

The Gdynia Railway Station Restoration Project¹

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The 1955-58 construction of the main railway station in Gdynia was a very difficult task in terms of both design and execution. It was erected in place of the old 1920s building, incorporating its parts, in conditions of uninterrupted railway service.² The building from 1926,³ which replaced an even earlier railway station complex,⁴ was destroyed in World War II. The new railway station was to be a modern and stately edifice, welcoming travellers to a modern and vibrant European seaport town.

The railway station was designed by Waław Tomaszewski, an architect who established himself before World War II with such buildings as the Cotton House and Gdynia Maritime University buildings in Gdynia. The vast station's monumental architecture, consists of a set of rectangular prisms of different height; it grew out of the Gdynia modernist tradition and displays its distinct features, transformed in the spirit of the socialist realism that was *de rigueur* at the time. Used both in the proportions of the façade and the interior, and in the architectural detail, the language of Classicism was combined with Art Déco accents and a modernist structural approach to give the building its original form. The building's interior is equally interesting, with its combination of austere orderly classicist forms with art-deco detail and colour painting and mosaic ornamentation.

The building is a complex and highly interesting object. It can be analysed as a remarkable example of 1950s architecture; it is an inspiration to design scholars and an important milestone in the history of post-World War II monumental painting and the history of painting technique and technology.

The new railway station was located in the exact spot where the pre-World War II station had been, with an additional building to serve the electric commuter rail line. The construction of the entire ensemble began in 1950. The first to open were the central part of the station and

its right wing. The left wing was designed to include the main passageway to the platforms, through a tunnel already built for the pre-World War II station, and a passageway to the electric commuter rail station. Furthermore, it included passengers' facilities, with a large restaurant, a waiting room, left luggage office and a row of ticket offices. The official opening of this part of the station took place on 22 July 1955.⁵ However, the very elaborate décor of the restaurant interior was not ready until 1957. In 1959, the commuter rail section was opened where, next to the waiting room, a youth day room was designed on the ground floor and a café and cinema room upstairs. The cinema, however, did not come to be so the rooms and terrace were adapted by the Kino Orbis Railway Station Restaurant Enterprise for a high-class stylish café. The Gdynia Railway Junction Technology and Rationalisation Club was established in place of the restaurant in 1960.

A large number of elements from the original interior have survived, although it has deteriorated, especially in recent years. The interior of the main building's ground floor is the most interesting with its richly decorated restaurant and main and ticket halls. It was very painstakingly designed with every detail meticulously finished using relatively inexpensive and readily available materials.

Just like other buildings from the period, the Gdynia Railway Station has always been the source of much controversy and public debate in terms of its heritage status. Nonetheless, it became a listed historical monument of the Pomorskie Voivodship in August 2008 and is now under protection. The Gdynia Railway Station ensemble has been undergoing repair, upgrading and restoration since 2010.

5. www.gdynianowaglowna.pl website dedicated to the Redevelopment of the Gdynia Main Railway Station complex.

1. This article is based on the restoration work performed by the author in the railway station interior.

2. Bara Zdzisław Konrad, *Wspomnienie o Profesorze Waławie Tomaszewskim (1884-1969)*, "Pismo PG", No. 3/2007, pp. 20-23.

3. The complex body of the building designed by Romuald Miller is a reference to the Polish corner chamber manor house (a reference to national historicism was a precondition for competition participants). The brick building has a vast underground storey, used as technical rooms and later adapted to the needs of an air-raid shelter. The building soon turned out to be too small for the needs of the growing station. It was expanded in 1938, including an extension of the underground tunnel leading to the platforms. The railway station was destroyed in World War II. It was provisionally rebuilt in 1946, but turned out to be too small to accommodate the needs.

4. The first railway station was built in 1879. This was a small one-storey wooden building. In 1894 the station was upgraded to include a passenger platform. In 1905 a brick railway station building with staff rooms and a switch tower was added to the wooden waiting room. A brick waiting room was built in 1907. (Zdzisław Bara, op. cit., gdynianowaglowna.pl).

1. Restaurant interior prior to restoration, exposed samples. Photo by A. Kriegseisen





2. Exposed samples of the wooden facing and a colouring test on a column in the restaurant. Photo by A. Kriegseisen

The project was completed in June 2012.⁶

The main building's interior layout remains clear in spite of many redevelopments and haphazard layers that had accumulated. The two zones, parallel to the front façade, the main hall with the ticket offices and waiting room, and the side hall with the restaurant and the former left luggage office, are divided by a pair of transverse passageways.

The floors in these spaces are covered with mosaics made of domestic limestone: black Dębnik, beige Morawica and reddish-brown Bolechowice. The walls and ceilings have rhythmic partitions made of rusticated and panelled stucco, and ceiling coffers. The lower parts of the walls in the ticket office hall and the ticket offices themselves are lined with panelling, part black Dębnik, part black varnished wood (plywood and veneer). The radiators were put into fireplace-shaped wooden frames. The openings of these "fireplaces" were enclosed in slotted casings. The décor was completed with massive panelled and glazed doors in the main hall and the passageway to the SKM commuter rail station and wooden portals with small pillars. The austere look of these monumental forms is softened by the purely art-deco

6. The work was performed under the Redevelopment of the Gdynia Main Railway Station Complex project. The construction works were by Mostostal Warszawa S.A. The project was managed by Tebodin Poland, with historical preservation supervision on behalf of Tebodin by Izabela Huk Malinowska. Restoration by Anna Kriegseisen Art Renovation.

3. Hall after the completion of the restoration project. Photo by A. Kriegseisen



detail; geometric stucco ornamentation in the soffits of the tall window openings and the lamp casings, rhythmically positioned on wall brackets, shaped like polygonal lanterns. The polished black of the stone and wood was combined with warm pastel ochre and the sky-blue of walls and ceilings. The partitions were highlighted with a colour that was a shade darker.

The classicism of the main and side halls' majestic forms is tempered by the large surfaces of the multi-coloured mosaics. The multi-coloured compositions made of small irregular pieces assembled in rectangular sections were designed by Teresa Pałowska and Hanna Żuławska.⁷ Both artists, who were very active in the Tri-City (Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) artists' community at the time, were among the founders of the Sopot School of Art and took part in creating the façade decorations of the Royal Route in Gdańsk, rebuilt after World War II. Hanna Żuławska was the head of the ceramics studio at the PWSSP State Art College in Gdańsk from 1948 and in 1956-57 lead the Kadyny group of ceramics artists.⁸

The hall has four monumental mosaics. The largest one, depicting a fantastical harbour, was placed on the section of the wall facing the Plac Konstytucji entrance. A long narrow space with an area of about 30 m² is filled in with a composition depicting harbour cranes with nets full of goods from various corners of the world: fruit, shells, fish. The upper part of the mosaic has the sun, the moon and a peacock. The lower part between the cranes features pyramids. In the middle, there is a fragment of a ship's side, while the left-hand half of the mosaic has various fantastically shaped fish. The mosaic's colours include shades of purple, blue and brown with touches of different shades of white, red, navy blue, sky blue and ultramarine. The shimmering background was made of multi-coloured pieces in the mosaic's basic colour range. Above the entrance to the restaurant, there is a mosaic depicting a pair of running pegasi and a symbol of the railway. The over 30 m² rectangular space is covered with a latitudinal grid against a background of a sky with clouds, small planets and fantastical symbols. The right-hand side of the composition features a pair of running pegasi against this background, under, with a winged wheel underneath. The sky consists of brown pieces, the longitudinal grid has pieces in various shades of white with gilded fragments, the pegasi are in shades of green and blue with black and navy blue, the wheel in shades of white, grey and black. The

7. *Tradycja i współczesność. Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Gdańsku 1945-2005*, companion book to an exhibition at the National Museum in Gdańsk, Gdańsk 2005, p. 407; Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, Anna Orchowska-Smolińska, *Wytuczne konserwatorskie rewaloryzacji Dworca kolejowego Gdynia Główna* [in:] *Wstępna ekspertyza techniczna kompleksu dworcowego Gdynia Główna* (Studio DZ Daniel Załuski), Gdańsk, 2008, typescript at the Pomorskie Voivodship Heritage Monuments Protection Office in Gdańsk, p. 22.

8. Ewelina Koźlińska, *Ceramika artystyczna - świat mało znany* [in:] *Tradycja i współczesność...* op. cit., p. 195.

5. Map with personifications of the Anemoi, the Four Winds, after restoration. Photo by A. Kriegseisen



4. Detail of the ceiling coffer ornament after restoration, with visible "aged painting" technique. Photo by A. Kriegseisen



brown surface on the left-hand side is brightened up with small yellow, red, sky-blue and green pieces.

Two further mosaics cover parts of the side hall, across from the former left luggage office. To the left of the old side entrance to the restaurant, there is a composition depicting marine plants and animals. The rectangular space of ca. 20 m² is covered with "water" as a background for fantastical seaweed plants and fish. The upper part has depictions of the moon in its various phases. The overall colour scheme is in shades of sea blue and green. This monochrome is softened with the reds, whites and navy blue of the fish, plants and moon. On the right-hand side of the restaurant entrance, there a mosaic depicts the sky above a sailboat harbour. The rectangular space has the exact same dimensions as the neighbouring mosaic and depicts a sky with clouds which is a backdrop for birds, sailboat masts with flags and the arm of a harbour crane. In the middle there is a moon motif. The overall colour scheme is dominated by shades of brown and white in the background. The lines of the masts and the crane are black, while the small pieces making up the triangular flags are shades of red, white, sky-blue and navy blue. The pieces used for the birds are the same set of colours. The final mosaic in the former commuter railway dispatch building depicts exotic animals: lions, gazelles and peacocks. The rectangular space of about 20 m² is covered with a shimmering multi-coloured background, with a predominance of yellow-beige pieces with images of semi-abstract animals with bodies decorated with colourful squares and stripes.

The restaurant is the building's most stately room. It has an irregular, almost rectangular, layout and is parallel to the façade. Its north-west wall is cut through with huge double window openings. The remaining walls have a three-section composition: the part near the ground is covered with black Dębnik limestone facing, the upper border has a huge cubic rectangular stucco frieze, while the section between them is divided with panels and rectangular fields, six of which are filled in with monumental painting decorations. The ceiling is also covered in paintings.

The central part of the ceiling has a large space in the form of two interlocked rectangles, while the southern part features ten coffers, alternatively sunk into profiled and flat frames. This part of the ceiling is supported by three rusticated and panelled columns. All of the walls, including those between the windows, feature wall brackets with lanterns. The vents are covered with ornamental open-work metal grilles with rosettes. The restaurant's floor, like the halls, is paved with a stone mosaic.

The restaurant's painted decorations were made by a team of artists led by Juliusz Studnicki and based on his design. The team included his wife, Krystyna Łada-Studnicka, Urszula Ruhnke-Duszeńko and Maks Kasproicz.⁹ The paintings on the ceiling and walls refer to travel and navigation. The main space of the ceiling features a night sky with a pair of suns, surrounded by a circle of fantastical creatures that symbolise constellations and zodiac signs together with small stars and sea creatures. In the flat coffers, three-quarter profiles of human and animal heads are placed on the edges of square fields. The sunken coffers, which contain vents, are decorated with colourful borders. The spaces on the walls feature maps of the world, Europe, the Baltic coast, Poland, the Gdańsk region, the Gdynia region and the wind rose above the entrance from the left luggage hall.

The restaurant's rich décor was designed down to the finest detail, in terms of both form and colour scheme. Whereas a cool shade of greenish-blue dominates the restaurant's exterior, the colourful painting decorations inside have a prevailing warm shade of ochre. Even the lantern panes inside have orange-tinted glass, while the ones outside are greenish.

9. Gdynia. Dworzec PKP. Sufit jajem, mlekiem i octem malowany. Interview by Agata Grzegorzczuk with Urszula Ruhnke-Duszeńko, naszemiasto.pl, Andrzej Zagrobelny, *Życie i twórczość Juliusza Studnickiego (1906-1978)*, master's thesis written at the University of Gdańsk's Art History Institute, 2010, typescript, p. 143 - the author's interview with Urszula Ruhnke-Duszeńko.



6. Fragment of the coast map after filler application. Photo by A. Kriegseisen

The paintings were intentionally "aged" when they were made to appear partially worn and damaged, like historical frescoes. The ceiling consists of a chaff soffit lining, onto which a gypsum skim coat was applied. A sketch of the design to scale was made on the impregnated surface with an indelible pencil. The sketch was filled in with quick, bold brushstrokes of tempera and casein paint. During the painting, some of the layers were sanded with some tool with a rough surface (e.g. sandpaper, wire brush), after which further layers were applied, this time glazed, or the contours were retouched to achieve the effect of a worn fresco. The surface of the finished painting was covered with wax paste which gave it a particular sheen, like that in medieval panel painting.

The maps on the walls were also made on a gypsum-glue plaster in oil technique. A pencil sketch was used here as well. The backgrounds were made with quick, dynamic brushstrokes using various paint colours, also for a worn fresco effect. Pencil drawing was used here not only as a sketch, but also in the finishing coat, for instance to apply the grid of longitudinal and latitudinal lines on the globes. These maps are especially interesting in terms of both form and iconography, painting technique history and artistic inspiration. The paintings and mosaics which decorate the Gdynia Railway Station seem to be Poland's only fully preserved ensemble of monumental décor from the post-World War II period.

Before the comprehensive conservation and restoration project began in 2010, the railway station's interior had been in a state of advanced disrepair. Both halls had accumulated all sorts of makeshift stalls and points of sale. The restaurant hall had been divided with partition walls and lost its original look completely. The painting decorations had been painted over.¹⁰ Its furniture did not survive. The paintings on the ceiling were chipped in many places and had debonded across large areas, had traces of damp-induced damage (roof slab damage) and were overall in very poor technical condition.

10. The decoration had most likely been painted over in the 1980s, when the Wars catering enterprise ceased to run railway station restaurants and the hall was rented out. There is a photograph from the time, taken as a memento by the restaurant staff, where the ladies stand against the background of a visible fragment of the map that was part of the wall decoration ensemble.

7. Left luggage hall with mosaics. Glazed stairway to the basement storey. Photo by A. Kriegseisen





8. Fragment of the old railway station basement, after uncovering. Photo by A. Kriegseisen



9. Fragment of the old railway station basement, after restoration. Photo by A. Kriegseisen

The brittle painted layer was heavily soiled (the protective wax paste had darkened) and had debonded practically across its entire surface. It had crumbled and chipped in many places. The wood-faced columns had been painted over multiple times, as were the wooden lanterns, the stucco ornaments, the ornamental vent grilles and the "fireplace" casings. One such casing was missing. The stone panelling was damaged in many places.

Conservation work is usually an opportunity to get to know a historical monument better and to make various "discoveries". Such was the case with the railway station in Gdynia. During the work on the ceiling samples were exposed on the walls to determine the size and condition of the wall paintings. Over this relatively short period, some two dozen years since they had been painted over, the paintings were completely forgotten. Because the multiple coats of paintwork had not bonded with the original coat, it was possible to remove them and restore the original appearance of these remarkably interesting decorations.

The mosaics were mostly covered with various random items that had accumulated during the building's use and the renting of its part to various tenants. All the mosaics had been covered except for the composition with the harbour. The lower part of the mosaic with the pegasi was hidden behind the remains of an illuminated marquee of a shop that opened in place of the former restaurant, the bottom third of the wall mosaics in the passageway to the suburban train station were hidden behind the roof of a row of temporary shops. The surface of all the compositions was very heavily soiled as the porous material easily absorbs dirt. The food stalls that had occupied the small open pavilions caused a brown greasy film to form. The dirt obscured the compositional detail and distorted the colour scheme. Cracks and chips in the mosaics' colour layer were visible in several places. The damage was probably caused by protracted water leakage.

Apart from the damage ensuing from long-term use (mechanical damage, soiling, multiple paint coats), the décor's wooden components - the panelling and richly decorated portals - were damaged when the interior had been divided to accommodate numerous food stalls.

Some of the features had been walled off, some of it removed. For example, the restaurant door and the clock above its exit to the left luggage hall did not survive and one leaf of the entrance door was missing.¹¹ Many of the lanterns were damaged, most of them had their glass panes broken. Sixteen of them were missing out of a total of 50 in the restaurant and the halls. Another "discovery" was the uncovering of the remains of the previous railway station building from 1926 on the ground floor, in the back of the ticket office hall and in the basement which was converted into a passenger-access area during the station's upgrade.

The following restoration work was performed under the Reconstruction of the Gdynia Główna Railway Station Complex project:

- reconstruction of the façade's original colour scheme and the restoration of the stone window surrounds;
- highlighting of the brick walls in the basement: the remains

11. A description of the building's styles and its technical and general condition can be found in the documentation by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, Anna Orchowska-Smolnińska, *Wytuczne konserwatorskie*, op. cit.

of the old railway station were uncovered, and a fragment of the arcade wall on the ground floor - also a relic of the 1926 building - was restored;

- the painting ensemble on the restaurant walls was uncovered, its loosened fragments bonded; the entire ensemble was reinforced, cleaned, the holes in the base and the foundation were filled in and the painting layer retouched;
- complete restoration of the ceiling paintings in the restaurant;
- complete restoration of the mosaics in the ticket and left luggage halls;
- complete restoration of the wooden décor components: panelling, 24 double doors, the clock in the ticket hall, the lantern casings, radiator casings and faux fireplaces.

The multi-coloured limestone floor in the restaurant was preserved in full. In the halls much of the flooring was replaced with identical ones due to extensive damage.¹² The stonework also included the restoration, filling in and reconstruction of the Dębnik limestone wall facing in the halls and the restaurant and the window sills made of the same stone in the restaurant.

The extensive construction works resulted in repairing the façade, the interior of the main building and the office building which is part of the complex. In the main building, the basement was converted for passenger access. The services were moved to shops built into the spans of the colonnade in the passageway to the SKM commuter rail station. After restoration, the restaurant hall is intended to serve its original function. The restaurant's kitchen facilities were reinstated after the restoration.

After almost two years of work, the railway station's main building regained the original character its designers had intended. In spite of the considerable upgrading required by the standards of a contemporary railway station, Gdynia Główna Osobowa (Gdynia Main Passenger Railway Station) remains a fine testament to its time. Though not easy, it was possible to reconcile the building's heritage status and highlighting its artistic qualities, with the prerequisites implied by its function.

An interesting highlight is an educational route with info boards placed throughout the building at the major pieces of the décor and the accompanying audio guides which can be rented at the station.

The application of restoration methods and principles to comparatively recent buildings is still controversial among the general public. However, both restoration authorities and practitioners have to deal with such issues more and more frequently.

12. Stonework restoration: Mr H. Janosik of Gdańsk.



10. Vent grille on the hall ceiling, after restoration. Photo by A. Kriegseisen