

# Václav Aulický: from Pankrác Plain to Dejvice

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“I have already designed a lot,” the veteran of Czech architecture and designing says in his workroom, situated “stylishly” in the building of the former Pankrác post office, built in the 1970s, when Czech architecture was dominated by brutalism. “It’s a rather well-made building, especially the part with the partitioned hall from raw reinforced-concrete and with an original skylight system,” Aulický points at the roof of an otherwise inconspicuous building, with numerous concrete sculptures that illuminate the vestibule of the building designed by Ondrejčíková.

The location where he is seated, just like the company Spojprojekt he has worked in for a long time, is also stylish, or characteristic. Architect Aulický has been connected to Pankrác with a kind of umbilical cord. This district of Prague contains large projects that he significantly participated in - for example one of the buildings of Czech TV - the so-called “Roll”, which is only a torso of the originally planned complex, and the City project, accompanied by a heated and emotional discussion. According to Richard Meier’s design, this project has been gradually constructed in Pankrác by ECM, and partly also by ECE/Rodamco, since 2000. Spojprojekt is the general designer for most of the buildings of this complex, so Aulický has been a direct stakeholder in the never-ending problems that encompass the Pankrác project, which crossed the borders of the Czech Republic because of the UNESCO opinions. “This year, the construction of my swan song should begin - the City Deco and City Element buildings, as part of the Empiria complex,” Aulický says, with a touch of resignation and fatigue, only to add on a more optimistic note: “And I will finally start paying all my attention to the school!” Another stage in the career of architect and designer Aulický is a synthesis of all the previous stages and involves teaching. Václav Aulický is the head of one of the studios at the Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University in Prague. And he added one more ultra-important position to his teaching tenure - he will work as a vice-dean for the construction of a new building of the Czech Technical University - its construction should start on the Dejvice site as soon as possible.

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## Technical and other innovation

“I didn’t believe it too much first, but I found out soon that I have things to say to the students,” Václav Aulický says about his activities at the school. And this is true in many regards. His long-term practice in varying conditions has given Aulický extensive experience not just in architecture as such, but its broader economic, technical, social and political context.

Even though it is very difficult to categorize the style or manuscript of a specific architect today, we can easily find a repetitive and unifying element in Aulický’s works: emphasis on technical and structural aspects. Even Aulický classifies himself (“should I classify myself in any way,” he says) as a hi-tech architect: “I’ve been always attracted by technical innovation. Testing new structural elements, technology and materials and especially the principle that technical and structural elements become an important, or maybe even decisive part of the building’s architectural style.”

This focus currently corresponds with efforts aimed at environmental or sustainable construction, based primarily on hi-tech products and procedures. Aulický is engaged in this area, but you should not definitely

see him as a fanatic pioneer of green architecture. Once again, he perceives the whole context of such activities: “It is definitely useful if a villa has solar panels and the parameters of the low-energy building in general. That is why the state should support this type of construction - so far, ecology and energy savings do not really have much of an economic logic. But if you see a three-litre jeep, a swimming pool and wall casings of tropical wood in this villa, you are right to ask if this is what deserves support.”

And Aulický has the same sober approach to aesthetic issues: “A building should be definitely pretty. But you mustn’t forget about its function, or purpose. For example the well-known villa by F. L. Wright above the waterfalls is really beautiful, and is therefore so famous. But it is not too suitable for permanent family living. For example because the waterfall is really noisy and you can hear it everywhere in the house. And in winter, when it’s freezing, the house is virtually encapsulated in ice.”

According to Aulický, the aesthetic values of buildings, required by the society and by customers, are already contained in the structural and technical design, which is an essential part of the architectural style for him. That is why, not surprisingly, he is clearly a staunch supporter of Kaplický’s library. He is well-prepared for the issues (and problems) of revolutionary concepts - for example from the process of preparation and construction of the Žižkov TV tower. At the time of its construction (1980s), it was a par excellence technical innovation (a reinforced steel coupled structure with a concept of spatial frames), which ran into the problems of scarce material possibilities of the then construction industry. And the setting of the building into the minimalist landscape of the district from the 19th century was also rather unusual at that time (Aulický himself preferred the more remote Na Parukářce location). The Žižkov tower there aroused and still arouses a lot of emotion and polemics. In this respect, history repeats itself - against a completely different background, Aulický and Spojprojekt are going basically through the same pains with the City project in Pankrác. This time, architect Aulický is the author of the reconstruction and completion of the former Czech Radio building, today City Tower, and the former Motokov building, now renamed to City Empiria.

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### **Before and now**

“You can’t compare that,” Václav Aulický says categorically when he talks about the studies in his school years and now, even though he attended the Czech Technical University in Prague in the legendary 1960s. “Not even the relative freedom of those days gave us what is, in my opinion, the most important thing for a young architect: ‘feel’ the jewels of global architecture in person. Nothing can replace personal experience in this case.” And today’s schools have a different quality in other respects as well. “The whole society and schools as such are open. It’s not just that the students can travel wherever they want and use all kinds of internships. The schools often offer lectures by foreign architects, there are discussions on problems, not silence, it’s simply all different, free. Modern technology helps this very much, especially the Internet is priceless.” When asked about the effects of these changes, however, Aulický as a teacher shows sobriety: “The new credit-based system (with points for passed examinations and studio work - editorial note) is way too loose in some cases and, in terms of lecturing, often impractical. It happens for example that after four years of study, a student takes the entrance examination again because “he failed maths.” The stricter rules applied in the past were not all that non-positive in this respect.”

Václav Aulický can pass on to his students not just his architectural know-how, but also his rich experience in a very important area for architects - relationships between them and the society. “The situation here is not perfect in this regard. While in the past, the architect, especially as the author of ugly prefabricated estates, was seen as a part of the Communist machine. Today most of the public see him as a mere prostitute of property developers,” Aulický says, adding: “The society is a little bit schizoid on this. On the

one hand, it rejects and permanently criticizes enterprising, including property development, but on the other hand it wants and demands the products of these activities, even though they are so condemnable.”

The unsatisfactory architect - society relationships are also obvious on the progress and nature of public discussions. It has been already said, Aulický has seen them in the past as well as in the present political regime. While before 1989, such discussions were very little, now the room for them may be unreasonably large. “Legislation is rather uncertain. Virtually anyone can interfere with the zoning and building proceedings. And let’s not think that everyone is guided by noble ends. This often involves blackmail, competitive fight and lowly personal ambitions.”

Architecture, designing, to a certain extent politics and, last but not least, evident ability to breathe life to visions - this all is associated with Spojprojekt in case of Václav Aulický. Before 1989, he designed and promoted his “connection” opuses under its name (mostly facilities for telecommunications), and after privatization mostly administration buildings (in addition to the Pankrác City project, he designed for example Česká pojišťovna’s building and Polygon House, again in Pankrác, Anděl Media Centrum in Smíchov and Diamond Point in Těšnov). Until a short time ago he was one of the shareholders of Spojprojekt, too. “Together with my partners from the ‘pensioners’ generation’, we decided to sell our interests to one of our younger colleagues,” Aulický comments on his business activities, or their end, to be more precise. On his way to the Czech Technical University in Dejvice, he also leaves Pankrác in this manner.

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Photo by Radovan Boček, Jiří Pištěk and Václav Aulický

1. Transit telephone exchange in Hradec Králové (Aulický, Eisenreich, Malátek)
2. Prague TV tower, Mahlerovy Sady gardens in Žižkov (Aulický)
3. Czech TV operations building, Kavčí hory, Prague 4 (Aulický, Dohnal, Slavíček)
4. Polygon House, Prague 4, Pankrác (Aulický, Kousal, Papp, Lajksner)
5. Anděl Park Smíchov - Anděl Media Centrum (Aulický, Papp, Vít)
6. Česká pojišťovna and PPF’s building, Prague 4, Pankrác (Aulický, Pappová)
7. City Tower, Prague 4, Pankrác (Richard Meier&Partners, cooperation Aulický, Papp) and City Empiria (Aulický, Sova)
8. Completion of the Empiria site - City Deco and City Element, Prague 4, Pankrác (Aulický, cooperation Herold, Mikule)
9. Diamond Point, Těšnov, Prague 8 (Aulický, Pappová)
10. Transit Gas Pipeline site, FMPE and SOF, Vinohrady, Prague 2 (Aulický, Eisenreich, Malátek, Loos)

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