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A CONTEMPORARY POLISH DETACHED “WHITE” HOUSES IN DIALOGUE WITH TRADITION

WSPÓLCZESNE POLSKIE „BIAŁE” DOMY JEDNORODZINNE W DIALOGU Z TRADYCYJĄ

Abstract

In the post-war period, the architecture of Polish single-family houses went through a number of phases. As a result, the landscape of Polish homes is very diverse and illegible. Currently, the prevailing architectural styles are strongly mixed up and their placement is accidental and does not flow from deeper historical analyzes and the architectural – urban context. In addition, the level of architectural awareness of investors and developers makes that there is a dramatic spatial chaos in Poland.

The article contains the results of research on the contemporary architecture of Polish single-family houses. A comparative analysis and a case study of two selected implementations of single-family houses in two different locations were also presented: historic district of a large city – Wrocław-Oporów and the village of Ramiszów near Wrocław. These are architects’ own houses and present respect for the historical and architectural-urban context. Research concerns various contexts – architecture as art (beauty, dynamism, symbolism, iconicity), architecture as an urban dialogue with the existing surroundings or finally architecture as a functional and technological machine responding to contemporary utilitarian and social as well as technical requirements. The conclusions from the analysis allow to determine the place and significance of the “architecture of single-family houses” in the changing Polish landscape in the period of socio-economic transformation after 1989.

Keywords: single-family houses, contemporary architecture, idea of desingning

Streszczenie

W okresie powojennym architektura polskich domów jednorodzinnych przechodziła szereg faz. W rezultacie krajobraz polskich domów jest bardzo zróżnicowany i nieczytelny. Obecnie dominujące style architektoniczne są mocno przemieszane, a ich rozmieszczenie jest przypadkowe i nie wynika z głębszych analiz historycznych i kontekstu architektoniczno-urbanistycznego. Ponadto poziom świadomości architektonicznej inwestorów i deweloperów sprawia, że w Polsce panuje dramatyczny chaos przestrzenny.

Artykuł zawiera wyniki badań współczesnej architektury polskich domów jednorodzinnych. Przedstawiono również analizę porównawczą i studium przypadku dwóch wybranych wdrożeń domów jednorodzinnych w dwóch różnych lokalizacjach: historyczna dzielnica dużego miasta – Wrocław-Oporów i wieś Ramiszów pod Wrocławiem.

Są to domy własne architektów i prezentują szacunek dla kontekstu historycznego i architektoniczno-urbanistycznego. Badania dotyczą różnych kontekstów – architektury jako sztuki (piękno, dynamizm, symbolika, ikoniczność), architektury jako miejskiego dialogu z istniejącym otoczeniem lub wreszcie architektury jako funkcjonalnej i technologicznej maszyny odpowiadającej współczesnym wymaganiom użytkowym i społecznym oraz technicznym. Wnioski z analizy pozwalają określić miejsce i znaczenie „architektury domów jednorodzinnych” w zmieniającym się krajobrazie polskim w okresie transformacji społeczno-gospodarczej po 1989 roku.

Słowa kluczowe: dom jednorodzinny, architektura współczesna, idea projektowania

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1. INTRODUCTION

“After a long day of work, I open the heavy house door with a key. I sit comfortably in a swivel chair with face facing the garden and surroundings. In front of me there is a magnificent view of multicolored rebates, and further yellow-green cereal fields closed on the horizon with a green patch of forests. Through the windows placed at different heights, the warm light of the setting sun leaks creating a game of various geometric shapes on the walls. I am peaceful, calm, safe and relaxed after a hard day’s work”.

“The space closest to man is the house” writes Józef Tischner in the *Philosophy of Drama* and adds “All the paths of man across the world are measured by the distance from the house. The view from the windows of the house is the first view of man in the world. The man asked where he comes from – he points to the house. The house is the nest of a man. This is where the child comes into the world, here the sense of responsibility for the order of the first community matures, here the man recognizes the main secrets of things – windows, doors, spoons – he enjoys and suffers, hence he goes away to eternal rest. To have a home means to have an area of original homeliness around us. The walls of the house protect the man against the severity of the elements and the enmity of people. They enable life and maturation. Living at home, you can feel yourself in your place. To be yourself is to experience meaningful freedom. The house does not allow play, nor does it mean captivity. Home space is a space of multiple senses. To build a house means: get settled”.²

On the other hand, W. Korzeniewski writes about the flat: “It is a place of interpersonal contacts going beyond the circle of the closest family. These will be courtesy contacts with friends, neighbors, acquaintances and members of a distant family, as well as utilitarian contacts related to the exchange of services and various mutual benefits. It follows the need to take into account the general principle of functional division of a flat into an intimate or private part – related to the needs of the internal life of the family as a whole and its individual members, general – related to the needs of maintaining family contacts with the external environment”.³ Quotations relating to the home we can find a lot in literature. I limit myself to quoting these two.

It should be remembered that the house should meet some of the main goals, ensuring:

- security – the apartment is a shelter from atmospheric influences, from intruders, gives a sense of privacy and is a place to collect various types of resources to survive (food, valuable items, etc.),
- stabilization – it is impossible to achieve stabilization without even having the minimum size of a flat, that is to say, the own space,
- psychological comfort – by creating privacy and enabling learning, working, practicing a hobby, relaxation. The need for privacy, meditation and self-reflection increases with the development of personality, and this requires an individual space adapted to the given activity. Narrowness always causes conflicts, promotes the formation of neuroses and social pathologies,
- physical comfort – apartments should be equipped with the necessary installations: electric, gas, water and sewage, central heating, telephone, as well as good lighting – functionally solved.

² Tischner, J. *Filozofia dramatu*, Znak, Kraków 2005.

³ Korzeniewski W., *Budownictwo mieszkaniowe. Poradnik projektanta*, Arkady, Warszawa 1989.

2. HOME ARCHITECTURE – HISTORICAL DRAW

In the post-war period, the architecture of Polish detached houses went through a number of phases. As a result, the landscape of Polish homes is very diverse and illegible. The houses of the '70s so-called „cubes” were very much present in the landscape. Throughout Poland, houses and even whole estates from the “cube” are clearly visible. This building, referring to modernist architecture, today does not impress. Poor finishing materials, for example, plaster “lamb”, heavy pedestals, small windows or non-functional interiors are the main problems of these buildings. The '80s in Polish single-family architecture is an attempt to break simple, modernist cubic. Houses with more complex forms appear that have pitched roofs, sophisticated functional systems, more diverse finishing materials. However, an important moment for Polish architecture was the year of political transformation in 1989, which fundamentally influenced the architecture of a detached house. After years of “bryndza”, typization, lack of creative “performance” in shaping the form, there was a period of almost unlimited possibilities in the implementation of detached house, depending on the creativity of architects and the wealth of the investors' wallet.

This period, unfortunately, was quite unfavorably in the contemporary history of residential architecture of detached houses. Due to the lack of proper aesthetic education and lighter regulations, daze with new possibilities resulted in a number of very diverse implementations, often combining disproportionate shapes with random colors. There was also admiration for unattainable building materials and the desire to overtake in everything a neighbor.

Several stylistic models have appeared in Poland:

Manor-house architecture – theoretically it is to refer to the native tradition, refers to noble and landowner roots. It's a pseudo-manor house. Is usually placed on a small plot, which in no way resembles the vast space in which this style of building was born, that is, during the Renaissance (XV-XVI century). The characteristic elements are: columns, bay windows and small balconies, as well as dormers.

Typical, universal architecture – these are catalog houses intended for the “new-rich/upstart” group of recipients. It is characterized by extensive roofs, decorative details, garages in the block of the building (car as a member of the family)

Regional architecture of Podhale – wooden architecture with a number of decorative details. Unfortunately, it is not created only in the Podhale region. Such realizations can also be found in the Baltic Sea region or around large Polish cities.

Modernist individual architecture – a form referring to modernist architecture. Buildings in the form of cubes, use of contemporary materials, innovative approach to functional solutions.

Traditional individual architecture – it is based on reinterpreted classic designs, , buildings with a simple form, with solutions referring to the architecture of the region and location. They present innovative functional solutions.

Currently, the prevailing architectural styles are strongly mixed up, and their placement is accidental and does not flow from deeper historical analysis and architectural-urban context. In addition, the level of architectural awareness of investors and developers makes that there is a dramatic spatial chaos in Poland. It can be said that Polish architecture after the period of political transformation is a unique richness of forms and colors, chaos and spatial cacophony. The architectural landscape of our country after 1989 has shaped yearnings, the aroused aspirations of new-rich, poor building regulations and the lack of an effective spatial

planning system. These are mostly buildings implemented in the style described above (1, 2, 3). These problems are repeatedly discussed among architects, at conferences and professional meetings. Unfortunately, the situation is deepening and you can not see even the lights in this long ugliness tunnel. Due to the number of catalogs of typical detached houses, less and less individual houses are designed, which already include in the design process the existing „genius loci” and the latest stylistic trends. Such solutions can only be created for the needs of a conscious investor who is familiar with contemporary cultural trends and when the investor trusts the talent and knowledge of the architect. The trends that suit individual architecture are completely different. Designs implement real needs of users / investors, are deeply thought out both in terms of architecture and functionality. They are not accidental and result from deep pre-design analyzes and ideas of creative architects.

3. INDIVIDUAL PROJEKTS OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES – CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, subjected to analysis were three completed single-family buildings presenting the stylistic model named – Traditional individual architecture, reaching the archetype of the house. In the article, these objects are considered as individual architectural works and as new elements of urban layouts. The research concerns various contexts – architecture as art (beauty, dynamism, symbolism, iconicity), architecture as an urban dialogue with the existing surroundings, with the history of the place, and architecture as a functional and technological machine responding to contemporary utilitarian, social and technical requirements.

Conclusions from the analysis allow to determine the place and meaning of “detached house architecture” in the changing landscape of Polish cities in the period of socio-economic transformation after 1989 in other words the systemic changes initiated in Poland in the 1980s. New realizations of detached houses are still few, but more and more often are noticed in various architectural competitions. They change the identity of the places where they arise and build positive relationships on the people – place level. Such architecture co-creates energy that allows the improvement of the built environment and also affects the state of architectural consciousness.

The approach to this little architecture, which are detached houses is important. The history of architecture shows that star architects often undertook to design single-family houses precisely because of their small scale. They could experiment new materials and solutions relatively quickly on this small scale.

Detached houses, signed up in capital letters in history, was: the house above the waterfall – F. L. Wright, villa Savoy – Le Corbuinnosiera or the house of Tugenhatians – Mies van den Rohe. It is also worth to remind that Koolhaas received the Pritzker Prize for the design of a single-family home.

Thus, a detached house design that should meet the expectations of future residents, be innovative, inscribed in modern architecture while respecting history and architectural context, is a big challenge for the architect. An even bigger challenge for an architect is to design a house for himself, because, on the one hand, such a house is subjected to severe criticism of the architects’ environment and requires a certain innovation and fantasy, and on the other hand, it is a space where one must comfortably function for years. The examples shown are architects own houses that meet the above-described requirements. These are: house in Wrocław and house in Ramiszów.

House in Wrocław



Ill. 1. Left – view of the building, right – land plan⁴

Data: address: Wrocław – Oporów, author: GRID architekci, architects: Agnieszka Zając, Artur Tobała, investor: private, usable area: 159 m², project / implementation: 2009/2012, 2013 – I prize in the XXIII edition of the architectural contest Beautiful Wrocław.

Location

The village Oporów was to be mentioned for the first time in the years 1201–1227 in the Cistercian documents from Lubiąż, to which it was to belong. In 1951, the village was incorporated into the borders of Wrocław. The boundaries of the estate are marked from the east by the Śleza River, from the north railway tracks to Jaworzyna Śląska and Wałbrzych, the southern border runs through undeveloped areas around Kowalskiego (Oporów) and Jutrzenki (Klecina) streets, and the western one coincides with the administrative border of the city, separating the estate from Mokronos Dolny, a village near Wrocław, which is served by provincial road No. 347.

Design description:

At the junction of Jarocińska and Ćwiczebna Streets, two architects wanted to buy old farm buildings. None of these plans came out, but soon they bought a plot of land in the neighborhood from the city, on the edge of vast meadows. The building is modeled on the pre-war farm, which the owners wanted to buy. Architect and owner of the house Artur Tobała says – “Our house is a synthetic representation of what was there: a small barn and farm building, connected by a partition – When you look at our house, with your eyes narrowed, you see a barn”.⁵ It is an imitation of great gates, white walls, a gabled roof. The interior also has a division, which was used in barns, over a part of the ground floor there is a large space. The plot on which the building was erected is corner, trapezoidal in shape. The project consists of a residential house and a detached one-storey studio, connected by a triangular terrace. The buildings are located parallel to the boundaries of the plot, therefore an acute angle is formed between the buildings. In the space between the buildings was designed the original triangular terrace, which from the street side ends with a full, wooden fence. The terrace and the fence were painted in black. Thanks to such location of the buildings, the plot was clearly divided into two zones: external / semi-private – placed between the buildings, the fence and the border fence and internal / private – between the buildings. Architects write about their home “To give the architecture a local character referring to the aforementioned farm buildings,

⁴ <http://archinea.pl/dom-wlasny-z-pracownia-grid-architekci/> (access: 3.01.2019).

⁵ <http://czterykaty.pl/czterykaty/1,133333,4836247,rozmowa-wspolczesnosci-z-tradycja-projekt-domu-a-autorskiej-pracowni.html> (access: 5.02.2019).

traditional materials were used for construction: wood, brick and plaster. The block is the archetype of buildings, pure geometry referring to tradition, emphasized by the lack of hoods, unnecessary details, eg. by the use of a hidden gutter”.⁶ The interior was interestingly solved. The ground floor has been divided into two zones: a sleeping area and a living area, which consists of a kitchen and a two-level living room with a dining table and a seating area from which through large glazing the view of the terrace and garden opens. Centrally located stairs lead to a private zone with a mezzanine, the main bedroom with a wardrobe and a bathroom. The finish is raw. It is based on the use of construction materials for this. Architects resigned from internal plasters, exposed prefabricated ceilings, lintels and wooden roof structure.



Ill. 2. Interior of the house, left – dining space, right – studio⁷

The adopted technical solutions made it possible to build the building using the economic method (Do-It-Yourself) with a little help from professional teams (walls, concrete floors, windows) which was a conscious choice of wanting to build a house by yourself and the consequence of a limited budget.

House in the Ramiszów

Data: address: Ramiszów, author: BG architecture, architects: Barbara Gronostajska, investor: private, usable area: 180 m², project / implementation: 2009/2012, 2016–2019.

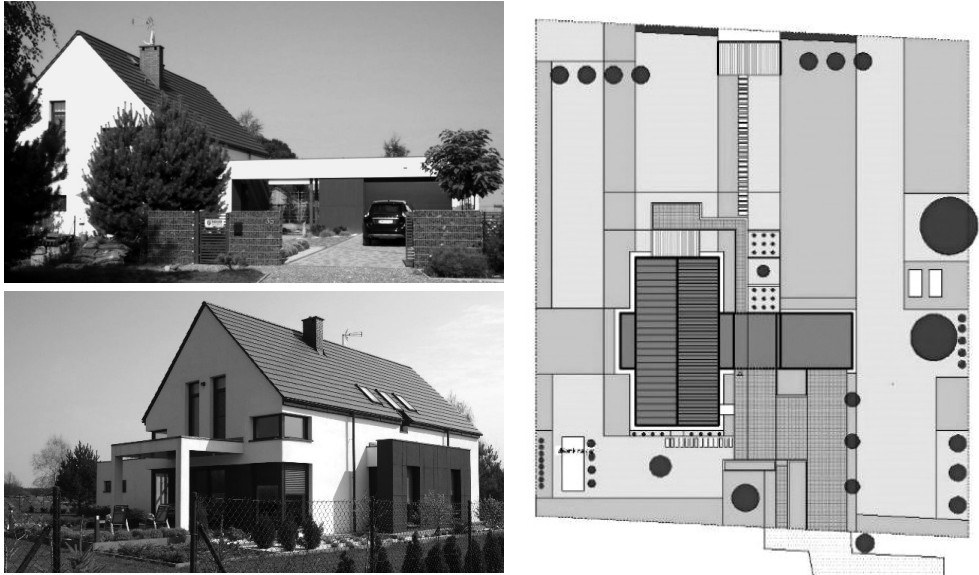
Location:

Ramiszów is a village located on the border of Wrocław, in the commune of Długoleka. The village is known for many equestrian centers. The village is small, situated along the

⁶ <http://archinea.pl/dom-wlasny-z-pracownia-grid-architekci/> (access: 11.06.2019).

⁷ <http://archinea.pl/dom-wlasny-z-pracownia-grid-architekci/> (access: 3.01.2019).

main road with several side roads. Typical buildings are typical homesteads consisting of a residential house and farm buildings. Depending on the size of the farm, the number of buildings is variable. The buildings are unfortunately neglected, but the situation has improved somewhat in recent years. The village is well connected by communication. Two years ago, the village was connected with Wrocław and Trzebnica by a suburban railway, and therefore it began to develop more rapidly. In the neighborhood there is an entrance to the city beltway and the A8 motorway. The Eurovelo 6 cycling trail passes through the village.



Ill. 3. Left – entrance and garden view of the building, right – plan [B.G]

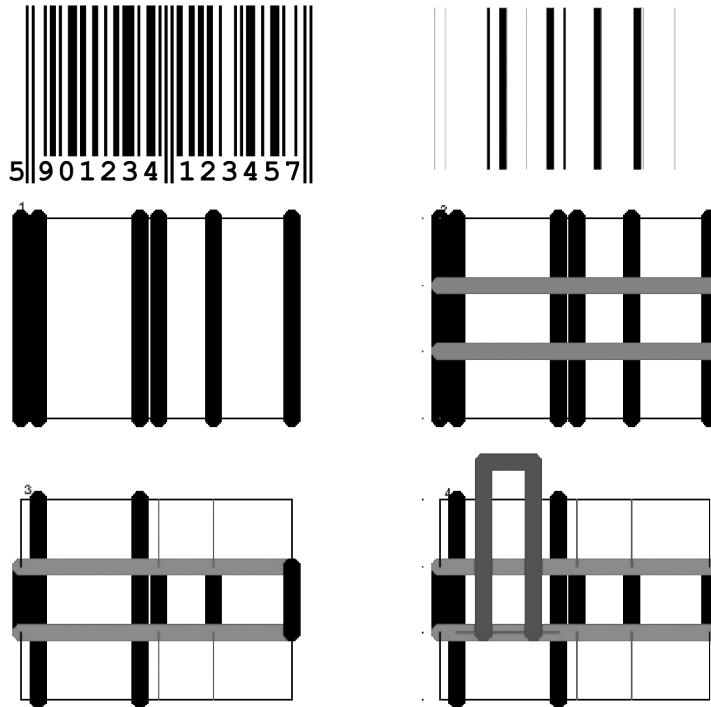
Design description:

The house was built in an open area on the outskirts of the village of Ramiszów near Wrocław. Buildings in the neighborhood are farm houses created in the interwar period. From the plot there is a beautiful view of the forest, fields and in the distance the Trzebnickie Hills. The plot is strongly withdrawn in relation to the street, therefore a long road leads to it. This long way has become the inspiration for shaping the house and garden design. The whole urban layout has been consistently subordinated to the linear system, referring to the bar code, which can be found on all goods. The plan of a building and a garden, analogous to a bar code,⁸ is a representation of information through a combination of dark and light elements. They have been assigned individual elements of the building, i.e: walls, rooms and gardens: discounts, paths, roads. Bands of varying width extend along the plot, defining var-

⁸ Barcode – a graphical representation of information through a combination of dark and light elements, determined according to the symbolism of the rules describing the structure of the code, (eg its dimensions, coded character set, algorithm for calculating a check digit and others) of a given code. The bar code is intended for electronic readers. It aims to enable automatic reading of information. The main application of the barcode is the automatic identification of products in the broadly understood logistics. Wikipedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kod_kreskowy (access: 6.06.2019).

ious functions. The main application of a bar code is the identification of a solution as a kind of an individual arrangement.

The project consists of a one-story garage, covered with a flat roof and a residential building. Both parts are connected by an openwork wooden pergola. The house is a paraphrase, consisting in the modernization of the surrounding farm architecture. The designer was inspired by the traditional shape of the house: a simple shape, covered with a gable roof with a 45-degree slope, referring to the architecture of neighboring houses, completed in the pre-war years. The arrangement of windows with an extended form of portfenets is a modern version of the gaps illuminating the utility rooms of neighboring buildings.



III. 4. Design idea – how bar code developed to the land plan, interior view, ground floor plan [B.G.]

To clarify the period of creation, different colors were used than in the neighborhood. White walls with graphite elements and a graphite roof are meant to contrast the brick red houses with red roofs. This solution is to emphasize historical difference.

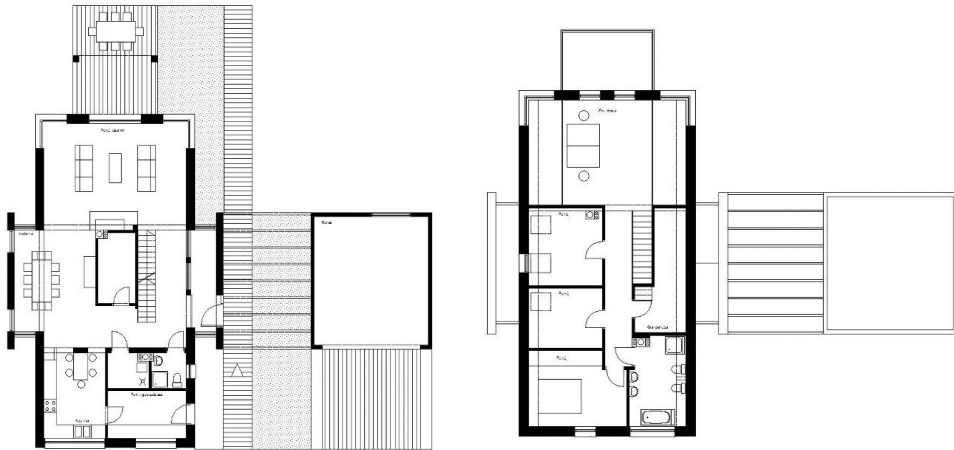
The interior of the building has also been designed in a banded system. The layout was solved in two squares, which were divided into three parts. The middle part was extended sideways, which was to additionally emphasize the longitudinal / banded arrangement. The central part of the house is a strip of stairs with an adjoining long wardrobe, behind which there is a seating area located around the fireplace.

On the sides of the wardrobe there is communication, in which on one side the dining room was integrated. Communication, from the garden side, is closed with glazing, followed by two-tone (white and violet) rebates. The banded floor layout emphasizes the entresol opening at the sides for lower level communication. One more trick was applied here. In the extreme

part of the mezzanine, a transparent glass floor was introduced, which on the one hand was designed to give the impression of lightness, floating in the air, and on the other hand to give the spaciousness of the space below. In the part of the entresol, a transparent glass floor was introduced, which on the one hand was designed to give the impression of lightness, floating in the air, and on the other hand to give the spaciousness of the space below.



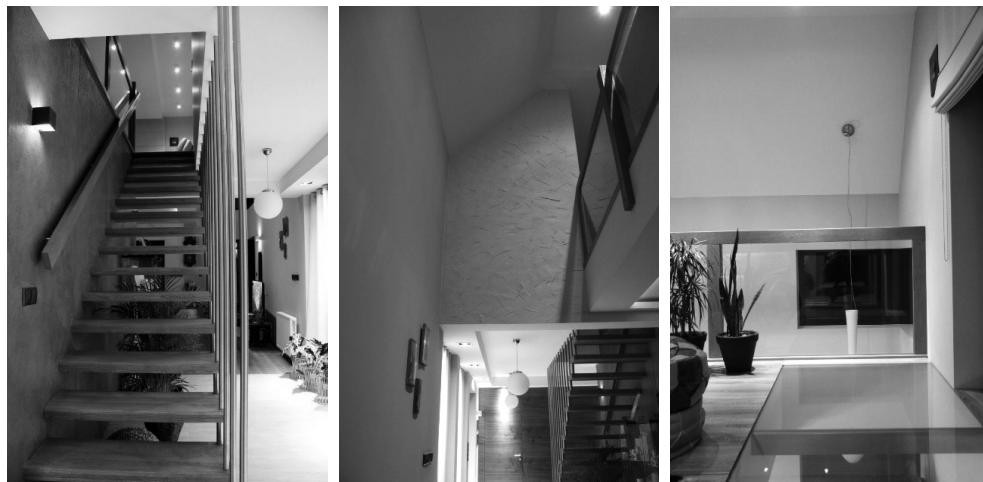
Ill. 5. Native architecture in village Ramiszów [B.G.]



Ill. 6. Left – plan of the ground floor right – plan of first floor [B.G]

From the entresol, a long corridor leads to a row of bedrooms, a dressing room and a bathroom.

A number of corner glazed elements have been used to illuminate the interior at all times of the day and the year, therefore the day-part oriented towards the north, due to the beautiful views, gained an interesting light. In addition, the introduction of external and internal blinds allows you to adjust the lighting and crop the views by closing to the habitable side and opening to wild nature – forests and fields. The entresol where the studio was located, thanks to the location on the first floor, has beautiful panoramas of the area. An important room with high functional value is an utility room. Connected by a door with driveway and designed in the form of a summer kitchen with a series of shelves, cabinets under the counter with a sink generates a lot of activity that can be moved from a representative kitchen partly open to the living room and dining room.



Ill. 7. Interior of the house, left – single speed stairs, middle – entrance hall, right – antresole [B.G]

The building was designed as a low-energy one, which is why the floors, roof and external walls were well insulated and energy-saving 3-pane windows installed in the insulation layer were used.

4. SUMMARY – CONCLUSIONS

Presented projects of detached houses present an individual approach to design. Of course, the ideas, assumptions and possibilities that led the architects in the design process are very different, however, they have a few goals. Willing to design a house tailored to the needs of future users, making their dreams respectful of the context and cultural heritage. For integrating the local community, the regional heritage is very important, which consists of monuments of local importance associated with the tradition and history of the place. The discussed solutions on the one hand present, through their form, the original pattern – an archetype of a traditional house with a unique layout, and on the other hand they are an example of creating a “genius loci” of the space in which they were created. A thoughtful approach, supported by the maturity of the investor, can change the landscape of Polish space and improve the quality of architecture. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to achieve. It is worth noting that the presented houses are architects’ own houses, that is, sensitive people, whose respect for the balance in the built space lies deeply at heart.

“The problem of typization and typical projects will not be resolved definitively, because we have not yet created a clear distinction between what should be consistent in the landscape, that is, the general space, and what should be left to the individualism of each individual. Being together in society, we should sometimes decide on a compromise so that the architecture that is currently being created gives a clear picture of a society conscious of its own cultural landscape. You can not cure your historical complexes and compensate for old injuries at the expense of architecture, which is an eye-opener for the level of modern society, as well as a heritage for generations. You can not forget about it”.⁹

⁹ Kwiatkowski K., *DOM. Architektura domu jednorodzinnego we współczesnej Polsce – problem czy wyzwanie?*, Budownictwo i Architektura, 2010, no. 6, p. 69.

Tab. 1 Comparison of the three buildings

	House in Wrocław	House in Ramiszów
Location	quiet district of a big city	suburban small village
Usable area	159 m ²	180 m ²
The form of the building	simple, gable roof, no garage, working with a flat roof as a separate building	simple, gable roof, garage with flat roof as a separate building connected by pergola with a residential building
Functional solutions	modern interior design, entresol, open to the landscape	modern interior design, lots of open space, entresol, open to the landscape
Aesthetic solutions	modern	modern, referring to tradition
Material solutions	plastered blocks, wood, glass	plastered blocks, wood, glass
Colors	white, black	white, graphite, mahogany

References

- [1] Korzeniowski W., *Budownictwo mieszkaniowe. Poradnik projektanta*, Arkady, Warszawa 1989
- [2] Kwiatkowski K., *DOM. Architektura domu jednorodzinneego we współczesnej Polsce – problem czy wyzwanie?*, Budownictwo i Architektura, 2010, no. 6, p. 69.
- [3] Tischner J., *Filozofia dramatu*, Znak, Kraków 2005
- [4] <http://czterykaty.pl/czterykaty/1,133333,4836247,rozmowa-wspolczesnosci-z-tradycja-projekt-domu-autorskiej-pracowni.html> (access: 5.02.2019).
- [5] <http://archinea.pl/dom-wlasny-z-pracownia-grid-architekci/> (access: 11.06.2019).
- [6] Wikipedia - internetowa encyklopedia, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kod_kreskowy (access: 6.06.2019).

Author's note:

Interested in the themes related to housing architecture. Three main lines of research works can be enumerate: housing environment in the context of health, housing estates with large plates, the elders and the environment of residence. The results of the above mentioned studies have been presented at national and foreign conferences. They have been also reflected in numerous articles and chapters in books. Author of 66 scientific publications.