For Maja and the children of the Résidence Eldorado Lille3000 project,
who sowed the seeds for this story.
Many thanks to you and to the whole team behind the
Lille Book Prize for this fabulous journey from gold to green!
G.E.

To the Lille Book Prize team – may our cities
flourish with creativity!
L.V.

For their help and enthusiasm in the preparation of this book,
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Apartment house in Vienna (Austria), concept and idea by
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HUNDERTWASSER

The House of Happy Spirits

Géraldine Elschner
Lucie Vandevelde



PRESTEL
Munich · London · New York

What exactly is going on in our city?
In our big, gray, tidy city,
some odd things have been happening.

The old factory that made grandma's furniture…
it suddenly looks like a chessboard.
And a tall chimney lights up in the distance.

Who is messing everything up?
"The wizard of the rooftops," whispers Lea.
"The witch of the forest," utters Leo.
Tokyo says nothing at all.
He's usually babbling on nonstop,
my beautiful parrot.

The most unbelievable thing
has happened right in our neighborhood,
opposite mom's flower store.

Right there, on a wild plot of land between the houses,
stands a noble old tree in the middle of cluttered bushes and grass.
With its magnificent crown, it is the king of our little forest.
Tokyo likes to hide in its twigs and in the shadows of its branches.
I celebrate my birthday there every year with Leo and Lea.
That's when, for one day, I become a little queen in our empire.
One beautiful morning, however…



...the bulldozers arrived, together with
cranes, concrete mixers and trucks.
They took over the whole plot in no time.

I like construction sites, but on this occasion
I shouted: "STOP! Leave my tree alone!"
Nobody listened to me.
A man in a hard hat even blocked my way.

My tree king was surrounded by machinery,
half-deafened by the noise. Alone, dusty
and unhappy, he could only stand and watch.
He was like a prisoner.

HUNDERTWASSER

PROFILE

FIRST NAME : **Friedensreich**

NAME : **Hundertwasser**

1928 – 2000

Austrian painter, architect, environmentalist and philosopher.

A PIONEER OF **ECOLOGICAL BUILDING DESIGN**

Friedensreich Hundertwasser was one of the pioneers of ecological architecture. As a committed environmentalist, he created buildings and houses with trees on rooftops and façades (so-called 'tree tenants'), so that he could find a place for the forest in his building projects. He also designed the floors to be uneven, like the terrain of the Earth. Hundertwasser wanted his buildings' residents to be more connected with nature. He also encouraged them to be creative and give their apartments a personal touch.

THE **PRINCIPLES** OF ECOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURE

Hundertwasser regarded the window as a bridge between the inside and the outside, as well as a way to express how we view our neighborhood. His residents were to have 'window rights' — they could design the parts of the outer wall surrounding their windows as they wished, using paintings, mosaics and plants. Hundertwasser rejected geometrical straight lines, as these do not exist in the natural world. He hated rulers and other traditional measuring instruments used by architects. His belief was that we live in a prison of straight lines. To rebel against this, he made architecture with bends and curves that resembled natural rivers, mountains or plants. Hundertwasser also believed that society should live in harmony with nature and not pollute it.

For him, trees should find a place not only on the roofs but also in the apartments themselves. One square meter (or square yard) of space should to be put aside so that a tree can develop and grow outside the building — becoming just as much a resident of the apartment as the humans who live inside.

THE **HUNDERTWASSER HOUSE** IN VIENNA

Built between 1983 and 1985 and unveiled on March 1st 1986, the Hundertwasser House brings together all of the architectural ideas that Hundertwasser had been developing since the 1950's. Austrian architect Josef Krawina worked with him on the development plans for this remarkable social housing project. They designed the house as a friendly space that could serve both its inhabitants and the environment.

The communal areas, so often neglected in conventional apartments, are especially attractive here, with mosaic-decorated stairwells depicting animals and plants, a welcoming conservatory and an adventure playground with undulating floors for children.

Lion sculptures and colorful cones remind us that the house stands on the junction of Löwengasse and Kegelgasse (or Lion Street and Cone Street). Fifty apartments, many communal and private terraces, as well as four commercial spaces and a medical practice are all included in the Hundertwasser House. Ranging from 320 to 1,600 square meters (383 to 1,913 square yards), the apartments are simple and functional in design — except for the bathrooms, which have colorful tiles on the walls and floors!

The area of Cone Street where the house stands is a pedestrian zone, laid out as a partly paved and partly planted promenade with undulations that look like natural terrain. At the front of the entrance is a fountain with three ceramic basins. A few steps away lies the 'Village,' a shopping mall also designed by Hundertwasser.

From the creator's workshop

A **FOREST** IN THE CITY

Standing in front of a house by Hundertwasser, you feel as though you're dreaming. The dream, however, is a reality of brick and concrete and a wealth of shapes and colors. There are trees everywhere, growing on terraces, façades and roofs. If you were a bird flying above the house, you could never guess that there are 50 apartments hidden inside this little forest. Such architecture brings humans and nature closer together, giving both equal respect. A zest for living, a freely designed space for families, a home for plants and trees: Hundertwasser houses embody the colorful spiral of life, an idea very close to the heart of their creator, who was both an architect and a painter. **G. E.**

TREE TENANTS

Every square meter (or square yard) taken from nature to build the Hundertwasser House has been given back in and around the building itself. Residents are permitted to occupy the inside spaces, whereas nature is entitled to the outside spaces, which the snow covers in winter. To create the living areas for nature, over 900 metric tons (990 tons) of earth were poured onto the roofs and terraces of this beautiful apartment in Vienna, Austria!

Hundertwasser himself stated that we are only tenants of this Earth, and that the trees are the tenants of our houses. Given the deforestation that is now damaging our planet, this attitude makes perfect sense today! Other architects are working along such lines as well. Stefano Boeri, for example, builds 'vertical woodlands' from China to Italy. Incidentally, the old tree from our story lives as a 'tenant' in Lille, France, where the kids of the 'Lille3000' project have adopted it. It has taken root both in a book and in the real world… **G. E.**

A **BRIDGE**

For me, Hundertwasser is an important artist, a true master. I have been inspired by his fabulous and colorful universe since my art student days. I knew much more about his paintings than about his architectural creations until, as I researched this book, I discovered his ideas and concepts. He believed that everyone has the right to access beauty, that we should bring nature back into our towns and live in harmony with it, and that a golden dome can make ordinary city dwellers into kings and queens. All of this sat well with me.

Even though this book is dedicated to the Hundertwasser House, it was impossible to limit myself to that one building when I designed the book's illustrations. I wouldn't have done justice to the artist's complete works and to him as a person. I also wanted to make reference to his painting. In my drawings for the book, I used my own contrasting color palette, which has always been similar to Hundertwasser's own. I played around with mosaics, a chessboard and checkered patterns, which were very dear to him and which, historically speaking, have revitalized rooftops, sidewalks and façades in the city. There are lines everywhere — lines that are never allowed to be straight (Hundertwasser tried to ban straight lines). My lines can form a spiral, a shape that symbolizes the entrance to the world. It takes shape here in the imagination of children. It is seen from beginning to end and forms a bridge between the fantasy world of the kids and that of the artist. On the final page, it is replaced by a boat because that is the point where the children and Hundertwasser begin their journey.

L. V.