

Strand 3. The New Frontiers: Unveiling Art Nouveau Cities

ART NOUVEAU ARCHITECTURE IN TALLINN: INTERNATIONAL AND MULTINATIONAL

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Introduction

Compared with the neighboring cities of Helsinki and Riga, the heritage of Art Nouveau architecture in Tallinn is not so numerous. This is hardly surprising as around 1900 Helsinki and Riga were already much bigger cities than Tallinn. During the building boom in 1908–1913, in Tallinn only about 30 large Art Nouveau apartment houses were erected, whereas in Riga and Helsinki this number reached into the hundreds. Still, there are remarkable Art Nouveau buildings to be found in Tallinn, including important symbolic buildings erected in this period, such as national theatres and banks. In the architecture of those buildings national aspirations of Estonians as well as of Baltic-Germans were expressed. As a result, Art Nouveau architecture is represented in Tallinn in many different forms and trends. It makes important to focus not just on architecture itself but also on the clientele.

International Art Nouveau architecture attracted clients of all local nations. German, Finnish and Russian architects were invited to design buildings here. In general, Baltic-Germans preferred to invite German architects from Riga, but some of them created close contacts also with St. Petersburg and Finnish architects. For Estonians the orientation towards Finnish National Romantic architecture was vital as an expression of national aspirations. Lack of professional architects of Estonian nationality made them to commission new buildings directly from Finnish architects. Only starting from 1910s the first professional Estonian architects joined the building market. Until then, local architects were of Baltic-Germans or Russian nationality, educated in St. Petersburg Art Academy or in Riga Polytechnic Institute. There was no professional school for architects in Estonia until 1921.

The stage of research of Art Nouveau architecture in Estonia

The rehabilitation of Art Nouveau as a style started in Estonia in the 1970s with the first articles by Leo Gens about Estonia theatre and German (now Drama) theatre as well as about Karl Burman, the first professional architect of Estonian nationality, were published.¹

In the 1980s several Art Nouveau buildings were restored in Tallinn but in “stylish way”, adding contemporary details (Luther’s villa at 67 Pärnu Road, Drama Theatre, dwelling houses at 18 Pikk St. and in 23/25 Pikk St.). In 1986 UNESCO Art Nouveau program was started with participants from more than 15 countries (incl. Cuba, Argentina, Japan etc.). Estonian Art Nouveau architecture was presented at the Art Nouveau conferences in Riga,² in York University at the conference “Architecture 1900” (1997),³ in conference dedicated to National Romanticism in Kecskemet, Hungary, and others. In 1998 large exhibition of the Tallinn architecture of the beginning of the 20th century was organized at the museum of Estonian Architecture. International project “Architecture 1900: Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, and St. Petersburg” was carried on in the 2003–2005 by architecture museums of five Baltic Sea countries.⁴ Art Nouveau architecture exhibitions in Estonia also included the displays of architects Karl Burman, Jacques Rosenbaum and some others, all of them at the Museum of Estonian Architecture. Monographs have been dedicated to Art Nouveau architects Karl Burman,⁵ Jacques Rosenbaum,⁶ and to the buildings – Estonia theatre, Drama theatre, Credit Bank and Estonian Student Corporation house in Tartu. Estonian art history discourse has been strongly influenced by German tradition, therefore in Estonian the term “Jugendstil” has been used as the general term for Art Nouveau, covering different trends and forms within a wide movement.

¹ Leo GENS: “Üürimaja Karl Burmani loomingus“ [“Tenement houses by Karl Burman“], *Ehitus ja Arhitektuur*, 1978, p. 7–16; Leo GENS: “Karl Burmani individuaalelamud“ [“Karl Burman’s private houses“], *Töid kunstiteaduse ja -kriitika alalt*, 2, 1978, p. 177–202; and others.

² Silviija GROSA (ed.): *Jugendstils. Laiks un Telpa. Art Nouveau: Time and Space*. Riga, Jumava, 1999.

³ Karin HALLAS: “Learning from Europe: the Architecture of Art Nouveau in Estonia“, in Peter BURMAN (ed.): *Architecture 1900*. UK: Donhead Publications, 1998, p. 282–288.

⁴ International Art Nouveau exhibition was accompanied by the catalogue: *Architecture 1900. Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, St. Petersburg*, Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum, 2003. There were conferences and seminars included into the program. The Stockholm conference publication: *Architecture 1900 – In a New Light*, Stockholm: Arkitekturmuseet, 2005.

⁵ Leo GENS, *Karl Burman*. Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum, Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 1998.

⁶ Karin HALLAS-MURULA, *Tallinna juugendarhitektuur. Jacques Rosenbaum (1878–1944)* [Art Nouveau Architecture in Tallinn. Jacques Rosenbaum. (1878–1944)], Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum, 2010. Enlarged summary in English.

Baltic-German Jugendstil

At the beginning of the 20th century Tallinn was a multinational city: Baltic-Germans, Russians and Estonians were competing for political power and architecture was used for expressing national aspirations. For Russian Czarist state the import of Byzantine church architecture was used as a visual symbol of russification. For German-Baltic gentry in Estonia it was but natural to orientate towards German architecture, helping to oppose the Russian political pressure and stressing the Baltic-Germans close cultural relationship with Germany. Estonians were fighting for their national independence, it was important to stress nationality also in architecture and Finnish National Romanticism was taken as a model for this. Finnish culture had been ethnically and nationally very close to Estonian. Estonian societies as well as wealthier clients turned directly to Finnish architects to commission the design for their new buildings.

The national clientele was not homogeneous: there are conservatives and innovative people in every nation. The most innovative circles among Baltic-Germans were not the old gentry but new generations of industrialists and merchants. It was them who started to import Art Nouveau architecture into Estonia. German capital was leading among foreign investments flowing into paper, pulp, and the wooden industries. Industrialist and commercial circles were active in implementing modern techniques and technologies. Also architecture was felt to be needed for the new imago of industry (factory buildings), of trade and banking (markets, banks, and shops) and of the new private life (dwellings and villas).

The Riga 700. Jubilee Exhibition in 1901 made its impact: it was a breakthrough of Art Nouveau style in Baltics. Fashionable interior design, furniture, stoves, architecture details and decorative elements were on display there. It became usual practice to order building elements – metal works, technical equipment, decorative elements, mosaics and sculptures from Riga enterprises (many of them were filials of German industry). As there were few architects in Estonia it was but natural that also architecture became the object of import. Majority of German-Baltic buildings in Tallinn 1900–1905 were commissioned from Riga architects. Also Tallinn municipality was among them (at that time ruled by Baltic-Germans). Municipality built a new covered market according to the project by Riga professor Wilhelm von Stryk. The building at Pärnu Road was

completed in 1900 (destroyed). The building was highly appreciated for its “good old-German style”, but its interiors already bear the elements of Art Nouveau.

In 1903 two prominent Riga architects – Wilhelm Neumann and August Reinberg – got commissions for two German bank buildings in Tallinn: the Scheel’s Bank in Vanaturu Kael and the Nobility Bank (currently the Bank of Estonia) at 11 Estonia Blvd., both were completed in 1904. The last one was in Neogothic style with elaborated Jugendstil elements in interior and was influenced by the Bourse School of Commerce in Riga (1902–1905, currently the Latvian Academy of Arts) by architect Wilhelm Bockslaff. Bockslaff was asked to design an archive and a gymnasium building in Pärnu, Estonia (1906–1907), and later an extension to the Pärnu town hall (1911). Reinberg’s contribution in Pärnu was a girls’ grammar school (26 Nikolai St., 1902). All those buildings kept the traditions of Historicist architecture, but were more plastic, mannerist and picturesque, and included Art Nouveau elements in details and interiors. Stained glass for both banks was commissioned from Ernst Tode’s workshop in Riga.

Among the early 20th century Baltic-German industrialists in Tallinn – Christian Luther, Christian Barthold Rotermann and Emil Fahle especially favored modern architecture. The first two came from prominent families of industrialists, whereas Emil Fahle was a self-made man who became successful during the last decade of the 19th century.

The first Art Nouveau building in Tallinn (and also the first building by Finnish bureau Gesellius, Lindgren & Saarinen in Estonia) was Carl Luther’s Plywood Factory Workers’ Club (1904–1905). Luther’s commission to the Finnish architects may be accounted for both by the increasing fame of Gesellius, Lindgren & Saarinen and their imposing performance at Paris World Fair in 1900, and also by the fact that one of the directors of the Luther’s company was a Finn by nationality. This limestone building with its brave dynamic forms could be easily characterized as National Romantic, but in this case there was any idea of nationalism behind it.

Same years Hermann Ammende ordered his villa in Pärnu from Finnish-born German architect Frithiof Mieritz (who had a bureau in St. Petersburg with Ivan Gerassimov), which is one of the best Art Nouveau villas in Estonia. The stoves and fireplaces were commissioned from Riga famous company “Zelm and Böhm”. Nowadays restored villa Ammende serves as a fashionable hotel.

Christian Luther also stood behind the competition of new German Theatre in Tallinn. The international architectural competition was organized in 1906 and it turned to be the biggest competition in Tallinn before the WW1. It attracted 61 entries from Germany, Russia, Austria, Finland and Latvia. The winners were Russian architects Nikolai Vasiljev and Aleksei Buby from St. Petersburg.

The German theatre was important national monument for local Germans being oppressed by Russian Czarist State, which had cut their historical privileges in Baltic provinces. The new theatre was to strengthen the national identity of Baltic-Germans. The heavy limestone building was influenced by Finnish National romanticism (admired by St. Petersburg architects and led to the “Nordic Modern” style in St. Petersburg). Finnish National Romanticism as well as romantic architecture of Germany took inspiration from American H. H. Richardson rusticated style, well known in Europe at that time. The heavy archaic forms were similar, and both of them felt this kind of architecture as their national. For Finnish National Romanticism it was connected with national mythic past. The same was stressed by Germans: according to Julius Langbehn`s theory developed in his book “Rembrandt als Erzieher”, the heavy natural stone was to symbolize the deep national roots of German architecture. The monumental stone buildings by Theodor Fisher, Fritz Schumacher, Mosel & Curjel and others from 1890–1900s exemplified this trend in Germany. It is not usual to speak about German National Romanticism in architecture. One of the first researchers who wrote about it was Barbara Miller-Lane.⁷ She was very clear about being different from majority of German researchers who do not speak about German National Romanticism but mainly about „Heimatkunst“, „Heimatstil“ or „Monumental Stil“. The last is the closest parallel for Scandinavian National Romanticism, greatly influenced by H. H. Richardson.

Due to monumental romantic forms the competition project by Vasiljev & Buby was chosen at the competition for German Theatre in Tallinn, but in the process of further elaboration it was considerably “Germanized” according to customer`s demands: the theatre in Tallinn became similar to the well-known Hebbel theatre in Berlin (completed in 1908, by Oskar Kaufmann). Tallinn German theatre was festively opened in 1910. In

⁷ Barbara MILLER-LANE, *National romanticism and modern architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian countries*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

connection with this German as well as local Estonian newspapers explained to wide audience the principles of new Jugendstil architecture, which forms are developing “from inside to outside” according to the functional needs of inner spaces.⁸

Christian Luther, member of the Society of German Theatre made St. Petersburg architects of more use: he commissioned from them also his private villa and apartment house (the last left unbuilt). The Luther’s villa at 67 Pärnu Road (1910, currently the Wedding Registry Office, Fig. 1) is one of the best Jugend-villas in Tallinn, despite alterations in interiors from 1980-s. Later Vasilyev and Bubyer designer for Luther also a new innovative factory building (1912–1914). After recent reconstruction the Luther’s factory building accommodates fashionable city apartments.

Among the Art Nouveau buildings by local architects the designs of architect Jacques Rosenbaum constitute the most artistic part. His earlier designs compiled the German Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Mannerism and Jugendstil (the house at 23/25 Pikk St.). The Dragon Gallery house (18 Pikk St.) stands out for its especially attractive façade (Fig. 2). Here Rosenbaum who had studied in Riga, experimented with the full language of Jugendstil decorative forms for a first time. It displays exotic writhing dragons, Egyptian women, lions, mascs, flaunting, lush flower garlands, frogs, shells and other decorative elements from all kind of different sources. Dragons were one of the favorite motifs of Jugendstil. In Riga Art Nouveau architecture one can find dragons on at least a dozen houses. Tallinn dragons were also ordered from Riga, from Magdeburg-born sculptor August Volz.

The Art Nouveau apartment house at 15 Roosikrantsi St. also by Rosenbaum (1911–1912) is articulated with arched windows, projecting parts, lions’ heads and other decorative elements.

Rosenbaum was also attracted with heavy-stone romantic architecture, traced in Höppener’s bank building in 9 Harju St. (1909–1910), Fire depot in Fahle Factory at Masina St. (1911–1912) and a hotel project on Pikk St. (1913, went unbuilt). The fire depot witnesses obvious Finnish influence: it has a romantic tower similar with the tower of the Pohjola insurance company building (1899–1901) in Helsinki by Gesellius,

⁸ More about it in Karin HALLAS-MURULA: “Eesti Draamateater. Ehituslugu ja arhitektuur“ / “Das Estnische Schauspielhaus. Baugeschichte und Architektur”, In: *Eesti Draamateatri maja 100 / Das Gebäude des Estnischen Schauspiels 100 Jahre*, Tallinn: Eesti Draamateater, 2010, lk. 9–99. Full text in Estonian and German.

Lindgren & Saarinen, and the triangular heavy stone portal which resembles portals in Lars Sonck's (and other's) buildings in Finland. The Finnish impact in Fahlé factory buildings, again, might be explained by the Finnish nationality of the technical director of the factory.

Also several retrospective styles were used by Jacques Rosenbaum in order to please Baltic-German clients – we see influences of Heimat-stil, Neobiedermeier and Neo-Baroque in his architecture of 1910s and 1920s.

ESTONIANS, FINNISH NATIONAL ROMANTICISM AND NEO-CLASSICISM OF THE 1910s

Until 1904 the city of Tallinn was ruled by Baltic-German gentry. Due to the active process of urbanization in 1897–1915 the population of Tallinn almost doubled – from 58 000 to 133 000. In this process the percentage of Estonians rose from 51, 8% in 1871 to 71, and 6% in 1913. In 1904 Estonians won the majority in Tallinn City Council elections. The new era of national movement started, being taken to urban dimension. National intelligentsia was now orientated toward modernization, europeization and creating national urban culture. Modern architecture became part of it. In connection with nationally symbolic buildings in cities – theatres, society houses, banks etc., the question of style became especially important. The closeness of Estonian and Finnish nations with their similar languages, national characters, history and culture made them feel as brotherhood nations. The Finnish architecture was taken as a model for expressing nationality in architecture.

As a parallel to Young-Finland, Young-Poland, Young-Latvia and other similar movements, in Estonia the literary group of Young-Estonia (Noor-Eesti) was formed. Their motto “Let's Be Estonians, However Let's Also Become Europeans!” vividly displays the aim of connecting the national movement with modern European culture, as well as the imperative need for conscious innovation process of modernization of the nation.

The project of the Vanemuine theatre and society house in Tartu was commissioned from Finnish architect Armas Lindgren. Lindgren's Vanemuine was no longer national-romantically archaic and rustic (Richardsonian), rather it provided evidence about Lindgren's affiliation of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Josef Hoffmann (particularly

regarding the garden facade). Anyhow, the architecture of Vanemuine was appreciated by Estonians as the “national” one. The architecture of Lindgren’s Vanemuine prompted, to a significant degree, also the architecture of the theatre Endla at Pärnu, performed by local architects (1911, G. Hellat, E. Wolffeldt, A. Jung). Both Vanemuine and Endla perished in the WWII.

Armas Lindgren, after becoming familiar for Estonian clientele, received next commissions: the project of St. Paul’s church in Tallinn (1906, went unbuilt), the house of Friedrich Akel in Tallinn (1912) and two more buildings in Tartu.

The most important Estonian national monument of the period was the theatre and concert house Estonia in Tallinn, also designed by Armas Lindgren and Wivi Lönn (Fig. 3). Announcing the architectural competition (1908) of Estonian theatre the promoters required in the rules of the competition that the building was to be in the “Finnish style”. Two equal projects were given the second prize – the one by Armas Lindgren & Wivi Lönn and – the one by St. Petersburg architects Vasiljev & Bubyr. The last one was even more in the “Finnish style” (associated with rustic National Romanticism). Armas Lindgren was already shifting towards more stringent geometrics and Neo-Classical symmetry. Since for Estonians the building under a project of a Finnish architect was more important than the “Finnish style” as such, it was the Lindgren & Lönn’s project that was selected for performance. The building, having gained even more Neo-Classical appearance in the course of designing, was finalized in 1913.

The monumentality of the building was prescribed by its large program: two distinctly separate blocks accommodate a 1000-seats theatre auditorium and a 1200-seats concert hall. The lower middle part was housing a restaurant. Remarkably enough there were voiced apprehensions during the construction of Estonia that the theatre was turning out too Finnish, whereupon Bertel Liljeqvist, the Finnish architect supervising the works, was sent to Tartu to do some research into Estonian ornamentation at the Museum of People of Estonia.

Estonian architect Karl Burman, trained in St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, was greatly affected by Finnish National Romantic architecture, and Lindgren’s buildings in particular. Burman’s first work was the building for the Kalev Sports Society (1911, destroyed) became a top achievement of Estonian National Romantic architecture,

although it featured clear influence of Swedish villas (observed by Burman during his trips). Burman himself referred to the style of the Kalev Society house as “both Nordic and characteristically Estonian style of timber buildings”.⁹ Also some Karl Burman’s wooden apartment building at 6 Laulupeo St, (1911–1912) could be described as National Romantic. The motif of the sun so often seen on pediments of early 20th century wooden houses refers to National Romantic moods. At the same time the image of the sun was one of the most popular motifs of international Art Nouveau.

1910–1913 was the peak of building representative Art Nouveau apartment houses. Modern conveniences started to appear in them, lifts, telephones etc. were introduced, and modern reinforced concrete constructions were implemented. Earlier romantic apartment houses had asymmetric plastic facades with sculpturally projecting parts (21b Tatari St. by Karl Burman, 1912, for example). Typically for Art Nouveau they combined various façade materials, used different shapes of entrances and doors and windows of different configurations. Somewhat later the influence of Lindgren’s Jugend-Classicism became to dominate in Karl Burman’s apartment houses with stressing the symmetry and central axe of the facades (39 Raua St., 12 Kreutzwaldi St.). Art Nouveau apartment houses were also designed by local Baltic-German architects (A. Hoyningen-Huene, Hans Schmidt and others). Hans Schmidt was educated in St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, and this can be seen in the architecture of his houses (59 Pikk St./ 44 Lai St., 1912). Most European in its appearance was the design of the Passage by Finnish architects Wäinö Palmqvist and Einar Sjöström in the Old Town (1 Väike-Karja St. / 4 Viru St., 1912). The arcade with shops, restaurants and cafés was to be covered by a glass ceiling. Unfortunately, the Passage commissioned by Jewish merchants Gutkin and Sundelevitch was never executed, and no this type of building was erected in Tallinn before the WW1. Only side parts of the big quarter were built by Karl Burman and Artur Perna.

The best example of the tectonic Late Art Nouveau urban block is the Estonian Credit Bank building in 10 Pärnu Road, by Eliel Saarinen (1911–1912, Fig. 4). The spatial elements of the facade – bay windows are flat and not sculptural, there are no differences in the shapes of windows, no rusticated natural stone, no asymmetry etc., which all was characteristic to earlier Art Nouveau buildings. The strikingly tectonic

⁹ L. GENS, *Karl Burman...* p. 54.

façade stressing verticals is derived from the reinforced concrete construction. The symmetric facade has a centered arc-shaped portal with high stairway, taking the visitor to the inner courtyard on the level of the 1st floor. The inner courtyard has three levels, making for the excellent traffic within the house and creating connections with different streets with the help of concrete ramps. The upper stores accommodated the classy apartments. Schindler & Co elevators (first in Tallinn), gas lights, ventilation, telephones and other modern conveniences were introduced. The betony works of the bank were ordered from Tampere Rautabetoni OY (Finland). Granite was also brought from Finland and staircase works were ordered from Fenska Steinindustri A. B. The cheapest cement was provided by Denmark. Glass-bricks were brought from Frank Factory in St. Petersburg, the gas lighting system was made by Pflug & Co, Riga. The whole process of construction of the building was very international.

Similar urban blocks with enlarged inner courtyards were designed by Eliel Saarinen in his “Greater-Tallinn” project, completed in 1913.¹⁰ With this project Saarinen created a magnificent vision for the future of Tallinn. The high tower of the new Town Hall was to be dominated the City and symbolizing the power of Estonians.

It was decided to build also a new Tallinn Town Hall according to Saarinen’s project; despite it did not win the competition in 1912. The competition of a Town Hall – a symbol of power – singled out the collision of Finnish and German orientations. The members of the jury were Leonty Benois and Herman Grimm from St. Petersburg, Otto Hoffmann and Eižens Laube from Riga and Onni Tarjanne from Helsinki. Altogether 15 entries were submitted to the competition by architects from Finland, Estonia and Russia. The first prize was given to rather traditionalist project influenced by town halls in Germany. Its author was local architect Alexander Jaron who had studied in Germany for a while. The decision of the Jury caused a public protest in Estonian newspapers. In his town hall project Saarinen was already taking a future planning into consideration. With the asymmetric building of the Town Hall he created the system of squares, organizing the complicated traffic in the very center of the city. Due to the WW1, the Town Hall went unbuilt.

CONCLUSION

¹⁰ KARIN HALLAS-MURULA, *Greater Tallinn. Greater-Tallinn project by Eliel Saarinen, 1913*. Tallinn: Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum, Soome suursaatkond Eestis, 2005. Full text in Estonian, Finnish and English.

The Tallinn architecture of the beginning of the 20th century found itself affected by multiple and multinational influences. The capitalist industry and markets propelled the international communication and spread of information. Orientation towards innovations and European fashion, created a market also for new Art Nouveau architecture.

Multiculturalism and parallel existence of different cultures in Tallinn, served as a positive factors in the development of architecture in Estonia in the beginning of the 20th century. Being provincial geographically Tallinn was not provincial mentally. The openness toward innovation led to active international connections. International architecture competitions brought here foreign specialists as Juries members, foreign architects and as a result, many different architecture trends. Through the construction activity international technical innovations were imported from neighboring countries. The buildings by foreign architects in Tallinn, such as Estonia theatre or Credit Bank served as an excellent study cases for local architects. “While receiving educational impulses from outside and from the other civilized nations, any intelligentsia should have the inner strength that helps them absorb all foreign elements by reworking them. Only anti-nationalists could wish for their nation to strive for spiritual independence in complete isolation from the surrounding world,” wrote Bernhard Linde, Estonian literati.¹¹

The period of Art Nouveau in Tallinn with its intensive international communication led to creative combinations of influences, practiced by architects of different nationalities. Being international by its essence, Art Nouveau architecture simultaneously offered a platform for creating architecture that could be defined as national by many nations. Tallinn German theatre was designed by Russian architects influenced by Finnish National Romantic architecture. Estonian theatre and national bank were designed by Finnish architects. Finnish National Romanticism as well as German nationally orientated architecture themselves were influenced by American architecture. Coexistence of different nationalities and openness toward innovation turned Art Nouveau architecture in Tallinn diverse and multinational.

¹¹ Bernhard LINDE: “Rahvusline omapärasus“ [“National originality“], *Sirvilauad*, 1912, p. 61.