

Urbanc House

Trubarjeva 1

0 km
127 C2
D4

Alternative name:

Centromerkur

Year of plan and completion:

1902-1903

Designer:

Fredrich Sigmundt

Contractor:

Faleschini & Schuppler

Investor:

Felix Urbanc

Building type:

department store

Source:

ZAL, Reg I, sv. XVI/2, f. 1511

The department store of Felix Urbanc was erected in 1903, as the date on the façade states, at the beginning of Trubarjeva ulica, on the site of a former three storey suburban house severely damaged in the earthquake. The new building was set back from the edge of the building lot, away from the building line of the old suburban street which mainly consisted of low, for the most part two-storey houses. Together with Mayer's house (5 Prešernov trg) standing opposite, it formed a new entrance to Trubarjeva ulica, whose suburban appearance now only begins with the former Hotel Lloyd (7 Trubarjeva ulica). At the same time it also marked the entrance to Miklošičeva cesta, whose southern part was reconstructed at the beginning of



the century. With the main façade, barely 5.5 m wide and turned towards Prešernov trg, Urbanc's house forms one face of the square, which was unified after the earthquake in terms of style and height by the adaptation of the old and the building of new bourgeois housing. Thus, a new urban space was created after the earthquake at the former suburban intersection, which nevertheless retained its original traffic function at the border between the old medieval town and the newly developing suburbs; at the same time, it also gained new importance with the new buildings, or, as Fabiani noted "in many regards, it became the centre of the city".¹

Urbanc's house was the first department store in Ljubljana. The spatial concept, that of a shop as a unified sales space linked with the surrounding sales gallery in the mezzanine by a monumental staircase, is reminiscent of contemporary department stores in Paris, Vienna, Graz or Budapest. The Urbanc department store is supposedly modelled directly on a particular shop in Budapest.² Such a concept is also echoed on the façade of the building, in which two bands of equally large windows are separated only with a narrow façade course. The design of the staircase, the elegant lines of its wooden handrails, terminated below with two wooden female busts, the design of the gallery railings, the stucco decoration, and the furniture are stylistically



reminiscent of distant Belgian examples of Art Nouveau rather than the nearby Austrian Secession architecture. There is nothing odd in this, since it is known³ that Budapest, mainly for national-political reasons, often preferred to adopt French and Belgian models, thus avoiding the influence of rival Vienna.

The groundplan of the building is conceived as an irregular pentagon. It faces the square with a narrow single-axis façade, which softens the otherwise sharp angle between Miklošičeva and Trubarjeva streets. The remaining two wings bordering the two streets run parallel to them. The courtyard was originally covered with a roof of glass and wrought iron. A vehicle access led to it along the edge of the wing by Trubarjeva, while the pedestrian access to the courtyard was through a beautifully designed Secession door in the wing by Miklošičeva.

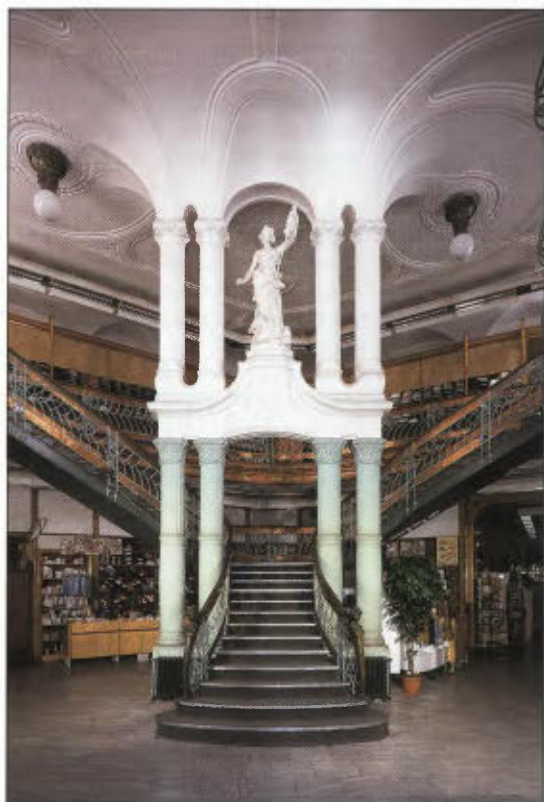
The main sales space is located centrally on the corner between the two streets and consequently has the form of an irregular, but axially symmetrical pentagon. The area is dominated by the staircase,

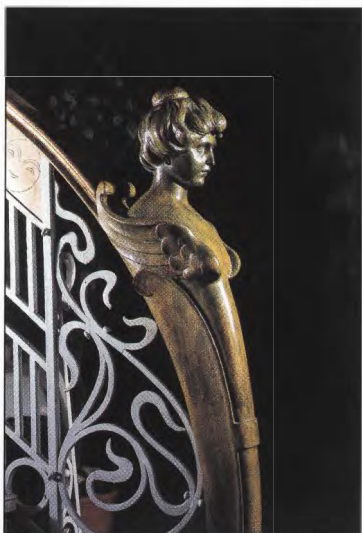


located directly in the axis of the main entrance. It begins with a wide landing, curved on both sides, and then climbs to a central landing more or less halfway between the ground-floor and the mezzanine, where it divides into two flights which then curve in sharp bends to either end of the gallery. The staircase is placed between two pairs of columns, laid in two superimposed rows, which support the ceiling; a female statue, the personification of trade, is set on the arch separating the lower and upper rows.

The building has been considerably rebuilt and radically altered in the interior (the courtyard overbuilt, stairs moved, partitions between departments removed, etc). Only the central hall of the store, with the original furniture, lights, even two original etched glass panes and the monumental staircase, has been more or less preserved, but unfortunately, the effect of the Secessionist interior is lost through the entirely inappropriate sales programme.

Urbanc's house is one of Ljubljana's Art Nouveau *Gesamtkunstwerks* of the highest quality. The exterior of the building is horizontally divided into two parts. The lower, shopping part, is articulated with two horizontal bands of windows joined in a unified composition, and separated from the upper, originally residential, floors, by a simple flat moulding. The two upper storeys are linked on the





façade with pilasters reaching from the moulding on the lower part of the building to the cornice. Powerfully projecting eaves are supported by metal brackets. The lower part of the façade is rusticated, and the upper part plastered. Secession plant decoration bunches towards the top of the building and is concentrated mainly on the pilasters from the third floor to the cornice. Particularly decorated are the window sills on the second and third floors. The main single-axis façade facing the square is accentuated with a portal which extends through the ground-floor and mezzanine. On the second and third floors above it, there is a single tripartite window on each, and on the top, there is an attic surmounted by a neo-Baroque statue of Mercury, god of trade and protector of traders. The portal is emphasised by two protruding pillars of rectangular section, tapering upwards in elegant curves. Being detached from the façade, they are linked with it by narrow, wrought-iron grille. The pillars support two wrought-iron brackets of vegetal form, which carry a semi-circular canopy in the shape of fan-like open petals made of glass and wrought iron. The canopy, in the purest Secession style, has no match in Ljubljana. It is essentially similar to the design of the canopy above the entrance to the City Savings Bank on Čopova ulica, but the latter cannot compete with it in quality.

Literature:

D. Prelovšek: Urbančeva hiša in njen arhitekt, *Sinteza* 1977/38-40, pp. 112-116;
 isti, Ljubljanska arhitektura Hribarjevega časa, *Grafenauerjev zbornik*, Ljubljana, 1996, pp. 579-650;
 N. Šumi, *Arhitektura secesijske dobe v Ljubljani*, Ljubljana, 1954;
 B. Rovšnik, Stilni razvoj ornameta na fasadah v Sloveniji od 1895 do prve svetovne vojne, *ZUZ*, n. v., 16, 1980, pp. 25-50.

¹ M. Fabiani, *Regulacija deželnega stolnega mesta Ljubljane*, Vienna, 1899.

² The design of the interior is a copy of a Budapest shop according to the testimony of a descendant of the owner. D. Prelovšek, *Urbančeva hiša in njen arhitekt*, *Sinteza*, 1977, 38-40, pp. 112-116.

³ D. Prelovšek, *Urbančeva hiša in njen arhitekt*, *Sinteza*, 1977, 38-40, pp. 112-116.