

## VALUE OF ANTIQUITY IN THE RESTORATION PROCESS OF THE ART NOUVEAU VILLA DUELFER IN BARLINEK

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### Abstract

The value assigned to time-worn objects and buildings seems crucial to a conservator's theoretical beliefs. The notion of antiquity is almost imprinted in the structure of the building itself, as well as in the concept of the time that has lapsed since the erection of the building. The head of the restoration project of the 1908 art nouveau Villa Duelfer, in Barlinek, which gradually fell into ruin after the war, presents how, in practice, this idea of antiquity was respected in that project. On the hundredth anniversary of the construction of the villa, the building, commonly referred to as the 'Pałacyk Cebulowy', has lived to see its revival by sustaining its primary residential function, its architectural form and its historic values, in an urban context.

Keywords: restoration, art nouveau, evaluation of listed buildings renowned for their architecture

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of a historical building's antiquity lies not only in care for its architectural value, its façade, colour and layout, but also its interior, the materials used, the woodwork of the windows and doors, and sometimes even

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how it was built. All these elements make up the character of the building. They should be kept in good condition and undergo extensive maintenance, to maintain their authenticity, highlight their antiquity and mark the passage of time. The simplified concept of restoration of monuments and buildings is construed as replacement of elements or just refreshing and renewing, which is misleading.<sup>2</sup>

A good example of proper care for such monuments of antiquity is the renovation of the Villa Duelfer in Barlinek, which is commonly known as the 'Pałac Cebulowy' (the Onion Palace). This is an Art Nouveau villa that was designed by the renowned German architect Martin Duelfer and built in 1908. It is situated in a beautiful spot on the edge of Barlinek, a small town in Western Pomerania. The symbolic name of the villa is derived from its characteristic towers, topped by onion-shaped domes covered with glazed tiling. After World War II, the building was used as an education and cultural centre, but in the early 1990s it fell into disuse and was left to deteriorate for 15 years. Fortunately, in 2008, a successful renovation of the building was begun.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONTEXT AND LOCATION**

Barlinek (Berlinchen until 1945, literally 'Little Berlin' in German) is one of the most beautiful cities in the Lubusz Land. Before the war, Barlinek belonged to the German Reich and was described by previous hosts as 'The pearl of the Neumark' (Ger. Neumark). Since the mid-19th century, tourism has flourished there. The city has a unique natural, historical and cultural heritage. It is located by several lakes and surrounded by Barlinek Forest. Barlinek was traditionally a holiday destination for residents of greater Berlin and the Reich everywhere. All of its advantages are still valid today, and modern tourist activity continues to develop in this picturesque place.

The beautiful Art Nouveau villa is located on a steep slope, and the plot's offsets are reinforced with resistance walls. The building has a wonderfully exposed architectural body entirely visible from below, that is, from a broad pedestrian path that runs parallel to the shoreline of Barlinek Lake and leads from the city centre to the beach. When standing on the front terrace of the villa, a wide view also opens up of the lake. Surrounding the villa on its other

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the term renovation is used to mean restoration, understood as renewal or repair. These are most often works undertaken to bring a building or monument back up to a state that best shows its artistic and historical values, in compliance with the requirements of: respect for all valuable strata of historical substance, exclusion of any solutions that mimic historical forms, and the conduct of all necessary restorations in a modern form. Ref.: definition, electronic encyclopedia: <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/>.

three sides is a forest (Fig. 1). Looking at the location and urban composition of the area, the villa's grounds blend into the green, tourist part of the place, which is slightly spatially separated from the centre in such a way that the two zones are axially linked by the clear, simple passage of Strzelecka street. The green areas are also still spatially combined with Barlinek's 'Old Town' area.



Fig. 1. Pre-war postcard of Berlinchen, showing the excellent location of the Villa Duelfer against the forest and lake. Source: Private collection

### 3. THE VILLA'S DESIGNER AND FIRST OWNER

The villa was designed by the German architect Martin Duelfer as his personal residence. He came to Barlinek from Munich, which in the late 19th and early 20th century, with Paris and Vienna, was one of the most important centres of European Art Nouveau architecture. At the time, this strong cultural centre intrigued with its spectacular cultural prestige and first place among the 'artistic' German cities.

Duelfer [1] began his career as an architect in Munich, where he opened his own office in 1892. His first Art Nouveau project was the Bechtolsheim family villa, constructed in 1898. He was the most prominent representative of the Munich secession, and used to design tenement houses, villas, hotels, department stores and public buildings. Duelfer has become not only a precursor of new trends in architecture, but also a pioneer of modern concrete solutions. "He was known for his blunt approach to colours. With courage, he combined shades of blue and green, combining them with yellow, red or black

and brightening the surface of the walls with gilded details and ornaments”[1]. The buildings’ ornaments often referenced southern naturalism-based German baroque, and folk art. It could be speculated that he drew inspiration for his creations from the rich palette of natural colours of the Barlinek landscape. Ultimately, it is surprising that as a professor of the Royal Saxon Dresden University of Technology, who educated many of his successors, Duelfer was almost completely forgotten in the 20th century. His preserved designs, including for his own Barlinek villa, come from the collections of various German institutions.

#### **4. THE VILLA’S ARCHITECTURE**

Villa Duelfer is a compact, two-storey block sited on a high pedestal and covered with a large hipped roof. Its corners are included in the semi-circular towers and covered with onion-type domes. There is a large number of architectural detail on its front elevation, which is crowned by a large tympanum with a soft silhouette, divided by cornices and pilasters and decorated with soft Art Nouveau decorations of male and female figures, with the architect’s initials at the top. The towers are decorated with garlands, and the windows are included within in a broad band of wooden ears of varying degrees of detail. The axis of symmetry of the building’s main part is disturbed by the veranda, located on a side elevation and blending in to windows on the other side.

#### **5. POSTWAR NEGLIGENCE**

Going back to the history of the villa, it should be mentioned that after World War II it was home to various Polish state institutions, including the Psychological and Educational Counselling Centre, and also as boarding rooms for the Vocational Schools. It was also the home of an art club, where the ‘Uśmiech’ dance and vocal group held dance classes. However, for many years the building was not properly looked after, and it began to fall into ruin. The ‘Onion Palace’ had almost completely deteriorated by the mid-1990s, when Barlinek was part of the Western Pomerania Province and the building became the property of the governor. In 2002, the villa was listed, but this did not immediately contribute to its rescue. Before that, safety issues caused the building control authorities to issue a warrant for its abandonment. The already decayed building met further ruin very quickly. But, after several years, the villa passed into private hands, since when the real repair has work begun.

## 6. CURRENT RENOVATION OF THE VILLA

This restoration of the historic villa began in 2008, preventing its further devastation, and the last few years have seen it become an example of good renovation and modernization practice. The 'Onion Palace' survived long enough to be returned to life, with its old residential function restored. Renovation of the Villa Duelfer consisted of a wide range of works; repairs to the roof's structure, replacement of the roofing, repairs to ceilings, damaged walls and plaster, replenishment of missing windows and doors, and restoration of the original colours. With the Provincial Monuments Conservator, it was decided that the building's symmetry should also be restored. Expansion of the villa from the west side was also planned for with the addition of a staircase and balcony supported by columns, using the east elevation as a model. The façade's decorations were renovated too, with replacement of missing items from the front and back of the building. The work proceeded at a rapid pace, taking only two years, even though the building had been badly damaged. The villa was finally restored to life in 2009.



Fig. 2. Front elevation of the villa, by Halina Rutyna, 2008

## 7. A TIGHT REIN ON THEORY AND MAINTENANCE AXIOLOGY

Back in 1903 - five years before the rise of 'the Onion Palace' a unique publication appeared on the German market entitled *Der Moderne*

*Denkmalkultus* [2]. It opened a new chapter in the history of conservation and axiology. It featured some of Alois Riegl's reflections - a representative of the Viennese school who had been initiated in the Age of Historicism, and who had blazed a trail in valuation in conservation. It must be assumed that Martin Duelfer was probably not interested in this publication, as the architect's career was instead turned towards a new creation, toward secession, not to historicism and eclecticism.

Whilst maintaining the conservation documentation for the 100-year-old Villa Duelfer, I decided to cultivate the values of antiquity, which I began at the planning stage of the villa's renovation (Fig. 2). The theorist, A. Riegl, maintained that the root of scientific conservation lies in the reasoning that every human action is directed by specific values. From the perspective of the 19th-century knowledge of culture, one could attempt to extract the leading values by analysing different kinds of motivation associated with conservation activities. The diversity of active entities leads, primarily, to the differences in perception of relics of the past and the different value judgements made about these relics.

In the remainder of this article, I will focus specifically on the value of antiquity ('alterswert' in German). Its origins can be derived from the attitude of the entity to the relic of the past, to the treatment of the relic as a certificate of the inevitability of the passing of man's works, and with this very perception becoming Riegl's 'monument of antiquity'. The key to the theoretical views appears to be the problem of intentionality, which returns in multithreaded arguments dedicated to the value of antiquity, such as 'Antiquity blends not into the work in its original formation, but into the idea of the time elapsed since its formation, which is revealed in the footsteps of its antiquity' [2]. With today's knowledge of the later transformation of attitudes to conservation toward the prophetic, Riegl's comments on the community dimension of antiquity should again be considered. They encourage reflection and are still valid in our times: the relics of the past as seen in the social arena as the 'materialization of lasting' [2] become carriers of individual and collective identity. The manifestation of antiquity is the manifestation of some imperfections. I believe that the value of antiquity is particularly important to the memory of the past, and can be categorized as 'memorial values'.

Before undertaking any renovation work, it is necessary to conduct some research. Without detailed analysis and evaluation of the value of a conservation project, instead of strengthening and increasing the value of a historical object, project proposals may instead reduce the values of authenticity and antiquity at the cost of the renovation work that upgrades the object to meet modern needs. The word 'conservator' is derived from Latin and means

‘defender, guardian’, and even ‘saviour’. This is the role of those involved in construction work at historic sites, including the design lead, construction manager and investor. It is important that the architect carries out pre-design works, including a site inventory, themselves [3]. They will then come to know the building and appreciate its antiquity quite profoundly. The main problems in conservation are to delay destructive processes, retain the authentic substance of the object for as long as possible, and minimize the extent of the necessary changes.

As such, making decisions on the removal of damaged plaster, rotting floors and woodwork is not easy. With regards to the villa, the extent of its destruction was so great that only the raw exterior walls were left, with ‘empty eye holes’ after removal of the windows. The windows themselves were restored to their original form and profiles and replaced. It was decided that it would be better to lay new plaster, preserving the old colours, and fit new woodwork, rather than try to renovate and save what remained.

The Villa Duelfer in Barlinek is an example of the good renovation and modernization practices carried out over the last few years. In light of Riegl’s views on conservation, the value of antiquity, most often calculated based on elapsed time, is now clear.

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## WARTOŚĆ DAWNOŚCI W PROCESIE RENOWACJI SECESYJNEJ WILLI ARCHITEKTA W BARLINKU

### Streszczenie

Kluczowa dla poglądów konserwatora zabytków architektury jawi się idea wartości dawności. Jest ona niejako odcisnięta w strukturze budowli i w wyobrażeniu o czasie, jaki upłynął od chwili powstania. Dobrym przykładem ilustrującym zagadnienie dawności zabytku jest ostatnia renowacja Willi Duelfera w Barlinku, wzniesionej w 1908 roku i potocznie zwanej „Pałacikiem Cebulowym”. Po wojnie popadającej w ruinę, W 2008 roku w wyniku konsultacji z konserwatorem zabytków właściciel postanowił przywrócić jej symetrię i dobudować z lewej strony dodatkowe pomieszczenie. Podjęto także rozbudowę wili od strony zachodniej poprzez dostawienie klatki schodowej i dodanie balkonu opartego na kolumnach na wzór elewacji wschodniej. Dokonano również renowacji zdobień elewacji i odtworzono brakujące elementy od frontu i z tyłu obiektu. Prace przebiegały w szybkim tempie i trwały zaledwie dwa lata, choć budynek był bardzo zniszczony.

Słowa kluczowe: renowacja, secesja, wartościowanie zabytków architektury

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