

A New Canon of the Modernist Villa from the 1930s in Gdynia – a Villa with a Semicircular Veranda. The Post-War Continuation of the Idea

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The villa as an architectural design theme

The villa has been present in designing as an architectural theme since ancient years. Throughout the centuries, Roman villas were the sign of luxury and good taste. Their tradition was continued in Italy during the Renaissance period and later on it deeply permeated European architecture. The villa has always been a symbol of the social and material status of the owner. Therefore, it has entailed architectural work diligence and in spite of its comparatively small size it has constituted good grounds for the artistic expression.

Typologically, the basic definition of the villa comprises a single-family home in the garden, although sometimes it is possible to come across the versions where it is a detached house for two or three families. The villa is a “product” of the urban culture, or more precisely the bourgeois one – although it was built out of the city or on the border between the city and the country. For centuries it was seen as highly exclusive goods, yet during the 19th and 20th centuries it became a more common element of a building culture and started to influence the style of the epoch. It was then used also as an element of the urban doctrines and theories that suggested various models of making the town a healthier place to live. The most famous of them was the garden-city one, which considered a house in the garden as a basic architectural design form.

For the language of Modernism the villa constituted a theme that, from many points of view, was “exemplary” or even ideal. A comparatively uncomplicated functional program, spatial autonomy of the building itself, a wealthy and culturally ambitious customer were its strong points. All that gave the modernists a great possibility of experimenting with a form. It was possible to treat buildings as free-standing sculptures where the leading motive of the new architecture was clearly visible, that is, a beautiful play of building shapes casting shadows in light. No other architectural period saw that many villas enter the canon of architectural styles as in the 1920s and 1930s.

The 1920s modernist villa canon and cubic villas in Gdynia

The modernist villa canon developed in the works of the most prominent architects of the first decades of the twentieth century beginning with Adolf Loos and finishing with Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. On the one hand, they looked for the maximal form simplicity, but on the other, they discovered artistic values in various combinations of shapes and colours.

As a result, in 1920s, the dynamically developing modernist movement created a model of the villa whose form was comprised in a stepped arrangement of a

rectangular cuboid or a cube. It can be clearly seen in the villa model of the Maison Citrohan by Le Corbusier from 1920. In those days the cubic forms practically became the rule in the stylistics of Modernism. The simplicity of the form was additionally emphasized by light, almost white colours. Only in some artistic circles, ideologically related to De Stijl movement, richly saturated primary colours contrasting with each other were introduced – just like in abstract paintings. The most suggestive example is the Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht from 1924.

However, the main development trend of Modernism did prefer the architecture of the cuboid, light coloured shapes. Such were the most famous villas of the time – Walter Gropius Dessau buildings and Le Corbusier’s buildings: the Maison La Roche and the Maison Cook. The same solutions were suggested by Rob Mallet Stevens in the Noailles Villa and by Mies van der Rohe in the Tugendhat Villa in Brno. They created a certain set of patterns that influenced European architecture including the villas in Gdynia.

The cubic forms were predominant in the modernist villa architecture in Gdynia both in the 1920s and 1930s. The first designs of that type were made for the villa district in Kamienna Góra by Adam Knauff, an architect from Warsaw, in 1928. They had a spatial shape similar to the cube. The first buildings of similar stylistics appeared there a bit later, as the peak of Modernism in Gdynia can be observed after 1930. From then on a lot of those buildings were built in all the town, although the most interesting architecturally buildings can be found in Kamienna Góra. We can see there the Rummel villa by Waław Tomaszewski, the Guttman villa by Leon Mazalon, the “Gdynika” guesthouse by Waław Tomaszewski, the Villa Ala by Stanisław Ziółowski and two great buildings by Zbigniew Kupiec – Tadeusz Kossak architecture company, that is, the villa of Czesław Antkowiak and Jerzy Prokulski and the villa of Magdalena Łosiowa¹.

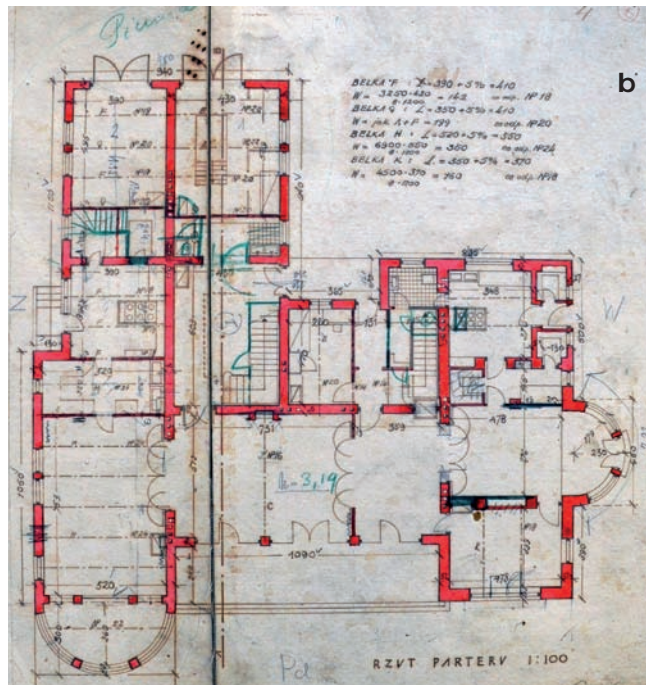
The streamlined fashion in the end of the twenties and its perception in Gdynia

Paralelly to the cubic forms, one can also observe the streamlined ones in the modernist aesthetics of the second half of the twenties. Although at the beginning they were not so common, they always constituted a prominent composition element of the building. Gradually, they gained popularity in European architecture, especially among the architects who, to a smaller or bigger extent, were related to the expressionist trend. The patterns of that solution type were created mainly by a German expressionist, Erich Mendelsohn, who shaped the rounded corners of his buildings in a specifically

1. The executions in question are presented in detail in the book by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Architektura i urbanistyka*, Warszawa 1993.



a



b

1 a, b. "Różany Gaj" guesthouse, designed in 1927 in Kamienna Góra by Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski and Włodzimierz Prochaska (a photograph from the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. The ground floor plan from Archiwum Urzędu Miasta in Gdynia (Archive of the Town Hall in Gdynia, further called AUMG)

dynamic way. It can be clearly seen in his department stores in Stuttgart and Wrocław (1928). A bit earlier Jacobus J. P. Oud introduced that kind of expression into the modernist design canon building streamlined worker's housing in Hook of Holland in 1924-27. Another expressionist architect, Hans Scharoun, used dynamic cylindrical forms which we can see in his hotel building in *Wohnung und Werksraum* (WUWA) housing estate in Wrocław from 1929. The execution of those buildings had an immense impact on the streamline trend development in the architecture of European Functionalism.

Since the end of the 1920s Polish architects also willingly used cylindrical forms, especially in the medium and large scale buildings. Those forms first appeared in the architecture of the exhibition pavilions during the Polish General Exhibition in Poznań (PWK) in 1929. It is also possible to come across them in the prestigious Warsaw building executions from the 1930s and many attractive buildings of that time in Katowice, Lwów and Gdynia. The most interesting examples of the streamlined forms of Functionalism in Gdynia are the three flag-modernist buildings: the ZUS office building by Roman Piotrowski, the BGK residential house designed by Stanisław Ziółowski and Dom Żeglarza Polskiego (The Polish Sailor's House - today the Faculty of Navigation at Gdynia Maritime University), the work of Bohdan Damięcki and Tadeusz Sieczkowski.

At the same time, both in Poland and all Europe, we may notice the influence of the streamline design aesthetics in the small scale architecture, namely, the villa architecture. Initially, in the second half of the 1920s only the single background elements and single wall corners were streamlined. The most famous European executions of that kind are as follows: a house by Hans Scharoun in Weisenhoff Exhibition in Stuttgart, the Stein villa in Garches by Le Corbusier from 1928, and his fabulous Savoye villa in Poissy from 1929. Gradually, the streamlined villa elements were

located in more visible places, becoming the strong points of the house front elevation. They were mostly designed in the form of semicylindrical quasi-extensions of the house, lower than the rest of the building and with a terrace on the roof. As a rule they had a shape of a semicircular glazed or partially glazed veranda, that is, the veranda with windows. We can see this in the villas by Luckhardt brothers and Adolf Anker; and also in the villas by Heinrich Lauterbach and Moritz Hadda at the aforementioned WUWA exhibition in Wrocław². The building executions which were made popular by numerous architecture publications became quite famous and encouraged the usage of the streamlined forms in single-family homes.

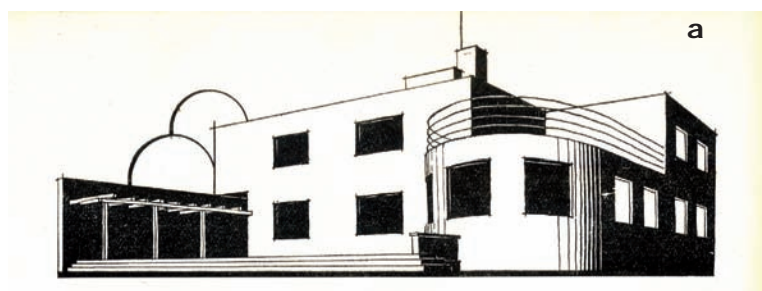
The first buildings with semicircular verandas in Gdynia and a new model of the modernist villa - the Roszczyniński's Villa in Orłowo

In the modernist functional aesthetics in Gdynia the motive of the semicircular veranda appeared as early as in 1927. One can see that in the designs of very young architects - aforementioned Adam Knauff and also Włodzimierz Prochaska and Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski. Those architects were either students or young graduates of the Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology.

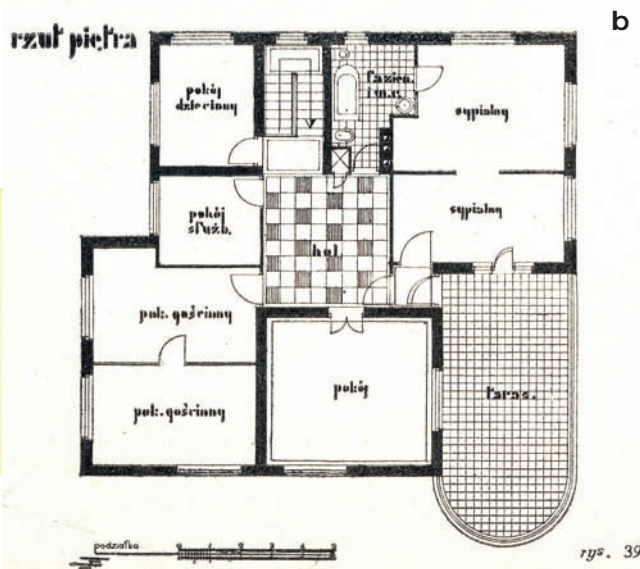
In February 1927 Adam Knauff designed the Dom Zdrojowy (Spa House) in Gdynia. Its construction began in March the same year. It was located at the end of Marszałek

2. Compare Urbanik Jadwiga, *Wrocławska wystawa Werkbundu WUWA 1929*, Wrocław 2002, pp. 212-225.

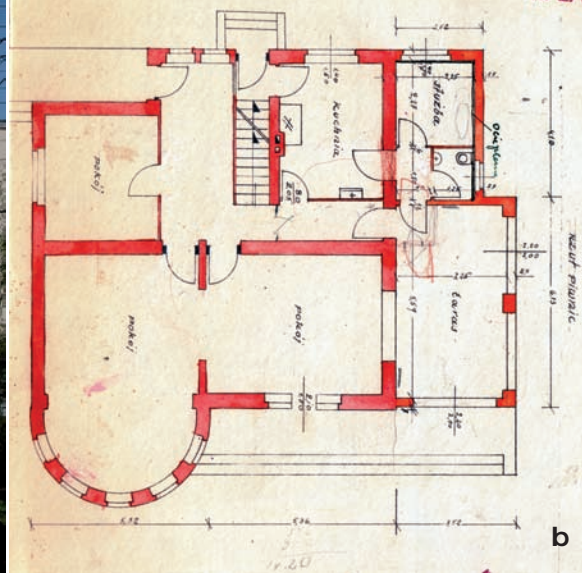
2 a, b. Wiktor Roszczyniński's villa design in Orłowo, arch. Leon Mazalon 1930. According to "Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie" (House, Housing Estate, Flat)



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b



3 a, b. Villa Dzinka in 24 Przebendowskich Street in Orłowo designed in 1933 by Stanisław Żwirski. Photo by M.J. Sołtysik, the AUMG plan

Piłsudski Avenue, close to the beach, by the sea. It was the very first functionalist building whose construction was begun in Gdynia. The investment was finished in 1929 and it was one of the two main hotels of the summer resort in Kamienna Góra. The extremely modernist form of the building with an assymetrically situated, pillared terrace which was counterbalanced from the north by a semicircular veranda constituted a very attractive architectural element of this part of the summer resort.³

A few months later, in September 1927, two university friends of Adam Knauff, Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski and Włodzimierz Prochaska, designed a big guesthouse "Różany Gaj" (Rose Grove) nearby the Dom Zdrojowy. It was to be built on the high slope of Kamienna Góra, above Marszałek Piłsudski Avenue, towering over the seashore and the beach. Its construction was begun at the end of 1927. The building shape that was inspired by the ship form was broken up with terraces on different levels and a round tower superstructure which had two half-round verandas. They, along with their wide windows, opened the building from the side of the sea and the south. The characteristic spatial shape of the "Różany Gaj" guesthouse dominated the Kamienna Góra⁴ outline for many years, constituting the symbol of the summer resort and Gdynia itself.

Probably those two building executions – apart from the European villa architecture examples – became the inspiration for the architect who as the first one designed

a villa with a half-round veranda in Gdynia. That architect was a young and talented engineer Leon Mazalon. In 1928 he graduated from the architecture faculty at Gdańsk Technical University (then *Danziger Hochschule*), where certainly the works of European expressionists were extremely popular. In 1930, having received an order from Wiktor Roszczynialski – a lawyer from Gdynia, he designed a villa in Orłowo – in those days a popular summer resort located in the vicinity of Gdynia and which, in fact, was incorporated into the town in 1935. The villa design was published in the national and prestigious architecture magazine "Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie" (House, Housing Estate, Flat) and the very construction of the building was begun in 1930.

Wiktor Roszczynialski's villa was located at 20 Przebendowskich Street. It was slightly moved away from the street and was preceded by a terrace and a meticulously designed garden which was situated in the front, the southern side of the building. Additionally, from the west, the garden was covered with a characteristic clinker brick wall with a pergola. The villa surroundings were arranged according to the rules set by the famous European villa executions, that is "the interiors, terraces and the garden were thought to be a unity with regard to colour, size and proportion".⁵ However, the main emphasis of the construction was put on the semicircular veranda located from the south and which dynamically entered the garden and the ground terrace. The

3. Unfortunately, after the war, in the 1950s the building was badly extended.

4. The building preserved its original form till the 1960s when it was totally rebuilt and the "Antracyt" hotel was created with boring and commonplace architecture. Nowadays, in 2012, the building was again rebuilt, however, with no respect for the forms of the interwar period, despite the fact that the old name "Różany Gaj" was restored.

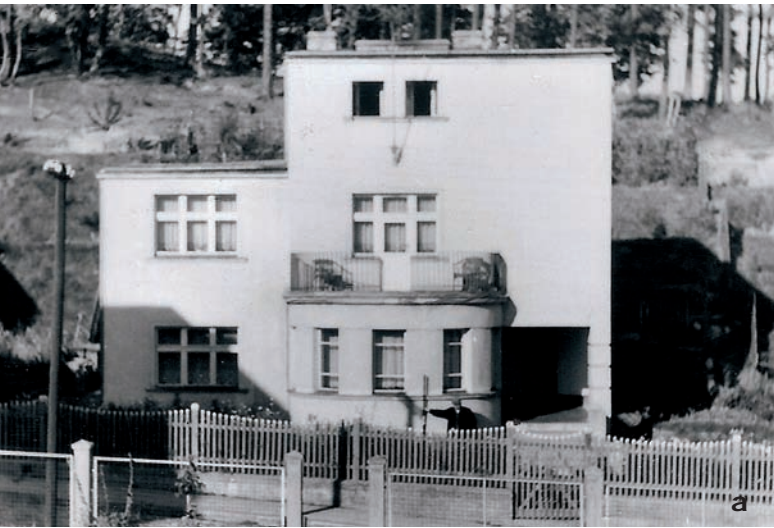
4. The villa of Irena Nowosielska at 104 Wrocławska Street in Orłowo built in the first half of the 1930s according to the design by Józef Kirkor. Photo by M.J. Sołtysik



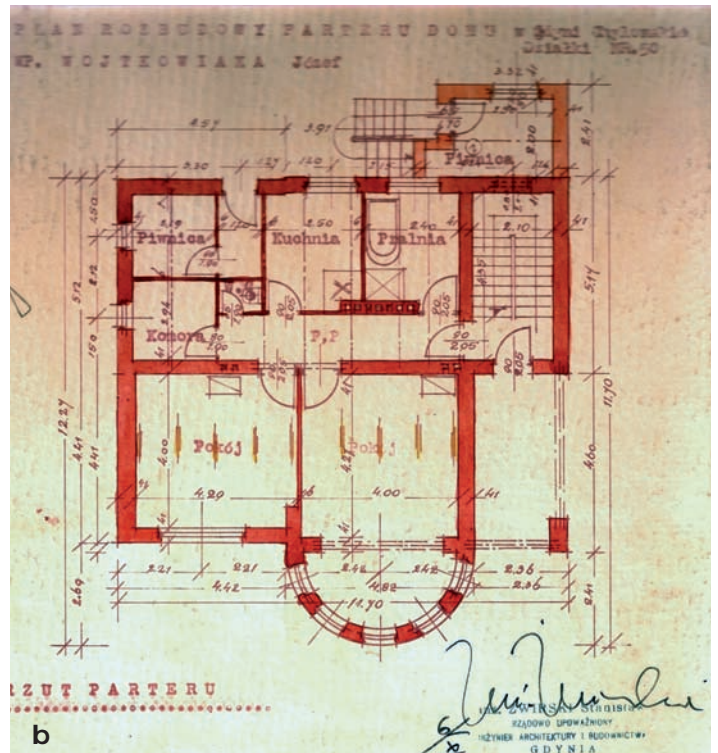
5. The description of one of the famous modernist villas which was presented in the Polish press at the end of 1920s – a villa in Neuilly, designed by Gabriel Guevrekian ("Dom Osiedle Mieszkanie DOM", No. 3 March 1929, pp. 26 and 27).

5. Villa Trzy Róże (Three Roses) 12 Sienkiewicza Street in Kamienna Góra built in 1933 for Halina and Kazimierz Bieliński. From AUMG





6 a, b. The villa at 12 Kwidzińska Street in Dziłki Leśne built in the middle of the 1930s according to the design by Stanisław Żwirski. From AUMG



veranda constituted a spatial extension of the main building interiors – a living room – followed by the enfilade suite of the library, the study and a big dining room. Upstairs were the bedrooms and guest-rooms leading onto the terrace on the roof of the cylindrical veranda.

The construction of the villa was finished in 1931 and it was so successful that the model of the house with the half-round veranda became a willingly copied design by other investors both in Orłowo and other districts of Gdynia.

The popularity of the new idea in the thirties

The villa canon with a semicylindrical veranda seemed extremely appropriate for the beautifully located seaside and forest districts of Gdynia. The theme was eagerly picked up by young modernist architects working here. As a rule, the semicylindrical form of veranda appeared in the house plan either from the south or south-west side so as to ensure the best insolation of the interior. It was always designed to have a view opening onto the garden. Therefore, it was the plot location that decided if the veranda was in the front, side or rear elevation.

In Orłowo, nearby the Roszczyniński's villa, a few houses inspired by its architecture were soon built. The Villa Dzinka, designed by Stanisław Żwirski in 1933, was constructed at 24 Przebendowskich Street. In its layout we can see the architectural juxtaposition of a taller cubic form with a one-storey high half-round front veranda with a terrace on the roof. A similar veranda is also a strong architectural element of the villa at 13 Popiełki Street, however, here it is the element of the side elevation.

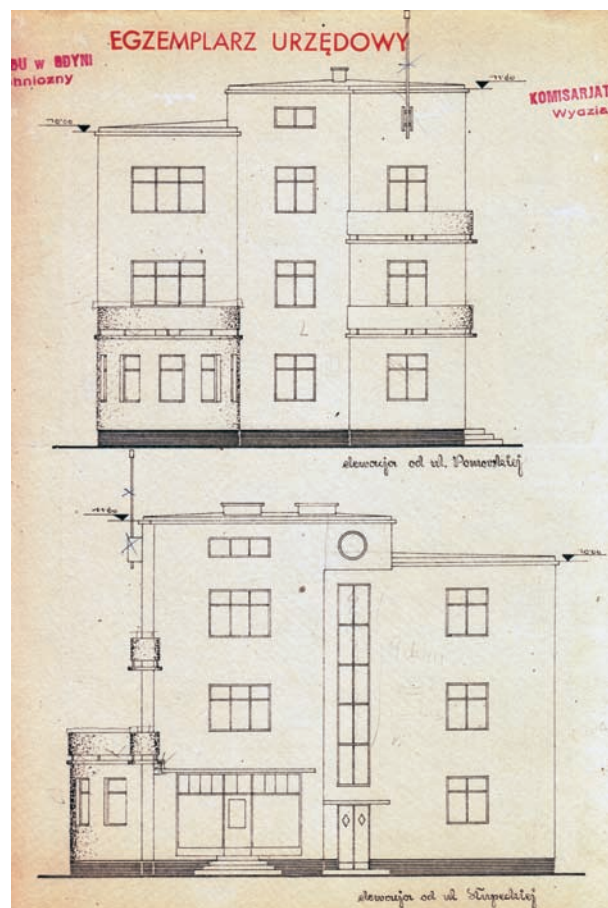
7. The villa at 23 Witomińska Street in Dziłki Leśne built in the middle of the 1930s according to the design. From AUMG



houses, at 15 Perkuna Street, there was also a non-existing today villa-guesthouse "Delfin" which was designed by architect-engineer Alfons Licznarski. There, the half-round veranda was located at the side of the building. In the middle of the 1930s the houses at 39 Orłowska Street and 26 Przebendowskich Street were built and their verandas were located in the rear elevation.

In another western part of Orłowo, at 101 Inżynierska Street architect Eugeniusz Maciejewski designed a semi-cylindrical veranda at the back of the building integrating its layout with the garden. The house at 108 Wrocławka Street was similarly designed. Not far from that house, at 8 Oficerska Street, the semicylindrical veranda was constructed at the

8. The house at 11 Słupecka Street in Dziłki Leśne designed by Władysław Madefa in the end of the 1930s. From AUMG





9. The villa at 10 Perkuna Street in Orłowo. Photo by M.J. Sołtysik

front side because the house front faced the south. One of the prettiest house executions of the type in the western part of Orłowo was the villa of Irena Nowosielska. It was built according to the design of Józef Kirkor at 104 Wrocławska Street in the middle of the 1930s. It had the recessed layout with a vertical staircase window and it opened onto the garden with a veranda located at the side. As we can see that element gave a lot of possible solutions, although they all come from one family of architectural forms.

Apart from Orłowo the villas with half-round verandas were also built in other parts of Gdynia. We can find them in Kamienna Góra, Działki Leśne and Redłowo. Their verandas were mostly located at the front side. Such is the architecture of the harmoniously designed Villa Trzy Róże (Three Roses) at 12 Sienkiewicza Street built for Halina and Kazimierz Bieliński in Kamienna Góra in 1933. However, the architect who mostly favoured the half-round veranda in his villa executions was Stanisław Żwirski. Apart from the previously mentioned Villa Dzinka in Orłowo he designed four villas of the type in Działki Leśne: at 4, 10, 12 Kwidzyńska Street and 23 Witomińska Street - all in the middle of the 1930s. The houses had a similar layout with the main entrance at the side of the façade. Besides, the villa in Witomińska Street also had a vertical window staircase and a wide shop window in the front elevation. The similar solution can be seen in one more execution from the area of Działki Leśne - in the house at 11 Słupecka Street which was designed by Władysław Madela in 1938.

The post-war continuation of the villa canon with the semicircular veranda

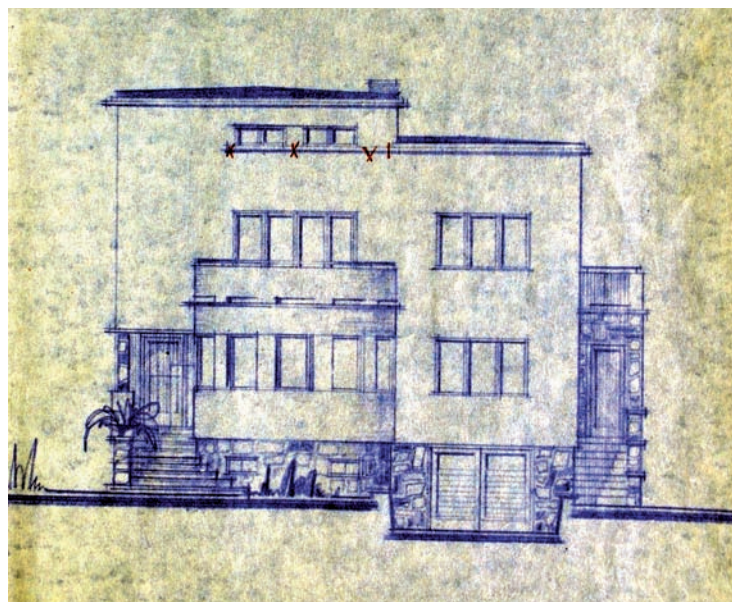
After 1945 the villa motive with the semicircular veranda was still quite common in Gdynia architecture, especially in Orłowo. It was there that the tradition survived most strongly. However, it is obvious that its spatial shape underwent a certain evolution, just as the stylistic trends of those days, too.

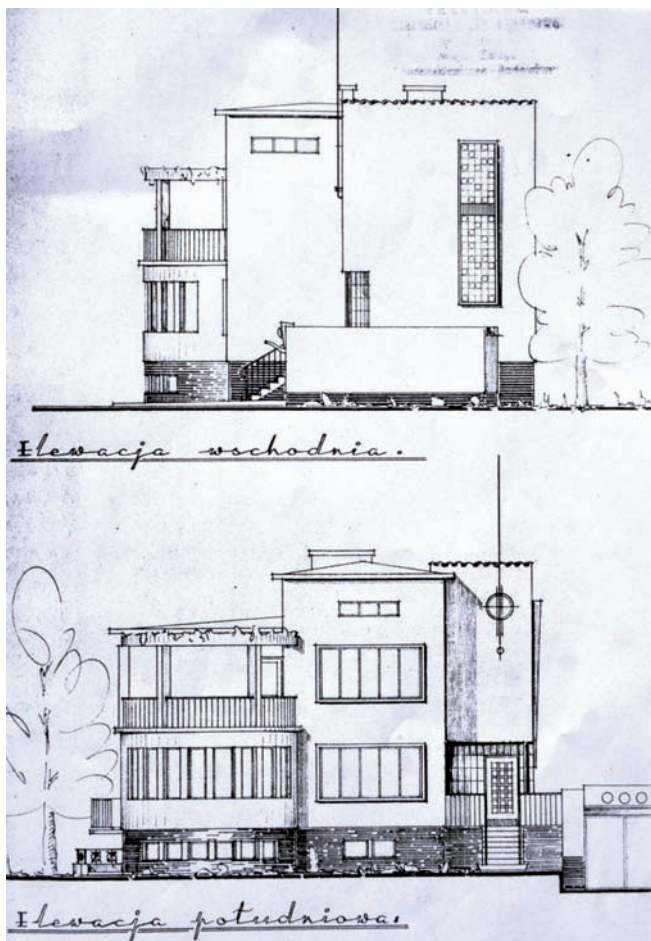
The first buildings came from the forties and to a great extent they were the continuation of the modernist way of the form shaping. The villa at 10 Perkuna Street in Orłowo is an interesting example of that building. Here, the architect once again reinterpreted the theme of the semicylindrical form which became a strong element of the building façade. The villa at 47 Akacjowa Street in Orłowo is a clear continuation of both the half-round veranda and the functionalist stylistics. Its first design was made in 1936, however, it was not built

before the war. Its construction, after a few minor changes which were introduced into the concept, began in 1958. The form of the villa at 22 Przebendowskich Street is thoroughly modernist with a veranda located at the front just as in all the aforementioned buildings. Its design comes from 1957 but it clearly refers to the stylistic convention of the interwar period.

The house at 10 Jana III Street, in a way, has a similar form of the building. However, there, for the first time, we can see the element that announced the new, post-war aesthetics. The designer introduced vertical articulations, which had not been seen in the villa architecture before, into the face of the cylindrical wall - a subtle rhythm of lesenes. These classicising elements are a kind of so-called realistic stylistic echo, although a bit outdated then but still marking its presence in architecture. Those references, along with genetically functionalist form shaping, resulted in the phenomenon which professor Adam Miłobędzki called socmodernism. That tendency turned out to be very persistent in the end of the

10. The villa at 47 Akacjowa Street in Orłowo designed originally in 1936 and redesigned in 1957. From AUMG





11. The villa at 12 Przebendowskich Street built according to the design in 1957. From AUMG

1950s and the beginning of the 1960s and we can see it in the villas at 53 Inżynierska Street and 17 Przebendowskich Street. Some of the post-war building designers seem not to be able to decide whether they were rather modernists or socmodernists. It was then that the stylistic “hybrids”



12. The villa at 10 Jana III in Orłowo built at the beginning of the 1960s. Photo by M.J. Soltysik

were created such as, for example, the house at 10a Przebendowskich Street. There, the vertically emphasized veranda was connected with a vertical window in the façade and all the structure was covered with a steep roof.

The clear end of the semi-circular veranda trend can be observed in the second half of the 1960s. It was exactly when the “Różany Gaj” guesthouse in Kamienna Góra was rebuilt and all its cylindrical shapes were substituted with perpendicular walls. Only in the latest architecture (that is after 2000), where all kinds of references to the modernist forms from the 1920s and 1930s are quite popular, we may observe the comeback of the motive of the half-round veranda. A few contemporary Orłowo building executions can serve as good examples, among others, those are the houses at 88 Inżynierska Street, 75 Inżynierska Street and 21 Oficerska Street.