

## THE FACES OF THE LUXURIOUS TREND IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF INTERWAR ŁÓDŹ

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### Abstract

In case of interwar Łódź, the nomination of the city to the rank of the province centre (1920) was of no small importance to the size and quality of the formation of the housing space. The growing number of high ranking officials, solicitors (county court), doctors (local Health Service), officers (the Military Garrison), culture animator artists and intellectualists were searching for apartments worthy of their social prestige. Along with the increase of affluence came new preferences and a rise in demand for higher living standards. To meet these requirements, a new offer of luxurious apartments in prominent tenements, located not only at or near the important Piotrkowska Street was put forward. The most stylistically splendid buildings (representing a high class modernism), being a match for the European realizations, even in such respects as basic furnishings and living quarters structure (apartments, underground garages) were erected near such streets as G.Narutowicza, Gdańska and Świętokrzyska. The factors which stimulated the increase of building and the activity of individual investors of the interwar Łódź were (similar to other large Polish cities): credit politics, deeds, building and tax regulations. The reminiscences of the interwar housing architecture development in Łódź are positively received even today. This is due to the high quality of housing of that time, which makes the tenants feel comfortable. Regardless of the style variety and the importance of these buildings in creating the spatial structure of interwar Łódź, even today they are important elements and links supporting the urban character and should be subject to special protection.

### Streszczenie

W przypadku Łodzi okresu międzywojennego, nie bez znaczenia dla rozmiarów i jakości procesu kształtowania wielkomiejskiej przestrzeni mieszkalnej był fakt nominowania miasta w 1920 roku do godności ośrodka wojewódzkiego. Powiększająca się rzesza wyższych urzędników państwowych i miejskich, adwokatów (Okręgowy Sąd), lekarzy (Okręgowa Kasa Chorych), oficerów (Garnizon Wojskowy), animatorów kultury i intelektualistów poszukiwała mieszkań godnych ich prestiżu społecznego. Wraz ze wzrostem zamożności zmieniały się upodobania i rosły wymagania dotyczące rangi miejsca zamieszkania. Naprzeciw tym oczekiwaniom wychodziła coraz bogatsza oferta wykwintnych lokali mieszkalnych w luksusowych kamienicach czy domach czynszowych, lokalizowanych nie tylko przy tradycyjnie najważniejszej ulicy Piotrkowskiej. Te najlepsze stylistycznie, dorównujące realizacjom europejskim (wysokiej klasy modernizm), również pod względem standardu wyposażenia i struktury lokali mieszkalnych (apartamenty, podziemne garaże) zostały wzniesione w rejonie ulic G. Narutowicza, Gdańskiej czy Świętokrzyskiej. Czynnikiem stymulującym natężenie ruchu budowlanego i aktywność inwestorów indywidualnych w międzywojennej Łodzi były (podobnie jak w innych wielkich miastach kraju): polityka kredytowa, akty prawne oraz przepisy budowlane i podatkowe. Reminiscencje międzywojennego rozwoju architektury mieszkaniowej w Łodzi są po dzień dzisiejszy odbierane pozytywnie. Zawdzięczamy to wysokiej jakości wykreowanych wówczas przestrzeni mieszkalnych, w których ludzie czują się nadal znakomicie. Niezależnie od różnorodności stylistycznej i wartości znaczeniowej tych obiektów we współtworzeniu struktury przestrzeni międzywojennej Łodzi, stanowią one po dzień dzisiejszy ważne elementy i ogniwa podtrzymujące wielkomiejski charakter i winny podlegać szczególnej ochronie.

Keywords: Housing; Modernism; Luxurious trend; Interwar Łódź.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the observation of the contemporary achievements in the field of shaping the urban housing of

Łódź of the IIIrd Republic and the economic situation of the real estate market, it is possible to put forward a hypothesis that the example set by the architects – the interwar modernists, is still beyond reach. This

applies to both the group of buildings erected in the context of the European Housing Reform movement (*Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*) as well as to the line of less or more exquisite flats built in the spirit of the widely known modernism of the 1930's, beginning with the "rational", going through the "elegant", and ending with the "luxurious".

In case of Łódź of the II<sup>nd</sup> Republic, the nomination of the city to the rank of the province centre (1920) was of no small importance to the size and quality of the formation of the housing space. The growing number of high ranking officials, solicitors (county court), doctors (local Health Service), officers (the Military Garrison), culture animator artists and intellectualists were searching for apartments worthy of their social prestige. Along with the increase of affluence came new preferences and a rise in demand for higher living standards. To meet these requirements, a new offer of luxurious apartments in prominent tenement buildings or villas, located not only at or near the important Piotrkowska Street, was put forward. The current state of research shows that during the interwar period the aforementioned tenements had been constructed by hundreds (the urban area of Łódź, at that time, had 58,75 km<sup>2</sup>) [1]. And how many were constructed along the border zone? Over a half of these buildings is an excellent example of this architectural trend, conventionally named "the luxurious trend" by *Tadeusz Jaroszewski*, the trend, which was the subject of study during the meeting of *The Society of The History Art* in Niedzica in 1988 [2]. The fact that Łódź had avoided the horrors of war which devastated the material and spatial heritage of the capital is a great asset to any discussion about the aforementioned trend. The editorial limitations prevent the author from shedding light on the whole problem, with its complex conditionings, circumstances and achievements in the area of shaping the urban space and housing in Łódź of the II<sup>nd</sup> Republic. They only allow to indicate, based on the examples of certain architectural accomplishments, interwar modernism typical of Łódź, the issue of the paradigm of luxury in the housing of the period.

## 2. THE LUXURIOUS TREND VERSUS SPACE IMPORTANCE

### 2.1. Conditionings and circumstances

The factors which stimulated the increase of building and the activity of individual investors of the interwar

Łódź were (similar to other large Polish cities): credit politics, deeds, building and tax regulations. Although The Tenant Rights Protection Act proved to be an inhibitor, The 1927 Foreign Currency Export Prohibition Act set in motion a drive for investing in property. This occurrence, after the interim collapse connected with the world economic crisis of 1927-1932, intensified thanks to the 1933 act which introduced a tax relief for housing investors. These two acts had a very positive influence on the quality of housing construction.

The most stylistically splendid buildings, representing a high class modernism, being a match for the European realizations, even in such respects as basic furnishings and living quarters structure (apartments, elevators, winter gardens, underground garages) were erected near such streets as G. Narutowicza, Gdańska, Świętokrzyska, Brzeźna – Radwańska, T. Kościuszko Avenue and the southern part of the most important Łódź street – The Piotrkowska Street. These buildings were entirely luxurious in the light of the definition set by *Tadeusz Jaroszewski*: "I see the luxurious architecture as solid, of very high construction quality, characterized by careful attention to every detail, provided with the latest technical equipment capable of simplifying everyday activities and providing the user with the highest comfort possible" [3]. According to the author however, it included one more and most important feature in the evaluation of every architectural creation – the aspect of the luxury which stems from the importance and uniqueness of location.

The spirit of this place is especially present in urban housing situated near parks, squares, intersections or main city streets. Unique examples can be found in the area surrounding parks such as S. Staszica (G. Narutowicza, Wierzbowa, S. Jaracza, Uniwersytecka Streets), J. Matejki (G. Narutowicza, J. Matejki Streets), H. Sienkiewicza (H. Sienkiewicza, J. Kilińskiego, J. Tuwima Streets) and the Komuna Paryska Square.

### 2.2. The paradigm of the location – the vicinity of parks

The largest concentration of the modernist housing, characteristic of the luxurious trend of the interwar Łódź, is located next to the streets adjacent to the Park of S. Staszic. Among them, a tenement-house at S. Jaracza 82 Street (access from Cegielniana Street) is of special interest in respect of structure and spatial form. It was erected between 1934 and 1935 on the

grounds of two properties, on the northern frontage of the street, opposite the main park alley, in accordance with the project made by *Abraham Markusfeld*, on the commission of his father architect *Wulf Markusfeld*. It consists of the part surrounding the front courtyard, with an east yard wing and the part next to the street constructed in the shape of a rectangle with a round ryalite staircase from the yard side. A thoroughfare hall was placed at the junction. The front yard was separated from the street by an openwork fence on brick foundation with a centrally situated gate. Entrances to the staircase are accessible from the courtyard – the main on an axis with a passage to the yard and a side entrance situated at the joint of the central part and the extensions. The staircase next to the street is accessible from the thoroughfare hall. This enormous, cellared, four storey tenement with a partly usable attic contains 39 apartments and two shops. The horizontal nature of these facades was emphasized by principal and hood-molding cornices a design of openwork balcony and terrace railing made of horizontal steel rods, and most of all, two – coloured stucco, bright under the windows and dark between the windows and the attic. The gate and the main entrance was emphasized with half columns (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.**  
Tenement-house – 82 S. Jaracza Street, The S. Staszic Park side view (photo by the author, 2006)

Proceeding with the inspection of the phenomenon of locating the interwar period housing in the vicinity of city parks let us move to the Radio Station area, generally accepted as being a hot spot during the interwar period. In the vicinity of the aforementioned S. Staszic Park, in the eastern section of the G. Narutowicza Street, in proximity to the new

J. Matejko Park (previously the “Industrial Garden”), created in the French fashion, a number of buildings, typical of the luxurious trend, were erected in the 1930s. (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.**  
Urban houses near The J. Matejko Park area (photo by W. Stępień, 2003)

Among the above – mentioned constructions, opposite the park, we can find a four storey cellared front house (without the outbuilding) with a partly usable attic, erected between 1937 and 1939 in accordance with *Paweł Lewy's* design. Initially, the planned development which was owned by *Jakub Prusicki* and *Józef Bender* was located on a deep rectangular lot stretching between 93a G. Narutowicza and A. Zelwerowicza streets (access from Mostowa Street). After a second division of the property into a part adjacent to the A. Zelwerowicza Street, which was also built over, the inner yard was turned into a garden. The construction and layout structure was innovatory at the time. An elevator shaft with a small lift was situated in the front part of the staircase and in the area of the protruding, large shaped ryalite, the central yard part and two skylights. The outer front bays, above the ground floor, have oriel windows. There are three apartments on every floor. The smallest were constructed in the middle of the yard bay, on the attic level, where a laundry was established. Part of the building was constructed using reinforced concrete ceiling slabs made of “Alpha” type breezeblocks on beams as well as concrete step slabs covered with marble, landings with a marble – terracotta floor mosaic and Swedish type windows. The front door were set in a modernistic portal made of white sandstone with a bas – relief depicting the Three Muses – the Music, Poetry and Dance. The facade



**Figure 3.**  
Urban house – 93a G. Narutowicza Street, street view  
(photo by the author, 2006)

was covered with hammered sandstone slabs in the ground floor area, plastered with precious quartz imitating polished sandstone slabs. The yard side was covered with white sandstone coloured clinker tiles (as well as in the area of filled balustrade and long loggia) (Fig. 3).

At the same time, between 1937 and 1939, construction was simultaneously taking place at a neighbouring property at 93 G. Narutowicza Street, which resulted in creating one of the best modernist tenements in Łódź. It is a one storey, cellared, frontage house without attic but with a vehicular hall, leading to the southern garden, with a partly underground garage and an observation deck on the top which was originally the property of *Józef Nirenberg* built according to the design of the distinguished partnership of *Jerzy Berliner* and *Mieczysław Łęczycki*. It is a building of both a high functional standard and an innovative construction structure. The inner part, constructed in the form of reinforced concrete (“free plan”), rests on reinforced concrete feet and continuous footings. The ventilated attic ceiling was set on the reinforced concrete slab. The main entrance, gate, transom windows, staircase window, skylight, window boxes and balustrades shielding the lower part of the quadripartite windows were made of steel. The lower staircase floor is made of marble, the upper of multicoloured lastrico. The roof is concealed behind the attic wall with metop slabs and a cornice. The facade was covered with hammered sandstone slabs in the pedestal area, and with polished sandstone slabs in the upper area (Fig. 4).

One of the most well – known interwar period housing designers in Łódź was *Radosław Hans*. He was the



**Figure 4.**  
Urban house – 93 G. Narutowicza Street, street view  
(photo by the author, 2006)

creator of both tenements and detached houses as well as urban villas representative of various modernist trends, beginning with the rational, going through the elegant and ending with the one which interests us the most, the luxurious. This last group includes the tenement at 42 H. Sienkiewicza Street, which neighbours the aforementioned Komuna Paryska Square and the H. Sienkiewicz Park. The tenement was constructed for *Henryk Richter*. The design of the building came into being in 1935, in 1936 the architect *Radosław Hans*, designed the enclosure and in 1938 he made plans for a garage which was situated under the terrace. Originally, it was only an apartment building but today there is a kindergarten located on the ground floor, in the corner area. At first there were two apartments on each floor which were later divided into smaller ones, using the service entrances. The building is located on the eastern frontage of the street, on a trapezoid shaped allotment neighbouring the park on the eastern and southern sides. Along the southern border, behind the stone openwork bay wall, there is a driveway leading to a garage located under the balcony which neighbours a small garden. The two row view, set on a C letter shaped plan, consists of the front building, which is located parallel to the park, and two shorter extensions – one by the street, the other by the garden. In the middle part of the front of the building there is the entrance area with two adjoining staircases – the elegant and the service one. The structure of this high standard building is diversified. In the area of the main staircase, from the inner yard side, there is an elevator shaft. A staff toilet as well as a waste chute are located near the service staircase (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5.**  
Tenement-house – 42 H. Sienkiewicza Street, The H. Sienkiewicza Park side view (photo by the author, 2006)



**Figure 6.**  
Tenement-house – 74 Gdańska Street, street view (photo by the author, 2006)

### 2.3. The paradigm of the location – the main street frontages

The creators of large tenements, constructed in a different part of Łódź, next to one of the main streets – The Gdańska Street, used a technique similar to the one used in the building described first (74 S. Jaracza Street), the manoeuvre of changing the front area into stair shapes which lessened noise, allowed proper sunlight and ventilation.

In 1932 *Juda Salomonowicz*, owner of *The Stockings Factory* at 57 Gdańska Street, applied for the approval of a design for a four storey, cellared, with a partly usable attic tenement at Gdańska 74 Street. In July 1933, the front building, constructed by the company of *Herman Kalisz*, was put into service. In 1934 construction started on northern and back outbuilding. The architect of the tenement, which included 42 more or less elegant apartments and a large shop, was *Jerzy Rozenberg*. The unique front building facade tectonics with a round driveway, “terrace – yard” over the ground floor and storey galleries surrounding the elevations merits special attention. In relation to shaping housing, the fact of a functional construction and the room spaciousness, which amounts to 3.30 m in height, must be noticed. The large bathtubs set in ceilings for the comfort of the guests are worth mentioning (Fig. 6).

Apparently, the aforementioned tenement was profitable enough, that between 1936 and 1938 the owner, *Juda Salomonowicz* had constructed another tenement house, at the junction of Gdańska and Zielona Streets. It was built over an area previously designed for the *R. Kellers*, and later *E. Eiserts* factory, on the grounds of two properties (55 Gdańska and

25 Zielona Streets). The construction started according to the permission which was granted in May 1936. The original design planned a three or four storey building with two front and back risalites. In June 1936 the project designer, *Paweł Lewy* created a new project, which planned a unified height four storey building, with a single risalite in the back. In 1938, there was a small change made to the central part of the frontal elevation. The revised design was signed by *Henryk Lewinson*. This “luxurious” corner tenement, containing 38 elegant apartments and 3 shops, with a frontyard from the Zielona Street side, numerous, multi – axis bays set on a sector, Venice and porte fenetre type windows, with facades originally plastered with a quartz stucco imitating red sandstone slabs, was lately (with a loss to its exceptional architectural design) insulated in “Dryvit” system (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7.**  
Corner tenement-house – 55 Gdańska / 25 Zielona Street, intersection side view (photo by the author, 2006)

#### 2.4. The paradigm of the manner of situating – The Komuna Paryska Square

In a strange set of coincidences, two equally well architecturally accomplished buildings designed by one company, *Jerzy Berliner* and *Mieczysław Łęczycki*, and with the help of *Paweł Lewy*, neighbour each other (similar to the G. Narutowicza Street) in a different part of Łódź, located near H. Sienkiewicz Park, in the vicinity of the Komuna Paryska Square. It is a luxurious urban villa erected between 1937 and 1938 in accordance with the design of the aforementioned company for a Łódź lawyer *Mieczysław Neufeld* at 2 Świętokrzyska Street, as well as an equally luxurious, separated by a garden, urban tenement constructed between 1937 and 1939 for *Jakub Lando* at 3 Świętokrzyska Street, designed by *Paweł Lewy*. This method of locating, transversely to the north pointing frontage of the square, resulting from dili-

gence to ensure a suitable (luxurious) sun exposure, ventilation, soundproofing and immersing the buildings in greenery, demands special attention (Fig. 8).

The one storey, cellared villa with a partly usable attic, designed by *Jerzy Berliner* and *Mieczysław Łęczycki* is such an unique building that it deserves a separate study. It is a high quality model of a luxurious urban villa development of the end of the 1930s, which can easily rival the best modernist works of this type created in Europe. Despite the afterwar change of the function (kindergarten), it used to be and still is perfect in every aspect (location: square covered with greenery and the vicinity of a park; programme – function and construction structure: a skeletal bearing structure with circular pillars; the architectural form and detail: reinforced concrete small, wavy shaped entrance roof; the selection of building mate-



Figure 8.  
The Komuna Paryska Square, aerial picture (photo by W. Stępień, 2005)



**Figure 9.**  
Urban villa – 2 Świętokrzyska Street, garden side view  
(photo by the author, 2006)

materials: glass hollow block walls, sandstone siding; the construction, furnishing and equipment quality) which makes restoring the original splendor easy (Fig. 9).

Similarly, a neighbouring six storey, cellared urban tenement contains all signs of the paradigm of luxury in the modern architecture of the described period, beginning with the importance of location through the unique shape of the building and apartments and ending with important utility elements such as the underground garage. It is worth mentioning that the solid construction of this laborious building (the inner skeletal bearing, Swedish type windows, stucco, etc.) is owed to a construction company owned by the architect *Stanisław Kowalski* (Fig. 10).

### 3. CONCLUSION

The reminiscences of the interwar housing architecture development in Łódź are positively received even today. This is due to the high quality of housing of that time which makes the tenants feel comfortable. Regardless of the stylistical variety and the importance of these buildings in creating the spatial structure of Łódź of the II<sup>nd</sup> Republic, even today, they are an important element and link supporting the urban character, and should be put under special protection so that the paradigm of luxury, which is contained inside, inspires the contemporary investors and designers of the still lasting modernism era.



**Figure 10.**  
Urban house – 3 Świętokrzyska Street, driveway side view  
(photo by the author, 2006)

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