

## OSLO, NORWAY

### AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, VILLA OTIUM

The U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Oslo, built in 1911, was the first legation building purchased in Europe by the United States.

Considered one of the most beautiful residences in Norway, it was designed by renowned Norwegian architect Henrik Bull for Hans Andreas Olsen, the Norwegian Consul General at St. Petersburg, and his wife Esther, the niece of Alfred Nobel. The building recalls a Russian palace the family admired. Its grand scale and opulent detail speak of the wealth the family acquired in the petroleum business in Czarist Russia.

The three-story villa of some fifty rooms is stylistically Art Nouveau, or Jugendstil. The asymmetrical yet balanced composition is elegantly designed. Bull, who also designed the National Theater and the Historical Museum in Oslo, was Norway's leading architect at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Villa Otium is his most important residence. A significant number of its furnishings were purchased from Jacques Bodart in Paris.

The surrounding garden preserves the connection of architecture and nature even though it has now been reduced in size by three-quarters. The property is part of the old "Otium," or park meant for leisure, which was itself originally part of Frogner Farm, later named Frogner Park.

Mrs. Olsen sold the property to the United States Government in 1924 – the \$125,000 price reportedly making it the most expensive U.S. residence abroad at the time and requiring Congressional approval. The Norwegian Preservation Agency has identified the Villa Otium as significant historical architecture.

