

Research influences architectural decisions.

Renovation of the Old Town quarter in Vilnius.

Type of intervention

Restoration Rehabilitation / Renovation

Concerned elements on the intervention project

- 1. Foundations and underground structures
- 2. Vertical structures
- 3. Horizontal structures and vertical connections
- 4. Roof and terraces
- 5. Façade and building envelope
- 6. Finishes and completion elements
- 7. Integrate services
- 8. General strategies for building recovery

Site Vainiai Palace “Senatorių pasažas”
Dominikonu st. 11, Vilnius, Lithuania

Objectives Rehabilitation of historical city quarter to multi-purpose complex.

Property Private: Niels Peter Pretzmann

Designer „DO Architects“: Arch. Gilma Teodora Gylytė, Justina Jauniškytė, Dovilė Skrupskelienė, Andrė Baldišiūtė, Sabina Daugėlienė, Algimantas Neniškis, Paulius Paskačimas, Milda Grabauskaitė, Domantas Baltrūnas, Emilija Staškutė, Dorotėja Žiugždaitė, Vadim Babij, Ignas Uogintas, Karolina Čiplytė, Eglė Varapeckytė; Author of the interior Indrė Baršauskaitė; Management project solutions were prepared by “Atodangos”; Wall paintings were preserved by “Archeodomus”

Date 2018-2020



Background to the intervention

The Old Town of Vilnius is one of the largest surviving medieval old towns in Northern Europe. It has developed over the course of many centuries, and has been shaped by the city's history and a constantly changing cultural influence. It is a place where some of Europe's greatest architectural styles stand side by side and complement each other. In 1994 the Vilnius Old Town was included as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in recognition of its universal value and originality. It has been recognised as one of the most beautiful cities of the Old Continent that also has the largest baroque Old Town in the whole of Eastern and Central Europe.

Senator's Passage connects Dominikonu Street and Stikliu Street in the heart of Old Town Vilnius. It is believed that in the 15th century. In the territory of the now-called Pociėjai Palace, there may have been two sessions with two houses standing along the street, which were already built in the 17th century. belonged to the city's elite (which is where it gets its name). In the earliest available 1737. Fiurstenhof's Vilnius city plan depicts these palaces as the only buildings in the entire quarter, so they were significant in the cityscape at that time. In the beginning of the 19th century, the premises were rented out as apartments, 8 stores, a tea house and a bakery were located near Stikliu Street. There was a shop and a bookstore on Dominikonu Street in the building, and a printing house occupied several rooms in the yard.

Last time before Scandinavian owners bought the property, there was the offices of a water company. 1992 the building complex is included in the state register of immovable cultural heritage objects.

The owner of the complex, a Danish businessman Niels Peter Pretzmann, initially thought of setting up office space here. However, with the removal of the architectural layers formed over time, it became clear how this building actually looked in

the past and saw a completely different use of this building. It was decided to dedicate these historical spaces to the dedication of the culinary world. The aim is to unite responsibly operating Lithuanian farmers and craftsmen and become a new place for culinary experiences in the Old Town of Vilnius.

An interconnected complex of shops, eateries, and apartments with an enclosed courtyard and plenty of room for outdoor seating where visitors can enjoy goodies from the bakery, a glass of wine, and upscale street food in a modern, casual atmosphere. Adhering to the requirements for the preservation of historical architecture, the end result is one that is integrated visually with Old Town Vilnius and yet offers modern conveniences that began to draw residents and visitors to the city from day one.

Based on many historical, architectural, polychrome researches, a profound relationship was sought between precious heritage and bright, warm, expressive modern architecture exhibiting 400 years of historical layers. The restoration of the forgotten connection between Dominikonu and Stikliu streets creates a vibrant pedestrian passage with 20 authentic entrances highlighted by modern details, levitating concrete terraces, and a street fireplace.



Fig.1: Old town of Vilnius. Cathedral Square is marked in yellow, Town Hall Square is marked in green, School in red.

Description of the building

The building complex is formed by several buildings that surround the inner courtyard. The house was first mentioned in writing on the site of the present palace in 1600. The oldest building is two Gothic houses at the end of Dominikonų Street, the original basement vaults, skylight openings and staircases have been preserved in them. The third plot was perpendicular to the first one, going out to Stiklių Street. The oldest brick derivatives from the 16th century. This 16th century the building was used as the office of the palace, with stables on the ground floor, a large kitchen behind them towards Stiklių Street, a more modest decoration of the facades. 17th c. the house gradually turned into a palace, which in the 18th century. reconstruct with little change in exterior. On the second floor, during this reconstruction, the prevailing layout of the premises was formed, and the current main staircase, which had been open for a long time, had no front door. On the ground floor there are two kitchens, one of which has an impressive chimney partially preserved. The appearance of the palace, revealed in 2020, best reflects the historical periods of the two owners who have ruled them the longest: the palaces inhabited by nobles, when they were the most ornate and colourful, and the beginning of twentieth century when the architecture of the palace was simplified and the building itself was adapted for rent.

The Italian influence is very evident in the architecture of the palace, not only in the details and composition of the facades, but also in the abundance of open arcades. Gradually, the arcades became rooms. Initially, the palace was painted black, but soon the facade planes between the pilasters, cornices, openings, and crossings were repainted lighter, imitating a light grey stone. The niches are repainted in Venetian red. and the facades are decorated with additional mouldings depicting vegetable garlands, symbolizing the hospitality of the hosts.

The Soviet period brought its own changes - part of the

facades and interiors were changed, the height of the ceiling was lowered, and six doors of Stiklių Street were demolished. The analysis of the data at the beginning of the design confirmed the fact that the yard was not closed. The main entrance from Dominikonų Street to the palace courtyard has been operating since the time of Vainai Palace in the 17th century. But there was both a separate farm entrance and an entrance from the Stikliai side to the 12-horse stables, the office building and the pub that operated in the courtyard of the palace. Historically, this place is an arcade-type yard, and there are very few of them left in Vilnius.



Fig.2: Development of the building complex.



Fig.3-4: Senators' Passage in the fabric of the old town.



Fig.5: Facade along the Dominikonų street.



Fig.6: Senators' Passage.

The Diagnosis of the building (values and state)

At least in the 16th century. The buildings of the Senator's Passage are a valuable historical memory. Not only authentic materials, but also planning solutions, volumetric spatial composition formed by the cultural layer of the buildings, the buildings of which surround the inner yard, and the landscape of Vilnius Old Town are its composite values. Prior to the reconstruction, the history of the building complex was hidden under layers of plaster, plastic and concrete. The Senators' Passage suffered the most during the Soviet era - the openings on the ground floor were bricked or reduced, new ones were cut down, and cars were parked in the yard.

Rehabilitation works

The purpose of the buildings that make up the complex has changed over time, as can be seen in the architecture, which has been left authentic in many places.

Vilnius Old Town is a World Heritage Site and the project was developed taking into account that it is part of this area. The project preserves all of its previously known valuable features and reveals new ones in the course of the project. All project participants, including the investor, learned a lot during the project, and are proud of the result. From the initial positive feedback from the public, discussions and abundant attendance, it is clear that a professionally restored heritage object improves the public understanding, encourages thinking about heritage that has always been in the vicinity in a different way than before.

When the reconstruction began, the original plan was simply to renovate the administrative building and find tenants for it. However, everything changed after analysing historical sources and conducting research - the architect proposed a completely new concept: to demolish low-value buildings,

open the street and install an attractive public space in it. The project is unique in that it did not aim to design as many square meters as possible. From the very beginning, the client demanded the building to be as expressive and authentic as possible. As a result of this desire, the usable area even decreased: there were places where outdoor space appeared instead of premises. But the whole has become much more real and authentic.

Main structural change – the passage through the courtyard with two links to the neighbouring streets creates a lively public passage instead of the closed parking which was here almost for one century. New passage connection between nearby streets creates a vibrant pedestrian passage with 20 restored authentic entrances highlighted by modern details, levitating concrete terraces, and a street fireplace. The project was designed and implemented by maintaining a contact with the surrounding communities as one of the goals of the project was openness to the citizens by establishing a new public space - passage-courtyard.

Also, the story could be read through materials. Because the palace was built over a long period of time, the different periods are reflected through the materiality of the facades exposing various bricks and plaster layers. New architectural details such as terraces, roofs, doors and windows are designed in sharp metal forms to emphasize the sensitive contrast between past and the present. The Senators' Arcade project does not lack exceptional solutions. One of them is the largest opening skylight not only in Vilnius, but also in all Lithuania. It is located on the roof of a previously abandoned house on Stiklių Street. In the restored complex, the former ghost house has acquired an important role - through the passage formed by the architects on the ground floor you can enter the courtyard, and at the top, like a glass crown, there is a two-sided glass and steel structure. During the restoration,



Fig.7: Facade along the Stiklių street.

one of the biggest challenges was to open 37 openings - the structure of the openings was dictated by the object itself. In addition, the original level of the entire yard had to be restored. During the Soviet era, all floors were artificially raised by as much as 1 m, followed by thermal tracks and other communications. Opening the openings required not only a change in floor level, but the installation of modern systems. Extreme care had to be taken as the cellars were found at the bottom. It was also necessary to repair the damage caused during previous repairs - on the authentic lime facade of the 20th century (a cement mixture unsuitable for such a base was coated). In addition, during the restoration, the colour and bas-reliefs of the palace period were restored, and a contextual division of the windows was created. The restaurant was opened next to the restored historic window openings to Stiklių Street which, for some reason, have been bricked up for a long time. Fragments of the masonry of the facade of the eastern house with niche arches are exhibited in the interior.

The interior solutions for the Senators' Passage were entrusted to the designers. The author of the project conveyed both historical authenticity and modernity. The colour gamut used in the interior is close to historical memory, avoiding bright colours that contrast with the authentic details left in the building's spaces. No less important is materiality. In the interior of the Senators' Passage, a lot of attention was paid to authenticity, more precisely, an attempt was made to preserve as many original elements of the building as possible. One of the main stages of interior finishing was plastering the walls with as few new finishing materials as possible. All the plastering work was done by hand in an attempt to restore the methods used in antiquity and thus preserve the historical authenticity of the walls. It was necessary to work very carefully near the places where fragments of the ancient brick wall were opened. On the ground floor, six different plastering methods were used, each designed individually, depending on

the desired result, the condition of the wall. Bricks or old plasters were uncovered, even several coats of paint from different periods. They are exhibited in combination with the necessary new surfaces to be installed. It has been decided that the character of the building itself is quite striking, so it is only necessary to emphasize it and not try to obscure or replicate it. In historic sites such as the Senators' Passage, the period of the building is defined by walls, arches, vaults and decorative elements that have been accentuated by indirect, asymmetrical or concentrated light fixtures to avoid glare and direct light. No effort has been made to create either luxury or impression, but to emphasize naturalness and quality, sustainability and simplicity. "For example, a fire pit that has collapsed over time and burned out without removing the effects of time can become a much more interesting element in the interior than a newly, neatly reconstructed fireplace," said the interior designer.

The cosy spaces are reminiscent of historical times, but no less important is the fact that the complex is re-creating its own history. "Yes, the complex had three owners, but the fourth is today, we can't deny it, they have to make a contribution to the story as well. Now everything is equipped in a modern way, adapted to our thinking, different values have been raised than a century ago," says the architect of the complex G. T. Gylytė.

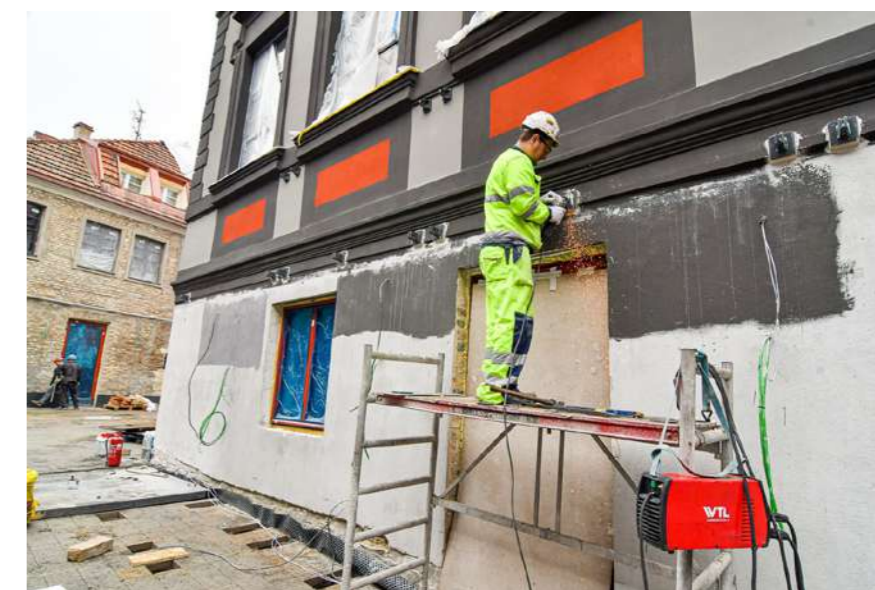


Fig.8-10: Reconstruction works.



EXISTING STIKLIŲ STREET FACADE



FORMER STIKLIŲ STREET FACADE

Fig.11: The facades of the building complex: at the top before the reconstruction, at the bottom after the reconstruction.



Fig.12: Floorplan of the reconstruction project.

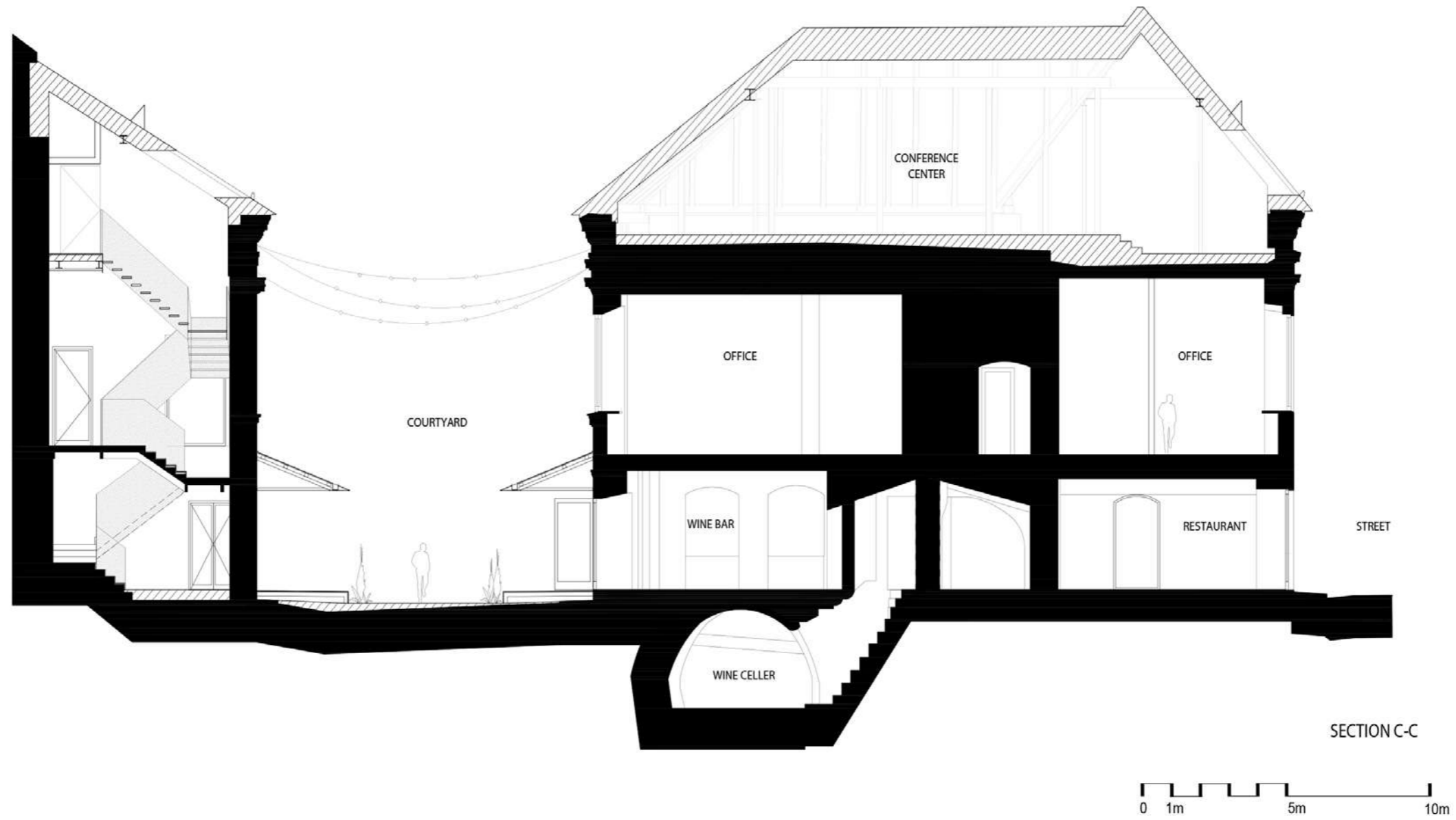


Fig.13: Section drawing of the reconstruction project.



Fig.14: Street facade before and after reconstruction.



Fig.15: Courtyard facade before and after reconstruction.



Fig.16: Interior during and after reconstruction.



Fig.17: Café under the sunroof.



Fig.18: Bird's eye view of the project.



Fig.19: Passage to the yard.



Fig.20: Façade details.



Fig.21: One of the small shops.



Fig.22: Restored staircase.



Fig.23: New stairs.

Assessment of the results

Rehabilitation of one of the oldest Vilnius elite's family palaces into a vibrant old town quarter – a 400 year old forgotten heritage object in the centre of Vilnius was opened to the public again.

The uncovered appearance of the building is consistent with its urban context, which also changed in a similar historical evolution. This project created an open space that every citizen can enter and get familiar with the valuable features of the complex.

A distinctive project feature is the harmony of professional heritage principles and modern architecture raised above formal requirements – its historical image was all revealed while sensitively adapting the complex for a new function. Special attention is paid to historical detail. Combining modern innovations, the complex of buildings becomes a very modern, distinctive and unique space, with a mysterious atmosphere, somewhere between now and then.

It has been selected as the best architectural, landscaping and urban design work for recreational purposes, open to the public in 2020, in a competition organised by the Lithuanian Architects' Union and the Algimantas Zavišos Charity and Support Foundation. The first prize was awarded to it for its complexity - the project, based on a wealth of historical, architectural and polychrome research, found a profound relationship between precious heritage and bright, warm, expressive modern architecture, exposing 400 years of historical layers.

References

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<https://welovelithuania.com/senatoriu-pasazas-atgimstanciam-e-vilniaus-senamiescio-kvartale-duris-atvers-kokybiskam-maistui-dedikuota-erdve/>

<https://www.geoportal.lt/map/> (Fig. 1)