

THE SWEDISH EMBASSY IN VILNIUS

DIDZIOJI 16



Sweden was the first country to open an embassy in Vilnius on August 29, 1991 after Lithuania recovered its independence. The property on Didzioji 16 was bought by the Swedish state in 1996. The building has a highly varied history and consists of rests of several buildings with various functions and from different architectural periods. In the Vilnius' city archives, the property is mentioned in 1567 for the first time, but the oldest parts of the building date back to the 14th century.

The archives mention a smaller separate building on the grounds. This building is the oldest part of the embassy where one can still see remains of medieval brick vaults. The different buildings were gradually linked to one unit, a process that was completed with the addition of the glass entrance which makes it possible to pass between the two side wings.

When the Swedish state took over the property in 1996, the Swedish National Property Board and the Lithuanian authorities agreed to preserve and reconstruct as much as possible of the building's historical core. The building went through a thorough renovation and was in 2000 awarded a prize for the best kept building in Vilnius' Old Town. The front of the building, facing the street, houses the embassy's offices, whereas the rear part of the building contains the residence, consisting of the official reception part and the ambassador's private residence.



Swedish interiors, art and design

Whilst the building itself is the product of local building styles, its interior, with its well-chosen fixtures and fittings, conveys something of the Swedish tradition in the arts and crafts. The vast majority of the furniture and textiles have been designed and produced in Sweden – this general principle applies to the furnishing of all Swedish embassies. Most of the furniture represents the functionalist tradition in Swedish design from the mid-20th century. There are also a few pieces from the 1990s. The rich selection of contemporary and older art is also Swedish. The art pieces are on loan from the National Public Art Council in Sweden, which has the task of showing art in public buildings in order to spread Swedish art to a wider audience.

The dining room

The proportions of the dining room are reminiscent of the dining room of a small 18th century Swedish manor house. The prototype of the china set is the so-called “Gripsholm set” which was made in China and given to the Swedish king Gustav III in 1776. The set was intended to be used at Gripsholm castle in Sweden. In the early 20th century Swedish embassies around the world started using copies of the original china set. The modern art pieces on the walls contrast against the traditional style of the dining room.



Medieval vaults in the library and cellar



The library and cellar of the residence belong to the oldest parts of the building (14th or 15th century). The library has a gothic star-vaulted ceiling in brick. The niches have probably been used for some kind of lighting arrangement. The Swedish coat of arms in glass reminds of the building’s present function while taking into account the medieval style of the room.

In the cellar, the aim has been to preserve as much as possible of the original brick, while filling the gaps with new brick. The old stone stairs are probably at the height of the original street level. The cellar is used as an exhibition room.

The salon

A modern version of a chandelier, with specially made prisms from the Kosta Boda glassworks, is a good example of how the residence combines traditional furniture pieces with modern design. The sofa groups are lit up by the colourful armchair, with a fabric design by the well-known textile artist Josef Frank. The place of honour among the art pieces is occupied by the painting “Tyresö” by Prins Eugen, a Swedish prince and artist who left a large art collection to the city of Stockholm in his will. The small table lamp in yellow, red and green is a design by Svenskt Tenn and acquires a particular significance in Lithuania.



Photography: Max Plunger, Jan Gyllbäck.