**Architectural and cultural significance of the houses at 25-27, 29 Király utca**

The three buildings are located side by side in the main street of the old Jewish quarter of Pest, in Király utca, an iconic street in terms of cultural, urban and architectural history. The street is practically the axis of the unique street structure that developed organically in the quarter over the centuries and is worthy of special attention. Since it is the old main street of the quarter, the buildings erected in it faithfully reflect the way of life of the community that has been living here since the early 19th century, and its changes throughout various historical eras; therefore, Király utca and its buildings represent an extremely important and unique imprint of the social history of Hungary. At the turn of the century, it became the pedestrian street of the old Jewish quarter of Pest, the first place in Pest where modern shops and shop fronts were established. Until recently, retail and small industry shops were present in the area. From the point of view of Hungarian architectural history, it is of particular significance that this is the only place in Pest where the Neoclassical, Eclectic and Art Nouveau urban landscape is found in a truly unified and harmonious form. Its oldest buildings, with only one or two storeys, still preserve the original scale and proportions of 19th century buildings – this is a rare asset in the modern cities of Hungary.

Consequently, the preservation of the entire street running through the old Jewish quarter of Pest, as well as each of its buildings, is of utmost importance – any demolition and reconstruction will disrupt and irreparably shatter the urban fabric that miraculously survived the wars and the drastic urban development plans of the Socialist era. If we do not take care of this unique architectural heritage, these urban spaces that are unique in Europe – and therefore have huge tourism potential – will be lost forever. Neighbourhood rehabilitation and revitalisation must be organically based on the assets of the past. Rather than demolishing buildings in whole or in part, the preservation of assets, as well as careful, authentic and high-quality renovations are worthy of the architectural heritage left by our ancestors that has managed to survive the hardships of the last century. Not only is this important to demonstrate that the present generation appreciates the assets of its historical past, but also in that it represents economic opportunities that can be exploited. We should bear in mind that architectural heritage is not only about a single prominent building, but also about its environment, the surrounding neighbourhood and residential buildings – representative buildings serving community needs can be interpreted within the urban fabric, thus reflecting the history and lifestyle of the community that built them.

**25 KIRÁLY UTCA**

# The single-storey, early Classicist house was built around 1810, and by 1820 the street wing of the then ground-floor house and one of the adjoining courtyard wings were already standing. The first courtyard and the first floor, designed by József Diescher, were completed in 1838. The building is a beautiful example of a half-rural, half-urban bourgeois house with a spacious courtyard, reminiscent of Pest in the so-called Reform Era, and is therefore particularly valuable and worthy of preservation.

The historical building has two adjoining courtyards; the wings surrounding the rear courtyard were built later, at the end of the 19th century. Similarly to other houses in the street, 25 Király utca was inhabited by a number of wealthy merchants, industrialists and lawyers, while the simpler, smaller apartments were occupied by craftsmen and apprentices. The business premises opening onto the courtyards were used as workshops; one interesting example is that of János Mérő's light recording studio (photography studio) from 1885, or later, in the early 1900s, a small salami factory and meat smoker shop.

The gate to the rear courtyard is currently walled up, while the courtyard facing the street has staghorn sumac and chestnut trees.  The side wings of the façade feature semicircular reliefs above the windows. The entrance gate has a vaulted ceiling; in the courtyard there is an outside corridor supported by stone consoles. The street front of the house was first restored in 1956, followed by the south-eastern side of the front courtyard in 1959, according to the designs of Dénes Komárik.

Until the early 2000s, the house was inhabited by a French owner running a furniture maker shop in one of the front shops, and a café in the rear courtyard. Later, the tenants of the apartments and shops were evicted. Today, the building remains abandoned and in a state of disrepair, despite decades of struggle by civil initiatives to preserve and authentically renovate one of the oldest buildings in the district.

The wall of the house facing the playground shows the firewall painted by Neopaint – the plaster and paint is peeling, and so is the painted picture. The playground is one of the rare public green spaces in the so-called Belső-Erzsébetváros area.

**27 KIRÁLY UTCA**

The two-storey house with Neoclassical origins but an Art Nouveau façade, built in 1833, is a typical representative of the houses in Pest that were converted from a bourgeois house into a tenement, which underwent many changes and was rebuilt on several occasions (1866, 1910). The old original section of the building overlooking the street features an open stairwell bordered by Tuscan columns, with a semicircular red limestone staircase and cast iron balustrade. The early 20th century extension and façade renovation preserved the Neoclassical balcony and its wrought-iron balustrade with the inscription “ZUR STADT PEST” – a reference to the former inn.

The cultural significance of the building is further enhanced by the fact that the Mercur Café, run by Mór Ungerleider, opened its doors on the ground floor in 1891, where Ungerleider – one of the founders of the Hungarian film industry – first projected “laterna magica”, shadow images projected on tulle, which can be considered a forerunner of the cinema. Gyula Krúdy, who was a resident of Király utca at the time, later wrote about Ungerleider's projections at the café in his novel *Autumn Journeys on the Crimson Coach* (1917).

The “First Hungarian Fire Enamel and Badge Factory” operated in one of the street-front shops for more than 100 years; its relics of insignia history represent unique imprints of the 20th century, which were preserved and maintained by inheritor Zsuzsanna Berényi – one of the chroniclers of the history of the Gozsdu Court and also one of its last inhabitants – until her recent death. The shop and the workshop could be converted into a museum commemorating local small industry.

**29 KIRÁLY UTCA**

The former house situated at 29 Király utca was demolished, allowing innkeeper János Puphka, lessee of the “Zur Stadt Pest” inn located on the adjacent plot, to build his one-storey tenement house on the plot in 1831. As the house built by Ferenc Kasselik was severely damaged in the 1838 floods in Pest, merchant Ignác Hohlfeld had it fully rebuilt and extended to two storeys in 1843 by József Hild.

In 1863, the building's courtyard was converted into a studio for Mór Arnstein's zincograph (a reproduction shop for pen drawings and manuscripts), which was modernised in 1871 based on the designs of Pál Schusbeck. Subsequently, at the request of József Wohl, the house was expanded by a ground-floor residential building in the courtyard and an Eclectic balcony in 1903, designed by Károly Heinrich. Subsequent to renovation, the house could be a sophisticated, beautiful example of a 19th century Neoclassical tenement house in Pest.

It is important to add that the houses at 27 and 29 Király utca are also Holocaust memorials. At the boundary of their courtyards located close to the street called Dob utca, there is a section of the wall of the Budapest ghetto built at the end of November 1944, which is preserved in its original state, and only remains in very few places. They used the stone walls built in the second half of the 19th century to separate the inner courtyards of the houses to enclose the ghetto, with barbed wire stretched across the top. In its recommendation to the Hungarian National Committee, UNESCO, the UN heritage agency recommended the remains of the wall to be preserved and protected as a memorial to the saddest period of the Jewish community's history and the victims.

References:

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