



THE LICHTENSTEIN PALACE



Office of the Government
of the Czech Republic



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Not far from the Charles Bridge, the Lichtenstein Palace stands at the corner of Na Kampě and U Sovových mlýnů streets. The spacious building, built with a hexagonal floor plan, belongs among the distinctive buildings of the Malá Strana [Lesser Town] panorama, completed by the monumental silhouette of Prague Castle.

The oldest mention of the property where the Lichtenstein Palace is located dates from 1555, which said that a garden was begun, on which two wooden cottages were later built. Along with most buildings on Kampa Island's Vltava riverbank, these dwellings probably disappeared at the end of the Thirty Years' War during the Swedish siege of Prague's Old Town. In 1660, the garden was bought by Jan de la Cron, and he built a larger apartment building there. His niece, Františka Blandina, who inherited the building, brought the property as a dowry into her marriage with František Helfried of Kaiserštejn in 1684. In 1696, Helfried obtained a permit for its reconstruction and expansion from the Lesser Town municipality.

A baroque palace was built there from 1697 to 1698 according to a design by Giovanni Battista Alliprandi. The building had a hexagonal ground plan, but what especially drew attention were its towers on the northeast and southeast sides with onion-shaped roofed arbours. Facing the Vltava at river level, a tunnel led into the palace's interior with a dock for small boats. The palace's garden, with a greenhouse and gardener's cottage, was laid out before its southern façade. The palace's appearance at the time is captured in several engravings, drawings and panoramic views. The engravings of Jan Balzer from 1780 and Filip and František Heger from 1793 are



*The palace's eastern façade
in an engraving by Filip and František Heger, 1793*



Part of Kampa with the Lichtenstein Palace in Langweil's Model of Prague, 1826–1837

among the most valuable from a documentary perspective. When the Kaiserštejns sold their water palace, the building had 11 rooms for gentry, 7 rooms intended for servants, a stable for 20 horses and a coach-house for two wagons.

From 1726 to 1739, the palace belonged to Ferdinand Adam Kustuš of Zubří. The building was probably seriously damaged in a fire or flood. In 1739, the area was purchased at a very low price by leather-dresser Placidus Gialdi – not for housing, but so that he could put a tannery in the building. On 3 November 1741, the building, along with its garden, was sold in an auction to Barbora Krakovská of Kolovrat, whose family then owned the palace for nearly a century. An orthographic draught by Josef Daniel Huber from 1769 captures not only the palace with its twin towers, but also the garden with a network of paths and a fountain with a baroque ground plan.

František Antonín Libštejnský of Kolovrat sold the palace on 30 August 1831 for 27,000 gold Míšenský 'kopa' [a currency unit at the time] to Jan Josef of Lichtenstein. This nobleman had spent most of his life on battlefields, and during the Napoleonic Wars was promoted to field marshal, and also held the post of commander in chief of the Austrian imperial army. He later turned his attention to his farms and also strongly altered the appearance of the Prague palace. Lichtenštejn had both towers with their rooftop arbours removed, and he placed his family's coat of arms above the entrance portal, which was framed with columns. He could also enter the building through the tunnel for small boats, which is documented in Langweil's model of Prague.

The palace remained the property of the Lichtensteins until 1864, when it was

*Overall view of the Malá Strana
[Lesser Town] bank of the Vltava River in
an engraving by Ludvík Kohl, 1793*



purchased by František and Marie Odkolek. By this time Building No. 506 no longer looked like an honourable nobleman's residence. The Lichtensteins were constantly in Vienna and did not devote adequate care to the Prague palace. František Odkolek, who came from an old milling family, added a floor to the building. He had a pair of balconies added to the Vltava-facing eastern façade, and added more decorative architectural framing. With the exception of the entrance portal, the building's Baroque character was replaced by a Classicist façade. The extensive adaptation work was realised according to a design by builder František Srnec, but at the same time the participation of architect Josef Schulz cannot be overlooked; Odkolek used his services in adapting the neighbouring Sovový mlýn complex.

The building has been owned by the municipality of Prague since 1897, which has used it for various official purposes; a number of construction modifications to the interior took place between 1924 and 1934. Judging from period photographs, in which the building has a cracked facade, it is clear that minimal care was devoted to its exterior. At the time the access from the river probably disappeared, and Prague lost its only water palace, one whose equivalents have been preserved in certain European cities to this day.

The regional leadership of the Nazi Party had its headquarters in the building from 1940 to 1945. They placed a large eagle carrying a swastika above the entrance portal. During the occupation, the Germans had the palace's fences removed, including its low walls, and created a training ground for the Hitler Youth on Kampa Island. After



View across the Vltava River of the palace and Sovový mlýny [Sova's Mills], circa 1874

World War II, Kampa was turned into an English-style city park, bordered by the flow of the Vltava River and the Čertovka canal.

The Lichtenstein Palace was added to the list of cultural landmarks, and different institutions have alternated in its spaces, such as the State Construction Committee or the State Planning Commission. The palace passed into the ownership of the Office of the Czechoslovak Government Presidium in 1978. At the time the building

was in desolate shape. Its masonry, unmaintained for dozens of years, started to gradually fall apart, and there was a threat of the collapse of the entire eastern façade into the Vltava.

In 1979, the Office of the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic requested that the State Institute for the Reconstruction of Monument Cities and Buildings reconstruct the building. The demanding construction work was carried out from 1982 to 1991 by Pražský stavební podnik [the Prague Construction Company] according to a design by Ing. arch. Kamil Fuchs and Ing. arch. Jarmila Ledinská. In cooperation with Vodní Stavby, they had to first secure the palace's perimeter wall against water using Milan walls, whose concrete protection reaches from 10 to 14 meters deep, and then had to carry out an injection of the walls and pull down the entire building using steel draw bars. The careful cleanup of the foundations enabled the spaces to be expanded by one underground floor. The goal of the reconstruction was not only its structural security, but also especially the historic monument's overall renewal. The reconstruction also took place in the palace's interiors, which were altered and furnished as luxury apartments for special guests of the Czech president, parliament and government. The destructive floods which hit Prague in the summer of 2002 destroyed the ground floor spaces, and the palace awaited a new and expensive reconstruction.

The government of the Czech Republic currently uses the Lichtenstein Palace for representational purposes. The apartments situated on the 2nd floor were host



*Overall view of the palace's
western side,
10 December 1929*



*View from the courtyard,
circa 1925*

to Spain's King Juan Carlos and his wife Sofia; in 1996 the British Queen Elizabeth II stayed there with her husband, Prince Philip, as did Japan's Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko in 2002. The ground floor halls and salons are also used for working meetings and deliberations, expert seminars and conferences. At the same time, the doors of the Lichtenstein Palace are regularly opened to the public. An exhibition mapping the 50-year history of the Czech Institute of Egyptology of Charles University's Faculty of Philosophy was installed in its spaces in 2008. A year later, the original Imperial Charter was exhibited there; in it, Emperor Rudolf II guaranteed the Czech status of religious freedom and their estates' privileges. Exhibitions of art made by children in orphanages are regularly held during the Christmas holiday season at the Lichtenstein Palace.



Opposite: *Masaryk's salon*





The Brown Hall

The Kampa Salon





Dining room in the presidential apartment

Spiral staircase



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Photography: Martin Frouz, Archive of the City of Prague,
Archive of the National Museum, Museum of the City of Prague
Engravings taken from a book by Cyril Merhout and Zdeněk Wirth

Graphic design: Jerome s. r. o. – Petr Liška
Production and printing: Jerome s. r. o.

Published by the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2010
ISBN 978-80-7440-020-9



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of the Czech Republic

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The Lichtenstein Palace serves as prestige space for the Czech prime minister and is one of the buildings that the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic uses to perform tasks linked to the government's activities. The buildings also include the Straka Academy, the Hrzán Palace, the Kramář Villa and the Villa of Hana and Edvard Beneš in Sezimovo Ústí.



The atrium in front of the southern facade

Back page : The Lichtenstein family coat of arms above the entrance portal

