

The Board of Architects of NSW;

The Byera Hadley Travel Scholarships for 2000

**lithuanian architecture through the ages**

**LITHUANIA'S VIOLENT PAST AND ITS (REFLECTION) REBIRTH THROUGH ITS ARCHITECTURE**

g i n t a s f r a s e r

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Firstly, I would like to thank the Board of Architects and in particular the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship for this esteemed scholarship.

I would like to thank the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of New South Wales, in particular, the former Head of the School of Architecture, Professor Desley Luscombe, for not only my education, support and mentoring, but also encouraging and supporting my submission for the Byera Hadley.

Thank you Desley for all your help!

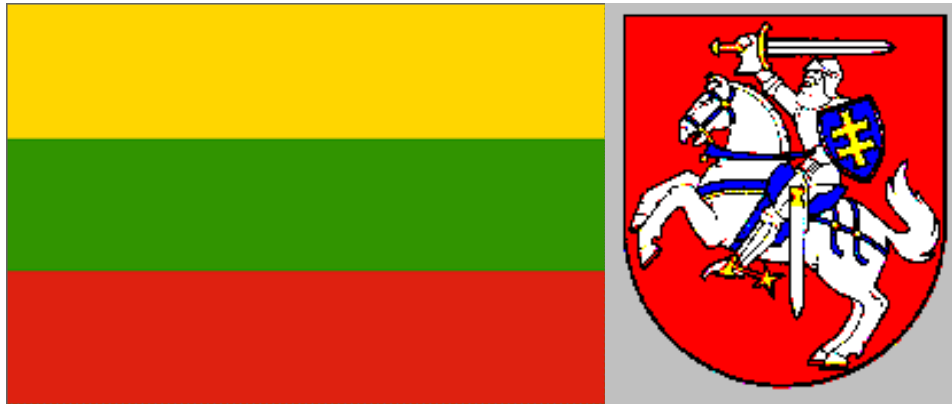
Most importantly I would like to thank my dearly missed Senelei, Terese and Jurgis Reisgys, my mother Jurate Reisgyte and my sister Daina.

Without their love, support, encouragement and assistance, I would not have gotten to where I have today.

Ačiu Senelė, Seneli, Mama ir Daina!

# **lithuanian architecture through the ages**

## **LITHUANIA'S VIOLENT PAST AND ITS (REFLECTION) REBIRTH THROUGH ITS ARCHITECTURE**



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## **personal statement**

Receiving the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship has enabled me to take a journey that is much greater than the trip itself, it has given me the opportunity to see my grandparents Homeland, Lithuania, a Country that I am proud to call my second home, learn more about its history, and more about its people which is reflected through its architecture. It is important to me, that I present you with an understanding as to why this work is so important to me both educationally, and emotionally.

It was my endeavour to study “Lithuanian Architecture Through the Ages, and How it is Taught at the Universities of Kaunas and Vilnius”, that I arrived in Lithuania just before Christmas, whilst the Universities were on holidays, and then later during exams, so was not able to interview, students nor university staff.

My focus thus turned towards “Lithuanian Architecture Through the Ages”.

Born in Sydney, Australia, my first language was Lithuanian. With an Australian Tevelis (father), and Lithuanian – Australian Mama (Mother), my first spoken language was Lithuanian, as I spent much of my childhood with my Mother and Senelei (grandparents). Learning about how they had to flee their beloved Homeland, leaving their lives, and their families during World War II was difficult to grasp at an early age, but has become something that I have been able to better understand with age and maturity.

My Senelei and Mama were very active members of the Sydney and Australian Lithuanian communities. Going to lectures, talks, festivals and celebrations were a great part of my upbringing, as was going to Lithuanian Saturday

School, and also attending Demonstrations at the Soviet Consulate and Embassy, the Sydney Town Hall and at Parliament House in Canberra, for a Free and Independent Lithuania. In 1990, my mother was the President of the Sydney Lithuanian community, held discussions and negotiations with the Soviet and American Embassies, and I can recall vividly the devastating loss of life, that took place in Vilnius, the Capitol of Lithuania, when mass demonstrations at the Television Tower came to a bloody end at the brutal hands of the Soviet troops on January 13, 1991, when thirteen (13) Lithuanians were murdered and more than a hundred were injured when tanks and armed forces were used in an attempt to quash and scare the Lithuanians from the push for Independence. This was the first time that I understood the oppression and fear that not only my grandparents must have felt when they had to flee from the invading Soviet army, but also of the Lithuanian people, and the desperate lengths they had gone to for Freedom, and Independence, from the oppressive and devastating Soviet occupation that they had been subjected to for the past fifty (50) years.

On March 11, 1990, aged eleven, I recall the celebrations that took place, when the Lithuanian Parliament, voted to declare Independence, and rejected Soviet occupation. Our home telephone started ringing at two o'clock that morning. Calls came from all around the world, including the United States, across Australia and from Lithuania, from community presidents, television, newspaper and radio journalists from Sydney and beyond.

It has been from this time, that we have been able to freely communicate by phone and mail, meet family and friends without fear of reprisal against them. We have been able to hear, read and see, what life, the people, the environment and the country are really like, and also to travel freely, not only to Lithuania, but also within Lithuania itself.

Since I was a child my Senelis (grandfather) and Senelė (grandmother) would tell me fascinating stories, which completely engrossed and fascinated me as a child, of their far away Homeland, describing in detail the natural beauty of its 'laukai' – the outdoors, and its 'miestai' – towns and cities. It was the lasting

impressions of the beauty and grandeur of the old towns, its old Churches, Castles and town walls, instilled in me by my grandparents, which convinced me to explore Lithuania's architectural history.

Leaving for my trip overseas, on Wednesday, December 20, 2000, as part of the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship, was one of the most emotional and moving days I have yet experienced. The fact I was travelling to the other side of the world, to my Grandparents Homeland, was incredible. But seeing the tears of joy in my Senelio and mother's eyes, and how proud they were to see me going there, was something I will never forget.

## introduction



“It was noticed long ago that, if lines were drawn on a map of Europe connecting Gibraltar with the northern Urals, Scotland with the Caucasian mountains, the southern Greek islands with northern Norway, almost all of these lines would intersect in Lithuania, the geographical centre of Europe. The French National Geographic Institute has recently made new calculations, according to which, from the height of 180 kilometres the geographical centre is placed 25 km north of Lithuania's capital Vilnius.”<sup>1</sup>

Lithuania is a nation that has been impacted by many historically and politically altering events, that have influenced its progress and growth, (and at times regression, economically and technologically) as a Nation. Lithuanians as a people, as a nation, have fought to uphold and nurture their culture, its arts, through dance, song, art, sculpture and its architecture, even during times when their overbearing Invaders had deemed these illegal, with the threats of gaol, deportation to extreme Siberia, and execution hanging over their heads.

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<sup>1</sup> LIETUVOS MOKSLAS IT STUDIJS - 'Lithuania as Part of Central Europe'; <http://www.mokslas.lt/content/misc/english/ce.htm>; March 25, 2005



Lithuania has suffered many struggles, at the hands of invading tribes, nations and conquerors over the ages, and it is the ability to capture the positives that have brought remarkable representations of the resilience of the Lithuanian people.

Much of its history has been destroyed by different occupations and censorship during the recent fifty (50) year Soviet occupation, and the previous Russian occupation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Under these occupations, Lithuanian secondary schools, and Universities were closed, Lithuanian publications in the Latin script were outlawed, and the Roman Catholic Church was severely suppressed. However, the restrictive policies, failed to extinguish indigenous cultural institutions, heritage and language.

Lithuanian architecture, is not unique to Lithuania, but has also greatly influenced part of north-eastern European folk architecture. Not only did Lithuanians influence architecture in other territories populated by Lithuanians such as Lithuania Minor, (Klaipeda and its surrounding areas) West Belarus and north-eastern Poland, but Lithuanian architecture also shares many common features with neighbouring Latvian, Western Belorussian and Polish folk



architecture. The architecture of Lithuanian cities and towns, like a mirror, is a reflection of her History. Brick churches, castles and town walls are the oldest surviving monuments of Lithuanian architecture, (attesting to the ascetic periods) of the founding of the State, by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Century Grand Dukes and Courts of Lithuania.

Classical, Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and all the styles and movements, one by one reached her borders, at times belatedly, but like Europe, and the rest of the civilized world, from the Middle Ages onwards. Lithuania's architecture was influenced and shaped by these styles and movements of European traditions.

There are several splendid examples of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic architecture that can still be found in Lithuania, with the early Gothic style castles of Trakai, and Kaunas, and late Gothic style of that of Sv. Anna (St. Anna) in Vilnius.

During the Renaissance Period of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, cities began to be constructed to a formal plan and structure. The Rulers' Palace of the Lower Castle, at the foot of Gedemino Pilis – Gedeminas' Castle, and behind Vilniaus Katedras - Vilnius' Cathedral, dated from this period, and is currently under reconstruction.

But of the styles, which have been best preserved throughout its history, must be those masterpieces from the Baroque era, which took hold in Lithuania, during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Vilnius is sometimes considered to be the Baroque capital of North-East Europe.

Lithuania was the centre of the multinational and multi-religious Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the baroque era, with the heart of Vilnius housing the Russian Orthodox Church, Greek Catholic, Jewish synagogue, Lutheran, Calvinist, Tartar and Karaime temples. The Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries in Lithuania were already marked by tensions between the various denominations all striving for equality, but these tensions were much greater to the east and to the west of the Grand Duchy. Baroque may have thrived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania partly due to expressive motifs, and the foreign influences, fusing the different religious and ethnic elements.

Many Catholic churches and Monasteries were closed, and given to the Orthodox community. The renovation of old Orthodox churches ensued, which involved transforming the western-style Gothic and Baroque churches into the Moscow style. Vilnius was undergoing 'regeneration', which resulted in demolition of the ancient town walls and the surviving parts of the Valdovū Rumai (The Rulers' Palace of the Lower Castle) all razed. In its place, Russian authorities erected monuments of the Russian Empire.

Following the end of World War I, the newly independent nation, went about a conservation and regeneration, purging Vilnius' 'lowly' valued buildings of the imperial epoch and returning the churches occupied by the Orthodox communities back to the Catholic church. The rebuilding also entailed the renovation of Vilniaus Katedra (Vilnius Cathedral), where discoveries of the remains of the Grand Dukes and Kings of the past had been unearthed, and a mausoleum of the rulers was set up to highlight the role of Vilnius as the capital.



Today, in the heart of Vilnius, still stand more than forty (40) churches, many are presently still being renovated, as the Soviets destroyed and/or desecrated

them in many ways during the occupation. The Soviet regime banned all religion and used the churches for other things, like museums, storerooms, car repair workshops and storage places for people whom the KGB was interrogating. Although the Soviets desecrated places of worship, it appears they were still 'fearful' of dismantling altars and religious statues, but in many instances chose to conceal these with ply-board and other building materials during their 'renovations'. Since 1990, Lithuanians, in many instances, have been able to restore places of worship with minimum repairs to the actual altars and religious statues.

What is considered as the jewel of Vilnius, if not of all of Lithuania, is the Vilnius Senamiestis – the Vilnius Old Town. This romantic old quarter, has been painstakingly restored, and has been recognised as the historic heart of Vilnius, and was accepted as a World Heritage site, by UNESCO in 1994.

What has become a great concern, in this developing nation is that along with Lithuania's push to become a stronger market economy, sacrifices are being made with its architecture, even with the Vilnius City Strategic Plan, in order to make economic and social 'improvements'.

"What is the future of Vilnius architecture? It is obvious that merciless reality of market makes improvements irrevocably in the vision of idealistically planned Vilnius. It is time to start discussions whether the new urban-architectural vision of capitalistic Vilnius is necessary; find investment for a reputable architecture contest (competition) to create this vision.

In all times the best examples of Vilnius architecture contained romantics and possessed various meanings. The wish is to believe, that pragmatic point of view will not kill the poetry in the new architecture of Vilnius. It is known that poetry is the only real art, while other arts appear to be arts as much as they contain poetry."<sup>2</sup>

Post Independent Lithuania, is still just a young nation, with only fifteen (15) years of newly found independence. Its architects are striving to find a voice of their own, with newly found Independence, Lithuanian architectural expression has been freed to accept modernism. Present day architects continue to display close connections to the environment, and the countryside, and this is reflected in its architecture as well. Lithuanian architects have been heavily influenced by modernist architects, such as Le Corbusier and Mies Van Der Rohe and also by their Finnish neighbours, in particular Alvar Aalto.

Post independent design is celebrated in two significant projects, have become symbols of its creative potential, Vilniaus Tarptautinis Oro Uostas – Vilnius' International Airport completed in 1994, and the recently completed Karaliaus Mindaugo Tiltas – The King Mindaugas' Bridge.

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<sup>2</sup> PALEKAS, Rolandas; 'Vilnius Architecture. Between Idealistic and Pragmatic Urbanism'; "Archiforma"; 2002/1; p. 66

## **a geographical glimpse of Lithuania**

**Location:** Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, between Latvia and Russia

**Geographic coordinates:** 56 00 N, 24 00 E

**Area:** total: 65,200 sq km land:

**Population:** The population of Lithuania was estimated at 3,596,617 in 2005.

**Land boundaries:** total: 1,273 km border countries:

Belarus 502 km,

Latvia 453 km,

Poland 91 km,

Russia (Kaliningrad) 227 km

**Coastline:** 99 km

**Maritime claims:** territorial sea: 12 nm

**Climate:** transitional, between maritime and continental; wet, moderate winters and summers

**Environment:** Lithuania has over seven hundred rivers; the longest are the Nemunas (937 km), Neris and the Venta and over three thousand lakes of which the largest is Druksiai (44.5 sq km), the longest is Asveja (21.9 km) and the deepest is the Tauragnas (60.5 m). The country's terrain is mostly low-lying with some hills.

Over thirty percent of Lithuania is forested.

Five areas of wetlands (Cepkeliai, Kamanos, Nemunas Delta, Viesvile and Zuvintas) are of international importance and designated protected areas.

There are a number of regional parks (Dubysa, Kurtuvenai, Pajuris, Rambynas, Salantai, Tytuvenai, Venta and Varniai) and five national parks (Aukstaitija National Park, Dzukija National Park, Zemaitija National Park, Kursiu Nerija National Park including the Curonian Spit, and Trakai Historical National Park).

Amber, formed by resin from ancient trees and insects in the resin, is found on the Curonian Spit .

Wildlife found in protected areas are: elk, deer, foxes, wolves and wild boar. Birds include eagles, hawks, geese, herons, swans and white storks.

**Elevation extremes:** lowest point: Baltic Sea 0 m  
highest point: Juozapines/Kalnas 292 m

**Natural resources:** peat, arable land

**Land use:**    arable land: 35%  
                 permanent crops: 12%  
                 permanent pastures: 7%  
                 forests and woodland: 31%  
                 other: 15% (1993 est.)

**Irrigated land:** 90 sq km (1998 est.)

**Environment - current issues:** contamination of soil and groundwater with petroleum products and chemicals at military bases

## **a brief history of Lithuania**

### **early history**

Lithuanians belong to the Baltic States group of nations, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Baltic ancestry arrived when tribes from the Volga region of central Russia, moved to the Baltic region approximately 3,000 B.C. In Roman times, they traded amber with Rome and around A.D. 900-1000 split into different language groups, namely, Lithuanians, Prussians, Latvians, Semigallians, and others. Only the Lithuanians and the Latvians survived the ravages of history.

Traditions of Lithuanian statehood date from the early Middle Ages. As a nation, Lithuania emerged about 1230 under the leadership of Duke Mindaugas. He united Lithuanian tribes to defend themselves against attacks by the Teutonic Knights, who had conquered the kindred tribes of Prussia and also parts of present-day Latvia. In 1251 Mindaugas accepted Latin Christianity, and in 1253 he became King. But his nobles disagreed with his policy of co-existence with the Teutonic Knights and with his search for access to Western Europe. Mindaugas was killed, the monarchy was discontinued, and the country reverted to paganism. His successors looked for expansion toward the Slavic East. At that early stage of development, Lithuania had to face the historically recurring question dictated by its geopolitical position, whether to join western or eastern Europe.

At the end of the fourteenth century, Lithuania was already a large empire extending from the Baltic Sea to the shores of the Black Sea. Grand Duke Jogaila (1377-81 and 1382-92) of the Gediminas Dynasty faced a problem similar to that faced by Mindaugas 150 years earlier: whether to look to the East or the West for political and cultural influences. Under pressure from the Teutonic Knights, Lithuania, a kingdom of Lithuanians and Slavs, pagans,

Orthodox and Christians, could no longer stand alone. Jogaila chose to open links to Western Europe and to defeat the Teutonic Knights, who claimed that their mission was not to conquer the Lithuanians but to Christianize them. He was offered the crown of Poland, which he accepted in 1386. In return for the crown, Jogaila promised to Christianize Lithuania. He and his cousin Vytautas, who became Lithuania's Grand Duke, converted Lithuania to Christianity beginning in 1387. Lithuania was the last pagan country in Europe to become Christian. The cousins then defeated the Teutonic Knights in the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410, stopping Germanic expansion to the east.

Attempts by Vytautas Didysis - Vytautas the Great, to separate Lithuania from Poland (and to secure his own crown) failed because of the strength of the Polish nobility. In 1569 Lithuania and Poland united into a single state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose capital was Kraków, and for the next 226 years Lithuania shared the fate of Poland.

In 1795 an alliance between the Germanic states, Prussia and Austria, and the Russian Empire ended Poland's independent existence. Lithuania became a Russian province. Two insurrections, initiated by the Poles in 1831 and again in 1863, failed to liberate the country. The Russian Empire eliminated Polish influence on Lithuanians and introduced Russian social and political institutions. Under tsarist rule, Lithuanian schools were forbidden, Lithuanian publications in the Latin script were outlawed, and the Roman Catholic Church was severely suppressed. However, the restrictive policies failed to extinguish indigenous cultural institutions and language.

A Lithuanian nation awakening once more in the 1880s, led by the secular and clerical intelligentsia, produced demands for self-government. In 1905 Lithuania was the first of the Russian provinces to demand autonomy. Independence was not granted because the Tsar firmly re-established his rule after the Revolution of 1905. World War I led to the collapse of the two empires--the Russian and



the German--making it possible for Lithuania to reassert its statehood. On February 16, 1918, Lithuania declared its full independence, and the nation still celebrates that day as its Independence Day.

### **a newly independent nation - 1918-1940**

Lithuania attempted to maintain its independence from Poland by waging war against her from 1918-20. Unfortunately, at the end of 1920, the newly independent Poland, annexed Lithuania's capital city and province of Vilnius, which it held until World War II. Lithuania refused to accept its annexation to Poland, claiming this annexation of the Vilnius region to be illegal, and thus refused to have diplomatic relations with Poland until 1938.

In November 1918, the Red Army invaded the country but ultimately was repulsed by the forces of the young Lithuanian government. On July 9, 1920, Soviet leader Vladimir I. Lenin signed a peace treaty with Lithuania, "forever" denouncing Russia's claims to the territory and recognizing the Lithuanian state.

In the early 1920s, Lithuania had a border dispute with Germany. The city and region of Klaipeda had been under German rule for 700 years. Originally inhabited by Lithuanians, it was detached from Germany in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles and placed under French administration. In 1923 Lithuanians organized an insurrection and took over the Klaipeda region. These conflicts burdened Lithuania's international diplomacy. Domestically, however, they fed the development of national identity and cultural awareness, displacing German and Polish influence.

From 1920 to 1940, independent Lithuania made great strides in nation building and development. A progressive land reform program was introduced in 1922, a

co-operative movement was organized, and a strong currency and conservative fiscal management were maintained. Schools and universities were established (there had been no institutions of higher education and very few secondary schools under Russian rule), and illiteracy was substantially reduced. Artists and writers of the period produced works that have become classics.

### **50 years of “illegal”soviet occupation**

On August 23, 1939, Joseph V. Stalin and Adolf Hitler signed the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This Pact included a secret agreement to share Poland, much of Central Europe, and the Baltic States between Germany and the Soviet Union. Lithuania, at first assigned to the German sphere of influence, in September was transferred to the Soviet Union. In October 1939, the Soviet Union forced on Lithuania a nonaggression pact that allowed Moscow to garrison 20,000 troops in the country. In return, the city of Vilnius, now occupied by Soviet troops, was granted to Lithuania. On June 15, 1940, Lithuania was overrun by the Red Army. At first a procommunist, so-called people's government was installed, and elections to a new parliament were organized. The elections were non-competitive; a single approved list of candidates was presented to the voters. The parliament met on July 21, declared Soviet rule, and "joined" the Soviet Union as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on August 6, 1940. The United States and many other countries including Australia, refused to recognize the Soviet occupation.

Soviet rule brought about radical political and economic changes and Stalinist terror, which culminated in deportations to Siberia of more than 30,000 people on the night of June 14-15, 1941. Germany interrupted the Stalinist terror by attacking the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The next day, the Lithuanian Activist Front, an organization of anti-Soviet resistance groups, revolted against the Soviet occupiers. Partisans took over the largest cities--Kaunas and Vilnius-- and declared the restoration of Lithuanian independence. The Germans replaced the provisional government with a Lithuanian Council of Trustees,

which was headed by an ethnic Lithuanian, General Petras Kubiliunas, and was given some autonomy in local affairs.

The Lithuanian leadership went underground. An anti-Nazi resistance movement developed, publishing underground newspapers, organizing economic boycotts, and gathering arms. The resistance hoped that after victory the Western allies would insist on the restoration of Lithuanian statehood.

The nationalist Lithuanian resistance was supported by many Lithuanian political parties and resistance groups, including the Social Democrats and a coalition known as the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania, which continued its activities many years after Lithuania was retaken by the Red Army. In 1943 this resistance frustrated German efforts at organizing a Lithuanian Schutz-Staffel (SS) legion. The Nazis responded by arresting Lithuanian nationalists and by closing universities. Moreover, occupation authorities succeeded, in the period 1941-44, in recruiting or capturing tens of thousands of people to work in Germany or to serve in the German military. Many perished in prisons or concentration camps. The main victims, however, were members of Lithuania's Jewish community. About 185,000 Jews, or 85 percent of the community's population, were massacred by Nazi squads, which were helped by Lithuanian collaborators in a number of localities.

Soviet armies recaptured Lithuania in the summer of 1944, although Klaipeda did not fall until January 1945. Lithuania's full "Sovietization", however, was obstructed from 1944 to 1952 by an armed partisan resistance movement, which cost an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 partisan casualties.

Soviet rule in Lithuania displayed well-known features of communist rule. The party had a monopoly on power, and the management of the economy was centralized. The regime collectivized agriculture from 1947 to 1951. Secret

police terrorized the society and attempted to transfer Lithuanian nationalist loyalties to the communists. Deportations to Siberia were resumed. Religion was brutally suppressed. One Roman Catholic bishop was shot, one perished in prison, two died shortly after release, and two were banished for more than thirty years, leaving only one in office. Almost one-third of the clergy was deported, although survivors were allowed to return after Stalin's death in 1953. Eventually, the training of new priests was essentially stopped.

Underground resistance never disappeared, although the armed underground was destroyed. As a movement, resistance was first sparked by efforts to defend the Roman Catholic Church. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which led to increased repression throughout the Soviet Union, the dissident movement spread. In the 1970s, Lithuania had numerous underground publications. The most significant and regularly published among them was *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania*. It was never uncovered by the Soviet secret police, the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti--KGB), and was published for twenty years. In 1972 a young student, Romas Kalanta, immolated himself in protest against Soviet rule. Army units had to be sent in to quell a street rebellion by students that followed the self-immolation. At the same time, the Lithuanian intelligentsia, especially writers and artists, demanded greater freedom of creative expression and protection of the Lithuanian language, traditions, and cultural values from the pressure to Russify that had intensified during the administration of Leonid I. Brezhnev (1964-82).

### **the push towards freedom + independence 1987-1991**

In 1987 Baltic dissidents began to hold public demonstrations in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius. In 1988, against the wishes of the regime, Lithuania engaged in widespread celebration of the February 16 Independence Day. Lithuanian intellectuals were pushed into taking more forceful action as well. Meeting at the

Academy of Sciences on June 3, 1988, communist and non-communist intellectuals formed "an initiative group" to organize a movement to support Gorbachev's program of *glasnost* democratization, and *perestroika*. A council composed equally of communist party members and non-party members was chosen to organize the Lithuanian Reconstruction Movement, which became known subsequently simply as *Sajudis* (Movement).

In October 1988, Algirdas Brazauskas was appointed first secretary of the party, and Sajudis held its founding conference in Vilnius. It subsequently elected as its chairman Vytautas Landsbergis, who had never been a member of the communist party. In the elections to Moscow's newly authorized Congress of People's Deputies in March-May 1989, Sajudis was victorious. From the communist party, the voters elected only Brazauskas and Vladimiras Beriozovas, his associate, whom Sajudis did not oppose. From that time, Brazauskas co-operated fully with Sajudis. Lithuanian sovereignty, as distinguished from Lithuanian independence, which had been declared on February 16, 1918, was proclaimed in May 1989, and Lithuania's incorporation into the Soviet Union was declared illegal. In August 1989, a human chain from Tallinn (Estonia), through Latvia, to Vilnius (Lithuania) commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. In December Brazauskas forced the Communist Party of Lithuania to secede from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to give up its monopoly on power.

On March 11, 1990, the newly elected parliament voted unanimously for independence. Brazauskas lost the election as chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet to Landsbergis.

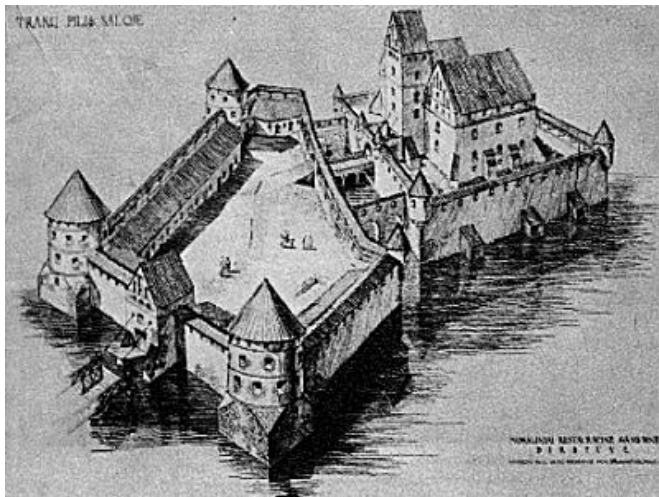
However, Moscow did not accept the legality of the independence vote, and in April 1990, imposed an economic blockade that lasted three months, until the Lithuanian legislature, now known as the Supreme Council, agreed to a six-month moratorium on its independence declaration. Later, Moscow obstructed

Lithuanian efforts to gain Western recognition of its Independence, and on January 13, 1991, attempted to use force to remove the Lithuanian government, from Parliament House in Vilnius, and to re-establish Soviet rule. Mass demonstrations in Vilnius came to a bloody end at the brutal hands of the Soviet troops on January 13, 1991, when thirteen (13) Lithuanians were crushed as Soviet tanks drove up the crowded stairs of the Lithuanian Radio and Television station in Vilnius. More than a hundred Lithuanians were injured when tanks and armed forces were used in an attempt to quash and scare the Lithuanians from the push for Independence, Lithuanians' determination did not falter.

Finally, the failure of the August 1991 coup in Moscow permitted Lithuania to regain self-determination and prompted the international community to recognize it as an independent state. The United States extended recognition on September 2, and the Soviet Union did so on September 6. Lithuania was admitted to the United Nations on September 16, 1991.

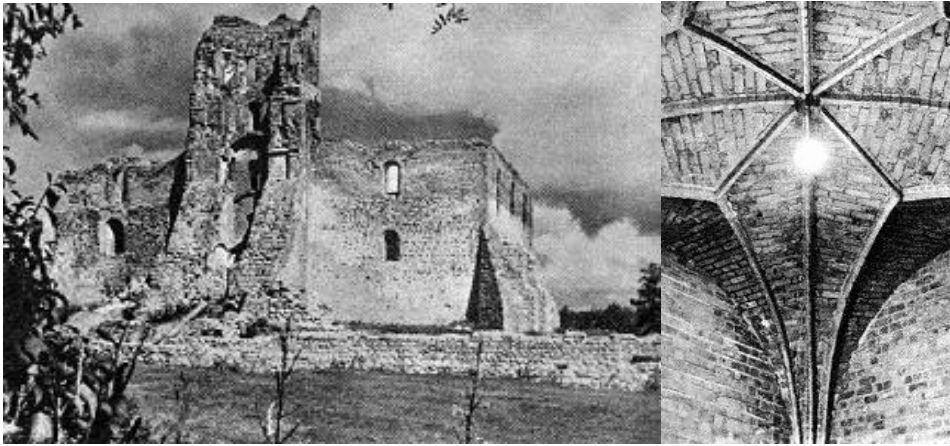
## traku pilis – trakai castle

Hardly is there another place that so manifestly reflects Lithuania's past, as Traku Pilis – Trakai Castle. The ancient capital of Lithuania lies 28 kms west of the present capital Vilnius. This small town, situated on a peninsular and surrounded by five lakes, Lukos (Bernardinų), Totoriškių, Galvės, Akmenos, Gilušio lakes.

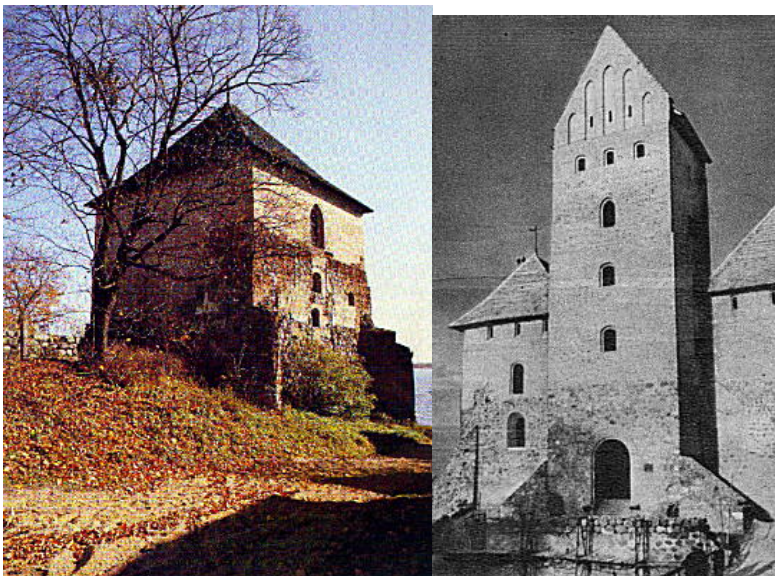


According to annals, Grand Duke Gediminas after a successful hunt found a beautiful place not far from the then capital Kernavė and decided to build a castle. That is how a new castle was built in Senieji Trakai which at that time was called Trakai. The town of Trakai was first mentioned in German annals in 1337, which is regarded to be the official date of its foundation. When Grand Duke Gediminas finally settled in Vilnius, Senieji Trakai was inherited by his son the Duke Kęstutis. This is the birthplace of the most famous ruler of Lithuania - Vytautas Didysis – Vytautas the Great.





The Gothic castle is an impressive example of Lithuanian fortress architecture. The castle has a defensive wall and an outer fortress which are separated from the main palace by a deep moat. When Vytautas Didysis became the vassal ruler of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Trakai became a political and administrative centre for Lithuania. Construction of the castles was finished and a catholic church was built.



During the 15th century, the castle was the residence of the rulers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In September, 1430, Vytautas invited a great number of guests to the castle to celebrate his coronation as King of Lithuania. However, the envoys of Emperor Zigmantas who were supposed to bring the crown to



Trakai never made it - they were captured by Polish noblemen who feared discord between Poland and Lithuania, which at that time were united into one state.



The castle is of an irregular design, it occupies the area of 1.8 hectares. It comprises the Palace with inner courts, defensive buttresses which surround them and a fore - castle. As the entrance into the fore - castle, the rectangular three - tiered tower of gate with a draw bridge is used. The mentioned tower is located on the Southern wall. The fore-castle consists of a yard of an irregular shape, surrounded by a wall which possesses massive powerful towers. Inside, there are casemates located which were used as store - houses, and also had the defensive function. The walls of the fore - castle are 3.15-3.90 m thick. The Gothic Palace represents the centre of the architectural monument of the Castle. A 25 metre high donjon with shooting apertures dominates the front façade of the Palace. A defensive wall surrounds the Palace, and it is separated from the fore-castle by a water canal.



Wooden galleries lead you into the inside rooms of the Palace. The right block of the cellar is supposed to have contained the treasury. A representational reception hall is located on the first floor. Household facilities used to be situated on the ground floor, and the residential ones - were located on the first floor. Fragments of the Byzantine mural paintings dating to the 15th century have been preserved there. The murals depict mundane aspects of the Ducal life. The impact of the Byzantine school on the painting is obvious. The murals had been performed by the artist of Vilnius. The ceiling of the Palace is decorated by ribbed stellar vaults. Profiled bricks, stained glass and decorative tiles were applied for the decoration of the interior of the Palace.

After Vytautas died, the castle was used less and less, and eventually fell into complete decay. Trakai lost its political significance in the sixteenth century. During the war with Russia in the seventeenth century the town was plundered and burnt, and Trakai Pilis was destroyed. After that it wasn't rebuilt. As time passed, the stones and the bricks of the castle broke down and were often used by the townsmen for their buildings. The ruins of the castle commenced restoration in 1930-1931.

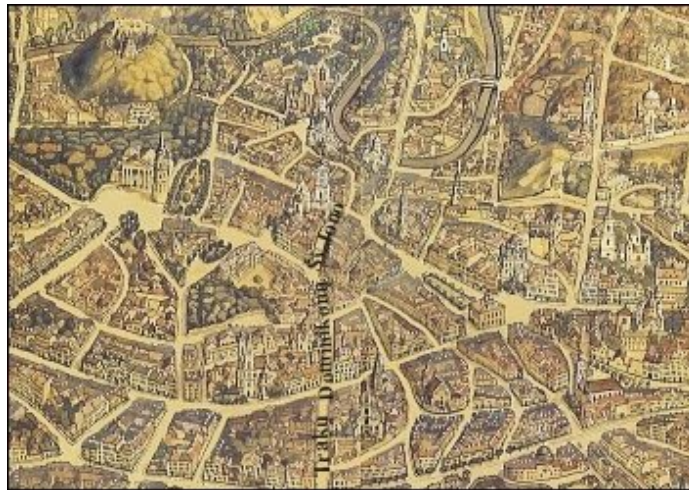
At present the castle of the island is mentioned as the architectural ensemble of international importance. It is the only water-type castle in Eastern Europe. The names of the builders and architects of the castle are not known. The whole complex of defence facilities and dwelling-houses ingeniously matched the environment.



Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Slowacki, Maironis and other famous Lithuanian poets gave their literary tribute to the Castle of Trakai. Visitors to the Castle are favourably impressed by the romantic atmosphere of the architectural monument. At present the castle is a real Mecca for tourists. A rich museum has been established, showing the struggle of Lithuanians against the Teutonic Order and the history of Trakai and its surroundings from ancient times to the present day.

## senamiestis – the old town

Arguably one of the most culturally significant and best preserved 'old towns' in Eastern Europe, still exists today in Vilnius' Seniamistis – the old town. As short as ten (10) years may appear historically, the life of the Senamiestis in Vilnius after restoration of the Lithuanian state is pivotal and full of events. There have been three regeneration projects presented and approved by the Vilnius Municipality over this time.



The Senamiestis stretches from the Vilniaus Katedra (Vilnius Cathedral) square, along Vokeciu Street, past Rotuse Square to Aušros Vartai (the Gates of Dawn), and from the river to Uzupis, across to the Presidential Palace.





So important is the Vilnius Senamiestis, that it was registered in 1994 with the World Monuments Catalogue by the UNESCO Committee, as the Historic Centre of Vilnius.

Great care and renewal have been carried out on the works of the Senamiestis. In the first stage of restoration, highly visible and important buildings such as the Katedras, surrounding buildings by the Ministry of Defence along Totoriu Street as well as S.Daukantas Square were restored.

So important was it to restore and blend into the true character of the Senamistis, that great care went in to restoring the cobble streets. Asphalt surfaces were replaced with different sized cobbles. Simultaneous building restorations took place, not merely façade painting, but in places, there were desperate needs for re-roofing, new metal works, and gutter replacements basements and base causes restored.



Strong economic growth, which is indicated by the growth of new business enterprises and the increasing demand for modern style apartments, together with the community demands that the senamiestis maintain its aesthetic and

historical importance to the city of Vilnius has resulted in plans being drawn up to regulate future development of this area.

Unfortunately, these plans often do not coincide with the desires of the government regulating bodies. This issue is further complicated by the fact that there is more than one regulating body involved in the control of the senamiestis area and the roles defining each body's authority is unclear. National Government and local council acts contradict each other as do time-limits and it would be extremely beneficial if the current plan could clarify issues before it is implemented.

The proposed restoration plans, submitted to UNESCO in 1992, for World Heritage Listing, has had amendments regarding two security zones within Senamiestis, subsequently submitted. Once again, these security zones are controlled by more than one government institution and both council and National laws are affected.

One of the most important criticisms, levelled by UNESCO investigator Dr. Ray Bondin, was the minimal sanction of 300 euros for any breach of developmental codes. He believed that this could not guarantee the aesthetic integrity of Senamiestis being maintained. Community leaders agreed with him.

I believe that the city is currently facing four (4) major concerns:

- The erection of multi-storey buildings;
- The renovation of old buildings;
- Overshadowing;
- The renovation of historically significant buildings.

New multi-storey buildings are causing the greatest concern as all of current multi storey buildings are situated in the Senamiestis security zone, yet the centre of the Senamiestis is on the opposite side of the river. These multi-storey building have definitely significantly altered the aesthetic architectural feel of Senamiestis. The mayor has stated that all multi-storeyed buildings will be built on the other side of the river. Yet, even here, there are timber buildings, of

historical significance, which, because of government restrictions, have now come under threat of demolition.

Governments have listened to the voice of the people and have undertaken restoration of historically significant sites. Yet these restorations are also being questioned because modern materials are considered not authentic and some consider this a type of modernisation of the building.

Another significant decision facing authorities, is whether currently open spaces should have demolished historical buildings rebuilt on their original locations. Many citizens do not wish to forego these recreational spaces and claim the reclaiming of this land from public use can not be justified.

The proposed plan for the redevelopment and restoration of Senamiestis, I believe, does not go into enough detail. Whilst in some areas colour schemes appear to have been considered, this has not happened in other parts designated within the proposal. There are also many large areas without specific zoning specifications.

It is obvious, that Vilnius, as every other city, must change and grow, but the challenge facing planners is the blending of the old, historical with the new, modern whilst ensuring that security is not compromised.

“Now mainly investments and economical, social requirements determine the urban development of Vilnius. Lots of problems concerning present urban and architectural development in Vilnius (can be noted): detailed plans are made for a single plot without any concern to neighbouring plots; several units of Vilnius street system are not built yet though planned many years ago; new building materials, constructions that spread in Lithuanian building market and poor choice in building typology weakened the quality of architecture; the role of chief architect of the city is diminished; building investors care for profit but not for architectural quality; only the architects acknowledged by the Department of Conservation of Cultural Values are allowed to design in the Old Town; the design of new architecture in Vilnius historical localities has stopped and only re-created buildings are built there; there are lots of institutions regulating the design process; and many others.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> NAVICKIENE, Egle – “Architecture of Vilnius City Between Yesterday and Tomorrow”; “Archiforma” 2002/1 p.80

## **vilniaus katedra - vilnius cathedral**



Walking down the old cobbled street of Gedemino Propektas, you are funnelled down a journey of modern and old buildings that lead toward the heart of Vilnius. At its northern apex you are thrown into an intersection, embracing in the foreground, Vilniaus Katedras - the Vilnius Cathedral, and the Bell Tower, in the background Gedemino Pilis -Gedeminas' Castle, and to the side, Katedro Aikste - the Cathedral Square.





Vilnius Katedra, the oldest Church in Lithuania, has had a very long, mixed, complicated history due to its repeated construction and deconstruction over the Centuries originally the site of a Pagan Temple, for the Pagan God Perkunas.

“Damage by storms, floods and fires since it was erected on the site of a pagan sanctuary about 600 years ago, the cathedral has been renovated, here and there, many times. The result is architectural schizophrenia.”<sup>4</sup>

The Vilnius Katedra, that we see today, was designed and built by Lithuanian architect Laurynas Stuoka-Gucevicius, between 1777 and 1801, and encompassed the size of the earlier Katedra. Stuoka-Gucevicius' intention was to turn away from red brick and embraced the classical architecture of Italy.



The front and side façades are lined with huge, classically designed columns. Four doric columns rise above the cathedral's high altar, while St. Kasimir's Chapel (one of 11 interior chapels) boasts pink and white marble walls, silver-

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<sup>4</sup> HESTER, Elliot; "History, Heritage Linger in Lithuania";  
[http://www.sptimes.com/2003/11/16/Travel/History\\_heritage\\_lin.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2003/11/16/Travel/History_heritage_lin.shtml) ; November 16, 2003

plated statues and white stucco relief work on the wooden pulpit and the frescoed cupola. The overstated ornamentation is a tribute to high baroque. Behind the columns, some sculptures show evidence of a baroque style reminiscent of ancient Roman and Greek works. Other sculptures, such as those depicting seven grand dukes, are fashioned in decorative rococo.

The main altar, was earlier also known as the Vytautas altar, because Vytautas Didysis is buried below the Katedras in the crypts, along with other Lithuanian Kings and Grand Dukes.

The walls of the Katedras, are adorned in exquisite art works, along with many sculptures, recovered and restored after they were hidden in the crypts are regarded as the most valuable art collection of Lithuania of all times. Along with art works, valuables included sixteenth century cult gear made from precious metals, several hundred gold and silver items with precious stones whose collection is estimated to have commenced immediately after Lithuania's baptism in 1387 were hidden in the Cathedral shortly after the commencement of World War II in 1939. These collections were only rediscovered by historians and archaeologists in 1985.

The three saints on the rooftop have their own history. They sat atop standing guard over the Katedras and Vilnius, before the Soviet occupation, but the Soviets took them down and smashed them. After Lithuania declared its independence, an artist was commissioned to make and redesign new statues of the Saints, and in 1996, they were reinstated into their positions, standing guard once again.



The first church was built on this site some time in the mid- to late-1200's after King Mindaugas, Lithuania's Grand Duke and first King, his family and his Court were baptized. Mindaugas was the unifier of Lithuania, unifying the tribes to defend themselves against attacks by the Teutonic Knights, who had conquered the kindred tribes of Prussia (to the South) and also parts of present-day Latvia (to Lithuania's north). In 1251 Mindaugas accepted Latin Christianity, and in 1253 he became King. After establishing a Lithuanian diocese in Vilnius, he erected the first Lithuanian cathedral.

After the King's death, the building and many of the people reverted to their old ways, and the church became once again a pagan temple, as a means of resistance against the growing influence of Christianity.



There aren't many documents telling what happened to the temple, but Pope Urban VI did mention in 1388 that it had been destroyed and a new cathedral was being built in its place. That papal bull came about because just a year earlier Lithuania had been re-converted to Christianity. To mark the occasion, King Jogalia of Poland (who was also Grand Duke of Lithuania) commissioned a new cathedral to be built on the site. It wasn't around very long – burning to the ground in 1419. The rebuilding effort started almost immediately, and some of the surviving columns can still be seen today in spite of the fact that the whole thing burned again some time before 1700.



In 1950, whilst Lithuania was under the Soviet regime, the Cathedral was closed. Orders from the Kremlin were given to the Red army to destroy, and pillage its art and treasures, as were many other Churches and culturally significant sites throughout not only Lithuania, but throughout the Baltic States. Defiant and scared young troops, it is said, and many deeply religious themselves, boarded up, and conceal much of the Cathedral, entombing its contents. It was used for several years as a warehouse, and then later it was abandoned by the Soviet troops. Restoration of the Katedra, commenced again in 1980.

## gedemino pilis – gedeminas' castle



A defiant symbol of Lithuanian freedom, Independence and pride, sits atop the highest point in Vilnius, atop Gedimas' Hill, Gedemino Pilis – Gedeminas' Castle, also sometimes referred to as the Upper Castle. An octagonal brick turret marks the high ground where the Neris and Vilnele rivers meet in the heart of Vilnius. The original castle was built in the 1200's, but was destroyed. The current building was erected at the direction of the Grand Duke Vytautas. The Duke's castle ended up being used as a prison 200 years later, and even though its walls are ten feet thick, it was heavily damaged by Russian troops in the 17th century. The castle lay mostly ruined until the early 20th century, when restoration work began. Today it is one of the must-see destinations in Vilnius, not just because of its history, but because its height offers a wonderful view of the historic district.





## **voldovu rumai- the rulers' palace of the lower castle**



The Palace of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes, today called Voldovu Rumai – The Rulers' Palace is the most important building of the Vilnius Lower Castle. Like the Vilnius Katedras, it too has had a 'schizophrenic' archetypal past, being finished in many architectural styles through the ages.



Archaeologists have discovered that remnants of the palace date back to the mid 13<sup>th</sup> Century, where Archaeological research on the site between the Katedra and Gediminas' Hill started as late as 1987. Historians refer to chronicles, from the Crusaders Order, which mention the name Vilnius, as far back as the years of King Mindaugas' rule. The first mentioning of Vilnius is

related to the letters written by Grand Duke Gediminas, in the year 1323 whilst occupying the Voldovu Rumai. However, historians have argued, that it was 1323 that Vilnius was established as the Capital of Lithuania, not the year of establishment as a city in general.

The Voldovu Rumai and Vilnius Cathedral built during the rule of King Mindaugas, were burnt down in 1419. They were replaced by a Gothic ensemble that stood for over 100 years. After the fire of 1520, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Zygimantas Senasis (Zygimantas the Old) renovated the ensemble in the Renaissance style. The buildings housed one of the richest collections in Eastern Europe, a grand library, the most valuable art collection of Lithuania, armour from precious metals, and a collection of several hundred gold and silver items with precious stones which was started immediately after Lithuania's baptism in 1387.



After the great Vilnius fire of 1610, the Voldovu Rumai was again rebuilt, but this time in the 'modern' Baroque style, and stood so for the next forty (40) years, until in 1661, the retreating Moscow army, that had occupied the Capital since 1655, burnt it to the ground. Voldovu Rumai was never restored and at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the remains of the palace were levelled.



In the year 2000, a project was launched to rebuild the Voldovu Rumai, from the remaining archaeological evidence from excavations and on the basis of surviving iconographies, and will be rebuilt to a very similar design to that that stood there in the past. The project to rebuild the Palace, is scheduled to be completed in 2009, ready for the 1000 year Anniversary celebrations of when the name Lithuania was written in documents.



## **aušros vartai – the gate of dawn**

The history of Europe is filled with epic battles, brave campaigns, and tales of warriors performing heroic deeds. And for every warrior who took up a blade, there was a city that needed a way to defend itself. That's why so many of the continent's historic cities are ringed by fortress walls, and many times, architectural gems like fortress gates. This particular gate was built in the 15th century as a way to let people out of the city of Vilnius so they could trade with Medininkai Castle, and farther lands. It was also designed to keep undesirables out.



At the beginning of the 16th century, Vilnius was surrounded by a brick and stonewall with nine gates. The most representative was Ausros Vartai, - The Gate of Dawn, the road, through which (by streets of Ausros Vartai, Didžioji, Pilies) led straight to Valdovų Rūmai - The Ruler's Palace of the Lower Castle next to the Vilniaus Katedra – the Vilnius Cathedral.

Ausros Vartai - The Gate of Dawn was built in the 15th century as a city gate leading to the village Medininkai south of Vilnius (on the road to Minsk in Belarus). Usually, the town gates had chapels in them, filled with religious pictures that were meant to protect the city from enemies and to bless people leaving the town.



The gate is the only one out of nine, remaining undestroyed by wars. In 1671 the Carmelites from the neighbouring St. Theresa's Church built a chapel above the gate to house a holy image, a Renaissance-era painting, of the Virgin Mary, the White Madonna, which is said to have miraculous healing powers. Above the gate is a shrine containing an image of the Virgin, long an object of pilgrimage.

Thousands of votive offerings decorate the walls and many pilgrims come to pray, queuing up on the stairs which were installed in the 18th century to connect the chapel to the adjacent Church of St. Theresa. Mass is said in both Polish and Lithuanian.

On September 4, 1993 Pope John Paul II offered prayers at the Gate of Dawn Chapel. The Church festival of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of Mercy is of utmost importance in the archdiocese of Vilnius and is celebrated in the third week of November. The holiday of the Gate of Dawn Mother of Mercy is celebrated in November.



It was here, at the Ausros Vartai, that Lithuanians congregated, in defiance of Soviet rulers, to commemorate, Easter, Christmas and National celebrations such as February 16, Independence Day. Services were held in the small Chapel above the street whilst thousands of Lithuanians prayed openly in the street below.

## **sv onos baznycia – church of st anne**

What is considered Lithuania's greatest Gothic masterpieces, is the quaint Sv Onos Baznycia – The Church of St Anne. Completed in 1581, the church has just the one nave, and is of a simple and graphic form. What is its greatest expression, is its main façade, a unique brick constructed Gothic architectural expression.



Sv Onos Baznyce is perhaps Vilnius' most durable house of worship. Attesting and surviving Lithuania's sometime turbulent history, it has virtually been unchanged since its unveiling at the turn of the 16th century. The ornate design is often referred to as "flamboyant gothic." The building flaunts pointed-arch windows, slender pinnacle towers and thirty - three varieties of decorative and shaped bricks.

A magnificent Gothic cathedral, its low arched entrances enhance its height by drawing the eye upwards toward the ornate spires. The construction is

remarkable, because it was completed entirely from brick, and not the massive marble or limestone slabs common in other large churches of the time.



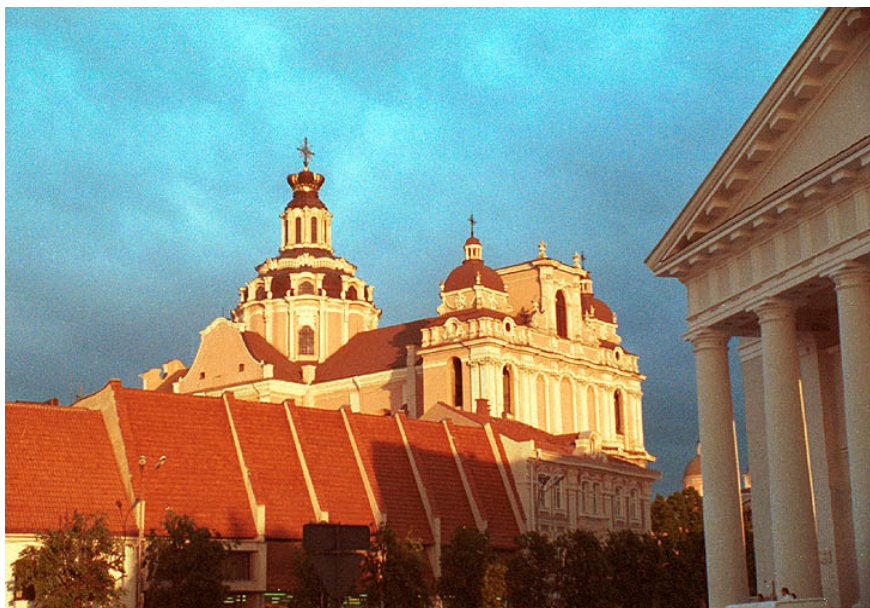
There is a popular urban tale that Napoleon, whilst on his crusades against the Russian Empire, stopped in Vilnius, and was so awestruck by Saint Anne's Church, that he wanted to take it apart, brick by brick and have the church re-assembled in Paris.





## **sv kazimiero baznycai – church of st kasimir**

Walking through the Senamiestis – The Old City, along its main artery of Didzioji Gatvė, from Ausros Vartai – The Gates of Dawn, you are led to another magnificent Baroque church, Sv Kazimiero Baznyčia – The Church of Saint Kasimir, the first Baroque styled church built in Lithuania. Sv Kazimieras, a Jesuit Order Church, with monastery was built between 1604 and 1618, designed by Italian architect Giano Maria Bernardoni, and constructed by Lithuanian builder Jonas Prochovicius.



Its exterior, a vision in soft pink baroque, the Church of Sv Kazimieras is famous for its finely detailed crown-shaped cupola, which is a distinct feature of the Vilnius panorama. The church's deep, yet narrow plan, twelve (12) metres in width, is in the form of a Latin cross, and the main longitudinal axis, together with its high cupola accentuates the depth of the church, some forty-eight (48) metres, and leads you to the central main altar. The narrow side naves, which have been transformed into smaller alters, open up and embrace the main

navel space. In designing the church, Bernardoni has modelled the proportionality of the early Roman Baroque styles, and in particular Giacomo della Porta's Il Gesu in Rome.



In 1749, a fire destroyed the buildings interior, and the cupola dome structure collapsed. The central alter, vestibule, ancillary alters and the 25 metre high cupola were rebuilt over the next six years, which reflected the late Baroque style.

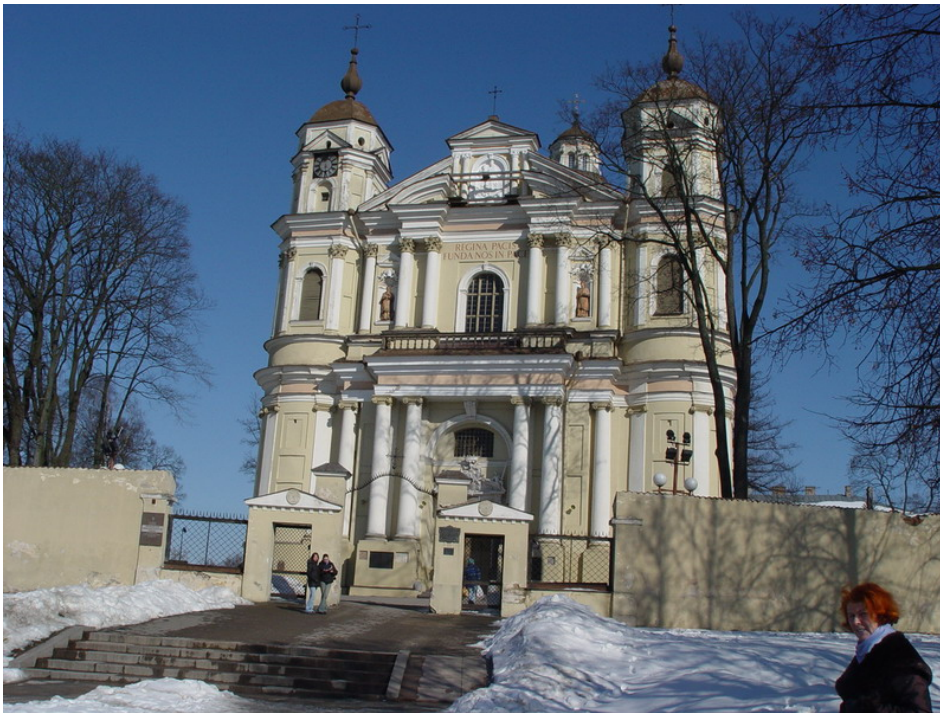
During the nineteenth century, under Russian occupation, the Jesuit Church was surrendered to the Orthodox Church, the altars were all demolished, the façade was completely redecorated, the towers along the street façade were lowered, and the cupola was redesigned into a shiny helmet.

After World War II, the cupola and dome, were again redesigned, resembling the crown, that we see today. But the church did not survive too long, as the Communist officials as elsewhere under the Soviet occupation, converted this church to a museum of atheism.



## **sv petro ir povilo baznycai – church of st peter + paul**

Situated on the outskirts of the Senamiestis (the Old City), not far from the River Neris, is the splendid Baroque styled Lateran, Catholic Sv Petro ir Povilo Baznycia – Saint Peter and Paul Church. Built between the years 1668 and completed in 1675 by the Lithuanian architect Janas Zaoras, under the initiative of the Lateran Canon and the Governor Mykolo Kazimiras Paco.



The planning is styled according to the Latin cross plan, with Basilican styled three (3) naves. The main nave intersects with the presbytery of the same width. The naves on the southern sides have been established with small alters. A copula rises at the intersection of the main and seventh minor nave. The façade is short and stocky, the central section is widely framed with two semi circular towers, which result in a certain discord with the church's structure. This discord can be attributed to the attempt by the architect to blend the local Lithuanian architectural elements with the Baroque style.

The interior of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul is a dream in baroque. It is graced with more than two thousand white stucco statues and relief works. Biblical, mythical and historical figures leap from the walls: a resurrected Jesus Christ, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, St. Paul, cherubs, demons, mythical animals and everyday people caught between pain and repose. These religious stucco statues and sculptures were started in 1671.



On the arched ceiling, delicate frescoes appear to be held in place by the outstretched hands of floating children. They in turn are surrounded by hundreds of protruding faces.



A small woven fence, surrounding four small chapels, was built in the fourth quadrant off the central nave, during the seventeenth century. A monastery, made of four sections, was built across the rectangular yard, and was built between 1677 and 1682, but the monastery was closed in 1864. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, renovations and reconstructions, made some internal planning changes.

## **vilniaus universitetas – university of vilnius**



Located in Vilniau's senamiestis – Vilnius' Old City, the University of Vilnius ensemble harmoniously blends Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Classic styles of architecture - all of the architectural styles of Vilnius.



## kaimai - lithuanian villages

Village life centred around the oldest family residing in that village. Whilst most villages had some form of governing body, members of the oldest residing family in the village generally played some part in this governing body. The Church also played a very important role as all villagers needed the services of the local minister for births, deaths and marriages.



Paluses Church, located in the Aukstaitija National Park, was built in 1750. Father Juozapas Basiliauskas inherited the land from his parents and built St Juozapas Church. Historical documents indicate that the only tool used to model this entire wooden church was an axe. The octagonal bell tower, reminiscent of the early defence towers built in ancient castles, is the only one of its kind in the whole of Lithuania. The Church has been designated as an architectural monument. Today it is one of the most popular tourist attractions of the area.



## Stripeikiai



The oldest inhabited area in the Aukštaitijos National Park. The first mention of this village was made in 1357 and later belonged to the Bishop of Vilnius. The village has lost many of its inhabitants and is mainly populated by pensioners. The homes are typical of many villages throughout Lithuania, built of timber and modelled according to the financial and capability limitations of the original owners. The kitchen is central to family life as the timber fuel stove not only used for cooking, but also provides heating for the house. Earthen floors on occasions are covered with lino.

The wooden skulpture in front of the property generally depicts a religious motif and reflects the artistry of an inhabitant or the wealth of those who are able to commission this.





Below, once again, the religious sculpture, or folk art, dominates the village landscape. This cross, as it is popularly referred to, welcomes visitors to the village. All homes in this village are built by locals using local timber.



The first format of villages was that of *gatviniai* – street villages. Here, the residential home faced the street, the *tvartas* - barn was located behind it. On the opposite side of the road, facing the the residence, was the *kletis* – granary and further along, the *rusys* – cellar.



## modern lithuanian architecture

Lithuania's three modern cities, Vilnius, the modern day capital, Kaunas, an ancient capital and Klaipeda, the modern day port, have greeted and fully accepted 'modern' architecture. The architects' 'struggle', appear to fully resolve the battle between the 'ancient' and the 'modern', demonstrating great sensitivity not to completely reject and create overbearing modern design.



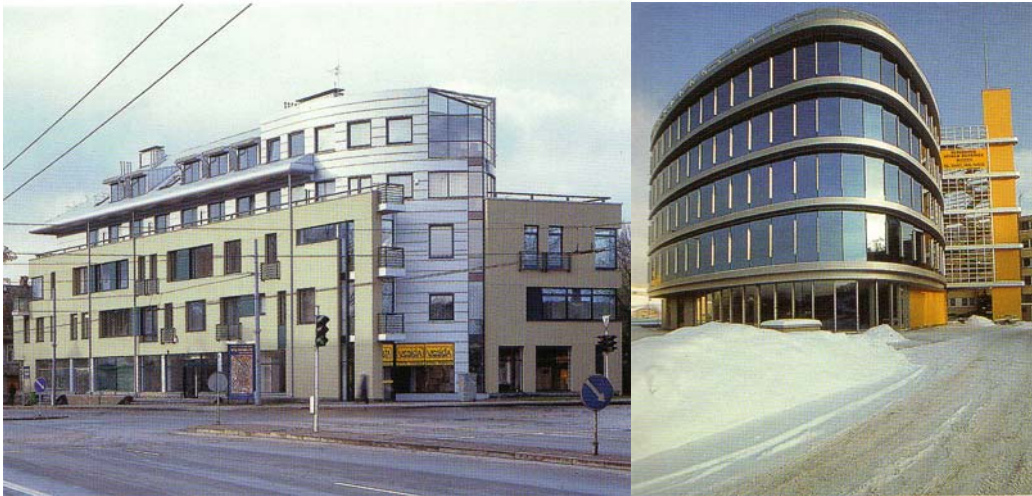
Lithuanian architecture almost has its own modern styling, as the art of architecture in Lithuania has been able to capture the typological diversity showing the development and the status of post-Soviet Lithuania, and its city culture, far greater than the other branches of art. There is a type of expression of the modern which can almost be acknowledged as a type of schizophrenia, as Lithuanian 21<sup>st</sup> Century architecture attempts to blend together styles of the last 100 years, where, modernism, post-modernism, 'cyber-architecture', minimalism and modern simplicity, celebrating its freedom and grasping to express its own identity.

"Vilnius' architecture has grown into diversity of shapes and forms; from short lived, seasonal or virtual to monumental structures seemingly destined to last centuries"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> KUCINSKAS, Romas "Trends of Styles in Vilnius: Today and Tomorrow"; "Archiforma" 2002/1,p.63

Like many of the post-Soviet nations, Lithuanians crave the modern, pop-culture, to stay in touch with the what is perceived from the West as the here, the now of Western Europe and America. Lithuanian architects, like there Scandinavian counterparts, have been able to demonstrate modern comfort and a harmony between the old and the new elements.



In the formation of Vilnius housing resources, single residential construction is becoming an important growth factor. In the capital, several stages of this type of construction can be distinguished: prior to World War II - where single residential and 'one-flat' construction formed entire quarters of the City; post war – single residential construction was considered illegal and prohibited by the Soviet government; Independent Lithuania – where single residential construction has been set free from the clutches of prohibition. People have been given the freedom of choice again, as to whether they wish to live in the cold concrete 'tower' apartment blocks, to single and medium sized residential developments. Yet it seems that paradoxically, it is the last stage that may bring about destruction into the urbanistic and architectural face of the City.

In 1990, independence, political freedom and the re-birth of democracy in Lithuania also heralded a similar 'renaissance' for architecture. With the end of the Soviet occupation in 1990, the explosion of freedom and want of the Lithuanian people and its architecture to again have their expressions expressed led to a quandary, how to express modern tastes and design, without the materials to do so at hand?



Over the last decade Vilnius has been rapidly changing, where this process has been influenced by objective reasons. Earlier being just a centre of province, now Vilnius has become a City representing the state, with all the attributes belonging to it. The City obtained a Lithuanian character, which has provided it with the attractiveness for other inhabitants of Lithuania. One can notice the concentration of business and migration of more active Lithuanian people to Vilnius, although the uneven development of the country is not a good sign.

The authorities have developed 'The Vilnius City Strategic Plan', where, by 2020, the plan is to create Vilnius into the centre for Central and Eastern European economic, technological, biotechnological development and tourism. For this development to come to realisation, they point out that there are several key elements to its success, where Vilnius needs to increase its international competitiveness, the development of a new economy, the transition to

becoming a more progressive society and the development of a competitive communication and engineering infrastructure.

“The long-term development priorities of Vilnius are also effective and raise no doubts. While reading the formulated aims and tasks, questions arise – how all this may be achieved? Through actions, organizers, executors are indicated in the strategy plan, the ways to carry out priorities (aims and tasks) are not shown and, especially the mechanism of harmonization between priorities.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> VYSNIUNAS, Algis; ‘Vilnius – A Province of Europe or the European Capital City with Provincial Ambitions?’; “Archiforma” 2002/1 p.59

## **vilniaus tarptautinis oro uostas – vilnius' international airport**

The alteration and expansion of the Vilnius International Airport was one of the largest and was one of the first major projects undertaken on the national scale, overseen by three Vilnius based architects, Leonardas Vaitys, Algimantas Alekna and Gintautas Telksys. It took almost ten (10) years for realisation, commencing during the Soviet period in 1983, and became an important symbol after Independence, and finally realised in 1994.



The airport was designed to handle some nine hundred (900) people an hour, and is composed of two interconnecting blocks: the old one, built in the first after-war decade and the new one of strikingly contemporary design. This co-existence of the old pseudo-historical style building with a light and dynamic modern structure resulted in what was considered quite a daring approach by the architects at the time.





When inside the terminal, one sees modern interior space with its decorative elements like a centrally located glass pyramid and unique furniture. This modern interior is 'interrupted' by a fragment of an old exterior wall with its relief mouldings showing soviet style wreaths and psueudo-classical cornices. The exterior is dominated by symmetrically organised tilted glass planes. From its aerial view or plan view, the buildings organic feel resembles some form of insect, or alien bird, that has either just landed or is preparing itself to take off.

The influence of several prominent architectural trends and styles can be observed, as the architects have successfully transformed and harmoniously integrated into their project, features of Japanese Metabolism, where the project has allowed for further expansion, postmodernism and also technological hi-tech.



The ingenuity of the architects, and the scarcity of materials after Independence, must be highlighted by the open-mindedness and resourcefulness that they exhibited. They were unable to source metal panels for the ceilings from Europe, due to the economic blockade that the Soviets had imposed. So the architects negotiated with a local fridge company, to modify fridge doors, so that they could be used in the ceilings.

The Vilnius International Airport has become a witness of the epoch-making turn in the history of Lithuania, and a symbol of its creative potential.

## **karaliaus mindaugo tiltas – king mindaugas' bridge**

What has been planned for almost two decades, and postponed many times due to either lack of finances or shortage of means of construction, in 2003 became the centre of King Mindaugas' 750<sup>th</sup> Crowning Anniversary celebrations, the construction of a bridge over the Neris River in his names sake, by joining the intersection of T.Vrubleviskio, Arsenalo and Zygmintas Street, on the 'Old City' bank, with the intersection of Rinkties and Zveju on the 'New City' bank, and also the erection of a monument to Mindaugas.



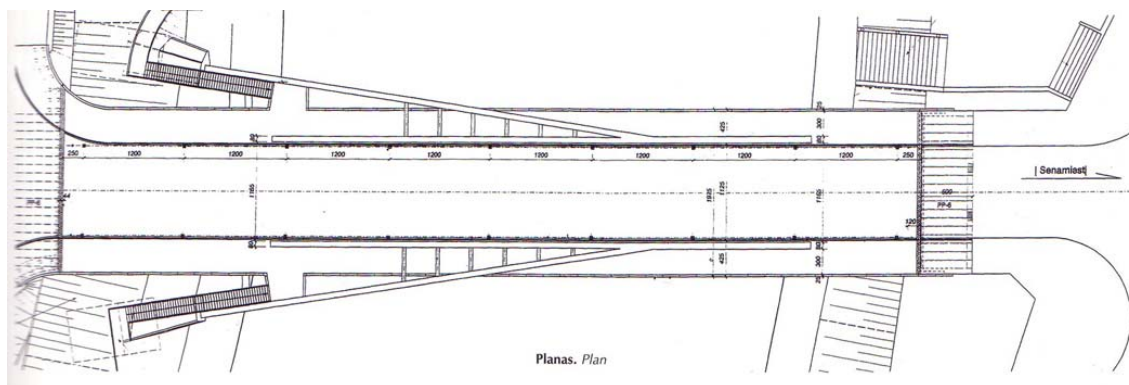
A Government competition for the bridge project was announced in 2001, and was won by a joint team of Kelprojektas and architects Vladas Treinys. The design project had to comply with very strict requirements with regards to finding a synthesis between dealing with its significant adjacent monuments, and retaining a significant monument of itself.

It could not obstruct the historically built up banks of the Neris River: Sv Rapolo Baznycia (St Rapolas Church), Jesuit monastery, Slušku Rumai (the Palace of

Sluskos) and Raduskeviciu Rumai (the Palace of Raduskeviciai) on the right bank 'new city' side nor the Triju Kryziu kalno (Three Cross Hill), the Vilniaus Katedra (Vilnius Cathedral) nor the (Aukstutines ir Zemutines piliu komplekso (Upper and Lower Castle complex) on the left back 'Old City' side.



Surrounding panoramas also required protection, so this dictated a typologically original special- architectural solution for the arched bridge, which sits one hundred and one (101m) metres across the Neris River, and almost twenty metres (19.75m) in width, with three lanes of traffic flowing over it, the minimal, geometrically simple architectural masterpiece.



The competition conditions also set out a very limited timeframe for construction, but this central and monumental site obligated and commanded the highest quality in design and construction.

## **summation**

Lithuanian's, are and have always been a very proud and patriotic people. The regaining of Independence in 1990, has given rise to a very strong wave of symbolic historical adjustments. The national rebirth involved a movement for the protection of monuments, which has called for more efforts to protect, preserve and reconstruct the heritage of not only the Senamiestis – The Old City, but many of its architectural monuments throughout the Country. The first stage in the international rebirth of the Nation, is marked by the aspiration to restore the monuments and buildings of Lithuania's early history, reflecting its epoch of Kings, Grand Dukes, and its great power.

The ability for the Nation to take pride in these powerful symbols, exemplifies the positive nature of the people and the nation, looking at Her history of victories against struggle, as the means of a way to move forward even today.

With Lithuania struggling once again to be an independent nation, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its monuments are needed to remind the people of the history of the state, and the role it has played in Europe. The most important example of this aspiration was the campaign of archaeologists, who have and are exploring the Vodovu Rumai – The Rulers' Palace of the Lower Castle, and the teams of architects and engineers, working with the Government. The rebuilding of the ancient embattlement is still identified with regaining the independence of Lithuania and with the national rebirth.

A Vilnius City Strategic Plan is in place, where in summary it is aiming to make Vilnius:

“The most modern city in Central and Eastern Europe, an international centre of political, business, science and culture. Modern character of Vilnius is manifested by the New Economy created by the progressive society residing in the Peculiar Environment.”<sup>7</sup>

The plan lists such objectives as upgrading the city and making it an attractive business and tourist destination. To translate that scheme into action, not only are there plans to revive, restore and re-construct the buildings of ancient times, but there are also proposals to revive plans from the 1950-60's to build a modern city centre on the opposite side of the River Neris.

Pride – it is perhaps the most suitable and comprehensive word defining the historical centre of Vilnius, the Senamiestis – The Old Town. It has become and still is the fundamental historical and cultural value for the urban population, as well as, all Lithuanians relatively, being one of the strongest and most tangible links with the national consciousness and rich past. Beginning with the legend of the ‘Galezyinis Vilkas’ – The iron wolf, this place still remains to be an unexhausted spring for the hopes of people of the realization of their noble and majestic dreams. The Senamiestis today is not only the source of cultural – historical experience but also, for a certain part, the stimulus of economical processes and even their guarantee.

Vilnius has a unique peculiarity – it is the city with fascinating sights unexpectedly coming into view, with the Senamiestis, having an inimitable character, evenly passing onto the historical centre with suddenly revealed spaces of greenery. A course link between the dominating architecture of baroque and cosy courtyards, squares and green spaces seems to demand the presence of the third participant – fine forms of architecture which would enrich them, would help form the directions of interests, would develop the network of service and information, would form the objects of visual attraction – in the environment of which the Man would feel comfortable today.

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<sup>7</sup> Summary of Vilnius City Strategy Plan 2002-2011, <http://www.vilnius.lt/vmsp/en/html>

Lithuania, and in particular its capital Vilnius, are facing another tough period in its quest for historical and cultural identity. The embracement of the 'renaissance', of the new, has been illustrated over the centuries. It will be interesting to see, whether a new Lithuanian architectural style, will be able to grow, flourish and embrace the past, or whether it will morph, reject the past, and evolve independently.

Vilnius and its architecture is at a very precarious cross road, of whether it is being controlled and driven by commerce and the drive for profit, or architectural merit.



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