

Conservation in action

The renewal and restoration of part of the old town of Vilnius

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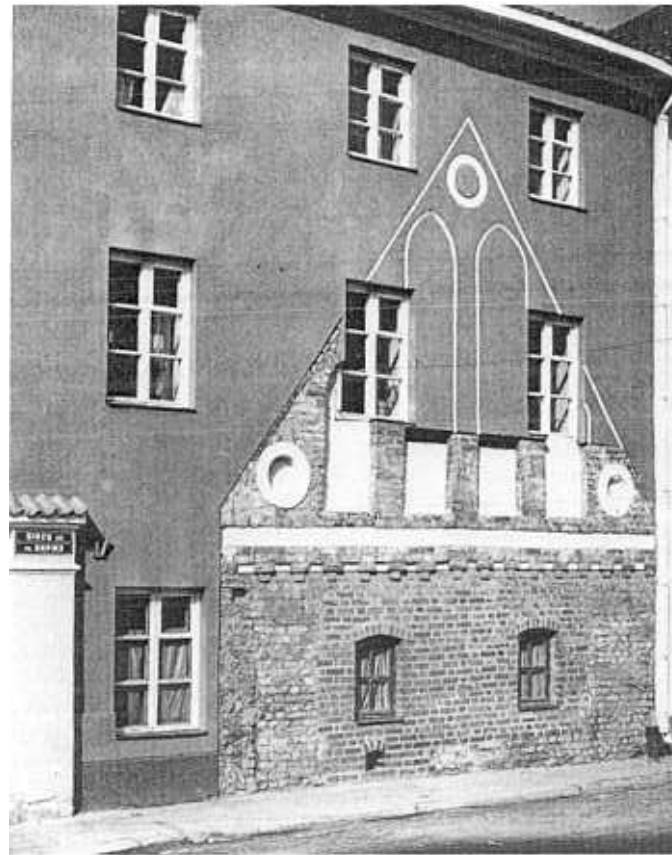


FIG. 1. The street facade of No. 3 Biržų Street, Vilnius, after renewal and partial restoration.

¹ The preliminary studies and designs were undertaken by architects in the Institute of Monument Conservation and Municipal Economy (A. Dukevičiene, R. Jaloveckas and N. Masaitiene). The Vilnius Trust of Building and Maintenance and the Vilnius Restoration Workshop executed the work.

In the Lithuanian SSR, the most valuable old town is that of Vilnius, which consists of seventy-four insulae or blocks of various sizes. In 1974 the second rehabilitation project of the town was planned, and this is now being put into practice according to the established sequence of investigating, designing, renovating and restoring individual insulae. Four have now been rehabilitated in this manner, and one of the last (No. 54) was completed in 1982.¹

The block bounded by the streets named Rūdininkų, Lazdynų Peledos, Arkliu and Gorkio, developed around the Town Hall square (now a part

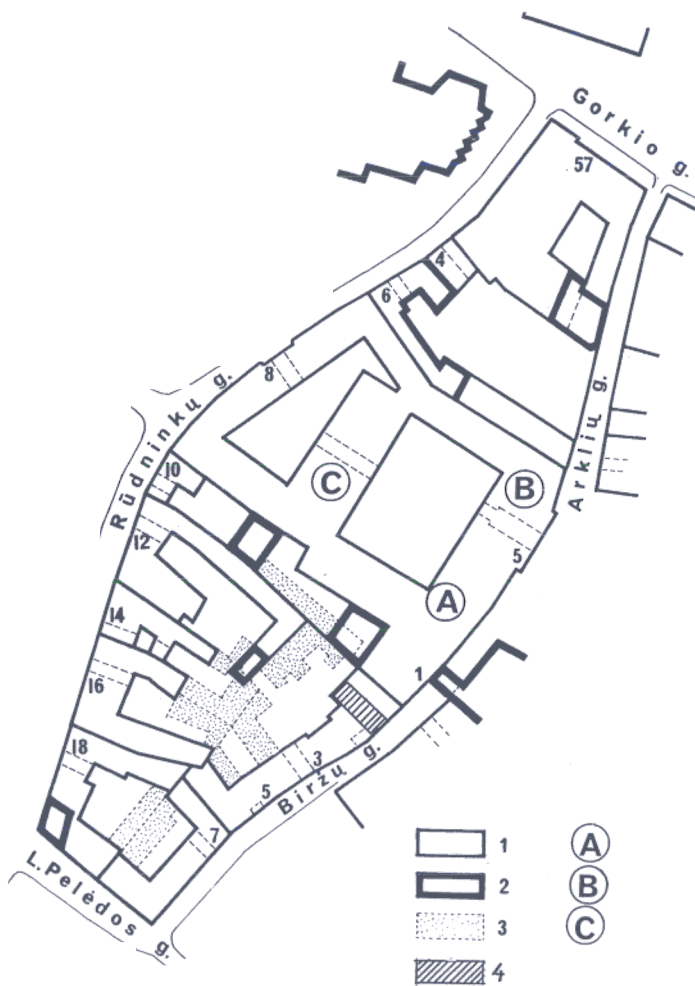


FIG. 2. The plan of insula 54 of the old town. 1: historic buildings; 2: new buildings; 3: demolished buildings; 4: the Gothic house, No. 3 Biržų Street; A: Youth Theatre; B: Puppet Theatre; C: Conservation Centre.



FIG. 3. No. 3. Biržų Street; a seventeenth-century decorated beam after conservation.

of Gorkio Street) and the commercial centre of Rūdininkų Street in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Fig. 2). When the defensive walls were built round the town in the sixteenth century, Rūdininkų Gate was erected in this street, and the site which forms the district was divided into narrow plots characteristic of medieval town layouts. The earliest buildings, which faced onto the street, were constructed of brick in the Gothic style; but only some cellars, isolated walls and architectural fragments have survived from this period. In later times the district became more densely built up, and as a result of reconstruction and additional structures it possesses an interesting variety of historical buildings which has given it a special importance in the old town as a whole.

The renewal and restoration of the district is due to the need to improve inadequate living conditions, but as a result some interesting discoveries have been made. Preliminary studies were carried out in order to reveal the sequence of building, and to assess the historical and architectural values of the structures; and in the process a number of unknown monuments came to light. The most distinguished is a Gothic house forming part of a group in Biržų Street (No. 3). Investigations show that in the sixteenth century there were separate plots occupied by single-storeyed Gothic houses; but in the course of time the plots and buildings were joined, reconstructed and enlarged. In the nineteenth

² The restoration project was the responsibility of two architects, S. Dagilis and N. Masaitienė.

original steeply sloping gable were found under the later rendering. This is now displayed in the new rendered surface to indicate the assumed original appearance (Fig. 4). The street facade of No. 3 Biržų Street has been treated in a similar manner (Fig. 1).² Architectural fragments, remains of arcades around courtyards, and some decorative external elements were found in other buildings, and these have also been restored and displayed.

Some later ancillary buildings that were regarded as having no value were taken down to improve living conditions and to provide more light and air. Nevertheless, the general architectural and stylistic character has been preserved. The historical outlines of the plots have been indicated by low walls, and former structures are represented by open lawns. Better services have been provided to improve the standard of living in the buildings which are still used principally for their original function as living accommodation; but there have been a few conversions to new uses. The former eighteenth-century Orginsku Palace (No. 3 Arkliu Street) is now a Youth Theatre and Vilnius Puppet Theatre, and a nineteenth-century building in the courtyard of No. 8 Rūdininku Street is now the conservation centre of the Vilnius Museum of Art. A number of ground-floor and basement spaces have been adapted as offices, shops and cafes; but the principal aim has been to preserve the district as a living, residential part of the old town.

Résumé

La ville ancienne la plus précieuse de la République Socialiste Soviétique de Lithuanie est Vilnius; elle est composée de soixante-quatorze îlots de taille variée. Quatre îlots ont déjà été rénovés dont le dernier en 1982 (No. 54). Au cours des travaux, d'intéressantes découvertes ont été faites, en particulier celle de la maison gothique qui fait partie d'un groupe de bâtiments dans la rue Biržų. Le plan original en a été mis à jour et une latte de plancher décorée en assez bon état est maintenant exposée. Les deux façades sur rue et la cour ont été traitées de façon à montrer la silhouette originale présumée du bâtiment, telle qu'elle pouvait être avant les ajouts.

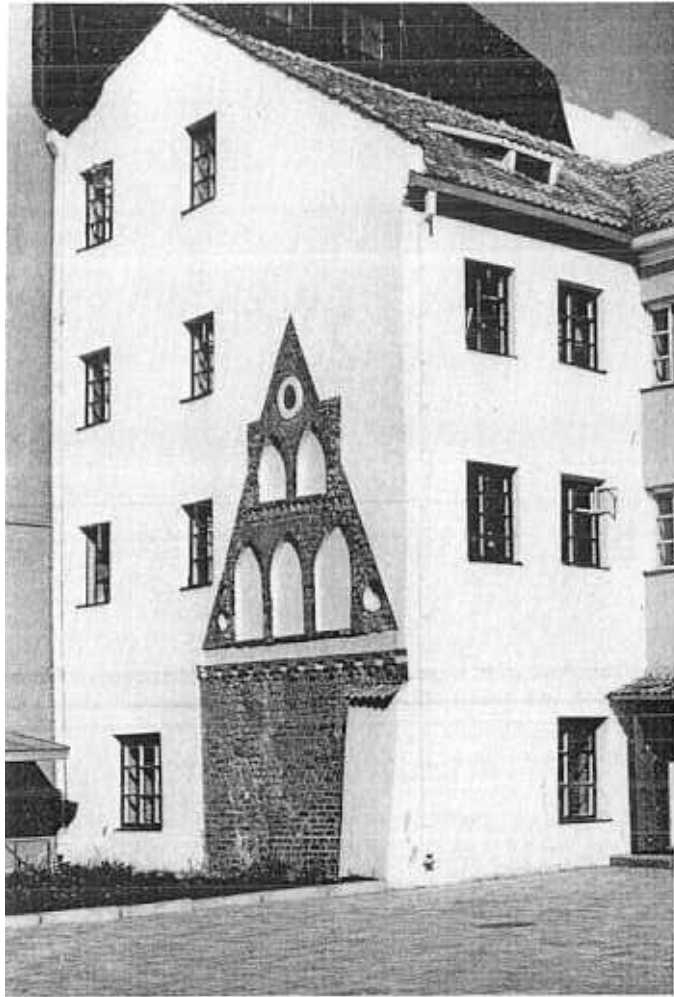
L'un des objectifs des travaux fut d'améliorer l'habitat car ces bâtiments sont toujours utilisés selon leur fonction originelle de résidences. Cependant quelques bâtiments ont trouvé un nouvel usage: Théâtre de la Jeunesse et Théâtre des Marionnettes ainsi qu'un Centre de la Conservation.

Resumen

En la R.S.S. de Lituania, la ciudad antigua más valiosa es la de Vilnius, que contiene setenta y cuatro manzanas o bloques de diverso tamaño. Cuatro han sido ya rehabilitadas y una de las últimas (núm. 54) se completó en 1982. Durante el transcurso de las obras se han efectuado descubrimientos interesantes, especialmente la casa gótica que forma parte de un grupo en la calle Biržų. Ha salido a la luz la planta original y se ha descubierto una viga del suelo decorada y en buen estado de conservación. Las dos fachadas exteriores y el patio han recibido el tratamiento adecuado para que expresaran el que se considera aspecto original antes de que se llevaran a cabo nuevas adiciones.

Uno de los propósitos de las obras fue el de mejorar las condiciones de habitación, y los edificios se destinan aún principalmente a su función original de ser habitados, aunque ha habido algunas alteraciones para nuevos usos como son un Teatro Juvenil, un Teatro de Marionetas y un Centro de Conservación.

4. The courtyard side of No. 3 Biržų Street after renewal and partial restoration.



century a new three-storeyed frontage was constructed, but in their work the architects have been able to reveal the original plan of the Gothic building which consisted of a kitchen and two adjoining rooms. In the living quarters facing the street they found a relatively well preserved timber floor beam decorated with carvings, dating from the seventeenth century. This has been restored and displayed in the house (Fig. 3).

On the frontage to the courtyard a Gothic facade and evidence of the