

## Revalorisation of Modernist and Social Modernist Interiors in Gdynia

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In the 1920s and 1930s, elaborate designing of prestigious interiors of public buildings, shops or tenement houses was an important challenge for every architect who respected their work. Apart from creating, at the design stage, an interesting and functional layout and harmonised décor, the designers usually made sure that their concept was executed in every single detail. Only an overall aesthetic solution could form a complete picture of a unique piece of architecture. This included not only space arrangement, colour scheme and floors, but also woodwork, staircase décor, lighting and a number of details, sometimes unparalleled.

Today, conservators face many problems concerning the adaptation of historical interiors to present-day needs. Modernist interiors seem to be particularly prone to aesthetic, spatial and functional changes destroying their historical tissue. This is so, because these spaces are hardly perceived as valuable, much less historical. Over the years, the original interior of moderate expression, with unobtrusive details, often lost their original character and no longer had its previous effect. Even minor alterations of the original layout and décor made during numerous renovations and refurbishments, led to the loss of the original expression. Moreover, present users' tastes rarely follow the Modernist liking for aesthetic solutions: simple forms, yet a distinctive image. And when a building has more than one owner, there is the pervasive need for individuality of the décor, its adjustment to individual needs and – worst of all – uncritical pursuit of one's own likings and tastes.

Interiors are also more prone to all sorts of décor changes and upgrading than the building shape. Unlisted buildings are not protected against alterations, as they are not subject to building permit procedures or any formal and legal checks prior to their conversion. More often than not, users of residential or office space in historical buildings are the only ones to decide the nature of alterations, as they cover renovation costs; and when the tenancy expires, they do not restore the premises to the original state. Unfortunately, lack of awareness on the part of the owners and their arbitrary approach to interior space contribute to the destruction of its historical form. After several alterations and conversions, where worn-out décor elements and fittings have been replaced, nobody knows what the original interior looked like. What is left of the original interior, deprived of their aesthetic context, fails to offer an overall picture and so is often replaced by state-of-the-art elements. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out thorough historical and architectural studies and comply with conservation rules while designing interior revalorisation. The appreciation for a comprehensive reconstruction of historical Modern Architecture interiors requires the willingness to bring back their values, coupled with a positive attitude of the owners and users to such undertakings.

The further part of this article discusses revalorisation plans of historical interiors of two public buildings: Gdynia Port Authority and *Gdynia Główna* railway station. They have been accepted by the owners of the buildings and are awaiting execution.

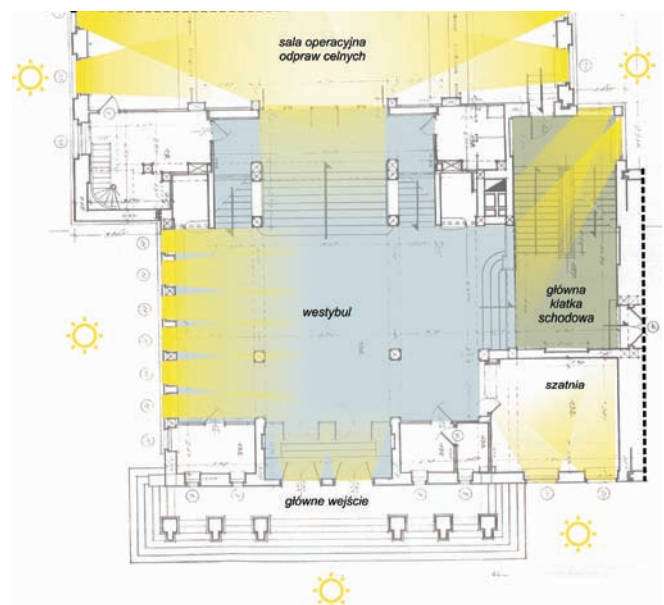
### Gdynia Port Authority – the former Customs House<sup>1</sup>

The former Customs House at 9, Rotterdamska is one of the most remarkable public buildings within the port of Gdynia. The construction of this impressive edifice was connected with the rapidly growing export trade through Gdynia's commercial seaport, then under construction.<sup>2</sup> The conceptual design for the building was selected by the Union of Polish Architects' Associations on

1. Based on research by: Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Koncepcja rewaloryzacji konserwatorskiej wystroju wnętrza budynku Zarządu Morskiego Portu Gdynia przy ul. Rotterdamskiej 9 wraz ze wskazaniami ogólnymi dotyczącymi rewaloryzacji całego zespołu*, Gdynia 2005 (typescript kept in the archives of Gdynia Port Authority).

2. Under Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of 11 March 1933 a Free Zone was established within Minister Kwiatkowski Basin V. It concentrated Polish and then Baltic trade in cotton, leather, coffee and tea. Gdynia's free zone, just like other zones in the great ports of Europe, improved the port's effectiveness significantly and made it more competitive than the port of Gdansk in the nearby Free City of Gdansk.

1. *Former Customs House in Gdynia, by architect Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski, 1934-1936 (layout of the entrance space: vestibule and main staircase); simulation of natural lighting of the interior of the original outlay (based on the original design). Sketch by A. Orchowska-Smolińska*





2. The building of Gdynia Port Authority S.A. (former Customs House), by architect Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski (1934-1936) – the former open passageway as seen from the vestibule (the wall hides the lift shaft built during WWII German occupation). Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska

11 May 1934<sup>3</sup> in an architectural competition organised by the Military Quartering Fund. The winning design (with a right to develop an engineering and construction designs) was made by a Warsaw architect, Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski. Construction started in 1935, after the engineering and construction designs were accepted by the Maritime Office. The Customs House was formally opened in February 1936.

The architecture of the building in spatial and aesthetic terms consisted in asymmetric composition of the elements of the building shape and entrance accentuation by the clear-cut vertical outline of the façade. The architecturally predominant corner tower part of the building makes the whole structure monumental and is kept in the style of moderate Modernism. The tower housed a spacious front office and a number of impressive reception and conference facilities.

3. The award decision in the competition for Gdynia's Customs Office. building (Except from the minutes of the competition committee), "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1934, No. 6, pp. 188-197

4. Gdynia Główna railway station, by architect Wacław Tomaszewski (1950-1956) – the main hall with shops and snack-bars built in the former passenger waiting room. Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska



3. Gdynia Port Authority S.A. (former Customs House), by architect Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski (1934-1936) – fragment of the preserved mosaic floor of the vestibule (three-colour, diagonal geometric composition). Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska

The interior was designed with great care. The functional concept of the entrance is particularly interesting. The portico, supported by columns, led to a glazed doorway and a spacious, elegant vestibule. It was naturally lit by a row of six windows. The use of the reinforced concrete frame made it possible for the hall – almost four metres high – to be supported by a few slender square-sectioned pillars only. Elegant stairs, directly opposite the entrance, took visitors to a spacious three-aisle front office, where customs clearance was conducted. On the right, a wide opening led to the main staircase, illuminated with a vertical line of corner windows, and then to offices and laboratories.

Grand mosaic tile floors completed the artistic image of the interior. They were laid in the finest rooms of the building – the vestibule, the main and side staircases – as well as in laboratories and sanitary facilities. Black, grey and cream-white glazed tiles (10 x 10 cm and 15 x 15 cm) were arranged in distinctive, repeatable patterns. The most remarkable complex pattern was applied in the vestibule: larger tiles arranged in a diagonal geometric pattern. An equally elaborate pattern was used in the main staircase. It was a pattern of three-colour check with black framing, the most popular motif in the building's flooring. It could be found in most of the staircase landings. Elsewhere in the building, there were two-colour patterns (black and grey), chequers or stripes (grey and cream). Grey or black terrazzo plaster of stairs (steps and stair risers) and mop-boards completed the design of landing floors. Banisters were the finishing touch: solid, with brass and chrome-nickel plated handrails or openwork, made of flat steel.

The Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II left its mark on what the Customs House looks like today. It was then, only four years after its completion, that the impressive public, harbour building was converted into a German naval hospital.<sup>4</sup> The conversion into a building so different from what it had been designed for involved a significant change in its functional layout, as well as its décor. The most significant change affecting the artistic image of the interior was made in the vestibule. In the wide opening connecting the vestibule with the main staircase, a lift shaft was installed; two additional rooms were built in the once open space of the vestibule. These changes, together with further, post-war alterations, caused the space of the vestibule to shrink and wide passageways to close; they also obscured daylight and concealed the side parts of a rich mosaic floor.

The revalorisation concept developed in 2005<sup>5</sup> provides for five main types of activities: to restore the cohesion of the spatial and functional layout; to repair and maintain the floors, stairs and other valuable elements of décor; to recreate the flooring according to the historical pattern; to unveil the fragments of flooring covered in the process of

4. *Kriegsmarine Lazaret, Marinelazaret* – the design for a conversion into a hospital was made in May 1940, approved for construction on 10 July 1940, construction work completed by the end of 1940.

5. Sołtyś M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Koncepcja rewaloryzacji...*, pp. 104-107.





5. Gdynia Główna railway station, by architect Waclaw Tomaszewski (ticket counters in the main hall). Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska

alterations; and to harmonise the planned décor with the historical one. On the basis of this concept, a final design for interior renovation was developed in 2008.<sup>6</sup>

#### Gdynia Główna Railway Station<sup>7</sup>

The station, situated in Plac Konstytucji, was erected in the 1950s,<sup>8</sup> to the design of professor Waclaw Tomaszewski, an eminent architect and teacher at the Technical University of Gdańsk. When designing the station, he was at the pinnacle of his career and creative achievement. As the author of many public buildings and tenement houses built in Gdynia before World War II, he was well acquainted with the language of Modern Architecture. It was then that he developed his unique style of designing. Although tinted with the social realism of the 1950s, the architecture of the station formally remained steeped in Modernist tradition, and many distinctive Art Deco details – frequently used by Tomaszewski before – were integrated into the station's layout.<sup>9</sup>

At the front, the spatial composition of the station is a free, harmonious and symmetric arrangement of several shapes of various sizes, with the office building in the background as a dominant feature. The elevations are elegant, planned with moderation and restraint, typical of Tomaszewski's. This is continued in the interior as well. In spite of the whole palette of trim and fittings, used as both structural and furnishing elements, the whole interior is extremely coherent. The functional concept was outlined

6. Design authored by M. and R. Ickiewicz of Kenton from Gdańsk.

7. Based on a research by: Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Wytyczne konserwatorskie rewitalizacji Dworca Kolejowego Gdynia Główna*, Gdynia 2008 (typescript kept in the archives of Pomorskie Conservation Officer in Gdańsk); part of a study *Wytyczne projektowe przebudowy dworca Gdynia Główna*, made by Studio DZ Daniel Załuski for PKP S.A. Oddział Dworce Kolejowe.

8. The principal body (main building with an office and administration building) – 1950-1954, finishing works and interior design finished in – 1957, city rail station – 1956-1957.

9. Compare: Sołtysik M. J., *Dworzec Kolejowy w Gdyni – czyli modernista w nowej sytuacji* [in:] *Aktualne problemy konserwatorskie Gdańska. Modernizm powojenny (1946-65)*, Gdańsk 2006/07, pp. 75, 77 and 78; and in: Buriak A., *Między dwoma biegunami* [in:] *Modernizm w Europie. Modernizm w Gdyni. Architektura lat międzywojennych i jej ochrona*, Gdynia 2009, p. 92.

clearly and with a flair. All the components of the space link smoothly: spacious halls (the main hall with ticket counters and a waiting room, and the side hall with a left luggage office), passageways (on the axes of two front doorways), and a back corridor (with sanitary facilities). The most impressive element of the interior was the main restaurant, with the kitchen and other facilities in the basement.

The most precious preserved elements of the station's décor include: ceiling decorations with large coffers; ceiling paintings in the former restaurant; wall decorations with geometric, neoclassical patterns (panels, convex texture surfaces and wooden wainscot); ornamentation of pillars, pilasters and binding joists); large artistic mosaics; multicoloured stone floors; and details like wall-mounted street-like lamps, or clocks.

The project was so elaborate and comprised so many décor elements that it required the involvement of many excellent artisans. However, what deserves particular attention is eminent artists who created unique wall and ceiling compositions that completed the aesthetic effect of the interior. Prof. Julian Studnicki created<sup>10</sup> the restaurant ceiling painting; it depicts the zodiac and unreal, mythical creatures (including his favourite dragons) placed in the sky. Artist Teresa Pałowska created four mosaics<sup>11</sup> in the station halls. Two of them, depicting themes symbolic for the port of Gdynia, may be titled "Marine Wildlife" and "The Sky over the Port and Marina". They can be found in the side hall, flanking the entrance (no longer in use) to the former restaurant. The other one, depicting "Transshipment in the Port", is opposite one of the main entrances to the building. The mosaic "Winged Horses and Winged Wheel", the symbol of the railway, is above the entrance to the former restaurant.

In the fifty years of its service, the building retained its basic spatial and functional constitution and most of its décor, which however, for lack of regular conservation, lost its original expression. The main changes are in the functional-spatial arrangement of main hall (opposite ticket counters) and of the side hall (in its central part and along the wall with the former entrance to the restaurant). In the 1990s, the seemingly empty space was filled with rows of small shops and snackbars. The former restaurant was first converted into a fast-food bar, which was closed some time later; finally, the space revived as a chemist's chain shop.

10. The painting was made in cooperation with following artists: Krystyna Łada-Studnicka, Urszula Ruhnke-Duszeńko and Maks Kasprzewicz.

11. The fifth mosaic, currently not available, is inside the former WARS bar in the train station building.



6. Gdynia Główna railway station, former restaurant – ceiling painting by Julian Studnicki, fragment depicting a dragon, 1956. Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska



7. Gdynia Główna railway station, former restaurant, by architect Waclaw Tomaszewski (1950-1956) – ceiling and wall ornamentations. Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska

The guidelines for the revalorisation project<sup>12</sup> were based on the studies of the décor of individual interiors, including wall, ceiling and flooring compositions. The authors of the guidelines recommended the preservation or restoration of most of the building's historical functions, focusing on the removal of all the shops and bars interfering with the clear-cut, historical layout. The actual revalorisation activities (conservation, restoration, protective covering, reintegration, restitution and reconstruction) were defined in detail in the conservation schedule,<sup>13</sup> developed on the basis of the examination of both exterior and interior plaster and paint coatings.

12. Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Wytyczne konserwatorskie rewaloryzacji*, pp. 7-11.

13. Mądrych P. G., Mądrych Ł. P., *Program prac konserwatorskich zespołu budowlanego dworca głównego w Gdyni*, typescript Warszawa 2009.

8. Gdynia Główna railway station, former restaurant – ceiling mural by Julian Studnicki, fragment depicting the sun, 1956. Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska



In 2008, in recognition of its outstanding spatial value and rich décor, *Gdynia Główna* station buildings became the youngest site in Gdynia to be listed in the provincial register of historical monuments.<sup>14</sup> Later that year, some repair and conservation work was carried out, giving the building some facelift: the roof was repaired, inner walls were painted and one of the mosaics restored.<sup>15</sup> The colour scheme of the most prominent parts of the interior was restored to the original: honey-beige walls became pastel emerald green. Further work, which is to restore the building's original architectural value, will be carried out with EU co-financing in 2010-2012.

14. Decision of the Pomorskie Conservation Officer in Gdańsk of 11 August 2008, number of register A-1834.

15. The work was done by a conservation company based on the *Mosaic conservation works programme in Gdynia's main railway station*, by Huk-Malinowska I., Kriegseisen A., Gdańsk 2008 (typescript kept in the archives of Gdynia's Conservation Officer).

9. Gdynia Główna railway station, by architect Waclaw Tomaszewski (1950-1956) – interior lighting details (wall-mounted, street-like lamps). Photo by A. Orchowska-Smolińska

