



Czech Modernism

Inter-war architecture in Prague, Brno, Hradec Králové & Zlín

5–10 September 2022 (MI 460)

6 days • £2,710

Lecturer: Professor Harry Charrington

Early twentieth-century architecture in the (then) new nation of Czechoslovakia, a highly creative crucible of modernism.

See the transformation of Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau and some of the most handsome and original modernist designs in Europe.

Much of the itinerary is far from the regular tourist trail.

Dismembered, occupied and marginalised for fifty years from 1938, and an oppressed province of Austria-Hungary before 1919; perhaps it is not surprising that Czechoslovakia's brilliant contribution to the art and design of the twentieth century has tended to be overlooked.

All branches of the visual arts and architecture flourished during the short period between the wars – the only period of political independence before 1990 – and during the twenty years before this, when the struggle for self-determination was rolling inexorably towards its climax. As much as in any European country and more than in most, the avant-garde was lively, creative and mainstream in the new, forward-looking country of Czechoslovakia.

While in all disciplines practitioners were at the forefront of international movements and ideas, what is particularly exciting is that so much was original, idiosyncratic and distinctively Czech.

Modernism had its roots in Art Nouveau, while some architects, by complete contrast, digressed into an unparalleled application of Cubism to buildings and furniture. This briefly morphed in the 1920s into Rondo-Cubism, a mix of richly sculpted surfaces and geometric forms. Meanwhile, Functionalism and International Modernism were becoming the orthodoxy, producing some distinguished and beautiful results, though idiosyncrasy continued in the imaginative variations of classicism practised by Josip Plečnik.

Modernism and experimentation found such fruitful soil here because Czechoslovakia was highly developed industrially (80% of the Habsburg Empire's industrial might had been concentrated in the Czech lands), society was meritocratic and liberal and politics left-leaning but robustly democratic (it was the only



Brno, etching c. 1930.

Central European nation not to succumb to totalitarianism before the War).

Even in the Communist era there was much good design; since the Velvet Revolution of 1989 some excellent buildings by international as well as Czech architects have been added.

Itinerary

Day 1: Prague. Fly at c. 10.10am from London Heathrow to Prague. There is an afternoon walk in and around Wenceslas Square, where there are some choice early modernist buildings as well as Arts & Crafts, Art Nouveau and historicist predecessors. Overnight Prague.

Day 2: Prague. Visit Prague Castle to see Josip Plečnik's restorations and additions in transforming the historic complex into the centre of government, wholly original and utterly beautiful. The Museum of Czech Cubism in the House of the Black Madonna by Josef Gočár well displays this idiosyncratic phenomenon. The Baba estate is a model colony of modernist villas planned by Pavel

Janak and built 1928–40 with many architects contributing. Finally, visit the Villa Müller, the masterpiece of Adolf Loos and one of the best houses of the ear, excellently restored.

Day 3: Prague. The Legions' Bank is the outstanding example of that unique Czech style, Rondo-Cubism, here a national memorial enriched with sculpture. Josip Plečnik's Church of the Sacred Heart in the suburb of Vinohrady is a quirky but serene masterpiece. Return to the centre to see the Mánes Building by Otakar Novotný and the Trade Fair Building (Veletržní Palác), a major piece of Modernism that now houses the modern art branch of the National Gallery. Overnight Prague.

Day 4: Hradec Králové. An extensive new town spreads across the river from the historic kernel of Hradec Králové in eastern Bohemia, planned by Josef Gočár 1909–11. The Museum, one of the best buildings of its time, was designed by Jan Kotěra, father of Czech modernism. Rondo-Cubism is evident in the bank buildings in Masaryk Square, glass walls in the railway

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continued

offices, red brick in the school and concrete in the austere expressive Hussite church.
Overnight Brno.

Day 5: Brno. The Czech Republic's second city and capital of Moravia, Brno was a major player in Central European industry and design between the wars. A walk takes in some of the modernist buildings in the city centre. Depart mid-morning for Zlín, the ultimate company town, the creation of Tomáš Baťa, the shoe manufacturer. Despite post-War vicissitudes, many of the factories, offices, houses and civic amenities survive in good order and major restoration has recently been completed.
Overnight Brno.

Day 6: Brno. In the Exhibition Centre several buildings survive from the 1928 trade fair. Designed by Mies van der Rohe, Villa Tugendhat is one of the finest modernist family homes in Europe. Drive to Vienna Airport and return to Heathrow c. 9.40pm.

Lecturer

Professor Harry Charrington. Architect and Head of the Department of Architecture at the University of Westminster. He read Architecture at Cambridge, where he was the founding editor of Scroope: Cambridge Architectural Journal, and subsequently combined academia and practice in both England and Finland. He has a particular interest in the history of modernism and obtained his PhD from the LSE on Alvar Aalto. His books include the award-winning Alvar Aalto: the Mark of the Hand. Most recently he has contributed to Artek and the Aaltos: Creating a Modern World (Yale University Press) which accompanies the 2016 exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center, New York.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,710 or £2570 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £2,950 or £2,810 without flights.

Included: air travel (Euro Traveller) on scheduled British Airways & (Economy) Austrian Airlines flights (A320); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 4 dinners with wine; admission charges for all museums and places visited; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all airport and state taxes; the services of the lecturer and the Czech guide.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Bohemia Prague (grandhotelbohemia.cz/en/): Excellently located in the Old Town beside Obecní dům, the Grand Bohemia was built in 1923 and retains some original features. Bedrooms are modern, with pleasantly understated decor and comfortable furnishings. A newly opened 4-star boutique hotel, the luxurious Grandezza Hotel (grandezzahotel.cz) is located in the heart of Brno's historic centre, The Green Market. Single rooms are doubles for sole use.

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking, much of it on roughly paved, cobbled and steep streets, some on inclines. The tour would not be suitable for anyone with difficulties with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Fitness is essential.

Optional music: We hope to be able to offer tickets to some performances; programmes should be available in early 2022.

Group size: between 10 and 20 participants.