



YEARS OF
THE CROATIAN
NATIONAL
BANK

Building

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The seat of the Croatian National Bank is situated on Trg hrvatskih velikana (Square of Croatian Greats), at the intersection of Martićeva Street and Franje Račkoga Street. The building in which it is situated is a protected cultural property and the most renowned work of the architect Viktor Kovačić. The impressive palace was erected to accommodate the Zagreb Stock and Commodity Exchange, while the central bank began using the building as its seat after the end of World War II.

The Croatian National Bank Building

The building is recognizable for its façade covered in famous white stone from the island of Brač. Its main façade is emphasized by four tall Ionic columns which rest on a classical base and carry a simple cornice, reminding of a Greek temple.

The monumental appearance that characterizes the façade continues into the entrance area as well. The area has the shape of a tall vestibule with a coffered ceiling, decorated with rosettes. The main focus of the space is a staircase leading to the foyer of the main stock exchange hall. Large cloakrooms used to be situated on both sides of the vestibule.

The semicircular foyer in front of the stock exchange hall is roofed by a large glass vault. The north side of the foyer leads to the commodity exchange hall, which serves as a conference room today. The walls of the hall are covered in wallpaper in wide wooden frames.

Above the entrance to the main stock exchange hall hangs one of the clocks designed specifically for the Stock Exchange Building. The clocks, located in various parts of the building, have a common mechanism and display the same time. The main stock exchange hall is circular in shape, covered by a 21-meter wide coffered dome made of reinforced concrete and opened by a circular skylight. It is interesting to note that the dome's external layer is taller than the building's main façade. The floor of the main stock exchange hall is covered in mosaic, whereas in the central part, glass prisms allow light to reach a smaller hall located on the ground floor. In addition to the main entrance from the foyer, the hall has two more entrances leading from both sides of the building, enabling a good connection with all rooms in the mezzanine. The hall's niches used to contain telephone booths intended for stock exchange transactions. Today, the booths are used to accommodate the vast collection of books from the library of the Croatian National Bank. The stock exchange hall is surrounded by a gallery which is entered from the hallway in the first floor.

The first floor contains the conference room in which the meetings of the Croatian National Bank Council are held, formerly the room of the Stock Exchange Council. The hall is covered in wood, while its ceiling is decorated with stucco. Next to the hall, the Governor's and the Deputy Governor's offices are situated in the former rooms of the Stock Exchange President and the Stock Exchange General Secretary.

The central hall on the second floor is the arbitration tribunal hall. It is situated above the conference room on the first floor and is square in shape, roofed by a domed ceiling and a large skylight. The space next the conference room contains rooms which were used by arbiters, parties, members of the Council and attorneys. Two fireplace frames are located in the room, above which a sign used to read "LAW AND

JUSTICE".

The history of the Building

The story of the Zagreb Stock and Commodity Exchange Palace is closely connected to the establishment and work of the Stock Exchange itself. Although 1907, the year of the establishment of the Stock and Commodity Exchange Department under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce, is usually perceived as the year the Stock Exchange was established, it was in fact officially founded in 1918. The Stock Exchange was initially located in the building of the Chamber of Commerce situated in Jurišićeva 1, where the Chamber of Commerce leased a large hall to the Stock Exchange to be used for one hour a day in order to hold stock exchange meetings and one room to accommodate an office. Stock exchange transactions increased in that period, as did the number of its members, causing the space used by the Stock Exchange to become insufficient within a short period of time.

As a result, the Zagreb Stock and Commodity Exchange decided to have its own palace built. In November 1920 the Zagreb Stock Exchange purchased land from the city: a construction site of triangular shape located at the very end of Jurišićeva Street, at the intersection of Martićeva Street and Račkoga Street. The Stock Exchange began with the construction immediately. It was decided that the best design be selected on the basis of a competition inviting architects Viktor Kovačić, Aladar Baranyai, Ignjat Fischer, Bruno Bauer, Laza Dungjerski and Jože Plečnik to submit their proposals. The solution proposed by Viktor Kovačić was selected as the best. In the submitted design, Kovačić also took the entire urban complex into consideration, proposing the construction of another building as a twin to his Stock Exchange building. The two buildings were supposed to form a symmetrical portal leading to the new part of the city.

The Stock Exchange Council and Secretary's Office decided to send the architect Viktor Kovačić and the General Secretary on a study trip in 1922. Kovačić thus visited the stock exchange buildings in Vienna and Berlin as a part of his journey. Upon his return and after consulting the Stock Exchange Management Board, Kovačić completed a new design according to which the building was ultimately constructed, with a few minor changes. After the death of Viktor Kovačić on 21 October 1924, Hugo Ehrlich, Kovačić's former business partner, took over the work on the construction, accompanied by architects Alfred Albini and Mladen Kauzlarić. They completed the interior of the building. Particular attention was paid to the building's equipment: furniture, light fixtures and balustrades on the staircases and the gallery of the main stock exchange hall were designed especially for the building.

The Zagreb Stock and Commodity Exchange Building was inaugurated on 18 June 1927. To honour the occasion, the weekly *Svijet* dedicated an entire issue to the event. Regrettably, the completion of construction works coincided with the deceleration of Croatian economic growth and a decrease in stock exchange transactions. Until World War II, the Zagreb Stock Exchange leased most of its premises. The Stock Exchange discontinued its work in 1945.

Viktor Kovačić

Viktor Kovačić was born on 28 July 1874 in Ločen Dol near Rogaška Slatina. He was educated in Graz, where he lived with his uncle. After moving to Zagreb in 1891, Kovačić began working for the then renowned Zagreb builders and architects, Gjuro Carnelutti and Kuno Waidmann. On the basis of a recommendation letter by Kuno Waidmann, Kovačić got a job in Hermann Bollé's studio. Having worked with Bollé for five years, Kovačić decided to continue his education at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna, where he studied in the class of Otto Wagner, the most prominent architect of the Vienna Secession.

Upon his return to Zagreb, Viktor Kovačić wrote a programmatic text entitled "Modern Architecture", published in the first issue of the periodical *Život*, the first theoretical text on modern architecture in Croatia. The stance taken by Kovačić in his text differed substantially from the practice in Croatian architecture at that time. In 1905, Kovačić was one of the founders of the Croatian Architects' Club. The Club was active until 1914, and its members advocated the advancement of architecture and actively took

part in organizing competitions. Kovačić was a lecturer at the Technical College in Zagreb as of 1920.

Kovačić often took part in competitions; however, many of his designs remained either unrealized or partially realized, in spite of receiving numerous awards. He built numerous villas and residential buildings. The first residential building Kovačić designed was the Oršić Divković House in Masarykova Street, where he, instead of receiving financial remuneration for his design and construction management, was given an apartment on the top floor. Today, the apartment is a memorial collection of the Museum of the City of Zagreb, providing excellent insight not only into the life and work of Viktor Kovačić, but also into the housing culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

Two major designs of Viktor Kovačić left a particularly strong mark on Zagreb's architecture: the Church of St Blaise in Prilaz Gjura Deželića and the Stock Exchange Palace. The Church of St Blaise is famous for its large reinforced concrete dome, the first of its kind in Croatia.

Viktor Kovačić died on 21 October 1924 in the middle of the construction of the Zagreb Stock and Commodity Exchange Palace, at the time when his second great dome was being constructed. A year after that, he was posthumously awarded the Grand Prix at the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts in Paris.

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