

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1979)
Heft: 1754

Artikel: An english country house in Switzerland
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690621>

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AN ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE IN SWITZERLAND



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In the December, 1978, issue of the *Swiss Observer* there appeared a review of a book by Dr. Katharina Medici-Mall, published by the Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte: "Das Landhaus Waldbühl".

More recently the author of this book gave an illustrated talk at the Swiss Embassy in April, in the presence of Dr. and Mrs. R. Bühler, the present owners of "Waldbühl" and Mrs. Lucie Burckhardt, President of the Swiss Society for the History of Art. The talk was followed by a reception by H.E. Ambassador E. Thalmann and Mme. Thalmann.

The history of "Waldbühl" is fascinating and also slightly paradoxical, in so far as "Waldbühl", situated in the Swiss countryside in Uzwil/SG, became the finest example of an English Country House by the English architect *Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott* (1865–1945). Together with Voysey and Mackintosh, Baillie Scott was one of the most prominent architects and designers of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In his concept of the English house Baillie Scott wanted to create an amalgam of tradition, comfort and a new

conception of design, laying great emphasis on the very best of materials and highest standards of contemporary workmanship.

While he was alive Baillie Scott's influence in Europe and America was greater than in Britain. Along with Frank L. Wright, Josef Hoffmann and Le Corbusier, Baillie Scott did much to popularise the open plan.

Theodor Bühler (1877–1915) was a successful and wealthy Swiss

industrialist, being co-owner of the engineering firm Gebrüder Sulzer in Uzwil, which by the turn of the century was already exporting its milling plants all over the world. He had spent two years with his wife in England and the United States and had become a lover of all things English. Therefore he wanted his house in Switzerland to be an English country house in every aspect. Theodor Bühler first established contact with Baillie Scott in

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1907. From then until 1909 when building began, Baillie Scott made three journeys to Uzwil and had five meetings with Theodor Bühler in England. Approximately 400 pages of correspondence were compiled, including some 160 plans. By good fortune, these documents, together with the contractors' estimates and invoices, have survived to form the only existent archive of a Baillie Scott house anywhere.

As building progressed, Baillie Scott continued to polish his final plans until November, 1911. They cover everything in detail, from the foundations to the brushes and bottles for the dressing-table.

The interior decoration has no parallel in Baillie Scott's other work, since in none of his English houses was he given the opportunity to design the overall decoration. The panelling for dining-room and study, the furniture, metalwork, specially woven fabrics for curtains and covers, marble and tiles for fireplaces and bathrooms, all came from England, where Baillie Scott had kept a watchful eye on the craftsmen executing the orders. The gardens, too, were laid out to his design.

"Waldbühl" is a masterpiece, conceived by Baillie Scott at the height of his powers and commissioned by a patron with great

perception and patience as well as the necessary means to complete the house. Its unique quality lies in the fact that Baillie Scott was able to create an organic whole in which everything down to the keyhole bears his signature.

"Waldbühl" has remained practically unchanged and Dr. Rolf Bühler has lived in it since childhood.

Along with Waldbühl, the best preserved Baillie Scott house, 11 other Baillie Scott houses in Britain are featured in Dr. Medici's book, which all bear out the tradition of the house as a civilised place in which to live.

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Interior at Waldbühl (Damenzimmer)