



Odessa – architecture and the organisation of space

The German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe once said that, “Architecture starts when you carefully put two bricks together”. In the case of Odessa, these “two bricks” are not only laid carefully together, they are also arranged with much artistic taste to boot. When you find yourself in the cityscape of Odessa, you get a sense of comfort and cosiness.

This ideal town layout was born of the talent of the Dutch military engineer Franz de Volan, combined with the classical architecture and the near perfect natural landscape that it complements. Not to forget the optimal building material that simply lies all around beneath your feet in Odessa: Pontic limestone. This light material is easy to work, has a low level of heat transfer



Ekaterina Square

and therefore played its role in the incredibly quick development of the city's buildings.

The network of city streets is laid out according to the tradition of old Rome, oriented on the three important factors of city life: the relief of the area, the prevailing winds and the light.

When judging the work of architects it is easy to forget another extremely important factor influencing construction: who commissioned a building. Odessa was lucky in this sense too. The first largescale building works in the town were started by people who possessed not only capital but also a fundamentally European education.

In the world of architecture, it is not just the organisation of space that is important but how that space is filled stylistically. And here, as architects say, the “caprices of the time” are at play. The initial period of Odessa's construction was dominated by Classicism. After that, the town evolved according to the European architectural style of the age: Baroque, Art Nouveau, Post-Modernism – these not only enriched but also contributed to the individuality and distinctiveness of Odessa's architectural mix.

One of the finest compositions is the Ekaterina Square, which was awarded the accolade of “Best Architectural Complex of Europe” at the 1901 Paris



Odessa Opera House,
central facade

Architecture Conference. To this day the square has hardly changed at all. A completely original hundred metre wide street of the same architectural style links Ekaterina Square to the Duke de Richelieu monument and the famous Potemkin Steps. It all appears to be a single architectural ensemble.

The most familiar architectural object in the city must be the Odessa National Opera and Ballet Theatre. Constructed in 1887 in Viennese Baroque style, according to the plans drawn up by Austrian architects, this building has long been a symbol of Odessa.

In the centre of the city almost all houses can be viewed as architecturally interesting or even monuments of architecture and the intersections as architectural compositions in their own right.