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PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION



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CONSERVATION OF PUURMANI MANOR

Puurmani manor house in Jõgeva County, built between 1877 and 1881, is one of the most beautiful and majestic Renaissance Revival style manors in Estonia. It got its Estonian name from the von Buhrmeister family who were given the estate by Queen Christina of Sweden as a gift. After the Great Northern War (1700–1721) the manor went to the von Manteuffel family and remained in their possession until the expropriation of 1919. The manor house is dominated by a four-floor high octagonal corner tower; rich decorations on the façade as well as elements of several historical styles (Rococo, early and late Neo-Classical) in complex combinations decorating the interiors of the main hall and other rooms adorn the building. High double-swing doors decorated with carvings of torches and laurel wreaths, cornices above doors, decorative corbels and the coffered ceiling of the dining room are fine examples of woodwork. The interior is also embellished by several historical tile stoves and fireplaces. Since 1923, the manor house has housed a school.

In autumn 2009, conservation works of the manor were launched under the auspices of the national programme for manor schools.

EXTERIOR WORKS

First of all, the manor house received new metal sheet roofing and a rainwater drainage system. Old cement plaster was removed from the walls that were subsequently repaired with lime plaster and whitewashed. The partly damaged stairs at the main entrance got a new foundation and granite steps. The imposing flaring stairs with a stone balustrade on the south side of the mansion were also restored. Exterior lighting was installed that brings out the decorations and cornices also in the dark.

INTERIOR WORKS

The conservation of the historic wallpaper found in the manor house is so far the most extensive project of its kind carried out in Estonia and will, hopefully, pave the way for the future. In winter 2010, a large amount of well-preserved wallpapers were found during the works of the ground floor rooms, the oldest of which could be dated to the beginning of the 1880s when the manor house was first built, while the more recent ones date back to the turn of the 20th century. Out of the dozen different types of wallpaper used, two borders and five wallpapers had been preserved to such an extent that the entire repeat of the pattern could be seen. The rest of the wallpapers used in the living quarters on two floors were represented by only a few narrow strips. There were three wallpapers that the conservators were able to preserve *in situ*: in the former

dining room, in the *chinoiserie* dressing-room and in the countess's bedroom. The largest amount or about 50 sq metres of wallpaper had been preserved in the former dining room that today serves as a festive classroom of Puurmani Gymnasium. On a closer look, it turned out that the dining room walls were actually covered with two layers of wallpaper. The older layer dates back to the 1880s. The gradual uncovering of wallpaper layers revealed the pattern made of hunting trophies — comprising a deer's head, a grouse hanging upside down, a bugle and a gunpowder pouch. The wallpaper was covered with a layer of shellac varnish making its surface shiny, smooth, hard-wearing and easily cleanable — a treatment commonly used in corridors, kitchens and bathrooms.

When seen from a distance, the second layer of wallpaper in the dining room resembles a tapestry or embroidery because of the fine grid printed all over the pattern comprising rich foliage with exotic birds and bugs as well as blossoms and fruits of different colour. Unfortunately, it could not be established when the wallpaper was installed but the pattern type suggests it was manufactured between the 1890s and 1910s. After the removal of the wooden panelling a shocking picture was revealed: the wallpaper was buried in cobweb, its surface was stained with whitewash splashes and runs and the borders had large holes in them made upon installing central heating pipes and batteries. Due to extensive moisture damage approximately 12 sq meters of wallpaper was so deteriorated that it crumbled to pieces when touched. After careful photographing and measuring, the damaged parts were removed. However, a large part of the wallpaper was in fair condition and tightly glued to the wall. In order to give the room a uniform look, it was decided to reconstruct the missing parts of the wallpaper. No doubt the reconstruction of the entire decorative scheme, i.e. from the upper rim of the preserved wallpaper to the ceiling cornice would have been an ideal outcome but because of the rather tight budget it was decided in favour of partial reconstruction. Conservator Kristiina Ribelus made a digital copy of the wallpaper. To that end the wallpaper strips that had been removed from the wall were scanned, digitally retouched, joined together into a repeated pattern and printed. The same process was repeated with the borders and matching corner pieces. Since it was not possible to achieve a shiny golden surfaces and elements, they needed to be stencilled by hand. The reconstructions are visually distinguishable from the original as they were printed in slightly colder or bluish tones. The paper used was also more slippery and thicker than the original. For



- (1) Puurmani manor. Photo by Anatoli Makarevit
 (2) The dining room with its well preserved wallpaper was the biggest surprise. Photo by Raivo Tasso
 (3) Two layers of wallpaper were found on the walls of the former dining room. The older layer dating back to the 1880s is decorated with a composition of various hunting trophies. Photo by Kadri Kallaste
 (4) *Chinoiserie* wallpaper of European origin was revealed under the wall panelling of the countess's dressing-room. The tile stove after minor repairs. Photo by Raivo Tasso
 (5) The wooden panelling on the lower part of the countess's bedroom wall revealed a wallpaper with pastoral motives. In order to display the wallpaper, part of the panelling was removed and replaced by a layer of glass. Photo by Kadri Kallaste

(6)



(7)



(6) The main hall after conservation. Studies revealed faux marbling on the lower part of the walls that was restored by OÜ Vana Tallinn. The floors of the main hall and the adjacent greenhouse were covered with newly assembled parquet panels, the exact copies of the original ones. Photos by Raivo Tasso

(7) The walls of the foyer revealed grained surfaces and bright blue colour

the upper part of the wall, where the wallpaper had not been preserved at all, the conservators chose a monochrome wallpaper of neutral colour. The transition from one wallpaper to another was disguised with a narrow strip of paper inspired by the pattern of the original border.

The second well preserved wallpaper was found in the countess's dressing-room in *chinoiserie* style. The walls of the room were covered with Rococo Revival style wooden panelling that, once removed, revealed a very well preserved late *chinoiserie* wallpaper of European origin depicting romantic scenes of children flying kites, oar-boats and nice pavilions.

The third well preserved wallpaper was found in the former bedroom of the countess. The wooden panelling on the lower part of the wall revealed a wallpaper with pastoral motives. In order to display the wallpaper, part of the panelling was replaced with glass.

Literature concerning interior decoration and the history of wallpapers suggests that the wallpapers found in Puurmani manor are typical examples of the trends that prevailed at the end of the 19th century. Archive photos also suggest that many Estonian manor houses were once decorated with wallpapers the majority of which have perished. The few fragments still found here and there refer to a strong Central European influence. In the European context, the examples of wallpaper found in Estonia are not noteworthy but in the local context they are.

In addition to the rare wallpapers, a faux marbling imitating sandstone was found on the walls of the ground floor hall. An uncovered area was made to display the old faux marbling while the rest of the wall was reconstructed taking the original as a model. In several rooms there were stencil paintings that were partly uncovered and conserved.

In the beginning, it was planned to conserve the old parquet floor of the main hall but it turned out that after grinding it would have been only a millimetre thick and, therefore, it was decided to replace it with new flooring except in one corner where the old parquet was displayed. The newly assembled parquet panels were made to the exact measures and design of the old ones. Parquet was

also used in the former greenhouse separated from the main hall with beautiful columns, the old flooring of which made of concrete slabs was worn out. It was foreseen in the conservation concept that the old wooden floors would be preserved as far as possible. Nevertheless, there were rooms where the old flooring was in a very poor condition and was replaced with a new one. The cast stone floor of the foyer was preserved along the perimeter where it was less worn out and the damaged stones were replaced with new ones following the principle that they must be visibly distinguishable.

In the earliest finishing layers of doors and wall panelling traces of gilding were found. Uncovered areas were left on doors to display all the paint layers. Rich wooden adornments on doors and door jambs were stripped to the first paint layer and restored. At some point, many of the doors and windows had been grained. On the double-doors of the dining room the painting imitating wood grain was surprisingly well preserved and after slight retouching it was displayed.

The manor house was mainly heated by white tile stoves decorated with ornaments. They were in good condition and there was no need to dismantle them. One of the stoves that had been painted over was cleansed and restored to its original colour. Today, the stoves serve as part of the ventilation system. Some smaller conservation works were also carried out on fireplaces.

The conservation works were based on the concept of not interfering with the original design and elements while displaying what had been preserved and conserved and replacing the missing elements with new ones. Another important factor was that the manor houses a school requiring, for example, certain lighting conditions. Therefore, the classrooms were equipped with ordinary luminous tubes while chandeliers, true to the era, were used in the main hall and teachers' lounge.

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