

JELGAVA PALACE TODAY AND EARLIER

Jelgava Palace is located on the outskirts of the town of Jelgava, on the Lielupe Island. Ernst Johann Biron's wish to demonstrate succession of dynasties, constructing a new palace precisely in the place of the previous building, squeezed it into fortification ramparts and deprived of a typical Baroque-style composition: connectedness with surroundings and a spacious park. The architecture of Jelgava Palace suffered from this fate both compositionally and spatially, in addition, the building was difficult to perceive.

The entrance to the Kettler's castle led through the gate in the raveline of fortification rampart – "Bridge Head". It was retained when the new palace was built. In 1772, a new driveway was built, leading through the south-west corner bastion to the palace "cour d'honneur". In the late 18th century the gate was transferred opposite the centre of the southern block.

The palace is a tripartite building block of 150 × 120 m with the main east-west symmetrical axis but its side blocks are ended with short crosswise westward blocks. This compositional idea, with inner courtyards enclosed to different degrees, typifies all Rastrelli's projects from the 1730s; he concluded his architect's career with Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.

The central eastern block is stressed in the planning of Jelgava Palace. The main or eastern façade faces the river; its composition accentuates three-risalite division favoured by Rastrelli. Two smaller two-axis risalites are subordinated. The middle seven-axis risalite is a semi-floor higher and ends with a triangular (initially segment-shaped) pediment like side risalites. In general the facade is much more plastic and dynamic in comparison with all former buildings by Rastrelli. The façade decorations of cast iron made in Rodion Batashov's factory in Tula significantly contribute to the overall effect. They belong to the first and most important metal decorations in European architecture.

In total, 524 ornaments are seen on the facades now but 80 of them are of cast concrete made during the restoration works in 1956-1963 because many cast iron details were stolen shortly after World War II. 13 kinds of castings are found on the facades. They were executed after Rastrelli's sketches and correspond to his ornamental style of the 1730s.

Comparing Rastrelli's project and the present building, the main difference is lack of sculptures and coats of arms on the roof and pediments. They were not set up because of Biron's exile but several balconies were dismantled in the 19th century. The initial entrance staircase has not survived as well.

Nowadays access to the palace leads from the side of the dam made in 1829 to the centre of the southern façade. The central risalite is stressed in the façade composition: instead of the upper mezzanine there is a peculiar attic-shaped rise with a triangular pediment in the centre; pilasters are decorated with cast iron Ionic capitals. In the lower part of the risalite there is a projecting gate passage enclosed by rounded demi-columns supporting a balcony. Side risalites feature balconies as well; their railings are made in the early 19th century.

Metalwork of seven ground-floor windows of the family vault of the Dukes of Courland was made by the Jelgava blacksmith Johann Georg Frey who signed a contract on 12 November 1738.

The passage gate of the southern block was forged in Riga in 1908, imitating the 18th century forms and conforming to Jelgava Palace window metalwork. Four vaulted aisles of the passage are supported by groups of monumental columns, walls are decorated with niches. A staircase leads directly from the passage to the first-floor premises.

The eastern façade is the central one in the courtyard. The shape of the central risalite is similar to the river-side one but its middle part is additionally stressed by three-axis projecting unit. The present finish of facades in English red and white, renovated in 1964, endowed the building with expressive qualities usually unattainable in one-tone colouring. The colouring restored after a long break was initially introduced by the architect Severin Jensen.

Trough the eastern façade door one gets into ground-floor vestibule whose three vaulted aisles cross the central block. Staircases lead to the first floor from the vestibule on the courtyard side but the middle corridor extends to either side of the entire central block. At the end of blocks the corridor leads into a right angle side wings, continuing as a two-aisle gallery and ending with staircases leading downwards to passages. In the 18th century, the ground floor was occupied by household premises – several kitchens, storages, and servants' quarters.

Courtiers lived in the central block, there were several institutions of the Duchy on the first floor as well – an office, a treasury, and Duke's archives.

Jelgava Palace staircase was the most important solution of ascent in Rastrelli's career. In the 18th century the staircase premise was three times larger than today, occupying the whole width (32 metres) of the central risalite. In 1797 during the restoration after the fire, the premise was divided in three parts with partition walls, arranging staircase only in the middle part. The Orthodox church, the later French court chapel, was set up instead of the south-side staircase on the ground-floor level.

From the upper platform of the staircase premise a door led to the enfilade of state premises. The entire central block was occupied by a row of state halls ended up by living apartments. They were located at the corners of other blocks as well, but the large ballroom was in the middle of the southern wing. The previous look of all these premises is known from the 1811 inventory lists.

The first premise from the staircase was the White Dining-room destroyed by fire in 1788. Now there is a lecture-room of the Chair of Mathematics and a meeting-room of the Senate of Latvian University of Agriculture, but lecturers' rooms are located to the south.

Two salons separated the White Dining-room from the Throne Hall upholstered in red damask. The Duke Peter's portrait painted by the Court painter Friedrich Hartmann Barisien in 1775 was hung here.

The largest premise in this enfilade was the Silver Hall with an original fireplace. Its decoration was dominated by two lush tree branches burst into leaf; in addition, all shapes in this premise were silvered.

Johann Michael Graff, the author of stucco decorations, was from Bavaria where his family belonged to the so-called circle of Vessobrunn Monastery sculptors and stucco masters. But, as his style indicates, Graff had moved to Prussia because he was deeply related to the decorative Rococo sculpture of the Berlin-Potsdam school. Its specificity was created by the architect Georg Wenzeslaw von Knobbelsdorf together with the deco-

rator Johann August Nahl and developed by the brothers Johann Michael and Johann Christian Hoppenhaupts.

The enfilade of state premises concludes with the Duke's study, called also the Golden Hall, at the southern end. Its ceiling, frames of wall and fireplace mirrors as well as sopraporta frames had been gilded but walls had been upholstered in flowery silk which had been preserved up to the early 19th century. Barisien's paintings were on the rims of stucco decorations of ceilings. One had been destroyed already in the first half of the 19th century but the rest were painted anew in 1859.

The study formed a passage from the state central block to the Duke's living apartments.

The next premise was the Duke's bedroom. Its walls were covered with wooden panels painted in varnish technique by the amateur artist von Salza. Paintings manifested Chinese motifs popular in the 18th century. The ceiling decoration and the stove were Graff's work.

The door leads from the bedroom to a small premise that had been used as a cloakroom. Three wardrobes were built in the walls but the ceiling was covered by stucco decoration with a lattice work motif that seemingly imitated park pavilion's ceiling. The neighbouring study was upholstered in yellow Chinese wallcoverings from which it has got its name. The so-called Red Chinese Study up to 1919 had been upholstered in textile wallcoverings, embroidered by the Duchess Benigna Gottlieb in exile.

Moving further, one could enter state premises again, including the summer dining-room whose walls were covered by Dutch tiles.

Moving from the dining-room through the southern block, one could reach the ballroom that was 405 m² large; its stucco finish had been destroyed during the reconstruction of 1805.

In the 18th century the Duchess' apartments occupied the western corner of the southern block. Premises were smaller and with lower ceilings as in the Duke's apartments because of mezzanines – premises of 5 m height were divided by cross-pieces above which small servants rooms could be arranged.

The Duchess' bedroom was deepened with an alcove niche decorated by wood carvings and several small consoles for porcelain objects, and flanked by two stucco stoves. The ceiling featured a round lattice work rosette with a mirror in the centre. All ornaments in the premise were originally gilded.

In his project of 1738 Rastrelli envisaged to build a chapel in the height of two floors near the Duchess' apartments. During the second building period the chapel was divided in two floors but dimensions were cut almost for a half. Artificial marble finish of the chapel was carried out by Johann Michael Graff; a bluish artificial marble pulpit-altar was located at the northern wall.

Only vaulted corridors and vestibules have survived from the first building period, interiors of the second period have perished completely. The planning has partially been changed because of many reconstructions. Still the building's exterior should be described as rather well preserved in spite of many damages, repairs and reconstructions. Jelgava Palace can be conceived as a very typical example of Rastrelli's first period in Courland that lasted for five years. Jelgava Palace marks crossroads in his creative career. It features many solutions, ideas and elements found in all subsequent Rastrelli's buildings. It is hard to find any of the later palaces that had not been indebted to the Jelgava

Palace for some of their parts. Voroncov's Palace had borrowed the composition with the central risalite, Winter Palace – the passage, Carskoje Selo Palace – bipartite staircase with the vestibule in its middle.

Jelgava Palace is significant not just as a particular work of art. Together with Rundāle Palace it is unique testimony to a lasting, active period in Rastrelli's career (from the early 1720s to the mid-1740s). All buildings designed by Rastrelli in this period had perished, except these two palaces in Kurzeme. Jelgava Palace has a special place in Rastrelli's opus – it is the greatest work of his early period, and he had an opportunity to work on it in his late years as well.