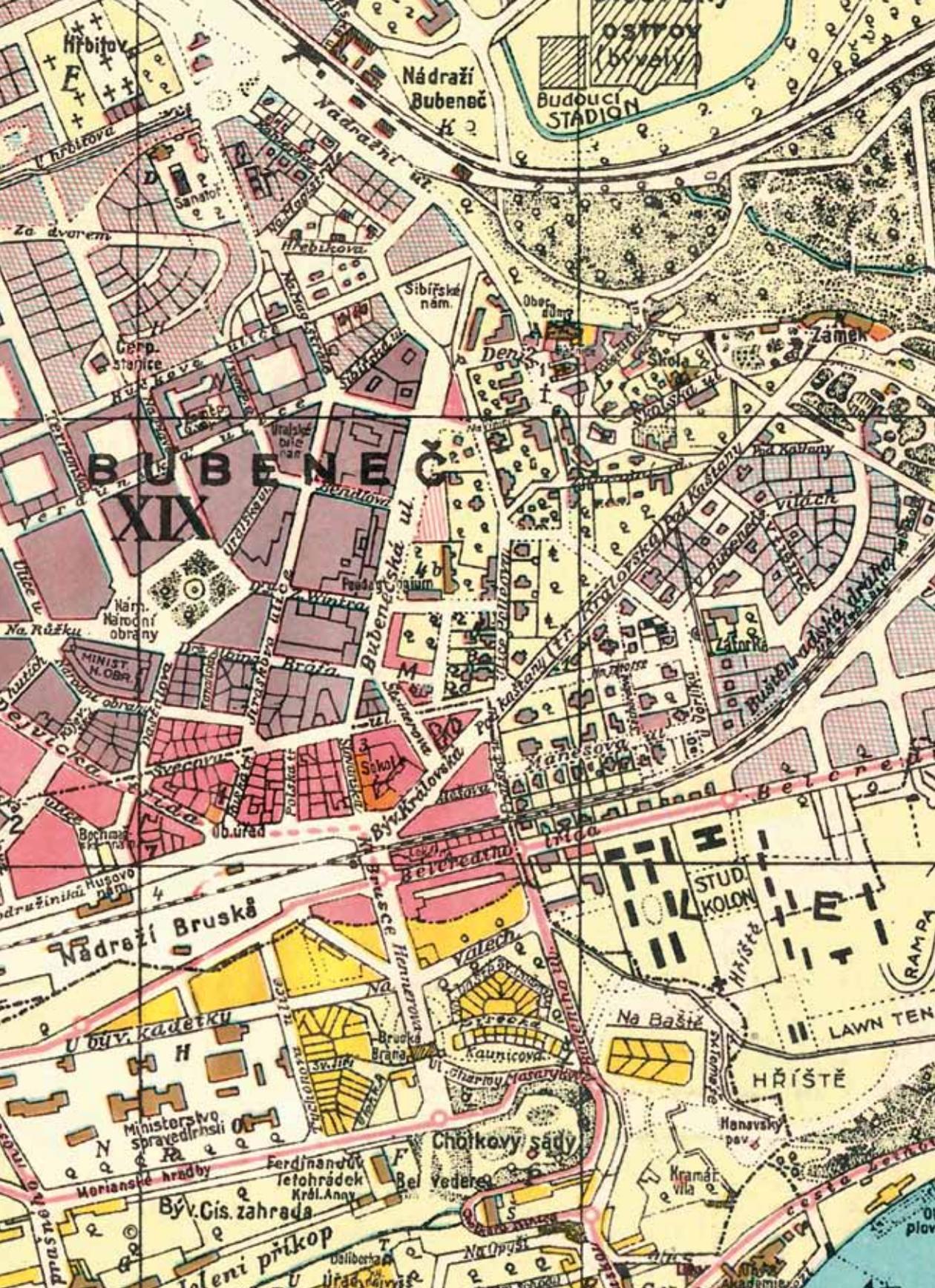




# The Residence of the Norwegian Ambassador in Prague

A Czech journey through  
the 20<sup>th</sup> century



Nádraží  
Bubeneč

OSTROV  
bývalý  
Budoucí  
STADION

**BUBENEČ**

Nádraží  
Bruská

STUD  
KOLON  
HŘIŠTĚ

Chotkovy sady

Byt. Cis. zahrada

HŘIŠTĚ

Morianské hrady

Ferdinandův  
tetohrádek  
Král. Anny

Honavský  
pov.

Toleni přikop

Na Opysi

Kramář  
vila

Due to their country's location in the heart of Europe, only very few nations experienced the turbulent events of the 20th century with greater intensity than the Czechs. In Bohemia and Moravia, economic boom, faith in democracy and immense creativity alternated with Nazi atrocities, one-party dictatorship and Cold War stagnation.

The residence of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway in Prague has borne witness to all the dramatic events that have shaped, for good and for bad, both Czech and European modern history. This beautiful villa also mirrors the major changes in the relations between our two countries after World War II.

The villa at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street represents a small corner of Norway in one of Central Europe's most distinctive residential areas. This publication documents the turbulent history of this building. I would like to express my thanks to Terje B. Englund, who has mapped out and written its story.

We would also like to honour the memory of the two people who built the villa. The fate of Ema and Artur Melichar must never be forgotten, not least their conviction that it makes sense to build bridges.

Prague, April 2019



Robert Kvile  
Norwegian Ambassador to the Czech Republic

# Villas for the nation's elite



Villa construction, Bubeneč 1909

The city district of Bubeneč is in the northern part of Prague. This area was originally pasture land surrounding the Zátorka estate, bounded in the north by the Royal hunting ground, today's Stromovka park, and in the south by the railway track to the small town of Buštěhrad, built in 1863. When the estate ceased to operate as a farm in the 1870s, the land in rural Bubeneč was available for the construction of residential houses.

The first to build a new Renaissance villa close to the chestnut alleyway leading from Stromovka to the Lesser Side in

1872 was industrial magnate Vojtěch Lanna. Other ambitious individuals soon followed suit. At that time, over 70 percent of Austro-Hungarian industrial production was carried out in the Czech lands, and Czech nationalism was on the rise. For the country's elite, owning a prestigious villa in Bubeneč had not only become visible proof of individual success, but also of the growing importance of the Czechs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

After 1895, construction activity increased significantly when Bubeneč was incorporated into the capital. An urban plan was drawn up which was carefully adhered to by the builders. Clearly inspired by the iconic Bedford Park in London, the urban plan designed an enclave of monumental villas with large gardens and with Na Zátorce Street as one of its axes. Avenues of chestnut trees accentuated the green and idyllic atmosphere of the new neighbourhood.

When Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918, as one of the states to emerge from the ruins of the Habsburg monarchy, the villa district gained the unofficial status of a small power centre in the new state.

Leading architects such as Max Spielmann and Jan Kotěra were commissioned to design prestigious houses for coal barons, bank managers and factory owners, many of whom were of Jewish origin. Two of Czechoslovakia's most prominent sculptors transformed one of the streets in the southern part of the

villa district into an art quarter, with villas inspired by Slavic mythology. World-renowned painter Alfons Mucha was so enamoured with the location that he built a beautiful villa there, which he also used as his studio.

The special status held by Bubeneč's villa district was finally confirmed in the summer of 1926 when then Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš and his wife Hana moved into a newly renovated villa at No. 9 Na Zátorce Street.

The building, which is today the Residence of the Norwegian Ambassador to the Czech Republic, was completed in 1929 as one of the last villas to be erected in Bubeneč. This was probably because the land in the southern part of the villa district was on a steep slope. Moreover, it was bounded by a high railway embankment, with trains trundling by as they journeyed from Prague to the coal town of Kladno.

Nonetheless, the location in the middle of Na Zátorce Street and at the end of the side street, V Tišíně, showed great promise. The land was ideal for a builder who aspired to erect a majestic and prestigious villa and, at the same time, possessed the financial resources to do so.

Ema and Artur Melichar, husband and wife, had both.



# Czechs, Germans, Jews

Ema Metzlová was born in 1887 in Telč, a picturesque town between Prague and Vienna. At that time, the Kingdom of Bohemia was multi-ethnic, as was the Habsburg monarchy of which it was part. Rivalry was growing between the two largest of these groups, the seven million Czechs and three million Germans.

The question of language was particularly delicate. In the second half of the 19th century, the Czechs had established themselves as a modern nation with an economic, political and intellectual elite. They had become increasingly outraged that their Slavic mother tongue did not hold equal official status to German.

Bohemia and Moravia's 120,000 Jews were caught in the middle. They were often bilingual, but since many Jews were engaged in business and entrepreneurial activities, and indeed had extensive contacts in other parts of the Habsburg Empire, they usually referred to German as their main language. This was especially true of the Jewish population in the big cities.

The opposite was true of the Metzl family in Telč. The tannery owner Moritz Metzl, his wife Karolina, and their six children spoke Czech to each other both in and outside the home. Their relatives later commented that Ema, the "brains of the Metzl family", and her sister Olga, who was three years her junior, were completely assimilated into Czech society.

For Artur Melcher, born in 1878 to a Jewish family in Kolín, the desire to assimilate into Czech society was completely evident. Once he came of age, he changed his name to the Czech-sounding Artur Melichar and officially declared himself as having no religion. While around the turn of the century some Bohemian Jewish intellectuals were attracted to Theodor Herzl's Zionism, Artur and his liberal friends in the Czech-Jewish movement endeavoured enthusiastically to become closer to the majority Slavic population.

Artur himself made a crucial decision when in autumn 1900 he moved to Prague to study. In what was then Bohemia, young men, who sought to become lawyers, usually studied at the German part of Charles Ferdinand University, but Artur decided to join the Czech part.

Ema Metzlová and Artur Melichar married in 1908, the same year that Artur passed the final state examination in law studies. Sugar played a key role in their life together.



Telč around 1890

# A class journey in sugar

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bohemia ranked among the most important European producers of “white gold”. The town of Kolín, Artur’s birthplace, was at the centre of the Czech industrial fairy tale. Due to its mild climate and clay soil, the arable land along the Elbe is very suitable for growing sugar beet.

In 1880, the chemist Bernard Mandelík founded his first sugar refinery in Ratboř near Kolín. Thanks to Mandelík’s expertise and business acumen, the Ratboř sugar factory grew into one of the most profitable industrial enterprises in Bohemia over the next few decades.

Artur and Ema Melichar were close to the Mandelík family thanks to their professional and family ties.



Ema and Artur Melichar in 1908

Artur met Robert Mandelík, Bernard’s eldest son, who was three years his senior, and his father’s successor at the Ratboř sugar refinery at the turn of the century when both men were active in the Czech-Jewish movement in Kolín. Their progressive attitudes laid the foundation for lifelong collaboration, whereby Artur’s role was to act as legal adviser to the expanding Mandelík corporation.

In 1909, family ties were also established. Ota Mandelík, Robert’s younger brother, married Ema Melichar’s younger sister, Olga Metzlová. The same year Ema lost her child immediately after childbirth. Over time, she developed a motherly relationship with her niece Hana Mandelíkova, who was born in 1912, treating her as if she were her own daughter.

The foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 brought good times to the



Ema's driving licence from 1931



Managing clerk Artur Melichar, around 1920

Melichar couple. Ema and Artur lived in an apartment building in Prague city centre, close to Palacký Bridge. Artur was the managing director and co-owner of a metal trading company. It was a period of economic growth, and Artur regularly travelled to Western Europe on business. By 1920, he was already able to afford a stay at a Swiss sanatorium for Ema and himself. A few years later, Artur was given his first of many assignments as member of the board of directors of the various companies run by the Mandelík family.

One of these contracts was crucial to the Melichar family's advancement up the social ladder. In 1924, Artur was appointed legal advisor to the Union of Czechoslovak Sugar Refineries. In reality this was a lobbying organization run by Robert Mandelík and other sugar producers which, through cartel agreements and good relations with the authorities, guaranteed stable prices. There were vast amounts of money involved. In 1926, Czechoslovakia was rated as the second largest sugar producer in Europe. Sugar alone accounted for more than 12 percent of the country's total export revenue.

By the second half of the twenties, Ema and Artur had definitively become part of the Czechoslovakian elite.

Artur was accepted as a member of the Czechoslovak Automobile Club and the Gentlemen's Club, the latter established exclusively for rich entrepreneurs. Ema officially used the title of "managing clerk's wife" and played an enthusiastic role in cultural life, while simultaneously assisting Artur with his investment activities. The social status of the Melichars was definitively confirmed in 1926. The five hundred-crown banknote issued that year was signed by Robert Mandelík, a newly elected member of



Double wedding in the Mandelík family, Prague 1908. In the back row from the left Artur, Ema and Bernard Mandelík. In the front row from the left Ema's mother Karolína, Ota Mandelík and Olga Metzlová.



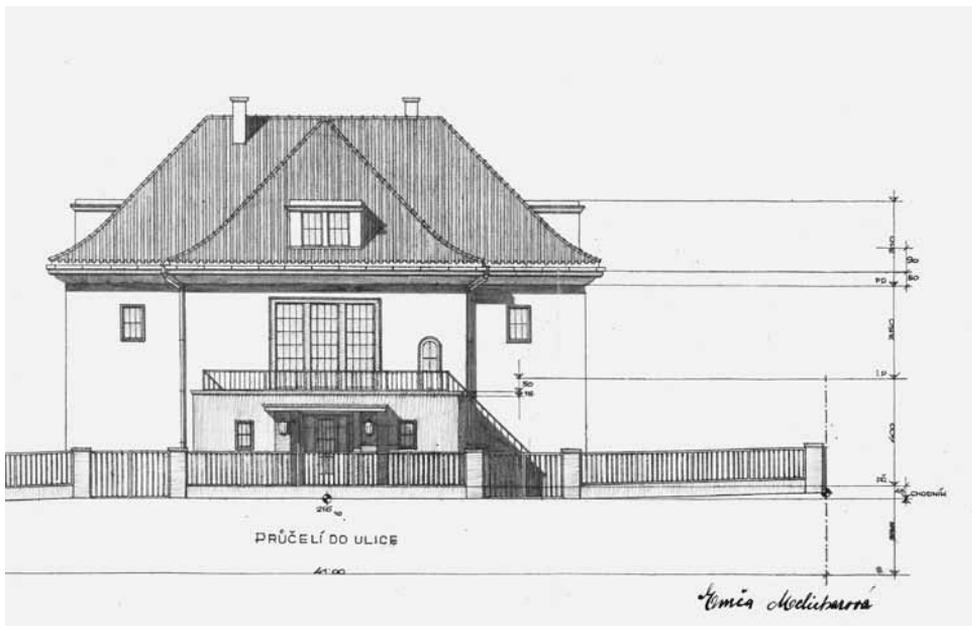
the Board of Directors of the Central Bank and Artur's friend and closest business partner.

Ema and Artur's advancement up the social ladder says a lot about the relatively liberal atmosphere in Czechoslovakia between the wars. Although anti-Semitism was still a reality in some parts of the population, the political and economic elites respected the ideals set out in 1918 by the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk, on the occasion of the foundation of the Republic:

National identity was not associated with ethnicity but with loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and its democratic and secular ideals. Masaryk himself was of Slovak-German origin, Ema and Artur had Jewish roots. They were all equally good Czechoslovaks.

## A tribute to Masaryk in reinforced concrete

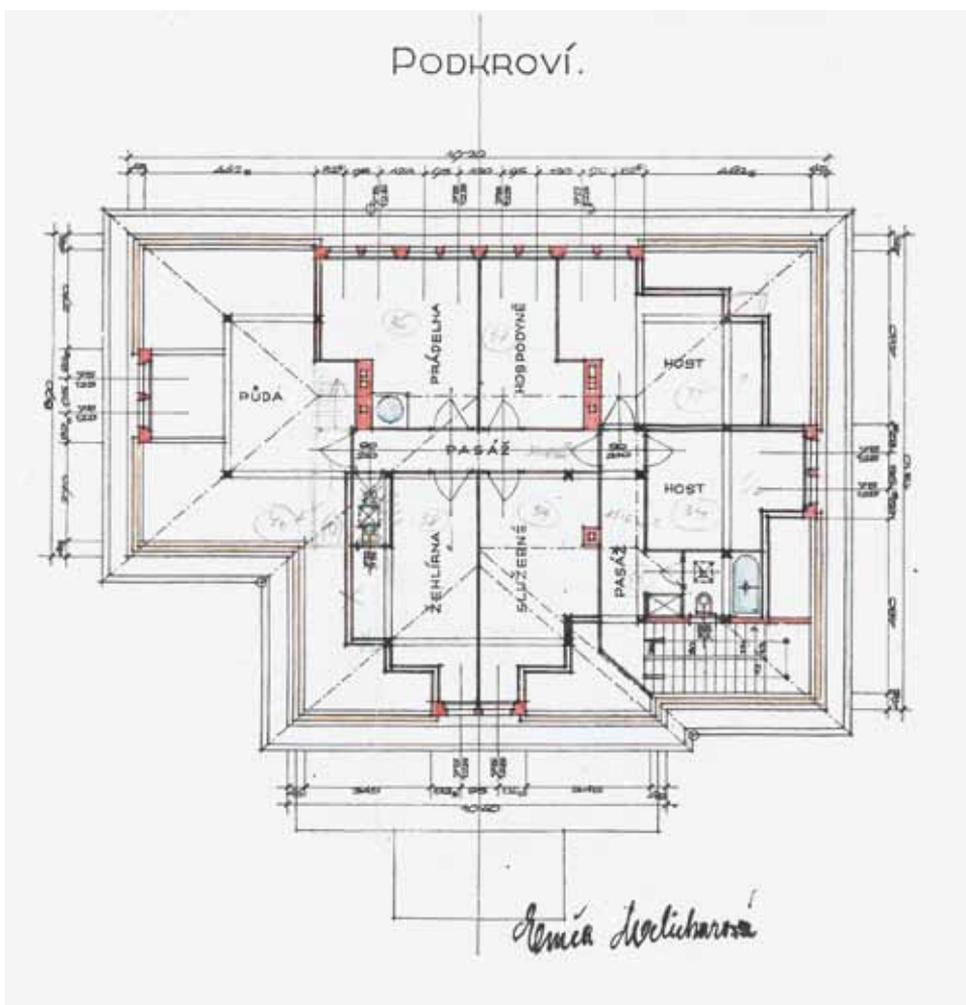
At its meeting on 20 July 1928, the City Council in Prague made the decision to sell an undeveloped site with an area of more than twenty ares at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street to Ema Melicharová. The selling price is not listed.



The fact that Artur's name was left out of both the sales documents and all other papers related to the sale was most likely a mere security measure. If, for some reason, his many business activities were threatened by bankruptcy, it would not have been possible to confiscate the villa in which the couple had invested all their assets.

The building permit states that the projected house had a built-on area of 252 sqm, comprising two floors and a high attic. The façade is north facing, while a south-facing veranda and stairs lead down to the large garden.

The contract for the construction of the villa was awarded to Matěj Blecha's building company, which had already completed several residences in

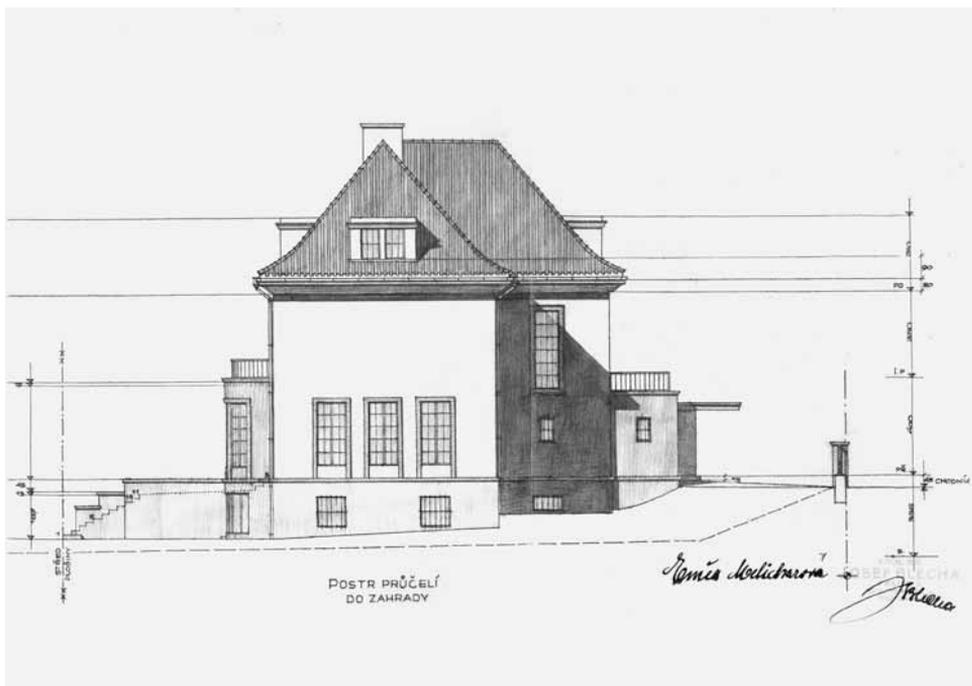


Bubeneč. The company was in collaboration with leading Czechoslovak architects, but the Melichars' villa was probably designed by the company's then owner, Josef Blecha, who was also an architect.

Blecha's drawings depict an elegant neoclassical building. The choice of style was hardly random, as the Melichars wanted to demonstrate their commitment to Czechoslovakia.

After its establishment in 1918, the young state needed numerous buildings for state institutions, universities, courts and banks. Neoclassicism quickly became the dominant architectural style of official Czechoslovakia.

The clean lines were timeless and in harmony with the surroundings, but also marked a departure from the Austro-Hungarian era. The emphasis on symmetry was inspired by antiquity, although the building material used was modern reinforced concrete. Neoclassicism was elegant and monumental, without being pompous or ostentatious, much like the founding father of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk. The president determined the direction of the architectural style when in 1920 he commissioned one of the leading proponents of neoclassicism, Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, to modernize Prague Castle.



Josef Blecha had just finished work on the magnificent residence of painter Alfons Mucha on the other side of the street when his firm began to build Ema and Artur's villa in summer 1928. The construction work progressed remarkably quickly. As early as the end of February 1929, inspectors from the Municipal Building Department declared that the villa had been completed. Central heating was installed, and electricity, gas, water, sewage, and a telephone line were connected.

One month later, the owners of the house were informed that it was ready to move into. The newly built villa at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street was designated building number 620 in Bubeneč. The formal completion of the construction process is dated 2 May 1929, when the villa was entered into the land register.

Ema and Artur clearly intended their home to be used as a high-class venue for gatherings and receptions. Guests enter the villa into a monumental hall, the walls of which are covered with dark oak panels, drawing attention to the exceptional style and taste of their hosts. Three lounges are symmetrically located off the hall, one of which had a piano, another a bay window looking out onto the beautiful garden, and a third with a dining area for hosting large dinners.

The first floor was the couple's private apartment. An impressive dark oak staircase led from the hall up to their private quarters. Even from the outside, the villa had an air of respectability. The neoclassical building blended in with the villa across the street and with the redbrick house next door, inspired by the Dutch architectural style, into which entrepreneur Lumír Kapsa had recently moved.

The Melichars spent eleven years in their spacious villa in Bubeneč. Both were passionate about art and culture and held regular get togethers at their home, attended by leading Czechoslovak painters, writers and musicians.

Ema loved music, played the piano herself and spent considerable resources supporting young talent. One of those who was able to complete his musical education thanks to her financial assistance was the young pianist and composer František Pollak. Artur devoted much of his time to the applied arts. During the 1930s, he built up an extensive collection of crystal vases, handmade in Bohemia at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The hospitable couple who lived in the house at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street was undoubtedly among Czechoslovakia's cultural elite.

# The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Although Ema and Artur were not interested in politics, they could not but notice the horrific developments in Central Europe in the autumn of 1938. By signing the Munich Agreement in September of that year, Britain and France had stabbed President Edvard Beneš in the back. Czechoslovakia was forced to cede the Sudetenland to Hitler's Germany. In the weeks that followed, 130,000 Czechs, Jews and Germans opposed to the Nazis fled to Prague and other Czech cities.

During the November pogrom – mockingly called “Kristallnacht” by the Nazis (the Night of the Broken Glass) – synagogues were set on fire in Liberec, Mariánské Lázně and dozens of other towns in the annexed Sudetenland. Jewish shops and houses were looted on a massive scale; the flow of refugees grew stronger.

Racial persecution eventually spread to what was left of Czechoslovakia. The Bar Association and the Sokol movement expelled Jewish members. Prime Minister Beran's government, which was installed after the Munich Betrayal, took “preventative measures” by firing all state administration employees of Jewish origin. In March 1939, the catastrophe came to a head,



Helga Weiss, 14 years old: Deportation to Theresienstadt 1942

ÚSTŘEDNÍ KARTOTÉKA — TRANSPORTY.	
R. č. <u>27.562</u>	
<u>Melicharová Ema</u>	
Rodná data: <u>6. 9. 1887</u>	
Adresa před deportací: <u>Praha V. Pávězká 32</u>	
<u>1. transport</u>	
dne: <u>26. X. 1941</u>	
<u>C</u> c. <u>193</u>	<b>LODŽ</b>

with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany. The country was renamed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; Adolf Hitler celebrated the occupation with a gala dinner at Prague Castle.

It is uncertain whether Ema and Artur tried to get out of the Protectorate. Maybe their identification with Czechoslovakia was so strong that they felt safe there for a long time. Perhaps they did try to escape but left it until it was already too late. In any case, Ema and Artur were not among the Protectorate's 30,000 Jews who managed to be saved.

In August 1940, the Melichars were forced to hand over their villa to the Auswanderungsfond für Böhmen und Mähren (Emigration Fund for Bohemia and Moravia). The fund was created six months earlier to give a cloak of legitimacy to the Nazi theft of Jewish property. Ema and Artur had to move into a flat in an apartment building and were told they would receive compensation for the villa once they had obtained their emigration permits. This was a hideous scam. In October 1941, the couple were deported to the Lodz ghetto in one of the first transports to leave Bohemia.

17 The heavily guarded Lodz ghetto comprised more than a hundred factories and workshops in which Jewish prisoners produced equipment for

the German war machine. Artur was 63 years old at the time, Ema was 54. The Prague couple was held in a building for older prisoners. Here they managed to survive for almost one year. In autumn 1942, the Germans began the mass transport of prisoners to the Chelmno extermination camp, where mobile gas chambers had been introduced. Ema was included in the transport, officially bound for work in Germany; Artur was too old.

Ema was murdered the day after she arrived at the camp, most likely on 12 September 1942. Along with about fifty Jewish women, she suffocated to death, gassed with carbon monoxide in a sealed van that drove from Chelmno to prepared mass graves in the forest. According to his prisoner file at the Lodz ghetto, Artur died of heart failure on 8 May of the following year.

Their villa did not stay empty for long. As early as autumn 1940, senior Protectorate officials and high-ranking Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst officers moved into the villas of deported Jews. Ema and Artur's villa was taken over by Bohemia's vice president Leo Schubert. The 55-year-old Sudeten German had a long career as mayor in northern Moravia, was a decorated member of the Nazi Party and held the rank of SS-Standartenführer.

Another Sudeten German, Karl Hermann Frank, lived across the street from Schubert, in what was renamed Yorck Strasse in honour of the Prussian



Joseph Goebbels visits Na Zátorce 9, November 1940

commander. The former book dealer from Carlsbad, who ran the entire security apparatus during the Protectorate, confiscated the villa from bank director Max Kantor. A little further to the west, the magnificent villa that belonged to the Jewish Petschek family, was turned into the headquarters of General Rudolf Toussaint, military commander in German-occupied Bohemia.

In 1942, immediately after the new year, Schubert was unexpectedly removed from office and thrown out of the villa. The official explanation was that he had enriched himself on the assets confiscated from the deported Jews. The Sudeten German had evidently sold off Ema and Artur's valuables to an extent that even caused a stir among Nazi circles.

Schubert was replaced by Horst Naudé. The year before that, the former Berlin lawyer was a trusted collaborator of Reinhard Heydrich, Reich Protector in Bohemia and Moravia, and one of the chief architects of the Holocaust. The fact that the official owner of the villa now became the Czech Land Office (Das Land Böhmen) attests to Naudé's importance.

Horst Naudé lived in Ema and Artur's house until May 1945, when he and the German occupation forces fled west. After two years in US captivity he became a free man. Leo Schubert hid in Austria after the war but lived in West Germany from 1949 onwards. Neither of them has ever been declared legally responsible for complicity in the murder of 77,297 Czech Jews.

## In the service of the people's democracy

In March 1945, President Beneš travelled from exile in Britain to Moscow to meet with Klement Gottwald. The chairman of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia spent the war years in the Soviet capital. With the support of Stalin, he had been drafting an action plan for a National Front government, a unification government that would assume power in Czechoslovakia as soon as the German occupation forces were defeated.

Gottwald's draft government programme was adopted with minor changes and subsequently published in April in the liberated town of Košice. The main points of the programme involved radical changes: the nationalisation of all major banks and businesses, the banning of some political parties, a limited number of approved parties, the appointment of communists to key positions in the new government and the role of the Communist Party as the largest party in the interim National Assembly.

The Košice Programme became the most important instrument used by the Communists to promote the “people’s democracy”, the one-party dictatorship in Czechoslovakia which would last four decades. The man appointed prime minister and hence also a leading figure in the dismantling of democracy was long-time Ambassador of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union Zdeněk Fierlinger.

In July 1945, less than two months after the liberation, Prime Minister Fierlinger moved into Ema and Artur Melichar’s villa.

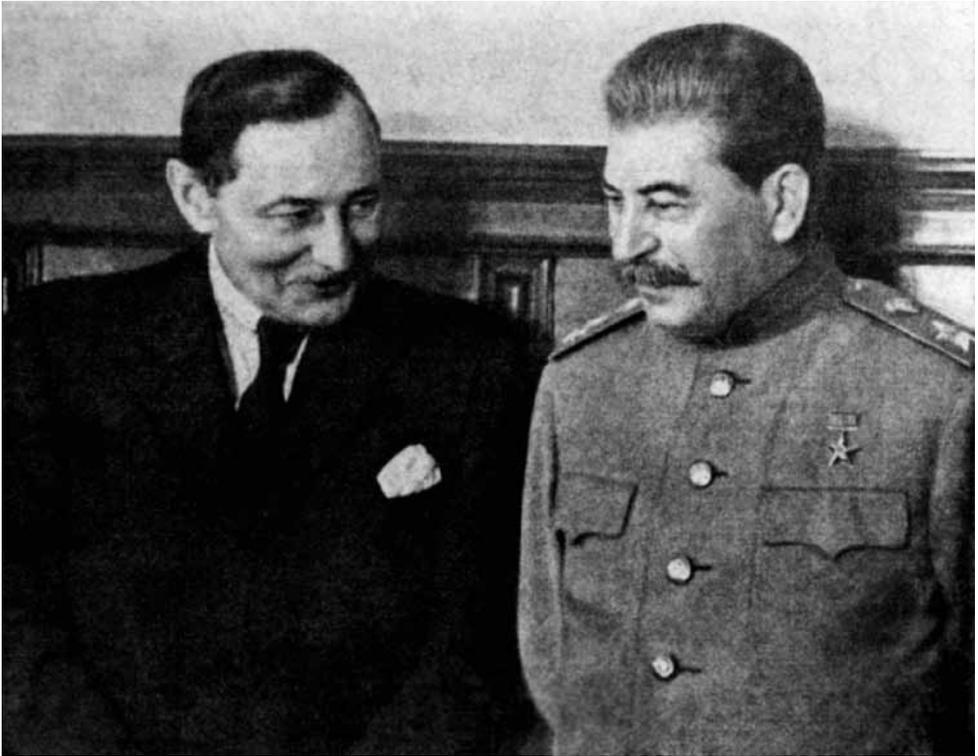
At that time, the appalling extent of the Holocaust had started to become evident, but there were no confirmed details of the fate of the Melichars. Ema’s younger sister Olga survived the war in the United States and was the formal heiress of the property. Nonetheless, in August 1945, Olga and her family did not take over the house. Instead, it was taken over by the Czechoslovak state.

The villa at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street became part of the war settlement. In response to what had happened in the years before the war, when many Sudeten Germans had allowed themselves be used as a tool by Hitler’s Germany to break up Czechoslovakia, in May 1945 President Beneš issued a decree on the confiscation of the property of “Germans, Hungarians, traitors and collaborators”. This also applied to Ema and Artur’s villa. Indirectly, therefore, the Czechoslovak authorities had acknowledged the confiscation in 1940 by the Emigration Fund as legitimate and Das Land Böhmen as the rightful owner of the villa.

The same procedure was followed for other buildings in Bubeneč that the Germans had stolen in 1940 from Jews who had either fled or were later deported.

The opulent palace, which had been confiscated during the war from banker Jiří Popper, was handed over to the Soviet Union in 1945 as its new embassy in Czechoslovakia. The following year, the newly elected Secretary General of the Communist Party, Rudolf Slánský, moved into the villa of Holocaust victim Vilemína Altschul Bondy. The Secretary General enjoyed living in the beautiful house at the bottom of Na Zátorce Street for a short time only. In 1952 Slánský, who had himself lost his parents and brothers in the Holocaust, was sentenced to death as a “Zionist and bourgeois nationalist traitor” and executed.

Zdeněk Fierlinger and his French wife Olga Theresie Favre lived in the Melichar family villa for 19 years. In the last decade, he was Chairman of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia.



Zdeněk Fierlinger with Joseph Stalin, 1945

In the period between the wars, Fierlinger pursued a successful career in Czechoslovakia's foreign service and was considered to be one of Edvard Beneš's few close friends. The president's personal trust was also crucial to his appointment as head of the "Košice" government in 1945. However, Fierlinger utterly betrayed his confidence. In the power struggle between the president and the communists which led to the Czech coup in February 1948, Fierlinger systematically took the side of the Communist party.

Even when his friend Jan Masaryk was found dead on the pavement in the courtyard of the Czernin Palace two weeks after the coup, Fierlinger did not change course. Over the next few months, he made a significant effort to merge his party, the Social Democrats, with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In practice, this meant the demise of the country's oldest democratic party.

After emigrating to the United States, Marie Jana Korbelová, later known as Madeleine Albright, studied Political Science. As part of her studies, she wrote her thesis on Zdeněk Fierlinger. Her conclusion is merciless: this man was democratic Czechoslovakia's answer to Vidkun Quisling.

# The Kingdom of Norway moves into the villa

In the summer of 1964, Fierlinger retired and had to move out of his official residence at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street. At that time, the decision was made to transfer the villa to the Administration for Service to the Diplomatic Corps, which had orders to rent the building to an ambassador seeking a residence. Perhaps it was not entirely by coincidence that the Diplomatic Service chose a country that had closed its embassy in Prague a few years beforehand: The Kingdom of Norway.

When Norway opened its first embassy in Prague in 1945, relations between the two countries were still in the romantic phase. Their common experience of Nazi German occupation, coupled with the desire of governments in Prague and Oslo to build bridges between East and West, formed the basis of promising cooperation. Writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's solidarity with Slovakia at the turn of the century was commemorated by an official day of friendship, celebrated in both countries.

With the Communist takeover in 1948, and the surprisingly harsh criticism of the coup by Norwegian Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen, good relations between the two countries came to a sudden end. Over the next few years, before the Iron Curtain ultimately divided Europe in two, Norway had taken in more than 300 political refugees from Czechoslovakia. In the 1950s, Skoda cars and JAWA motorcycles sold well in Norway, but as the Cold War became even colder, political relations fell to freezing point.

In 1957, the Communist party's official newspaper *Rudé Právo* accused the archivist at the Norwegian Embassy in Prague of being the handler of a Czech television journalist accused of espionage. The journalist was later sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for supplying intelligence to the United States and "another NATO country". That same year, the Norwegian Security Police revealed that the Czechoslovak State Security (StB) had been engaged in extensive espionage activities in Norway.

By the end of 1958, the Norwegian authorities had run out of patience. The embassy in Prague was closed and responsibility for diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia was transferred to the embassy in Vienna. The Norwegian authorities officially argued that the closure was "for economic reasons", but the Czechoslovaks perceived the act exactly as it was intended – as a diplomatic slap in the face.

It took seven years before Norway decided to reopen its embassy in Prague. The fact that the Czechoslovak authorities immediately offered the Norwegian ambassador a highly fashionable villa in Na Zátorce Street as his new residence could be interpreted as a desire to forget the clashes of the past. The Communist regime had initiated a cautious liberalization process, one of the elements of which was to become closer to the West.

Egil Ulstein was the first ambassador of Norway to have his official residence at the Melichars' villa. Like the rest of Prague, the building was also displaying traces of decline at that time. Therefore, before the former war pilot moved in in April 1966, the villa was quickly renovated. Furniture was purchased in the exclusive Forum department store in Oslo and transported to Prague, along with paintings, etchings and busts. The result was an exquisite and representative residence with a sophisticated design and excellent location.

The potential of the residence as a venue for meetings was only used to a limited extent. After Soviet tanks crushed the Prague Spring in 1968, all attempts to become closer to the West were put on hold. Events at the residence over the next two decades reflected the cold relations between Czechoslovakia and Norway. Social functions rarely took place, and the vast majority were receptions held for employees of the Foreign Ministry and members of the diplomatic corps, with the occasional dinner for colleagues from friendly embassies.



The most notable event at the time of normalization under Husák's regime was a gas explosion in the basement of the villa in the mid-1970s. In some places, the parquet flooring was badly hit on the ground floor, but the blast did not cause any permanent damage. The most obvious reminder that time had not come to a complete standstill in the Bubeneč villa district was the trains to and from Kladno, which rambled by along the railway tracks behind the garden every half an hour.

## A meeting place in the spirit of Ema and Artur

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czechs set about redressing the damage wreaked by 40 years of totalitarian rule. One of the first priorities was to return the property confiscated by the communist regime to private individuals, i.e. to the original owners. In the case of the Melichars' villa, Ema's sister Olga's descendants were considered.



Democracy at last. The Velvet Revolution, Prague 1989

In autumn 1940, Olga and her husband Ota Mandelík escaped miraculously from the Protectorate. They spent the war years in the US, where they lived with their daughter Hana. They only heard about Ema and Artur's terrible fate when they returned to their homeland after the liberation. Two of Olga's four brothers and their entire families were also murdered in the Holocaust.

One of the few survivors with any ties to the villa at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street was Ema's former piano student, František Pollak. In 1936 he emigrated to Palestine where, under the name of Frank Pelleg, he became over time one of the leading Israeli pianists, renowned for his interpretation of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Pelleg also established himself in the new state as a conductor and music teacher.

Olga and her relatives soon realized that developments in Czechoslovakia after the liberation were heading in the wrong direction. Not only were the sugar refineries and private properties confiscated from the Mandelík family. In the summer of 1945, Ema's niece Hana married Václav Beneš, a nephew of President Edvard Beneš. The family thus definitely fell out of favour with the new ruling elite.

When democracy was quashed three years later, they decided to emigrate to the United States for a second time. Ema's piano was one of the few things they could take with them from Czechoslovakia. And so, they decided to look ahead. Like many other families who had lost their relatives in the Holocaust, they found the memories too traumatic to talk about.

Unlike Olga, her daughter Hana lived to see the fall of the communist regime. As early as autumn 1991, the District Court in Prague 6 handed down a judgement stating that Ema Melicharová's niece was to be granted full ownership of the villa at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street. The democratic Czechoslovakia had managed to put right the injustices of 1945 in record time.

The Norwegian ambassadors were Hana Benešová's tenants for the next 14 years. During this time, the residence underwent extensive renovation, both inside and outside. King Harald and Queen Sonja were able to see for themselves its stylish interiors during their state visit to the Czech Republic in spring 1997.

In 2005, Hana Benešová's daughters Nina Hajda and Eva Hanhardt decided to sell the villa to the Kingdom of Norway.





KVARE DU I GDD OG KVARE DU I BORI III  
OG KVARE DINE WOMFRUKLÅ DE SKORNE













Today, the building is owned and managed by Statsbygg, the Norwegian Directorate of Public Construction and Property. Although the ambassador's residence in Prague is not one of the largest in the Norwegian foreign service, it undoubtedly boasts one of the richest histories. Its location is also unique. Today, the villa district in Bubeneč has about one hundred buildings and is one of the most compact and best-preserved residential areas in Central Europe built between 1870 and 1930.

The last chapter of the history of the Norwegian residence was written in May 2019.

Exactly 90 years after Ema Melichar was officially registered as the owner, the Norwegian Embassy had two stones of the disappeared (Stolpersteine) placed in front of No. 20 Na Zátorce Street in memory of its original owners and their tragic fate. At the same time, they confirm Norway's respect for Ema and Artur Melichar's original intention – the villa will continue in the future to be a meeting place that helps build cultural, musical and social bridges.



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**Norwegian Ambassadors residing in the villa  
at No. 20 Na Zátorce Street:**

Egil Ulstein 1966 – 1969  
Thor Brodtkorb 1970 – 1973  
Torfinn Oftedal 1973 – 1975  
Henrik Andreas Broch 1975 – 1976  
Olav Lydvo 1977 – 1980  
Georg Krane 1980 – 1988  
Knut Elias Taraldset 1988 – 1993  
John Egil Grieg 1993 – 1996  
Mette Kongshem 1996 – 1999  
Lasse Seim 1999 – 2004  
Peter Nicolay Ræder 2004 – 2009  
Jens Eikaas 2009 – 2014  
Siri Ellen Sletner 2014 – 2018  
Robert Kvile 2018 –



Norwegian Embassy