

KAUNAS

ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE



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FOREWORD

This guide is another step in the work by the Architecture Fund introducing the public to the heritage of modern and contemporary Lithuanian architecture. The first architectural guide published by the Fund was dedicated to Vilnius, and was published in several editions in different languages.¹ It became a strolling companion for many researchers, architects and curious residents of the city, while the English edition proved to be a good guidebook for visitors and a popular present for foreign friends and colleagues. The success of the Vilnius guide encouraged us to bring together a team of editors for a guide to Kaunas. The preparation work took quite a long time: volumes have been and are being written about Kaunas' new architecture, but it has not yet received a systematic analysis, so an attempt to overview it raises issues about conveying the style and historical periods of the buildings, an evaluation of their architectural quality, the present state of affairs, and so on, which we have discussed in detail.

In putting together this guide, we have tried to combine the interests of experts and lovers of architecture. We strove to take into account the size of the publication itself, in the process of selecting objects and drawing up routes for seeing them: it is a small pocket-size book, which is able to present and overview only the most prominent architectural objects.

We decided to link the beginnings of Kaunas' modern architecture with the development of Lithuanian statehood, which gave Kaunas the status of a temporary capital. This approach matches a point of view that is becoming increasingly widespread among historians, that the end of the First World War should be considered the beginning of the 20th century. The arrangement of descriptions combines chronological principles (the interwar period, the Soviet era, restored independence), and typological principles (public, commercial and residential buildings). The publication also distinguishes complexes of prominent buildings and wooden suburban architecture,

which is important to the diversity of Kaunas' interwar architecture. In addition, it features a section that is not so common in urban guides: the 'grey pages' present lost or fundamentally altered buildings that used to shape the city with their presence, and still influence our relationship with Kaunas, as an image that lives on today in the collective memory.

The history of the buildings in the descriptions is intertwined with a general narrative about the city, its residents, and political, economic, social and cultural conditions. The buildings are indexed in the guide according to their period, and present-day or historical photographs and drafts are provided. This will help the reader to identify the buildings and understand their structure. The addresses are accompanied by references to map segments, where you will easily find the objects and will be able to get a sense of the architectural surroundings. In addition to the index of names, the publication also contains a list of objects according to their year of construction, which shows clearly the periods of construction boom and decline in the city.

A team of professional architectural researchers and historians, photographers, graphic designers and consultants have spent almost three years putting together this guide. Unfortunately, one of the editors and authors, Nijolė Lukšionytė, will not be able to leaf through it. As we were completing the work, we missed her knowledge, apt insights, rigour and efficiency. We share the grief of the entire Lithuanian cultural community at having lost one of the country's best architectural historians.

Julija Reklaitė

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN KAUNAS

Kaunas is Lithuania's second city in size and importance, but when it comes to Modernist architecture, it takes first place. Its great architectural treasure, the interwar heritage, consists of public and residential buildings, industrial architecture and the urban structure of individual districts in the city which developed during this period, primarily Naujamiestis and Žaliakalnis. The 1920s and 1930s buildings, road network and public spaces shape the city's distinctive character and atmosphere. No other Lithuanian city can boast such a concentration of interwar architecture, and there are not many similar examples in neighbouring countries either.

In the interwar years, Kaunas transformed itself from a humble provincial town in the Russian Empire's North-west Region into a comfortable, energetic, human-scale Western city. This metamorphosis amazed and fascinated contemporaries, and still remains impressive in our times, reminding us that interwar Kaunas is one of the most magnificent episodes in Lithuania's history, demonstrating the extraordinary breakthrough of the creative powers of the young state's citizens.

The almost five decades of Soviet occupation after the Second World War altered Kaunas quite a lot. The city was developed as an industrial centre, and grew in size considerably: new factory districts, workers' settlements and quarters of apartment blocks emerged, and the city centre changed. Nevertheless, all these transformations did not fundamentally affect the interwar-era core.

Traces of the 21st century are prominent in Kaunas as well. Public buildings, hotels, commercial and industrial architecture, and houses have all enriched the city with new traits, while successful efforts at renovation have revitalised parts of the interwar and Imperial Russian architectural heritage.

The Interwar Period

Kaunas became the centre of the independent Republic of Lithuania as a result of unfortunate historical circumstances. The government of the newly created state relocated to Kaunas in January 1919, in the face of the invasion by the Bolsheviks, and remained there afterwards, as Poland forcibly annexed the historic capital. Kaunas kept its status as

temporary capital until the 1940s, as Lithuania did not have sufficient military and diplomatic resources to reclaim Vilnius.

Situated almost in the very middle of Lithuania, at the confluence of the country's two largest rivers, the Nemunas and the Neris, Kaunas was in a convenient location in all respects. Admittedly, in terms of development, it was far behind Western cities. Contemporaries' testimonies provide a vivid portrayal of the difference. The Italian journalist Giuseppe Salvatori, who visited in 1923, wrote: 'When I got off [...] at Kaunas station, my heart sank. Can it be, I asked myself, that this small town will from now on have to be the capital of a European state, however modest?' (G. Salvatori, *I lituani di ieri e d'oggi*, Bologna, 1932, pp. 16–17).

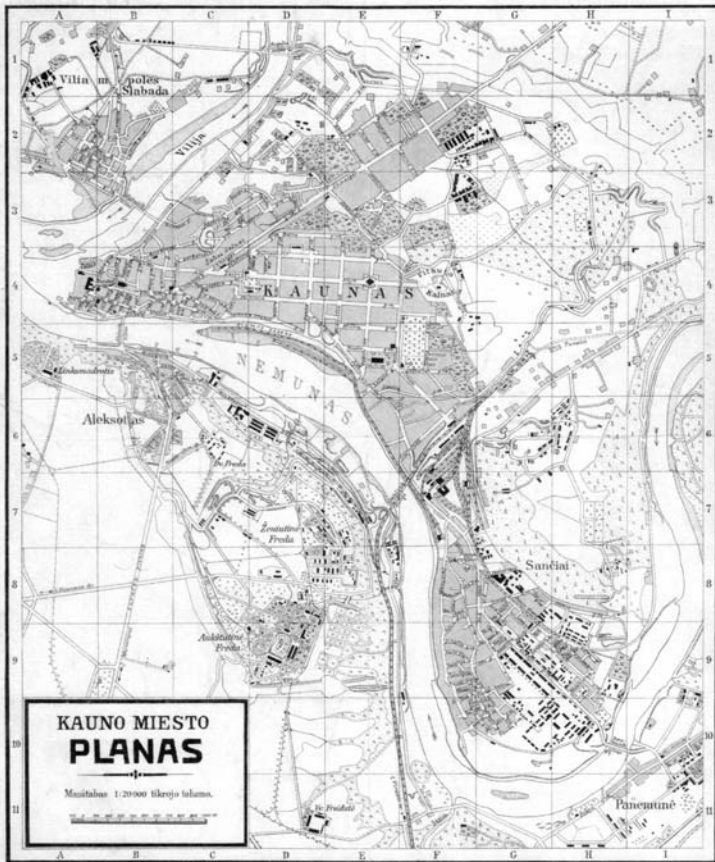
The well-travelled Italian must indeed have felt uneasy. The Old Town was a sorry sight: the once elegant Baroque Town Hall was neglected, and many churches were closed. The Imperial Russian quarter of the New Town, which stretched between the Old Town and the railway station, was shabby and built of low, mostly wooden houses, with the dome of an Orthodox church built for the needs of the garrison looming over it. The red brick walls of factories and barracks extended nearby, leading eventually to the squalid houses on the outskirts. The city limits were marked by fortifications, a circle of forts and ancillary buildings constituting a first-class fortress, whose construction had begun in 1879. The reality at the time is reflected accurately by the street names. For instance, the 1922 *Visa Lietuva* (All Lithuania) directory lists streets like Purvų (Mud) Street and Žąsų (Goose) Lane in the district of Žaliakalnis (Greenhill). These names show the way of life that was normal for residents of the district and other suburbs at the time, with gardens, poultry and other livestock. Only a few of the houses in the central part of the city had access to the local water supply and sewerage in the early 1920s; most residents of the city drew their water from the rivers or wells in their yards. The only means of public transport were the cab and the *konka*, a horse-drawn streetcar, which trundled several times a day from the railway station to the Town Hall along Nicholas Avenue, which was like a suburban road, symbolically renamed Laisvės (Freedom) Avenue in 1919.



THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROPOSED BY PETER MARIUS FRANSDEN AND ANTANAS JOKIMAS. 1923. 89.5 × 122.5 CM

On his next visit to Kaunas in 1931, Salvatori could barely recognise the city that had once disappointed him. He was fascinated by it: 'Now, when going from the station, one passes a shady cemetery and ends up at a huge paved square in front of the former Orthodox church. A harmonious row of new city villas goes up to Vytautas Park along the street from the square. Two very high radio masts can be seen above the park's oaks. At night, these technically perfect constructions beam powerful spotlights, which assist the landing Lufthansa planes, and shine over Kaunas like a new constellation' (G. Salvatori, 1932, p. 19).

The local press echoed his impressions. An anonymous author in *Naujas žodis* (New Word) magazine conveyed the atmosphere of the rapidly growing city in the year 1930: 'If there is a man who is not convinced by either the hammers knocking in the city day and night, or the new houses springing up daily, let him go to the construction department of the Kaunas municipal council; perhaps seeing a legion of people waiting at the engineer's door with construction plans in their hands will be the best way to make sure that construction fever has seized the city. Businessmen, industrialists, officials and ordinary people are



A MAP OF KAUNAS.
CA. 1920, 38x39 CM

THE SANCTUARY OF THE BENEDICTINE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS, WITH THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, ADORATION OF THE ANGELS BY LIUDAS TRUKIYS (CA. 1939) AND AN ALTAR BY DOMICELĖ TARABILDINĖ. CA. 1938



A COMPETITION PROPOSAL FOR THE LOBBY OF THE AUDIENCE HALL OF THE STATE PALACE ENSEMBLE, UNKNOWN ARCHITECT. CA. 1940



all building something. The only difference is that some of them erect a skyscraper in the centre of the town, while others build a modest little villa somewhere in the suburbs. The era of shanty towns has long gone, because the city council does not issue permits to build them. The building must be beautiful, provide enough space for a yard, have a fireproof brick wall separating it from the neighbours, and not stick out into the street or back out into the depths of the plot too much' (*Moderniškas Kaunas, Naujas žodis*, 1930, No. 23–24, p. 44).

This quote not only captures the construction fever which took over the city, but also briefly describes the construction norms of the late 1920s, which were observed in anticipation of a proper Construction Act. The act was not passed until the Second World War, although Kaunas' growth had been projected since as early as the Lithuanian struggles for freedom, with the aim of imparting a clear direction to this process and setting minimal rules. After all, all the state institutions had relocated to Kaunas, including the President's Office, the Parliament and the ministries. Politicians, civil servants and members of the professions, doctors, lawyers and artists, were concentrated here. It was obvious that the institutions required headquarters, and their employees needed housing. When the university and the music and art schools

opened in 1922, Kaunas was rejuvenated and revived. As student life expanded, youth organisations and culture and sports clubs emerged. They, too, needed buildings of their own. In 1925, Lithuania's first stadium was built, in *Ažuolynas* Park in *Žaliakalnis*, at the initiative of the pilot *Steponas Darius*. Various professional, confessional, and political organisations formed, which encouraged their members to get out of their workplaces and homes. Venues for culture and entertainment also lured residents into public spaces. The State Theatre (A2), with opera, ballet and drama troupes, opened in the renovated City Theatre building in 1925. Cinemas, restaurants and cafes opened one after another. The growing city lacked space, not just buildings, but also urban conversions, as well as visions for the future.

The first development plan was devised in 1923. It covered only the Old Town, the New Town and the *Žaliakalnis* district, even though part of the *Vilijampolė* and *Šančiai* suburbs had been incorporated in the city as early as 1919. The plan's authors, the Danish engineer *Peter Marius Frandsen* and the engineer *Antanas Jokimas*, a Kaunas municipality employee, elaborated the plan for the New Town, but focused primarily on expansion in a northeast direction (p. 8). They projected the residential district of *Žaliakalnis* on both sides of the *Ukmergės Highway*



Over the two interwar decades, Kaunas changed fundamentally its social image and its architectural face, having grown from being on the periphery of the Russian Empire into a civilised European city. The most valuable relic of the tsarist era is the New Town plan (1847), around whose regular framework the city centre developed. As large rectangular plots were built in the interwar years, cul-de-sacs, arcades and semi-closed public spaces, original urban features unique to Kaunas, emerged next to the main streets. When the city became the temporary capital (1919–1939), the most pressing need was to upgrade the outdated infrastructure and public utilities. Sewerage installation work began only in 1924, the water supply came next in 1929, and the streets were paved only after that. A decree in 1929 allowed for the compulsory demolition of derelict, abandoned buildings. In contrast, in 1931–1933, the new 'obligatory edicts' already regulated where, how and of what new objects should be built. These regulations not only served the city's planned development, but also formed its architectural character: for instance, they stipulated that houses built on the green slopes of rivers and

hills, and in other visible locations, had to have tiled roofs, while the buildings on Laisvės Avenue and Vytauto Avenue had to be at least three storeys high.

In the 1920s, when construction was gaining momentum, specialists were very scarce. The first generation of urban planners and architects had studied in the Russian Empire, and came back to lay the foundations of the new state only after the declaration of independence. A lot of Lithuanians completed their studies at Riga Polytechnic Institute, including one of Kaunas' first chief architects Feliksas Vizbaras, and the author of the 'Construction' textbook, Vytautas Magnus University Professor Jonas Šimoliūnas. The most popular places to study engineering and architecture in St Petersburg were the Civil Engineering Institute (E. Frykas, A. Gordevičius, A. Jokimas, K. Reisonas, P. Taračkovas) and the Institute of Technology (A. Macijauskas, S. Grinkevičius, L. Ritas, design engineer P. Markūnas). Professors Vladimiras Dubeneckis and Mykolas Songaila, graduates of the prestigious Art Academy, came to Lithuania for different reasons: Dubeneckis was running away from the revolution, and Songaila had been invited to train lo-

THE INTERWAR YEARS 1918–1940

cal specialists at Kaunas University (established in 1922, and renamed Vytautas Magnus University in 1930). The Faculty of Technology had 180 graduates in construction engineering and architecture in 1925–1940 (F. Bieliniskis, J. Jasiukaitis, the brothers J. and K. Kriščiukaitis, A. Lukošaitis, A. Novickis). In the 1930s, graduates from schools in Italy (V. Landsbergis, S. Kudokas), Germany (N.A. Mačiulskis, A. Funkas, design engineer A. Rozenbliumas), Czechoslovakia (V. Kopylov), France (J. Kovalskis) and Belgium (B. Elsbergas, design engineer V. Ražaitis), joined the intense construction process.

Architectural competitions were held for important public buildings; there were more than 20 over the two interwar decades. Of these, nine were for objects of national significance (the Printing House, the Bank of Lithuania, the Physics and Chemistry Institute, Vytautas Magnus Museum, the Karininkų Ramovė officers' club, the Central Prison, the Clinics, the Savings Bank, and the State Palace).

In the early stage of the temporary capital's development, the city's architecture was dominated by Historicist tendencies, manifested in Neoclassical and Neobaroque forms, as

well as a coalescence of different historical styles. Architects regarded citations of Baroque, the architectural style most cultivated in Lithuania, as an opportunity to develop a national style. The quest was a specific sign of the epoch, characteristic of all countries seeking to consolidate their national identity. The second source of inspiration for a national style was folk art and crafts. Ethnographic decoration and stylised motifs were used mostly for the decoration of both exteriors and interiors. This trend became more pronounced in the architecture of the 1930s. From 1925, Art Deco, albeit not so bold and extravagant as in the West, yet still forceful and vivid, began to gain prominence alongside Retrosectivism. It became popular in the architecture of residential buildings and cinemas. Modernism, initially manifested in Art Deco stylizations and the purging of static volumes from Historicist décor, gradually acquired increasingly recognizable traits: a greater variety of volumetric/spatial compositions, and geometric abstraction. In the 1930s, Kaunas turned into a 'buzzing construction site'. Modernism spread everywhere.

Jolita Kančienė



Public Buildings. The Temporary Capital Phenomenon

The status as temporary capital had a twofold significance for the city's development. It propelled the expansion of the city and the construction of residential and commercial buildings, but the sense of temporariness hindered the construction of state and government buildings. The issue of Vilnius stirred everyone's thoughts and emotions, and resounded in declarations and slogans ('We will not give up without Vilnius!'). The government, relocated to Kaunas, did not rush to build residences and buildings for ministries, settling in the old Russian buildings instead. Only two objects which symbolised the state's strength were built in the 1920s: the Bank of Lithuania and the Ministry of Justice, which later hosted the Parliament as well. The idea of the State Palace (a complex of buildings for government offices) was brought up only in late 1938, after Poland's ultimatum. Objects of national importance built at the time were dedicated to social issues (the State Insurance Agency, the State Savings Bank) and the national identity, i.e. culture and education (the State Theatre, the Art School and the temporary M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery, Vytautas Magnus Museum, the campus of Vytautas Magnus University with the Physics and Chemistry Institute, the complexes of the Veterinary

Academy and the University Clinics). Education was a priority area. Schools, primary, secondary and specialised, were built by the government, the municipality, and the ethnic communities. More than 20 were built in Kaunas.

Alongside the official and municipal buildings (the Central Post Office, the district municipality), important formative elements of the city's metropolitan image were the commercial and administrative buildings of joint stock companies in the New Town, mostly on Laisvės Avenue and K. Donelaičio Street (the Dairy Centre, Progress, Lloyd's, the Jewish Bank, the Agriculture Bank, the Chamber of Agriculture, and the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts). In the 1920s, Neoclassicism and its interpretations were the most prominent (the Bank of Lithuania, the Ministry of Justice, the Polish Small Credit Society, the Neo-Lithuania Palace), while in the 1930s, Modernism with a distinctive Kaunas trait, the rhythm of verticals (the Agriculture Bank, the district municipality, the Palace of Labour, the State Savings Bank, Lloyd's Lithuania) took over the stylistic monopoly.

Jolita Kančienė

Ministry of Justice and the Parliament

(now the Kaunas State Philharmonic Hall)

L. Sapiegos St 5 / E. Ožėškienė St 12 (KAU4)

Edmundas Frykas

1929

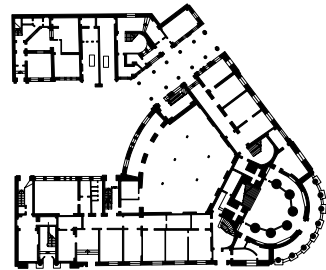
A1

When the design work began in 1925, the building was intended to house only the Ministry of Justice. When the construction was nearly over, it was decided that it could also accommodate the Parliament, dissolved after the 1926 coup, if there was a need. The first session of the new Parliament took place here on 1 September 1936, and subsequently it was called the Ministry of Justice and the Parliament.

The complex architectural structure was necessitated by the irregular shape of the site. The monumental Neoclassical palace is represented by a semi-circular colossal Corinthian colonnade dominating the intersection of three streets, whose frieze was adorned by the Latin motto *Justitia est fundamentum regnorum* (Justice is fundamental to reigning) indicating the building's purpose. The open colonnade forms the entrance to the palace. The lobby mimics the motif of the colonnade, creating an unusual semi-cylindrical space illuminated by a round skylight. The

meeting hall on the second floor of the E. Ožėškienė St wing is decorated by a vivid Art Deco relief.

In Soviet times, the building housed various institutions, until 1961 when the Philharmonic Society moved in. In 2005–2008, it underwent restoration: the hall was renovated and equipped with a balcony and a new glazed lobby (architects L. Perevičienė, R. Gudienė).



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



State Theatre

(now the Kaunas State Musical Theatre)
Laisvės Ave 91 (KAU4)

Justinas Golinevičius, Vladimiras Dubeneckis,
Mykolas Songaila, Vytautas Landsbergis
1925, 1930, 1982

The theatre was the epicentre of political events in 20th-century Lithuania: on 15 May 1920, the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly, whereby Lithuania was declared an independent democratic republic, took place in the theatre building. On 21 July 1940, the People's Parliament, formed by the Soviet occupying authorities, proclaimed Lithuania a Socialist Soviet Republic, and drafted a resolution for its incorporation into the USSR. On 14 May 1972, the 19-year-old student Romas Kalanta set fire to himself in protest against the Soviet occupation in the theatre's garden. This act triggered mass anti-Soviet demonstrations, which were brutally suppressed.

The old Kaunas City Theatre, built in the 19th century, featured eclectic forms and a rectangular design, and could accommodate up to 500 people. It was used mostly for commercial entertainment. After the declaration of independence, the theatre's activity changed: professional drama, opera and ballet troupes were formed. In 1922, it

was granted the status of State Theatre. In the course of the theatre's renovation in 1922–1925, the capacity was increased to 763 seats, and it acquired the ergonomic shape of a rounded shell. It was equipped with streamlined balconies and an upgraded stage, divided into movable planes for dynamically changing the set design. The hall was fitted with a uniquely structured ceiling: the vault was made from tamped reeds and plaster, and suspended from wooden constructions (engineer P. Markūnas). The theatre's new architectural expression conveyed the notion of the national style that was popular at the time. The new façade acquired plastic Neobaroque forms, while the auditorium was decorated with natural motifs adopted from folk art, and stylised in the manner of Art Deco.

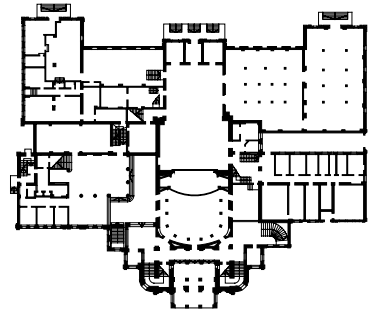
The 1929–1930 renovation improved the theatre's material conditions. New wings were added, and the stage was equipped with a fire prevention iron screen with an automatic water sprinkler system (which saved the theatre



from a fire which started in the props storage room in 1931). The new façade facing Keštučio Street featured basic elements of Modernist architecture.

In 1980–1984, the theatre was renovated again: underground cloakrooms were built, the decoration of the public spaces was upgraded, and the auditorium was restored to its earlier 1925 colour scheme (architects K. Žalnierius, A. Staskevičius). The most recent renovation started in 2008 (A. Kančas Studio).

The theatre's garden features busts of musicians, and a monument to Romas Kalanta, the symbolic *Field of Sacrifice* (2002, sculptor R. Antinis, architect S. Juškys).



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Art School and Temporary M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery

(now the Justinas Vienožinskis Faculty of Arts of Kaunas College)

A. Mackevičiaus St 27 (KAU4)

Vladimiras Dubeneckis

1923, 1925

The Art School and the M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery were one of independent Lithuania's first public buildings dedicated to the new cultural institutions of the young state: the gallery was established in 1921, and its building was inaugurated in 1925. The school, founded in 1922, moved into the new building in 1923. The area of the Ninth Artillery Battery of the Kaunas Fortress, with a wide view of the Old Town, was chosen, in the hope that the gallery would move to a more central location in the city, and the school would expand as the country's economic situation improved. Furthermore, the plot was municipal property, and was therefore freely available.

Both buildings were designed by Vladimiras Dubeneckis, a graduate of the St Petersburg Academy of Art. Neo-Classical features (symmetry, order elements, such as columns, engaged columns, corbels and pediments) demonstrate its official aspirations. The exterior of the buildings alludes to their function. The volume of the gallery is closed, the first floor, intended for exhibiting paintings, is windowless, illuminated by skylights hidden by the attic:

horizontal niches are carved on the first floor level, probably intended for allegorical sculptural reliefs, which were never completed due to lack of funding. The school, with its four-column portico, resembles a country manor. Big windows ensure good illumination of the classrooms. Both buildings are two-storeys high (the space of the school was expanded by constructing an attic, adapted for teachers' studios with skylights), and compact in volume, and have premises grouped on both sides of the central staircase. The school utilises a hallway system, the gallery halls and utility rooms are arranged around the ground-floor lobby and the first-floor landing. The school's interior gains additional luxury from the low stairs and the double-height hall on the first floor, on to which a door with a balcony opens from the attic hallway. The gallery's interior is restrained, and an impression of solemnity is produced by the columns and engaged columns in the lobby, and the combination of black and white (emphasised particularly by the checkered pattern of the floor). The columns of the lobby and the staircase handrails, as well as the banisters

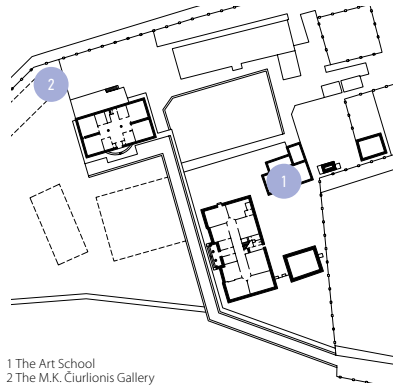


supporting them, imitate black marble, but are actually manufactured from wood and cement. The inexpensive materials and the buildings' modest scale suggest that the builders' financial resources were limited.

The M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery relocated from Oak Hill to the Vytautas Magnus Museum of Culture (A38) in 1937. Its building was handed over to the Art School. In 1938, a ceramics studio was added to the school's old building. From 1940, the building housed the Kaunas Institute of Applied Art, based on the Art School. After the Institute closed in 1951, it was home to the Stepas Žukas Technical School of Applied Art, and since 1989, the Justinas Vienožinskis Higher School of Art, which later became the Justinas Vienožinskis Faculty of Arts of Kaunas College.

The school was named after the artist Vienožinskis to commemorate the Art School's founder and first director. The buildings of the gallery and the school are included in the Register of Cultural Treasures, and are protected by the state. Most of their original elements, such as light fittings and door handles, have survived to this day. An

interesting detail is the stationary metal shoe scraper outside the entrance to the gallery.



1 The Art School
2 The M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery



House of the Jewish OZE Society

(now Kaunas Sports Medicine Centre)

D. Poškos St 1 (KAU4)

Krechmer (Shragenheim), Grigorijus Mazelis

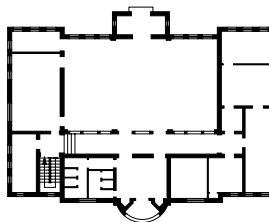
1926

The design for the 'Health House' of the Jewish Healthcare Society was not new. The construction documents specify that it was copied from a project by the architects Krechmer and Shragenheim (the ending of the latter's surname is illegible). The project was adapted for Kaunas by the construction technician Grigorijus Mazelis. The small healthcare centre was initially called simply a gym, because that formed the core of the building, while the other premises, except for the dispensary, were intended to serve it. In 1928, the gym hall was adapted for screening films ('hygienic and educational'), as well as hosting community gatherings and cultural events.

The building has a symmetrical composition and a rectangular plan, animated by outbuildings, the core of which is a 135-square-metre, six-metre-high hall, with a recessed inner balcony (loggia) above the ground-floor hallway. The exterior, with its original forms that are not typical for Lithuania, represents Modernism and Art Deco. The contrasting fragmentation of the volumes gives it a playfulness, which is further emphasised by the central avant-corps in an unusual semi-cylindrical shape with an arched entryway. The volumes in the background reiterate the

arched window motif. A rare element for the architecture of the period is the almost flat roof, constructed over a reinforced concrete ceiling by laying the insulation material and pouring asphalt over it. The OZE Health Centre has many surviving valuable and interesting elements, such as the lobby skylight, the black and white Mettlach floor tiles, which form a 'honeycomb' pattern in the entryway and a rhombus in the lobby, the decorative planking of the doors and niches, with laconic decoration that resembles sunrays, and other décor and furnishing details.

The original plan of the building was damaged by the 1979 renovation.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Jewish Schwabe Gymnasium

(now the King Mindaugas Vocational Training Centre)
Karaliaus Mindaugo Ave 11 (KAU3)

Grigorijus Mazelis
1927

The Kaunas Second Jewish Gymnasium, where the language of instruction was Hebrew, was established in 1920 by the notable Jewish educator, Zionist, and Classical Hebrew philology scholar Moshe Schwabe (1889–1956). The new gymnasium, built in 1926 according to a design by the construction technician Grigorijus Mazelis, at the initiative of the Society for Promoting Education among the Jews of Lithuania, was named after him. There were six Jewish gymnasia, all private, in Kaunas in the 1930s, and yet only two of them were in specially constructed buildings. In 1929–1930, this school had 368 students. Among its pupils was the future classic of Jewish literature Lea Goldberg (1911–1970), one of Israel's most prominent cultural figures.

The gymnasium complied fully with the hygiene and pedagogical requirements. It had a large 3,000-square-metre yard, with a playing field and a school garden. It was the largest building on the whole Nemunas embankment. The three-storey-high building (with an outbuilding in the yard) is somewhat removed from the line of the street to provide safe access. The symmetrical main façade is flat and monotonous, and broken up by large windows, like restrained Oriental decoration, fragmented by fine frames.

Their white colour, the cartouches between the ground and the first-floor windows, and the plinth of the deep portal, animate the façade to some extent. The specific stylization of the portal's serrated plinth is reminiscent of Secession (Modern) motifs.

In 1931, the gymnasium was granted permission to enlarge its building with an annex facing Palangos Street designed by Feliksas Vizbaras. The plan was not implemented. A huge new enlargement was constructed only in Soviet times, when the Third Vocational School moved into the building.



Bank of Lithuania

Maironio St 25 / K. Donelaičio St 85 (KAU4)

Mykolas Songaila, engineer Feliksas Vizbaras
1929

One of interwar Lithuania's most luxurious and impressive buildings, it is the best-restored and best-preserved specimen of Lithuanian architecture from the first half of the 20th century. Visitors can book a tour of the building.

The Bank of Lithuania bought the corner plot between Maironio and K. Donelaičio streets from Teklė Kelpšienė. In the same year, it announced an international call for proposals for design projects for the new bank building. The winning project by French architects was considered too costly by the contracting party, hence it commissioned the local architect Mykolas Songaila to design the building. The construction work began in 1925, and ended in 1929.

The volume of the three-storey building is formed by three blocks composed around the operations hall. The lobby, the operations hall with columns and coffered ceiling decorated with allegorical painting compositions, the

main staircase, and the meeting hall on the second floor are both impressive and functional. The apartment on the second floor (whose only residents were the prime minister Augustinas Voldemaras and his family) was also lavishly furnished. Particularly lush were the audience chambers above the meeting hall and the prime minister's office in the rotunda (which now houses the administration).

The elements of Classical architecture, expensive materials (genuine and faux marble, bronze, parquet, crystal), and works of art (a sculptural allegory by Kajetonas Sklėrius in the window niche of the Maironio Street facade attic, and paintings by Vladas Didžiokas, Olga Dubeneckienė, Jonas Janulis and Petras Kalpokas in the operations hall), reveal independent Lithuania's ambitions, the young state's growing economic power, and confidence in the country's future.



Visitors who are interested in the history of Lithuania's artistic culture will notice the valuable works of art from the bank's collection in the hallways and in the boardroom, and the former prime minister's apartment adapted as offices for the present-day bank's administration, as well as the murals in the operations hall and the state rooms of the prime minister's apartment, and the stained glass on the staircase. The building features numerous authentic furnishing details, and some surviving items of furniture: oak bookshelves, and a Historicist meeting hall table and chairs. The American-made 1936 Otis elevator, installed in the auxiliary entrance, is still in operation; the cellars are equipped with British Milners safes, with impressive chamber doors weighing several tonnes.



Lithuania Hotel

S. Daukanto St 21 (KAU4)

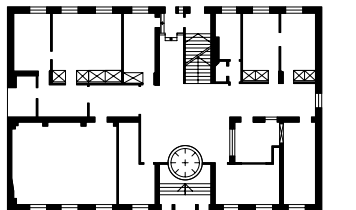
Vladimiras Dubeneckis
1925

In 1922, the famous Metropolis hotel and restaurant (1899, engineer N. Andreyev) was given over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Soon the newly established Lithuania Hotel joint venture built a new three-storey building next to the old one. Only the restaurant retained the Metropolis name. The hotel building has a symmetrical composition and hallway plan. Several luxury double-room suites with a shared salon were created on the first and second floors on the side facing S. Daukanto Street. The suites were used to accommodate foreign dignitaries. The other rooms were economy class, without even sanitary facilities. They were grouped next to the staircase.

Vladimiras Dubeneckis sought to convey an image of Lithuania in the hotel's façade. He associated it not only with ethnic culture, but also with Lithuanian Baroque. The exterior of the Lithuania Hotel employed metaphors of 16th and 17th-century manors and stylizations of their décor. The central part of the façade is emphasised by a convex oriel window topped by a half-dome covered with cement tiles. The attic is decorated with cartouches bearing the

hotel's initials (LV) and crowned by a Baroque pediment and vases. A flagpole stands on the top.

Particular attention was paid to the lobby, which gave the first impression of the hotel. It combined two styles, Classical and national. Visitors entered the lobby through a glass revolving door. The walls were panelled in dark wood, arranged in a herringbone pattern, which was popular in folk art. The ceiling stucco moulding features Lithuanian tulip and bellflower motifs; and the Mettlach floor tile decoration resembles fabric.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Polish Small Credit Society

K. Donelaičio St 76 (KAU4)

Edmundas Frykas

1932

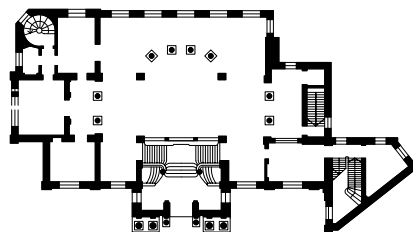
A8

The building of the Polish Small Credit Society testifies to the existence of different notions of officialdom which coexisted in the early 1930s. The mid-size building with a Classically symmetrical facade states clearly that the winds of Modernism had not affected it. On the contrary, the official nature of the treasury is communicated by academic, lavish Classical architectural form and details. The small and irregular-shaped site dictated a complex plan, but the architect Edmundas Frykas, who had received an academic Classical education in St Petersburg, managed to create the required symmetry and monumental regularity in the facade.

Architectural details, such as the massive foundation, pairs of Corinthian columns, a prominent cornice with a balustrade, and the imposing portal, might have slightly exceeded the actual means of the Small Credit Society, but not its desire to look solid. Classical means are employed in order to create an impression of grandeur in the interior: a two-sided staircase adorned with vases and volutes leads to the two-storey operations hall, with

Doric columns arranged in a semi-circle and garland decorations, which occupies the entire central part of the building. The office spaces are concentrated in the west wing and in an outbuilding. On the west side, the plot is hedged by a concrete wall with metal tracery and a gate, decorated with a vase.

In Soviet times, the building housed a library, a bank, and a savings bank. Later, after the restoration of independence, it housed a bank again.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



The St Zita Society

(now the Faculty of Catholic Theology of VMU)
Gimnazijos St 7 (KAU3)

Feliksas Vizbaras
1925

The Lithuanian branch of the St Zita Society of Catholic servants, established in Kaunas in 1907, looked after the social, domestic and spiritual affairs of women, most of whom had come to the city from the countryside to find work. Members of the society set up various service-based activities (bakeries, canteens, spinning workshops, laundries) and used the income (as well as the membership fees) for the society's activities and to care for ill and disabled members.

Having acquired a property in 1922, in 1925 the society built a luxurious four-storey building. It was one of the first buildings in Kaunas to have not just a water supply and sewerage, but also central heating. Particularly lavish was the hall, laid out over two floors and hired out for meetings, drama productions and film screenings (but not dances!). There was a canteen on the ground floor and a hostel on the second. These spaces occupied the rectangular main part of the building, whose avant-corps housed a lobby (the main entrance was from the peripheral P. Eimutis Lane), with the main staircase to the foyer and the hall.

The style of the building is Historicist. Its general image resembles a Renaissance palace, but the façades also feature Classical and stylised Baroque elements. The tympanums of the avant-corps pediments bear the coat of arms of the St Zita Society. The interiors feature even

more stylistic diversity. The hall is dominated by a Classical mood, but incorporates many other styles as well. The lobby staircase is Baroque, while the meandering frieze which decorates its walls is Antique. The canteen was done in the Lithuanian style: with painted decorations which resemble a folk sash. This scheme was chosen for a reason. The servants of St Zita were raised in the Lithuanian spirit, and were famous for their weaving skills.

In Soviet times, the property was nationalised and handed over to the Technical School of Economics in 1961. The building was ravaged, the hall was partitioned into classrooms, and the interiors were destroyed. In 1991, the property was given back to the Archdiocese of Kaunas, which lent it to the VMU Faculty of Theology. In 1998–2001, it underwent restoration (architect L. Perevičienė) and renovation (architect R. Gudienė). The façades, hall and lobby were fully restored. Restored details of the original ethnic decoration can be seen in the cloakroom and in the auxiliary staircase. Other facilities were renovated and adapted for academic activities. The mid-19th century building near Gimnazijos St, which had served as a hospital in the times of the St Zita Society, and to which a chapel (F. Vizbaras) had been added in 1927, became the faculty's administration.



Jewish Orphanage

(now Kaunas District Centre for Addictive Disorders)

Giedraičių St 8 / P. Višinskio St 43 (KAU5)

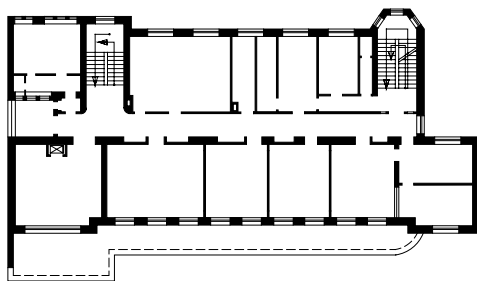
Hirschfield, Boruchas Klingas

1932

The Functionalist orphanage in Žaliakalnis was built in 1931–1932, based on an already proven design by the German architect Hirschfield, and adapted for Kaunas by the engineer Boruchas Klingas, rather than an original site-specific design.

Obviously, the main concern was the functional qualities of the building, intended to accommodate 120 children. The building's plan utilises a two-sided hallway system. The ground floor housed the utility and administrative premises, and the apartment of the head of the orphanage. The children's bedrooms and playrooms, with rooms for nurses next to them, were located on the first and second floors. An outbuilding in the yard housed a canteen with a large balcony. The kitchen, with a separate dish-washing facility, was located below the canteen. A lift connected the kitchen and the canteen. The south side of the first floor, designed as a nursery, has a balcony. It was used for getting infants used to outdoor conditions all year round. There was a sunbathing ground and a garden in front of the building.

In Soviet times, the building was home to the Children's Hospital for Infectious Diseases. A number of annexes were built in the yard.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



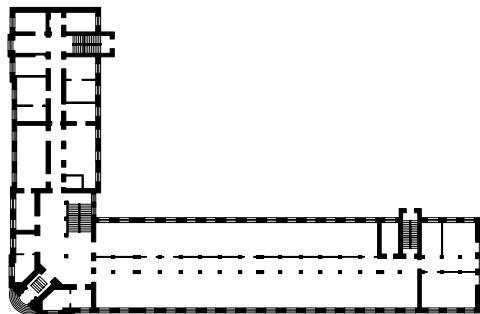
State Printing House – VMU Central Building

K. Donelaičio St 20 / Gedimino St 50 (KAU5)

Henrik Fischer, reconstructed by Vytautas Landsbergis
1923–1925, reconstructed in 1929

The competition for the design of the State Printing House held in 1923 was the first international architecture competition in independent Lithuania. The standard of the entrants revealed that the young state's architectural talent was still fairly meagre. Out of 11 proposals submitted, the competition jury (engineers A. Macijauskas, A. Gordevičius and S. Kimontas) chose one by the Brandenburg-based architect Henrik Fischer, who not only professionally designed an industrial building which complied with the requirements for a printing house, but also presented 'a façade in a modernised German Classical style' that, according to the jury, would improve the city. The three-storey printing house with four-storey-high corner volumes, which featured a prominent cornice and occupied almost the whole block, looked impressive when it was built in 1925, but doubts were soon voiced regarding the necessity for such large industrial premises. The construction was criticised as an irresponsible waste of public money. In 1927, the building of the State Printing House was handed over to the university, while the equipment was transferred to

the Spindulys printing press, which was built in 1928. In 1928, the young architect Vytautas Landsbergis adapted the printing house building as the central building of Vytautas Magnus University.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Fire Station

I. Kanto St 1 (KAU4)

Edmundas Frykas, design engineer Pranas Markūnas,
technical supervision Jokūbas Peras, Antanas Jokimas
1930

A12

The Fire Station was built beside the Nemunas, a natural water supply, on the site of the former Dairy Market. The structure and the plan are complex. The large main building is concave, the other three are smaller and with angular edges, and surround the inner yard, which can be entered from Nemuno Street. There is a segmented parking area for fire engines paved with cobbles in front of the concave main façade. The ground floor of the main building housed garages, above which were the fire brigade's rest and locker rooms, as well as the premises of the volunteer firemen's society. The second floor was open to the public: it was home to the Vincas Kudirka reading room and library, and the Pedagogical Museum. The ground floor of the building on Nemuno Street housed a range of shops, while the first floor was occupied by the apartments of the fire brigade chiefs. The second floor (and perhaps part of the inner yard building) housed a pawn shop, which reportedly had 14 rooms. A reinforced concrete store was made for the most valuable items.

The huge garage space was covered by a reinforced concrete ceiling, the floor was made from Duromit concrete,

and the walls were covered with yellow Mettlach tiles. The fire station also needed special equipment: a water reservoir, a tower for drying hoses, and a sliding pole shaft.

The architecture of the building is moderately Modernist, with some features of Art Deco. The main façade is symmetrical, framed by towers decorated with relief elements: slightly stepped attics, corner lesenes, and arched niches embellished by vertical geometric ornamental stripes. The principal plane is rhythmically broken by continuous lesenes, with groups of three narrow windows between them. The whole ground floor is filled with garage doors. The composition of the Nemuno Street façade is asymmetrical; the entrance is emphasised by an oriel window and a balcony above it.

The new Fire Station aspired to be the best in the Baltic States, the only thing missing that prevented the city's fire service from being completely modern was an automatic fire alarm system.

The two upper floors of the building were burnt at the beginning of the Second World War, but were quickly restored by the end of the war.



Adam Mickiewicz Polish Gymnasium

(now the Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas Gymnasium)

Miško St 1 (KAU7)

Edmundas Frykas

1929

The tense political relations with Poland and the occupation of the Vilnius region did not prevent the Polish community in Kaunas from fostering its national identity. Many Polish organizations were active in the city: the community had its own press, libraries, bank (credit society), the Lithuanian Polish Education Society, a Polish gymnasium, established in 1919, and even a soccer club.

The new gymnasium building was built on the opposite side of Vytauto Avenue from the Russian (A14) and German gymnasia. Designed in 1928, the school was supposed to have three buildings arranged around an inner yard. The school opened when the two buildings facing the street were completed in 1929. The third building in the yard, which was to house a gym and a celebration hall, was not built. In 1931, the hall was constructed according to a plan by Edmundas Frykas on the ground floor of the Vytauto Avenue building by joining two classrooms and converting a third one into a stage. In addition, the school had specialised drawing, physics, natural sciences and chemistry classrooms. The classrooms were arranged on the

outer side facing the street, while the hallways were in the part of the building facing the inner yard. The middle of the main building on Miško Street housed a spacious lobby; the main staircase was located in the avant-corps, which jutted out into the inner yard. A second staircase occupied the junction of the buildings.

The retrospective architecture of the building is characterised by the lavishness provided by typical Polish Renaissance attics. The centre of the symmetrical main façade is emphasised by a tall pediment in complex forms; lower pediments mark the side axes of the composition, as well as the entrance on the façade on Vytauto Avenue. Ornamented inserts add variety to the lower segment of the parterre, separated by a corbel. The windows are of several different sizes to avoid monotony: wide on the main planes (the classrooms are well lit), and narrow in the lower and side parts.

An annex was built on Vytauto Avenue in 1962, and another one on Miško Street in 1970. The plan of the old gymnasium was partly changed, and the hall was destroyed.



Russian Gymnasium 'Learning is Light'

(now the Kaunas Teacher Training Centre)

Vytauto Ave 44 (KAU7)

Aleksandras Gordevičius

1925

The gymnasium is by far the only interwar civil building in Kaunas which is an example of the Historicist neo-Russian style. It is situated in Ramybės Park, which was the location of the city's Carmelite cemetery from 1847 to 1959, symbolic of an international community spirit. The cemetery was zoned according to confessions: Orthodox, Catholic and Calvinist. Part of the latter zone was portioned off for Muslims. It was allowed to build houses of worship and community houses in the cemetery.

In 1925, the 'Learning is Light' Kaunas teachers' society built a two-storey building for a private gymnasium (established in 1920) on Vytauto Avenue. Classes began before the building was finished. The work continued until 1928. However, the funds were still insufficient for the halls that had been planned in the yard.

The gymnasium, which became a centre for Russian culture, was run by the famous public figure Alexander Timinsky (1884–1959). As society was unable to support the gymnasium, at the end of 1939 it was reorganised into the Kaunas Fourth State Gymnasium.

The main building on the street housed classrooms and wide (4.7 metre) hallways, called recreation halls. The annex with halls, different to the original design, was built later. The basement gym was built in 1928 or 1939, and the auditorium superstructure was built in 1961. The choice of the building's style was most likely determined not only by the gymnasium's purpose, but also by its location, close to the Orthodox cemetery and church. The neo-Russian style was interpreted quite freely, and in a romanticised manner. The south side of the main façade stands out with its rich decoration: diamond-faced rusticated lesenes, an intricate portal, and relief ornamentation on the upper part, of which the exotic pattern resembles knitting. The playful serrated silhouette is formed by the decorative triangular pediments in place of a regular attic.

The red brick façade on the yard side, which remained unplastered for a long time, resembled the 'brick style' typical of the Kaunas Fortress barracks (late 19th century). This feature disappeared in 2013, when the whole of the building was plastered.



Jewish Exact Sciences Gymnasium

(now the Juozas Naujalis Music Gymnasium)

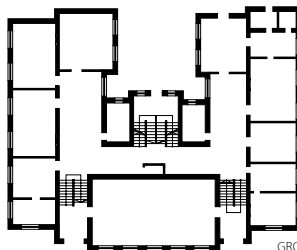
Keštučio St 85 (KAU4)

Boruchas Klingas

1931

This was the most modern Jewish gymnasium in Lithuania. It was established in 1915, thanks to the efforts of Chief Rabbi Rozenbakas, who served in the German occupying army. The construction of the new three-storey building, designed by Boruchas Klingas in 1930, was generously supported by the American-Jewish philanthropist Edward Chase, after whom the gymnasium was named (although the name did not survive). In addition to the usual classrooms and a gym, the gymnasium building featured premises for a kindergarten, a bookshop/library, and a doctor's surgery. The structure of the building is plain, almost schematic. It has a regular symmetrical composition, and consists of three parts, the main one by the street, and the side wings extending towards the yard. The latter house the classrooms. To ensure proper illumination, all the classrooms are arranged along the external perimeter. Windows are omitted at the end of the wings in order to block the noise from the yard. The building has two entrances

with separate staircases from the street side to prevent the flows of students and other visitors from mixing. The main staircase is intended for general use. The building's austere look is characteristic of Functionalism, such as the German Bauhaus or the Dutch de Stijl schools. The geometrically 'clean' rectangular volumes are divided by straight lines and the mesh of large inter-storey windows.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Jewish Primary School (now the Juozas Naujalis Music Gymnasium) Karaliaus Mindaugo Ave 30 (KAU4)

Antanas Jokimas
1931

A16

At first sight, the ascetic exterior of the school evokes associations with Utilitarianism. The style is Functionalist, similar to the Jewish gymnasium (A15), in its principle of the division of planes. It was a municipal school intended for 400 children. The building was designed in 1930 by Antanas Jokimas, the head of the municipality's Construction Department, who simultaneously designed the Jonas Jablonskis Primary School (A20) for Lithuanian children.

Seen from the street, the building's volume resembles a simple rectangle (the pitched roof is obscured by the parapet). The view from the yard side reveals the real structure, the junction of the teaching part and the hall, and the staircases. The classrooms are arranged on both sides of the hallway in the teaching part, and the hall is perpendicular to the west end. The teaching premises and the hall have different entrances. The hall, which occupies the first and second floors, was surrounded by a balcony on three sides. Special facilities were designed for handicrafts

lessons, a doctor's surgery, and hygiene (not only toilets but also showers). In addition, the building featured apartments for the headmaster and the caretaker. The composition of the façades relied on the contrast between blind and windowed planes. Asymmetry was emphasised on the main façade: the hall on the west edge is marked by a blind plane gently carved by vertical recesses, while the horizontal shifts of the wide windows and the slightly more embossed spandrels are stressed in the teaching part. The tall portal integrated into the eastern edge is framed by banded rustication, which extends above the ground floor. This laconic decorative motif recurs in the spaces between the windows. The Functionalist architectonics were emphasised by the geometrical graphics of the window frames. Unfortunately, the windows of the main façade were replaced in Soviet times.





There are two most distinguished periods of Lithuanian architecture – Vilnius Baroque architecture and Kaunas Modernism of the Interwar period. Plenty of books are written about the first one, whilst Kaunas modernism is beginning to receive the deserved attention only nowadays. Extremely short period of the first independent Republic of Lithuania showed that even a young state can emerge with exceptional architecture. These structures had a significant influence over the Soviet period, as well as on contemporary Lithuanian architects. 243 buildings – original and distinctive, from Interwar and Soviet Kaunas, together with architecture of today, can be found in Kaunas Architectural Guide, published for the first time. Here, illustrated with photos and drawings, their history is being told. The book also has a special forfeiture chapter – with stories of already demolished or abandoned buildings, which still remain very important to Kaunas’ genius loci. Kaunas Architectural Guide is dedicated to professional researchers as well as to common readers, to everyone who cares about the city and its’ elements.



THE INTERWAR YEARS 1918–1940
THE SOVIET YEARS 1940–1990
AFTER INDEPENDENCE 1990–2015