

MERGING FUNCTIONALISM AND ECLECTISM

The modern movement of the 1920s–1930s is in Latvia better known as functionalism. It has left remarkable architectural monuments throughout the country, but most of them are to be found in the capital city Riga. The first functionalist buildings in Riga were built in 1927–1928, only a few years after the earliest monuments of that style in Europe. It was the most characteristic style of the period, but its Latvian developments were far more pluralistic than in its purist MoMo counterparts in Europe—several buildings display traces of historicism or art deco, such as the rather popular trend of erecting lantern towers on top of public buildings. In the 1930s the modern movement developed in a more traditional direction, canonical features of the style merging with architectural details taken from the vocabulary of previous historical styles, such as cornice profiles and other elements of classical orders. The language of classical forms was considered appropriate to express ideas of local or national identity and a kind of neo-eclecticism leaning towards monumental and heavily classic architecture (sometimes also called monumentalism or authoritarian architecture) became especially popular in the late 1930s with the dictatorial regimes of Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, etc., but in Latvia, where President Ulmanis established a 'soft' authoritarian regime (1934–1940), architecture followed, all in all, the time's global trend where neo-eclecticism was merely one of the country's frequent spells of historicism.

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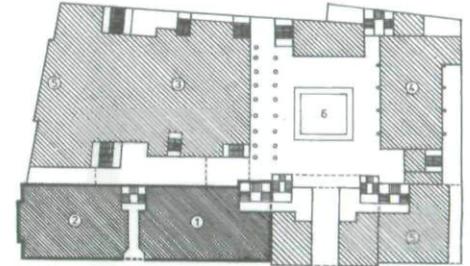
People's House

Rigaa

1929

ALFRED KARR (1886–?)

AND KURT BAETGE (1888–?)



The People's House is the first stage of a large multi-functional project that included offices, a theater, sports and meeting halls, shops, restaurants, etc. Architect R. Weber from Dresden won the international competition, but the local office of the Baltic

German architects Alfred Karr and Kurt Baetge was finally commissioned for the construction works.

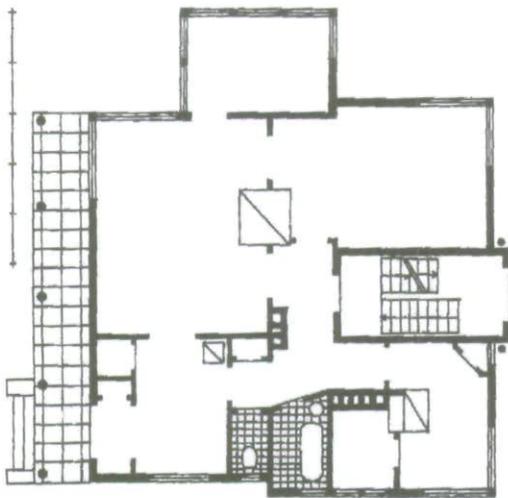
Their practice was the most successful in promoting the modern movement in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s.

The expressionist architecture of the building also reflects art deco influences. A tower, which was a popular motif in the period's European architecture, caps the building.

In 1934, after President Ulmanis's coup, the building was occupied by Aizsargi (National Guards), but in the Soviet time it housed the Trade Unions House. Today the building accommodates different offices and retail outlets.



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Two-Family House in Garden City

Riga

1931

HARALDS KUNDZINSH

(1898–1981)

This two-family house is located in a small street of the first Latvian 'garden city,' originally established as *Kaiserwald* in 1901 and later renamed

Mežaparks (Wood Park). The neighborhood was built in several stages, including the 1920s–1930s period. The building's modest architecture reflects the classic Nordic leanings which were so characteristic of the Baltic countries after World War I. A portico leads to two separate flats, one on each floor, and gives the main façade a monumental appearance.

The typology of detached houses is typical of those years in Riga, where the construction works were carried out with the slogan: "Build for Yourself and One Extra Family!" After World War II architect Haralds Kundzinsh went into exile and worked in Canada.



Post Office

Vestiena

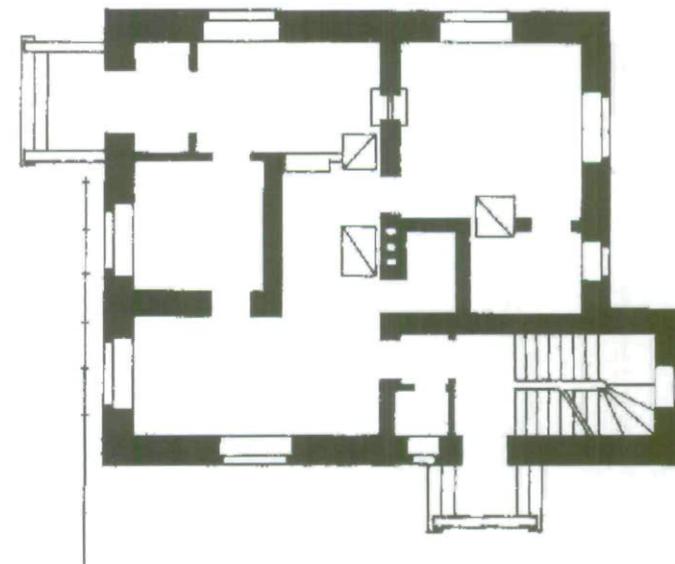
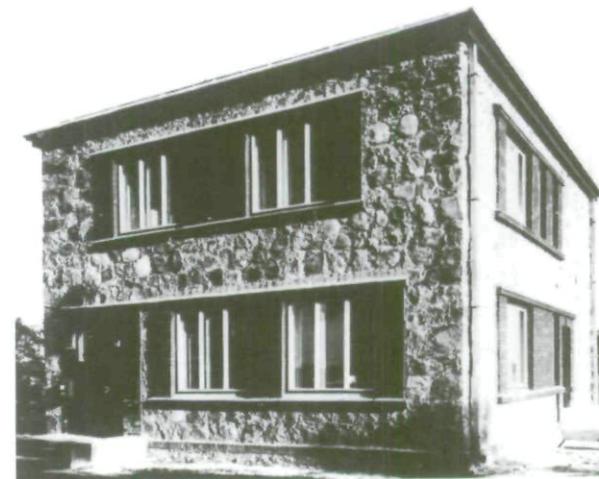
1934

DĀVIDS ZARINSH

(1892–1980)

Many small governmental and municipal buildings were built in the Latvian countryside during the 1920s and 1930s. Most layouts were based on the typology of past eclecticism, but some had a more contemporary and modern design, such as this small post office in the minor commune of Vestiena, far from the capital Riga.

This part of Latvia is rich in natural stone and granite boulders used by the traditional builders ever since the Middle Ages. Rigan architect Davids Zarinsh felt encouraged by the local context to take advantage of a material as magnificent as granite for an otherwise purely functionalist building. Sadly, the architect was deported by the Soviet regime to Siberia after World War II.



Vienības Nams (Unity House)

Daugavpils

1936-1937

VERNERS VITANDS

(1903-1982)

This multi-functional building, built in the 1930s, was the first of its kind in Latvia: it included a theater, a swimming pool, a hotel, conference rooms, a department store, a restaurant and offices. The building's monumental architecture reflects neo-eclectic inspirations. The main entrance's portico opens the building towards the central square of Latvia's second largest town. Nevertheless, the other façades of the building, which occupies the whole block, show more of the streamline style so characteristic of functionalism. The building was damaged during World War II, but it was restored and is still in use. The architect, Verners Vitands, went into exile after the World War II and worked in West Germany.



Former Court Palace

Riga

1936-1938

FRIDRIHS

SKUJINSH

(1890-1957)

This monumental building is a typical example of the late 1930s

neo-eclecticism. The general intention was to create an eye-catching and impressive new landmark in the city center's cityscape. As far as possible, local building materials of high quality were used for the external and internal finishing. Only the granite for the entrance portico's Doric columns was imported from Sweden. The architect, Fridrihs Skujinsh, left Latvia for Germany in 1939 and after World War II voluntarily chose the Soviet Zone where he worked on the design of the USSR Embassy in Berlin. In the late 1950s Soviet architect Vladimir Schnitnikof (from Moscow) added an eastern wing to the Court Palace, which fully retains the building's previous 1930s monumentalism. After World War II the building was used by the Council of Ministers. Today it houses the Latvian Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Cabinet of Ministers.



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