EMBASSY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN PARIS

BUILDING RENOVATION

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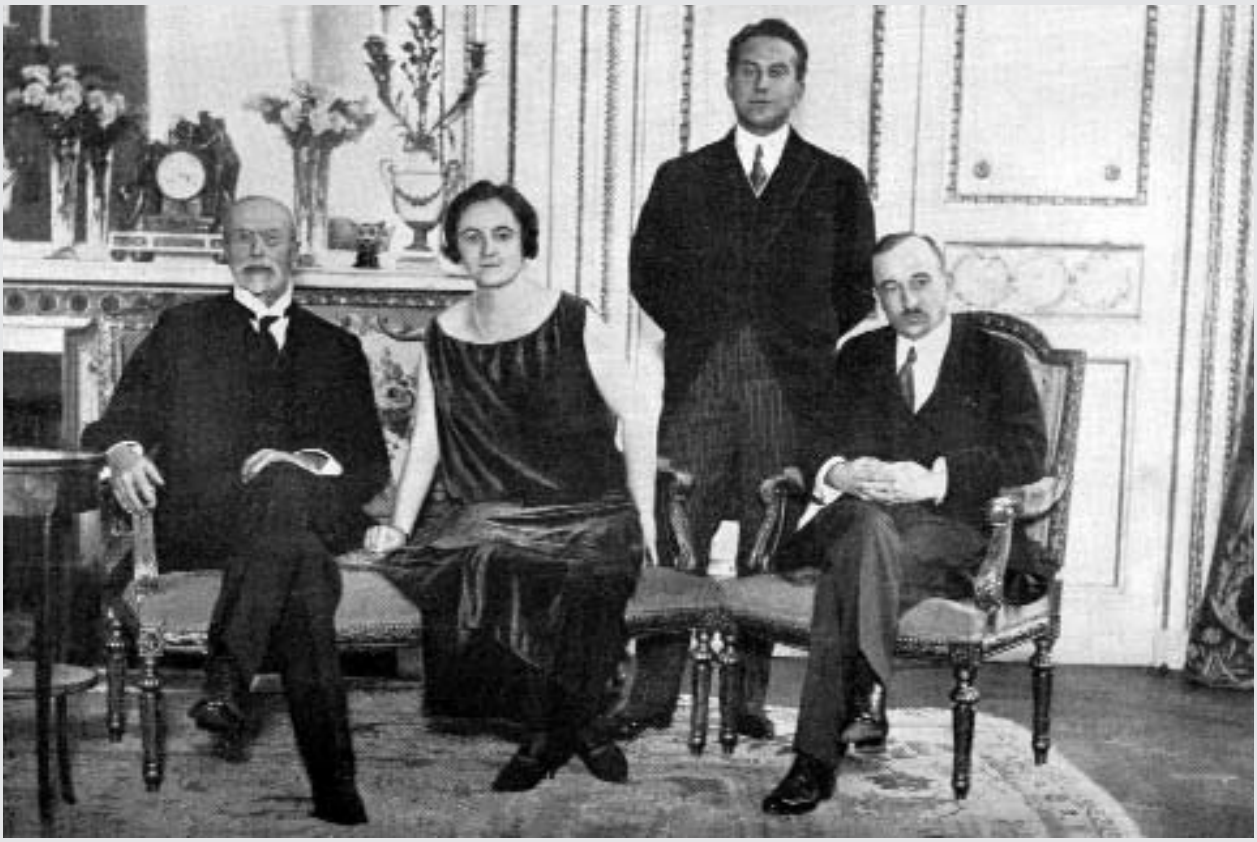
HISTORY

French diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia were established on 17 October 1918 at the level of embassies. France did not recognise the situation created by the occupation after 15 March 1939 and suspended diplomatic relations on 8 September 1940. Following the occupation of France, the French National Committee renewed diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovak government in exile on 7 October 1941. In April 1945, diplomatic relations were restored to the level of embassies. The Czech Republic, as one of two successor states, was recognised on 1 January 1993, and diplomatic relations with the Czech Republic were established on this date at the level of embassies.

Envoys of Czechoslovakia in France:

SYCHRAVA, Lev, chargé d'affaires, 19 October 1918–March 1919
KOBR, Miloš, chargé d'affaires, 1 April 1919–May 1920
TRČKA, Vratislav, chargé d'affaires, 19 May 1920–January 1921
OSUSKÝ, Štefan, 6 January 1921–1940
ČERNÝ, František, 2 November 1943–November 1944
NOSEK, Jindřich, 18 November 1944–August 1948
HOFFMEISTER, Adolf, 18 August 1948–October 1951
SOUČEK, Gustav, 16 October 1951–25 March 1956
URBAN, Josef, 24 April 1956–22 March 1960
PLESKOT, Václav, 7 May 1960–27 May 1966
PITHART, Vilém, 9 July 1966–16 March 1970
ZACHYSTAL, František, 16 March 1970–6 October 1971
SEDLÁK, Juraj, 29 July 1972–3 November 1976
PUDLÁK, Ján, 10 December 1976–11 August 1982
JABLONSKÝ, Mečislav, 14 October 1982–13 January 1989
COLOTKA, Peter, 13 January 1989–June 1990
ŠEDIVÝ, Jaroslav, 29 June 1990–December 1994
LOM, Petr, MUDr., credentials, 7 June 1995–1999
JANYŠKA, Petr, PhDr., credentials, November 1999–July 2003
FISCHER, Pavel, credentials, 4 November 2003



President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk on a visit to the Czechoslovak ambassador in France in 1925 (Gilded hall no. 1.20). In the picture from the left: Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Pavla Osuská, Štefan Osuský and Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš.

Gilded hall no. 1.20 after restoration (2004)

PETR PITHART'S SPEECH

Speech delivered on the occasion of the festive opening of the newly renovated building of the Czech Embassy in Paris, 28 September 2004 (6 October 2004)

"Today is September 28; it is the name-day for Wenceslas according to our calendar. This day has always been celebrated, but only recently was it declared a state holiday. It is the Day of Czech Statehood. I want to tell you now why we decided to hold the festive opening of the renovated Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris on this day. Czech statehood has a connection with this attractive palace, you see.

On 28 September in the year 935, the Czech prince Wenceslas from the ruling Přemyslovec line was murdered. Soon proclaimed a saint, he was viewed as the patron of the Czech lands from immediately after his death. It was judged of the rulers reigning after him that they were only his temporary successors. Such reverence toward him as toward an eternal undying sovereign was unknown in Europe at that time. Everywhere else the current ruler was "vicarius Christi" – only in Bohemia was the holy representative from the domestic dynasty

Chief of the General Staff of the Czech Army Pavel Štefka (left), Senate Chairman Petr Pithart and French Minister for European Affairs Claudie Haigneré at the festive re-opening of the historic building of the Czech Embassy, which took place on 28 September in Paris.

French Minister for European Affairs Claudie Haigneré and Czech Senate Chairman Petr Pithart (centre) attended the festive re-opening of the historic building of the Czech Embassy on 28 September on avenue Charles Floquet near the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

of the "eternal ruler." This notion added continuity to power and was spread to the whole community of politically active noble subjects, to those whom we could call the nation or, to exaggerate somewhat, the "political nation." It was the first embryonic, still only intuitive construct of a state in the Middle Ages as an abstract, impersonal, overarching entity. I mention here that analogous but not identical was the case of St.-Denis Abbey Paris, whose abbot Sugar was able to convince believers as well as the sovereign that St. Dionysus was the patron of France and that the king was merely his feudatory. At the same time Wenceslas was mild as a ruler, because he was unreservedly saintly. Rather than governing, he was more of a personal example to others – mostly still pagans – in then-unpopular Christian virtues. It was not difficult to kill him, but even his murderer – his brother on top of it all – brought his remains from the scene of the crime to the Cathedral of St. Vitus in Prague, because reverence for Wenceslas spread so quickly across the land.

This land, and the nation which lives on it to this day, has had a dramatic history over the ensuing almost eleven centuries; it was at times larger than it is today and at times smaller, at times independent and at times occupied. It was twice the seat of the Roman Emperor and at other times merely an outlying province. It waged wars; at times Bohemians, Moravians and Silesians waged wars with each other, at others literally with the whole world, as during the Hussite period. For all the old and new conflicts and disputes, in the person of Prince Wenceslas the Czech nation has perhaps its only indisputably unifying figure. This is why on 28 September, St. Wenceslas's Day, we remind ourselves that our state is rooted not only in the political power of its founding dynasty, but also in the world of spiritual values, that the strength to found and maintain a state is essential but insufficient, and to the contrary, that even when that strength fails, the nation survives, as long as it abides – as did the servants of St. Wenceslas – by values which are not only worth living for, but also suffering for, and perhaps even dying for.

The fate of modern Czechoslovak statehood is surely connected with this palace, built in 1912 and originally belonging to Princess de Ligne, born Rochefoucault. Not with its very beginnings, however, which took place not far from here in rue Bonaparte 18. There, at the beginning of the First World War, the National Committee of the Czech Lands came into existence – the embryo of a foreign government recognised by the great powers even before the end of the First World War at a time when we did not have any state territory, although we had tens of thousands of legionnaires on all fronts as well as the charismatic and above all credible Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his companions active in the states of the Triple Entente.

The building in which we are standing, first leased to and later purchased by the Czechoslovak government, was the seat of the Embassy from 1 October 1919. The lease agreement was signed personally by Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš and in 1924 this former aristocratic residence was purchased.

At this time Štefan Osuský, one of the most eminent Czechoslovak diplomats, had already been Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris for four years and would head the Embassy until the capitulation of France in 1940.

Let's pause for a moment to remember Štefan Osuský. Osuský, who had studied law in the United States and then held an important office in the Slovak compatriotic organisations, eventually became involved in the activities of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris. He was the general secretary of the Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference and in 1920 was named Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, despite the fact that Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš did not foster warm feelings toward him.

After Munich, of course, his disputes with president Beneš, who had just resigned, came out in full force. The Paris titular requested that the president's activities be reviewed in detail, and clashed with him in the affair of the so-called "ordered pressure," in which Beneš allegedly tried to cover up his concessions. Osuský, although an unconcealed supporter of Slovak autonomy, behaved like a brave man on 15 March 1939; he refused to give the Germans legation and requested that the French government condemn the occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia.

From 15 March 1939, number 15 avenue Charles Floquet became an important centre of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance. Osuský financed the magazine Československý boj, created the Czechoslovak Committee in France and organised a congress of foreign Czechoslovaks. From the legation he also directed the recruitment of Czechoslovak citizens into military units and prepared a French-Czechoslovak military agreement. He left the building only shortly before the German army entered Paris in June 1940.

The embassy building had a curious fate during the war. The Germans established an experimental television studio here, from which they broadcast programmes to cheer up wounded Wehrmacht soldiers in military hospitals. The reason was most likely the building's proximity to the Eiffel Tower, where they set up a broadcasting antenna.

Paris attracted noteworthy personalities of the Czech foreign service even after the war. For example, Adolf Hoffmeister worked on avenue Charles Floquet. Although he complied with the totalitarian regime after February 1948, he tried to at least maintain relations with the French cultural elite. Hoffmeister never enjoyed the full trust of the Prague authorities, however, he was too much of an intellectual for that. He was recalled in a very strange way. His wife was obliged to depart for Prague for childbirth, as per regulations. Hoffmeister followed her and there his comrades informed him that he would not be returning to Paris. In his place was sent a "diplomat" who was trained as an electrician. During his tenure he repaired all the building's electrical circuits but otherwise did not get involved in anything.

As in March 1939, the Paris Embassy again in August 1968 became the bulwark of a state under attack. At that time the Czechoslovak ambassador was my father, Vilém Pithart. The night of 21 August found him in Mariánské lázně. He immediately got into his car and, instead of going to Prague for instructions, hurried to Paris – to exaggerate a little I will say to his garrison. He did what is and always has been the duty of the ambassador of a country under attack, but what only a handful of ambassadors did at that time: he immediately requested an audience with President de Gaulle to convey to him the government's position and to appeal to him to support our affairs. He immediately organised a large press conference, and then this Embassy became a sanctuary for hundreds of our countrymen, especially students, who established an improvised headquarters here to help all those who were stranded in France. After some time my father became a worker and pump operator in the company Vodní zdroje, where I too worked in the interim. Each somewhere else, we lived and worked all over Bohemia in trailers and had plenty of time to think about the twists of our history, and about our own fates as well. The honour which I received today from the President of the French Republic thus belongs to a certain extent to him and to his colleagues back then. The son of one of them, Petr Fleischmann, is here with us.

Twice in the most difficult times for our country, ambassadors at avenue Charles Floquet number 15 conducted themselves like men at their posts. They faced overwhelming force; they could not succeed, but they lived up to their obligations. They knew they would pay for it.

Perhaps it is not presumptuous to recall this on the day of Czech statehood. Statehood is not an abstraction; it consists after all of small and large acts of fidelity by Czech men and women to values, the defence of which means making a sacrifice, and not just once. France and the Czech Republic are allies today, in arms and in building a peaceful and prosperous Europe. Different but no lesser tests than those which I have recalled still lie ahead for us. I believe we will prevail in them, and thus I wish that in this beautiful and now renovated palace connecting us with France and standing just on Campus Martius, where soldiers once trained, and below the elegant and worldly Eiffel Tower, that our state will always have the best possible representation. Excellent Czech-French relations and all those who have contributed to them in the past and present – and I take the liberty of recalling for all who stand here with us today, former Ambassador and Foreign Minister Jaroslav Šedivý, former Ambassador Petr Janyška and Ombudsman Otakar Motejl – they deserve it.

THE PROJECT

Renovation of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris

Location: 15 avenue Charles Floquet, Paris, France

Institutional investor: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Loretánské nám. 5, Prague 1

General designer:

ANTA spol. s r.o. in cooperation with studio pha s r.o.
and the companies EXCON, a.s. and Urban Concept s.a.r.l.

General contractor:

The "Paris" association of companies

- Metrostav a.s. – division 9
- Skanska CZ a.s. – Technology Division

Contractor for restoration work:

GEMA ART GROUP a.s.

For other contributors see list of subcontractors

Dates:

2000–2002: research and design work
2002–2004: realisation

Work performed:

- schematic modifications
- structural and restorative repairs
- creation of new premises
- restoration and decoration of official state premises with historical furnishings
- creation of new interiors in all other premises
- replacement of all building utility systems and technical facilities

The renovation of the Czech Embassy in Paris was carried out by the "Paris" association of companies – Metrostav a.s. and Skanska CZ a.s. The renovation design for the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris was prepared by ANTA spol. s r.o. in cooperation with many subcontractors. The authors were Ing. Arch. Karel Scheib, M.A. Tomáš Velinský and M.A. Jan Šesták. GEMA ART GROUP a.s. arranged most of the restorative and artisan work, including the realisation of several newly designed parts of the building.

The Embassy building was constructed in 1909. Its original owner, Princess de la Rochefoulcauld, leased it in 1919 and in 1924 sold it to the Czechoslovak state.

The building of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris in avenue Charles Floquet is located in one of the most prestigious districts of Paris, in the immediate vicinity of the Eiffel Tower. The building of the Embassy of the Czech Republic was purchased by the Czechoslovak state in 1924, shortly after its inception, and has a rich history, which is closely connected with the history of our state (see History). The palace-like structure was built at the end of the nineteenth century and served for official state functions and as a residence for its then owner – Princess de la Rochefoucauld. The building was used for similar purposes after its purchase by the Czechoslovak state. In addition to official state and administrative premises, the residence of the ambassador was located here, as well as the caretakers' residences and courier flats.

During its history the building underwent no significant renovations. Many minor technical and schematic modifications were made, as required by the changing demands of the Embassy's operation. Over time, however, the building deteriorated into a technically and morally untenable state, which necessitated a radical renovation.

It was decided that for the period of the repairs the employees of the Embassy would be relocated to other premises and a complete renovation would be performed. The project encompassed schematic modifications, structural and restorative repairs, the creation of new premises, the restoration and decoration of official state premises with historical furnishings and the creation of new interiors for all other premises. Another aspect of the renovation was the replacement of all building utility systems and technical facilities.

In addition to the basic commission for structural and technical renovation, the institutional investor's construction plans also included other requirements. These consisted primarily of the following items:

- relocation of the ambassador's residence outside of the Embassy
- equipping all official state premises with adequate sanitary facilities
- equipping official state premises in the individual storeys with sufficient serveries, connected by means of a dumbwaiter with the newly created underground central kitchen.
- constructing an extension to the structure and building conference rooms and rooftop terraces with adequate sanitary facilities in the newly created storey
- redesign of the inconvenient stairway system including the installation of a new elevator
- construction of stately maisonette flats for the building custodians

All of this had to be resolved in the demanding environment of an area of significant historically protected structures, and in what was for us an unusual manner with respect to the architectural and structural design of the building.

NEW REALISATION

Prior to commencing with the design work, detailed measurements of the building were taken and structural and technical examinations were performed. Unfortunately, it was necessary to carry out these activities while the Embassy was in full operation, which resulted in very difficult conditions for Embassy employees as well as for our workers. It was impossible to carry out larger-scale investigative probes, and consequently the diagnostic examination of the building involved only minimal encroachment on the structure. For example, the geological examination of the substratum was carried out only after construction work had begun, and the definitive composition of many important structural elements was determined only after they had been uncovered in construction.

In initiating the projects themselves, it was necessary to decide whether the gradual change from the building's original residential-state character to its new administrative-state character gave us the right to make significant modifications to the building's schematic design. After thorough consideration of all positives and negatives we opted for extensive modifications to the schematic design of the building's third storey. The greatest such modification occurred in the area of the roof, which was completely removed and replaced with a two-storey extension. The final design of the rooftop extension underwent a long approval process. During this time we conferred with the local historical landmark preservation authorities, first clarifying the general outlines of the project and later certain details. This communication lasted almost a year.

The original fifth storey, in which the technical offices were located, was completely demolished and replaced with a two-storey steel extension weighing 140 tonnes, anchored into the new crown cornice. The original intent was to leave the crown cornice and the balustrade without substantial modification and restore it in place, and then to continue the historicist extension of the fourth and fifth storeys. After examining the crown cornice, however, it was decided to reinforce the building with a circumferential ring. After reinforcing the load-bearing structure, the steel extension of the fourth and fifth storeys was built. The fourth historicist storey was overlain with local stone, while the new fifth roof storey has the character of a mansard roof. The surface is made of titanzinc.

Another architectural issue in the renovation was determining the extent of the schematic changes to be made to the original building. From the examinations conducted it was obvious that the renovated structure would consist of two original buildings which had been functionally connected over time.

As a result of this, very complicated and poorly arranged schemata and passageway connections had come into being. Individual storeys in the building were connected by several staircases, none of which ran through all storeys. The existing personal elevator was installed later into the centre of the operating four-wing staircase and did not serve all storeys. One aspect of the renovation was thus to remove several inconveniently located staircases, leaving only two main staircases in the building: the first, connecting the ground floor, the mezzanine and the first storey, remained unchanged, while the second, a three-wing staircase, was extended to the fourth storey. One of the service staircases was replaced by a new personal elevator connecting all storeys of the building.

Model 1:100
A model was used to verify the overall design for the newly proposed fourth and fifth storeys of the building. The scale of the model was chosen in order to allow for the verification of details in the shape of the cornices, dormers, windows etc.

View from the northeast

VIEW FROM THE SOUTHWEST

The model and perspectives before and after the renovation

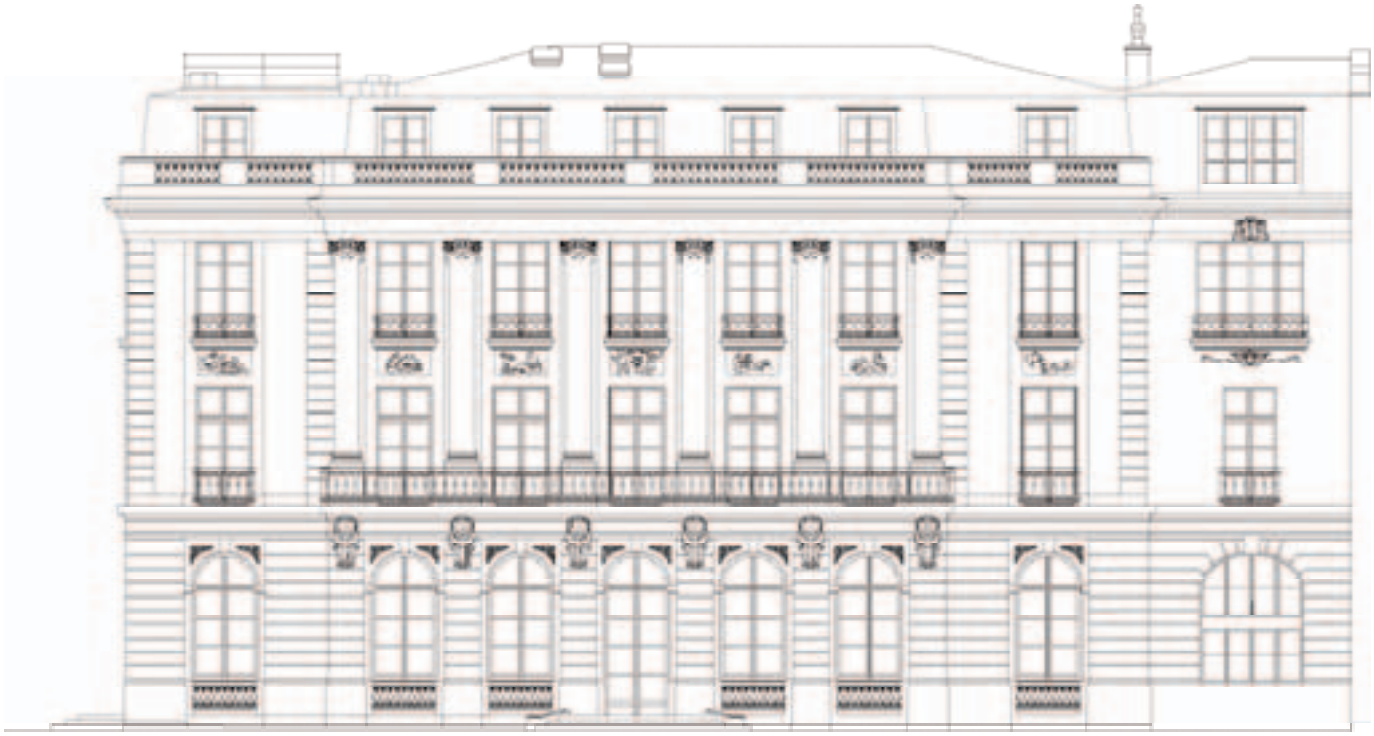
View from the south – before the renovation

View from the south – after the renovation

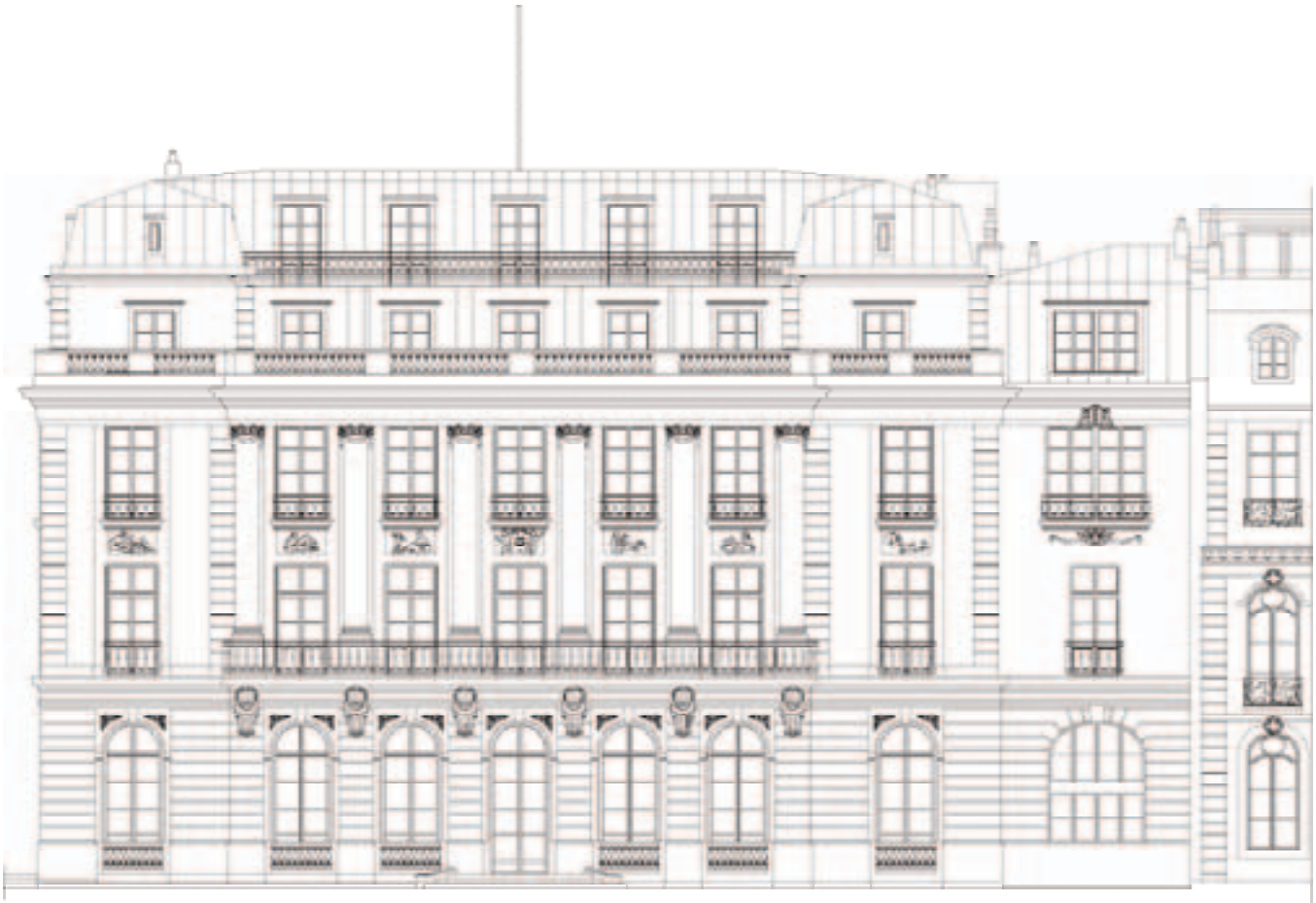
View from the east – before the renovation

View from the east – after the renovation

VIEW FROM THE SOUTHEAST

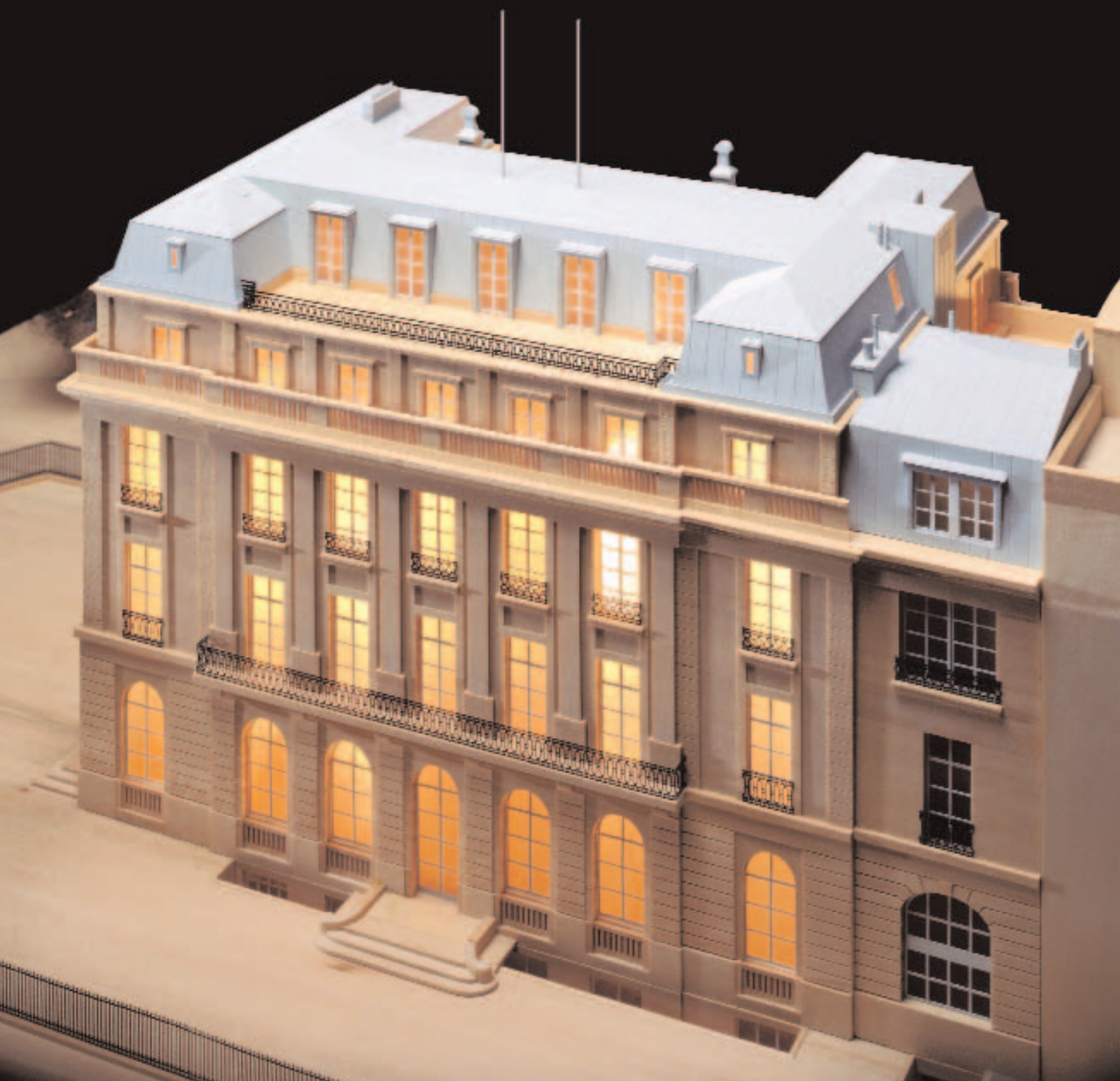


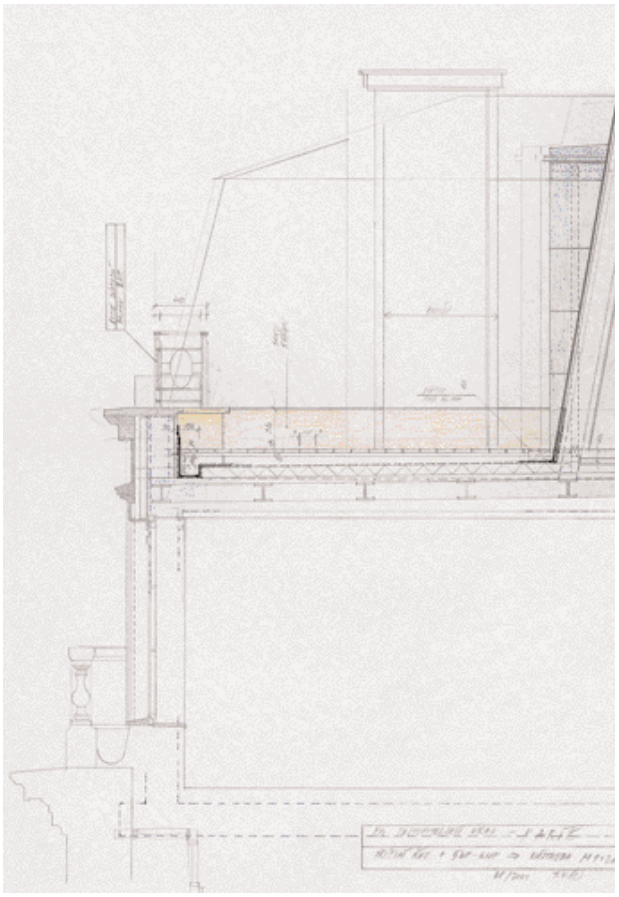
View from the north – before the renovation



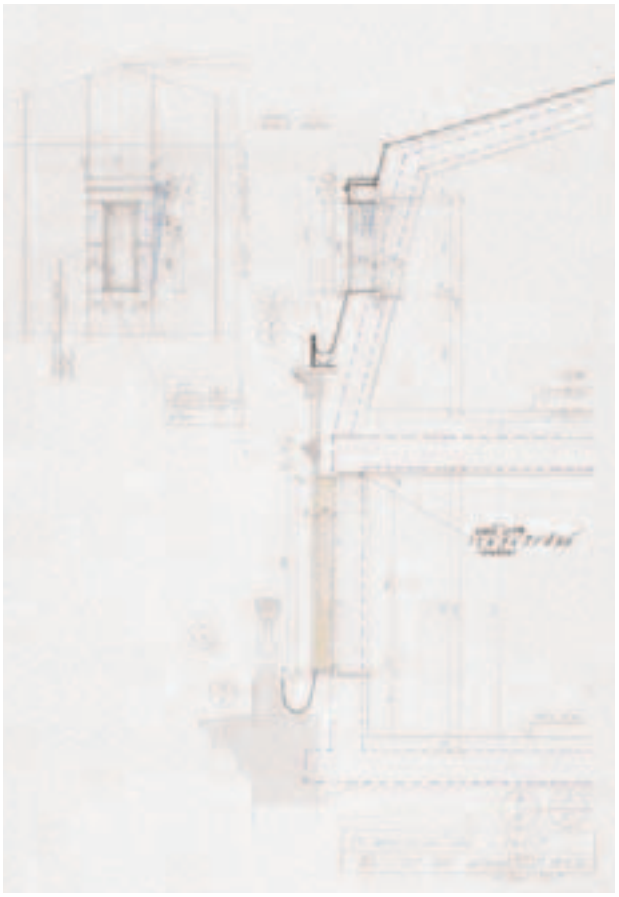
View from the north – after the renovation

VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST

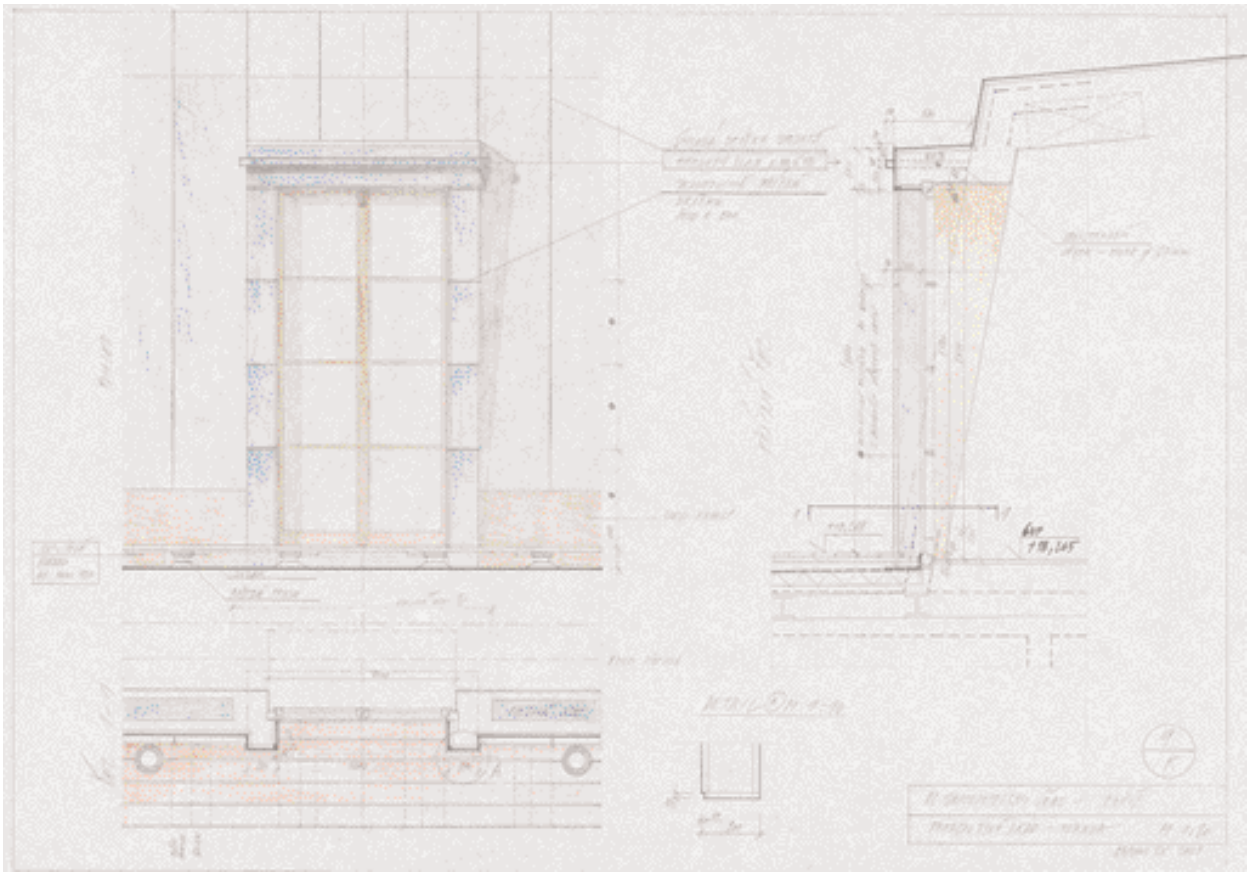




Terrace cross-section



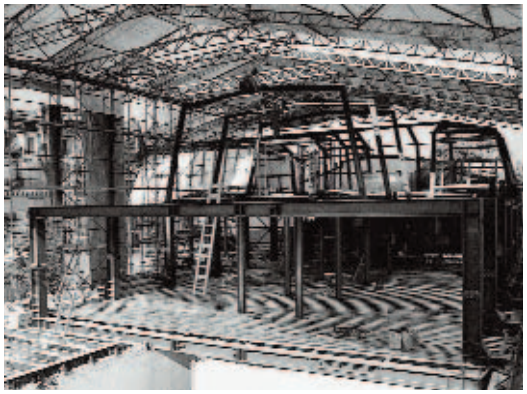
View of dormer and cross-section



View of French windows on the terrace and cross-section

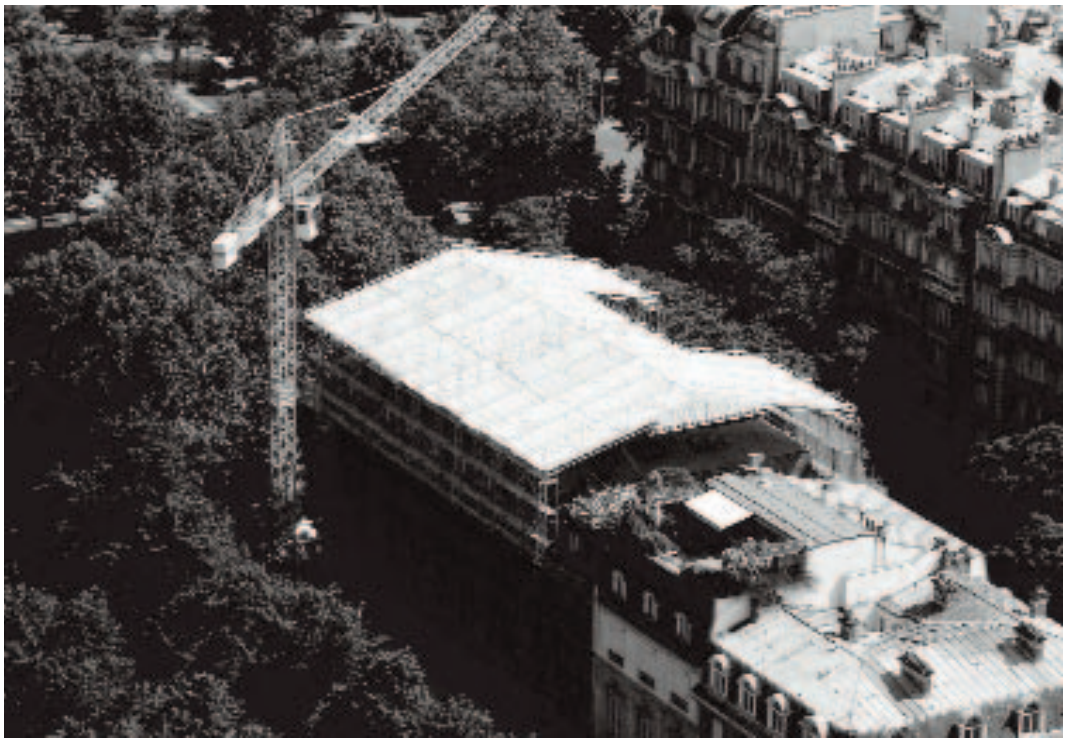
View of detailed design of the mansard extension

The new extension was proposed as a steel structure with a suspended stone jacket on the exterior and drywall on the interior, in order to meet the square and cubic measurement requirements for the space.



New extension of the fourth and fifth storeys

Rooftop terrace



New extension – scaffolding with a tarp roof, view from the Eiffel Tower.

Demolition of the original fifth storey

Fifth storey conference room

Fifth storey – view of the newly constructed rooftop terrace with a view of the Eiffel Tower

Eastern view from Avenue du Dr. Bouardel

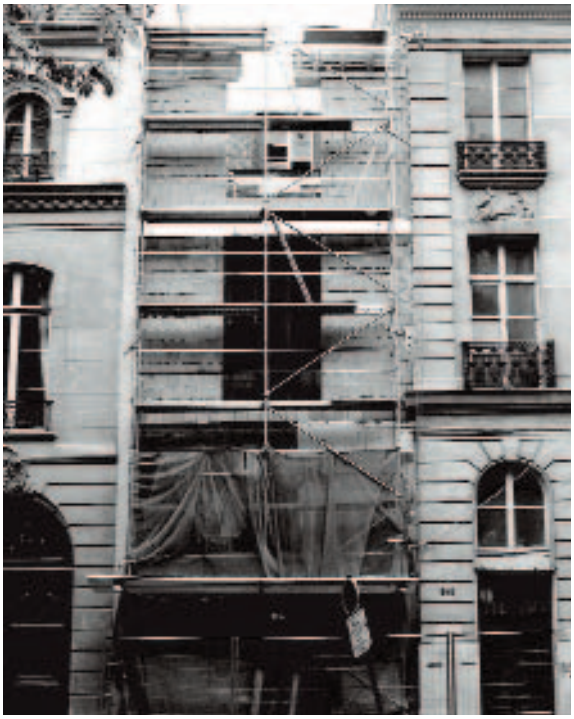
The conference room in the newly created fifth storey is directly connected to the rooftop terrace facing Campus Martius.

The rooftop terrace in the newly created fifth storey is connected with the conference room through French windows.

NEW ADDITION

Construction of two new maisonette flats for the building custodians

View of the completed addition from avenue Charles Floquet



The course of the renovation of the addition

Of the independent parts of the structure only the north perimeter wall facing Campus Martius was left, forming a caesura between the main building and the neighbouring property; the remainder of the structure was demolished. The new addition's storeys were converted and raised by one storey. A new atrium was created here, below which garages were located, and above which two new flats for the building custodians, a lounge and offices were created.

The southern frontispiece on avenue Charles Floquet was designed in contemporary character, thus acknowledging the original character of the two independent buildings.

The annex on the original site of the demolished building has been reconciled with many limitations connected with its functional connection to the main building. The design was based on the classical proportions of local facades, complemented with a stylised "bossage" of anti-rust lamellae, unifying the somewhat inhomogeneous structural orifices. The facade was overlain with local, commonly used stone.

CROWN CORNICE

Close-up of the crown cornice
In order to place the truss of the load-bearing structure for the last two storeys, it was necessary to remove the present cornice and replace it with a monolithic ring installed into protrusions on a base of artificial stone in the shape of the original cornice.

The shell was fabricated in approximately 1-metre pieces and was constructed so that it was possible to connect the individual segments and to insert the armature of the new concrete ring.

The exposed parts of the concrete shell were made of artificial mineral-based stone, perfectly matching the stone of the building.

In renovating the exterior, the main task was to resolve the structural embedding of the steel edifice into the crown cornice. Upon examination, it was decided that the crown cornice should be removed, as a probe of the full width and height of the cornice had revealed that stone blocks were situated in places only above the crown of the wall and that the remainder had been made out of a heterogeneous material. The moulded surface, including dentils on the exposed side, was completed in place with plaster – technique a la prima – in order to perfectly match the limestone already used on the building. Casts were taken of the arches and parts of the cornice and then the cornice was removed. After consultation with a structural engineer, the new cornice was fabricated as a concrete protrusion, which formed the lost casing for the new concrete ring. The exposed parts of the concrete shell were made of artificial mineral-based stone, perfectly matching the stone of the building. The shell was fabricated in approximately 1-metre pieces and was constructed in order to make it possible to connect the individual segments and to insert the armature of the new concrete ring.

TECHNOLOGY

New gas boiler

De Dietrich natural gas hot water heater

The newly created main kitchen

As part of the overall renovation, new technology was installed in the building.
The original heating oil boiler was replaced with a gas boiler. The original impractical elevator was replaced with a new one connecting all storeys of the building.
The new schematic plan of the underground storey made it possible to install a new main kitchen, connected by means of a dumbwaiter with serveries in the above-ground storeys. Air conditioning was installed in the fourth and fifth storeys.

Fujitsu cooling systems

RESTORATION

Restoration work formed an independent part of the renovation. After conducting an examination, almost all historical elements of the building were either restored or copies were supplemented.

The largest portion of the restoration work consisted of the renovation of the stone facade of the building with plaster reliefs and alternating surfaces of local seashell limestone and artificial stone. A significant part of the damage to the sculpted elements and reliefs arose as a result of rain, freezing temperatures, alternating damp and dry weather and intense sun. The north side was the most damaged, as the climatic influences had been much greater here than on the other sides. The reliefs located on this side showed such a degree of material degradation that restoration could not be considered in the sense of visual and material integrity of the sculpted relief. For this reason, all these reliefs were reconstructed.

The interior restoration work consisted of ornamental stucco mouldings on walls, and the removal and replacement of the existing recoats and paintings. In removing these non-original surfaces it was necessary to pay careful attention to the anticipated discovery of fragments of the original colour scheme. After treating and stabilising the surfaces, the colour scheme for the rooms and halls was implemented in accordance with the architectural design.

In addition, windows and doors in the interior were refurbished and partially replaced, including the fittings. Forged items, wooden mosaic floors, stone staircases and marble floors and walls were restored. Crystal chandeliers and brass wall lamps were also restored and supplemented.

Another aspect of the interior design was the selection of carpets, draperies and new upholstery fabric for the restored or supplemented pieces of period furniture in the historical premises. The attempt to achieve a uniform period effect in the historical premises led to the careful selection of original patterns and colours for the upholstery and draperies, made primarily from Lyon silk. As part of the design, it was also necessary to determine patterns and colours for the period copies of carpets – “savoneries.”

EXTERIOR

The Embassy building has a typical French horseshoe schema with abbreviated wings enclosing a courtyard. A three-level gantry with an edikula extends from it on the frontispiece. At the level of the band cornice the gantry ends with a glass and iron baldachin, above which is located a balcony with a balustrade.

The building was constructed at the beginning of last century. Later it was supplemented with the northwest addition, where technical facilities, a garage and flats for the building custodians are now located. In addition, minor structural adjustments resulting from maintenance-related modifications are evident over the entire exterior of the building. The balustrade around the mansard obviously dates back to the partial reconstruction, as well as the present form of the socle. The building's main entrance probably also came into existence at this time. For these structural modifications, several different types of construction materials were used.

The stone part of the facade with alternating surfaces of local seashell limestone and artificial stone was visibly deteriorated and covered with a thick layer of dust deposits. In the rain shadows the stone surface was covered with a crust, as was the surface of all decorative elements, statues and reliefs. In the past this situation had been remedied by building up oil and limestone coatings, but under the air-tight surface the limestone was severely degraded.

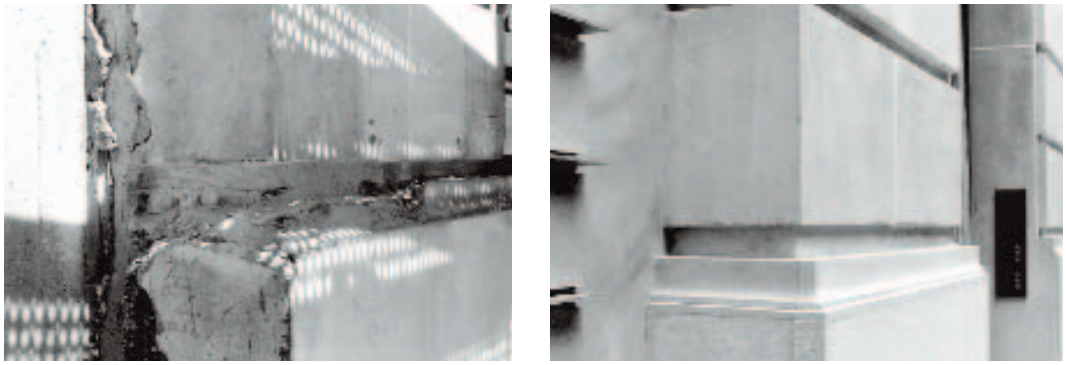
The band cornice was covered by an already corroded sheet of metal which did not prevent the penetration of rainwater into the limestone, resulting in significant degradation in the material of the cornice and its surroundings. Forty percent of the plaster grouting was degraded, loose or completely missing. The interior sides of the window and door linings, as well as the window cornices (fourth storey) were notably damaged mechanically – grouting crumbling away, damaged edges and damaged and weathered corners of the window cornice.

The stone facade was completely restored and the newly created extension was given a historicist stone jacket.

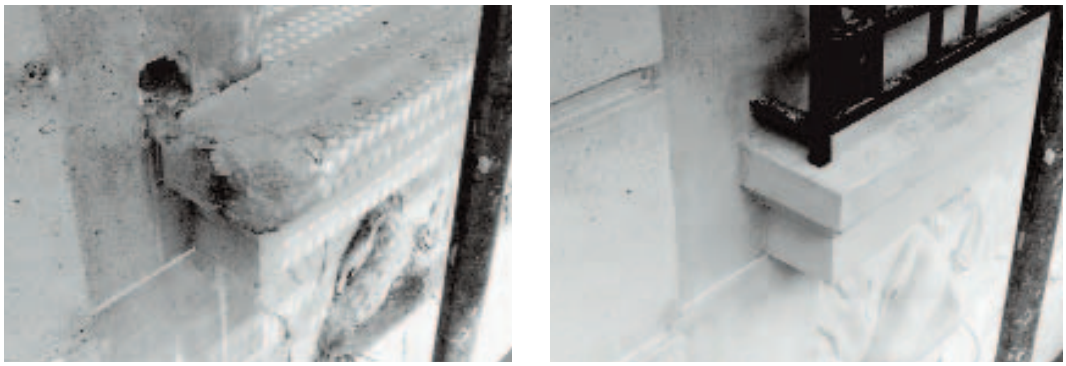
Fragment of the north facade

Head of a pilaster, close-up of a volute before and after restoration

Reliefs on the external jacket of the building can be classified into several groups according to plasticity, nature of workmanship and theme: reliefs representing the four seasons of the year, reliefs depicting four types of artistic activity, reliefs with a hunting motif and reliefs with a medallion. The building is ornamented with 20 such reliefs ca. 70cm x 140cm in dimension and 4-10cm in thickness located in alcoves below the windows of the second storey.



Left wing – bossed corner on the first storey (before first high-pressure wash and after completion)



Window cornice on the fourth storey – before the start of restoration work and after completion

Right corner of the fourth storey – gradual replacement of deteriorated components, after mounting the new blocks, after mounting the new crown cornice and after completion

Window cornice in the fourth storey – after first high-pressure wash and after completion

Sculpted relief in a niche near the side door from the east side of the building facade; relief dimensions 4.5 m x 1.5 m

View from the southeast – official state entrance

Night view
of the Embassy

INTERIOR

- removal and replacement of the existing recoats and repaints
- stucco ornamentation of the walls
- restoration of the wooden mosaic floors
- restoration of stone staircases, marble floors, walls and fireplaces
- one aspect of the interior design was the selection of carpets, draperies and new upholstery fabric for the restored or supplemented pieces of period furniture in the historical premises

One of the basic restorative refurbishment activities throughout the building was the removal of recoats and repaints. The artificial stone surfaces in the entrance hall on the ground storey and on the ceremonial staircase were hidden under 21 coats of paint in places. After our restoration, however, all moulded stucco and sculpted surfaces were again visible. While removing the recoats it was a great surprise to find an original period genre figural oil painting in a room in the third storey.
In the original diplomatic storeys (the first, second and third storeys) almost all surfaces had to be restored. The restoration also included installing new electrical circuits in the storeys which were renovated completely. In view of the fact that the original floors were constructed out of plaster concrete of a type unknown to us, it was decided after consultation with experts and a review of the literature that a steel grating structure would be installed in these floors, upon which a new parquet surface would be placed.
The design of the interior also included the decoration of the official state premises with period furnishings, the decoration of the offices in the historical premises in the second and third storeys with period, primarily atypical office furniture, and the decoration of the office spaces in the extended fourth storey with modern design furniture. The renovation was guided by an attempt to preserve the historical atmosphere without forcing a stylised composition of forms on aspects of the design where the new technical functionalities of a modern office are a necessity. In such cases a contrasting style of furniture was chosen, which was unambiguously separate and became rather a “partner” of the historical milieu.

Close-up of tapestry in the Marble Hall in the ground storey with a view through to the small and large Gilded Hall

ENTRANCE HALL

After removing the recoats, the artificial stone on the surfaces of the walls was restored.

PARLOUR

Removal of recoats and repaints

Restoration of the wooden mosaic floor

Original stucco ornamentation of the walls and ceilings

New stucco ornamentation and gilded details of the walls and ceilings

MARBLE HALL

The original surfaces of the hall's artificial marble walls were covered with later repaints. The repaints were removed and everything was restored with original materials. Three original Gobelin tapestries, restored after many years, were returned to the hall, whose furnishings were rounded off with a new carpet, upholstery and draperies.

DINING HALL

Before restoration, obvious spontaneous exposure of paintings

Gradual removal of mastics

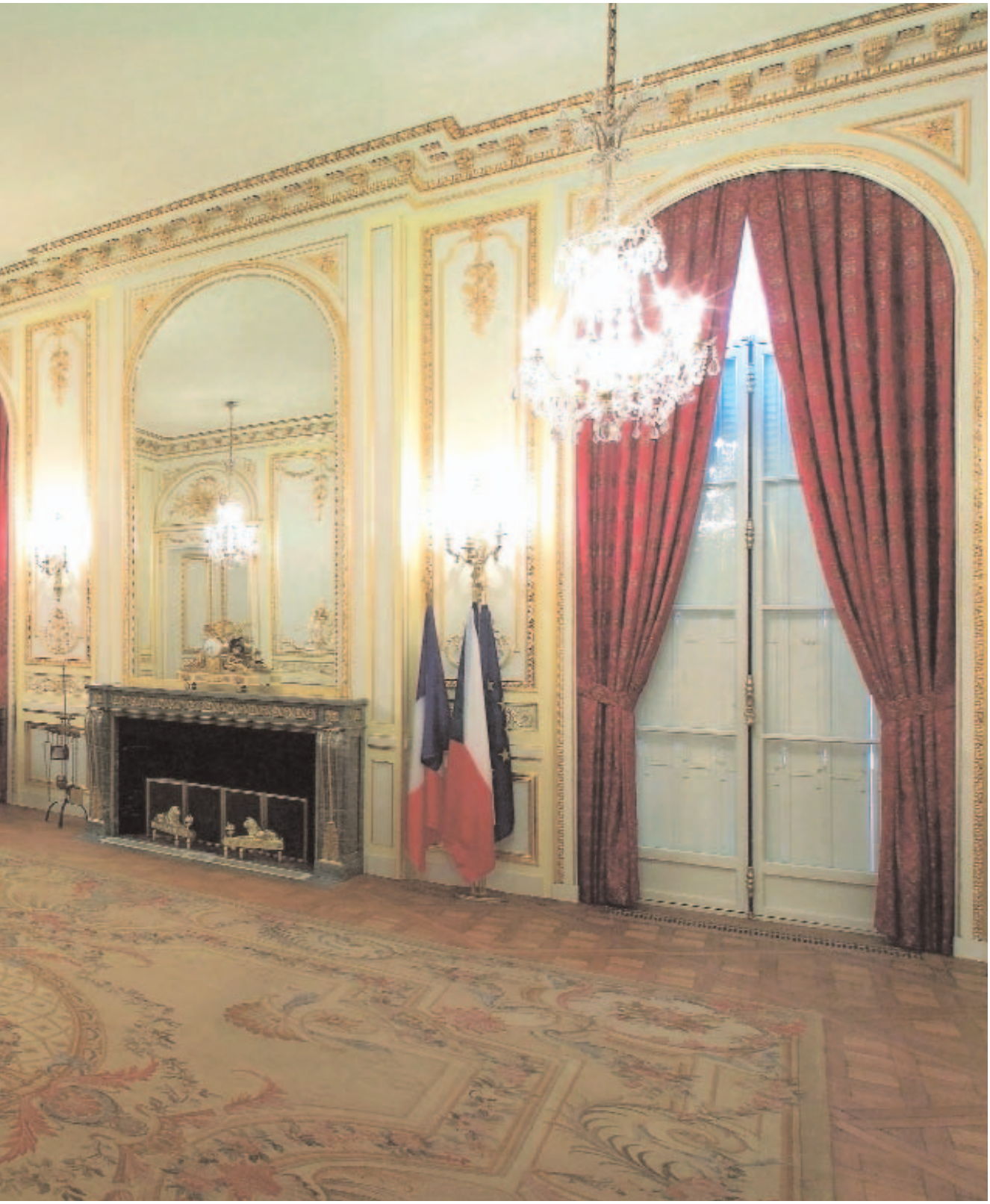
REMOVAL OF REPAINTS AND RECOATS

While removing the recoats it was a great surprise to find an original period genre figural oil painting in a room in the third storey. The entire surface of the painting was hidden by a thick layer of various oil recoats and mastics, which had served as a basis for an integral treatise of colour on the walls of the whole room.

After consulting with the institutional investor, the entire work was restored completely. After the tedious removal of all layers of repaints and fixation of the undercoat, the work was retouched, although the author's signature was left unaltered.

To add to the overall effect of the work, slats were designed with a sculpted motif of acanthine leaves, which frame the whole picture and thus form a single whole with the work of art, creating the dominant element of the room. The walls of the dining hall were modified as well, with an oil grain linking them to the original wood elements on the walls of the room.

GREAT HALL

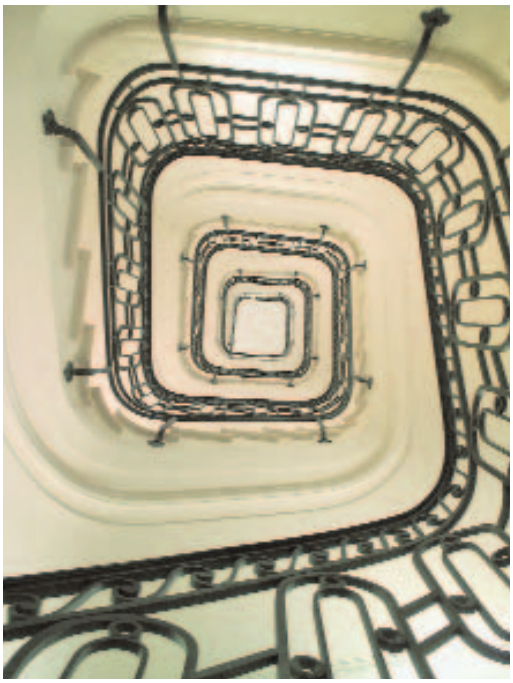


The main reception hall was cleared of period modifications. The hall's furnishings were rounded off with a new carpet and draperies.

Banister of the main staircase and elevator shaft

The banister of the main staircase is a classicist forged banister with a drawn square profile supplemented with cast and wrought ornamentation and a moulded brass handrail. The formation of the bar repeats the motifs used on all types of banisters.

The restoration of individual elements was realised in a studio; the surface was cleaned, reground and modified according to original methods of workmanship. The statics and anchor elements were also proofed.



RESTORATION WORK

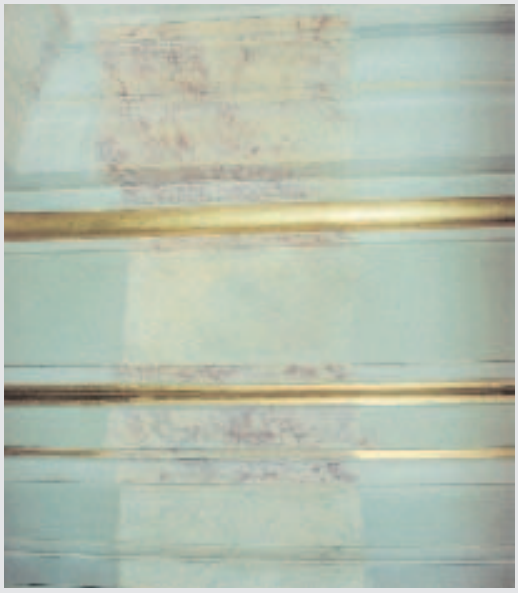
The cavetto cornice was removed and remounted.

Process of removing the layers of repaints from the artificial marble.

Method of cleaning the surface of the artificial stone in hall 1–17

Many defects were revealed in the plaster ceilings after cleaning

Process of removing twenty-two layers of repaints in entrance hall 1–17



The contrast between the later repaints and the original colours of the artificial marble

The cavetto cornice in the Marble Hall was in a disastrous state.

DETAILS

- restoration and partial replacement of windows and doors including the fittings
- restoration of forged fittings
- restoration of mirrors
- restoration and supplementation of crystal chandeliers and brass wall lamps

The new and historical windows of the building are conceived simply, made out of oak and painted white with single panes. Exceptions are the double-pane windows of the fourth and fifth storeys.
The individual window friezes are decorated with profiling, with the most complicated profiling in the first storey. The friezes of the second and third storey windows have a smaller cross-section and simpler profiling. This gradation is visible in the fourth and fifth storeys as well. A similar hierarchy obtains in the window fittings.
The building doors have a frame construction with infillings and jambs; while the frames are oak, the infittings are limewood and the jambs are pine. The layout of the doors is the same throughout the building. The individual doors have three infillings: a lower square, a middle rectangular infilling oriented on its side, and an upper top upright rectangular infilling. The doors are distinguishable from one another by means of decorative elements and the shape of the fittings.
The inner shutters are different in each room. They differ with respect to décor as well as in the materials from which they are made. The doors are ornamentally decorated in a manner derived from the wall decoration. In two halls in the ground storey the doors are decorated with ornamental shapes lining the infilling. These band elements are fabricated from a staffir mass and glued to the moulded slats lining the infilling. The doors and shutters in the Marble Hall are overlain with mirrors.
Doors in the first above-ground storey are painted in broken white colour. The ornaments are gilded and patinated.
The classification of the building's windows is basically simple; they are decorated with profiling only. The most significant elements are the fittings. In the official state halls the windows close with espagnolettes made from iron and brass chased elements. The other windows are closed with a bolt mechanism with swivel bascules, either of shined brass or of patinated cast iron.
Except for profiling around the infittings, the doors in the third storey do not have any decoration. An exception is the Dining Hall, where there are strips of stylised laurel leaves attached to the door jambs. The doors are grained just as the walls of the room, resembling dark carved oak.
The other doors in this storey are broken white or matched to the colours of the oil paintings on the walls of the room.
The most prominent decorative element of the windows is again the fittings, the bolt or swivel espagnolette.
The single and double doors of the fourth storey are similar to those in the previous storey.

Restoration of windows

The windows of the first, second and third storeys were restored, with a few exceptions (fundamental damage through earlier structural modifications). The glass was replaced, mastics removed, damaged dripstones and friezes replaced, many-layered recoats removed, grinding and cementation performed. After the repair, the windows were painted with a complete composition of coats, from impregnating primer to repeated surface coats.

Restoration of window fittings

There are five types of window fittings. Fittings A and B are differently formed espagnolettes with brass decorated handles; the other three types have bolt mechanisms. They can be distinguished from one another in shape and material. Types C and D have rails and hidden mechanics with brass bascules; type F is made of grey cast iron.

During previous modifications, the window fittings were overpainted with unsuitable recoats: bronze and sometimes white paint served to "repair" the window coats. Therefore, after dismounting the fittings, the restorers disassembled the mechanisms into their component parts, removing old coats, foreign matter and corrosion. They completed mechanical repairs, added the missing brass and cast iron components, fabricated new parts, polished and performed lacquer and wax surface modifications. The fittings were attached to the restored windows at the very end so as not to become soiled.

Restoration of doors

The doors throughout the building had been damaged mechanically through various unsuitable modifications, replacements of locks and the repeated application of new layers of paint without removing old ones. The modelling of the sculpted ornamental and linear elements was thus rather congested and had lost depth. Additional serious damage to the doors had resulted from their very construction; soft limewood changes its dimensions in response to changes in temperature and humidity. As a result, some of the door infittings shrank to such an extent that they slid out of the frame construction. In previous repairs the resulting gaps had merely been filled with putty. After removing the coats it was determined that the infittings were too narrow. The pressed gilded elements were also damaged and incomplete.

The following work was carried out on the doors: removal of all old coats, replacement of missing wood, replacement of damaged and bowed friezes, expansion of shrunken infittings, addition of missing ornaments fabricated from a staffir mass, overall grinding and cementation, application of primer and surface coats.

The doors were painted a broken white colour primarily; only in a handful of cases was the coat matched to paintings on the room's walls.

In the first storey the ornaments on the white doors of the official state premises were gilded with metal; doors interrupting the symmetry of the entrance hall were disguised with an overpaint. In the third storey again several doors were matched to the oil paintings of the interior. The Dining Hall doors were grained, the others painted in the tone of the oil paintings. The door handles and locks were in a very degraded state: the brass handles were twisted, broken and unartfully soldered. Conic squares were dislodged. All components were damaged by corrosion. The pins for strengthening the door handles had been re-forged many times, resulting in significant wear on the holes.

In the first above-ground storey in the official state premises, the original internal mortised locks were preserved. Their mechanics were no longer functional and most of the keys were missing. The type E box locks had been painted white, including the brass ringlets in places. The internal mechanics were not generally functional either. Brass fittings were missing from many doors in all storeys, and had been replaced with common, standard fittings. In the original design neither keys nor keyholes were equipped with escutcheons. It was decided to add escutcheons throughout, to prevent damage to the paint in the vicinity of the keyholes, and also to have copies of the missing door handles made. The door fittings were thoroughly cleaned, paint and corrosion removed, and worn parts replaced (replacements of squares and door handle sockets, replacement of defective parts in locks, fabrication of keys). Broken door handles were welded and chased. Missing door handles were reproduced for historical and new doors alike. The new doors in the first through fourth storeys in the historical part of the building were made by the restorers copying the original design. The new windows in the historic part were all copies made in the same style as the original window design.

Brass door handle with top lock, doors D1-1.19, after restoration

Door fittings type A – brass door handle with supplemented key plates, after restoration

Window fittings type B – brass window fitting parts, after restoration

Window fittings type E – copies, after restoration

COMPANY PROFILES

Metrostav a.s.
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http://www.metrostav.cz

Metrostav a.s., member of the DDM Group, is among the largest and most stable construction companies in the Czech Republic. It was established in 1971 as a company narrowly specialised in the construction of the Prague metro system. In the 1990s, thanks to restructuring, it became a universal construction company focusing primarily on general construction contracting. It is one of only a handful of companies in the Czech Republic capable of realising metro construction and other projects using mining technology. Since 1995, the company has been realising its own investments in the area of development projects as well.

Many exceptional structures in the Czech Republic and abroad are connected with the name Metrostav. Many of these projects have impressed experts as well as the lay public with their architectural approach, the conditions under which it was necessary to construct them and the technological methods chosen. The company's skill and ability is also visible in exacting and complex renovations of historical and protected structures, on which Metrostav works to restore their original beauty and shine.

In the renovation of the Czech Embassy in Paris, Metrostav was represented by Division 9, which specialises in the renovation of historic buildings. Its workers have participated in the repair of such significant architectural gems as the early Baroque Nostitz Palace, the Noblewomen's Institute at Prague Castle and the Hartigovsky and Lichtenstejnsky Palaces.

Skanska CZ a.s.
Technology division
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100 05 Prague 10-Vršovice
http://www.skanska.cz

Skanska CZ a.s. is the largest construction group on the Czech market and one of the largest construction companies on the Slovak market. It secures all work in the area of surface construction including environmental and transportation projects, provision of technical infrastructure in buildings, production of construction materials and components, as well as development. The parent company Skanska CZ a.s. is at the head of the group, which consists of six domain-specific or regionally focussed divisions.

The renovation of the Embassy of the Czech Republic was carried out by the Technology Division – a specialised organisational unit of the Skanska CZ group focussed primarily on conducting complex technological and specialised contracting (central heating, healthcare technology, heavy-current and light-current power lines, stationary extinguishing facilities, production and installation of ventilation systems, steel structures, jacketing of buildings, aluminium and plastic infillings, pipelines, asbestos removal, technological contracting for the chemical and energy industries and facilities management services).

The Technology division has implemented a certified control system of the type specified by the international norm ČSN EN ISO 9001:2001.

An environmental policy according to ČSN EN ISO 14001 was declared in the entire Skanska group in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

The ANTA project studio was established in 1992 and carries out complex project preparation for new structures, renovations and repairs of public and residential buildings as well as interior projects. The studio is made up of architects, construction designers and builders. Other work is performed through collaboration with permanent external partners.

The studio prepares studies, documentation for land-use proceedings, projects for the issue of building permits, documentation of project realisation and interior projects. It carries out the engineering work to secure land-use decisions and building permits, and provides author inspections as well as technical oversight for investors. It assists in the selection of subcontractors and in final building approval proceedings.

The project studio has authorisation to carry out the above-mentioned activities, issued on the basis of the authorisations of its workers.

ANTA spol. s r.o.
Sokolovská 205
190 00 Prague 9
http://www.anta.cz

Studio pha was established in 1994 as an architect office which arose out of collaboration within the company Atelier P-H-A, which has been in existence since 1988. Studio pha is involved in all types of project work, in the area of construction and urban planning as well as interiors and design, with emphasis on the architectural quality of its work.

The studio is open to conceptual collaboration with other architects, designers and architecture studios.

studio pha s r.o.
Haštalská 27
110 00 Prague 1
www.studiopha.cz

GEMA ART GROUP a.s. arranged the subcontracting for most of the restorative and artisan work on the renovation of the Czech Embassy in Paris, including the realisation of several newly designed parts of the building.

The company's main focus is the restoration and preservation of historically protected buildings and works of fine art. Gema Art has been active in the area of protecting and restoring monuments since 1990 and in the intervening years its restorers have acquired substantial experience in the area of monument preservation under the auspices of UNESCO and within the Phare programme, as a result of which they have a broad overview of international regulations in the area of monument preservation. Four times projects realised by Gema Art have been awarded the Europa Nostra prize; the most famous of these is the complete renovation of Wallenstein Palace, the seat of the Czech Senate, completed in 2002.

GEMA ART GROUP a.s. uses a control system of the type specified by the international norm ČSN EN ISO 9001:2001.

GEMA ART GROUP a.s.
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LIST OF SUBCONTRACTORS

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Tomáš Trojan – visualisations/sketches

JENÍK – architectural models

TRAMONTÁŽ, spol. s r.o. – lifts

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