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A HOUSE IN THE CITY

DOM W MIEŚCIE

Abstract

The house – an unusual object in the city, taking many forms relating to either the material or the spiritual realm. The house – a place to live. Longed-for security refuge, family memories, goals, ambitions, and everyday life, which we share with the loved ones. The house – a place of rooted culture and traditions, usually handed down from one generation to the other. The place where the householder is the cause of life and the sense of the building because the house is a place living in the rhythm determined by its owners. A place where the sound of steps is not anonymous, where every kiss and “good morning” create an anticipated atmosphere. A place of ongoing conversations at the table, it is also a corner with the comfortable chair, a picture on the wall, telling its own story.

The house is a witness of the city’s history, shaping its culture. The historic character of the house is the living proof of its roots in the urban space. It’s a showcase of the architect – the creator, and the supreme memory of his work.

Keywords: house, villa, modernity, history, culture, material and spiritual sphere, urban space

Streszczenie

Dom – niezwykle obiekt w mieście przyjmujący wiele postaci odnoszących się bądź do sfery fizycznej, bądź duchowej. Dom – miejsce do mieszkania. Upragniona ostoja bezpieczeństwa, rodzinnych wspomnień, celów, ambicji, a także codzienności, którą dzielimy z najbliższymi. Dom – miejsce zakorzenionej kultury i tradycji najczęściej przekazywanej z pokolenia na pokolenie. Miejsce, w którym domownik jest sprawcą życia i sensu budynku, bowiem dom to miejsce żyjące rytmem wyznaczanym przez jego właścicieli. To miejsce, w którym odgłos stawianych kroków nie jest anonimowy, gdzie każdy pocałunek i słowo „dzień dobry” tworzy upragnioną atmosferę. To miejsce toczących się rozmów przy stole, to także kąpiel, w którym stoi nasz wygodny fotel, to obraz na ścianie, który opowiada swą własną historię. Dom to świadek historii miasta, to obiekt tworzący jego kulturę i dzieje. Zabytkowy charakter domu jest żywym dowodem jego zakorzenienia w przestrzeni miejskiej. To wizytówka architekta – twórcy i najdoskonalsze wspomnienie jego pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: dom, willa, nowoczesność, historia, kultura, sfera materialna i duchowa, przestrzeń miasta

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1. INTRODUCTION

House – a unique place in our heart and space. It takes individual character and values for each of its users. For those that travelling is the sense of life, a house is a no-house as it is something ephemeral, impermanent. Another meaning is often associated with a family home – a place where we happily return in our thoughts, feel emotional and experience affection we have for him. It reminds us of the years of the often carefree childhood, relatives and a range of smells, sounds and images that stay in us forever. A house also represents tradition, culture, and certain habits. It is also a detail shaping its aura and atmosphere, without which, again, our house would become a no-house. It's the smell of morning coffee, sound of the steps, certain everyday life that we love. The house in the morning – half asleep, waking ray of the sun shyly knocking to get inside of the room. House after school and work – full of bustle and smells, mad work, stretching talks. House at night – sleeping, filled with silence and darkness where a clock moving forward sounds as loud as ever during the daytime. This is our home. It changes during the daytime, changes with the passage of years, but still, it remains the same place for us – one we love. We feel happy here, safe, inside we find ourselves, our soul and passion – Show me your house and I'll tell you who you are! This timeless phrase carries lots of truth. The house is also the history of not only of the family, but also the place it stemmed from. Immersed in the landscape of the city, it becomes its integral part. It is the story of its creator – the architect. Living proof of his work, spirit and passion. Therefore, it may be said that city objects, such as monuments and houses, with their own history and experiences, also those created in the difficult years of the interwar period, are the witnesses of the city's history.

Villa of Francis and Leopold Macharski designed by Waław Krzyżanowski and located at the Wyspiańskiego street in Krakow built between 1921–1922, the villa of Stefania and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz from 1924–1926, made by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz and located at Jodłowa street, villa of Aneri (Irena) and Wojciech Weiss by Francis Mączyński from 1922–192, at Krupnicza street –examples of the work of great architects, the witnesses of the past years, creating a history of the city and its image. These are not only houses for ourselves, our families, but for the city, its architecture, values and culture.

The house of the drams is a challenge for the architects, an inspiration for the artists – painters and great composers, because beyond the material sphere – physically present object, its silhouette embedded in the landscape of the city, it also has the spiritual realm – certain amount of emotion, nostalgia and feelings. The house can also be understood as the immediate surroundings of the building in which we live. Thereby, rendering the essence of particular importance, coming from every little thing which accompanies it. And so a deeper meaning to take: the path we follow every day to shop, passing images of everyday events that we see walking down the street, a small architecture – baskets, lanterns, benches, small sculptures in home gardens. A house is not just a building, or the four walls of our room, it's also our surroundings, where we feel marking our presence. This is our street where we live, district, settlement, city or our country.

“Home is a place very close to every human being, a place where we come back as to a lost paradise of childhood, even just in our thoughts. The fullest and at the same time the most real form of the house is presented in its cultural context, having, in addition to the

material form, also the spiritual one, reflecting the complexity of the national tradition, also with the romantic notion of the home – the homeland”¹.

2. HOUSE IN THE ART

The house has always been an inspiration for great artists – composers, poets and painters. There is also no active professional architect who has never took up the project of the house. Its modern dimension can even become a source of pride during various stages of a designer’s career. As the theme of creative work, it is often an expression of emotions, and perceptions about their own vision of home – a place of living of our loved ones and ourselves. *Yellow house*, by Vincent van Gogh is a memory of the painter’s visit in Arles. The artist also painted its interior – his bedroom, and this work was considered by van Gogh as one of his favourites. Vivid colours and interesting perspective are the source of its uniqueness, as well as a subject so close to each of us –the room – our room. “Yellow House” located on Place Lamartine 2 in Arles with artist’s bedroom was the subject of three very similar works of Van Gogh, which always depict the same elements, but in different colours. On the right, there are slightly opened door, behind which, although the picture does not show that, were the stairs leading to the second floor; this door led into the room of Gauguin. The bedroom was not rectangular; it had the shape of a trapeze.²

Although the first idea of the artist was to show home as a peaceful place that each of us wants to have – an oasis of space, eventually Van Gogh decided to convey his feelings, not those he desired, but ones that tore his heart: anxiety, longing for a safe and cosy space. The tension and anxiety can be found in the chaos that accompanies location of the objects without any logical justification. They seem to be just for themselves – separated from others, yet strangely shortened and standing obliquely (table with chairs and basin). Also, the paintings that hang on the walls and illustrate the profiles of van Gogh’s friends are placed unevenly. Most telling, however, is the floor, the tilt of which creates an optical illusion, accompanied by a vision of the collapse of its surface and a swoop at one point. The picture of the artist is therefore an expression of his loneliness, and longing for home, which in fact he never had. Feelings, such as solitude and alienation, are more familiar to him. This is how Vincent van Gogh himself described this picture in a letter to his brother:

I can finally, send little sketch to give you at least an idea of the way in which this work will take on its form. Today, I feel good again. My eyes are still tired, but I have a new idea in my mind and here is the sketch. Another 30. This time it is simply my bedroom, only the color is to decide on everything and transmit, through simplification, greater refinement of objects

¹ A. Bujak, J. L. Dobesz, *Poland – a home of a thousand year old nation*, Biały Kruk, Kraków 2003, p. 7.

² Wikipedia: Although the building was damaged by bombing on June 25, 1944 and later demolished, its plan dating back to the 20s of the twentieth century was preserved by the architect from Arles, Leon Ramser. The plan preserved the essential information about the building. see: Roland Dorn: *Décoration”: Vincent van Goghs Werkreihe für das Gelbe Haus in Arles*. Hildesheim, Zürich & New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990, table XIX/XX. (niem.)

associated with the rest or even sleep. In a word, looking at this picture should give the mind, or rather the imagination, a rest. The walls are pale violet. The floor of the red boards. The wood of the beds and chairs is yellow, the color of fresh butter, while the sheets and pillow are very bright, lemon green. Scarlet bedspread. Green window. Orange dressing and blue basin. Lilac door. And that's it – nothing more – in this room with lowered blinds. The rectangular shape of the furniture must again express unperturbed rest. Portraits on the walls, a mirror, a towel and some clothes. The frame, as there is no white in the image, will be white. All of this is as a kind of revenge for the forced rest that I had have here. I will work on it again all day, but you see how simple this idea is. Shadows and midtones are subdued; It is painted in optional, uniform colors, as Japanese prints³.

Also, music and poetry, which comes directly from the artist's heart and frequently tells about the places that he or she feels close to, and considers home.

It is difficult here not to mention *Pieśń o domu* by Maria Konopnicka:

“Kochasz ty dom, rodzinny dom,
Co w letnią noc, skroś srebrnej mgły,
Szumem swych lip wtórzy twym snom,
A ciszą swą koi twe łzy?”

Kochasz ty dom, ten stary dach,
Co prawi baśń o dawnych dniach,
Omszałych wrót rodzinny próg,
Co wita cię z cierniowych dróg?”

3. ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOUSE

Also, architecture is an expression of visualised images of the house. This ability to read signs and metaphors that fit firmly in the building with specific materials, the use of which has changed over the centuries. According to historians, the first houses were built out of straw, reeds and clay, only later stone, wood or brick were considered to be lasting material.

The first Egyptian constructions were extremely simple, but soon the proportions, statistics and the strength of the material began to be related to aesthetics. Poles were replaced with columns with floral motifs, not only the form, but also the detail became significant. Soon, also the law of proportionality started to be recognised. It was dictated by the module of a triangle with sides equal to 3,4,5 – the so-called holy triangle with the right angle, which in addition to the practical application affected the division of façade, cross-section of roof, etc.

Every era was ruled by its own laws and associations, which have always created some insights concerning beauty. Work of an artist was interpreted as a metaphor of the image resulting from visual awareness or the material shaping the form. But each time, it was the

³ vangoghletters.org: Letter (554) from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Arles, 16 October 1888 (ang.). [accessed on 2011-02-02].

active participation of the recipient and his sensitivity that enabled architecture to be appreciated and accepted. “As in painting, the emotions expressed in the posture, gestures, facial expression and external image revealed the interior of the man, his thoughts and feelings, also in architecture, rich formation of shapes expresses the ideals of patrons, their ideology, dreams of wealth and glamour, philosophy and aesthetics resulting from the metaphorical process”⁴.

Writing about the history of architecture, the role and image of the home, one should mention the work of great architects and their masterpieces. Among other, the villa of Edgar Kaufmann designed by Wright. It is one of the most famous architectural projects developed in 1936. House over the waterfall is recognisable throughout the world. Its mysticism lies in the strong influence of nature on architectural form, which co-exists with the natural elements and becomes its component. Terraces suspended above the water, “flowing” dynamically from the cascades are like the water levels full of expression. In conjunction with the nature, they create a kind of a landscape, from which an architectural form emerges. Material – not accidental here, since Wright “for the first time used in a conscious way the term material in depth, that is exposed, allowing to be read in depth”⁵.

Falling water is an example of a home that never ceases to amaze. Its uniqueness is seen in the form, deeply penetrating extraordinary landscape shaped by water spontaneously flowing from the waterfall and stately forest. Its components also penetrate into the interior – large boulders lying in the water during the construction of the building are still present. One of them gently rises from the living room floor. The building is also largely glazed, which makes it open to the nature that almost comes inside. These assumptions even more emphasise how much the house over the waterfall exceeded its time, because only now we have started to see the value of close relations with nature, thinking about how to approach it in the best way possible, especially in the context of housing architecture.

Also, the windmill system became a characteristic feature of Wright’s work, which was also an incentive to the development of the concept of Mies van der Rohe – a master who, before he became the father of glass skyscrapers, created great designs of the single family houses, often left in a drawer of his desk.

One of them included a brick farmhouse made in the windmill system (1923). Its main elements were walls growing outside of the building’s main body, creating an association with the wings of a windmill. A similar effect was obtained in the house for a bachelor (1923) as well as at Suntop home in Ardmore (1939). It should be mentioned here that 30’s were not easy, also for the architects. Germany was not the ideal place for avant-garde architecture. It was hard at the time of the Nazi rule to conduct project activities, hence the house for a bachelor was the only work of the master from that period. The property was realised for the building exhibition in Berlin in 1931. It became a proof of architect’s motto – “less is more” and synthesis of two of his works – the Barcelona Pavilion and early brick villa. It amazed with its simplicity and openness, the penetration of light, outer space and the interior. Single storey, fully glazed cuboid was a kind of a phenomenon in the middle of the great exhibition hall. Its interior concealed freely growing planes of full wall formed a vision of cohesion between the interior and the exterior, with a silhouette passing into the garden, being at the same

⁴ J. Jaśkiewicz, *About the metaphor*, Politechnika Warszawska, Warsaw 1991, p. 69.

⁵ B. Schmidt, *Order of the space*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 1981, p. 57.

time a closing of the terraces. This building was also extremely important for another reason – it was one of the last manifestations of modern German architecture, which collapsed at the moment when Hitler took power in 1933. It was also a difficult time for the creative work of Mies van der Rohe which he limited only to creating of conceptual designs of single-storey atrium houses with characteristic planes of the walls penetrating through the interior of the courtyards. Only in the 40s this great architect, being an emigrant at that time, was able to implement projects of the glass house and skyscraper.

Particularly noteworthy is the great masterpiece of the designer – The Tugendhats' Villa in Brno, built between 1929–1930 for the wealthy industrialist Fritz Tugendhat and his wife Greta, who bore huge costs of building this villa (for the price of this object one can build 40 traditional houses), but unfortunately could enjoy it for only 8 years. As representatives of a Jewish family fearing the Nazi regime, they decided to flee to Venezuela in 1938.

The building was implemented in the frame of steel structure stiffened with walls (that was the reason for the enormous cost of the building construction), which was a novelty in housing. Due to this solution, the architect could smoothly and freely shape the interior of the villa – thus the living room opened to the conservatory could measure up to 235 square meters.

The property is beautifully situated – on a vast plot of land (approx. 2,000 m²) with high drop of the terrain that the architect has treated as both visual and functional asset. The picturesque hill is overlooking the Old Town and the areas below, which makes this place charming and unique. By implementation of large glass surfaces, the architect was able to absorb the view from the villa to its interior. In terms of function, the decline of the terrain allowed to create an attractive solid; so looking streetward, the hill required the object to be a single story building, but from the side of the garden, it opens with three storeys. This way the entrance to the building located on the street side leads to the top floor. The block is simple, devoid of detail, corresponding in its form with the landscape, which was also emphasised by natural materials used for the construction of the house: onyx, or wood, including among others, mahogany. A major role in the proper selection of the materials was attributed to interior design. Due to a translucent wall of onyx, light can intervene in the interior, penetrating the building in various degrees. Moreover, the interior of the house is raw, simple, spacious and very attractively furnished with the pieces designed by the architect himself and German designer Lilly Reich. One type of chairs designed for the Tugendhats is still produced.

The fate of the house and its purpose were different after the World War II. Initially, it served as a sports centre, with the interiors divided into gyms. Then, the villa became a government resort.

Today, Tugendhats' villa belongs to the state treasury. It is a place frequently visited by the tourists. In 2001, UNESCO listed the villa as a World Heritage Site. Six years ago, work began on the total renovation of the building, which took about three years. In 2012, the villa regained its former glory.

An example of a modern home design is a *House by the sea* designed by Ultra Architects (Marcin Kościuch and Tomasz Osiegłowski), which was awarded with the SARPU in 2013. The project was appreciated due to: excellent implementation of the properties of the used materials, advantages, but also disadvantages of the site, which in result gave a friendly and energy efficient house with remarkable architecture.

The biggest challenge was to overcome the problem of ground instability. It was achieved through the usage of an appropriate construction – monolithic reinforced concrete, poured out in the form of a single shell. Besides stability and tightness provided by this material, it also influenced the interior of the building – concrete resulting from its construction has become a finishing material inside the house. Its austere character contrasts with the warmth of wood that was used both inside and outside the house. Wood appears on some of the partition walls, floors, but also in the outer zone – the elevations – in the form of a lining made of vertical boards. “So specific role reversal was achieved – the outside of the building is covered with “warm” wood, while inside we have concrete with the reflection, as in the negative, of the wooden formwork”⁶.

4. FINAL REMARKS

The house in the city space is seen primarily as an architectural object that reflects trends in architecture existing in the period in which they arose. But often, as in the case of masterpieces, such as a *house over the waterfall*, the architecture of the building, its uniqueness and genius of its creator proceed the times in which the house was built. Then, the object permanently records not only in the city, but also in the minds of the people – their many generations, tradition, culture and history of the place. Each city has in its structure, the objects to be proud of, treated as relics of the magnificent architecture, memories of the great architects. In Krakow, beside the modern realisations, the city space is full of historic houses, including those of the interwar period designed by famous architects such as Józef Kryłowski, Waclaw Krzyżanowski, Franciszek Mączyński, Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, or Stefan Żeleński.

However, in addition to the material value of the home, there is still its spiritual value, often described in the art – painting, music or poetry. It is also a value that we carry deep in our heart because who of us does not reminisce the family’s home or a desired house in which he lives or wants to live in the future. A happy man is one who has a happy home – family, shelter and joy. It is we who add substance and life to our house – our signing, our laughter and despair, our “good morning” and “good night”. Our house is us – our desires, thoughts, our habits, preferences, feelings and actions. The house changes with them – it looks differently in the morning when the residents wake up to meet the challenges of a new day, differently when they leave it, going to work or school, and differently when they return again. It is the dimension of the house that we create – it cannot be defined. It is composed of many moments forming a pattern repeated every day at the same time, but also those that are fleeting, spontaneous, unprogrammed. Always, however, the physical presence of the house is there, typing in the spatial structure of the town, creating not only the story of a family, but above all the history of the place from which it emerges.

⁶ SARP, Architectural Magazine SARP Arch, No 5 (25), September/ October 2014, p. 34.

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