

Unknown Bohemia

15 July to 16 October 2026

Press tour: Tuesday 14 July, 10am

Speakers: Adolph Stiller (curator) and
Stephan Templ (concept and consultant, Prague)

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www.airt.at/en.

Curator: Adolph Stiller

Venue: Ringturm Exhibition Centre
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)

Official opening: Tuesday 14 July, 6.30pm
(invitation only)

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Architektur im Ringturm LXX: *Unbekanntes Böhmen / Neznámé Čechy*. Edited by Adolph Stiller, with city portraits by Stephan Templ. Featuring numerous photographs specially commissioned for the catalogue, as well as previously unpublished visual material. German/Czech. Mürý Salzmann Verlag. Approx. 240 pages.
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A journey of discovery off the beaten track

Bohemia is one of Europe's richest cultural landscapes. Yet public attention often focuses on Prague or well-known spa towns such as Karlovy Vary. The exhibition "Unknown Bohemia" deliberately turns its attention to the lesser-known regions of the Czech Republic's largest historical region. It takes visitors to hidden towns, extraordinary buildings and landscapes which, despite their architectural and cultural-historical significance, have often remained obscure. The exhibition is based on numerous research trips through Bohemia as well as extensive studies of literature and archive material. This has resulted in a fresh perspective on a region whose cultural wealth extends far beyond the well-known sights.

Bohemia's rivers as cultural-historical itineraries

The exhibition follows Bohemia's major rivers – the Vltava, the Elbe and the Eger – as well as the landscapes between them. These rivers not only form geographical axes but also tell the story of the region's development. Along their banks, visitors encounter an impressive variety of castles, palaces, churches, monasteries, synagogues, historic town centres and engineering structures such as bridges, power stations and water towers. The selected examples span a spectrum from the Romanesque through the Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Historicism to modernist architecture, showcasing Bohemia as an exceptionally multifaceted cultural region of Central Europe.

Landscape, Economy and Architectural Culture

Another key focus is on the economic foundations that made Bohemia's extraordinary built heritage possible in the first place. The time-honoured fish-pond industry around Třeboň – which remains the largest historic pond landscape in Central Europe to this day – hop cultivation and the culture of beer brewing, as well as the fertile agricultural landscapes, created prosperity over the centuries and shaped towns as well as palaces, manor houses and industrial sites. Even seemingly unremarkable buildings such as storehouses, breweries or agricultural facilities are revealed as part of a unique cultural landscape.

Bohemia and Vienna – a shared cultural space

The exhibition also highlights the close cultural, economic and personal ties between Bohemia and Austria. Numerous artists and prominent figures from the worlds of architecture, music, literature and business hailed from Bohemia or had close ties to the region. Gustav Mahler, Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana, as well as Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and prominent entrepreneurial families of the Danube Monarchy, are all part of this shared history. The exhibition thus offers a glimpse of Bohemia as an important cultural hub in Central Europe, whose significance extends far beyond its geographical borders.

Modernist Architecture

Particular attention is paid to 20th-century architecture. Alongside prominent Czech architects such as Jan Kotěra, Pavel Janák and Josef Gočár, the exhibition also showcases works by Austrian architects including Josef Hoffmann, Jože Plečnik, Heinrich Kulka, Leopold Bauer and Fellner & Helmer. Less well-known buildings – including villas, theatres, churches, savings bank buildings, industrial complexes and memorials – demonstrate the high quality of the architecture even deep in the provinces. Examples of contemporary architecture, as well as successful restorations and repurposing of historic buildings, also demonstrate that Bohemia has remained a place of remarkable architectural culture to this day.

A new perspective on Bohemia

The exhibition is intended as an invitation to rediscover Bohemia – not as a nostalgic space of memory, but as a vibrant European cultural landscape. Specially commissioned photographs, historical documents and in-depth research bring to light a rich architectural

heritage as well as the diverse historical ties between Bohemia, Austria and the rest of Central Europe.

A selection of places in Bohemia

Bechyně

Bechyně is linked to Tábor by the monarchy's first electrified railway line (opened in 1903). The town has been known as a spa resort since the 17th century. In 1884, the ceramics school – which remains significant to this day – was founded. The castle, situated on a high rock, evolved from a Gothic structure. The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, located in the disused monastery, houses a two-nave hall featuring Bohemia's most significant cell vaults (diamond vaults).



*Bechyně / Church of the Assumption with diamond vaults (cell vaults)
© Adolph Stiller*

Also in Bechyně: the interest and knowledge of Jan Kotěra (a pupil of Wagner and the founder of Czech Modernism) in the architecture of English and Scottish country houses (e.g. by Charles Voysey), as well as in the Arts and Crafts movement, are clearly evident in an early work of his – a house for the Mácha family. The spatial design and the refined, superbly crafted interior finishes also reveal strong links to the Viennese architecture of his student days under Otto Wagner.

Ústí nad Orlicí

After the town was connected to the Prague–Olomouc railway line in 1845, several large textile factories were established here. Among the largest companies were: Akciové textilní závody Jan Hernych a syn, Adolf Jandera – a mechanised weaving mill and finishing factory; Friedrich Pollak & syn – a fashion goods factory owned by the Viennese industrialist Friedrich Pollak; and the firm Josef Sobotka – a weaving and spinning mill. The Pollak and Sobotka companies were 'Aryanised' in 1939. After 1948, all the companies were nationalised and incorporated into the 'Perla' company, which ceased operations in 2009.



*Ústí nad Orlicí / Roškot
Theatre (1934–35) /
Architect: Kamil Roškot
© Andreas Haller*

The successful librettist and writer Fritz Löhner-Beda (born Bedřich Löwy) was born here in 1883. He rose to fame with the librettos for the operettas **The Land of Smiles** and **The Flower of Hawaii**. It is also remarkable that a theatre was built in this small town in 1935 to a design by Kamil Roškot. The construction was financed by public donations.

The Roškot Theatre is regarded as the magnum opus of the Prague architect Kamil Roškot (born in 1886 in Vlašim, died in 1945 in Paris), who trained at the German Technical University. It is a unique building in the Czech Modernist style. The composition is characterised by its interplay with the basic forms of geometric solids, which can be attributed not least to the influence of the international architectural discourse of the time (Le Corbusier or the CIAM congresses in the West, or the Constructivists in Russia).
