



MONTENEGRO

Contrast Landscape Architecture Context

From 19 September until 15 November 2013

Concept: Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević (publicist and lecturer, Belgrade)

Exhibition venue: Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30

Opening hours: Monday to Friday: 9 am to 6 pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays and 31 October 2013)

Press tour: Wednesday, 18 September 2013, 11.00 am

Speakers: Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević

Official Opening: Wednesday, 18 September 2013, 6.30 pm (by invitation only)

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For the first time, the Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's Architektur im Ringturm series will focus on Montenegro. Thanks to its unique landscape, this small country on the Adriatic coast is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination. But Montenegrin architecture is less well known. This exhibition will showcase the traditional building styles seen in the rugged rural hinterland, as well as the coastline with its echoes of the Dalmatian cities to the north. Vienna Insurance Group has been active in Montenegro since 2010, following the establishment of life insurance company Wiener Städtische Osiguranje.

Geographical context and landscape

Montenegro lies on the southernmost tip of the Balkan Adriatic coast, south of Dubrovnik, nestled between Croatia and Albania. It has land borders with Serbia and Kosovo, and mountains reaching heights of 2,000 metres, snow-capped into early summer. The country's internationally recognised name – the Italian translation of the Serbian *Crna Gora* – harks back to the long period when the coastal region, especially the Bay of Kotor, was strongly influenced by the Venetian Republic. This is evident in its urban and architectural heritage, and can be seen in the positioning, structure and urban development of towns such as Kotor, Perast, Budva and Risan, including their fortifications. Similarities in layout and atmosphere with better known places like Split, Šibenik and Dubrovnik conjure up images more commonly associated with these bustling Dalmatian coastal towns.

The country's mountainous region contrasts starkly with its coastal reaches and for centuries it was this area that represented the actual "monte negro" (black mountain), ruled by southern Slavic clans. With a few small exceptions (e.g. Kolašin, Mojkovac), and one town established in the 1860s (Žabljak), this space is uninhabited apart from a few villages, and the land is furrowed by deep canyons and fast-flowing rivers. The largely bleak landscape occasionally opens up to offer broad, heady, sweeping views, unimpeded by buildings. Its nature reserves and recreational potential inspired the construction of a number of impressive hotel developments in the area during the years of Yugoslavian economic prosperity. The arresting architecture makes a strong statement in terms of form, scale and atmosphere, with these edifices standing as a monument to a bygone era.

Historical changes and architectural genesis

The discipline of architecture in its academic sense only began in Montenegro relatively recently, though the traditional building vernacular seen in the rugged rural hinterland is also worthy of attention. The first wave of intensive construction activity by the state and wealthy private investors came during the country's short term of independence as a kingdom. Montenegro became an autonomous principality following the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, and then a Kingdom from 1910 until 1922, the year it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929). Plans were drawn up for the development of Cetinje, the quiet town that became the royal capital, and various government buildings sprang up (e.g. the Ministry of Culture) as well as other buildings of architectural significance.

French Legation, 1910 Paul Guadet and Auguste Perret

The historical and artistic significance of the French Legation in Cetinje (constructed 1907-10), designed and executed collaboratively by Paul Guadet and Auguste Perret, lies above all in the unique character of the architecture, though its formal inventiveness has been referred to as oriental, Jugendstil and secessionist. Reflecting local architectural tradition, the building also reworks those aspects and is designed, in Guadet's own words, in line with "good, economic construction" and the level of comfort and luxury that an ambassador would expect. As in the grand city residences that he built in Paris in the same period, Guadet chose to use a reinforced steel skeleton and a facade clad

with ceramic tiles. These decisions were made more for pragmatic than dogmatic reasons. The issue of how easily materials could be transported – since a large proportion of them had to be imported – and difficulties in controlling the quality of local products were both important considerations.

Ultimately, the architectural design is testament to the extensive research carried out by Guadet. The decision to use stoneware as cladding is a clear reference to buildings in Vienna, helping to set the building – located so closely to the Austro-Hungarian Empire – in its wider context. At the same time, the vocabulary of classical monumental architecture is inventively reinterpreted in certain elements such as the stoneware balcony balustrades, or the fluted cast concrete motifs framing the entrance. In this way the building uses detail to combine the formal innovations of its time with references to the architectural past of the surrounding geographical area.

The golden age – or consolidation and concentration

Montenegro's most significant period of architectural development occurred during the phase of economic and political consolidation experienced by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the second half of the 1950s. This intensified after 1961. Podgorica – named Titograd until 1992 – became the Montenegrin capital in 1948. A large number of public buildings of high architectural quality were built in all parts of the country in the space of just three decades: schools, hospitals and sanatoriums, event and cultural centres, shopping centres, apartment buildings and hotels. To a large extent they still form the backbone of notable architecture in Montenegro today, and though many are currently in a poor state of repair this has not affected their intrinsic value.

Internationally outstanding buildings

Children's home for physiotherapy, 1962 Nikola Dobrović (1897–1967)

The choice of the site for this children's home – far from any urban centres – was based on the purported therapeutic benefits of the local climate. The Bay of Kotor has long been renowned for the regenerative effects of its fresh air. Children from all over Yugoslavia were treated here, and the loss of this extended catchment area could be one of the reasons why the institution has now closed.

The design is an excellent example of a combined working and architectural solution. Twin mirrored structures lie along the sloping ground of the site, connected on the upper floors by a perpendicular section, the space beneath which cuts into the slope to create a courtyard. The colours and materials used here create a continuity of design with the main building and have the effect of making this section a kind of core, surrounded by a distinct second layer – differentiated by the use of riverbed gravel, a traditional local building material that provides a textured appearance. Balconies, a setback top floor and parapets with incisions typical of Dobrović give the facade facing the valley a striking, sculptured structure. Thanks to the ingenious, organic composition of the structure to fit its natural surroundings, a second entrance can be found on the side facing the slope, sheltered by an optically unimposing awning in reinforced concrete. A bridge branches out from the next floor up, leading to the nearby pine copse. The graceful design and subtle use of materials – even in the design of the floors – continues in the gardens, whose terraces and permanently built furniture form an integral part of the whole. A covered swimming pool, intended for therapeutic purposes, lies in front of the building, its roof forming a spacious terrace.

Hotel Mediteran, 1965 **Milan Zloković (1887-1965)**

Milan Zloković completed two buildings in Montenegro: the health centre in Risan (1935) and the Hotel Mediteran in Ulcinj, one of his later works.

Guests arriving at the hotel – which has a somewhat unusual layout comprising five separate buildings – are greeted by the delicate appearance of the main building, set on a slope and in parallel to the hillside. With its large balconies, aerial walkways, stairways and warren of open air spaces, the building is more a spatial design that resembles a viewing platform overlooking the sea. This main building does not contain any guest rooms, but houses the reception, kitchen, dining rooms and common recreational areas. The other buildings, two of which had to be pulled down after the 1979 earthquake, are situated close by and comprise the guest wings. Emerging perpendicular to the front of the buildings, the natural brick side walls – between which the guest room balconies are threaded – are made from roughly hewn local stone which brings the individual construction elements together in harmony with the surrounding environment. The other elements have been maintained in red and white concrete, which – in apposition to the stone blocks that provide a solid sense of scale – lends the whole composition a playful, polychrome, summery feel. Looking at old photographs of the Hotel, this effect must have been even stronger to begin with, before the bay had become so built-up. When there were scarcely any other buildings present, the hotel stood majestically atop its natural surroundings, like a bustling city wall forming the boundary to the hinterland.

The exhibition

In an exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein presents contrasting aspects of the landscapes and architecture of Montenegro. Alongside architectural highlights from different eras in the country's history, the exhibition takes a look at a wide range of contemporary buildings. In this way, it aims to draw attention to a rich cultural heritage and help to ensure that it will be conserved for future generations.

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm XXXIII, Montenegro. Contrast – Landscape – Architecture – Context. Adolph Stiller (ed.); 160 pages approx.; German/English; fully illustrated. Price: EUR 27