

‘MARGIT HÁZ’, THE CREATION OF AN AWARD-WINNING PUBLIC BUILDING

Bence VADÁSZ*

Vadász és Társai Építőművész Ltd, 29 Kmety Street, 1063 Budapest
e-mail: vadasz.bence@vadaszstudio.hu

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Abstract: Family tradition and a desire to explore are intertwined in the history of Margit Ház, this award-winning office building designed by Bence Vadász. On the one hand, there is the almost transcendental link between the designer and his grandfather, Mihály Vadász, sending a powerful message through space and time. On the other hand, we can see how the designer succeeded in incorporating both BAUHAUS and DE STIJL elements in his design. He also succeeded in creating a building that fits into the fabric of the town with ease and grace, revitalizing the environment.

Keywords: Family tradition, Design, Inspiration, Era, Buildings, BAUHAUS, Location, Environment, Architectural vision, Heritage, Structure, Material, Color, Review, Praise, Plan, Reference

1. Antecedents

When I was a young architect - having been born into a family of 3 generations of architects, - I gained countless indirect and tangible impressions at home. On the one hand, these were made by my grandfather, Mihály Vadász, the strict BAUHAUS pioneer, who opened up new prospects in the history of architecture, and whose significance in it can hardly be avoided. On the other hand, I was inspired by my constantly renewing father, György Vadász, representative of today's untethered romantic eclecticism. There was a wide range of impressions, being either concrete and

* Designer: Bence Vadász, Ybl-prized architect

objective (like the houses that actually got built, tangible designs, drafts, sketches, exhibitions and -first and foremost- conversations about architecture) or abstract and subjective (like feelings, colors, the smell of buildings, photographs, anecdotes and marveling at a certain detail, etc.). These made an impact on one another, too, thus defining my architectural attitude.

But sons usually tend to reject their father's ways at one point or another, wishing to explore uncharted territories. It is also possible that genetic inheritance - that is seldom direct and straightforward, but makes small detours, moving like a knight on the chess board - is the factor that can really influence the second generation. Whatever the case, my grandfather's architecture feels a bit closer to me, together with the architectural era and the modernist approach, which defined the architecture of the 1930s.

Loving and respecting the so-called 'modern' traditions of architecture is not much of a foothold in itself. Place, time, but mostly the environment should motivate the architect to use the motifs - the rules of composition - and the eurhythmy (system of proportions) correctly and adequately when designing. That was why I was waiting for the opportunity and the favorable constellation of tasks and circumstances to try my hands at designing. I needed to find out whether I am being led astray by myself or there really is a possibility to translate an architectural design that was concluded in the 40s, into the architecture of the end of 20th century. Will my grandfather help me through space and time?

2. Forerunners

2.1. General forerunners: Modernists, BAUHAUS

Primarily it were the Vadász-Preisich houses - which I had already got to now both from photographs and by seeing them on the premises for myself - and the oeuvre of the great names of the 'Modern' chapter in my architectural studies (from Gropius to Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier [1]-[14], along with the important Hungarian Modernists (from Farkas Molnár, József Fisher to Lajos Kozma and *Marcell Breuer* [15]-[30] that were nudging me towards the - as yet - unfamiliar path. Repeatedly sauntering along the BAUHAUS-estate in Napraforgó Street made it pretty obvious for me that I was going to set foot on this path.

2.2. Personal forerunner: Grandfather - Mihály Vadász

My grandfather, Mihály Vadász was an emblematic figure of BAUHAUS. As a young architect, he worked at Emil Bauer's architecture firm. It was here where he met Gábor Preisich, who later became his work partner. In 1933 they opened an architecture firm under the name Preisich and Vadász. It was around this time that they designed and built - both together and alone - their best modernist creations. In their firm they managed to create the most puritan and formulaic buildings of the BAUHAUS and the Modern Era. It was at this time that the apartment building in Káplár Street and the Simplon apartment building and movie theatre in Bartók Béla road (as it is named today) were built (*Fig. 1*). The latter was the first apartment-building-cinema complex

in Budapest that was originally designed to be a cinema and which was built in Modern style as well. In 1934-1935 they designed together the so-called OTI-houses, the first group of modern apartment-buildings in Budapest, at Köztársaság Square (previously Tisza Kálmán Square).



Fig. 1. Simplon Apartment Building and Movie Theater, built in 1934

Until the Second World War they designed countless family houses and apartment buildings in Buda, and some in Pest, too. These buildings are composed consistently along the guidelines of pure Modernism. For instance:

- a cottage in 26/b Városmajor Street, 2nd district, Budapest, built in 1935;
- a family house in 52 Örs Vezér Square, 14th district, Budapest, built in 1935;
- a family house in 20 Bazin Street, 12th district, Budapest, built in 1936;
- his own family house in 46 Rác Aladár Road, 12th district, Budapest, built in 1936;
- a family house in 34 Tusnád Street, 12th district, Budapest, built in 1936;
- an apartment building in 69 Krisztina Blvd, 1st district, Budapest, built in 1937, (*Fig. 2*);
- an apartment building in 65 Margit Blvd, 2nd district, Budapest, built in 1937;
- an apartment building in 4/d Csalogány Street, 1st district, Budapest, built in 1938;
- the so-called 'Bauxit-Palace' in 18 Kossuth Square, built in 1938.

Grandfather, in his quiet, subdued way consistently represented and perfected a certain style of architecture. As a real Baumeister, he elaborated on even the tiniest details, integrating them into the formulaic Modernist composition. Grandfather, in his quiet, subdued way consistently represented and perfected a certain style of architecture. As a real Baumeister, he elaborated on even the tiniest details, integrating them into the formulaic Modernist composition.

He would work on establishing the domestic - or national - version of Modernist architecture. Not by applying national motifs and embellishments - this would have contradicted to the strictly functionalist system of Modernism - but simply by reacting

instinctively to the environment, by keeping the insertions as subtle as possible and by making everything fit seamlessly into the texture of the city. He would avoid 'posh' designs, was never ostentatious and never intended to act like a missionary of architecture. All he ever wanted was simply to design good houses, following a crystallized architectural voice.



Fig. 2. Apartment building in 69 Krisztina Blvd, 1st district, Budapest, built in 1937

After the war until his death he was 'only' teaching at the Department of Construction Technology at Budapest University of Technology. He wrote several books on architecture: *Project Supervision* [31] in 1938, *Building Technology* [32] in 1952, *Lectures at Budapest University of Technology and Economics* [33] in 1955 and *Urban Family House* [34] in 1959 (co-authored with Gábor Preisich, for the last time).

My grandfather's whole oeuvre had - and still has - a great influence on my architectural creations. But since I finished university I have been nurturing this dream about trying my hand at this style of architecture for real, and I have been also dreaming about having a dialogue with my grandfather through space and time. I wanted to express via my architectural creations that his Message found me - even after half a century.

2.3 Influential forerunners: Modern houses in the surrounding area

'Dugattyús-Ház' in 15-17 Margit Blvd., designed by Ferenc Domány and Béla Hofstaetter in 1937-38

This excellent building, standing on the corner of Margit Blvd. and Rómer Flóris Street (*Fig. 3, Fig. 4*) was a reference point during the designing process not only because of its physical proximity. The materials used for the facade of this beautiful, modern apartment-building, the shaping and rhythm of its continuous windows, the terrace banisters all served as examples. Dividing and traversing the mass were exciting tools as well and later I implemented them as solutions to be followed, because their shadow effect made the composition more statuesque. The design and masonry of the beautiful staircase and foyer are important and independent features of this building. I strived to treat the foyer(s) according to their importance in my own design as well. Playing with casing, entanglements and curved intersections are present in my own work, too.



Fig. 3. Dugattyús-Ház, built in 1937-38,

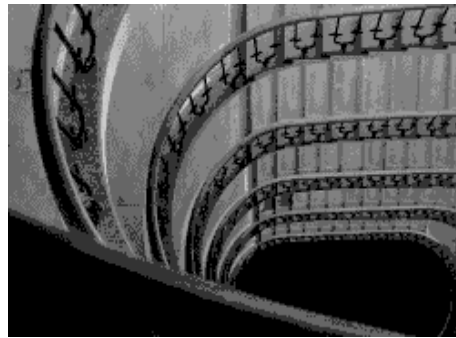


Fig. 4. Dugattyús-Ház, Staircase

The Átrium Movie Theatre -designed by Lajos Kozma in 1936

The most important, almost emblematic example of the modern architectural setting of Margit Blvd., and also a precursor to my future design is The Átrium Movie Theatre (*Fig. 5*). The proportions of the building, the details of the continuous windows, the separation of the plinth and the superstructure, the retracted roof level were all architectural guidelines when designing Margit Ház.

Lottó Ház by Dezső Dúl, in 1959 (27 Margit Blvd.)

It is an interesting fact even for me that Dezső Dúl, the excellent architect would be mentioned several times in this treatise. It is interesting because his impact on my work was hardly conscious; on the contrary, it was almost imperceptible, since I had never been acquainted with his architectural oeuvre before, nor had I studied any of his houses previously. Would that be the criterion of good architecture? That it affects the receiver - be either layperson or expert - by just being what it is, without any further analysis?

Be that as it may, Lottó-ház (*Fig. 6*) is by all means an important architectural feat, and by its sheer proximity was able to influence my own designing process later. Both the projecting, cubic facade building unit and the recessed main-entrance gave food for thought.



Fig. 5. Átrium Movie Theater, built in 1936



Fig. 6. Lottó Ház, built in 1959

Bambi-ház (1957) in 2-4 Frankel Leó Street, designed by Dénes Perczel, István Janáky Sr. and Olga Mináry

The precursor that was physically the closest to me was the so-called ‘Bambi-ház’ (*Fig. 7*) standing in Feketesas Street, at the corner of Bem Square. Its extreme

simplicity, box-like quality and pillared ground floor made quite an impression on me, and at the same time made me even more determined to use white limestone for facade casing on Margit Ház.



Fig. 7. Bambi-Ház, built in 1957

3. Finally, in 1999 the TASK found me!

I plunged into the work happily, and with youthful vigor. The ‘genius loci’ - the most prominent architectural compositions of the environment, the spiritual heritage of my grandfather, every precursor (either theoretical or built), they all strengthened my determination. I knew that my current design project - ‘MARGIT HÁZ’ Office Building - must emerge in the redefined form language of BAUHAUS. I felt that finally this spacious area in Buda, the architectural setting of Margit Blvd., the history of the environment were all giving me a free hand to compose a truly modern building. The architectural program and the magnitude of the designing project both fitted into the preliminary concept.

The constellation of two factors - locale and time - was present at the designing of MARGIT HÁZ. The locale, which was suitable to embrace this architectural vision, due to the modernist predecessors of both its immediate and distant environment. The time, which made several creators and sensitive, receptive audience alike come to the

conclusion that implementing BAUHAUS principles and redefining form would have a benign effect on present time architecture.

It was this environment where the designing process started, the first step being historical research. What I did first was obviously to browse my grandfather's creations. Simplon Cinema and Apartment Building from 1934 was an important architectural example for me, along with his apartment buildings at 69 Krisztina Blvd and at 65 Margit Blvd, both built in 1937. The latter, apart from being an excellent example of architectural design, also served as a reference point due to its physical proximity.

4. 'MARGIT HÁZ' - an architectural introduction

The Margit Ház, Budapest, 2nd district, Bem József Street - Tölgyfa Street - Feketesas Street, Office Corner (*Fig. 8*).



Fig. 8. Margit Ház

The *location* is very valuable in terms of traffic and city-scape, because it is situated in one of the main traffic axis in Buda, in an exciting architectural environment, near the coast of Danube. Building in the vacant corner lot is discussed by the Zoning Plan as well, defining the recommended building line, the enclosures and the possible functions of usage. Before finalizing our plan - taking the ZP in consideration - we had to consult several experts on the following technologies: city planning, traffic, petrol station engineering, hydrogeology, fire protection, structural engineering, elevator and mechanical engineering, electricity, environment protection and last, but not least, we also had to consult the principal and the investor as well. The expert architect judge

called upon by the Department of City Planning and the Department of Technology of the 2nd District, appraised and recommended our design to be executed without further alterations.

The building process

Our design follows the development in unbroken rows, closing the enclosures of the corner. At the same time, these enclosures get to be divided visually by the exciting play of light and shadow and the use of materials. The new building conforms to the already existing width of the other buildings, whilst architecturally resembling the style and mood of the modern apartment building in Rómer Flóris Str., proudly propagating the previously discussed compositional principles and the redefined stylistic characteristics of their details and architectural gestures.

From Bem József Square, the building follows the recess in the recommended building line, creating a hollow that continues and also closes the already existing spatial arrangements.

From Tölgyfa Street, the frontal plane - being retracted from the actual property line - gives space to the pavement of the pedestrian traffic coming from the direction of the museum. By doing so, it connects the commercial, entertainment and cultural center (yet to be created) on the other side of Feketesas Street to a pedestrian axis, threading it into the already existing texture of the city.

Plans and functions

Having the recommendations of the City Plan (CP) taken into consideration, a petrol station with 4 fuel dispensers was built on the *ground floor*, with the belonging shop, a car wash and frontal car parks. This zone is protected by automatic foam-based fire-extinguisher system. On the same level there is a room that is not yet specified for use, along with the belonging car parks.

On the ground floor, the partly roofed, partly roofless traffic zone allows for two-way car traffic between Feketesas Street and Bem J. Street.

The four office levels of the building and the underground parking lot can be approached from this monitored main level. The car park can store up to 145 vehicles, which is partly done by lifting them. This number is twice as much as the CP requests.

So that the several functions could co-exist peacefully, and because there was a need to transform/separate the office levels, three pedestrian, vertical cores were created in the focal points of the building:

- the main staircase for office workers and guests, with 2 elevators;
- a monitored office staircase in Bem J. Street, with 1 elevator;
- a smoke-free, card-operated check-in system staircase, with a separate elevator that is suitable for disabled people.

The entrance cores of the office building also follow this triple arrangement. The comfortable *main entrance in Tölgyfa Street* is a prominent element of the main frontage. Its arched citadel and the averted blade wall, the latter being covered with

colored metal, seem to have the effect to draw in the clients. This foyer resembles the interior decoration of the 'Dugattyús Ház'.

The entrance in Bem József Street has the same effects with the dynamic delineation of its curved stone cylinder and the use of material.

The entrance from Feketesas Street uses the card-operated check-in system. In the raster of this staircase can we find the garbage containers, the gas meter, the transformer, the electrical rooms (0.4 kV and 10 kV) and the mechanical room of the car wash.

The (-1) level contains an underground parking lot, capable of storing 145 cars. Its background base is small: workshop, storage room, mechanical and water tanks. The CO detector and the artificial ventilation system can also be found here.

The fuel tanks are underground as well, but they are separated from the building and are sunk in the ground (*Fig. 9*).

Above the ground level, the U-shaped office levels are situated along a corridor, with the smaller offices looking at the inner, green roof - covered courtyard. The outer frontal zone mostly contains the bigger offices. The firm points of the office levels are the staircase-cores, the plumbing units and the mechanics shafts (*Fig. 10*).



Fig. 9. Corner of the main entrance



Fig. 10. Main entrance

The first floor differs from the inner system of the general levels (2nd and 3rd levels) only because of the recess in frontage above the main entrance and its frontal design in

Tölgyfa Street, where the stone facing is interrupted by a continuous window instead of the retracted glass wall. From this level there is easy access to the green roof of the inner courtyard, which, due to its level-shifting design, is able to provide the car traffic of the ground level with natural light. Two spot-like ceiling lights serve the same purpose, too (*Fig. 11*).

The functional arrangement, traffic system, mechanics, plumbing and staircase units of the general levels (2nd and 3rd levels) follow the design and logic of the +1st level. On these levels the frontal corner citadels are separated by glass panels that are divided by ferroconcrete plates. These serve both shading and fire protection purposes. Behind the glass panels of the frontage there is a suspended ceiling, and the mechanical units of the offices are placed into the suspended ceiling of the corridors, and into parapets behind the partly solid frontage. The ferroconcrete parapet walls in front of the glass openings serve as fire protection as well (*Fig. 12*).



Fig. 11. Detail of the main entrance



Fig. 12. Colors of De Stijl

The retracted building line of the roof level follows the inner system of the lower levels - though it is less wide. The walkable terraces created at this level are interrupted by low-slanted metal plate sections over the glass panels. The terraces are graced with green roofs, making them more humane. The most valuable attic corner office (on the corner of Bem J. Street and Tölgyfa Street) is complete with an impressive gallery that closes with a semi-cylinder. This creates the effect of a pontoon, referring to the close proximity of the Danube, which can already be seen from here. The arched shading

projecting roof, the metal casing are in accordance with the recommendation of the ZP - that is, to give an architectural emphasis to this important corner point.

The roofing panel of the flat roof is used to store all of the mechanical units and rooms (engine house of the elevator, ventilation technology, etc.)

Traffic

The units of the ground floor can be approached by car from a westward direction, from the turnout (yet to be made) in Bem J. Street; and also from both lanes of Feketesas Street. Under the stands of the building, at the main level, there is a two-way vehicular axis that connects the two streets. The petrol station, the fast food restaurant, the car wash and the monitored car ramp all branch off and can be reached from this axis. The car traffic in the parking level is one-way, and the car park is easy to overview due to the roundabout, thus minimizing the possibility of accidents.

Structure

The building concludes in a box-structure under the square level, with its 50-centimeter-wide watertight ferroconcrete encircling walls and 30-centimeter-wide monolith ferroconcrete roofing panel above the basement.

The structural system of the building is based on a ferroconcrete framework of pillars, with spans varying typically between 6.00 - 6.40 meters, 7.50 meters, 5.40 and 7.20 meters.

The framework is supported by the ferroconcrete cores in the staircases and by ferroconcrete blade walls.

Structurally the building is made of dilated units, and the row of pillars is doubled along the dilatational axis.

On the ground floor the requested parameters and axial distances of the fuel dispensers made it necessary that two-level ferroconcrete frames of greater cross-section (50/80-70/100) would be used for support, since several items of the pillared framework had to be substituted on this corner because of the traffic routes. After the slab above the ground floor, the original raster of the pillared frame continues. The pillared frame supports 27-centimeter-wide flat ferroconcrete slabs under and above each level, using cantilever technique on the solid corners up from the +1st level. (The conduits and boxes of the electrical wiring are placed between the lower and upper hinges of the slab.)

The infill brick work is made of 30-centimeter-wide blocks of high heat-insulating nature, both the at the front of the inner courtyard and at the front of the averted unit in Bem J. Street.

The structure of the stone facade is made of 15-centimeter-wide insulated monolith reinforced concrete walls, built at the edge of the reinforced concrete slabs, which were projected cantilever-like from the raster of pillars. On top of that follow the fitted stone facing tiles, leaving ventilated air space.

The structure of the roof: reverse flat roof on monolith reinforced concrete slabs, with gravel bed as load; walkable roofs on the terraces; partly green roof in the inner courtyard. The metal casing of the sloped section above the frontal glass panels are put on the boards on the rafters supported by the reinforced concrete slabs.

The partition walls of the building are mostly plasterboard. The suspended ceilings are made of metal and plasterboard boards, hanging from a metal frame.

Materials and colors

Above the ground floor the outer, solid surfaces of the building are covered with matte-polished, white limestone (put down in bond), with grey stone stripes at the edges of the slabs, and pure white plaster on the inner facades, on the averted facade section in Bem J. Street and on the walls in the attic. The plinth has stylish and elegant matte grey stone facing. The facade in Tölgyfa Street in the main entrance unit, the projecting frontal box in Bem J. Street, and the gallery in the attic and the 3rd entrance in Feketesas Street introduce colored and grey metal casings. On these important and accentuated frontal points I used three strong and distinctive colors: red, blue and yellow. These colors are characteristic of many creations (Rietveld) of the 'De Stijl' architectural and artistic era, which is so close to my heart. They also projected the outline of my next architectural period (which was to be defined only later).

The doors and windows have metal framework that are colored grey, and partly work as curtain walls in the middle sections.

The metal banisters of the building are sintered black. The section of the roof that is covered with grooved plate is made of uncolored VM Zinc metal plates and Rheinzink. The frontage of the observation gallery is made of metal plates as well.

To sum up, the plans were made in accordance with the recommendations and parameters of the ZP, so that the silent mass of the building, its frontal rhythm and building line could be seamlessly integrated into the urban texture of the environment; and at the same time its dynamism, use of materials, strong shadow-light effects and the corner tower would function as an exciting visual landmark of the town.

5. Short reviews

'*Margit Ház* by Bence Vadász does not strive to make the impression of having always stood there. Nor does it suggest that it intends to stay there until the end of time. It just appears. Now. Like a great actor. Who simply enters the stage. He does not do anything. Does not even strike a pose. No theatrical gestures. Still, he has everybody's attention. And there he stands, with an air of serenity and pertness, wearing a light summer suit and a big yellow flower in his buttonhole. And there is a Girardi-hat on his head. Magical five seconds follows. Then the roar of applause. This sort of stage presence is inimitable. It is not taught either in schools or at universities. It cannot be taught at all, it just exists,' said Béla Borvendég DLA, Ybl-Prized Architect, Honorary associate professor, Honorary life president of MÉSZ (Association of Hungarian Architects) [35], (*Fig. 13*).

'Bence Vadász made the finest function of architecture unfold when he dreamt his dream to this seemingly hopeless urban site. It was a vision about a building that would offer a new scale of useful space, and eventually, future to residents and employees alike. ... Ease, soaring, charm, the house in Tölgyfa Street is a balm for the dust-coated, scabbed wound of a foolish era. A dialogue between grandfather and grandson, with its

voices surging from canonized forms,' wrote Iván András Bojár, Leader of OCTOGON Workshop of Architectural Criticism [36].

'What else could be said? It seems Van Doesburg - who defined the essence of architecture in 16 points in 1923 - was right. Since all we need is a building that is elemental, but never monumental, economical and functional, but not strictly cubic, dynamic, straightforward in its choice of colors and one that avoids decoration. I think something like that has just been born in Buda,' said Cecília Lovas, Critic of architecture [37], (*Fig. 14*).



Fig. 13. Lights and shadows



Fig. 14. Old and young

'The new office building, bounded by Feketesas Street, Tölgyfa Street and Bem József Street is truly remarkable for its simplicity (resembling Bauhaus) and the refined use of structure and materials,' said Dr János Böhönyei, Herder-prized architect, Honorary president of MÉSZ.

6. Possible reasons for the favorable reception

I think there are more reasons behind the success and general recognition of the building.

- Apart from consistently following through with the forms and principles of composition, I instinctively *eased the functional strictness and consistent*

puritanism of BAUHAUS. This obviously comes from my father's heritage - his free, soaring spirituality 'got under my skin genetically', letting me glimpse beyond the boundaries of the trinity of Function-Form-Structure. These '*free association*' elements are for example the spirally twisted side entrance in Bem József Street, or the asymmetric 'conference-room tower' in the attic. My father and grandfather led my pencil together. Three Vadász together! Maybe this is why this building is more than just a good office building. Maybe it conveys a message... (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. From the corner of Bem József street and Tölgyfa street

- *Using colors for emphasis and as compositional tools.* This is my first ever public building where I used colors in a consistent manner. I used the *powerful and distinctive primary colors - blue, red and yellow - of De Stijl Movement*, which I hold dear to my heart, though the movement proved to be short-lived and hardly any example of it can be found in Hungary. Here, in this composition it is not yet the main motif - they appear locally and only three times - but they do mark important parts of the building. They mark and emphasize the entrances from Tölgyfa Street and Feketesas Street, and in Bem J. Street they strengthen the effect of a peculiar projecting overlay element. At the same time, applying De Stijl colors is in a logical accordance with the modern world of architecture as well, there is no breach of style here. We might as well recall the Rietveld-Schröder House (Fig. 16, Fig. 17).

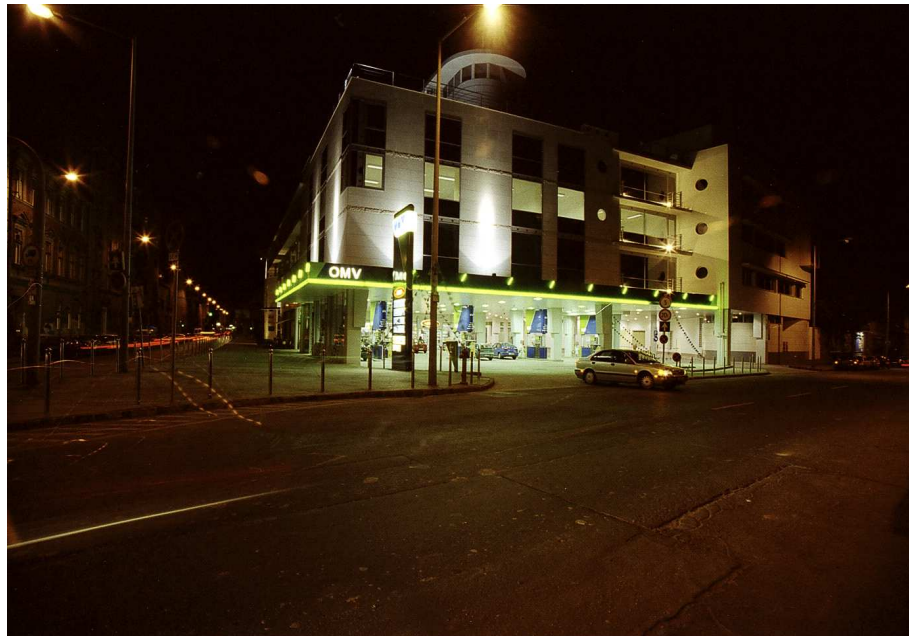


Fig. 16. Corner in the night



Fig. 17. Corner in daylight

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