VILNIUS
1900–2016

AN ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE

ARCHITEKTŪROS FONDAS

LAPAS

UDK 72(474.5-25)(036)
Vi-177

The publication of this book has been supported by

LIETUVOS KULTŪROS TARYBA

This book has been published in cooperation with Architektūros fondas

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ISBN 978-609-95484-9-4

EDITORS
Marija Drėmaitė
Rūta Leitanaitė
Julija Reklaitė

EDITORIAL BOARD
Audrius Ambrasas
Rūta Leitanaitė
Darius Osteika
Julija Reklaitė

AUTHORS
Marija Drėmaitė
Rūta Leitanaitė
Nijolė Lukšionytė
Karolis Kučiauskas
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Aida Štelbienė
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PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Audrius Ambrasas
Norbert Tukaj
Raimondas Urbakavičius

TRANSLATED BY
Andrius Gailiūnas, Gabrielė Gailiūtė,
Rūta Leitanaitė

LANGUAGE EDITOR
Joseph Everatt

DESIGNERS
Jūratė Šatūnienė, Kontis Šatūnas

FOREWARD

Vilnius 1900-2016: An Architectural Guide is a comprehensive survey of Vilnius' most striking buildings and structures from the 20th and 21st centuries, and includes information about the development and spread of architectural styles, and previously unpublished facts, together with a great deal of visual material. The guide will show you old and new, known and perhaps undiscovered, Vilnius, and is intended for all those who are curious about the city's architecture and culture.

You are holding what is already the second English edition of this guide (see p. 351 for a detailed look at them all), with an ever-growing abundance of visual and factual material, which has been updated, rewritten and revised, and illustrated with new photographs. Each edition encourages you to discover a new layer of the city's seemingly inexhaustible history. Each edition is effectively a reexamination of the architecture of the previous century from a new reference point, and is also a record of the architectural changes that have taken place.

In the second edition, 25 entries have been removed, and 23 new ones have taken their places. However, the guide has grown by 50 pages, as buildings of exceptional cultural and architectural significance are examined in more detail. These include the National Opera and Ballet Theatre, the National Drama Theatre, and the Contemporary Art Centre.

The entries are divided into four sections, and arranged chronologically: pre-First World War, the interwar period, the Soviet years, and the years following independence. The entries within each section are arranged according to the type of structure (public, commercial, residential or cultural), or its architectural style (Modernist, Stalinist or Postmodernist), whichever reveals more about the period in question. In addition, more important locations are examined separately, such as the right bank of the River Neris and the suburb of Saulėtekis, which have seen extensive architectural developments during both the Soviet period and the period since independence.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN 1900 AND 2016

The written history of Vilnius dates back to 1323. Its very first mention describes it already as a ruler's city *(civitas regia)*, a capital, and the primary residence of the Gediminid dynasty. An important stage in its development is marked by the right to self-government (Magdeburg rights) granted in 1387 by Jogaila, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. That was when the structures and insignia (a coat of arms depicting St Christopher) of a long-term administration were established. At the beginning of the 16th century, during the reign of Grand Duke Alexander, these government structures were centralised in Vilnius, with various official positions, the chancery, the treasury and archives. The city became an East European metropolis, comparable to other Jagiellonian capitals, such as Prague, Buda and Krakow. Later, during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its rulers rarely visited, even though the nobility built residences in the city and it was considered to be the capital of Lithuania until the final partition of the Commonwealth. This unique, easternmost Baroque city, which grew up on a web of Medieval streets, became a source of inspiration to many artists, writers and historians. Books, poems and songs have been written about it, it has been painted and photographed, and it has even been the inspiration for various myths and stories, until, eventually, the city became somewhat mythical itself.

In 1994, the historic centre of Vilnius was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site, according to two criteria: as 'an outstanding example of a medieval foundation which exercised a profound influence on architectural and cultural developments in a wide area of Eastern Europe over several centuries', and 'In the townscape and the rich diversity of buildings that it preserves, Vilnius is an exceptional illustration of a Central European town which evolved organically over five centuries.' However, its urban planning during the 19th and 20th centuries did not fit in with this romantic image; quite the opposite, the 19th-century modernisation was seen as damaging the culture and the beauty of the city. What is more, this period coincided with a loss of both sovereignty and its status as a capital city, Lithuania's annexation by the Russian Empire, the establishment of Tsarist rule, the destruction brought on by two world wars, and later Soviet rule and mass construction.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Vilnius was the centre of a province of the Russian Empire. During the century, political power changed hands nine times. Until 1915 (from 1795), it belonged to the Russian Empire. During the First World War, it was occupied by Germany (1915-1918); and between 1918 and 1922, the armies of Lithuania, Poland and Bolshevik Russia fought over it. On 16 February 1918, the Council of Lithuania declared Lithuania's independence in Vilnius, and began to set up the first state institutions. However, in December 1918, Lithuania was invaded by the Red Army; and in 1919, Vilnius became the capital of two separate Soviet socialist republics, first of Lithuania, and later of Litbel, a country created from the merger of Lithuania and Belarus. On 29 September 1920, Lithuania and Poland signed the Suwałki Agreement, and decreed Vilnius to be a part of Lithuania. This agreement was broken when the army of General Lucjan Żeligowski occupied Vilnius on 9 October. The capital of Lithuania was 'temporarily' moved to Kaunas; and in 1922, Vilnius was annexed by Poland. It was returned to Lithuania on 28 October 1939; although by June 1940, Soviet soldiers had entered Lithuanian territory; and on 21 July the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic was established, with Vilnius as its capital. On 22 June 1941, the city was occupied by Nazi Germany. On 13 July 1944, the Red Army marched in, and Vilnius became the capital of the Lithuanian SSR for the next five decades. On 11 March 1990, the city was the location for the declaration of Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union.

Many of these shifts in power were so short that there was no time for any planning changes to take effect. There were ideological battles over the way certain symbolic locations, such as squares, monuments and Gedimino Avenue, were denoted. Urban development in modern Vilnius can be divided into four distinct longer periods

of change and expansion: Tsarist, interwar Polish, Soviet, and 21st-century independent Lithuanian periods. This guide will take you through this modern layer.

The modernisation of a provincial centre (mid-19th century to the 1920s)

It would be difficult to understand the urban and architectural development of modern Vilnius without taking into account the planning changes that began in the late 19th century, when the city became the administrative centre of the Russian Empire's Northwest Region. It was then that its expansion into the New Town was planned; and the urban planning principles of this expansion remained in place until the middle of the 20th century. The Imperial Russian administration devised master plans; although these were prepared for Vilnius too (in 1817, 1834 and 1837), they were not required, as the city did not expand, and its actual development did not depend on plans, but on practical interests and opportunities for investors. The only truly important innovation came in the form a central thoroughfare characteristic of the Neoclassical pattern of Imperial Russian cities, St George's Avenue, which extended the Old Town into new areas.

It was only in the second half of the 19th century that Vilnius started to resemble a modern capitalist city. A typical period of 19th-century civilisation followed the abolition of serfdom, the enactment of land reform and the construction of the railway. The number of residents grew from 60,000 in the middle of the century to 155,000 at the end. Vilnius has always been a multinational city. By 1897, 40% of its residents were Jewish, 30.9% were Polish, 19.98% were Russian or Belarusian, and 2.1% were Lithuanian. During the second half of the century, 400 new stone houses were built, and a new master plan, approved in 1875, began to be implemented. It envisaged the construction of new, planned districts: Lukiškės, Pohulianka (J. Basanavičiaus Street and the surrounding areas), and the New Town (around Naugarduko and Algirdo streets). The new district of Naujininkai (Nowy Swiat) formed on the other side of the railway, and extensive construction took place around the station.

By 1914, the population of Vilnius had grown to 203,000. With the ever-increasing construction expanding into new areas, the structure of the city began to change: more and more public and government offices moved to the New Town, and even the centre of the city shifted from Town Hall Square to Cathedral Square, which connected the Old Town with the newest part. St George's Avenue was intended to be the city's symbolic main street, and the site of public and government offices. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, it was dominated by commerce: rented houses, hotels, shops and cafés. The increase in commerce also affected the Old Town. Buildings were adapted as hotels and shops, and for apartments, with the construction of additional storeys and the installation of display windows on ground floors. A completely new formation in the structure of the city was the Žvėrynas district: an area made up of equal-sized blocks, with wooden buildings, town houses and summer houses. Small industrial enterprises were established in Lukiškės along the River Vilija (now the Neris), and along the River Vilejka (now the Vilnia), while larger and more modern ones were established along the railway. The increasingly modern face of Vilnius was also changed by signs of technical progress: metal bridges, built-up river banks, steam power, gas (from 1863) and later electric (from 1903) street lighting, and a horse-drawn tram. A sanitation infrastructure, however, was lacking.

Until the end of the 19th century, there were no freelance architects in Vilnius; architectural plans were drawn up by specialists in local state institutions, while important structures (the railway station, court, prison) were designed by specialists in St Petersburg. Architects from Russia were appointed as officials in the governorate's construction department. At the beginning of the 20th century, architects in Vilnius began to open private architectural and construction firms. Władysław Stypułkowski's and August Klein's firm (1901), Tadeusz Rostworowski's architectural studio (1908), Eduardas Rouba's firm Stroitel (1911), and

Vilnius Real Gymnasium

(today the Petras Vileišis Railway Transport Department of the Vilnius College of Technology and Design)

Tauro St 20 (VLN2)
Aleksander Sonin
1913

Only one modern school building was built in Vilnius in the early 20th century, the Real Gymnasium (from the German *realschule*). It is an expressive, late Art Nouveau building. The architect is thought to be Aleksander Sonin, who oversaw its construction. This three-storey, asymmetrical building was built on a plot belonging to the city. The corner avant-corps contains a spacious hall and stairwell, into which light falls through arched windows. The façade's vertical rhythm is formed by the yellow brick lesenes that continue through all the horizontal interruptions. The windows of all three storeys are different in shape, and its silhouette is enlivened by merlons and balustrades. Between 1948 and 1991, the building was home to the Vilnius Technical College of Railway Transport. The Vilnius Vocational College of Transport was set up here in 1991.

Warehouse

(today the Material Resources Department of the Ministry of National Defence)

Savanorių Ave 8 (VLN7)
1910s

This two-storey rectangular warehouse, built for military use, has features of Constructivism. Its architecture was influenced by new construction materials: a reinforced concrete frame, with the spaces filled by red brick walls. The ground floor is built on a tall plinth, and the space between the concrete foundation and the floor above is intended for ventilation. The internal frame is made up of two rows of supporting columns, angled away from each other and spaced at six-metre intervals. It also has a characteristic feature of warehouses, a ground-floor ramp with a wider overhanging first floor. The windows are made from wired glass with metal frames, while its concrete, gently sloping roof is covered with modified bitumen sheets. The wide double doors of the ground floor slide on rails. The areas below the windows are enlivened by ventilation openings. The original design of the interior did not include partitions, but the warehouse was reorganised after the Second World War with the addition of concrete partitions and a new roof.

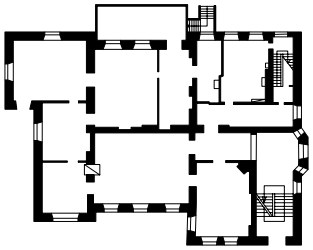
Anton Filipowicz-Dubowik villa

M. Valančiaus St 3 (VLN1)

Anton Filipowicz-Dubowik
1903

The villa of Anton Filipowicz-Dubowik, on a small street on Tauras Hill, is the city's most prominent expression of the Sezessionist floral trend. The villa was built by its owner, a construction technician. In 1893, he passed an exam with the St Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineering allowing him to supervise the construction of buildings, bridges and roads. He built around 100 buildings and structures of various kinds in and around Vilnius at the beginning of the century. The building has complicated forms, and the volume is split by the asymmetrical connection of the parts. The spacious, comfortably planned owner's apartment took up the entire ground floor. There were smaller apartments in the basement and the mezzanine (they may have been intended for the family's needs, or to be rented out). The new aesthetics are reflected in the dynamic, stepped form of the villa, the windows (shaped like horseshoes or flowers), the curves in the façade and the fence by the street, and the lush floral decoration.

Filipowicz-Dubowik did not keep to the Sezession style, but used everything he found charming and attractive in it. Botanical motifs were combined with reminiscences of Baroque, which were first seen as symbols of Vilnius and the national identity at the beginning of the 20th century. The main pediment is decorated with a relief of the Filipowicz family's coat of arms, called Pobóg. The interior is made more unique by its stoves made of glazed tiles, decorated with motifs of nasturtiums, sunflowers, sea shells and a woman's head, echoing the relief on the façade.

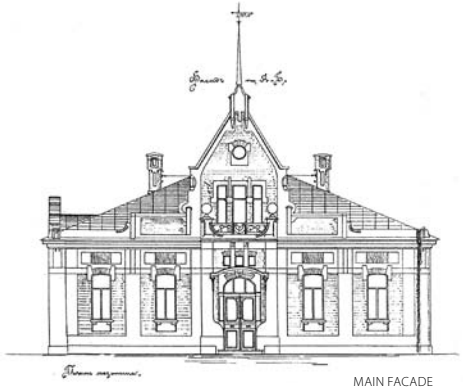


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Anna Dobrocheyeva villa
Vytauto St 16 (VLN1)

S. Wolonsiewicz
1907

This villa stands out among the wooden houses of Žvėrynas with its dynamic Sezession elements. It was built for Anna Dobrocheyeva, the wife of a titular councillor. The whole house was occupied by a single family; there was a stable, a coach house, an ice house and a well. This symmetrical building with a single storey and a mezzanine floor resembles a traditional suburban home. The façade is made more unusual by the rounded veranda and balcony. The spaces over the windows are decorated with reliefs of botanical motifs.



MAIN FACADE

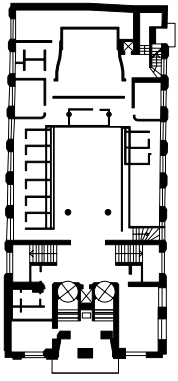
General State Savings Bank (PKO)

(today SEB bank)

Gedimino Ave 12 (VLN2)

Juliusz Żórawski, Zbigniew Puget
1937

The General State Savings Bank (Powszechna Kasa Oszczędnosci in Polish) was designed by the Warsaw architects Juliusz Żórawski and Zbigniew Puget, while its construction was supervised by Jan Borowski. The high-quality pale yellow sandstone and granite finish gives the otherwise calm and simple building an air of sophistication. While it is possible to discern allusions to Neoclassicism in the clear and symmetrical structure of the building, the exclusively ascetic shapes used by its Warsaw architects give it an impression of Functionalist architecture. The operations hall was decorated across two storeys by a mural by Ludomir Sleńdziński entitled *Work and Frugality Leading to Success*. The adjoining three-storey building, designed together with the main building, used to accommodate Gustaw Gebethner's and August Wolff's bookshop during the interwar period. After the Second World War, the main building housed the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, and from 1950 the Institute of the History of the Lithuanian Communist Party and its archives.



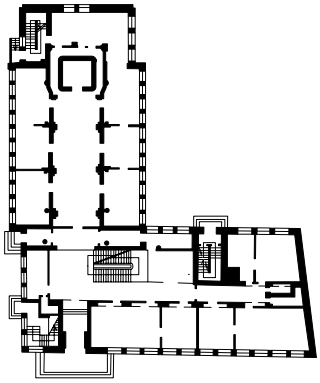
GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Polish Land Bank (BGK)

(today retail premises and offices)
Gedimino Ave 14 (VLN2)

Stanisław Gałęzowski, Jerzy Pańkowski
1938

Designed by architects from Warsaw (its construction was overseen by Jan Borowski), the Vilnius office of the Polish Land Bank (Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego in Polish) blends harmoniously with the adjacent General State Savings Bank. The modern reinforced concrete shape of the building, consisting of two rectangular volumes, is set back from Gedimino Avenue. There were originally plans to erect a statue of Adam Mickiewicz on the resulting forecourt. The façade's most significant detail is the concave plane above the main entrance that rises to the top of the building, decorated with a high-relief entitled *Fortune* by the sculptor Tadeusz Godziszewski. The bank used to be famous for its ornate, two-storey operations hall, with a mural by Ludomir Sleńdziński called *Time*, and various allegories of business (not extant). This is one of the few interwar public buildings that show features of Functionalist architecture. It was renovated in 2005 to a design by Alvidas Songaila; the original layout and interior decor were destroyed.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

D38

Stalinist Architecture

The first decades after the war in Vilnius saw the construction of objects representing socialist ideology. Their architecture was mainly influenced by Stalin's totalitarian regime. 'Palaces and temples' were built in Neoclassical architectural forms, as a means of Soviet propaganda, as symbols of the new order. This style, which was referred to as Socialist Realism, is monumental, massive, pompously symmetrical, clearly rhythmical, and Classically ordered, with Classical decorative details, and symbols of socialist life and forms of folk art.

Jūratė Tutlytė

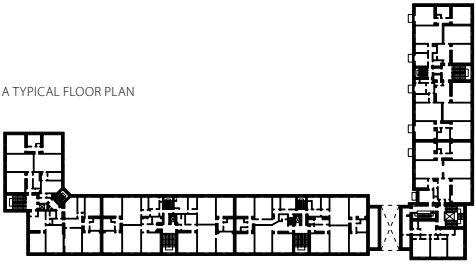
House of Academics

J. Tumo-Vaižganto St 9 (VLN1)

Giovanni Rippa
1951

This building with its Neoclassical composition and decoration, built according to a design by Giovanni Rippa, who arrived from Leningrad after the war, is one of the most prominent examples of Socialist Realism in Vilnius. The story of the building is interesting: it indicates the existence of a higher class in the 'classless' Soviet society.

A TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN



The construction of such buildings in the Soviet Union was determined by a government decree: every Soviet republic's capital had to build a house with luxurious apartments (of four to six rooms, of 160 to 190 square metres, with a study and a library, bathrooms, and even a servants' room) for loyal activists in science and culture. This building contained 50 such apartments. The five-storey building on a street corner was finished with a traditional feature of the prestigious contemporary style, a tower with a belvedere and a spire (by Viktor Anikin and Anatoly Kolosov). In keeping with the architectural ideology of the times, Rippa tried to give the building a national form: he emphasised the 'Vilnius style' by decorating the façade with Baroque pediments and portals. The courtyard contained garages, an electricity substation and a pool, and a tennis court was even envisaged. It has recently been included as a typical example of Socialist Realism architecture in the Lithuanian Cultural Heritage List.

C20

The Composers' Union building and terrace of houses

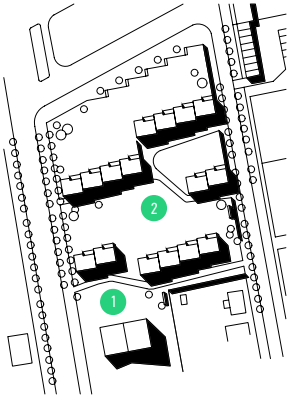
A. Mickevičiaus St 29 (VLN1)

Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas, engineer Česlovas Gerliakas
1960–1966

The Composers' Union building complex was erected in the pine woods of Žvėrynas, on the banks of the River Neris. The auditorium and a terrace of 16 two-storey houses were designed in 1959 at the Vilnius Institute of Urban Planning. Because of the special function of the building, permission was granted to produce an individual design, which was rare at the time, since the boom for standardised mass construction was already in full swing. The young architects Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas and Vytautas Brėdikis proposed an unusual idea for terraced houses, which was a new trend in modern urban planning, with a strong Scandinavian flavour. Čekanauskas made it quite clear that the trip to Finland that was organised by the Architects' Union of the USSR in the summer of 1959 had a huge influence on the layout and design. Nordic Modernism, especially the residential areas in Tapiola, inspired and influenced the selection of local materials (stone, red brick, wood and rough plaster), as well as a respect for the natural environment. The beautiful pine trees of Žvėrynas on the banks of the River Neris were preserved. The architect's idea to provide composers with two-storey homes was an unheard-of luxury in the context of the mass construction of housing that had already begun, and shows the privileges of the cultural elite. Each three or four-room home (55.6 or 68 square metres), with a terrace, a balcony and a spacious studio, was arranged on two floors and was able to accommodate a piano. The Composers' Union building (audition hall) is an expressive example of the Early Modernism of the 1960s. The two-storey rectangular building contains a vestibule, administrative and club areas on the ground floor, and an auditorium, a foyer and a library above. The artistic expression of the exterior applied contrasting natural materials: red brick, light grainy plaster, wooden ply walls, and stone partitions. The original interior is still extant: the walls are covered in grainy plaster decorated with wood, there is a monumental fireplace and copper bubble-shaped lamps, and the ceiling of the audition hall is covered with natural bent boards that clearly resemble Alvar Aalto's Viipuri library, and once more show a close connection between the building and Nordic Modernism.

Photograph from 1960s

KEY
1. The Composers' Union building
2. Residential buildings



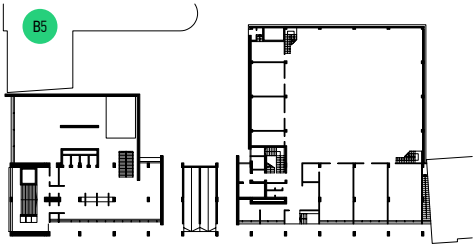
SITE PLAN

National Planning Committee

(today the Ministry of the Economy)
Gedimino Ave 38 (VLN2)

Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė
1973

One of the first high-rises in Vilnius was erected on a tiny plot between four and five-storey buildings. The postwar Modernist building emerging in an old part of the city stands out clearly from its surroundings. The volume of the building is composed of a high-rise rectangular part, and wider lower floors decorated in black polished stone. Two of the 11 storeys of the building are below ground. The finish of the outer walls is rather simple, but quality materials were used. In the higher part of the building, strip windows with aluminium frames were mixed with slightly profiled strips covered with grains of grey marble. Both the structure of the plan and the composition of the exterior walls gave priority to the function and the quest for original construction solutions.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Secondary school
Naugarduko St 7 (VLN8)

Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė
1969

The construction plans of the Soviet years gained momentum, and educational institutions were no exception. Large, standard school buildings are typical of the era. This school for 1,500 pupils was one of the first Soviet schools to be built according to an individual design. It was built near a crossing of busy streets, on a small plot with an awkward relief. The brick building comprises several volumes, forming a semi-open courtyard. The architectural composition is functional, emphasising the construction materials, and is dictated by the function and the situation of the building. The gym features an unusual idea. Not only is it well lit from above, but it is also mobile: moving walls provide a possibility to turn the surrounding recreational areas into a hall. The main instruction wing for the first time in Lithuania uses a nine-metre step construction of horizontal walls the entire length of the building. Both the interior and the exterior are predominantly simple.

C36

Vilnius Bus Station

Sodų St 22 (VLN8)

Vytautas Brėdikis, engineer Jonas Šyvis
1974

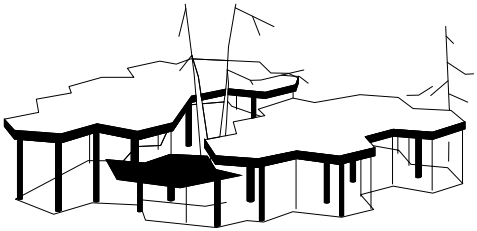
Vilnius Bus Station, designed in the early 1970s, reflects trends in the later stage of Modernist architecture. The architect envisaged two contrasting rectangles: a horizontal two-storey part was intended as a passenger waiting hall, with ticket offices and platforms; and a 12-storey high-rise tower was expected to house the Vilnius City Transport dispatch centre. However, the tower did not comply with the taste of the minister of transport of the time, and was therefore never built. The roofs of the platforms are covered with monolithic reinforced concrete supports, with 9.5-metre-long corbels. The ceiling of the bus station features unusual cupola-shaped one-sided skylights.

Photograph by Antanas Grinčelaitis (1978)

Flower shop
(today a club)
Pylimo St 21B (VLN8)

Nijolė Vaičiūnienė, Rimvydas Pranaitis
1968

This site for selling and exhibiting flowers was built to a design drawn up in 1961 by the architect Nijolė Vaičiūnienė and the construction engineer Rimvydas Pranaitis. a unique example of Functionalist architecture, it consists of hexagons around a small courtyard. Each one has a metal column in the middle, supporting the reinforced concrete roof, and double-glazed windows with frames take the place of walls. Its flexible construction matches the surroundings, and is made compositionally more lively by the colours and the geometry. The building used to comprise various areas: a store, an exhibition area, rooms for employees, and rooms for storing, receiving and arranging flowers. The interior was memorable for its pond with aquatic plants, decorated with ceramic plates for cut flowers made by the artist Danutė Daunoravičienė. Each room was intended to have different-coloured lighting. One of the more interesting examples of modern Lithuanian architecture, today it has lost its unique architectural characteristics, and has been adapted for a different function.



1-464-LI series housing blocks

Žirmūnai, Lazdynai, Karoliniškės, Viršuliškės (VLN9)

Bronislovas Krūminis, Algimantas Umbrasas, Vidas Sargelis, Vaclovas Zubrus
1966

A group at the Department of Standard Design of the Urban Construction Design Institute, led by Bronislovas Krūminis, improved the standard 1-464 series of large-panel buildings of five, nine and 12 storeys. The new series was named 1-464-LI (LI standing for Lithuanian), and from 1963 these buildings began to be produced at the Vilnius House Construction Factory. Working with a standard wall length of 3.2 metres, the architects improved the layout of one to four-room apartments: the number of walk-through rooms was reduced, the bathrooms were separated from the toilets, and loggias were installed instead of balconies. In 1962, the rules did not allow larger utility areas, so the apartments were planned as comfortably as possible: 6.5-square-metre kitchens, 17.1-square-metre living-rooms with loggias on the sunny side, and 13.9 and 12.9-square-metre bedrooms. The houses of this series were most popular in Lazdynai: in 1967, five-storey (30, 60 and 90 apartments) and nine-storey buildings (72, 108 and 144 apartments), descending in terraces and matching the relief of the location, began to be constructed. In other residential districts, the houses of this series varied in the panel decoration (mosaic tile) or the colour (brick-coloured plates, in Karoliniškės) of the loggias.

Photograph by Romualdas Rakauskas from the 1980s

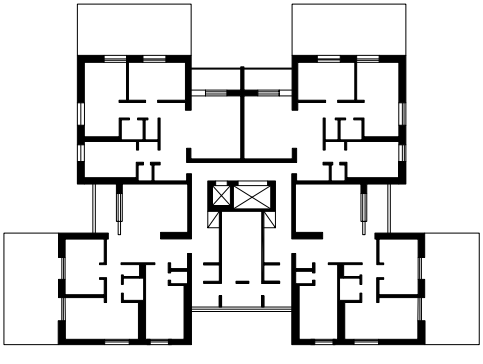
Sixteen-storey monolithic tower blocks in Lazdynai

Type A: Architektų St 55, 59, 65, 67, 112

Type B: Architektų St 77, 79, 91, 184 (VLN9)
Česlovas Mazūras
Type a 1978, Type B 1982

As the standard of five, nine and 12-storey blocks became usual in the mass construction of residential districts, the issue of making micro-districts more unique started to be solved by using bright colours and different finishes of the panels, or variety in the urban layout. Later, 16-storey tower blocks were introduced, as a way to provide each micro-district with unique identifying marks. The Lazdynai residential district was constructed between 1967 and 1973, with some spaces left for future vertical landmarks, tower blocks of monolithic reinforced concrete. Two types of tower blocks were designed and constructed. The first group of five architecturally expressive Type a towers was arranged in the northwest of Lazdynai, between Architektų Street and Laisvės Avenue. The second group of four Type B towers was erected in the northeast of Lazdynai. These buildings were important, not only as architectural towers that provide variety to the district, but also as landmarks of modern Vilnius in important views of the city.

GENERAL SCHEME OF THE DISTRICT



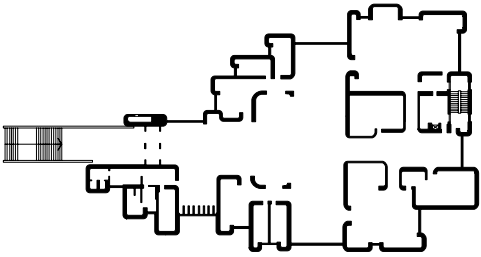
A TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN

Palace of Weddings

K. Kalinausko St 21 (VLN1)

Gediminas Baravykas
1974

The first civil registry building in Lithuania (and the entire Soviet Union) was an interesting architectural project. Built to be suitable for processions, the clear axial composition of the volume of the building begins with a solemn staircase leading to the second storey, where the ceremonies take place. The interior contains two kinds of spaces: vertical, rather high and closed halls for ceremonies, and an open horizontal foyer on a more friendly scale, for the final celebratory procession. The decorations are subtle: light monochromatic walls lined vertically with textured plaster (just like the exterior finish), along with a tapestry by the artist Zinaida Kalpokovaitė-Vogelienė, stained glass by Konstantinas Šatūnas, and furniture by the architect Eugenijus Gūzas. The structure of the interior of the building is reflected on the outside. Its volume comprises separate vertical elements of various sizes, joined with glass, thus merging the interior with the trees of the former Lutheran cemetery in which it was built. The strong vertical divisions make the building dynamic, reminiscent of the rhythm of tree trunks. The architects won the Prize of the Council of Ministers of the USSR in 1976 for creating a socialist ceremonial building with modern means.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

The Lithuanian Dream. Private Housing

A free-standing house located on its own private plot of land represents a common dream for many Lithuanians. After spending many years squeezed into tiny flats in uniform Soviet blocks, with little privacy or individuality, as soon as the economic situation changed and private property was reestablished, many citizens eagerly rushed to make the dream come true.

As the chances of having such a home in the middle of the capital are quite small, Vilnius burst its limits, proliferating with new suburbs. Scattered in precious natural surroundings, these new quarters represent not only the overwhelming demand, but also the city's poor ability to control the process of growth.

The variety of individual houses built during the last two decades speaks volumes about the shifts in taste, values and lifestyle of society. Pompous castle-like residences, the legacy of the 1990s, were succeeded by tinier houses in different styles. The mosaic of styles embraces everything, from an American dream chalet to the prototype of a vernacular Lithuanian cottage, from prosaic rationality to bold experimentation, from the pretentious display of material wealth to elegant minimalism.

The most noteworthy specimens of new private housing in Vilnius show a sensitive and respectful approach by the architect and the owner towards the surroundings, the natural and urban heritage, and search for a synthesis of vernacular, regional and contemporary architectural features.

It is no wonder that the most unique and inspiring private architecture has usually emerged in the smart residential quarters that are hidden in the tranquil woods of the outskirts. Naturally, this is not affordable for everyone, and neither is it accessible: these micro-settlements are shielded from the eyes of strangers by fences and security gates.

On the other hand, the suburbs became a fertile ground for cloning standard projects. Since in most cases the priority of this architecture is rationality and a low price, the chances of finding original solutions, adapted to the personal needs of the owner, are low.

A commission to build attractive and sustainable private housing, adapted to the uniqueness of the owner and the site, is still more the exception than the rule.

Rūta Leitanaitė

Residential quarter

Nugalėtojų St 21B–21G, 21K (VLN14)

Rolandas Palekas, Gintaras Čaikauskas,
Virginija Venckūnienė, Alma Palekienė
R. Paleko ARCH studija, 2002

A small residential quarter consisting of eight houses is located near the old settlement of Aukštagiris on the border of the city of Vilnius. The shapes and textures are a contemporary interpretation of a traditional settlement: the volumes with pitched-roofs are scattered irregularly along the street. The finish of mahogany clay brick and dark tiling are a reference to Scandinavian style. The different colours of the windows of each house and the single-floor wooden garages add a certain playfulness to the architecture. Each house, with approximately 150 square metres of space, is different, but employing a common scheme: the ground floor is for common spaces, and the first floor for individual rooms. The quarter is noteworthy for its purist architectural language, its rational planning, and its attention to the comfort of the residents.

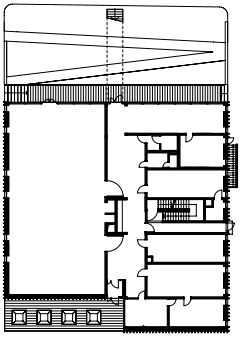
SITE PLAN

Rupert Art and Education Centre

Vaidilutės St 79 (VLN13)

Audrius Ambrasas, Vilma Adomonytė,
Mindaugas Reklaitis
Audrius Ambrasas Architects, 2011-2013

The main motifs that inspired the design of the Rupert Art and Education Centre were the resort atmosphere of Valakampiai, the most popular riverside beach in Vilnius, and the mystery of the creative process. The continuous wooden finish (in thermally treated pine) helps the building to blend with the pine forest around it, while the single entrance in the blank façade lures the visitor inwards, as if through a keyhole, to peer into the artists' world. The building expresses precision, moderation and continuity, both inside and out. The bleached pine finish makes the views of nature visible through the windows the focal point of the building's interior.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

CROSS-SECTION

National Centre for Physical Sciences and Technology

Saulėtekio Lane 9 (VLN14)

Remigijus Bimba, Markas Gorpiničius, Gintautas Adlys, Laura Dabravalskytė Architektūros kūrybinė grupė, 2011–2015

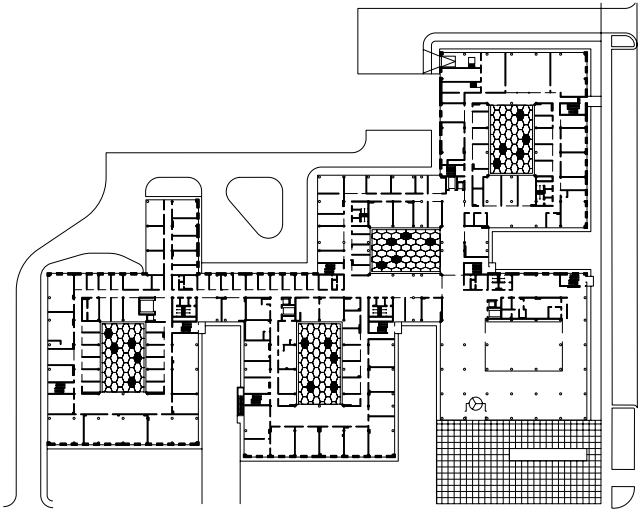
The largest science centre in the Baltic states has been created by joining institutes of physics, semiconductor physics, chemistry, and theoretical physics and astronomy, with the Lithuanian Textile Institute and the Department of Electrical Engineering of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. It is unique in a Central and East European context, due to the scientific fields focused on: lasers and light wave technologies, materials science and nanotechnology, semiconductor physics and electronics.

The 25,000-square-metre building provides space for 700 scientists and students to conduct research, and includes 24 open-access laboratories.

The architects approached the complicated task of coordinating this exceptional programme and the activities of different institutions by improvising on the topic of crystalline structure. The public areas of the building are the backbone around which the different facilities are grouped. The institute received its own separate volume, and has electronically locking doors. All communal stairways, lifts, hallways and specialised laboratories are located on a lower floor: it is conveniently accessible, the facilities have a rational use, and four atriums inside each volume provide plenty of greenery, daylight and a place to sit, creating comfortable and convenient recreational areas.

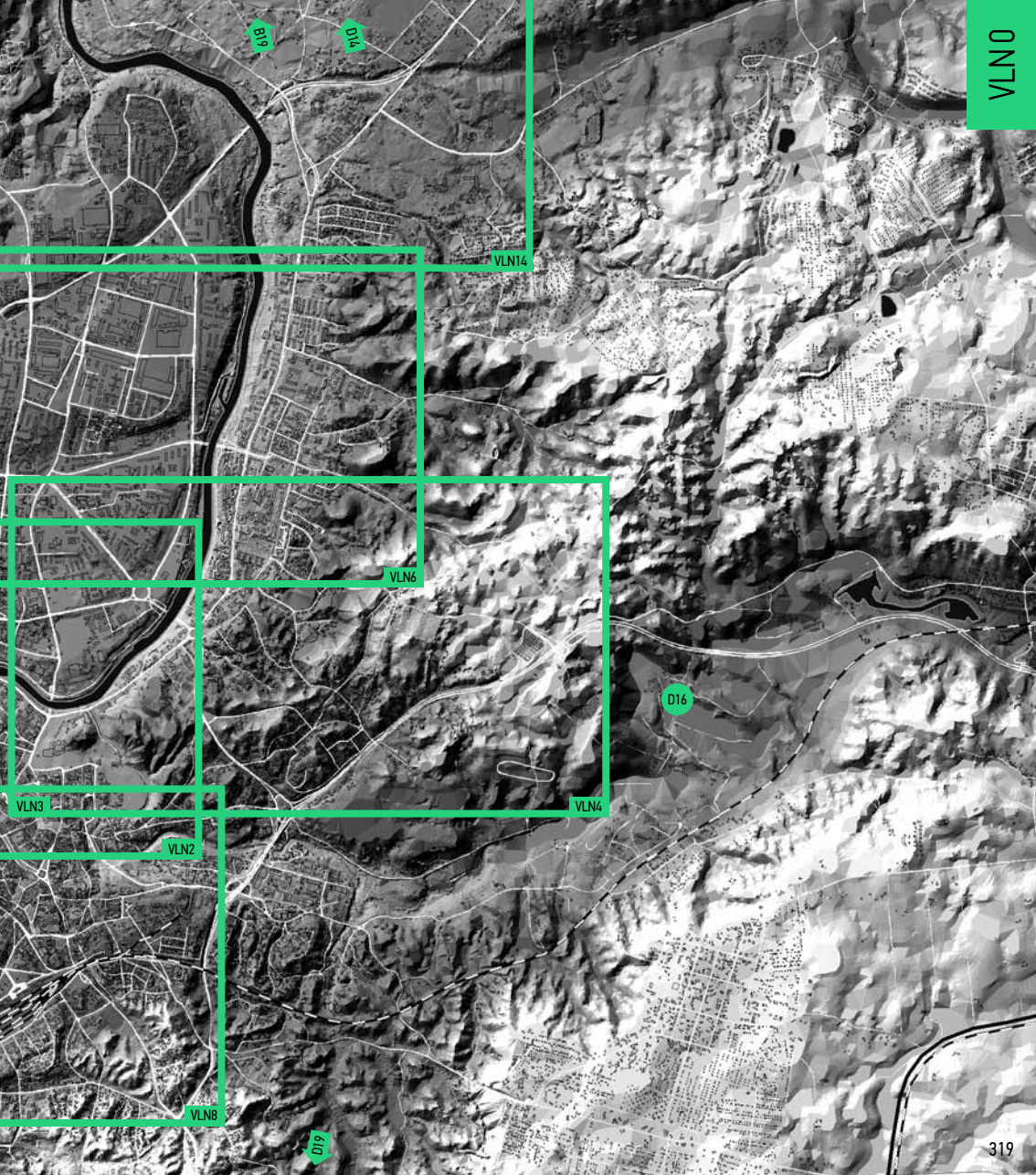
The simple layout can be adapted easily to any future changes in the function of the premises. Four large, rectangular volumes, connected by corridors and divided by gaps, have created an architectural composition that is uniform, but by no means boring, and avoids being overly monumental.

The molecular aesthetic is continued on the façade: the primary motif is graphene's hexagonal lattice. The laconic, rectangular volumes create a backdrop for the nearby library, which dominates. The building's structure echoes its adjacencies: its volumes form the perimeter of the area around the main square and the entrance, while an area of pine trees opens up behind them.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

D81
D32
VLN13
VLN11
VLN12
D60
VLN5
D24
VLN1
VLN9
VLN10
VLN7
D50
C7
D79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VILNIUS: AN ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE

Based on: VILNIUS 1900–2005: NAUJOSIOS ARCHITEKTŪROS GIDAS / VILNIUS 1900–2005. A GUIDE TO MODERN ARCHITECTURE, published in 2005. The first edition was edited by Darius Osteika and Jūratė Tutlytė, compiled by Jūratė Tutlytė, written by Marija Drėmaitė, Nijolė Lukšionytė, Vaidas Petrulis, Jurgita Rimkevičienė, and Jūratė Tutlytė, with co-authors Tomas Grunskis, Diana Kontrimaitė, Renata Vaičekonytė-Kapežinskienė, and Aida Štelbienė, and photography by Raimondas Urbakavičius.

Revised and updated edition in Lithuanian:
VILNIUS 1900–2012: NAUJOSIOS ARCHITEKTŪROS GIDAS, compiled by Julija Reklaitė and Rūta Leitanaitė, Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2011, 304 p.

Translation of the 2011 edition into English:
VILNIUS 1900–2013: A GUIDE TO THE CITY'S ARCHITECTURE, edited by Julija Reklaitė and Rūta Leitanaitė, translated into English by Gabrielė Gailiūtė and Rūta Leitanaitė, Vilnius: Lapas, 2013, 304 p.

Translation of the 2011 edition into German:
ARCHITEKTURFÜHRER VILNIUS, edited by Julija Reklaitė, Rūta Leitanaitė, translated into German by Saskia Drude, Berlin: DOM publishers, 2015, 252 p.

KAUNAS: AN ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE

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COMING SOON

KLAIPĖDA IR PAJŪRIO MIESTAI: ARCHITEKTŪROS GIDAS [KLAIPĖDA AND OTHER SEASIDE RESORTS: AN ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE], compiled by Liutauras Nekrošius and Indre Ruseckaitė, Vilnius: Lapas, 2018.

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Vilnius' architecture of the 20th and early 21st centuries ranges from the Modern Style to High-Tech, and reflects all the architectural trends and political shifts that swept across the city during this period.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the elegant Central European Sezession style was still in vogue. Architecture later progressed to the stripped-down interwar Modernism of the 1920s and 1930s, and after the Second World War it ventured into the controversial Soviet-imposed Neoclassicism. After 'totalitarian' architecture was officially discredited in the mid-1950s, postwar Modernism flourished, particularly in the new residential districts that were built to house the city's growing population. At the end of the Soviet period, Late Modernism saw a large number of public buildings appear around the city centre.

With the reestablishment of independence in 1990, and with the consequent changes that took place in the economy and in society, Vilnius experienced yet another wave of urbanisation. Private houses were built again, filling the city to the limits, and a spectacular steel and glass city centre took shape on the right bank of the River Neris.

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CENTURY 1900–1918
THE INTERWAR PERIOD 1918–1940
THE SOVIET YEARS 1940–1990
AFTER THE RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE 1990–2016