Brno 29 February 2012

Tugendhat Villa: restoration completed

The process of restoring the Tugendhat Villa, a unique landmark of modern world architecture listed as a UNESCO world heritage site since 2001 has come to its end. The thorough restoration of the building took two years and included restoration of the building, all interiors and the garden. Its objective was to restore the villa as much as possible to its original shape between 1930–1938 when the villa was occupied by the Tugendhats. Specifically, this concerned preservation and conservation work on the authentic structural substance and lay-out, including structural details, spectrum of materials and functional systems

"Exceptional architectonic landmarks make our city exceptional, too. I am glad that the most significant of them will introduce itself again in its full beauty. The skills of experts and artisans of the 21st century joined forces with the skills of our ancestors to make this Brno architectonic gem shine dazzlingly again. I believe that this shine will send a signal to the world that the city of Brno appreciates its cultural heritage and can take due care of it," said **Mayor of Brno, Mr. Roman Onderka.**

Some of the important milestones of the renovation and restoration work

25 January 2010 – Mayor of Brno, Mr. Roman Onderka, and Managing Director of UNISTAV, a. s., Mr. Miroslav Friš, signed a contract which officially started the Tugendhat Villa restoration. At the same time, the website www.tugendhat.eu was launched, supported also by the grant project of the Ministry of Culture of the CR entitled „Support for a UNESCO world heritage site".

8 February 2010 – the site (of Tugendhat Villa) was handed over to the contractor, UNISTAV, a. s. The project manager, Mr. Michal Malásek, received a key of the building and commenced the implementation of the monument renewal.

27 January 2011 – a scientific research project ***„Tugendhat Villa – Documentation collection project"***, was introduced to a delegation from the Ministry of Culture visiting the site. This project is supported by the grant project entitled „Support for a UNESCO world heritage site" and handled by the Museum of the City of Brno – Tugendhat Villa office. As part of this project, a modern ***Study and Documentation Centre of the Tugendhat Villa*** is being established, dealing also with the collection of archive design documentation and photographs obtained from public as well as private sources in the Czech Republic and abroad. These materials are digitalised and stored in newly created databases and some of them are also presented on the website dedicated to the villa. Besides the scientific research activities focusing on the Tugendhat Villa and Brno architecture of the 19th and 20th century, the Centre will "enliven" this famous house with lectures presented by Czech and international experts. There should also be educational programmes provided for children and youth from nursery schools up to secondary schools.

Tiskové středisko MMB | Dominikánské náměstí 1 | 601 67 Brno
tel: 542 172 029 | fax: 542 172 129

11 and 16 November 2011 – the elected Brno city representatives made a site visit of the Tugendhat Villa. On 11 November, Mayor Roman Onderka took over the revitalised garden and on 16 November, he ceremonially lit up the historic Strebel boiler.

24 January 2012 - the Tugendhat Villa restoration was completed.

How the renewal and restoration work on the house progressed

Design

The design of the Tugendhat Villa renovation and restoration was developed by a consortium of three architectural firms: ***Omnia projekt, Archteam and RAW***. The villa restoration was based on complete rehabilitation of the building and most sensitive and precise renovation of all authentic surfaces and individual elements. This corresponded to the method of supplementing the missing components, such as fittings and built-in and free-standing furniture. The renovation covered the civil structure itself as well as service networks, technical equipment and the garden.

Progress of work

- First, those structural components that were the cause of repeated emergencies were renovated – insulations, internal and external drains, sanitaryware, wiring, exchanger station. The garden terrace with a staircase was completely repaired and structurally secured including the transfer and re-application of authentic plasters. The load-bearing wall in the so-called "tunnel" was structurally secured. The layers of roof cladding past their service life were renovated and security damp proofing layer was fitted over the roof. Additionally fitted partition walls and bricked up spaces were removed.
- Special care was given to surfaces. Authentic substances of specific material elements were preserved to the maximum possible extent (e.g. external and internal plasters – approx. 80 % is authentic plaster dating from 1930 with its defects and traces of scratches - metal, wood etc.). Historic layers often hiding away authentic surfaces are presented in several places in the form of the so-called “archaeological windows”. The column cladding and the onyx partition wall in the main living room were not renovated, apart careful cleaning.
- During the restoration and renovation it was necessary to expose some structures and finds including fragments of authentic elements and materials used during the house construction between 1929–1930 (authentic fragments of DLW flooring, insulation plate with the trade name Torfoleum, authentic elements of wiring, fragments of authentic glass, etc.). In the future, a small separate exhibition should be dedicated to selected structural elements and materials presenting also this part of the structural-technical history of the Tugendhat Villa.
- Some elements were manufactured according to the original formulas that are not used anymore or have gone through major technological innovations. These are, in particular, Sorel cement, patented in 1927 and used predominantly when applying floorings without joints (xylolit). This material was used in the construction of the house in the living room and bedrooms and was also used as the base layer for the authentic DLW flooring (Deutsche Linoleum Werke). The DLW linoleum was also manufactured specially for the Tugendhat Villa according to the original formulas.

- The exact copy of seven authentic glass panes from 1930 (destroyed in air raids in 1944) was manufactured by a Belgian company. It is absolutely transparent crystal-like glass with a thickness of 1cm. The panes are 5m long and 3.5m wide and are used as a glazing in the living room.
- What was of exceptional importance was the discovery of the authentic segments of Makassar veneer from the rounded partition wall defining the dining room, which disappeared from the villa no later than autumn 1940 as testified by contemporaries. Its individual parts were used to line up walls in a university canteen of the School of Law, Masaryk University at Veveří, where Gestapo had its base during the war. These very valuable authentic elements from the Tugendhat Villa returned to their original place after more than 70 years.
- The technical facilities of the house were carefully restored, too. These include a window electric retractable system and air conditioning (including the original system of the conservatory ventilation).
- The garden was thoroughly revitalised. Specialists ensured professional treatment of woody species, reconstructed mobile vegetation on the terraces and vegetation in the conservatory where a pond with aquatic plants was put into service.

Funding of the renovation

The renovation and restoration of the Tugendhat Villa was funded by the Integrated Operational Programme in the field of the national support of the use of the cultural heritage potential administered by the Ministry of Culture of the CR. The project was managed by the Statutory City of Brno, with its partners being Brno University of Technology in Brno – Faculty of Architecture - and the Museum of the City of Brno. **Total cost (excl. design) amounted to CZK 173.6m.**

What is unique about the villa

The villa for Greta and Fritz Tugendhat was designed between 1928–1929 by the German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe living in the USA since 1938. His proposition „less is more“is typical of clean forms and work with material. Glass, steel and concrete are attributes of Mies's "international style" influencing architecture up until now.
The villa is a unique masterpiece in the sense of the construction, spatial lay-out, interior furnishing, technical facilities and its setting in the natural environment. This was the first time in the history of architecture that a steel supporting structure made up of 29 columns of a cross-shaped ground plan had been used in a private house. The interior makes use of rare materials – onyx from Morocco, Italian travertine and woody species from south-eastern Asia. Mies's collaborator, the designer Lilly Reich, participated in the design of furniture, carpets and textiles (colours, materials). Seating furniture was manufactured using predominantly tube and strap steel (armchairs and chairs type Tugendhat, Barcelona, Brno and MR 20). A number of furniture and interior drafts were the work of Sergius Ruegenberg, who also cooperated with Mies on the design of the German Pavilion for the International Exposition in Barcelona. Built-in furniture and parts of the free-

standing furniture were manufactured by the Brno company Standard bytová společnost managed by architect Jan Vaněk.
The technical facilities were also unique – hot-air heating and cooling, electrically retractable window panes, photo cell at the entrance, etc.

How history affected the house

Birth of Villa Tugendhat

Greta and Fritz Tugendhat, commissioning the construction of the house, came from Jewish families of industrialists and businessmen. In March 1929, Greta's father, Alfred Löw-Beer, gave his daughter an exclusive lot of land, which was a part of a lot behind the Löw-Beer Villa and offered stunning views of the city. Mies van der Rohe came to Brno in September 1928 and, impressed by the position of the lot as well as the excellent standard of Brno architecture, he accepted the commission. The genteel clients respected his vision and financial limits were of little importance. They became familiar with the design on 31 December 1928 and the construction commenced in mid-1929. The construction was implemented by a Brno construction company owned by Artur and Mořic Eisler. The family moved in before Christmas 1930.

Fate of the villa after the Tugendhats had gone to exile

In May 1938, the Tugendhats left for Switzerland and in January 1941 for Venezuela. During the war, the house became the property of German Reich and in April 1945 it was ravaged by a Soviet army cavalry troop. A private dance and rhythmics school was based here until 1950 when the villa became national property. Between 1950–1979, the villa was used for therapeutic physical education classes. The first efforts to restore the house in the 1960's, when Brno was visited several times by Greta Tugendhat, foundered. In 1980, the villa became the property of the City of Brno and its first renovation and reconstruction took place between 1981–1985, which basically saved the house. In the former socialist Czechoslovakia this was close to a miracle.

After November 1989, the house was made accessible to the public for a short period of time. In August 1992, it hosted negotiations over the country break-up. Since 1994, the villa has been managed by the Museum of the City of Brno, which has made it accessible to the public as a landmark of modern architecture. Between 2010–2012, the building underwent its second monument renovation and restoration.

PhDr. Soňa Haluzová
Brno City Hall Press Centre
e-mail: tis@brno.cz
phone: 542 172 026
fax: 542 172 124
www.brno.cz

Tiskové středisko MMB | Dominikánské náměstí 1 | 601 67 Brno
tel: 542 172 029 | fax: 542 172 129