

Architecture of Charles Carr in Liepāja

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Abstract. Contribution of civil engineer Charles Carr to the development of Liepāja's Art Nouveau architecture is analysed in the article. Art Nouveau in Liepāja is one of the greatest values of architectural heritage of the city. Buildings of this style determine the cityscape in many places, but data on Liepāja's Art Nouveau architects until recent past were extremely sparse. Ch. Carr was known only as the author of the design of the building at Graudu iela 45. Two more his designs, including the one for the building at Graudu iela 44, were found during research. Analysis of planning principles, methods of artistic composition and architectural detailing of these works allowed identifying several other notable Liepāja Art Nouveau buildings as possible creations of Ch. Carr and to determine the place of this personality in the history of Latvian culture.

Keywords: history of Latvian culture, Liepāja's Art Nouveau architecture, apartment houses

Introduction

Liepāja is the largest city in the western part of Latvia. One of the pearls of the city's architecture is St. Trinity Church (1742–1758, architect Johann Christoph Dorn) – a Baroque edifice, which have no analogues in the whole Kurzeme, the western region of Latvia, but the most outstanding value of Liepāja's architectural heritage is Art Nouveau dating back to the early 20th century. Its importance definitely goes beyond national borders. Liepāja's building stock contains about 70 large-scale Art Nouveau buildings of high artistic quality, but one or the other Art Nouveau feature or individual detail of the style can be seen in at least half a hundred of other buildings. It is in more than in several European cities proud of their Art Nouveau legacy. Art nouveau in Liepāja determines the whole cityscape in many places.

Until recently, most of Liepāja's Art Nouveau buildings were anonymous, as during the Soviet 1970s the archive of historical projects of the City Construction Board was destroyed, and as a result accurate data on the time of building construction and architects were lost. The only known documentary evidence was the personal archive of the architect Paul Max Bertschy and his son Max Theodore Bertschy, which is stored in the Liepāja Museum. This collection of the projects developed by the two architects includes also some works by other authors. Several of them were signed by Charles Carr, a civil engineer. Recent research has made it possible to expand the range of individuals who have actively practiced in the early 20th century in Liepāja, simultaneously specifying contribution of each of them to the Liepāja Art Nouveau heritage. One of the four most prominent personalities along with M. T. Bertschy, Ludwig Melville and Pauls Kampe was Ch. Carr.

Personality

The data on Charles Carr's personal life are relatively scant. It is known that he came to Latvia from England. Between 1894 and 1901 he studied at Riga Polytechnic Institute and received a degree in civil engineering [1]. He worked as a junior engineer at the

Steering Committee of the Road Construction Department of Courland Governorate in Jelgava. The districts of Grobiņa and Aizpute were under his supervision, and since 1902, he had the same duties in Liepāja as well. He also combined working for “the crown” with his private architectural practice.

Most of Carr's accomplishments in architecture are known from the documents kept in the archive of Bertschy's construction designs at Liepāja Museum. One more document with his signature was found in the Latvian State Historical Archives. It is the project of the extension of the hotel at Baznīcas iela 11 in Kuldīga, approved on March 5, 1914 [2]. Most believably, this is not the only Carr's work in architecture outside Liepāja.

Legacy

In the early 1980s, while doing research at the Liepāja Museum, among the drawings of Bertschy, a blueprint of the construction design of the trading and apartment house in Liepāja, at Graudu iela 45 was found [3]. It was signed by Charles Carr, whose name was completely unknown at that time in Latvian cultural history. Design was developed in 1913 and approved by the Liepāja Construction Board on 20 September. Blueprints were reproductions of technical drawings rendered in Indian ink on tracing paper, using a contact print on light-sensitive paper in ultraviolet light (Fig. 1).

The house at Graudu iela 45 was built exactly according to the project. It belonged to a tradesman Abraham Lippert who sold bicycles and sewing machines. A wide shopping halls with no partitions occupied the first two floors of the building constructed in metal skeleton structure. Toilet facilities and an auxiliary room were located at the end of the side wings. Two servant staircases made the supply and delivery of goods more convenient. They also functioned as “the black staircase” that led to the kitchens of the two posh apartments on the second floor. There were six rooms in one flat and seven – in the other. Each flat had a bathroom, a separate toilet, a maid's room and a larder at the kitchen.

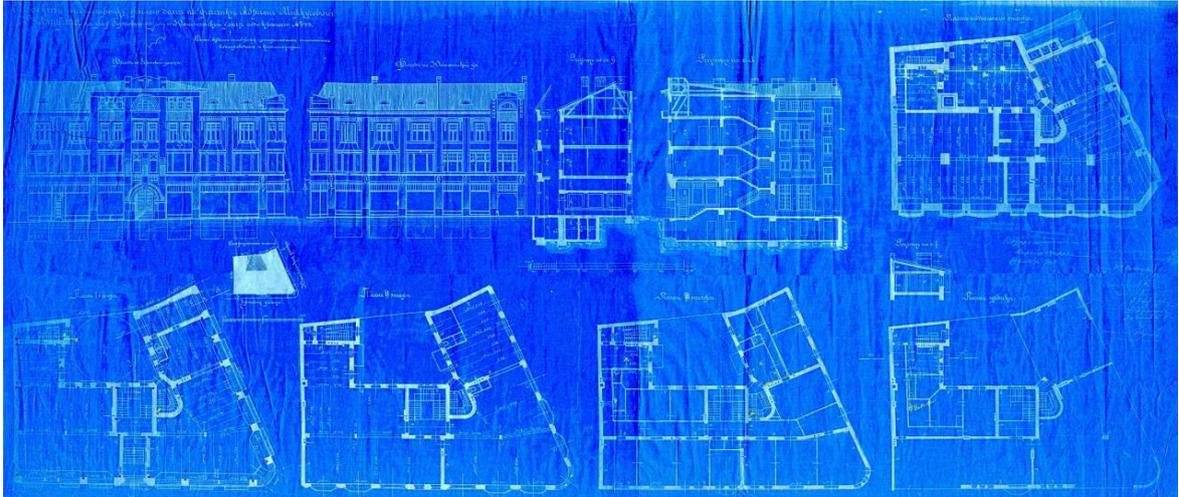


Fig. 1. Blueprint of the construction design of the trading and apartment house at Graudu iela 45. 1913



Fig. 2. Trading and apartment house at Graudu iela 45. A photo of the 1930s [4], a photo taken in 1983 and a photo taken in 2011 [both by the author]

The façades precisely reflect the spatial structure of the building: large shop windows display the goods on the ground and the first floors, while the windows of the second floor are smaller. On the first floor, shop windows are fully glazed forming semi-polygonal bay windows. They are covered with elegant metal roofs of pyramidal shape that makes a harmoniously smooth transition to windows on the second floor. Massive, rhythmically arranged lesenes rise up the full height of the façade accentuating verticality of the composition. Ornamental reliefs fill the spandrels between the floors. Two lion heads guard the entrance overlooking it from the spandrels between the first-floor windows. There used to be another mask – more human in appearance.

During the interwar period the building accommodated a casino. In Soviet times, a district committee of the Communist Party, a city committee of the Komsomol and a dozen of other committees supporting the communist ideology moved in at Graudu iela 45. Shop windows on the ground floor were bricked up, wall plaques of various sizes were tastelessly attached to the entrance portal and lion heads were removed. The mask adorning the middle part disappeared as well. In 2002, the building was restored (architect Agris Padēlis-Līns). The façade has regained its original appearance. Lion heads again stare down at passers-by, though

they are not as sculptural as those shown in old pictures. Only the central mask has not found its way back. The entrance to the building has become more open. Interior spaces have been adjusted to meet the current requirements. For this purpose, new functional spaces have also been built in the former inner courtyard.

One of the most magnificent Art Nouveau buildings in Liepāja stands on the opposite side of the street, at **Graudu iela 44**. This building, the trading and apartment house overlooking the corner of Graudu and Krišjāņa Valdemāra streets, belonged to Wilhelm Raeder, a well-known merchant in Liepāja. A long time it was assumed that the architect of the building was Karl Eduard Strandmann [5], a Swedish architect active in Liepāja and responsible for a number of churches in Latvia and the northern part of Lithuania. Nevertheless, the building's construction design which after its approval at the City Construction Board was given to the commissioner (Fig. 3), is signed by Charles Carr. This document has been kept in the personal archive of Wilhelm Raeder's grandson, economist Heinz Raeder, who currently lives in Germany and kindly sent a copy of it.

The construction design of the building was approved in the spring of 1908 by both the Liepāja City Construction Board and the superintendent of the Engineering Works Section at Liepāja Fortress.

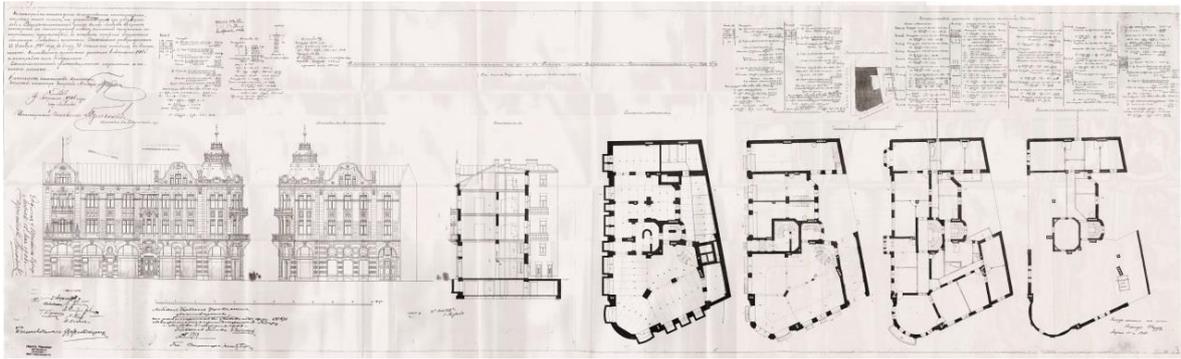


Fig. 3. Construction design of the trading and apartment house at Graudu iela 44. 1908



Fig. 4. Apartment house with shops at Graudu iela 44. A postcard of early 20th century and a photo taken by the author in 2012

Already on July 27, 1907, the status of a fortress was abolished for the Liepāja naval base, but the military authorities were still trying to intervene in the city building issues.

Wilhelm Raeder's trading company sold products made of china, glass and metal, sports goods, haberdashery, various fashion goods, lamps and lots of other things. His shop, located in a rented house in the New Market (now Rožu laukums) offered "household items, leather goods from Offenbach such as: albums, dressing cases, business card holders, wallets, cigar and cigarette cases, letter folders and letters bags, perfumes and soaps, combs, skin, tooth and nail brushes, pipes with wooden and meerschaum bowls, driving whips and riding whips, walking sticks, lacquered tinplate goods, petrol, spirit and paraffin stoves, tea and coffee machines and so on" [6]. Commercial success allowed Raeder to purchase his own real property on the corner of Graudu and Vilhelmīnes (now Krišjāņa Valdemāra) Streets and construct his own trading and apartment house. Construction was completed in 1909.

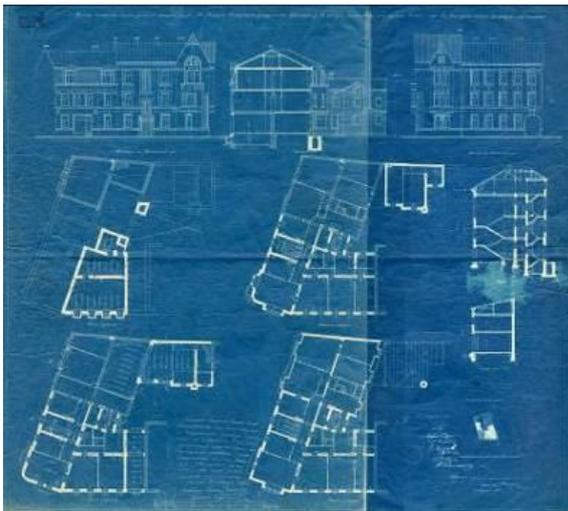
The façades of the building display an abundance of various ornamental reliefs, mostly geometric shapes and figures – squares, diamonds, triangles, circles, spirals, cones, pyramids, floral motifs, ribbons, wreaths, festoons, ornate decorative bands, stylised palmettes etc. (Fig.4). Large impressive birds – half pelicans, half storks – look at entrants from both sides of the entrance portal. All details form a unique sculptural façade. Surfaces incised by straight or wavy lines running in different directions

alternate with completely smooth surfaces or surfaces with a varying degree of roughness. However, all this exuberance unravels only at a close distance, but from afar, the building stands out with its articulated massing. At first, the silhouette captures the eye with impressive gables and dominating corner tower. Two gables overlook Graudu iela and one – Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela. The façade is also embellished by several bay windows and balconies with elegant hand-forged railings. Artistic composition is vertically inclined – it was a trend called Perpendicular Art Nouveau that had become quite widespread in Riga at that time.

Architecture of the building stands out also with the huge shop windows rising up two storeys high. They reflected precisely the modern layout the building used to have back then, since retail spaces were arranged on both lower floors. The left wing of the building contained three shops. Each of them occupied the entire space in the height of two floors along the street, but in the depth was a spacious balcony, to which a separate internal staircase led. In the biggest shop located in the corner part of the building, the balcony encircled the entire shopping hall leaving an atrium-like space in the middle. Only two pillars supporting the upper floors stood there. The imposing staircase, which led to the balcony, divided into two symmetrical flights at the top. The staircase also connected the ground level with the basement. Today older people still remember this marvellously spacious three-storey shop. In Soviet times, the building housed one of the



*Fig. 5. Apartment house with shops at Graudu iela 44.
Entrance hall, staircase and stove in the first-floor flat [photos by the author]*



*Fig. 6. Apartment house on the corner of Brāļu and Teodora
(now Šaurā) Streets. Design. 1913.*

Vojentorg shops (a special chain of shops for the Soviet army), but all the unique architecture of the interior was destroyed in the 1990s when the building was fitted for the needs of a bank.

On the second and third floors there are large flats with all amenities. In the façade their windows are framed by decorative mouldings encircling ornamental reliefs on spandrels between the floors as well. It is a typical method of artistic composition characteristic of Perpendicular Art Nouveau.

Interior spaces, especially the entrance, also have quite abundant decorative finish. A spiral staircase is a particularly attractive spatial element. Each floor contains two flats. One has five and the other – seven rooms. Kitchens have another entrance from the so-called “black staircase” that is located just behind the main one. A bathroom in the five-room

flat is located at the back of the flat, close to bedrooms. At that time it was quite an innovative solution which became more widespread only in the 1970s. Several stoves with typical Art Nouveau crowns can still be seen in some flats (Fig.5).

Charles Carr's signature can be found on two more projects that have been preserved in the in the archive of Bertschy's construction designs at Liepāja Museum. One of them is the project of the Eckblum's villa at Dzintaru iela 23, designed by the well-known Finnish architect Lars Sonck in 1912. Carr signed it as a construction manager because Sonck could not carry out this duty while working in Helsinki. Another one is the design for an unexecuted three-storey apartment house with a bakery on the corner of Brāļu and Teodora (now Šaurā) streets (Fig. 6). The design was approved by the Liepāja Construction Committee in March of 1913 [3]. The façades of the building containing several comfortable apartments were proposed in a fine manner of Perpendicular Art Nouveau.

Unidentified works

Both buildings built to the projects by Carr and the unexecuted project pay attention to a number of principles of planning, artistic finish of the facades and principles of creating individual details that are hardly found in the works of other architects in Liepāja. Carr tried to place the bathrooms at the depth of the apartments, as close to the bedrooms as possible, rather than in the entrance area as traditionally at that time. His buildings are distinguished by very dynamic massing, elegantly articulated facades and the sophistication of the artistic finish. The same concerns to interior finish.

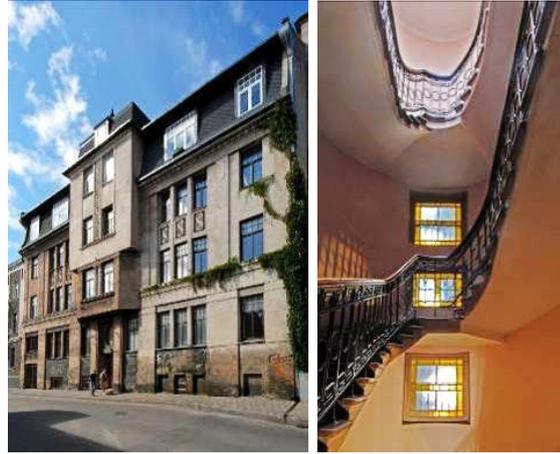
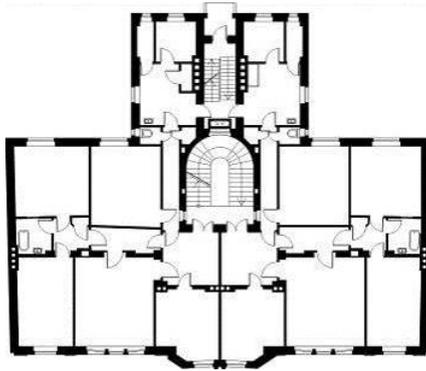


Fig. 7. Apartment house at Uliha iela 66. Around 1913. Charles Carr (?).
Plan [reconstruction based on data of State Land Service, Kurzeme region] and exterior view, staircase [photos by the author]



Fig. 8. Apartment house with shops and a cinema at Graudu iela 27/29. 1912–1913. Charles Carr (?). A postcard of early 20th century, a photo of 2012, main staircase in Graudu iela [both by the author] and plan [reconstruction based on data of State Land Service, Kurzeme region]

The ceilings of the staircase and the landings in his buildings are, as a rule, coffered. Such features can be noticed in a number of hitherto unidentified Liepāja Art Nouveau buildings.

One of such examples is the apartment house at **Uliha iela 66** (Fig. 7). The house was built shortly after 1912 as it was not included in Liepāja's directory published that year [7]. In the main staircase, like in the building at Graudu iela 44, partly curved flights of stairs create a visually effective staircase well. The servant staircase is located directly behind the main staircase. There are windows between them. The beautiful railing of the stairs was custom-made. The entrance hall has a coffered ceiling. All these features imply that Charles Carr could have been the author of this building. Also, the same principle as that applied at Graudu iela 44 underlies the layout of flats. On each floor of the house in Uliha iela 66 there are two five-room apartments with a bathroom located at the back of the apartment, next to bedrooms.

One of the largest and most imposing buildings in Liepāja is an apartment house with shops and a cinema *Palace* at **Graudu iela 27/29** (Fig. 8). The address of the building is also at Dīķa iela 10. The façade overlooking Dīķa iela among other elements of decorative finish includes a relief with numbers "1912–1913" designating the construction

year of the building. The construction was commissioned by the owner of the building Karl Stefan who was a businessman and film producer [8].

Like at Graudu iela 44 or Graudu iela 45, this building first attracts attention with its articulated massing and expressive silhouette being an example of refined Perpendicular Art Nouveau. The one-storey wing of a cinema hall adjoins the four-storey building at J. Dubelšteina iela. The entrance to the cinema is arranged from Graudu iela. The main entrance to the building is also located in the central part of the façade facing Graudu iela. It is emphasised by the balconies on the second and third floors and by a large gable that interrupts the line of the strongly projecting cornice. The overall architectural image of the building, its details and ornaments are designed in the same artistic vein as at Graudu iela 45. It is quite likely that both buildings were designed by the same architect.

There were four large flats with amenities on each floor. One of the largest flats overlooking Graudu iela and located at the main staircase had six rooms, and the other – seven rooms. Kitchens could also be accessed via the so-called "black staircase" that was situated directly behind the main staircase like at Graudu iela 44. In each flat there was a capacious larder by the kitchen.



Fig. 9. Apartment house with shops at Tirgoņu iela 22. 1911–1912. Charles Carr (?). Exterior view, façade fragment, staircase [photos by the author] and plan [reconstruction based on data of State Land Service, Kurzeme region]

Bathrooms were also large and well-lit as they had windows opening to the courtyard. At the other staircase towards Dīķa iela, there were two four-room flats on each floor.

The building retained its original function until 1940. Then the Executive Committee of the Council of People's Deputies of Liepāja Region was set up in the large, posh flats. The cinema continued to show films but its name was changed to “Sarkanā bāka” (*Red Lighthouse*). Today a shop of household goods has replaced the cinema and one can only imagine how ornate the original finish used to be in the cinema hall with its painted ceiling.

The building still houses various institutions. Since 2000, restoration works have been under way. A modern lift has been installed in the main staircase, and the Art Nouveau decorative finish there and in many rooms has been carefully restored. Portals and entrance doors to former apartments are one of the most elegant elements of Art Nouveau interior design in Liepāja.

Like the building at Graudu iela 27/29, the apartment house with shops at **Tirgoņu iela 22** stands out with its elegant, refined in appearance and strongly articulated façade. Above the entrance portal, the façade displays numbers “1911–1912” designating the construction year of the building, while the number “14” on the portal stands for its initial address. The present address was assigned during the Soviet period when Lielā iela together with Tirgoņu iela were renamed after Lenin, and the houses were renumbered accordingly. The architectural finish of the façade, its overall composition and expression strongly imply that it

could have been designed by Charles Carr. Coffered ceilings in landings and staircase railings made to individual drawings are present at Tirgoņu iela 22 as well.

Several more buildings displaying similar touch in artistic composition of facades supposedly were designed by Charles Carr. The most characteristic examples are apartment house with shops at **Toma iela 49** and apartment house at **Zāļu iela 17**. Architectural decoration of both buildings is much simpler than in the examples analysed above (façade finish at Zāļu iela 17 is still unfinished), but both are a significant part of Liepāja's Art Nouveau heritage.

Conclusions

Buildings designed by the civil engineer Charles Carr present the architecture of highest standards. They stand out with very dynamic massing, elaborated articulation of facades and fine detailing of architectural finish. Staircases in his buildings are peculiar with coffered ceilings and individually designed railings of usually saturated ornamental pattern. Apartments are well planned, convenient and with high level of comfort. He used innovative principle of placing bedrooms in the depth of apartments, close to the bedrooms.

Charles Carr along with architects Max Theodor Bertschy, Ludwig Melville and Pauls Kampe was among major creators of Liepāja Art Nouveau architecture. His contribution to the character of built-up environment of Liepāja and its artistic image quality is invaluable. Art Nouveau of Liepāja forms one of the most important parts of the city's cultural heritage.

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Kopsavilkums. Rakstā analizēts būvinženiera Čārlza Karra ieguldījums Liepājas jūgendstila arhitektūras attīstībā. Jūgendstils Liepājā ir viena no lielākajām arhitektūras mantojuma vērtībām. Šī stila celtnes daudzviet nosaka vides māksliniecisko raksturu, taču līdz nesēnai pagātnei ziņas par Liepājas jūgendstila arhitektiem bija ārkārtīgi skopas. Plašākās dokumentārās liecības bija vienīgi arhitektu Berči būvprojektu arhīvs Liepājas muzejā, kur Berči izstrādātajiem projektiem atrodami arī daži citu autoru darbi, tostarp būvinženiera Čārlza Karra parakstīts ēkas Graudu ielā 45 (1913) būvprojekts un vēl viens viņa neīstenots projekts. Kā būvdarbu vadītājs viņš parakstījis arī uz Ekblūma villas Dzintaru ielā 23 projekta, kuru 1912. gadā izstrādājis pazīstamais Somijas arhitekts Larss Sonks.

Pētījumu gaitā tika atklāts, ka pēc Č. Karrs projekta celta arī ēka Graudu ielā 44 (1908). Ēkas oriģinālā projekta kopija glabājas pie ēkas kādreizējā īpašnieka pēctečiem, kas tagad dzīvo Vācijā. Šo celtņu arhitektūras, kā arī neīstenotā ēkas Brāļu ielas un Šaurās ielas stūrī projekta kvalitātes analīze ļāvusi noteikt Č. Karra radošā rokraksta īpatnības. Viņa celtnes izceļas ar spēcīgi artikulētu un mākslinieciski izsmalcinātu, bet tektoniski skaidru fasāžu arhitektūru. Arī iekštelpu apdare ir izkopti detalizēta. Č. Karrs vannas istabas dzīvokļos centies novietot pēc iespējas tuvāk guļamistabām, dzīvokļu dziļumā. Viņa celtņu kāpņu telpās griesti, kā likums, ir kasetēti. Tieši šādas pazīmes var pamanīt virknē līdz šim neidentificētu Liepājas jūgendstila ēku. Ievērojamākās no tām ir ēkas Graudu ielā 27/29 (1912–1913), Uliha ielā 66 (ap 1913) un Tirgoņu ielā 22 (1911–1912).