



Council Currents

Special Edition: Prague Excursion (September 2008)
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Picturesque, Old World, Shiningly Beautiful, Surprising—This is Prague!!

by Pepi Weis

Our trip began on a sunny afternoon with a walking (which we did a great deal of) tour to Old Town Square to see its renowned centerpiece – a sixteenth century astronomical clock that still chimes the hours out over the city.



We continued over the cobblestoned streets (all the streets in Prague are cobblestoned – no high heels here) to Municipal House—Prague's most distinguished art nouveau building, where we were treated to an exclusive tour of the private Lord Mayor's rooms.

The entrance to the building has wonderful mosaic flooring and a stained glass dome, setting the tone for what we were about to see.

Before the tour of the rooms we were ushered into Smetana Hall, a concert hall that seats 1200 people

and has extraordinary acoustics. The hall was opened in 1912 and resurrected after 1947.

After hearing about the concert hall we went on to the Lord Mayor's room, whose walls were adorned with paintings by Alphonse Mucha and contained magnificent fabrics, brilliant chandeliers, stained glass windows, and an occasional fountain. Upon entering each room there were gasps of delight and oohs and aahs from the group.

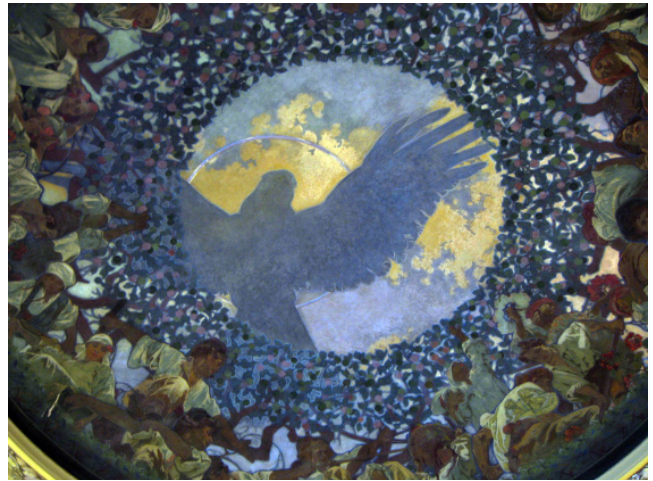


The first room was used as a confectionary and was done in Napoleonic style – all gold and white with shimmering chandeliers. Many of the rooms had curtain patterns that repeated the décor in the rooms. They were truly breathtakingly beautiful.

After the tour we caught our breath over a delicious dinner at the Municipal House's famous Francouzská Restaurace. Afterwards we walked back over the cobblestoned streets to our hotel, the Pachtuv Palace.



Top left: The iconic clock tower. Top: Our group at the Pachtuv Palace.
Above: Art Nouveau chandelier at Lord Mayor's Rooms.



Examples of splendid Art Nouveau decorations and artwork at the Municipal House, part of our group outside at the end of our first evening. Left to right: Philip Khoury, Jane Pappalardo, Anne Alden, Bob Sanders, Sara-Ann Sanders, Susan Cohen, Magda Fernandez, and Sheila Lemke.

Prague Castle



Above: Our charming guide to the magnificent Lord Mayor's Rooms in the Municipal Building.
Right: The spires of St Vitus Cathedral

To get to Strahov Monastery we walked through Prague Castle, which dates from the 9th century and is considered to represent the beginning of Prague history. The castle is actually a collection of buildings arrayed around an enormous square. It began with three churches, a monastery, and a palace – all surrounded by a fortification.

Despite many frequent fires and various raids, there are many preserved churches, chapels, halls, and towers of all historical periods from Romanesque to modern. Since the 9th century it has been the residence of Czech monarchs and presidents (the latter since 1918).



Strahov Monastery

Founded in 1140, the Strahov Monastery is still in use today as a monastery and a museum. Its walls are decorated with beautiful frescoes by Frans Maubertsch.

The monastery is home to the Strahov Library, the second oldest church library in Bohemia with an uninterrupted existence. There are about 280,000 titles dating back to 860 shelved in the beautiful floor to ceiling bookcases. The oldest book in the room is the Strahov Gospel. The room is three stories high and the vaulted ceiling is painted in the manner of Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel. It is a most inspiring atmosphere.

There is also the Philosophical Hall, housing archeological finds, glass, china, artistic crafts, etc.

These rooms are closed to the public, but our group was privileged to be able to walk through them to see titles and artifacts up close and personal, and even to handle the precious tomes.

St. Vitus Cathedral

And then on to the 14th century St. Vitus Cathedral with stained glass windows designed by famous Czech artists, including Alphonse Mucha. The cathedral houses the crown jewels and tombs of Bohemian kings.

The heart of the Cathedral is St. Wenceslas Chapel, with semi precious stones and frescoes embedded in its walls. This chapel is closed to the public but, again, our group was given entry inside to examine the stonework and the tomb closely. It was a rare treat.

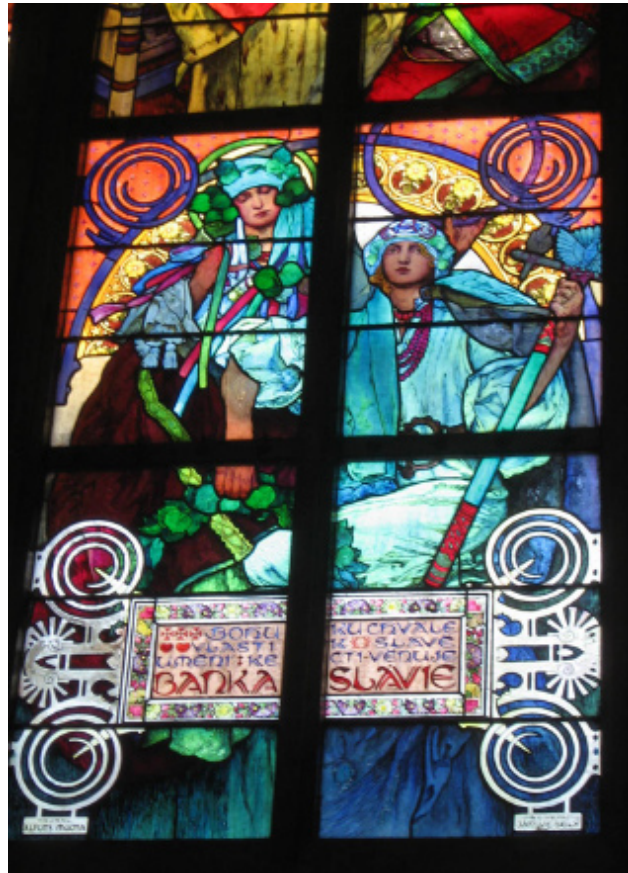
The cathedral also contains the silver sepulcher and statue of St. John of Nepomuk, an entire alcove done completely in sterling silver – a most amazing sight to behold.

St. Vitus Cathedral is topped with a bell tower containing the largest Czech bell and five others. The bell was made in 1549 and weighs thirteen and a half tons.

Villa Richter, our luncheon destination, is housed in a unique greenhouse with a ceiling covered in a grapevine motif, overlooking the city. It is considered a gastronomic jewel among Prague's restaurants and was a lovely and delicious respite in our busy day.



Top and middle right: views from the Strahov Monastery libraries. Bottom right: elaborate decorations from St Vitus Cathedral.



Far left: our ebullient companion and guide Helena on our final day in Prague. Left: Stained glass from St Vitus Cathedral. Above: the view of Prague as we walked to the Villa Richter restaurant

Kampa Museum

by Sara-Ann Sanders

Our group didn't know what to expect as we approached the Kampa Museum on the Vltava River, which runs through Prague. Our itinerary spoke about the collection of Central European modern art, but the building had all sorts of larger-than-life, colorful, plastic pop art animals around it.

The Museum is owned by the city of Prague. The Permanent Exhibition is mainly the Jan and Meda Mladek's lifetime collection of Central European modern artists, especially the works of abstract artist, Frantisek Kupka and cubist sculptor, Otto Gutfreund. The art lover and historian, Mrs. Mladek believed that culture is the basis of the nation's survival, so she supported many of these artists during the occupations, protests and the communist years when they had to go underground. Many of the paintings were found in an abandoned warehouse at the end of the Communist era.

The large animals we initially encountered were part of an exhibition of the Cracking Art Group. This display of penguins, rabbits, bears, and crocodiles and other animals was a light-hearted expression of contemporary

art, which put a smile on everyone's face. We could see the large plastic animals from our hotel and we were lucky to see them up close at the Museum.

The building dates back to 1393 and has gone through many reconstructions and fires. Although it was originally a water mill, it was also used by invading armies, and as residences, workshops and the Czechoslovak Academy of Science. The Museum was beautifully renovated in 2003 into a fabulous modern art gallery. The architect's design provided the museum visitor with scenic views of the river, city of Prague and the large glass sculptures in the courtyards.

The Museum was near the Charles Bridge, which is the oldest preserved and most famous bridge in Prague. The bridge was built in 1357 by the Czech King Charles IV. There are towers at each end and 30 baroque statues of saints and religious figures by F.M. Brokoff and M.B. Braun. Originally the statues were to bring the masses to mass, but now it is the place where artists and tourists gather.





This and previous page: images from inside and outside the Kampa Museum



Contributors to this issue:

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About the Lobkowicz Family

William Lobkowicz, the grandson of exiled Czech aristocrats, grew up in Massachusetts. In 1990, after the Velvet Revolution toppled the Communist regime, he and his young family moved to the ancestral home, Prague. After President Vaclav Havel's democratic government decreed that properties expropriated by the Communists could be returned to their rightful owners, William began a quest to restore the ten castles and palaces that had once belonged to his family. Lobkowicz Palace reopened in 2002 as the only private building in the Prague Castle complex. It has become a major tourist attraction and gathering spot for Prague citizens as well.



much devastation. It has taken years to restore and reclaim items such as Amati violins, original scores of Beethoven's fourth and fifth symphonies, works of art, including paintings from the 12th to the 20th centuries (including Peter Brueghel the Elder's masterpiece, *Haymaking*, done in 1565), ceramics, dining services, one of the finest collections of arms and armories in Central Europe, and much more. The restoration of the works of art now on exhibit show many members of the Lobkowicz family from past to present.



Following the magnificent tour, we were invited into the beautifully adorned private Ernestine and Bird dining room. William, a music lover, engaged a professional string quartet to perform as we enjoyed our dinner, with Chuck sitting next to William. Chuck and William's father Martin meet frequently at the Langham Hotel Fitness Club in Boston.

The Princely Collections

by Donna and Chuck Hieken

A wonderful trip to Prague was made even more exciting: we were treated to a visit to the recently restored Lobkowicz Palace that was returned to the Lobkowicz family. It was opened to the public in April 2007. The tour was personally hosted by William Lobkowicz.

It is a magnificent building built in the 16th century and has belonged to the family since 1566.

Unfortunately, many soldiers (and others) invaded the castle during World War II. Following the end of WW II, there were 40 years of Communists, who left



Above left: William Lobkowicz and Chuck Hieken.

Top: Sara-Ann and Bob Sanders at the moment dinner was revealed! Bottom: Krtek, (Little Mole) is the Czech Republic's answer to Mickey Mouse.

V Zatisi

by Pepi Weis

Our farewell dinner was held at the elegant V Zatisi Wine Restaurant – that happened to be right around the corner from our hotel. This restaurant has won several awards for its haute cuisine and exceptional service. Although Al and I had already left Prague and so did not attend this dinner, I do have an anecdotal story about the V Zatisi. Since the night before we left Prague was a free dinner night we decided to eat at V Zatisi so as not to miss the treat. There we were - just the two of us – knowing we would not bump into anyone we knew from the tour since they would all be eating there the next evening.

Suddenly in the midst of our reverie, a gentleman appeared at our table and said “Hello, Al.” Lo and behold a couple from our hometown, having just arrived in Prague, were dining there, at the V Zatisi!



Brit d'Arbeloff relaxes at Trebesice; John and Anne Kern at the Museum of Modern Art; a detail of the Opera House.



Villa Müller

by John Kern

On the morning of September 25, our intrepid group drove off to a residential section of Prague for a visit to a remarkable, restored 1928 “Bauhaus style” villa. It was designed by Adolf Loos. He had studied in Eastern Europe, traveled to the United States as a young man where he worked as a mason (his father’s occupation), floor-layer, and then dishwasher, and in 1906 returned to Vienna where he worked for a local architect. He then opened his own architectural office in 1898 and became involved with the likes of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Arnold Schönberg, and other “free thinkers” living in Vienna at that time. He “became more famous for his ideas than for his buildings.” His legacy is composed of a remarkable collection of writings, which just happen to have been published by the MIT Press in English as “Spoken into the Void” in 1982. But his handful of outstanding houses is really quite remarkable.

This particular house was designed for an industrialist whose company pioneered in the use of reinforced concrete, so of course this house is a reinforced



concrete block, on a hillside, with an aggregation of interior rooms all at different levels and ceiling heights, opening onto one another in a fascinating three dimensional play of spaces. No interior photography was allowed, so my prime interest on these trips, photographically documenting our experiences and surroundings, was circumvented at this stop.

I am attaching to the email containing this article one photograph I took of the house exterior. I found the following web sites an excellent source of interior and exterior photographs plus a fascinating bit of detail about this unusual architect and the times in which he worked: <http://architecture.about.com/od/greatarchitects/p/loos.htm> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Loos

Photographs of the Villa Müller by Brit d’Arbeloff, Peter Wender, and John Kern

La Perle de Prague: aka Fred & Ginger

From the Villa Müller we went on to one of Prague's best restaurants, La Perle. This restaurant is on the top floor of the building designed by Frank Gehry and known as Dancing House because of its architecture. It is also referred to as the Fred and Ginger building because of the way the two linked buildings resemble the body language of Astaire and Rogers.

After a joyous luncheon in this wonderful space we visited the Stavovske Theatre. This is where *Don Giovanni* premiered and where *Amadeus* was filmed. We enjoyed a private backstage tour and a reception and talk on Mozart as well as a short chamber concert.



Views of Gehry's "Fred and Ginger" and our group below the stage at the Stavovske Theatre examining the mechanical workings of the stage sets.



Karlin Studios

by Magda Fernandez

At Karlin Studios we met some of Prague's young visual artists at work, saw exhibits in the building's two galleries, and spoke with the resident publishing group, Divus, that publishes the alternative art magazine, *Umelec*. Karlin Studios also

year-old quarterly is published in 4 languages, and is distributed in Europe, South America, the United States, and Asia. Its mission is to promote the work of Czech artists to the international community, and to contribute to the local arts scene in turn.



leases office space to the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, houses an archive of contemporary art, and provides residency space to FUTURA artists. Alberto di Stefano, our amazing host at the Trebesice Castle, launched Karlin Studios in 2005 through his non-profit organization, FUTURA. Karlin Studios is now run by a civic association, and is located inside a vast reconstructed factory. With old wooden floors, exposed beams, and columns, the complex retains the raw industrial essence of its former self.

One artist, Lenka Vitkova, who worked in a large studio with an immense window, showed us her mixed media canvases of black dresses, as well as her layered paintings of the late punk singer Johnny Rotten. Another artist, Jitka Mikulicova, described how her gravestone portraits poke fun at the former Soviet occupation.

The tidy, organized office of the Divus publishers was a stark contrast to the some of the studio spaces we visited. Divus runs an impressive, lean and mean operation for an alternative arts magazine. According to its website, *Umelec* is currently the only dedicated visual arts publication in the Czech Republic. The 12



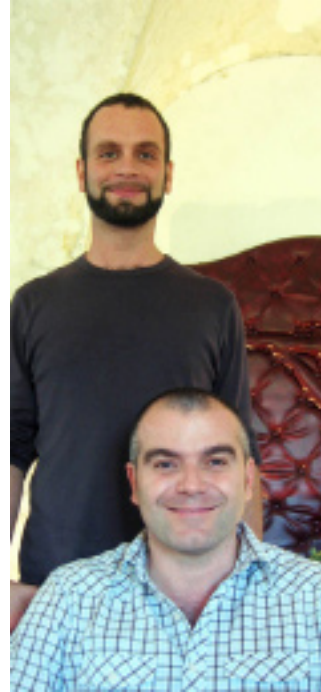
Karlin Studios: Ann Allen and Bill Macurdy in the Umelec office space; the exterior of the studio complex; one of the works of art from Karlin.

“Sometimes when I hear the birds sing I think my mobile phone is ringing”

by Jane Pappalardo with Sheila Pappalardo Lemke

Without a doubt, the high point for me on the Prague trip was September 26th when we ventured out of Prague to visit Trebesice Castle and Farm. Our host, Alberto, was warm and sweet and entertaining in relating the history of this 15th century moat-surrounded chalet that he and his partner Eugenio are painstakingly renovating. The two story main building is Renaissance Graffito with added touches of Baroque. The original roof had been wooden but during this reincarnation they have used rubber tiles from recycled electric cable. There was a sundial on the facade that had been added in 1673.

The main reception hall was originally three distinct rooms, but now it is a grand open space, light-filled,



Clockwise from left: Graffiti ceiling; Alberto and Eugenio; their little dog; Kathie Strehle experiences an installation; Al and Pepi enjoy a glass of wine.



by Magda Fernandez

We were so fortunate to have had a preview tour of DOX before its official opening in October. As Prague's first dedicated art center for contemporary art, architecture and design, DOX aims to insert itself into the international art scene, and draw that same community into Prague's own local artist base. DOX is the joint project of Director Leos Valka, a developer, and Artistic Director Jaroslav Andel. Architect Ivan Kroupa has designed a sleek compound that mixes new buildings with refurbished parts of the former factory on-site. Sections of the compound, such as the media center, were still under construction or undergoing installation. Our group got to tour the exhibition spaces on the first and mezzanine floors, as well as the rooftop. The outdoor roof offers a great view of the surrounding cityscape.



We also got a peek at some of the completed installations of the inaugural exhibition called, *Welcome to Capitalism!* This included Jose-Maria Cano's mock portraits of some of the world's economic power brokers, and Matej Kren's immersive installation inspired by Jorge Luis Borges' infinite library.

If DOX manages to survive the economic downturn, it should succeed at raising its international contemporary art profile, given the type of smart programming it has in store (such as Pipilotti Rist's homage to Czech New Wave filmmaker Vera Chytilova) and its relative lack of local institutional competition. I wish it all the best, and am really sorry that I missed the big inaugural reception.



A Trip to the Jewish Cemetery

Located in the Old Town in the heart of Prague City is the Jewish Cemetery, founded in 1478. In a limited space are thousands of graves, layered one on top of the other – some as much as twelve layers deep. Some are rough stones, others elaborate monuments. Wandering through the narrow paths that weave in and around the cemetery, the gravesite is a most amazing and moving experience. In the area there are also six remaining synagogues, one of which is the oldest synagogue in Europe, completed in 1270.



Welcome to Capitalism, the installation at DOX, Colleen Messing outside on the roof of DOX; the Jewish cemetery

celebrating the artists who spend creative time letting their imagination run freely. I won't take the time to describe all of the art throughout the building but some of the high points are the Ossiry room filled with



courtyard WORDS project in both Czech and English (from which the title of this piece is lifted); a white wool corner sculpture, knotted, spiderweb motif; allegorical ceiling painting; bookshelves in strange juxtapositions; underwear chairs; reused pencils; and the all grey/black/white room that Eugenio created.

The outer buildings on the property also contain installations by artists in residence; the angels in the barn; the life-size mouse trap. But the high point for me



was the grounds that are robustly planted with flowers, herbs, gourds, vegetables, fruits. The amount of time it takes to manage such a richly producing garden like that overwhelms the gardener in me.

Our very generous hosts served us lunch, all homemade, in a VERY tiny kitchen with VERY limited resources and just assisted by two sweet local women. But the repast was extraordinary! We started with a Slovakian Borscht

with potatoes, dumplings and meat; the buffet consisted of stewed chicken with green tomatoes; carrots in a cream/orange/coriander sauce; apple, walnut, celery salad; red pepper and potato salad; tossed salad with nasturtiums, raspberries, borage, stargrass; fresh peas; baked aubergines and pignolia nuts. And for dessert we were served Tiramisu and Fruit Tart. All of the produce served was harvested from their garden. Ample wine flowed during lunch and everyone was exhilarated by this wonderful day.



Tonight we attended the opera Rigoletto at the Statni opera Praha and then on to dinner at the Zahrad V Opere restaurant. Then back to the Pachtuv Palace Hotel for a much welcome rest.



More from Trebesice: Ann Allen poses with pencils, Peter Wender appreciates the cat rug, Eugenio's black and white room with Magda in color in the mirror, and later that day, Jane Pappalardo accompanies Beth Raffeld on the Zahrad V Opere piano.

Czech Food

by Brit d'Arbeloff



Czech food has noticeably improved from 2001 when I was last there. The general theme has not changed, but the execution is so much better, as befits one of the tourist capitals of the world. The theme is duck, duck, duck. (As opposed to Venice, where the theme was fish, fish, fish.) In the last seven years, the chefs have managed to remove congealed fat from the presentation, but cabbage of some form or other is still a player. And dumplings are everywhere. I'm not complaining. I love duck and red cabbage. Our stately dinner in the Lobkowitz Palace substituted guinea fowl breast for duck, but the effect was the same. It was delicious and with the conversation, the

string quartet playing Dvorak's favorite hits, and the wonderful portraits on the wall, I felt transported in time.

Another change in seven years: all the wines were GREAT as opposed to weird. The beers were fabulous, by the way. Budweiser, original, is so much better than our misappropriation of it.

We ate well and happily, but ... our absolutely, positively, undeniably best meal was Italian: slow, completely local, home grown, and exquisite; Trebesice Castle and Farm was a place I would happily spend more time, even if I had to garden or produce art to earn my keep.



Top: Colleen Messing, Sheila Lemke, Beth Raffeld and Jane Pappalardo enjoy the dessert at the Villa Richter
Bottom: Our last night at the V Zatisi Wine Restaurant