

VILLA TUGENDHAT

The villa of Grete and Fritz Tugendhat was designed by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1928–1929. It is a unique work of art in terms of construction, innovative spatial arrangement, interior furnishings, technical facilities and integration into the natural context. Villa Tugendhat is probably one of the first houses to use cross-shaped steel column-based structure in a private house. Rare materials are used in the interiors – onyx from Morocco, Italian travertine, and woods from Southeast Asia. Lilly Reich, Sergius Ruegenberg and Markéta Müller collaborated on the designs. The technical equipment was also exceptional – hot-air heating and cooling, electrically lowered windows, a photocell at the entrance.

The freestanding three-storey villa is set in sloping terrain, with its living spaces facing south-west into the garden. The street frontage, consisting only of the top third floor, is dominated by a milky curved wall at the main entrance and a passage to the terrace, which ingeniously frames the view of the Brno skyline and separates the living area from the part of the house that was reserved for the caretaker's apartment and garage. The built-up area is 907 m² and the area of the main living space is 237 m².

THE BUILDERS

Greta Tugendhat, born Löw-Beer (16 May 1903 in Brno – 10 December 1970 in St. Gallen) and **Fritz Tugendhat** (10 October 1895 in Brno – 22 March 1958 in St. Gallen), came from German Jewish families of textile industrialists and businessmen. In March 1929, Greta's father, Alfred Löw-Beer, gave his daughter an exclusive building plot, which was part of the land behind the Löw-Beers' villa and offered a magnificent view of the historical panorama of Brno. Mies arrived in Brno in September 1928 and, impressed by the location of the plot, but also by the excellent level of Brno architecture and construction, accepted the commission. The cultivated clients respected his vision, while financial limits did not play a significant role. Construction began in mid-1929, the house was approved on 1 December 1930 and was carried out by the Brno construction company of the brothers Moritz and Arthur Eisler.

There are several defining moments in the "communication" between the house and the garden. Seen from the upper terrace and from the windows of the rooms on the so-called bedroom floor, it is the panorama of Brno – the connection between the villa and the city. When viewed from the main living area, it is the views of the individual building landmarks of the city and the intimacy of the greenery – the connection with the surrounding nature. When viewed from the garden itself, it is the grassy meadow with trees and also the plants on the facades, evoking the optical "disappearance" of the building mass in the greenery. A herb garden is situated on the north-west side of the house.

ENTRANCE HALL (B)

The main entrance to the house is located in the lee behind the arch of the milk glass wall. The single-leaf entrance door is fitted with rosewood veneer on both sides. The door leaf occupies the entire clear height of the room, as do all other doors to the living rooms (only the doors to the service rooms have a normal height of about 2 m). As Grete Tugendhat reported, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe understood doors and windows as building elements, not as holes in the wall. The height of the door leaf is already one of the attributes of a free-flowing open space and eliminates horizontals that are limited to the floor and ceiling. A wooden wall with rosewood veneer and a door to a small anteroom that opens onto a terrace is located opposite the main entrance. There is a round table (MR 140) with two Stuttgart armchairs (MR 20) situated by the wall. To the right is the entrance to the so-called parents' section and a dressing room with a mirror.

From Černopolní Street, the hall is illuminated by a curved wall of opaque etched glass, the surface of which is glossy on the outside and frosted on the inside. The floor of the entrance hall and the spiral staircase to the main room on the 2nd floor are made of Italian travertine, the walls and ceiling are made of sanded Stucco Lustrato. The supporting steel pillar is covered with rounded brass sheet and, like the railing, is chrome-plated and polished. We can find the same solution in the main living area.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (29 March 1886 in Aachen – 17 August 1969 in Chicago) was trained in his father's stonemasonry. From 1905–1907 he worked as a draughtsman in the studio of Bruno Paul and from 1908–1911 he worked as an architect for Peter Behrens. He opened his own architectural office in Berlin in 1913. He designed the German pavilion for the World Exhibition in Barcelona in 1928. Almost at the same time, he designed a family house for the Tugendhats in Brno. In 1930–1933 he was director of the Bauhaus school of architecture and design. In 1938 he emigrated to the USA, where he opened his own design office in Chicago.

Lilly Reich (16 June 1885 in Berlin – 14 December 1947 in Berlin) trained as a seamstress and in 1908 joined Josef Hoffmann in the workshops of the Wiener Werkstätte. In 1912 she became a member of the Werkbund. From 1924–1926 she worked for the Trade Fairs Department in Frankfurt am Main. Here she had her life-changing meeting with Mies van der Rohe. They became partners in life and work, and together they designed the architectural solutions for numerous exhibitions and residential interiors over the next ten years. They were both appointed to lead the German presentation at the 1929 World Exhibition in Barcelona, where Lilly Reich also contributed to the interiors of the German Pavilion. From 1932, Lilly Reich worked as head of the weaving studio and construction department at the Bauhaus until the school was closed by the National Socialists in 1933.

THIRD FLOOR

UPPER TERRACE (A)

The entrance, street-side terrace has two levels. The entrance level is smoothly connected to the pavement, while the lower level serves the technical facilities of the house and has openings for coke drop, ash lift and air conditioning. A wide covered passageway between the main and staff wings, originally enclosed by a simple railing, provides access to the rear of the terrace with the view to the Špilberk castle.

The staff wing contains an apartment on this floor, where the driver and caretaker housed. Today the apartment is used as a staff center. The garage is extended to the border of the property, contrary to the building regulations of the time.

The terrace is accessible from every room (except the governess's room). Grete Tugendhat recalled that the children had a tub of water and a box of sand on the terrace and used to ride their toy cars there. The pergola was overgrown with greenery which created a pleasant shade, the railing of the arched bench was wrapped with climbing roses.

The cladding of the steel pillars with brass sheet is not chrome-plated and polished like in the large living room, but artificially patinated so that it appears in a bronze-like tone. On the southeast wall of the terrace you can see a so-called archaeological window (approx. 1 m²) with the original facade surface.

The upper terrace offers a beautiful view of the historical panorama of the city, which is defined on the sides by two main Brno landmarks – the Špilberk Castle and the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul. Greta's parents' house, the so-called Löw-Beer Villa, is situated in the lower part of the property on Drobného Street. In the neighbouring gardens to the west of the house (right), the roofs of the Arnold and Giskra villas, the oldest buildings of the first villa colony in Brno, founded on the hillside above Lužánky in 1860, shine through. The actual villa of the builder Josef Arnold was owned by Cecilie Hože, Greta Tugendhat's aunt, from 1909.

THE GARDEN

The garden was designed by Mies in collaboration with the Brno garden architect Markéta Müller. It is dominated by a large grassy meadow designed in the spirit of the so-called emphasised emptiness (betonte Leere). The summer seating under the weeping willow corresponded axially with the dining room in the main living area. In the garden of Villa Löw-Beer the gardener's house is situated. The gardens of both houses have always formed a territorial, though not architectural, unit.

PARENTS' SECTION (C)

PARENTS' BATHROOM

The bathroom with toilet in the parents' section is accessible from the hallway between parent's bedrooms. The overhead lighting is provided by a skylight with ventilation windows. In the hallway there is a shoe cabinet and a laundry box, painted cream white.

FRITZ TUGENDHAT'S ROOM

The room serves as a bedroom and study. Along the right wall are the original built-in wardrobes with rosewood veneer and interior surfaces made of maple wood. A bed is situated in front of the wardrobe wall. There is a writing desk with two armless Stuttgart armchairs (MR 10), perpendicular to the window, and a low bookcase against along the wall behind the desk, above which a painting hung on the wall by with the portrait of Emil Tugendhat, Fritz Tugendhat's father. The floor, like the floors of all the rooms on the bedroom floor, is covered with DLW (Deutsche Linoleum Werke) linoleum in cream-white. The architect chose this material mainly to give the floor a uniform, colour-neutral surface. The interior is complemented by two oriental rugs on the floor.

GRETE TUGENDHAT'S ROOM

This room combines the function of a bedroom and a ladies' dressing room. To the left along the wall are the original built-in wardrobes with rosewood veneer. The bed is situated against the window, with a smaller sofa under the window. Next to the sofa hangs a mirror with a ceiling top light and a dressing tableboard, in front of the mirror is a Barcelona stool. For seating, there is a Brno chair in strip steel with a cherry red leather cover and a round table in tubular steel. A white sheepskin rug has been laid on the floor. Opposite the window, near the built-in wardrobe wall is a door through which Grete Tugendhat could reach directly the boys' room.

CHILDREN'S SECTION (D)

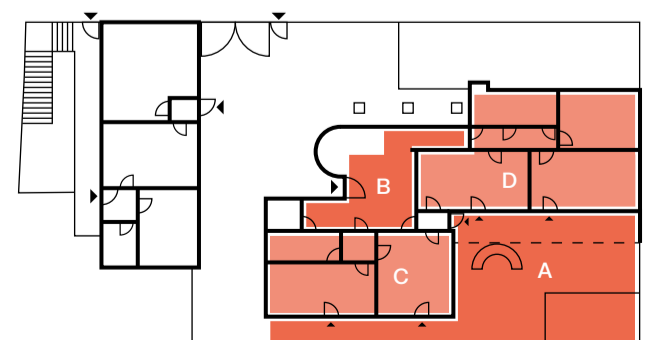
CHILDREN'S ROOMS

The boys' room, Ernst and Herbert's, is furnished with simple lacquered children's furniture, which was probably made by Jan Vaněk's SBS company. The furniture corresponds with the painting of the built-in cupboards in which the bathroom sink is installed. The boys' room can be connected to the room of the eldest daughter Hanna by a sliding doors.

The furnishings in Hanna's room were designed by Mies in collaboration with Lilly Reich. The built-in wardrobes, the inside of the door leaf and other furniture are veneered in African zebrano. There were two beds in Hanna's room. If a visit was announced or if a child was sick, the governess could sleep there and her room served as a guest room.

THE GOVERNESS'S ROOM

This is the only living room that does not have a window facing south-west. To the left of the entrance are built-in zebrano veneered cupboards with a hidden sink. There is a bed in front of the cupboards, a rectangular desk with a Stuttgart chair by the window and a Tugendhat armchair for resting with a cover of fabric checkered fabric cover. Along the longer wall opposite the bed is a low set of cabinets with a bookcase. There is an oriental carpet on the floor. From the small corridor there's the possibility to enter the joint bathroom.



A – Upper terrace
B – Entrance hall
C – Parents' section
D – Children's section

SECOND FLOOR

MAIN LIVING AREA (E)

The main living area is accessed from the entrance hall, via single flight of partly spiral staircases which terminates in a small hallway. From the hallway you enter the living room.

The steel supporting skeleton offers a free variation of the so-called flowing space, whose individual functional zones are indicated only by the straight line of the onyx marble and curve of the macassar partition as well as the regular rhythm of the steel supporting columns and the arrangement of the furniture.

The variable connection and enclosure of the space was achieved by the use of several black and cream-white curtains made of shantung silk and white velvet.

A very important part of the main living area are the original materials. The so-called onyx wall is a truly remarkable decorative and at the same time functional element. The honey-coloured, yellow rock with white veins was mined from the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. This semi-precious stone has a special ability where it changes its colour on sunny winter days, when the sunrays shine through the wall at sunset.

The space of the dining room is defined by a rounded partition veneered with Macassar ebony, surrounding a generous dining table. The original partition was removed from the interior in 1940. Thanks to the historian Miroslav Ambroz, it was discovered in 2011 in the canteen of the Faculty of Law of Masaryk University in Brno, where it was secondarily used as wall cladding. Thanks to the painstaking work of the restorers, this authentic element was returned to its place as part of the restoration process in 2012.

The round dining table is an exact replica of the original table, made according to the original design. The table, veneered in black polished pear, can be used in three possible sizes (diameters). The table top rests on a steel leg with the same profile and cladding found on the supporting columns.

The structural and aesthetic uniqueness of the entire space is complemented by a number of timeless

technical elements. For example, the AC system, which is used throughout the space to heat, filter or cool the air in the main living area. Equally timeless is the system that allows the large-format windows in the dining room and in front of the onyx partition to be completely recessed into the floor level. Along the windows we can also see the chrome central heating registers, which are designed to prevent moisture from precipitating on the glass. The vast majority of these elements have been preserved in their original state and are still functional today.

Solitary pieces of furniture are an equally important part of the living space. In this case we can concentrate on the seating in front of the onyx partition, along the south-west façade with the view towards the garden. In this section, we can see:

- A ruby red chaise longue/spring chair (MR 100);
- Three Tugendhat armchairs, with silver-grey fabric cover (MR 70);
- Three Barcelona armchairs and one Barcelona stool (MR 90) in emerald green leather;

A replica of the Torso sculpture by German sculptor Wilhelm Lehbruck is visible behind the seating area. The presence of the Brno chairs (MR 50) in the living space, which we see in tubular steel covered with white parchment (for example in the dining area) is also not to be overlooked.

In front of the onyx marble partition wall there was a carpet made of light natural wool, handwoven by Alen Müller-Hellwig in Lübeck (Germany). Behind the onyx wall there was a carpet made of brown natural wool, also hand-woven in Lübeck, which was added around 1934 and replaced an oriental carpet.

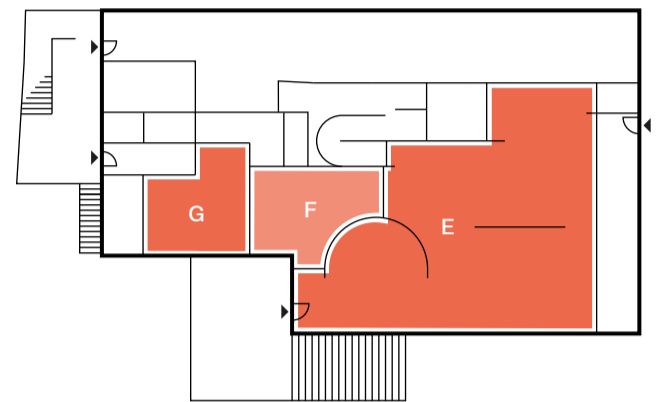
SCULLERY (F)

The scullery is located between the main living area and the kitchen. From the preparation room, a spiral steel staircase descends to the technical floor. The food elevator, which connects all three floors of the villa, also leads to the food preparation room. There are built-in cupboards for dishes between the elevator and the kitchen, behind them, the pantry is located. In front of a large window there are two high storage tables with steel legs.

KITCHEN (G)

The kitchen floor plan is linking the living and staff areas. An electric stove was probably located by the entrance from the staff wing. Below the window and along the northwest wall a kitchen is fitted. In the opposite corner was a square wooden kitchen table with four simple lacquered wooden chairs. Opposite the table is a built-in, cream white painted wooden cabinet that separates the pantry. The walls of the kitchen are lined up to the ceiling with cream coloured tiles, the floor is covered with ceramic tiles from RAKO in a similar, slightly darker color. In the kitchen, as well as in the food preparation area, a change of colour can be observed on the supporting columns, which are painted in a creamy white finish.

The staff wing on the 2nd floor used to be the rooms of the cook and maids. The rooms are currently used for the security staff and the Villa's Study and Documentation Centre.

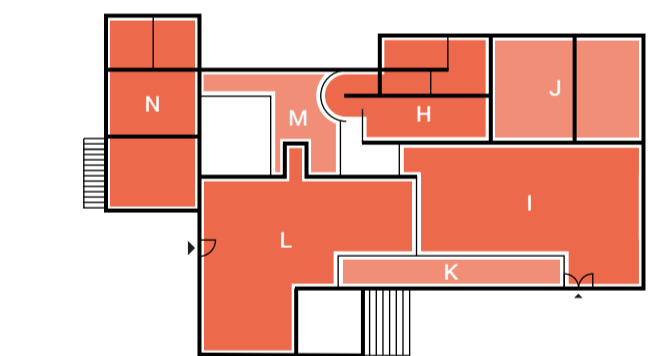


E – Main living area F – Scullery G – Kitchen

FIRST FLOOR

THE AIR-CONDITIONING ENGINE ROOM (H) part of the Extended tour

The air treatment plant, provides air treatment and distribution. It is controlled by a simple control panel



H – The air-conditioning engine room L – Exposition – bookshop
I – Exhibition space – auditorium M – Rainwater reservoir
J – Boiler room and coke store N – Laundry room, darkroom and moth chamber
K – Engine room for window movement

ON THE TUGENDHAT FAMILY AFTER 1938

The Jewish Tugendhat family was only able to enjoy their house for eight years. They knew about the threat posed by the National Socialists and their supporters in Czechoslovakia. After the annexation of Austria by Hitler's troops on March 12, 1938, they went into exile, first to Switzerland, then in January 1941 to Caracas, (Venezuela). Fritz Tugendhat managed to take some of the furniture and other furnishings of the house with him into exile before the entire Czechoslovakia, was occupied by the German Wehrmacht. Some members of the family who did not emigrate were murdered by the Nazis.

In 2017, more than 100 members of the Löw-Ber, Stiassni and Tugendhat families came to Brno at the invitation of the City of Brno and the Meeting Brno civic initiative. Grete Tugendhat's 2 daughters, 12 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren live in Canada, USA, Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

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#HRADSPILBERK #ARNOLDOVAVILA #MENINSKABRANA

MMZ Villa Muzeum
Tugendhat města Brna

with a mobile cranks, which are used to manually adjust the desired quantity, quality and circulation of the incoming air.

The air is cooled and humidified in a special chamber, at the bottom of which there are salt stones. These are sprayed with water from nozzles fitted into an arranged water pipe. Filtration is provided by a clock-driven rotary oil filter and a wood wool filter that traps oil fractions. A hot-air heat exchanger is used to heat the air.

The air circulation is provided by a radial fan with an electric drive (the surviving SVET motor dates from 1942). The fan is mounted on a concrete plinth with an intermediate cork bearing, which prevents the transmission of vibrations to the foundation structure.

The entire ventilation system has been preserved in its original condition with the exception of small details and is fully functional.

EXHIBITION SPACE – AUDITORIUM (I)

Originally the space was a storage area for garden furniture. Now it is used for a permanent exhibition where visitors can learn about the history of the building, it's inhabitants, the builders and the architect. The space is regularly used as an auditorium for lectures, professional seminars and short-term exhibitions.

BOILER ROOM AND COKE STORE (J) part of the Extended tour

During the first renovation of the villa in the 1980's, the coke boiler room was converted into a heat exchanger station connected to the outside district heating ductsystem. The only surviving element of the original technology is the ash elevator. During the last restoration two reconditioned historic Strebel coke boilers and one boiler designed for hot water heating were installed in their original location. Next to the boiler house is a coke storage facility where the original coke drop with original black tiles has been restored.

ENGINE ROOM FOR WINDOW MOVEMENT (K) part of the Extended tour

The preservation of the technical device mechanism for lowering of two large-format (approx. 5×3 m) window panes is completely unique. The lowering is provided by two electric motors, which were installed during the renovation in the 1980's. During the second restoration of the building 2010–2012 the system was fully rehabilitated. As Grete Tugendhat recalls, the family used the mechanism even in winter, when the sun was shining.

EXPOSITION – BOOKSHOP (L)

Originally this was drying and ironing room with an adjacent fruit and vegetable storage room and food lift. Nowadays it houses an exhibition and a visitors centre, including a bookshop.

RAINWATER RESERVOIR (M) not accessible

At the rear of the fruit and vegetable storage room, the original steel rainwater tank which was used for washing and garden irrigation has been preserved.

LAUNDRY ROOM, DARKROOM AND MOTH CHAMBER (N) part of the Extended tour

Behind a bookshop, there is the laundry room, and the darkroom and the moth chamber. The darkroom, where Fritz Tugendhat developed his photographs is already in a notch in the ground and is therefore ventilated by an ingenious system of vertical vents which open out in the form of circular openings onto the entrance terrace. None of the original laundry and darkroom furnishings have survived, so the rooms are furnished with period features as a suggestive display.

The space described in the original plans as the moth chamber (Mottenkammer) was used to store winter clothing. The room is conserved with its original form, i.e. hanging bars and authentic whitewash cream tiles on the walls and ceiling and slightly darker ceramic tiles on the floor.