Route of Modernism

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KATOWICE
for a change

Translated by Behlert & Behlert, Tłumaczenia i Konferencje

Printed on eco-friendly paper.

Mayor of Katowice's speech

Dear Sir or Madam,

It is with great pleasure that I present to the inhabitants of Katowice and visitors to our city a publication dedicated to the Route of Modernism. I hope that this short guide will inspire all of us to rediscover the modernist face of Katowice.

The industrial roots of the city determined its image for decades. For years we have been consistently working at the City Hall to disenchant the industrial stereotype and show Katowice as a modern, pro-ecological city, open to people and entrepreneur-friendly, which offers various ways of spending leisure time and developing passions. One of our unique resources is the urban development of the capital of Upper Silesia. Identifying its uniqueness solely with the Nikiszowiec housing estate would be an oversimplification, which is best evidenced by this publication.

The Katowice Route of Modernism is marked by a dozen or so objects that represent a new opening in the world architecture. The modern style focused primarily on minimalism and functionality, which worked well in the space of Katowice that was intensively developing before the Second World War. It was here that villas, public buildings, temples and skyscrapers began to appear, thanks to which Katowice was once called "Polish Chicago". On the Route, visitors can see, among others, works by such architects as Tadeusz Michejda, Karol Schayer or Zbigniew Rzepecki, whose imagination created the landscape of interwar Katowice.

Each object is described in a concise way, emphasizing the most important features of the building. All points on the Route of Modernism are located in the southern part of the City Center and there is a short distance between them that can be successfully covered on foot. To get to them, just follow the directions presented on the attached map.

I encourage you to take a walk along the road marked out by the modernist gems that other Polish cities may envy us. I am convinced that this is a fantastic opportunity to admire Katowice once again, in which - I hope - this brochure will help you.



Marcin Krupa
Mayor of Katowice City

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1 Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego

Mickiewicza 3

Banking modernism

Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego is one of the major Art Deco buildings located near Katowice's main market square. It was designed by Stanisław Tabeński in 1928 and completed two years later, as suggested by the year 1930 put on the tympana above the portals and within the triangular stained glass piece in the main hall. As Tabeński's design team had to fit the building into an unshapely small site, they divided the building into two sections – the broader north section and the narrower south section with the main entrance from ul. Mickiewicza. Both were connected in a cascade-like fashion with six shifts, the distinguishing feature of the building visible from the market square.

Geometry plays with decoration

The two main sections of the building are cuboids, and the six-storey elevation is dominated by angular bodies. However, a closer look at the somewhat cubist structure reveals many decorative elements, which impart the building with prestige due to the financial institution. A special role in this respect is played by the ground floor with the bossage making up a decorative socle. also notable are four-storey pilasters with capitals. The bands of glazing are vertical, and the ground floor of the south elevation has balcony windows with metal balustrades.

The main hall is dominated by marble intertwined with white stucco, but it also uses gilded and bronze details. Also note the square-plan pillars with capitals and geometrical lamps. The interior of the building was renovated in the 1990s, which restored the original decor of the first-floor conference hall.



2 Garrison Church

Skłodowskiej-Curie 20

Kościół Garnizonowy pw. św. Kazimierza Królewicza

The symmetrical triangle with the vertices set by: the Cathedral of Christ the King, the Neo-Gothic St. Peter and St. Paul Church and the Garrison Church in question, is one of the most characteristic elements of the southern part of Katowice's city centre. Located near another modernist gem, the 14-storey skyscraper on ul. Żwirki i Wigury, this unassuming temple fits neatly between the surrounding buildings. Anyone walking around will see just two walls of the Church, a condition that greatly limited architects' leeway. Their efforts focused on the elevation corner, where the two walls visible from Kopernika and Skłodowskiej-Curie streets meet. The Church is crowned with a 40-metre tower and a belfry with openings on top of it. The sounds from the belfry keep reminding Katowice inhabitants, who fervently run their errands, that this small building delivers religious services.

Ascetic body

The elevation of the Garrison Church is clearly modest and consistent with the adjacent buildings. The massive prisms that make up this temple include narrow crevasse-like windows, which tear apart the geometrical body of the Church. The building is an example of the first functionalist sacred venue in Poland. Its architects Leon Dietz d'Arm and Jerzy Zarzycki drew upon the European avant-garde architecture. The Church was delivered for the 23rd Infantry Division stationed in Katowice, and today, the parish belongs to the Deanery of the Air Forces of the Military Ordinariate of the Polish Army. The works on the site provided by the City of Katowice started on 22 June 1930. With a truly military pace of works, the temple was consecrated on 22 November 1931. This was the first of the major modernist buildings built in this part of the city (Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża, Żwirki i Wigury and Skłodowskiej-Curie streets).

Synthetic interior

The compact interior of the Church is also free from excess. It is furnished in the Art Deco style, as evidenced by the geometrical, functional and formally rigorous main stone altar and side altars, the balustrade and the baptismal bowl, as well as the original sculptures, benches and lamps. The culminating point of the presbytery is the linden sculpture of the crucified Jesus towering over the tabernacle in the centre of the altar. He appears to be a strong, upright and brave man with a proud and focused face. This depiction of Christ corresponds with the original military purpose of the Church; hence the various plaques commemorating soldiers and banners in the Church.



3 Skyscraper

Żwirki i Wigury 15/17

American dream

The dream of a modern city that throbs with life and is powered by industry has been reflected by many Katowice buildings. A good example is the skyscraper located on ul. Żwirki i Wigury, known as the Silesian Skyscraper. Upon its commissioning in 1935, after 5 years of construction works, the building was one of the highest buildings in Europe. It became one of the reasons why Katowice was dubbed the Polish Chicago. Tadeusz Kozłowski and Prof. Stefan Bryła, the building's lead designers, used the solution known from other skyscrapers of Katowice, namely the steel structure. The use of the steel framework allowed the designers to deliver 14 floors above the ground level and 3 underground levels.

Administrative culture

The building became a star even before the completion of construction works. In 1931, the nearby Rialto cinema theatre screened a film "Steel-structure construction: its principles and use," giving ample attention to the Katowice Skyscraper. It was featured, among others, on Katowice postcards. This unique address was available to a handful of residents. Some of them were famous people of cultural distinction, such as Gustaw Holoubek, Kalman Segal, Bolesław Lubosz and Kazimierz Kutz. Some apartments went to officials, who worked at the building's offices of the Inland Revenues, the Treasury, the Cadastral Agency, the Excise Duty and Monopoly Authority and the Stamp Duty Authority, as well as in the nearby Silesian Regional Authority. The original design provided 90 office rooms and over 50 residential apartments.

Example of functionalism

The skyscraper draws attention not only with its impressive size. The building was fitted with numerous amenities for residents and officials, including three lifts, a laundry, drying room, boiler room, transformer, vault and storehouses for the officials. The body of the building is composed of two modules: the slightly receded upper section (17 storeys, including three above the ground) and the lower one, accentuated on each side. The symmetrical structure with balconies with full balustrades impresses with its spectacular presence, ordered elements and architects' consistency with their fondness of geometry. The Silesian Skyscraper clearly towers over other buildings around, even the nearby Garrison Church.



4 Residential building

PCK 6

Eastern inspirations

By the time Karol Schayer agreed to design the house for the lawyer Wojciech Żytomirski, he was famous not only in the architectural scene. Before he started designing the building at PCK 6, Schayer had already delivered the modernist building for the Silesian Museum, which was demolished by Germans during WWII. In his design for Żytomirski, Schayer drew upon the work of his older colleague – the Russian Nikolai Ladovsky, a representative of rationalism that stressed architectural functionalism. The building permit was secured in April 1937.

Family luxuries

To call the apartments of this building 'comfortable' or 'convenient' would be an understatement. The abundance of space, with some of the apartments offering more than 200 m2, sunrooms, a unique staircase, glazed loggias, details that reveal the growing potential of industrial design, and the roof terrace are just some of the amenities for the residents.

Modernism at a glance

The most characteristic element of the geometrical body is the overhanging flat projection. Towering over the entrance, the glazed corner contains sunrooms, a solution typical of modernism. Talking about glazing, note that the windows form horizontal lines. The balconies and the terrace include openwork balustrades. Another interesting element is the building's entrance with the undercut ground floor and a cylindrical beam apparently supporting the projection above.



5

Residential building

PCK 10

Health with a political background

The unassuming street of Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża (PCK) is an important part of Katowice's modernist mosaic. One of its highlights is the corner building at the junction of PCK and Skłodowskiej-Curie streets, which is one of the best-preserved monuments to urban modernism. The building was commissioned in the year of the outbreak of WWII and was designed to play a twofold role. First, it was meant to provide housing to the family of the physician Kazimierz Wędlikowski, its owner, and, secondly, a part of the building was meant for a women's clinic. However, these plans were affected by the brutal realities of war. During the occupation, the building was inhabited mostly by prominent German figures, and in the Polish People's Republic – important party members. The house was given back to the owners – the Wędlikowski family – as late as 1989. The descendants of the director of the Gynaecology and Obstetrics Ward of the Hospital in Katowice have been administrators of the house to this day.

Zebra in the city centre

With the quarter-circular link between the two side walls with cylindrical windows, the building is often referred to as 'the soft corner'. This is one of the most typical modernist solutions on the elevation. Because of its dark rows of windows contrasting with light layers of balconies, Katowice inhabitants also call the building 'a zebra'. Visitors are also impressed by the four small, half-round balconies with full balustrades on the side of ul. Skłodowskiej-Curie. Few inhabitants realize the building also has a rooftop terrace overseeing one of the most beautiful parts of Katowice.

Modernism inside

The interior of this five-storey house is full of typically modernist solutions. The building administrators allow visitors to enter the staircase during the working hours of the institutions that have their offices in the building. There, you can see metal balustrades with wooden handrails, the originally fitted Sowitsch lift, floor terrazzo, original wall lining, mailboxes and the modernist details, such as doorbells.



6 Villa

Kilińskiego 32

Home, sweet home

Located at the heart of Katowice's modernist neighbourhood, the villa was designed by Jerzy Ebner and Teodor Merill, architects of Zjednoczone Przedsiębiorstwa Budowlane Sp. z o.o. in Mysłowice, who also designed the town-planning layout of the settlement and nearly all of its buildings. The building was constructed between 1925 and 1927, and its first residents were the Zieliński family, specifically the parents of the minister Tadeusz Zieliński. Over the years, the building changed its owners and was split into three apartments. In 1983, however, it regained its single-apartment status. To this day, the villa has retained its original decor, including the windows, doors and parquets. Since 2016, the building has housed the offices of Fundacja Dom Modernisty, and is presently co-owned by the founder of this organisation – Wojciech Siegmund. It is worth noting the uncomplicated body covered with a high pitched roof with numerous dormer windows. The side walls of this and other villas around are topped with decorative apexes.

One step short of modernism

Just as other houses of this type around Zajączka and Kilińskiego streets, the villa is a specimen of pre-modernism. It alludes to the classicist form and shows simple, geometrical decorations. It points to the evolution of modernism, a style that has changed across time. In its early stage, architects employed elements known in former styles; however, modernists became more and more rigorous and broke with other architectural époques to stress functionalism stripped of any excess and décor.

A family nest in a modern fashion

The architects responsible for this concept focused on the optimum use of the space available to the residents. The ground floor provided the show-piece part, and the first floor offered a private area (four bedrooms and a bathroom). The building also included a basement and an attic used for utility purposes. The entrance area was designed as a two-storey hall with access to a toilet, kitchen, office and two spacious living rooms. The two latter rooms were divided with a sliding door, making it possible to create a single living room on a whim. From the rooms, residents could go right into an arcade (capped by a balcony) and then into the garden.



7 Villa of the Deputy Regional Governor Z. Żurawski

Kilińskiego 46

House of the Deputy Regional Governor

The villa at Kilińskiego 46 is yet another example of Tadeusz Michejda's talent. Curiously enough, the well-known architect designed three houses next to each other, including a peculiar villa for his own family and a villa for his brother Dr Władysław Michejda. Between these two, the architect delivered a house for Deputy Regional Governor Zygmunt Żurawski. Importantly, thanks to Żurawski, who was the Regional Governor until 1931, Marshal Konstanty Wolny and Regional Governor Antoni Schultis, one of Katowice's major examples of modernist architecture, the Silesian Parliament, was built. The modernist house of the Deputy Regional Governor was erected in 1929-1930. Presently, it houses the offices of a consulting company.

Towards functionalism

The villa designed for Żurawski is an excellent example of the evolution of modernist architecture. The building is marked by an elaborate body with variable height. Its individual sections are crowned with panel cornices, which make up flat roofs with terraces. The overall design also shows that Michejda gradually freed himself of the influence of conservative architecture and headed towards functionalism and nautical architectural forms. Most pronounced are the following structural elements: the high hip roof, semi-round projections and a porthole window on the front elevation. The panel cornices along with external windowsills and the lintels above the windows stress horizontal lines, which contrast with the vertically oriented windows. You can also notice rhombic shapes on the balustrades of balconies and attic windows.



8

T. Michejda's private villa

Poniatowskiego 19

Family house

When Tadeusz Michejda applied for a construction permit in 1926, he was unmarried and had no children, but he wanted to design a space where he would like to live with his loved ones. The spacious house at the corner of Poniatowskiego and Kilińskiego streets points to the uniqueness of Tadeusz Michejda. The architect, a social activist, Silesian insurgent, painter, official and founder of the Silesian Architects' Association, later on the Association of Polish Architects, is sometimes called "the father of the modernist Katowice." His architectural career was interrupted by the war, which forced his family to leave the region of Upper Silesia. The house he designed for himself has two apartments – one with a design studio for the architect himself and the other – for rent. The design also envisaged the option of converting the roof into a garden. The building was built between 1926 and 1930.

Artist's manifesto

The building is one of few places in Katowice to allude to the Polish decorative art associated with the Decorative Art Show in Paris in 1925. It has an almost symmetrical body end expressionist decorations, which can be interpreted as the effect of Michlejda's fascination with formism. It is an example of the Polish Art Deco style in Katowice. The most prominent feature of the building is its north elevation, with its front entrance. This wall is marked by three centrally aligned recesses divided by archivolt pillars. The central part has a wooden door, crowned with a triangular top and a vertical band of windows. On either side of this band are symmetrically aligned windows. This part of the elevation has no other windows. It has two reliefs evocative of artistic and architectural work. The other part of the house shows decorations in the form of projections. The five-storey building (one storey is located underground) has a superstructure covered with a flat roof and is surrounded by a low wall.



9 E. Kaźmierczak's villa

Bratków 4

Steel structure on a small scale

What makes this villa unique is its steel structure, also used for Katowice skyscrapers. With skyscrapers, the solution made it possible to deliver high buildings within narrow sites, but to use this technology for a residential house was expensive. For that reason, it was rarely used in this way. No wonder there is just one more house of this kind in Katowice. Both houses are located on ul. Bratków and were designed by Tadeusz Michejda. The one commissioned by the lawyer Edmund Kaźmierczak now houses a restaurant. Originally, this was a residential house used by the lawyer's family and showed a typically patriarchal distribution of space: an office, living rooms, the housewife area, and the section with bedrooms, children's rooms and a kitchen.

Rebirth of French models

In his design, Michejda drew upon the solutions put forth by Le Corbusier, a French-Swiss architect born in the late 19th century. Some of the solutions that reflect this inspiration are the undercut corners and the interior designed regardless of the structure. Other features characteristic of this house are: the invisible structure, windows aligned in a band-like fashion and the small semi-circular balcony with a steel balustrade on the front elevation. Note the round window on the west elevation that breaks with the overall idea of the project. It is interesting that the roof was designed as the second terrace – the first one is on the first-floor level and is partially roofed. The building also includes a garage.

Following WWII, the significance of this building diminished. The residential use was gradually ousted by business use. The house gradually became dilapidated. Early in the 21st century, the villa, except for the garage, was thoroughly renovated. Luckily, the renovation drew upon the original design, and so its current form largely reflects MIchejda's ideas.



10

Residential house

Podchorążych 3

Katowice – the city of gardens

Compared with other modernist buildings in Katowice, the house at Podchorążych 3 stands out with its spectacular projection in the corner of the building, which contains sunrooms. What was the inspiration behind this solution? Experts provide multiple interpretations. First of all, the projection was inspired by the streamlined form of transatlantic ships. Secondly, bringing the garden idea under the residential roof blurs the distinction between the interior and the exterior, which was one of the modernist design goals. Thirdly, sunrooms are an advantage of the house that distinguishes it from other buildings, addressing the growing needs of the then affluent class of city dwellers. Their high demands are reflected in the design of other houses, too. These apartments were divided in two sections – the official one (including the living room, offices and the dining room) and the utility section, including kitchen, bedrooms, children's rooms and rooms for the servants).

Comfort within a standard package

The modernist houses offered their residents not only a consistent appearance but also a number of functional solutions to make daily life easier, including running water, gas, electricity, balconies and lifts. The mentioned sunrooms were available on this scale only to the residents of this house, but other houses of the time also offered high standards. The construction permit for the building at Podchorążych 3 was granted in 1936, and the building was designed by Filip Brenner, who also designed buildings in other parts of Katowice. The first owners were Łucja and Dawid Felix.

The body of the building is of varied height, and the said projection plays a dominant role in the overall design concept. What contributes to this impression is the corner positioning of the building, which further helps to highlight the glazed, rounded corner of the building, overlooking, among others, the Cathedral of Christ the King. The large, horizontally aligned windows increase the amount of light inside the building.



11

Polish Radio Katowice

Ligonia 29

Halo, tu Polskie Radio

The Katowice branch of Polish Radio was established in 1927. It was one of the first radio stations in Poland, as well as being a very important one. It also covered a large part of the German part of Upper Silesia and allowed the Poles living there to enjoy Polish culture and language. Initially, the radio was based at the intersection of Mielęckiego and Warszawska streets, but a new building was planned several years later.

The construction, in accordance with Tadeusz Łobos's design, selected in a prestigious competition, began in autumn 1936 and took less than a year to complete. Ceremoniously opened on 10 August 1937, the newly delivered venue at the time was the most advanced piece of architecture in Europe and the first to be designed in Poland for a radio station. The building had four recording studios, including one concert studio capable of hosting a symphonic orchestra, technical rooms with broadcasting equipment, and editorial offices. Some of the original radio equipment has been preserved to this day and is exhibited in the attic.

The most characteristic feature of the corner building is the extensive vertical glazing of the staircase and the flat swathe of the front elevation, as if cutting the entire body in two. Perpendicular to the staircase and over the windows of the first floor above the ground stretches a horizontal cornice, which provides an extension to the entrance roof. Following WWII, another storey was constructed on top of the wing of the building from Królowej Jadwigi Street, disturbing the original proportion of the building. On the 85th anniversary of Polish Radio Katowice and the 75th anniversary of the commissioning of the building, in 2012, conservation works were carried out to restore the former lustre of the venue. The neon "Polskie Radio Katowice" was mounted on the building then, which alludes to the original sign demolished during the occupation. On that occasion, the Stanisław Ligoń bench was also put in front of the building – a monument to the great writer, cultural activist and director of the Katowice radio station in the 1930s.



12

Gmach Urzędów Niezespolonych

Plac Sejmu Śląskiego 1

Officials, Nazis, communists and students

With the growing administrative needs of the city and the region, Katowice needed increasingly more office space. The new building was designed in the immediate vicinity of other important administrative buildings, adding to its status. The building was designed by Witold Kłębkowski, and the construction was carried out between 1935 and 1937. Upon its completion, the building came to house such administrative offices of: the Silesian Regional Authority, Demobilization Commissioner and the State Inspection Agency. The giant played its role for a long time since, upon the outbreak of WWII, it was renamed as the Gestapo Offices and a detention facility. Following the war, Communist party dignitaries and MO officers moved into the building and, as late as 1990, the building was transferred to the University of Silesia, and its Philological Faculty has since been based there.

Simplicity speaking

On the west side, the horizontal body adjoins Plac Sejmu Śląskiego. Wojciech Korfanty, with his back turned to the building in question, keeps a watchful eye on the square. As opposed to the building of the Regional Office in front of it, Gmach Urzędów Niezespolonych has a simple form. The ascetic elevation provides space for the equally aligned six rows of windows. The original design added some variety to the elevation with a relief of the Piast Eagle and fluting made by Stanisław Szukalski. The impressive decorative element, using over 30 tons of stone, lasted only until the occupation. The Nazis covered it with a swastika flag and then demolished it and replaced it with a carillon. The long cuboid with a flat roof and ribbon windows is yet another good example of functionalism in Katowice. The elevation of the building is made mostly of sandstone, giving the building its light colour. The contrastive lower band is intensely black due to the use of basalt. This play of colours is especially visible when you enter the building with the centrally positioned, massive door mounted within a rounded recess. Upon entry, the visitor will note the typically modernist railing..



13

Silesian Regional Authority and Silesian Parliament

Jagiellońska 25

Symbol of Silesian autonomy

In 1922, part of the region of Upper Silesia was incorporated into the Republic of Poland. The region gained extensive autonomy and was granted a separate legislative body, namely the Silesian Parliament, and the Silesian Treasury. This came with the need for a new building to accommodate both institutions. The new venue of the regional authorities and the Silesian Parliament not only needed to be functional, but also to emphasise the significance of the matters settled and proceedings taking place in the building, and the fact it belonged to Poland. Because of the latter, the design competition was open exclusively to Polish architects. The jury selected a group of three Kraków designers: Kazimierz Wyczyński, Stefan Żeleński and Piotr Jurkiewicz, but Kazimierz Wyczyński died of a heart attack soon after the results were announced and Ludwik Wojtyczko was invited to join the team. The construction works officially started in 1924 and came to an end in 1929. The official opening was graced with the presence of President Ignacy Mościcki. Katowice now owned Poland's largest administrative venue. However, some of the last finishing touches were carried out as late as 1932.

Play with Neoclassicism

On the outside, the style of the building differs from other modernist buildings. Clearly visible are Neoclassic references as well as numerous elements pointing to the national and regional identity. The upper part of the elevation boasts a frieze with the initials RP (the Republic of Poland) and a relief representing 12 regional cities guarded by sculpted eagles. The building was designed on a quadrilateral plan with a centrally located semi-circular parliamentary hall. The corners of the figure were additionally stressed with projections and decorative pilasters. In combination with tympana, the latter were also used above the north and south entrances, where they make up entry porticos. The venue is composed of six storeys and is built mostly of brick partly coated with sandstone.

Six kilometres of corridors

The size of the venue is highlighted by the fact that it consists of over 600 rooms, ranging from small offices to impressive spacious halls, connected by six kilometres of corridors. While navigating the corridors, you can use a unique paternoster elevator, which travels at a fixed speed and does not stop on individual floors. Anyone using the main entrance to enter the building from Plac Sejmu Śląskiego will first see a spacious vestibule covered by a dome.



14 Residential house

Dąbrowskiego 24

Simplicity yields uniqueness

The building of the Silesian Museum on ul. Dąbrowskiego was meant to be the largest modernist piece designed by Karol Schayer. The building was completed in 1939, but the designer's joy at the completion did not last long. In 1941, the occupiers demolished the Museum as "a monument to the Jewish and Polish haughtiness." Schayer's talent is evidenced to this day by other modernist buildings he designed, one of them being the tenement house located next to the no-longer-existing building of the Silesian Museum. The building designed for Augustyn Łabuś and Karol Łabuś is located at the intersection of Reymonta and Dąbrowskiego streets. The construction permit was granted in September 1936. The house stands out from Katowice's other buildings of the same kind and owes its originality to the simple architectural solutions.

Life is like a sine wave

The building has a compact cube-like body dominated by a clear horizontal division. From the perspective of ul. Reymonta, you can see the overhanging projection, a vertical detail that breaks the dominance of horizontal bands of glazing. Also note the impressive balconies. The wide and deeply receded balconies provide the dwellers with rest and leisure space next to their bedrooms. The ground floor is withdrawn compared to the other floors, which is stressed with the undercut ground floor and the corner pillar. The latter appears to support the floors above it. Note the interesting elevation line visible from ul. Dąbrowskiego. It is shaped as a sine wave, smoothly shifting from the street-level elevation into the deep loggias. This characteristically bent line of the building corresponds with the arch-shaped band of glazing.



15

Residential building

Wojewódzka 23

Quality housing

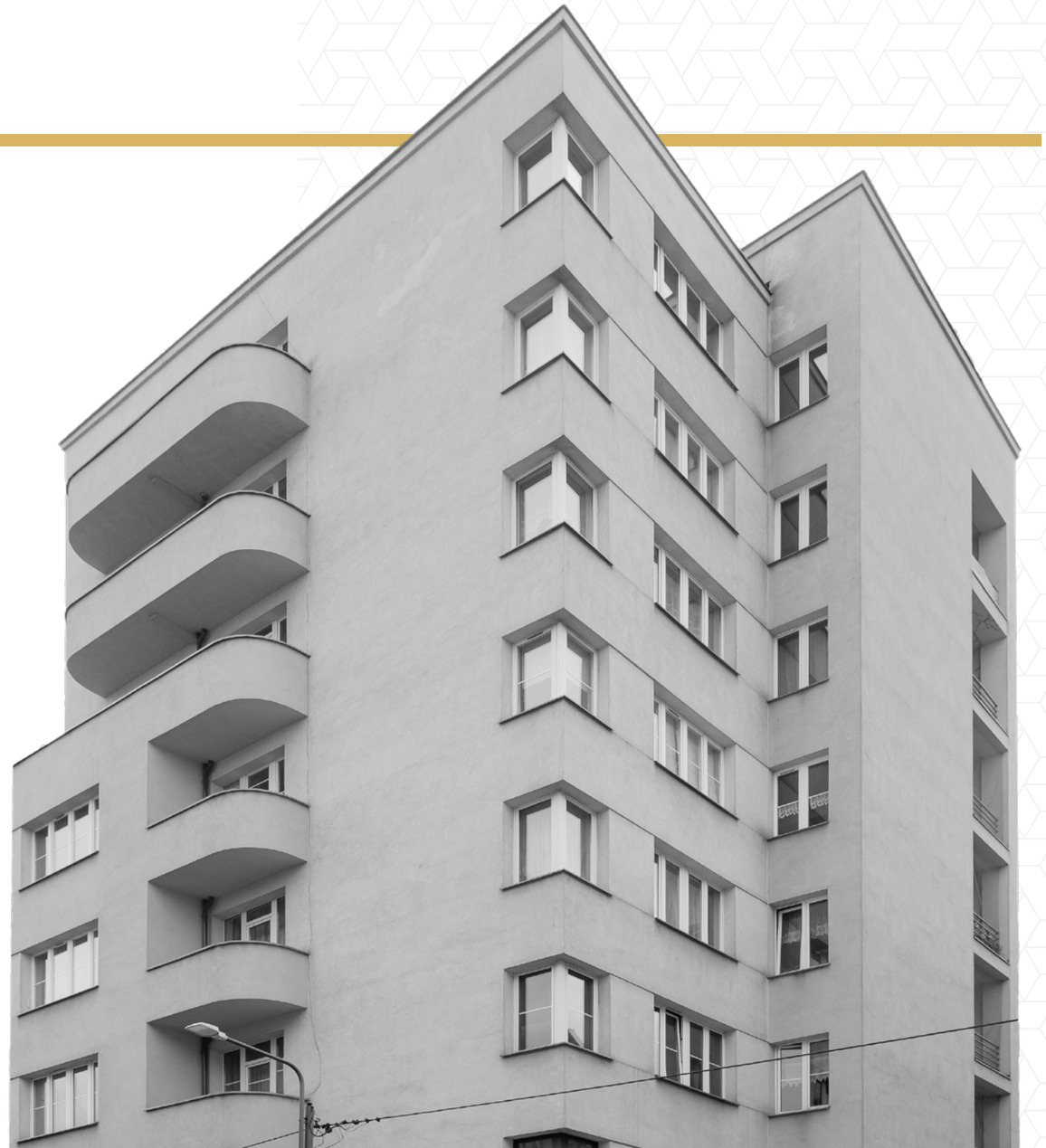
Running along the northbound railway, ul. Wojewódzka once became the debut site for the engineers behind the Katowice skyscrapers. Today, the 8 storeys of the building at Wojewódzka 23 might not impress many, but at the time it was designed it boasted impressive parameters. The building used a steel structure, which made it possible to build a high building on a small site and make efficient use of the plot. Aware that these solutions had proved successful across the ocean (in 1913, Woolworth Building in New York reached 241 metres and 57 storeys), Polish designers were more and more willing to use this technology.

A high building at a fast pace

The construction works were more than efficient. In 1929, Eustachy Chmielewski presented the concept, and the steel framework of the building was ready in the first half of 1930, with the building itself being commissioned in 1931. The apartments inside were provided to officials and professors of the Silesian Technical School, one of the major secondary education schools in Katowice. The residential and business use of the building was envisaged for the ground floor, prepared for a café, but the original plans were somewhat changed and a grain and commodities market was organised on the ground floor. Shopping and business outlets have been located there to this day.

High modernism

Some of the skyscraper features that correspond with the modernist style are: the elevated and glazed ground floor, the windows, both corner windows and vertically oriented rectangular windows, and the characteristic fashionable, rounded balconies. Even a less attentive observer will easily notice that the asymmetrical body is divided into three sections – two side 5-storey sections and the central 8-storey section.



16

Dom Oświatowy

Francuska 12

Bumpy road towards books

We don't know what the reading statistics were in Poland during the inter-war period. However, we do know that on 3 May 1923, the People's Libraries Society conducted a fund-raising campaign at its branches across Poland. The record-breaking amount raised in Upper Silesia helped the Society buy a plot in Katowice's city centre. In October 1927, the Silesian Parliament earmarked PLN 250,000 to build Dom Oświatowy (Educational House) for the People's Libraries Society. The construction took a few years, and the building was designed by Józef Rybicki and Stanisław Tabeński. The design was partially delivered by 1930, when the building was commissioned in its raw state as the investors lacked funds for the finishing works. The matters gathered traction when the building was bought by the Silesian Regional Authority for almost half a million Polish zloties. The building was commissioned in 1934.

Temple of reading and more

Despite construction complications, the original use of the building was kept. In line with the original idea, the venue became a place promoting the reading of books and magazines. It contained a lending library, a reading room and a book collection. After the working hours of the library, the rooms were made available for other purposes. For example, the charity ball of the People's Libraries Society was held in the main hall of Dom Oświatowy. The reading spirit remains present to this day – the building now includes, among others, the Educational House of the Silesian Library.

Reading modernism

Let's start with what's visible outside. This is yet another building along the Modernist Architecture Trail with the corner – at the junction of Katowice's two major streets, Francuska and Wojewódzka – that is the most striking element. The symmetrical composition of the body encompasses three cuboids, with the middle one slightly higher than the others and having its soaring look stressed by pilaster strips and three rows of vertical windows on each elevation. Inside the building, the visitors are greeted by equally aligned pillars, supporting the central body that divides two lower cuboids. Small decorations point to the supremacy of functionalism of architecture at the time. Upon entry, you will see a spacious hall and a triple staircase, and then there is a two-storey hall decorated with faux-marble lining, metal wall lamps and geometrical chandeliers, typical of modernism.



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Residential and business building

Dworcowa 13

Building shrouded in mystery

Its prestigious location and daring body made the building at Dworcowa 13 one of the most widely recognized examples of urban modernism. The two lower floors of the building, first owned by the engineer Jan Squeder, used to house the fashionable Café Scala. Above the café was the residential section. The building has retained its mixed shopping and business use to this day, and has a store on the ground floor and a coffee bar club on the first floor. The construction permit was issued in 1932, but the venue was commissioned in 1937. The reasons for the construction delays and the name of the building's designer remain unknown.

Modernist architecture sneaks into the market square

More is known about the building itself. It has a reinforced-concrete structure, and the walls converging at the corner of św. Jana and Dworcowa streets are not symmetrical. The cube-like body of the building is encircled by windows aligned in rows. The south wall has loggias with balustrade panels protruding outwards, located above the large windows that dominate the elevation on the first floor. You can see similar glazing on the undercut ground floor, which was emphasised with a dark colour during renovation. The highest floor has a large, mostly roofed terrace. The structure clearly reveals the designer's attempt to fulfil the principles of modern architecture set by Le Corbusier. The art historian Dr Waldemar Odorowski, the author of publications on Katowice's modernist architecture, said that "all parts of the building's elevation divisions are composed with full harmony and abstract order."



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