, will run through May 10.

A dinner was held last night in the

Founder's Room of the museum for lenders to the show, trustees, major supporters of the museum and museum staff who had worked on the exhibition.

Among those attending the dinner and private opening were Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Barr (he was director of the museum from 1929 to 1944 and was one of the first museum officials to give contemporary recognition to Guimard); Mr. and Mrs. John B. Hightower (he is director-elect of the museum and will assume his duties May 1); Mr. and Mrs. William S. Paley (he is president of the museum's board of trustees); the French Ambassador, Charles Lucet, and Mrs. Lucet, and the French Consul General in New York, Henri Claudel, and Mrs. Claudel.

Other guests included Mrs. Leo Palitz (Lillian Nassau), the art nouveau dealer and authority; Mr. and Mrs. Peter Eisenman (he is director of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies), and the architects, Philip Johnson and Gordon Bunshaft, and Mrs. Bunshaft.



Arabesques of iron form this graceful railing of balcony by Guimard



The New York Times Studio (by Gene Magglo)
The massive vitality of Guimard's earlier designs is seen in cast-iron fireplace with enameled lava insets he had in his office.



Something of Hector Guimard's wide range of design ability is indicated by silver-handled cane and the pearwood corner cabinet.