

READING NOTES

Campaigns for the maintenance of national, regional and local identities and for the retrieval of our tangible and intangible cultural heritage represent commendable initiatives after the long, dark night imposed by the omnipotent ideology of proletarian internationalism, which promoted the dissolution and destruction of these values. The guild of the architects in Romania has distinguished itself among the professional categories that have waged the above-mentioned campaigns. Acting individually, in groups, in associations or in NGOs, Romanian architects have vigorously advocated the recovery, preservation and development of our architectural heritage, all the more so as their forerunners succeeded in imposing a “national style in architecture.” An enumeration of these names, associations or NGOs would be superfluous and unfair on account of its inevitable omissions.

The magnitude of the restoration efforts targeted at monuments of architecture and urban ensembles has brought to light true jewels that leave us speechless and pleasantly surprise us, so we could ask ourselves: did we really have such architectural gems? How come we never knew about them?! Many published graphic materials, ranging from advertisements to archival or contemporary images, blueprints, sketches, posters and books, attest an interest in the retrieval of heritage as an identity marker. Whether they are complex studies on urban ensembles and/or architectural monuments, monographs on architects and collections of memoirs, these publications have made readers aware of their cultural heritage, awakening and consolidating their sense of belonging to a cultural space with a strong identity, making them love their cities and become more attentive to the “story of the houses” and of the buildings that surround them. One of the authors with outstanding works in the field of art history, Oana Marinache delights us with each publication bearing her authorial or editorial signature. Without having met her personally, but only through her books, I am impressed, in the case of this prolific author and doctoral student, with the effervescence of her publishing and civic projects and the maturity of her studies, which are the result of her exceptional power of work. Her professional dedication and her passion for shedding light on our architectural and biographical heritage have materialized in her monographs on architects like Cristofi Cerchez,

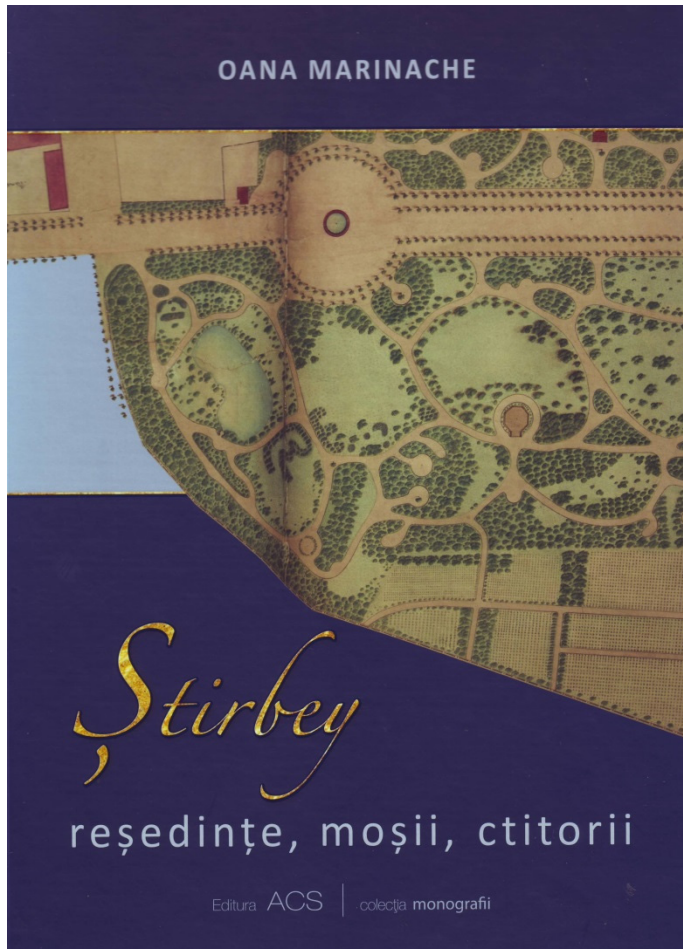
Louis Pierre Blanc and Edmond Van Saarinen-Algi, in her presentation of the heritage of several important Romanian families, like the Știrbey family, and in her editing of the memoirs of outstanding individuals like Nadeja Știrbey and Elisa Brătianu. The impressive volume of her publications, which are the result of large-scale archival and field research, is grounded in her teamwork with collaborators like Cristian Gache, Anca Dină, Ovidiu Baștea, Ion Marinache and Irina Gudană. At the same time, the author has consulted and has been guided by well-known architects-publicists, like Ioana Beldiman, Ruxandra Nemțeanu, Ruxandra Juvara Minea and others.

In 2012, Oana Marinache published a beautiful and refined monograph dedicated to the architect Cristofi Cerchez, who designed in Bucharest the “Villa with Bells by the Highway,” belonging to the physician Nicolae Minovici.



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Written with passion and being very well documented, this work is a model in its field as it provides a wealth of information, some of it unpublished before. It is richly illustrated with blue-prints, sketches, pictures of buildings, of their furniture and ornamental fittings, containing also various records, documents and photographs, all of these printed in an elegant layout. The book caught my attention and after reading it, I realized that its author is an exceptional scholar and that it would be worthwhile tracing her publicistic evolution. It seems that I was not wrong in my assumption for one year later, in 2013, she published a volume in English at ACS Press in Bucharest, entitled *Știrbey Residences in Bucharest and Buftea: architecture and interior decoration*.



This is an impressive study, comprising 301 pages in large-size format, with a preface signed by Ioana Beldiman. Dedicated “To my parents,” the volume exceeds the sphere of architecture, as it includes elements of genealogy and social history, remarkable archival pieces, such as old documents and records, including ads and historic photographs. In other words, this is a *tous azimuts* foray into the past of this great family, which played a decisive political, economic and social role in the evolution of Wallachia and, later on, of Romania. Sometimes placed in a mirror, the images of the buildings belonging to the patrimony of this family, captured both during their period of glory and in their lamentable present-day condition, is the best proof of our involution... The author manages to awaken interest in this illustrious family and its members, some of them, like Barbu Bibescu Știrbey or Barbu Al. Știrbey, being little known. This volume was organically continued with a sequel, *Știrbey: reședințe, moșii, ctitorii* (*Știrbey: Residences, Estates, Foundations*), which saw the light of print in 2014 at the same publishing house in București, with a preface by art historian Ioana Beldiman and a “Foreword” by architect Ruxandra Nemțeanu, both of them academics with reference works in the field. The author, Oana Marinache, dedicated this massive volume of 495 pages in large format to “my professors.”

It continues the presentation of the heritage of this family, a great commissioner of artworks. A mischievous reader might be tempted to say: residences! estates! hmm!, but reading the book carefully sheds light on the social role played by this family, who were founders of religious and social institutions (hospitals and schools), of cultural institutions (libraries), of economic enterprises (model farms and agricultural holdings, as well as agro-industrial or pharmaceutical companies, carpentry workshops, weaving mills, etc.), where there were hundreds and hundreds of employees. Patriotic and determined in their actions, the members of this family assiduously promoted Romanian products and Romanian creations. They were the authors of a genuine social project! The present-day status of some institutions, such as the Brătianu Foundations, suggests the imperative necessity of finding solutions for their use after their sorely needed restoration from the ground up. Romania would be much richer if these treasures were brought back into the cultural and social circuit.

After the publication of these volumes, Oana Marinache edited two books of memoirs written by illustrious women, members of the Știrbey family. These were Nadeja Știrbey's *Jurnal de prințesă: (1916-1919) (A Princess's Diary)* (2014) and Elisa Brătianu's *Memorii (Memoirs)* (2015), the first two books in the collection series *Carte de nu mă uita (Books That Should Not Be Forgotten)* that Oana Marinache launched at Istoria Artei Press. We wish a long life to this collection, with many books of memoirs and correspondence! Published in a special format, the two volumes are most welcome, as they grant readers the possibility of becoming acquainted with these authors' personalities and forming a correct image

about them, in the context in which, for a very long period of time, Communist historiography totally distorted their cultural contribution. These were patriots of high standing, who vibrantly exulted at every achievement of their country, which they loved enormously. Without being very extensive, these books are particularly dense in information, providing descriptions of events, situations, personalities and experiences. They are written in a beautiful, smooth, delicate style, especially in the case of Nadeja. The realities it presents, the events it records are a good opportunity for the author to engage in personal reflections of a disturbing lucidity, high patriotism and great sympathy for our country. Usually reserved, with an exquisite education, these great ladies of our culture were overwhelmed at some crucial moments in our history.



For example, Nadeja Știrbey reflects, in her diary, on the end of World War I thus: “30 October [1918, *our note*] Hurrrraaaah! We are avenged now! We are truly avenged! Lord, how beautiful this is! How grand! It’s too beautiful and too grand to be able to grasp the whole extent of our glory, so I thank Thee, Lord, on my knees, for this sublime moment! How good it is to live so as to feel this divine intoxication, our beautiful ideal fulfilled! This awful war ends in a permanent success! I feel like embracing all those in whose eyes I can see this spark that I feel

glowing in my own” (p. 71). Published in 2014, a year that “marks, at European level, the beginning of commemorations dedicated to the centenary of World War I,” Nadeja Știrbey’s journal is certainly a relevant effort in this regard!

Of a somewhat different nature, Elisa Brătianu’s *Memoirs* are important because the heroine lived in the highest circles of the Romanian society, leaving memorable descriptions of personalities from the forefront of our political and economic life who made history and including references to events that took place behind the scenes! And thus, the first two books of the collection *Carte de nu mă uita* fully belong to this category! They are also excellently illustrated with iconographic material, which is a constant characteristic of the publications written or edited by Oana Marinache.

In the same years, 2014-2015, this tireless author published in collaboration two monographs on architects: *Louis Pierre Blanc: o planșetă elvețiană în serviciul României* (*Louis Pierre Blanc: A Drawing Board in the Service of Romania*) (2014), together with Cristian Gache, and *Edmond Van Saanen-Algi, de la Baletele rusești la Palatul Telefoanelor* (*Edmond Van Saanen-Algi, from the Russian Ballets to the Telephone Palace*) (2015), together with art historian Gabriel Badea-Păun, opening thus the collection series *Arhitecți de neuitat* (*Unforgettable Architects*) as Istoria Artei publishing house in Bucharest. In these monographs, the authors present Louis Pierre Blanc’s Swiss origins and his training as an architect. He was a fellow student of Ion Mincu’s during their studies in Paris. The Romanian architect encouraged Blanc to come to Romania, where he became naturalized and accomplished impressive works of architecture. Suffice it to mention some of them: the building of the University of Iași, the Botanical Institute, the greenhouses of the Botanical Garden, the Institute of Bacteriology, the Faculty of Medicine, the Ministry of Agriculture and Estates in Bucharest, as well as numerous villa-type residences commissioned by Nicolae Filipescu, Ion Lahovary, Maurice Blank, Herman Speyer, all of them in Bucharest, which have become emblematic buildings! The unprecedented economic boom of our country led to territorial expansion of Bucharest, so Louis Pierre Blanc was the author and co-author of the so-called “parcelări” (land parcelling), a process by which vast plots were parcelled (divided) depending on the topography of the land in order to build villas on them. It was the case of the parcelling projects from Șoseaua Bonaparte, Dudești, Comarnic-Isvor and Băneasa. There were many others, conducted by other architects. Accessible to the middle class, whose members were commissioners of exquisite architecture, villas came to form entire neighbourhoods in Bucharest, giving it its peculiar charm. This volume is lavishly illustrated with a specific iconography in each chapter.

Edmond Van Saanen-Algi was born in Bucharest in 1882. He was the son of Robert Van Saanen, who had settled in Romania, a man of Dutch origins whose family from Hoorn had “conducted a notable commercial activity on the Baltic Sea and in the Ottoman Empire” (p. 17), and Luiza Bruzzesi, whose Italian

father had opened a shop on Calea Victoriei in 1852. The patronym Algi comes from his stepfather, his mother's second husband, Colonel Alexandru E. Algiu. The young man carried out his studies at the Munich Polytechnic and at the Higher School of Fine Arts in Paris, focusing on Architecture (1903-1914), with long periods of internship in architecture offices. A complex, sensitive personality, he was also a gifted drawer, painter and composer. The journeys he made to London and in New York shaped his architectural creation. Van Saanen-Algi is the author of the Antiquarians' House, of the palace housing the Academy of High Commercial and Industrial Studies and of the Telephone Palace in Bucharest, but also of the villas commissioned by Istrate Micescu in Cişmigiu Park and at Ciumeşti-Argeş, or the mausoleum of the Lenş family in Bellu Cemetery, as well as numerous projects that never materialized. This volume is richly illustrated, with ground plans and images of his buildings, but also with drawings, sketches and drafts, demonstrating his artistic qualities. Both of the above-mentioned monographs are valuable reconstructions of the creations belonging to these two great architects.

Finally, also in 2015, Oana Marinache published "a unique collection of ground plans and sketches" from the period 1830-1860, in what the author calls the "archive of architecture." Born from the desire to valorise her impressive archival documentation, Oana Marinache's book is dedicated to the beginnings of Romanian architecture in the period 1830-1860, from before the crystallization of the national style. After outlining the historical context of the period, with the first institutional and administrative regulations initiated and enforced by the Organic Regulations adopted in the Danubian Principalities under Pavel Kiselef, the author presents the ground plans and sketches of largely foreign architects. They can be grouped, as Marinache says, "into the great categories of public projects," but there are also a few private constructions and extra urban estates, namely: princely and administrative courts; military buildings; churches and monasteries; public buildings; cultural institutions; hospitals; streets and roads; hydro-technical works; gardens and cemeteries; inns and shops; houses; estates; that is to say, whatever was needed in order for the Danubian principalities to embark on the path of progress. Without analysing them in detail, but just highlighting them, the author points out, in her conclusions, that they "remain witnesses to a colourful era, waiting to be rediscovered and reinterpreted."

These books are definitely the result of a tenacious effort of research into the Romanian architectural and urbanistic phenomenon, conducted with youthful intensity and passion. A graduate of the School of Architecture in Bucharest, which gave a long series of valuable architects, Oana Marinache does honour to her *alma mater* and will certainly become a name of reference in her

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field. Her books have strong educational values, attempting to retrieve the biography and creation of certain architects who have fallen into oblivion, as well as of some exceptional commissioners of architectural artworks, whose estates are thus restored into the public consciousness, awakening in us the pride of belonging to this nation and making us stronger through the knowledge they convey about our prestigious history in this domain! The education of the reader's gaze that Oana Marinache subliminally undertakes in her books, enriching our aesthetic sense, contributes to strengthening our civic spirit. In other words, we are richer after reading and looking at these beautiful works. They are useful for a wide range of specialists, including architects, land planners, historians, geographers, tour guides, men of culture or, simply, to all those who love their country and want to know the identity of its places.

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