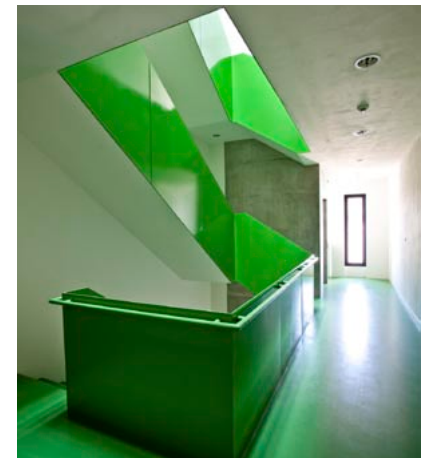




↓ The cantilevered section refers to the town gate that once stood here.

↓ Circulation space



↓ Entrance from the street side





↓ Rear elevation facing the square and the old town wall



Apartment building, Ostrava

Kuba Pilař Architects have created a new apartment building in the heart of Ostrava that is reminiscent of the old town gate that used to occupy this spot.

CZECH REPUBLIC — TEXT: VENDULA HNÍDKOVÁ, PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSTISLAV ŠÍMEK

Ostrava, the third biggest town in the Czech Republic, was once a booming industrial area, as witnessed by the many brownfield sites still visible today. But nowadays it is rather disadvantaged by its remote location in the far northeast of the country. As in many other post-industrial cities, Ostrava's politicians now focus on new cultural developments. The Black Meadow design competition for a cultural centre (in the context of Ostrava's aspirations to become a European Cultural Capital in 2015), won by Maxwan in 2010 (see A10#35), is indicative of the city's ambitions. But now that Pilzen has been chosen to be Cultural Capital, nobody knows quite what will happen to that plan.

Back in 2004, Kuba Pilař Architects (Ladislav Kuba and Tomáš Pilař) won an architectural competition for a new scientific library in Ostrava. Their 'Black Box' design symbolically resembled a piece of coal. Unfortunately, after many years of political vacillation and public anticipation, construction of the new library has now been cancelled.

In 2006, the same architects won another competition in Ostrava, organized by the developer Metrostav, with their study for a residential complex. The competition entry then became the starting point for the eventual structure.

The location played a crucial role in the design; for the architects, it is a place with special significance, situated as it is on the edge of the old town. The plot adjoins the spot where a town gate once stood and so Kuba Pilař Architects wanted to represent this historical fact visually and in a modern way, which they have

done with a cantilevered section overhanging the street. Perhaps this virtual gate will one day be completed from the other side of the street but as yet there are no plans for this.

In contrast to the heterogeneous character of the surroundings, the new structure is a strong, but in no way arrogant presence in the city centre. Its monumental volume creates a buffer between a relatively noisy street and a very intimate square centred around the oldest town church. This impression is accentuated at the south corner, where the new building meets a remnant of the old town wall, of which the gate was a part.

The new residential block defines the northeast side of the square and gives the space a clear form. The five-storey building contains 36 apartments, underground parking, several retail spaces and a café. The strict budget requirements did not allow much scope for experimentation. Nevertheless, the slightly rounded shape of the building makes for a variety of unique living spaces. All the apartments receive good levels of natural daylight, emphasized by tiny loggias, painted bright red.

Special interest was paid to the circulation spaces. The two staircases have rooflights and are surrounded by spacious corridors. Along with fresh green paint and the exposed concrete, they create a very pleasant interior environment.

Materials and colours also play an important role on the exterior. The architects managed to maintain control of all the external details, even though they had to abandon their original idea of covering the whole →

(Apartment Building, Ostrava)

building with steel sheeting. When the developer rejected this as too expensive, Kuba Pilář briefly considered concrete, but in the Czech Republic the quality of such a material solution is generally low and inexperienced contractors were unable to achieve the desired effect. In the end, the building was clad with black fibre-glass cement panels to which the red loggias form a playful contrast.

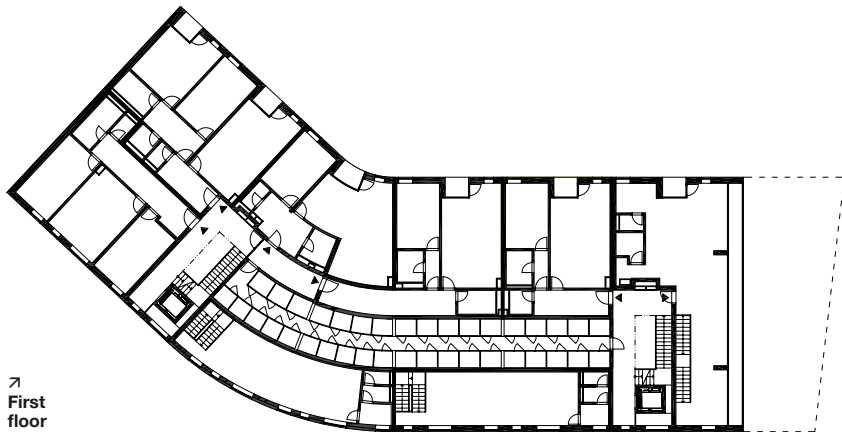
Although it was not the original intention, this final version alludes to a common perception of the polluted industrial city as 'Black Ostrava'. This connection is even stronger when one looks out of the windows at the local skyline which is dotted with mining towers. As such, the architects have created a link between the past and future faces of Ostrava. ←

APARTMENT BUILDING, 2008–2010

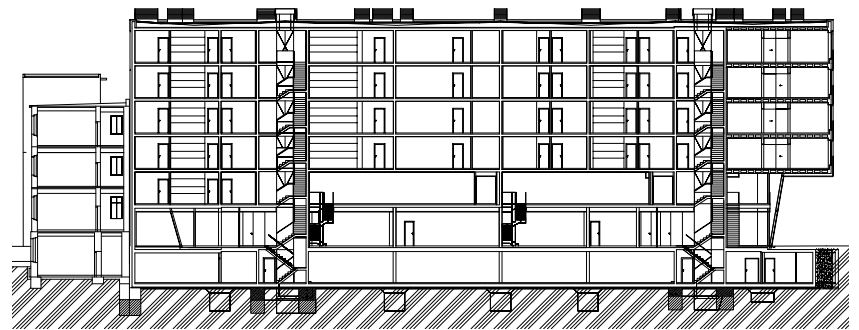
Architects: Kuba Pilář Architekti
Client: Metrostav
Address: Kostelní náměstí, Ostrava
Info: www.arch.cz/kuba.pilar



↑ The building works as a buffer between a noisy street and an intimate square with church.



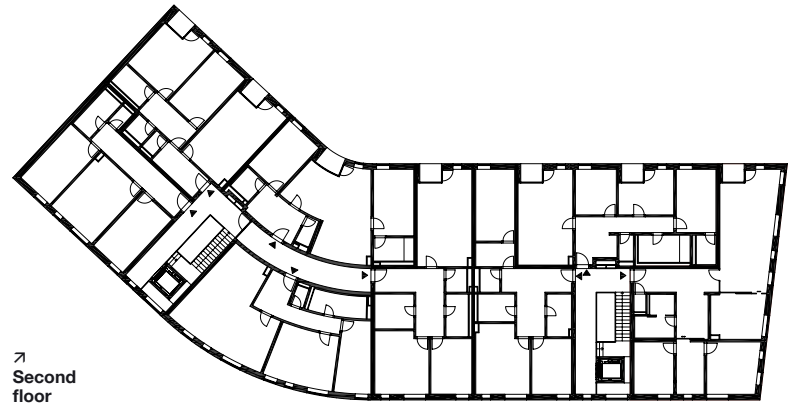
↗ First floor



↑ Section



↗ Ground floor



↗ Second floor

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