



Blueprint for the 1923 renovations of the Pelican House, currently in the Liberec Urban Development Archive.

The original blueprints for the house have not been preserved, but documentation exists dating back to the year 1923, identifying architect Rudolf Wichera as the house's owner. The house had undergone a partial renovation then, under the management of local architect Alfred Koschek. The interior layout was refurbished to accommodate the standards of modern-day living. We can therefore reasonably assume that the house had originally been used as a manufacturing and storage facility as well as a residence. The 1923 plans included a new bathroom with a bathtub and toilet in the attic. The attic was rebuilt into a loft apartment, which meant that heat insulation had to be installed. The house was outfitted with new interior doors in the Art Deco style, typical for inter-war design and industrial production. The architect's initials, RW, are carved into a medallion above the front door portal.

A new owner acquired the house in 1929, as documented in the drawings made by architects Gustav and Ferdinand Miksch. They proposed turning a section of the ground floor into a shop, which meant removing the left-hand-side window on the south-facing wall; it was supposed to be replaced by a glazed shop window and a side door. The shop would be accessed by this side entrance with several steps, ending in a porch with railing and brick pilasters. However, the refurbishment was never carried out.

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Photographs from the mid-20th century show the original building materials: a stone base and slate roof tiles, laid diagonally, with borders on the roof edges, gables and ridges. In mid-20th century, the granite base was covered with poorly-suited cement plastering, which caused the granite to degrade, and the original slate roof was replaced by metal roofing sheets. The most recent major renovations to the house occurred in 2017. The facade was restored; the original casement windows

were repainted; the metal on the roof was replaced by fiber cement roofing tiles; the sheet metal lining, eaves and drainpipes were replaced; and the pelican relief and the front door portal were restored. The current light gray facade with white windows has been inspired by earlier layers of paint uncovered on the outer walls, and gives the house an air of sober elegance. The monochrome color scheme allows for an interesting interplay of light and shadow, which highlights the facade structure. The house currently belongs to the Franciscan order. It serves as a community center where the nuns organize afterschool activities for children and provide psychological counseling.

## NEO-CLASSICAL HERITAGE

After extensive demolition works in the late 20th century, the Pelican House was the last of its kind to remain standing, amid a block of apartment buildings from the inter-war period and modern prefab buildings. It therefore offers a valuable glimpse of what the town used to look like, and serves as typical example of the Neo-classical architecture that emerged in Liberec at the turn of the 18th century. It is a tangible testament to the boom of the local textile industry and the ensuing expansion of the town. The house's original layout, structure and materials have all been preserved. The original doors and windows attest to the high standard of quality and craftsmanship, as well as careful maintenance. The stucco and stone facade décor contributes to the building's unique character. Despite later alterations, the interior layout follows the arrangement typical for traditional timber houses in Liberec, and speaks of the local builders' unwillingness and/or inability to abandon traditional methods and embrace new trends. Despite clinging to the local traditions, both the style and materials used place the Pelican House firmly among the new generation of brick townhouses. Though the new trend came about later than in other towns and cities, it represented a milestone in the town's architecture and urban planning.

Even later buildings in Liberec still contain some Neo-classical elements, such as the rear wing of the North Bohemian Museum, which the architects designed as a

traditional Liberec townhouse from the turn of the 18th century, albeit on a far more monumental scale, so as to commemorate and celebrate local craftsmanship. The Neo-classical style became so deeply ingrained in the local building tradition that it resonated in many projects designed decades later. Both the local Art Nouveau buildings and mansions of the local textile barons from the interwar period contain many Neo-classical elements.



#### GPS coordinates

N 50.7640411°, E 15.0605367°

#### More info at

[www.npu.cz/uop-li](http://www.npu.cz/uop-li)  
 heritage promotion section



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## LIBEREC-PERŠTÝN

### The Pelican House

## HOUSE NO. 243/IV, NA PERŠTÝNĚ, LIBEREC

The house known as U Pelikána (“Pelican House”) in Na Perštýně street is a prime example of the Neoclassical architectural style in Liberec. Built around the time when textile production began flourishing in the region, resulting in an overall economic boom, it was part of a new wave of development as brick buildings gradually replaced the former wooden houses and permanently changed the town landscape. In the early 18th century, the town of Liberec consisted of some 370 houses, predominantly made of timber. In the second half of the century, the influx of new capital and the support of the Clam-Gallas family led to a building boom, which culminated at the turn of the 18th century. Whole new city districts were built around that time, including Filipovo Město and Kristiánov, whose urban layout and architectural style became the template for future urban development. The Pelican House reflects many of these rules and principles.



Early 20th century drawing, showing the house's distinctive curved gable and mansard roof.

## PELICAN HOUSE HISTORY

The house No. 243 stands in the Liberec district known as Perštýn, named after a nearby hill located near an old road leading from Prague to Liberec and further north. The hill rises fairly steeply from the valley of Harcovský Potok (“Harcov Creek,” formerly known as Mlýnský Potok). The hill has had many names in the past: in the 16th century it was known as Galgenstein (“Gallows Hill”); in the 18th and 19th century, it was alternately called Monstranzberg (“Monstrance Hill”) or Töpferberg (“Potter’s Hill”). Today’s name, Perštýn, is probably a garbled version of the original German street name (Birgsteingasse, today’s Na Perštýně). The street was gradually filled with new, single-story, part-timber, part-brick houses, mostly owned and occupied by drapers, cloth weavers and other craftsmen associated with textile production.

Dyer Andreas Altmann was one of those who had set up their trade and living in the area. In 1803, he commissioned the construction of the building that was to be known as the Pelican House on the east side of the street, near the bend which takes the street running up a steep slope toward the south, which means the house now forms a distinct part of the Perštýn vistas. Like many other buildings in Liberec, the house was



View of the Na Perštýně street, showing the original urban layout and the current poor state of the street.

designed by architect Johann Karl Kunze. Born to a family of builders and architects, Kunze studied architecture in Vienna. Together with his father Johann Josef Kunze, chief architect to the Clam-Gallas family, he ranked among the most prominent Neoclassical architects in Liberec. Their style owed much to the Baroque principles, albeit with softened lines and a smaller scale of the buildings, their layout and décor. Typical for the period was the focus on decoration and ornamentation, applied to earlier, well-established building types and structures. In Liberec, this resulted in a specific Neoclassical building style, which had first been identified and described by earlier German researchers.

## ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PELICAN HOUSE THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The Pelican House is a prime example of this style. The single-story structure with a mansard roof faces the street widthwise. A plastered underpinning compensates for the slope of the terrain and a ramp built of sandstone blocks provides easier access to the main entrance. Facade décor is strictly symmetrical, with an avant-corps in the center, a ground floor entrance and a curved top gable. There are two windows on either side of the avant-corps, and the mansard roof has dormer windows with a gable roof on both levels. The attic has a similar layout, with a central hallway and residential rooms on both sides. The entrance hallway has a door in the rear leading to the garden, with an extended porch that is probably a later addition. There is a cellar with a barrel-vaulted ceiling underneath the north section of the house, accessible through a door under the staircase. The building layout is similar to the earlier timber houses built in Liberec. Other houses on the street were built in a similar style but have not survived, which makes the Pelican House all the more valuable.

The outside decor is fairly simple. The front entrance facade is relatively ornate, but still rather modest compared to the more imposing townhouses of the local merchants



Photo from the early 1930s showing the original slate roof.

in Liberec’s town squares, reflecting the original builder’s lower social status. The corners of the building are covered with lined stucco relief; the facade is smooth, divided by flat pilaster strips. The windows are fitted with polished sandstone sills and framed by profiled borders, with stucco voussoirs on the top floor and gables. The central avant-corps is decorated by corner pilasters reaching up to the mansard roof level, on top of which sits a robust, curved cornice. The top of the cornice follows the same curved shape as the bottom. The front entrance features a stone portal with a segmental arch, crowned by a voussoir, and doorposts with ornamental heads. The voussoir bears the date 1803, which was actually carved later, during the renovation in 1923. Above the voussoir there

is a partly carved, partly stuccoed festoon with a floral motif. As was typical for many Neo-classical houses in Liberec, the facade features a house sign. It was this ornate relief which gave the house its name. The carved pelican sits on a corbel between the windows on the top floor, right underneath the cornice. It is depicted with its wings wide outspread, protecting its young. Scratching its chest with its beak, it is feeding them its own blood. In Western iconography, the pelican symbolizes Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and personifies Christian love. For the Ancients, which were often a source of inspiration for Neo-classical artists, the pelican was a symbol of filial devotion and gratitude.



Current state of the house after the latest extensive renovation in 2017.



First floor interior, showing a wooden staircase and banister.