

Czech Architecture Greats

Bohuslav Fuchs (24.3.1895 – 18.9.1972)

Vladimír Šlapeta

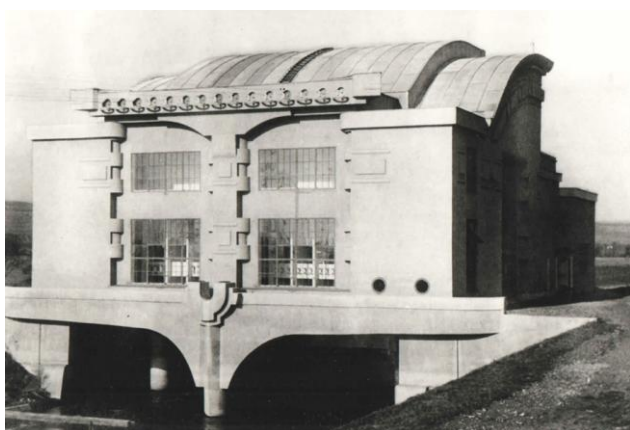
Architekt Bohuslav Fuchs belongs to the most important personalities of Czech fine arts of the 20th century. His work crossed the borders of his own field reaching from design of small objects and furniture, regional planning, writing and publishing to teaching architects at Brno Technical University. It was mostly due to his efforts that during the First Republic under T. Masaryk, Brno became an international centre of modern architecture.

His talent for drawing, as well as inspiration by folk architecture and Dušan Jurkovič's work, took him from his native foothills of Beskydy mountains to the art school in Brno, where his creative development was also supported by practice in the studio of Professor Jaroslav Syříště.

At the same time he also trained as a bricklayer and in 1916 he was accepted to study with Prof. Jan Kotěra at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts. This was followed by a two-year internship in Kotěra's studio, after which in 1921 and in collaboration with Josef Štěpánek, he began his career as a creative architect. Their joint work excelled in the complex of the hydroelectric power station and villa in Háj u Mohelnice, illustrating the path from Rondocubism to dynamic functional architecture. Jakub Deml, Roman Catholic poet for whom he built a villa in Tasov, described him as a 'man of action' and thus predicting his future career.

After his success in a competition for the master-plan of Prostějov he accepted the invitation of the

The hydroelectric power station and villa in Háj u Mohelnice

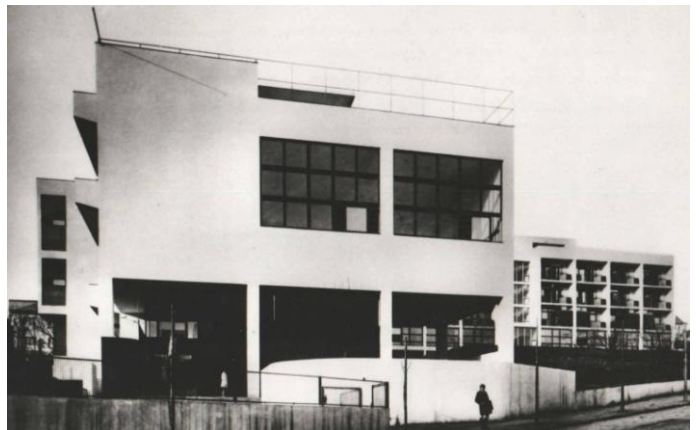


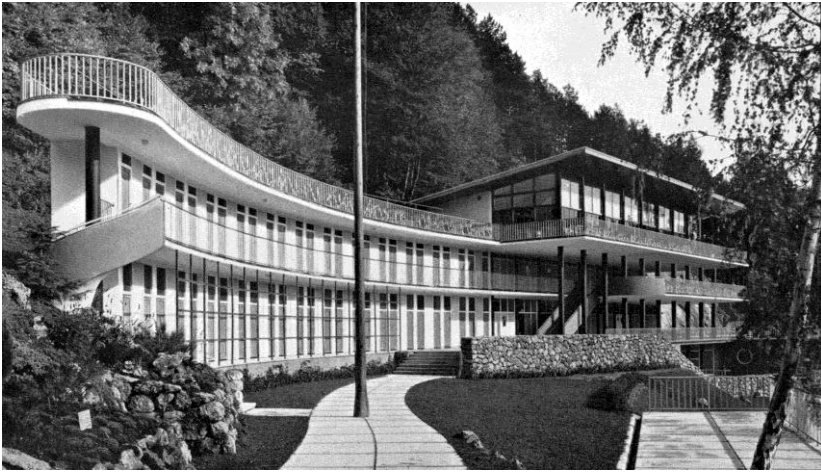
city architect Jindřich Kumpošt, and on 1st March 1923 started working for the building office of Brno. He remained loyal to Brno throughout his life and significantly influenced its appearance. Meeting the Dutch architect W. M. Dudok at the international congress in Gothenberg and a visit to Bauhaus in Weimar in September 1923 introduced him to an international debate, which was followed in 1924-25 by a series of lectures (*For New Architecture*) in Brno with participation of J. J. J. Ouda, W. Gropius, Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos. His buildings of the meat exchange and the ceremonial hall of the city cemetery marked the end of the influence by red-brick Dutch Civilism, after which he quickly progressed to the original concept of white Functionalism.

In the years 1925-29 he was also the chief architect of the city of Brno and his building designs were featured in the world's leading journals of Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Britain and France, making him quickly the undisputed, most famous Czech architect of its time. His winning competition designs for regulation of Brno from 1927 and 1933 still influence the planning of the city development today. He became a member of CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*) and in 1934 he was elected a corresponding member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, RIBA. His design for the Hotel Avion with its grand spatial plan on a narrow plot, and the boarding school Vesna, became icons of Brno's Functionalism. His influence also reached Slovakia, where he contributed sanatorium Morava in Tatranská Lomnica and thermal spa Zelená Žaba in Trenčianské Teplice, beautifully integrated into an abandoned quarry above the spa town.

During the WW2 he found an original way out in return to romantic concepts in natural materials

The Vesna School and Eliška Machová Dormitory in Brno





Above, the Zelená Žaba resort in Trenčianské Teplice. Below, the Morava Sanatorium in Tatranská Lomnica, Slovakia

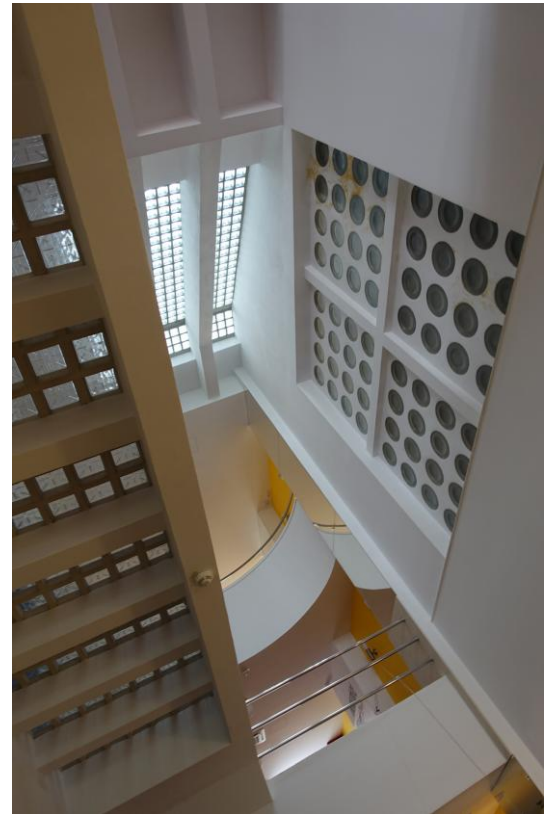


(stone and wood), especially in the Hotel Vlčina in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm and in a complex of a factory, a hydroelectric power plant and a residential settlement for his own family company AKA in Skryje near Tišnov.

After the war he became a professor of urban planning at the Faculty of Architecture at Brno Technical University and in co-operation with the Regional Study and Planning Institute he directed regional planning of the whole of Moravia, which together with Emanuel Hruška and Alfred Neumann, he successfully presented at the 6th Congress of CIAM in Bridgewater in 1947. He was also elected as a Vice President of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, IFHTP.

However, the communist coup in 1948 stopped his extraordinary career. In 1958 he was instantly dismissed from the School of Architecture which enjoyed a great international reputation and where he served three terms as the Dean, followed by a suspended sentence in a disgraceful court case for allegedly overvaluing projects. Fortunately, he found an asylum in the Project Institute for Reconstruction of Historic Towns headed by his former assistant Josef Němec.

Only in the course of the 1960s did he experience



Above, interior of the Hotel Avion in Brno

some satisfaction – in 1965 he won the competition for the completion of the National Theatre and in 1968 he was named a national artist.

Although he was rehabilitated during the Prague Spring of 1968, he never returned to the School of Architecture. Together with his son Kamil Fuchs he built a new department store in the historic square of Znojmo and created a number of beautiful interiors – exhibition displays and restaurants. In 1969 he was awarded the Gottfried von Herder prize at the University of Vienna, but during the Soviet occupation he was living the last years of his life in seclusion surrounded by only a few friends from the circle of his former students. His last work was an exhibition and a book on the work of his teacher, Jan Kotěra, in Brno in the summer of 1972.

Prof. Vladimír Šlapeta studied architecture in Prague. From 1973-1991 he was director of the architectural department of the National Museum of Technology in Prague and following the Velvet Revolution 1989 he became Dean of the Faculty of Architecture in Prague and later in Brno. He was a Fulbright-Masaryk scholar at the Cooper Union in NY and is a member of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. He is the author of Czech Functionalism 1918-1938 /AA London 1987. In 2023 he was awarded ULA Jean Tschumi Prize in Copenhagen.

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The Villa Tesař, Hroznová 18, Brno
Designed by Bobuslav Fuchs, 1937

