



GOČÁR HOUSES IN THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF PRAGUE

ZOOLOGICKÁ ZAHRADA HL. MĚSTA PRAHY,
U TROJSKÉHO ZÁMKU 3/120, PRAHA 7

INVESTOR/CLIENT: ZOOLOGICKÁ ZAHRADA
HL. MĚSTA PRAHY

CONTRACTOR: GEMA ART GROUP A.S.

IMPLEMENTATION: 04-12/2010



Josef Gočár was one of the most significant Czech architects of the 20th century, renowned for his Cubist, Functionalist, and Czech Decorativism designs. The two wooden houses located in the Prague Zoological Garden are unique examples of the Czech Decorativism style from the early 1920s. The houses were in a dilapidated state and in urgent need of restoration. The disastrous heavy flooding of the Vltava River in August 2002 contributed to their dereliction. The complex task of dismantling, moving and re-assembling the houses was carried out under the management of the company GEMA ART GROUP a.s. between 12th April and 31st December 2010. Restoration work mostly concerned the preserved wooden parts such as post and decorative disk panels. Before the work and the actual dismantling of the houses commenced, detailed photo documentation was carried out. The houses were then taken apart and moved into upper areas of the Zoological Garden, next to the Siberian tigers' enclosure.

The timber was found to be overall in a very poor state. The boards were rotten, in places disintegrated and mechanically damaged. The edges of the boards had rotted away and had to be sawn off and replaced by copies. Some parts had to be altogether substituted by copies. More recent dark brown layers of paint on the wood surface were removed using vibrating disk sanders. Original wooden parts were treated with fungicides and insecticides. For the final coat of paint the colours red, blue and white were chosen according to the original samples designed by the architect Josef Gočár himself. Some archival drawings suggested green paint for the surfaces of the wooden window claddings but colour probing did not confirm its presence and green colour was not used during the restoration.



New installation of houses outside of flood area



Roofing of tiles



Work in progress



Detail of window - after restoration



Decorations of exterior - after restoration



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RESTORATION OF THE PRESERVED ELEMENTS - THE DECORATIVE DISCS

The surface of the wood was mechanically sanded using sand paper, sponges and steel wool, followed by an application of insecticides and fungicides. The discs were then coated with suitable synthetic paint materials and alkaline resins.





Frontage of house



Detail before restoration



Detail after restoration



Detail of decorative target – after restoration



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RESTORATION OF THE PRESERVED ELEMENTS – THE POST

The post was dismantled and the later paint layer scraped off. More significant cracks and unevenness between the individual planks were ameliorated using suitably shaped inserts. The timber was treated with insecticides and fungicides and the surface coated with suitable paint materials and synthetic alkaline resins.





Overall view of the Gočár houses



Detail of column - before restoration



Work in progress



Decorative column - after restoration



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RESTORATION SURVEY

The restoration survey concentrated on the identification of the original colour schemes of the Gočár houses as very few elements dating back to the time of their construction survived.

House no. 18 did not retain any of the original decorative features; house no. 19 had a cylindrical supporting post on the veranda and three exterior decorative disks. The windows originally also had decorative elements.

Both the discs and the post were subjected to detailed research into their colour schemes. After the removal of the dark brown paint from the 1970s, small fragments of the original red and blue paint, oxidized by exposure to the elements, were uncovered. On the foot of the post were remnants of red paint, the post itself had a residual blue coating. The original paint was found mostly in the fissures. The timber would have most likely been painted with an undercoat before the red and blue paint was applied.

According to the original plans from the 1920s, the houses should also have been painted with green paint but no traces of it were found in any of the parts examined and the combination of blue and red was adhered to.



Detail of wooden mass



New paint according to the original shade



Wooden target before new paint



Reverse side of wooden target



Decorative target - after restoration