

## OSTERSITTEN UND BRÄUCHE / CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS

## Easter Markets of Vienna

tradition and its emphasis on the symbol of the egg. Or else it simply means that artists from neighboring countries are also invited to display and sell their creations.

Take Vienna, for example. Only a few hundred yards from St. Stephen's, the very center of the city, there are two distinctly different Easter markets within an egg's throw of each other. The "Easter Market Am Hof" consists mainly of handicraft stalls, offering Eastern European linen shirts and towels, handcrafted wooden salad bowls and cutting boards, naturally dyed scarves and felt products, as well as antiques and bric-a-brac, including even the occasional World War II steel helmet, bullet hole and all, displayed peacefully next to the Jesus figure on the cross. There are beer stands and pancake booths, and you can order Strudel according to your own taste right on the spot from the "Strudelmeister's" oven. Real hand-painted Easter eggs are just as popular as glass blown ones, wooden, plastic, or gypsum eggs in endless varieties.

Some steps further, in front of the venerable "Schottenkirche," founded by Iro-Scottish monks in the twelfth century, the scene is a little different. Though also dominated by thousands of decorated eggs, displayed mainly in the open, Art Deco-like structure of the "Osterstand an der Freyung" (Easter Stand at the Freyung), the emphasis here is on more sophisticated stalls. In the slanted, triangular square called "Freyung," with the Austria Fountain in the middle, thousands of beautifully decorated delicate blown-out eggs can make the choice almost a burden—and the quality of handicraft, wooden folk art, and specialty foods like the Bavarian "Lebzelterei" with its *Lebkuchen* (gingerbread) is just as carefully chosen.

But perhaps the most beautiful Easter market in Vienna, attracting the collectible-hunter just as much as families with children, may be the one at Schönbrunn Castle. Though not directly located in the center of the city, it is easily accessible by metro. Here, in the old Parade Court, before the splendid backdrop of the huge Baroque castle with its warm yellow façade, huge red, blue, and yellow eggs, girded with spring flowers, greet the visitor from afar.

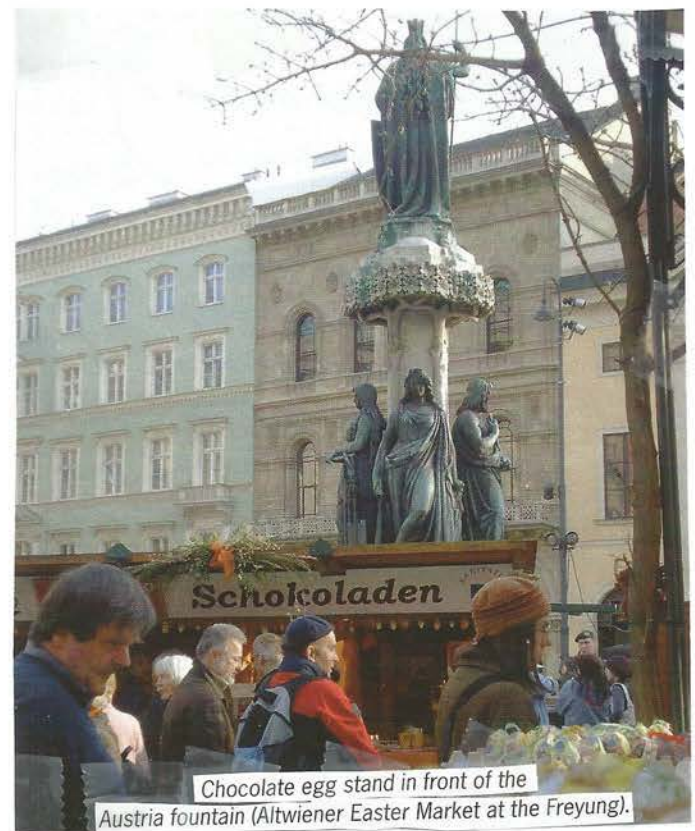
All wooden booths are painted dark green to correspond with the hunter green shutters of the high, arched windows of the castle, and each exhibitor is hand-selected for appropriateness, style, tradition, and quality of products. No cheap Asian-made merchandise here, no common street market entertainment, no ready-made plastic eggs, and no blaring music from a box. Instead, people come to look for the very special collectible, like the tiny tin soldiers and Easter bunny scenes with their delightful design right

out of Mother Goose. Or they are intrigued by the most delicate of hand-blown glass decoration or wooden Easter egg pendants, finely-carved to almost look like laces.

Handicrafts from all over Austria and some selected neighboring countries include a ceramics booth with the famous dark blue ceramics from *Bunzlau*, horn objects, handmade soaps, and eggs decorated in a hundred different ways. Especially, the elaborate Russian and Ukrainian batik (wax resist) eggs, the *pysanki*, are favorite collectibles.

After strolling through the alleys of the many booths, you can taste typical Austrian Easter specialties, lamb dishes, cakes or giant pretzels, and enjoy them with a drink, sitting on the rim of the huge round fountains on the lawn, entertained by a live jazz band.

With the huge Parade Court at Queen Mary Theresia's home of the eighteenth century, Schönbrunn can afford an attractive children's program. "Roberta," the hen, a man in a hen's costume on stilts, can be seen each year, towering over the visitors, to greet the children and invite them to participate. The games are non-electronic, non-plastic—but pro-dexterity, communication, and creativity, chaperoned by kind helpers. Century-old activities like walking on stilts are revived. What this looked like in the old days, can be admired, for example, the very same day, on the early seventeenth-century paintings of Peter Breughel in



Chocolate egg stand in front of the Austria fountain (Altwiener Easter Market at the Freyung).