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Prague hotels in the 1960's–1980's

ANNOTATION

The phenomenon of post-war architecture of Prague hotel accommodation has been gaining in popularity recently, though it still represents an unevaluated segment of the heritage fund. From the many surviving representatives of this kind of typological architecture in Prague between 1960–1990, the study analytically addresses three specific buildings which, although they come from different parts of the monitored period, share a common denominator in their architectural and artistic quality with an emphasis on the interior artistic furnishings. From the 1960's this is the Parkhotel, the 1970's is represented by the Hotel Intercontinental, and Hotel Forum from the 1980's is the third and youngest complex to have been exemplary processed. The subject of the research of the named objects was photographic documentation of the exteriors and existing interiors with an emphasis on preserved contemporary art-craft furnishings and equipment as well. The purpose of the research is to determine the current state of the buildings, to identify the architectural and historical values, and on this basis, to evaluate their heritage potential.

SUMMARY

This article focused on the period between 1960–1990 and typologically addresses the situation of public buildings in Prague which were intended for short-term accommodation, namely hotels and hotel complexes. The introduction outlines the general history and presents a list of all important hotel buildings that were built during this period. The article emphasizes that the following selection of three buildings that are described regarding their architectural, art historical, and heritage detail do not represent a mere qualitative selection but rather an illustrative cross-section of the period at hand.

The Parkhotel in Prague's Holešovice was completed in 1967 as the first of a series of large new hotels in Prague that emerged between the 1960's and 1980's. The project was designed by the State Project Institute for Trade (Státní projektový ústav obchodu), and its authors were architects Zdeněk Edel and Jirí Lavička in cooperation with Jaroslav Tomáš. The author of the original interior was architect Alena Šrámková. The monolithic building is characteristic in its reinforced concrete structure consisting of two sloping pillars bearing the bath below the tall accommodation section. The constructional design of the Parkhotel refers to the „classic Mies concept – building and base“; „the actual architectural concept of the accommodations section of the Parkhotel may however be considered as one of the purest paraphrases of the creation of Le Corbusier in our country.“ (Ševčík/Beneš 2009, 275). The Parkhotel ranks among the more progressive architectural projects of its time in Prague, during the socialist realism period of closure towards the west. The hotel exterior has been largely preserved to the present day; in particular the light facade panels were exchanged for contemporary tinted glazing. The original interior design was not preserved. This design, like the original furniture from A. Šrámková, consisted of simple shapes corresponding with the architecture of the building. From the few works of art, two tapestries remain (from Jan Hladík and Věra Drnková Zářecká) and two figural sculptures (from Zdenka Štěpánová Benešová and Václav Bejčka). The logo on the facade is from Jiří Rathouský. The original interior was designed without the need for additional artworks; a certain financial amount for their purchase was compulsorily determined from the construction budget. The current interior of the Parkhotel from 1994 (Atelier 2J, architects Zelený and Klika) does not correspond to the style of the building, but the current user has the intention to return to the original concept of the interior of the public areas.

The second presented structure, for which the authors make no secret of its primacy in quality, is the brutalist Hotel Intercontinental in Prague's Old Town. The building was built in 1968–1974 based on the project of a team of authors led by architect Karel Filsak. His colleagues were the architects Karel Bubeníček, Jiří Louda and Jaroslav Švec (exterior), while the realization of most of the interior was entrusted to a team of architects under Jan Šrámek with the participation of two „Brussels“ architects, František Cubr and Zdeněk Pokorný. The text by Kateřina Houšková focuses not only on the architecture, authorship, and heritage dimension of the building, but keeps the main focus on a detailed presentation of the artistic concept of the interiors with a thorough distinction between the original and current condition. Most of the participating artists are presented (selectively Věra Janoušková, Eva Kmentová, Jiří Novák, Hugo Demartini, René Roubíček, Stanislav Libenský, Jaroslava Brychtová, and Jiří Rathouský) as are many of the original art institutions of the time such as the Institute of Residential and Clothing

Culture (ÚBOK), the Headquarters of Artistic Crafts (Ústředí uměleckých řemesel), and Headquarters of Folk Art Production (Ústředí lidové umělecké výroby) and its affiliate Krásné jizby (beautiful parlors) in the realization of the original interior decoration. The text also includes a cross-section of the reception of the building in Czech literature from history to the present, which is not always as unequivocal as it might seem. In contrast, the current attitude to the building's importance and quality is often very different (compare Švácha 2007 and Ševčík/Beneš 2009, or Sedláková/Frič 2006). The text concludes by addressing the issue of heritage preservation, and despite reservations about the authenticity of the preserved interiors, the text states necessity of heritage preservation for the future preservation of the hotel.

The former Hotel Forum Praha (today the Corinthia Hotel Prague) is the youngest pre-revolutionary hotel in Prague. The construction was carried out by foreign contractors (Serbia and Austria) in record time, between 1986 and 1988. The project, however, dates back to 1982, when the VPÚ organized an intra-institutional architectural competition, won by the design of architect Jaroslav Trávníček. As was typical for the period, there was an extended lag between the design and actual realization, which often caused some belatedness in the architectural design. This was noticed by the criticism of the time, which rebuked the hotel for the backwardness in its architectural design and that it ignored the global trends of postmodernism and deconstructivism. The Hotel Forum is a representative of the late modernist mainstream of Czechoslovakia in the 1980's. The hotel interiors were noteworthy, featuring the author's original design (as was typical for the period) from the whole to the detail with the (mandatory) application of works of art. In contrast to the hotel's exterior, its interiors have not been preserved in their original form; after ten years of its existence, the interiors were replaced by uninteresting conventional solutions as part of the post-revolutionary euphoria. In terms of quality, originality, and overall authenticity, this structure is not under consideration for the declaration of cultural heritage status.

Based on the knowledge ascertained of these three buildings, we have consistently and unambiguously selected the Hotel InterContinental for our proposal for cultural heritage status; in our opinion, the hotel meets the conditions for declaration: it has outstanding architectural quality and a high degree of authenticity. The architecture is a valuable example of international Brutalism as adapted to the Czech environment. Despite the stated reconstruction and reconfiguration of the interior, it still represents significant value, and the overall urban design, no matter how bold, demonstrates signs of quality and timeless design. All three buildings have also been processed as registration sheets and stored in the constitutional library of the Prague Regional Office of the National Heritage Institute (NPÚ ÚOP HMP) to serve as a resource for researchers and employees of the National Heritage Institute.

Fig. 1. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, exterior, view from the Dukelských hrdinů street.

Fig. 2. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, original interior of the restaurant, tapestry by Jan Hladík in the background.

Fig. 3. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, original interior of the restaurant, tapestry by Věra Drnková Zářecká in the background.

Fig. 4. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, original interior with bar.

Fig. 5. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, restaurant interior after modifications in the 1990's, tapestry by Jan Hladík.

Fig. 6. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, interior after modifications in the 1990's, tapestry by Věra Drnková Zářecká.

Fig. 7. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, statue by Václav Bejček in the garden before the hotel.

Fig. 8. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, interior of the passageway space in the entrance after modifications in the 1990's, statue „Torso“ by Zdenka Štěpánová Benešová.

Fig. 9. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, restaurant interior after modifications in the 1990's, tapestry by Věra Drnková Zářecká in the background.

Fig. 10. Prague 7-Holešovice, No. 1502, Veletržní 20. Parkhotel, interior of the entrance area with reception after modifications in the 1990's.

Fig. 11. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, exterior, view from the Law Faculty.

Fig. 12. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, period photo from the hotel's construction from the end of the 1960's, facade articulated by vertical lines of ceramic tile.

Fig. 13. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, period photo, interior of corridor near the Hunting Salons (Lovecké salonky), space with concrete lintels and wooden columns by sculptor M. Hejný in contrast to the historical mirrors and furniture.

Fig. 14. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, period photo from the 1970's, interior of restaurant Guild Hall (Cecharovní síň), contrast between historical furniture and the „planked“ walls.

Fig. 15. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, present-day restaurant interior Zlatá Praha, Studio Len + K, all that remains from the original decorations are the ceiling lights from H. Demartini.

Fig. 16. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, period photo from the 1970's, interior of restaurant Golden Prague (Zlatá Praha), lights from H. Demartini, friezes on the wall from E. Kmentová, original furnishings.

Fig. 17. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, present-day interior of the lounge area, view towards the souvenir shops, in the center are the secondarily placed pair of original columns by M. Hejný, Studio Len + K.

Fig. 18. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, interior of the lounge area from the 1990's, view onto the reception and the bar area behind; the original ceiling beam is now covered by a drop ceiling, the glass sculpture in the background was not preserved.

Fig. 19. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, interior of the Guild Hall (Cecharovní síň) restaurant from the 1990's.

Fig. 20. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of stained glass designed by Josef Jíra, restaurant Primátor, present-day interior Studio Len + K.

Fig. 21. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of cassette wooden ceiling with paintings of guild crests designed by Čestmír Kafka in cooperation with the Headquarters of Artistic Crafts (Ústředí uměleckých řemesel), restaurant Primátor, present-day interior, Studio Len + K.

Fig. 22. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, period photo from the 1970's, interior of the Mázhaus winerom, ceramic artifacts by Arnošt Paderlík.

Fig. 23. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of glass frieze, design Stanislav Libenský, Congress Hall, lobby.

Fig. 24. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of ceiling light, design by René Roubíček, Congress Hall.

Fig. 25. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of metal ceiling light, design by Jiří Novák, Hunting Salons (Lovecké salonky), not preserved.

Fig. 26. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, pictogram above the door to the Vlasta Salon, design by Jiří Rathouský.

Fig. 27. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, present-day interior of the ground floor of the Congress Hall, ceiling lights by René Roubíček.

Fig. 28. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, detail of metal ceiling light, design by Hugo Demartini, Golden Prague (Zlatá Praha) restaurant.

Fig. 29. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, wooden wall – screens, design by Josef Klimeš, interior of the lounge and bar, Studio Len + K.

Fig. 30. Prague 1-Staré Město, No. 43, Pařížská 30. Hotel Intercontinental, hotel emblem in the niche of the facade, western side, exterior, Pařížská Street, copy.

Fig. 31. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, exterior, view from Karlova.

Fig. 32. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, exterior, hotel base with terraces turned towards the Nusle valley.

Fig. 33. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, exterior, western facade of the accommodations section.

Fig. 34. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the entrance hall, staircase, present-day.

Fig. 35. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the entrance hall, glass sculptures below the staircase by Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová removed in 1998, original condition.

Fig. 36. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the entrance hall, marble relief „Czech countryside“ by Jiří Kryštůfek.

Fig. 37. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the beerhall with billiards, the floor is not original.

Fig. 38. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, restaurant ground floor interior, after reconstruction.

Fig. 39. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the night club „Galaxie“, original condition, today non-existent (photo printed in the article: Novotný/Procházka/Kapusta 1989).

Fig. 40. Prague 4-Nusle, No. 1655, Kongresová 1. Former Hotel Forum, interior of the swimming pool on the highest floor, the original dynamic blue-white appearance has been replaced by a conventional straight style.

English by Bryce Belcher