

THE LUXURY TREND IN THE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE OF WARSAW TENEMENT HOUSES

Jadwiga ROGUSKA*

* Faculty of Architecture, Warsaw University of Technology, Koszykowa 55, 00-659 Warszawa, Poland

E-mail address: j.roguska@wp.pl

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Abstract

This paper sketches the underlying legal and financial structure of the luxury trend that surfaced in the housing architecture of Polish modernism developing in the 1930s. An analysis of examples from the architecture of Warsaw, the luxury trend in multi-family houses has been characterized on levels of: construction and functional solutions, contour of form and façade, application of finishing materials. In respect of placement, locations in prestigious city areas have been identified and location types classified. The relation of the period's novel application of skeleton constructions to adapting the formal features of the "international style" and Le Corbusier's "five principles of modern architecture" as well as the importance of modern construction and the principles of functionalism in designing comfortably arranged accommodation have been followed through. Characteristic material and aesthetic solutions have been presented. The paper presents opinions and ideological views of leading Warsaw architects in respect of the luxury trend in housing of the interwar years.

Streszczenie

Opracowanie wskazuje podstawy prawne i finansowe rozwoju nurtu luksusowego mieszkalnictwa w architekturze polskiego modernizmu w latach trzydziestych XX wieku. W wyniku analizy zgromadzonych przykładów z architektury warszawskiej, nurt luksusowy domów wielorodzinnych scharakteryzowany został na poziomie: rozwiązań konstrukcyjnych i funkcjonalnych, kształtowania brył i elewacji, zastosowań materiałów wykończeniowych. W zakresie usytuowań wydobyte zostały lokalizacje w prestiżowych rejonach miasta i sklasyfikowane typy usytuowań. Prześlędony został wpływ nowatorskiego wtedy zastosowania mieszkaniowej architektury szkieletowej konstrukcji na adaptację cech formalnych „stylu międzynarodowego” i „pięciu zasad architektury nowoczesnej” Le Corbusiera oraz znaczenie nowoczesnej konstrukcji i zasad funkcjonalizmu dla projektowania komfortowych układów mieszkań. Uwzględnione zostały charakterystyczne rozwiązania materiałowo-estetyczne. Artykuł przedstawia poglądy i postawy ideowe czołowych architektów warszawskich wobec nurtu luksusowego w mieszkalnictwie międzywojennym.

Keywords: Luxury housing architecture; 1930s; Analyses of architectonic design solutions; Evaluation of creative attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modernist architecture, after a purist phase of geometric functionalism in the 1920s and a period of involvement in tackling social problems with cheap housing on a mass scale, entered in the 1930s into a phase of searches for more refined formal and aesthetic solutions rendered possible by the increasingly widespread availability of modern technical and technological means, such as steel or reinforced concrete constructions. This movement, named the "international style" or sometimes "soft functionalism" [1],

respective to the aspects considered, was also described in Polish literature as "the luxury trend", a term introduced by *Tadeusz S. Jaroszewski* [2]. This term is particularly suited to the instances when "international style" tendencies were adapted to contemporary housing architecture addressed to wealthier users, built at considerable cost and usually for profit, with no consideration for the social implications of modernism.

As the economic crisis developed at the turn of the 1920s and 30s, and as the state withdrew from social

solidarity and support for community housing, strong differences appeared in the expectations vis à vis accommodation and how to fulfil them. In the architecture of Warsaw, starting with the thirties, there was a favourable climate to realize individualized needs. This became evident, among others, in the architecture of residential villas and the renaissance of city-centre tenements, reinterpreted in a modern way.

In Poland, particularly significant in drawing considerable capital to tenement house construction projects, and generating luxury versions of these, was the Law of 24 March, 1933 on tax rebates for private and legal persons, lowering taxable income by expenditures on new houses and allowing non-regulated rent therein. In Warsaw this brought about substantial investments, which rose to a peak in the years 1935-1938.

2. URBAN AND ARCHITECTONIC SOLUTIONS, INVESTORS AND ARCHITECTS

Higher than average outlays in this housing sector concerned every level of the investment, starting with location (expensive plots in attractive and prestigious central city areas), to end with outfitting and costly architectural detail.

2.1. Locations of luxury tenements and situational-spatial solutions

It is possible to distinguish three types of central locations. There were frequent “infills” among older buildings, on deep plots that had been divided in the 19th century. With the replacement of urban tissue modern tenements grew along the city’s main street, Marszałkowska, and in its vicinity. An example of this type of situation is the house at Marszałkowska 18 (1935-36), designed by *Lucjan Korngold* for *Oskar Robinson*, representing an industrial company from Nakło. The building was taken over before it was completed by the Association of Pensioners of the National Economic Bank. The grand location was complemented by the opulent and costly façade overlaid with sandstone (Fig. 1), and alabaster gateway and staircase. Masters of the “infill” were Jerzy Gelbard and Roman Sigalin, who operated as a design partnership. They elevated to perfection the elegant town house modelled on a skeleton construction. They built several of such for steel wholesaler *J. Glass*, with facades patterned on Parisian models, featuring many-sided, glazed bay windows and artful-

ly laid stone facing tiles (Fig. 2). Bay windows which augmented the proportions and light access were specially effective and striking way of adapting buildings to difficult central localizations in dense urban areas, where it was sometimes difficult to avoid the cramped yards that modernism spurned so much and side-wings that had light only on one side.

Other types of locations of luxury tenements were enclaves of new dense development, grouping several houses raised on new plots, sometimes fairly deep, within an urban block bordered by streets, or shallower, along a new and usually short street, often a cul-de-sac, quiet and exclusive. The type of block location is represented for instance by the architecture on *Wiejska*, *Frascati*, *Konopnickiej* and *Prusa* streets, in the neighbourhood of the *Seym*. A trapeziform area was sectioned into fairly irregular lots, excepting the corner ones – quite deep, where the acute and obtuse angles were accommodated by application of regular and flexible cage construction in steel or reinforced concrete. The block comprised of streetside houses, sometimes with added side wings, or houses designed on a T-shaped plan (Fig. 3). Prestigious plots cut from the gardens of the *Frascati* palace brought together moneyed companies and industrial managers, agencies of financial institutions and eminent designers – functionalists, usually experienced in utilizing centimetres of space to the very last.

Quoting the addresses, titles and names I want to bring into focus the extraordinary economic and social status of the investors, and professional one of the designers of these modernist buildings with overhanging first floors, rows of glazing, rooftop terraces and stone facings, that framed the streets with their elegant and modern looks. An exemplar frontage is the facades on the east side of *Wiejska* street (Fig. 4). At what is now number 12 on this street, in the years 1936-1938 was built the new house of *Józef Handzelewicz* (building ceramics, *Grudziądz*). Next door, at number 14, in 1935-38 *Wacław Weker* built a steel-contruction house for *Marian Dziatkiewicz* (cellulose and paper industry, *Bydgoszcz*). Successively, at number 16 the investor was *Oskar Robinson* and designer *Lucjan Korngold* (1936-37). The house at number 18 was designed in reinforced concrete by *Zdzisław Mączyński* and built in the years 1936-37 for the company “*Espewe*” (arms exports). This row of modern façades was concluded by the building of the *Riunione Adriatica di Securita* insurance company at number 20 (now gone), designed by *Edward Eber* and also built 1936-37.



Figure 1.
Warsaw, tenement house at Marszałkowska 18 (L. Korngold, 1935-1936) – west side – façade



Figure 4.
Warsaw, houses at Wiejska street no.: 14 (W. Weker 1935-1938), 16 (L. Korngold 1936-1937), 18 (Z. Mączyński, 1936-1937) – west façades



Figure 2.
Warsaw, tenement house at Konopnickiej 3 (J. Gelbard, R. Sigalin, 1936-1937) – stone overlay on façade



Figure 5.
Warsaw, tenement house at Konopnickiej 5 (B. Pniewski, 1936-1938) – east side – façade

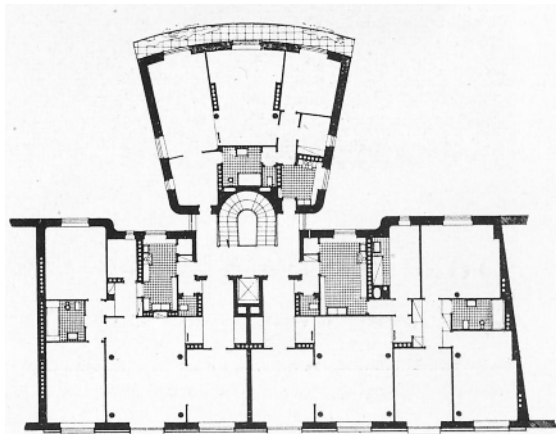


Figure 3.
Warsaw, tenement house at Konopnickiej 5 (B. Pniewski, 1936-1938), floor plan, according to the magazine Architektura i Budownictwo 8/1938



Figure 6.
Warsaw, tenement house at Puławska 20 (Z. Plater-Zyberk, 1938) – east and south façades

In the same block, at 1 Konopnicka street, on the corner of Frascati, in 1936-37 the building of the Pension Fund of the National Economic Bank was raised, in accordance with the design by *Bohdan Lachert* and *Józef Szanajca*, with pillars at the ground floor and a spacious roof-top terrace. At the same time next door, at Konopnickiej 3 the building of the Steinhagen company grew, Stenger (cellulose and paper) under the design by the partnership *J. Gelbard, R. Sigalin*. A reinforced concrete building designed by *Bohdan Pniewski* for *Franciszek Nowicki* at Konopnickiej 5 (1936-38) arouses admiration for the exquisite use of fine materials (different types of sandstone and different finishings, marbles, teak and oak, wrought metal). Its facade became a very personal interpretation of classic ideals, given by the designer in the language of 20th century modernism in a way that brought associations with a renaissance palazzo and contemporary, modernist Italian rationalism (Fig. 5).

Another group of luxury tenements was situated in part of the block at Puławska street, between Madalińskiego and Narbutta, in the district of Mokotów but not far from Central Warsaw. Most of the houses in this enclave are works of *Juliusz Żórawski*, who designed for “E. Wedel” confectioners at Puławska 28 (1935-36) and for the “Granat” Association (armaments) at Puławska 24, 24a and 24b (1936-37). Buildings raised in a skeleton or semi-skeleton construction have columns exposed against a panel wall at the ground floor, or, as in the example of the Wedel building, openings between columns giving a view of the green courtyard onto the street. Almost all have facades lined with facing stones, arranged expressively to highlight the fine material. Buildings designed by *J. Żórawski* exhibited the architect’s exceptional attention to form and, in this focus, his search for modern solutions. This frontage complements a double tenement at 26-26a to a design by *Z. Mączyński* (1937-1938) and no. 20 – to a design endorsed in 1938 by *Zygmunt Plater-Zyberk* for the Wielopolski family from Chroberz. This was a building with exposed construction columns on lower floors and a panel wall wrapped around a rounded corner (Fig. 6)

The type of location on compact plots along a cul-de-sac demarcated on an area reserved for development is best represented by the street-facing and wing-less buildings in Aleja Przyjaciół, raised almost simultaneously in 1937 on the site of the garden of the Sobański palace that had been parcelled out a year earlier. Again, the social and economic status of the

purchasers of these plots was directly related to the upmarket neighbourhood of the exclusive Aleje Ujazdowskie. The corner plot at Koszykowa 10/Aleja Przyjaciół 2 was bought by the abovementioned *Oskar Robinson*. This time, an extravagant house built according to a design by *L. Korngold* was not sold but remained in the hands of the investor. The neighbouring plot, number 4, was bought by *Gustaw Wertheim*, director of “Pocisk” company (armaments). On plots number 6 (the owner – Dora Fuchs – confectionery) and 8 (*Janusz Regulski* – director of the power company “Siła i Światło”) two houses grew designed by the *J. Gelbard, R. Sigalin* partnership, where the halls were inlaid in alabaster, with taste and no indication of any consideration for cost.

On the odd-number side of Aleja Przyjaciół, ownership of plots 1 and 9 was claimed by the Wellisch family, who participated in the boards of many companies in the steel and armaments industry. Plots number 3 and 5 were purchased by the “Ciechanów” sugar mill. For this investor, *J. Żórawski* designed a well-known house at Aleja Przyjaciół 3, of a steel construction (Fig. 7, 8), raised off the ground and placed on columns, with the curtain wall of the facade glazed with horizontal bands of windows and finished with sandstone tiles, and with the top storey pushed far back to create a terrace. A softly-curving roof over the lift shaft confirms the architect’s sensitivity to original form. This tenement house has been considered a prime example of a brilliant interpretation of the five principles of modern architecture codified by *Le Corbusier* (raised above the ground on columns, free plan, free facade, horizontal strips of windows, a roof terrace for recreation on top of the house) and it would have had its mirror-image on the neighbouring plot, if the sugar manufacturers had kept to their intentions. Plot number 5 was re-sold to the construction company “Rozbudowa”, and a more modest and less original house was raised there, after a design by *Aleksander Więckowski*. The investor on the next plot, number 7, was the Pharmaceutical and Chemical company, formerly Magister Klawe. The new architecture of Aleja Przyjaciół, with the unified height of four storeys, was different in all its components but created a harmonious whole. Not without irony, it was judged that had it been built in the West it would have attracted pilgrimages of Polish architects. [3]

Another corner of Central Warsaw, Jaworzyńska street, was picturesquely parcelled up along curves (to make more plots) on a post-industrial site, with mind to the perspective of the capital’s future forum

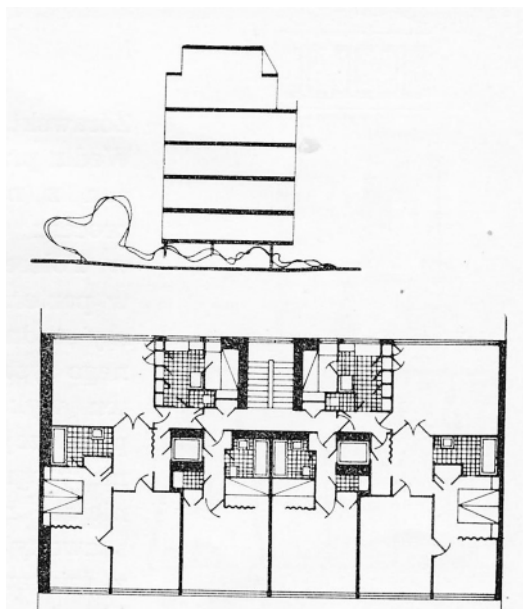


Figure 7.
Warsaw, tenement house at Aleja Przyjaciół 3 (J. Żórawski, 1937) – floor plan and section. According to the magazine *Architektura i Budownictwo* 8/1938



Figure 8.
Warsaw, houses at Aleja Przyjaciół: 3 (J. Żórawski, 1937), 5 (A. Więckowski, 1937), 7 (unknown, 1937), 9 (W. Moszkowski, 1937) – south sides – façades

on Mokotowskie fields. Eleven houses were built on the cramped plots, designed on irregular plans that were possible to organize with the application of skeleton constructions. Among the investors there was the Warsaw Association of the Cardboard Industry, which raised the buildings at numbers 9 and 11 (1937) and representatives of freelancing professions, to mention lawyer *Gustaw Szerer*, who owned the double house at no.15/17 (1937) and dr *M. Stamiński*, investor of house no.6 (1937-38) acclaimed for the functional values of its adaptable plan and Le Corbusieran aesthetics of its facade (Fig. 9, 10). The cited buildings, drafted by *Helena* and *Szymon Syrkus*,

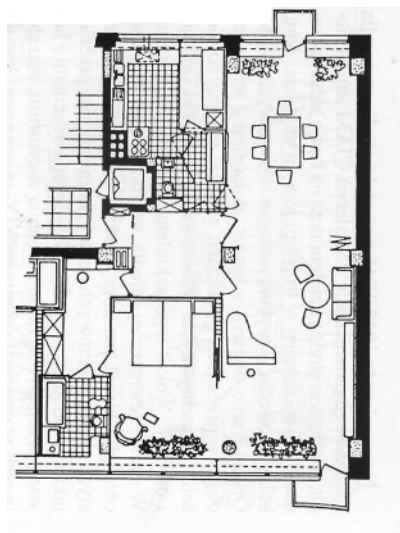


Figure 9.
Warsaw, tenement house at Jaworzyńska 6 (H. and S. Syrkus, 1937-1938) – part of floor plan. According to H. Syrkus, *Ku idei osiedla społecznego... o.c. (Towards the idea of a social estate...o.c.)*



Figure 10.
Warsaw, tenement house at Jaworzyńska 6 (H. and S. Syrkus, 1937-1938) – south side – façade

represent a high quality of design solutions. These fine points, rather than used relatively modest materials, determine that the houses at Jaworzyńska street are ranked as representative of the luxurious trend.

The quiet and elegant architecture of streetside houses stripped of side wings, with columns and open spaces at the ground level and terraces on the top floor, is represented by another new street in the neighbourhood of Mokotowskie fields: Oleandrów. Investing in the majority of the buildings there was the trading company “Gokkes”, designer by *Stanisław Wojciechowski* (1937). Modern street-facing town houses, without wings, were also built along

Smulikowskiego street which ran at the foot of the Warsaw Escarpment. Several of those were authored by *J. Gelbard*, *R. Sigalin* and *B. Pniowski*. The luxury qualities are moderately in evidence. An area which had barely raised itself from squalor did not attract richest investors. From here it was also farther to the city centre and the high institutions where the inhabitants of luxury homes worked and operated.

Unquestionably luxurious town houses were built on the edge of the Escarpment, with a view a River Vistula and not far from the Royal Route, along the curves of *Bartoszewicza*, *Konopczyńskiego* and *Sewerynow* street. Tall, seven-stored buildings were topped by Warsaw's first luxury apartment skyscraper, in reinforced concrete, at *Sewerynow* 4, under *Ludwik Paradista's* (1936-38) design. Among the designers in this enclave there are acknowledged names such as *L. Korngold*, *J. Żórawski*, *Z. Plater-Zyberk*, *J. Gelbard* and *R. Sigalin*. Thus, one of the attributes of luxury was location and a first-rate designer.

2.2. The progress of the skeleton construction in housing and its impact on issues of function and form

Skeleton, steel or iron concrete construction had key significance for the designing of luxury tenement houses. In Poland, before World War II, this was an expensive solution in comparison to traditional brickwork, based on cheap labour. The skeleton construction enabled design solutions that raised comfort of usage and aesthetic pleasure. It increased freedom related shaping form and plan, best positioning of living areas in respect of the compass and increasing light admission even among densely-placed buildings. It freed space from the restrictions of massive construction walls, enabling an uncomplicated, flexible and adaptable floor arrangement (free plan). It took buildings off the ground, placing them on columns, introducing passages and gaps, opening out courtyards arranged as oases of green, improving air circulation and the climate of an urban environment. The skeleton construction allowed top storeys to be retracted, making room on the flat roof for a garden, to create a place of rest, relaxation and enjoyment from the sun. Ultimately, it presented a vast possibility of aesthetic modifications of the facade. No longer a bulky construction wall sparsely pierced with orifices, but a panel attached by supports, which could be curvilinear, transparent, opened out onto the world with bands of windows, which could be built up of cavity bricks, insulation board, prefabricates, and

veneered with thin stone tiles to improve durability and aesthetics.

In the time of early functionalism of the 1920s, the steel cage was an objective and a fetish of cheap housing, a ticket to standardization, typification, mass production of homes. In the luxurious, fully-blown functionalism of the 1930s and in the products of the "international style" it became merely a means towards the end: functional and aesthetic comfort. It should be indicated, however, that in respect of the luxury housing in 1930s Warsaw, the skeleton construction made gradual progress. A mixed type of construction was quite common: a modern cage with traditional construction walls. Hybrid solutions were applied. A modern facade, characteristic for the skeleton construction, concealed a slightly modified traditional wall (*Marszałkowska* 18). On the other hand, there were also instances where behind a traditional-looking facade lurked a modern structure.

The luxury tenement houses in Warsaw had many features of the "international style". Cut-back top floors and gardens on the roof of the storey below were fairly common. Roofs were sometimes enhanced with dynamic, winding forms of thin-walled concrete canopies (rolled at *Al. Przyjaciół* 3, arcaded on the roof of the side-building at *Puławska* 24a, rounded grid at *Puławska* 28). Less common were openings (e.g. *Puławska* 28, *Wilcza* 69/71, *Oleandrów* 3-5, 4-6) that were an opportunity to accent a new relation between the regularly spaced construction columns and the independent, curved wall of a ground-level passage – i.e. at *Al. Przyjaciół* 3, *Frascati* 3. It was a frequent practice to expose the columns in the facade at ground level or overhang the first floor, so realizing the principle of taking buildings off the ground and putting them onto pillars. A facade with horizontal bands of windows was popularly applied to these buildings (Fig. 4, 6, 8, 10) although those designers who valued classic connections preferred to arrange windows in and among the regular pattern of the facing tiles (Fig. 5). More and more boldly made the facades, liberated curve outwards from their load-bearing function, endowing corners with a dynamic quality (e.g. *Puławska* 20 – Fig. 6, *Puławska* 28, *Skolimowska* 6, *Polna* 24, *Bartoszewicza* 1) or inwards (e.g. *J. Żórawski* – the building of *Chodorów* sugar factory – 1937, at *Kręta* 1). Le Corbusier's motif of a concave curve was most often applied in forming balconies (e.g. *Smulikowskiego* 13) or walls that extended in front of staircases.

2.3. Accommodation solutions

If not luxury, then certainly extraordinary consideration and design know-how converted into exceptional comfort become evident in the projections and floor plans of town house facilities. This is true in respect of large 3-5 room apartments and single-room, elegant studios to be used at will by frequent visitors to the capital. The modern layouts can be classified according to the communication solutions, resulting from the arrangements for servants. All stairwells were equipped with lifts, often both spectacularly designed. There were various approaches to communication routes. The most traditional continued 19th century custom, though in an altogether different form, providing separate main and kitchen staircases (e.g. *F. Męczeński*, ul. Wiejska 18). Moderately fashionable modernists preferred separate entrances: servants' and main from one landing of the same staircase (e.g. *B. Pniowski*, Fig. 4). Most common, in the wake of the functionalism lesson, were single entrances to apartments and separated routes inside (Fig. 9). There were also truly luxurious access solutions: private lifts that opened in apartment hallways (e.g. *J. Żórawski*, Al. Przyjaciół 3 – Fig. 7, Puławska 24b).

Comfortable apartment layouts, highly individualized, were designed in accordance with the principle of functional zones. In large homes, a system of hallways connected, conjoined and separated the zones: kitchen with servants' quarters and sanitary facilities, representative-daytime zone including the dining room, drawing room (sometimes with fireplace), usually the study, and the sleeping-private zone with a well-equipped bathroom and a battery of wardrobes or dressing room. The plans intrigue with their relatively small kitchens; in the studio flats these are no bigger than alcoves. Such a condensation of the kitchen area was possible because it was equipped with erstwhile luxury gadgets such as electric or gas cookers, in-built cold storage and waste incinerators. Attention to proper lighting and ventilation was obvious, there were even front-lit bathrooms (Fig. 9). The painstaking proportions of the living quarters bring to mind, with a little imagination, the golden ratio. The skeleton construction enabled flexibility of interiors, joined or separated by sliding walls (Fig. 9).

2.4. Material and aesthetic solutions

Materials and aesthetic solutions awarded the greatest scope for luxury. Having discarded ornaments, modernists allowed combinations and play of textures



Figure 11.
Warsaw, tenement house at Aleja Przyjaciół 8 (*J. Gelbard, R. Sigalin, 1936-1937*) – hallway tiled with alabaster



Figure 12.
Warsaw, tenement house at Marszałkowska 18 (*L. Korngold, 1935-1936*) – stairs (alabaster), lift (glass and metal)



Figure 13.
Warsaw, tenement house at Puławska 26-26a (*Z. Męczeński, 1938*) – sculptured reliefs by *J. Below* at the entrance

of fine and costly stuffs. Facades were overlaid with sandstone, mainly from Szydłowiec, arranged in tasteful, carefully designed patterns correlated with the open spaces. The undercut bases were faced with Italian marble or rusticated domestic stone. Halls and stairways used great slabs of alabaster (Fig. 11, 12), Carrara marble as well as many Polish varieties of marble. Bathroom tiles were a standard. The lifts were often impressively cased in glass. Entrance portals were sometimes black basalt, entrance doors – usually with worked grilles in the spirit of art deco. Copper, chrome-nickel and bronze were widely popular. The metal stairway balustrades and window grilles were artistic. There was exquisite craftsmanship all around. Some houses were adorned with real works of art by renowned artists. The Wedel building at Puławska 28 had a sculpture by *Stanisław Konaszewski* in the courtyard, a wall-painting by *Zofia Stryjeńska* in the hallway and the entrance to Puławska 26 – marble reliefs by *Józef Below* (Fig. 13).

3. VIEWS AND ATTITUDES OF ARCHITECTS – MODERNISTS TOWARDS THE LUXURY TREND IN HOUSING

Luxury architecture in the 30s of the previous century was an international phenomenon. It had many followers, it did not have (like functionalism before) an unequivocal ideological and theoretical foundation. Its arrival was heralded by architectural journalism that registered the all-round querying of the “machine aesthetics” in architecture.

The signal for retreat from de-individualized, puristic form came from the author of the phrase “a machine for living in” and propagator of the idea. In 1929 *Le Corbusier* admitted that “architecture begins where engineering ends” and expressed the belief that nothing can remove lyric aspects and personality from art [4]. Around the same time, here in Poland, the hitherto uncompromising rationalist *Szymon Syrkus* noticed that irrationalism in architecture was an inherent feature of beauty, and published in “*Praesens*” an article by *Lech Niemojewski* in which the author concentrated on the vital requirement of a spiritual factor in architecture and the need to use formal means that acted on emotions [5]. In the 1930s the human individual, not humanity and the masses as in the 20s, began to be cited as an important factor in architecture, especially in the declarations of architects, who considered neohumanism as part of the attitude that linked modernism with classic ideals.

Among the Warsaw architects, this position was

assumed as the ascetic purism of early functionalism by *B. Pniewski*, unwilling to restrict architecture to “dull utility”, satisfying only human material needs. “We would live better” he wrote “if we cared more for the development of man as a whole, and directed efforts not only at covering him with a roof and filling his stomach” [6]. *B. Pniewski* expressed an idea that had a growing circle of followers in the 1930s, that architecture was an art and the architect was an artist; that the aim should be towards synthesis of architecture, the plastic arts and artistic craftsmanship. He believed in the timelessness of the spiritual aspects of architecture, the roots which he sought in the Mediterranean classical tradition, also the source of Polish culture. Advocate of harmony, order, law and durability in architecture, he was an enthusiast of sandstone cladding tiles on facades and the pleasure of looking at the beauty of these did not appear to him unseemly even in the light of doubt “if shanties, (...) if so many people without a roof over their heads”. [7]

The need for beauty and emotion in architecture, not supplied by “naked, bony, completely unsweetened function” was also voiced by *Edward Norwerth* who, like *B. Pniewski*, saw the necessity to preserve connections with the past and “discover in dead epochs what has not died in them”. *E. Norwerth*’s convictions, his acceptance of individualism in architecture and architecture that digressed from the “geometry of the right angle”, searching for beauty in curved lines, in the rich play of quality materials, stemmed from fears of “bringing machinism down into the arms of dull dogma” [8]. Similarly, the virtuosity in using material and detail, such as *Z. Mączyński*, identified beauty in architecture with solid durability of material and the eternal values of the classics.

The architectonic discussions of the early 1930s in Poland gave victory to *Le Corbusier*. Condemned for “crypto-Bolshevism” in Germany in the thirties and in Soviet Russia for “machinism” and for abandoning his role as a great reformer and revolutionist proclaiming a new era of building construction and transformations in architecture to become the supplier of little villas for Parisian snobs [9]; in Poland he triumphed. He took the position held in the 1920s by Bauhaus and New Frankfurt.

Poland’s fascination with *Le Corbusier* was reinforced by the Department of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology, where students treated his theory as a Bible and his works as an undying source of inspiration. It was the luxury trend in Warsaw housing architecture of the 1930s which most widely

demonstrated this affirmation of *Le Corbusier* and the “International style”, a praise of elegance, concept and even “wit” in architecture, cult of fine materials and exquisite workmanship, in all: pure professionalism with no ideological entanglements. This attitude was evident particularly in the works of erstwhile graduates of the department: *L. Korngold, J. Żórawski, Z. Plater-Zyberk, J. Gelbard* and *R. Sigalin, J. and J. Ostrowski*. The designs by all the architects of the luxury trend in Warsaw housing demonstrate a bigger or lesser influence of the five principles of modern architecture, in a variety of personal interpretations.

The affirmative position concerned construction options and formal features of modern architecture as interpreted by *Le Corbusier*, it did not account for his social idealism. The architects of the 1930s did not treat functionalism as a mission but a practical lesson in flawlessly resolving construction, function and form, aiming at their complete synthesis. From the comments on his designs, penned by *J. Żórawski* the most eminent interpretator of the five principles of modern architecture in pre-WW2 Poland, it can be gathered that for him architecture was a field of creative searches of form and artistic solutions, and these contributed to his choice of the skeleton construction. Form could have been dictated solely by personal whimsy, to quote the author’s description of an extravagant roof on the house at *Aleja Przyjaciół 3*. An ideologue of functionalism of the 1920s would have considered it a heresy.

Whether to be or not to be a part of the luxury trend in housing built for profit was in the 1930s an ethical dilemma for architects ideologically involved in the avant-garde movement and laying foundations for cheap mass housing, such as *Szymon* and *Helena Syrkus*. The time reserve and doubt were revealed by *H. Syrkus* many years later, in an explanation on designs of luxury homes for rent, claiming the need to experiment with modern constructions and technologies that were believed to be the future of mass housing production and fundamental to its wider availability, but in 1930s Poland too expensive and out of reach to low-cost housing. *H. Syrkus* wrote that designing and building homes for private owners was treated as a type of “finger exercise” in architecture and technology, vital before tackling big social tasks [11].

The luxury trend also had its avowed critics, who recognized its decadent features on the threshold of disaster, condemning luxury from “national” vantages for its waste of resources that were needed for defence purposes and to improve the country’s out-

dated infrastructure. The accusations concerned funds that were really public (rebates) but became “frozen” in private housing, the use of foreign materials (alabaster, tiles, fittings), drainage of foreign currency and inhibiting the development of the national construction industry. “We can speak of these over-invested buildings, these snobberies embodied in iron concrete and marble, because these houses are our unbuilt ships, unasphalted roads, these are the monuments to bonuses on grand incomes, mostly snatched by foreign hands” – wrote in 1939 *Kazimierz Tolloczko* [12]. Uncompromising in respect of the excess in materials, he was kinder to “functional snobbery” that could become a model for more widely available comfort. Unfavourable opinions from some critics were gathered by a show of over-aestheticised house interiors at the Polish pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937: “it reeks of snobbery in times of poverty, unemployment and communism” wrote the reviewer in “*Myśl Narodowa*” [13]. Interestingly, a few years earlier and from another position, a similar opinion was formulated by *Alexei Tolstoy*, that Corbusierism was an aestheticism of the bourgeois elites developed from the quality of materials and emotionally absorbing only one thing, a momentary delight. [14].

4. CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL REMARKS

The above review allows the conclusion that luxury in Warsaw housing was generated mainly by industrial capital, often with sources distant from the capital. Luxury housing engaged industrial plants and commercial companies, especially wholesalers, pension and insurance funds, industry managers and to a smaller extent: landed gentry and representatives of freelance professions. The leading industries were: arms, motor, sugar (which was reaping profits after the formation of cartels), confectionery, cellulose and paper. The most active architects in the field were *L. Korngold* and the *J. Gelbard – R. Sigalin* partnership. Many designs were made by *J. Żórawski, H. and S. Syrkus*, and *Z. Plater-Zyberk*, himself occasionally being an investor.

These elitist houses were safe, quiet, exclusive, comfortable and aesthetically sophisticated to a degree well out of reach of the average dwellers of the city. They were important and significant for the image of the city, which until then did not have buildings veneered with stone and which in a short time gained a large portion of modern and sometimes outstanding architecture.

A historian of architecture must render justice to the luxury architecture of the 1930s – it was not only eminent, important for the places where it was raised, but more generally for the development of architecture in the 20th century. It awarded more appreciation to the beauty factor, invalidated by the “machinism” in the architecture of the 1920s. On the other hand, general historians note that over the ages, sophistication and luxury often signified exhaustion of the driving forces of development, decline and an atmosphere of ideological crisis. Looking at the geography of industry investing in luxury homes in 1930s Warsaw, one cannot but notice the symptoms of threat and escape of capital from border areas (e.g. Nakło, Grudziądz, Bydgoszcz, Ciechanów, as mentioned).

Similarly ambiguous opinions were voiced in respect of the earlier period of luxury architecture in Warsaw. If one assumes that every age has its own version of luxury, then luxury features possessed the architecture designed under the patronage of the last king of Poland, days before the First Republic lost independence. Art historians evaluate this architecture very highly. General historians accused the King of lack of moderation in his expenditures on art and calculated how many regiments it had cost (*T. Korzon*). Probably we will also disagree on the luxuries of the architecture of this age. Luxury in the eyes of some beholders signifies decline and is morally suspect, while for others it stands for allure and pleasure [15].

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