

Pictures from the past. Adapting a historical building of a former armoury into an exhibition and education center for the Museum of Photography in Kraków



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The article presents an example of the adaptation of the former armoury building into a museum of photography, in which, despite a relatively large interference in the existing structure, it was possible to retain the character of a monument.

Introduction

The adaptation of historical buildings for new purposes has gained ground over the last decades [1]. Buildings which are no longer capable of serving their primary purposes (such as fortifications or palaces) are compelled to undergo a transformation in order to be used in the contemporary Times [2]. There are many examples of adaptations of historical buildings into art museums in Poland and across Europe¹. Issues related to the adaptation of historical buildings for new purposes have been described in numerous publications² and discussed during scientific conferences³. Nevertheless, the adaptation of a historical building is still a major design challenge. The main obstacle for architects lies in the adaptation of a historical building for its new functions, not to mention the preservation of the historical significance of the building. As seen in numerous examples, historical buildings may provide the exceptional background to the exhibited pieces of art. The historical structure of the building is juxtaposed not only with old exhibits, but also with the contemporary art collections [3]. In this case, there is a reciprocal relationship between architecture and exhibits. An excellent example of capturing this special interaction between a historical building and exhibited artworks is the MuFo Museum of Photography in Krakow, located at 22 Rakowicka Street, where a former armoury was adapted for museum purposes⁴. The aim of this paper is to analyse this case with

a particular emphasis on retaining the qualities of the existing building, and to define the relationship between the exhibited photographs and the historical landmark.

Initial state

The parcel on which the former armoury is located is a fraction of the western frontage of Rakowicka Street and has an entrance from this street. The facility subjected to the adaptation was a part of the complex of Austrian military barracks associated with Krakow Fortress, erected in the years 1895-1914. During that time, it served as a warehouse. Originally,

it was planned as a single-storey building with a roof void, covered with a hipped roof and without a basement (il.1.). The armoury was built of solid ceramic bricks on a rectangular plan measuring 79.07 x 20.67 metres with a central risalit. The roof had a wooden roof truss system made of purlin and tenaille supported on wooden columns and covered with ceramic tiles. Klein's ceilings were used over the ground floor in the form of segmental brick vaults supported on steel beams and columns (il.2.). Steel mullioned windows have been preserved in the building. The building was listed in the register of historical monu-



Il. 1. Initial state – exterior (author of photography: Marek Pabich)

ments (no. 796) under the name Artillery Barrack Complex of the former Krakow Fortress – the so-called Armoury. Due to its poor technical condition, the building was not used before the adaptation.

Specific features of an art museum and a monument

A contemporary art museum transcends both exhibits and exhibition spaces [4]. In order to meet the expectations of modern visitors, a museum building should offer food and beverage facilities, a museum shop, conference rooms, office premises or even a bookshop. Moreover, a cloakroom, toilets and other service rooms should be provided. Apart from an appropriate functional layout, it is also crucial to provide optimal exhibition conditions brought into line with the characteristics of exhibited collections. Due to the specificity of an art museum, there were analyzed project measures which have enabled the adaptation of the former armoury for museum purposes. The impact of individual project activities on the historical structure of the building was taken into account in the analysis.

As far as the MuFo building on Rakowicka Street is concerned, the functional programme presented by the management proved to be too extensive to fit within the existing walls. Therefore, it became necessary to build new structures. The historical landmark was extended by glazed structures on the ground floor added on its south and east side.

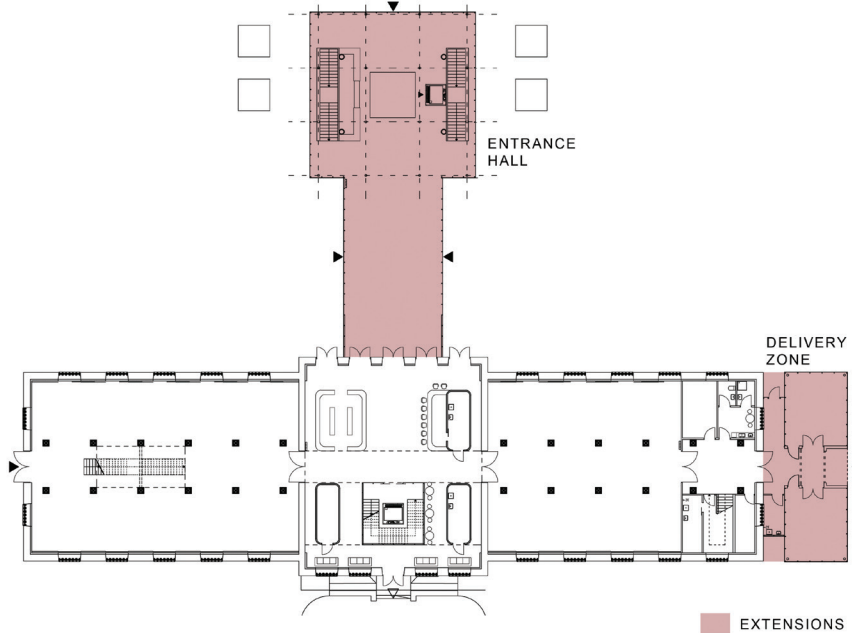
The new part of the building on the side of Rakowicka Street serves as the entrance hall, whereas the south block houses the technical facilities and the delivery zone (il. 3.). In both cases, the newly constructed structures have glass façades. On the one hand, the transparent surfaces do not cover the historical building, on the other hand, the glass material creates reflections, thanks to which the historical landmark and the newly constructed extensions intermingle. (il. 4.)

The building has also been enlarged by an underground part, which houses conference rooms and a cloakroom. This underground extension made it possible to create an additional usable space without interfering with the structure of the historical building. The only factor which indicates the presence of the basement from the outside are rectangular skylights integrated into the garden area. (il. 5.)

Another important construction step was to raise the entire roof by 70 cm, which increased the height of the rooms on the highest storey and, consequently, gave the possibility to adapt the attic for new purposes (il.6.). Areas such as a library, exhibition space and office premises were located there. The slight change in the proportions of the building connected with the raising of the roof is nearly invisible to the viewer. From an outside perspective, the glass strip does not



Il. 2. Initial state – interior (author of photography: Marek Pabich)



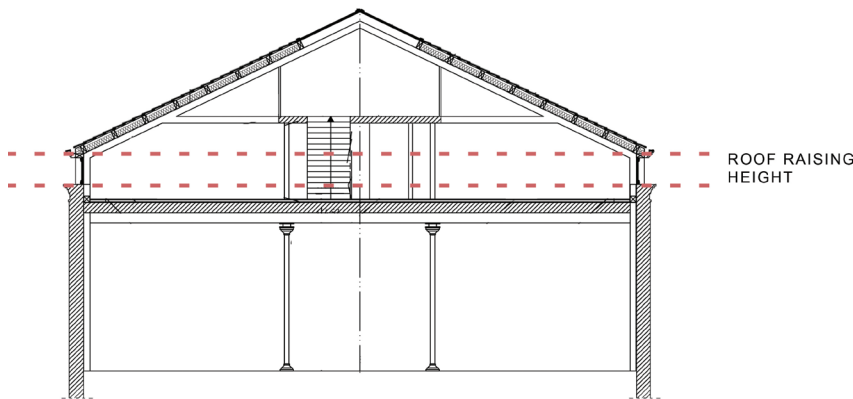
Il. 3. Ground floor plan (author of drawing: Marek Pabich)



Il. 4. Building after adaptation (author of photography: Zofia Kazimierak-Piotrowska)



Il. 5. Building after adaptation – skylights integrated into the garden area (author of photography: Zofia Kazimierak-Piotrowska)



Il. 6. Cross section (author of drawing: Marek Pabich)



Il. 7. Building after adaptation – interior (author of photography: Marek Pabich)

adversely affect the perception of the landmark. Furthermore, the visual separation of the roof from the remaining part of the building gives lightness to the whole.

A further advantage of raising the roof is more daylight in the rooms on the attic storey. This seems to be of crucial importance not only for the exhibition spaces, but also for the library and office premises. Since installing the roof windows was not allowed according to the conservation guidelines, additional daylight in the highest storey was provided by skylights on the roof's ridgeline.

The exhibition spaces on the ground floor did not require any additional lighting. The existing light conditions proved to be suitable for exhibiting photographs. Nonetheless, damaged window frames were replaced without violating the former layout and the character of the building. The use of contemporary glazing has also contributed to achieving appropriate thermal parameters for the interior.

The good thermal performance of the building was achieved through the internal insulation applied to the inner face of external walls, which helped preserving the architectural appearance of the historical façade, which only underwent restoration works.

The existing rooms on the ground floor were adapted mainly for exhibition purposes. The open spaces with a symmetric column grid create optimal conditions for exhibiting pieces of art. Even after the adaptation of the building, the interiors retained their original character. The existing columns have been renovated, whilst the segmental vaults has been left exposed, which allowed historical interiors to directly juxtapose with the exhibited photographs (il. 7.).

Interaction between architecture and exhibits

In this specific case, preserving the character of the historical landmark is not only important for the formal fulfilment of conservation guidelines. The power of experience and the intensity of feelings connected with the contemplation of pieces of art might be intensified by the surroundings, in which they are exhibited. For instance, in the Museum of Photography in Krakow the architecture itself is a source of aesthetic sensations.

The historical building, the new spaces and the small park create a harmonious background for the exhibited photographs. A walk through the park and a close communion with the architecture build up tension and prepares the viewer to move to the world of fleeting memories, which were immortalized on the photographs. Additionally, one may find a certain metaphorical correlation between the art of photography and the historical structure. Both the photographs and the historical building altered by contemporary architecture remind us of times gone by.



Il. 8. Building after adaptation (author of photography: Zofia Kazimierak-Piotrowska)

Conclusion

While creating an art museum in a historical building, one has to consider specific features of its functional layout and ensure appropriate exhibition conditions. Depending on the state of preservation and the intended final version, the adaptation for new functional purposes may involve extending the building's cubature, altering the existing one, or even reconstructing the whole building. The basis is the valorisation of the building while setting a limit for possible alterations [5]. These alterations refer both to the way of treating the historical structure and to the range of creating new forms that will affect the appearance of the landmark. Regardless of the magnitude of these changes, the design activities should not decrease the value of the existing fabric. The MuFo building under analysis is truly a reflection of this approach.

In this day and age, a visit to a museum might be treated as an aesthetic experience. The visitors judge not only the exhibits but also the exhibition surroundings. What remains in human memory after a museum visit is the atmosphere of the place and its special aura rather than an exact picture of the whole. As Juhani Pallasmaa noted, "We sense the atmosphere of an area, a place and its surroundings before any detailed observation takes place" [6]. When it comes to a historical building, the aura of a place is closely related to its historical value. A good state of preservation contributes to the creation of a unique environment for the exhibited pieces of art. It might also intensify the feelings connected with the contemplation of photography (il. 8.).

The adaptation of the armory into the Museum of Photography is a perfect example of a successful architectural project. Unquestionably, a mutual relationship between photography and the landmark has been established. Moreover, the historical building has succeeded to retain its character

despite quite extensive intervention. After the described proceedings, the Museum of Photography has become an important point on the tourist map of Krakow.

1 In Europe, one can mention the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice or the Castello di Rivoli near Turin. In Poland, the Four Domes Pavilion in Wrocław, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Łódź and the Contemporary Museum in Wrocław.

2 Particularly noteworthy are the studies edited by B. Szymgin entitled "Adaptation of historic buildings to modern utility functions" and "Protection of values in the process of adaptation of monuments". There also can be mentioned works that deal with specific projects, such as "Transformation of the sea station in Gdynia into a museum of emigration" by Robert Hirsch.

3 For example, a scientific conference at the National Museum in Krakow entitled "Museum and monument. Conflict or harmony?"

4 The architectural concept was prepared by Prof. Marek Pabich, PhD DSc. Eng. Arch. The Kontrapunkt Design Team sp. z o.o. was selected by tender to carry out the construction documentation.

5 The director of the Museum of Photography in Krakow is Marek Świca.

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PRAWIDŁOWY SPOŚÓB CYTOWANIA

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Abstract: There are many examples of adaptations of historical buildings into art museums in Poland and across Europe. Nevertheless, the adaptation of a historical building is still a major design challenge and requires an individual approach. On the one hand, the architect's task is to adapt the existing building to its new function, and on the other hand, he faces the challenge of preserving the historical value of the building. The article presents an example of the adaptation of the former armory building into a museum of photography, in which, despite a relatively large interference in the existing structure, it was possible to retain the character of a monument. There were analyzed project measures which have enabled the adaptation of the former armory for museum purposes with the reference to the historical structure. The article also highlights the relationship between historic architecture and the presented photographs.

Keywords: museum, photography, architecture, adaptation

Streszczenie: KADRY Z PRZESZŁOŚCI. ADAPTACJA ZABYTKOWEGO BUDYNKU DAWNEJ ZBROJOWNI NA CENTRUM WYSTAWIENNICZO-EDUKACYJNE MUZEUM FOTOGRAFII W KRAKOWIE.

Zarówno w Polsce, jak i w Europie istnieje wiele przykładów zestawienia zabytku z funkcją muzeum sztuki. Pomimo to praca przy historycznych obiektach jest nadal dużym wyzwaniem projektowym, wymagającym indywidualnego podejścia. Z jednej strony architekt ma za zadanie dostosować istniejący budynek do nowej funkcji, a z drugiej staje przed wyzwaniem zachowania walorów historycznych obiektu. Artykuł przedstawia przykład adaptacji budynku dawnej zbrojowni na muzeum fotografii, w którym pomimo stosunkowo dużej ingerencji w istniejącą strukturę udało się zachować charakter zabytku. Przeanalizowano działania projektowe, które pozwoliły na dostosowanie historycznego obiektu do nowej funkcji oraz dokonano oceny ich wpływu na zabytek. Artykuł zwraca również uwagę na relacje między zabytkową architekturą a prezentowanymi fotografiami.

Słowa kluczowe: muzeum, fotografia, architektura, adaptacja

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