



**From a Commercial Office
Building to a Research Center:
VEKAM'S JOURNEY TO
'BÜYÜK APARTMAN'**

BÜYÜK APARTMAN

Commissioned by Vehbi Koç and built in 1928 as part of the young Republic's vision for its capital, Büyük Apartman holds a special place in Ankara's commercial and institutional memory. This nearly century-long story takes on new meaning with the relocation of Koç University's Vehbi Koç Ankara Studies Research Center (VEKAM) to the building. Reinforced through a meticulous restoration process, the structure preserves the traces of modernization while evolving into a hub for academic research and cultural exchange.



Erman Tamur
Collection





Anafartalar Avenue represents a defining axis in the formation of the capital's identity, as one of the spatial manifestations of modernization during the Early Republican Period. In this context, both the avenue and its surroundings stand out as a hub where commercial and social spaces meeting the needs of modern urban life were concentrated. The avenue was lined with shops and commercial buildings, the former hosting photographers, bookstores, hotels, pastry shops, cafés, glassware shops, jewelers, textile merchants, shoe sellers, and hardware stores, while the office buildings housed doctors, dentists, architects, engineers, contractors, and lawyers.

Construction story

Büyük Apartman was commissioned by the late Vehbi Koç, who later founded the Vehbi Koç Foundation, to serve as a commercial office building. Completed in 1928, it became one of the first modern apartment buildings on Anafartalar Avenue. The construction was undertaken by İnşaat İdare-i Fenniye, a company owned by Ankara-based contractor Erzurumlu Nafiz Bey, architect Mehmed Galip, and engineer Feşçizade İbrahim Galip, an expert in reinforced concrete construction. The building's first tenant was the General Directorate of State Railways and Ports Construction and Operation. Subsequently, the Ministry of Public Works (1929–1934) and later the Ankara Directorate of Urban Planning operated out of the building

for several years. From 1954 onwards, Muhabank became closely associated with the building in the city's institutional memory. Some notable tenants of the ground-floor shops included Atlas Shoe Store, the stationery shop of Halil Naci Mihçioğlu, the glassware shop of Yusuf Ruso, and the hardware store of Gülzade Hakkı Bey.

Architectural expression of modernity

Symmetrically designed with a façade clad in Ankara stone, the building is organized around a central courtyard and consists of a ground floor with a mezzanine level, two full floors, and a top floor (Erdoğan, Günel and Narince, 2007, p. 176). Above the ground-floor shops, the plastered and painted façade is divided into five main vertical bays. The undersides of the eaves are plastered and the eaves themselves are wide. In one shop model, the entrance is located on the right. On the first floor, the façade features a striking composition formed by the gussets of the columns. On the right and left projections, three pointed-arched windows appear beneath these gussets. In the three central bays, the windows completely fill the gusseted areas, taking on their form, and are fronted by iron balcony railings. On the second and third floors, projections appear in the second and fourth vertical bays from the left. These rest on stone corbels. The first, third, and fifth bays contain balconies with stone railings, while all windows on the second floor are rectangular.





On the third floor, the windows in the first and fifth vertical bays are Tudor-arched, while the central third bay features a three-arched arcade formed by two columns rising from a stone balcony railing; the windows behind it are rectangular. Above the projections, there is an additional level. The windows on the projecting bay are pointed-arched and grouped with two rectangular windows on either side. In the central bay there is also a balcony with a stone railing. Wide eaves extend across the structure at different levels (Koç University VEKAM Archive, TKV 290).

A renewal faithful to the historic fabric

Dismantling works on Büyük Apartman began on April 2, 2023, by Ark İnşaat. The building is registered as a Grade II protected cultural property. Because of its listed status, the restoration projects adhered closely to the building's original architectural features, introducing only new functions suited to the needs of the Center. In reinforcing the building's hybrid structural system, three different methods were applied: FRP (Fiber Reinforced Polymer), a steel column-beam system, and basalt mesh applications.

During the restoration and renovation process, original materials were preserved where possible, while wood, marble, mosaic, carpet, and LVT (Luxury Vinyl Tile) were also used for floor coverings depending on the intended function of each level. For ceilings and walls, wooden partitions and drywall were installed alongside original materials, followed by plastering, rendering, and painting. Every element removed during the renovation was reused in appropriate areas within the building. The mechanical and electrical systems from previous periods were replaced with natural-gas heating, electric climate control and ventilation systems, and a power generator. In addition, technological systems such as fire detection, security cameras, audio-visual systems, and card-access control were

integrated in ways that do not disrupt the historic character of the building.

A new era in Büyük Apartman

The reinforcement and restoration works were completed on January 31, 2025. Following the installation of the interior furnishings, Koç University's VEKAM began using the building in November 2025. The library and offices, previously located in the Vehbi Koç Bağ Evi in Keçiören, were moved to Büyük Apartman. The mezzanine level was converted into a conference hall, while the courtyard was arranged as a foyer that can also function as an exhibition space together with the former shops. VEKAM will now host its exhibitions, conferences, symposia, and other national and international events in this building. One of the former shop spaces now serves as the sales office of Koç University Press.





VEKAM's new building is hosting the exhibition 'Palestine from Above' until April 11, 2026. The exhibition explores the historical, political, and cultural impact of viewing the geography of Palestine from above through a multi-layered selection of archival documents, maps, photographs, videos, and works of art.

PARTS OF ANKARA'S CULTURAL MEMORY

Established in 1994 by Vehbi Koç in the Bağ Evi (Orchard House) in Keçiören under the Vehbi Koç Foundation, the Ankara Studies Research Center (VEKAM) became part of Koç University in 2014. Following the relocation of its offices and library to Büyük Apartman, Vehbi Koç Bağ Evi continues to function as a venue showcasing Vehbi Koç's life, personal belongings, and a selection of documents presented to him.

Another property in the same area, the Ankara Bağ Evi, which also belongs to the family, was restored in accordance with its original character by Semahat Arsel, Chair of the Vehbi Koç Foundation and Member of the Board of Directors of Koç Holding, and opened as a museum. The house, which also displays the Semahat-Nusret Arsel Copper Artifacts Collection, features an exhibition curated by Sadberk Hanım Museum illustrating the transition from traditional to modern life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

All three buildings owned by VEKAM constitute important elements of Ankara's cultural memory and serve both the residents of Ankara and the academic community.

References

Erdoğan, A., Günel, G., & Narince, M. (2007). Ankara: History and Culture Series 4 – The Republic and the Capital. Ankara Metropolitan Municipality.

Koç University VEKAM Library and Archive Inventory of Immovable Cultural Heritage

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