

ART NOUVEAU



Art Nouveau emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century as a style of architecture and design which was aimed at presenting the style of the times. At that time, Riga was one of the most important cultural and economic centres in the Russian Empire. It sought not to fall behind other European cities in terms of public styles and traditions. Early in the 20th century, construction in Old Riga and along Alberta, Elizabetes and Marijas streets became unprecedentedly active. Art Nouveau only dominated Riga's architecture for a short period of time, but it left behind true masterpieces of architecture. Visitors to the Latvian capital city can see two typical styles of Art Nouveau – decorative Art Nouveau and the style of National Romanticism.

You can gain your first impressions about Art Nouveau architecture in Riga in the old part of the city:

**1. Audēju Street 7
(1899, A. Aschenkampf, M. Šervinskis)**

This was the first Art Nouveau building in Riga. Look at the façade of the building, and you will see the classical elements of the style – stylised plants (irises, blooming trees, reedmace), as well as mascarons (human faces of a fantastic appearance). The mansard story of the building is encircled with ornamental metal railings.

**2. Audēju Street 9
(1900, K. Pēkšēns)**

This is a building in which Historicism coincides with Art Nouveau. The solar motif on the pediment of the building can be encountered elsewhere, too. This was a key element in Art Nouveau, depicting the flourishing of new life.

**3. Kalēju Street 23
(1903, P. Mandelstam)**

The façade of this building reflects eclectic and decorative Art Nouveau. Of interest is the corner portal with the gilded sun, shaped to resemble the crown of a tree.

**4. Teātra Street 9
(1903, H. Scheel, F. Scheel)**

This building represents a combination of Art Nouveau with the Baroque. The building was once owned by a seller of books and antiquities, which is why the reliefs on the corner of the façade depict figures from mythology – Athena and Hermes. The building is crowned by figures of Atlas, carrying a globe which is made of glass and zinc on their shoulders. At night, the globe is lit up. This was a major demonstration of the technologies of the day.

5. Kalēju Street 6

The building is decorated with flower motifs – engraved ornaments which were typical of late Art Nouveau. Look at the metal ornamentation – the flag is held by a stylised dragon.

**6. Šķūņu Street 10/12
(1902, H. Scheel, F. Scheel)**

A rental building and optics store at one time owned by a man called Detmann, which is why you see the initials "H.D." in the façade. The building is richly ornamented with elements of the world of flora. The dogs on the pediment are clearly there to "guard" the building.

**7. Tirgoņu Street 4
(1900, H. Scheel, F. Scheel, W. Hahn)**

Another building owned by Detmann, this one an apartment building and shop, but with a difference façade.

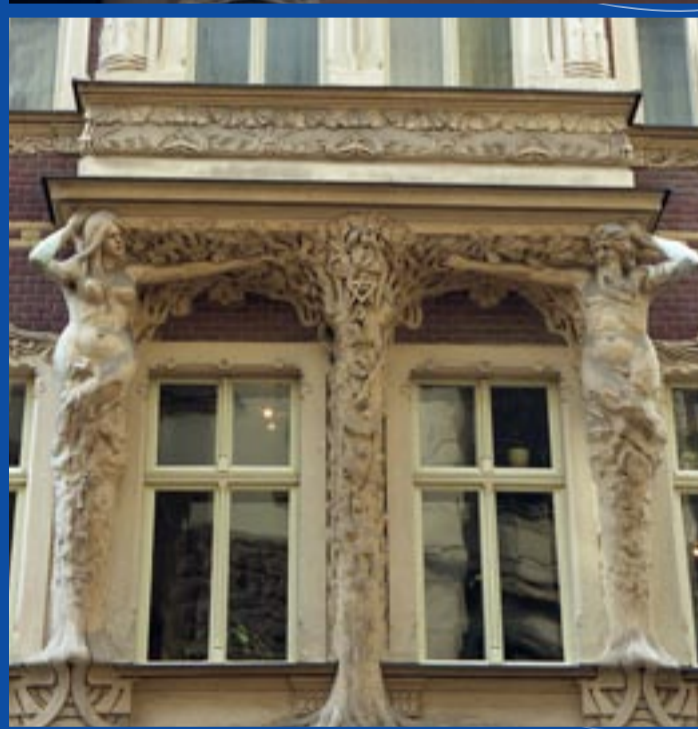
Smilšu Street was the most important street in Riga until the 17th century. Today it is sometimes known as the Riga equivalent of Wall Street – banks, more banks, the Finance Ministry and luxurious office buildings at every step.

**8. Smilšu Street 1/3
(1906, N. Proskurnyin)**

This building was commissioned by an insurance company called "Rossiya", and that may be why the centre of the façade features an allegorical figure of Hope.

**9. Smilšu Street 2
(1902, K. Pēkšēns)**

Specialists say that this is a true jewel of Art Nouveau architecture in Riga. The decorative building, with figures of women and masks, is typical of the style. The figure of the peacock is also one of the symbols of the beauty and nobility of Art Nouveau. On the mansard windows you see the common motif of the sun. The figure of a goddess that is seen under the pediment is considered to be the most beautiful Art Nouveau sculpture of a woman in all of Riga's Art Nouveau world.



**10. Smilšu Street 3
(1910, A. Medlinger, H. Seiberlich)**

A typical "vertical Art Nouveau" building. Initially a bank, the building therefore features figural reliefs on the entrance portal on Smilšu Street. These represent the idea of a bank as an international institution. The building still houses a bank.

**11. Smilšu Street 6
(1912, W. Bockslaff)**

A rational Art Nouveau building influenced by Neoclassicism, which is seen in the gilded ornament. This building, too, houses a bank.

**12. Smilšu Street 8
(1902, H. Scheel, F. Scheel)**

This building features a wealth of mascarons, hybrid forms, elements of flora – all of this typical of eclectic, decorative Art Nouveau. Specialists say that the entrance hall is a masterpiece of ornamental forms which express the praise of living nature that was typical of Art Nouveau.

**13. Smilšu Street 10
(1910, E. Pole)**

This is a typical of late, rational and applied Art Nouveau with stylised elements of Neoclassicism.

**14. Vaļņu Street 2
(1910, E. Friesendorf)**

The entrance portal to this "vertical Art Nouveau" building, with its sculptural reliefs, is seen as one of the most expressive elements of late Art Nouveau in Rīga. We see images from Ancient Greek mythology – Asclepius (the god of medicine) and the Moirae Atropos (goddess of fate). This symbolises the idea of human life, health and work.

As we leave Old Rīga, we find ourselves at Bastejkalns Hill. The "hill" was created as the fortification walls of Medieval Rīga were torn down. The terraces on the hill are a very popular place for leisure, both among the people of Rīga and their guests. That was true in the late 19th and early 20th century, and it is still true today.

The grandest and most important Art Nouveau buildings in Rīga are found in the Central District – more than 700 buildings, representing approximately 40% of all buildings in the city centre.

**15. J. Alunāna Street 2a, A. Pumpura Street 5
(1906, A. Lindberg, K. Vasasherna, A. Vanags)**

This building is in the style of National Romanticism and was designed by Finnish architects. It was Finnish architecture which inspired architects in Rīga to develop National Romanticism in their city. Here we see a creative depiction of the building forms and ethnographic ornaments of the Latvian people.

**16. Antonijas Street 8
(1903, K. Pēkšēns)**

On the façade of the building, we see a powerful accent, with winged dragons under the pediment. Dragons were much beloved by Art Nouveau architects. There are more stylised dragons in the upper part of the façade.

The café with the romantic name of the "Flying Frog" is interesting for its interior stained glass windows. Specialists have declared that some of them are authentic.

Elizabetes Street is known for many interesting buildings of the styles of Eclecticism and Art Nouveau. One short stretch of the street is distinguished by three buildings with a particular wealth of façade decorations and ornamentation.

**17. Elizabetes Street 10b
(1903, M. Eisenstein)**

Much beloved by photographers, this building has been declared by specialists as a unique example of international Art Nouveau, with many symbols, ornaments and geometric forms.

**18. Elizabetes Street 10a
(1903, M. Eisenstein)**

**19. Elizabetes Street 33
(1901, M. Eisenstein)**

This building features a brightly decorated façade, one which depicts nearly all of the historical styles of architecture that were used over the centuries. There are Art Nouveau elements in the mix – masks, plant motifs, etc.

Alberta Street

Alberta Street is named for Bishop Albert, who founded Rīga in 1201. Architecture along this street is among the most vivid and ornate in all of Rīga. Alberta Street was built up in a relatively short period of time – between 1901 and 1908. The 14 buildings on the street are a good example of how applied and practical styles can be merged with artistic and emotional enjoyment.

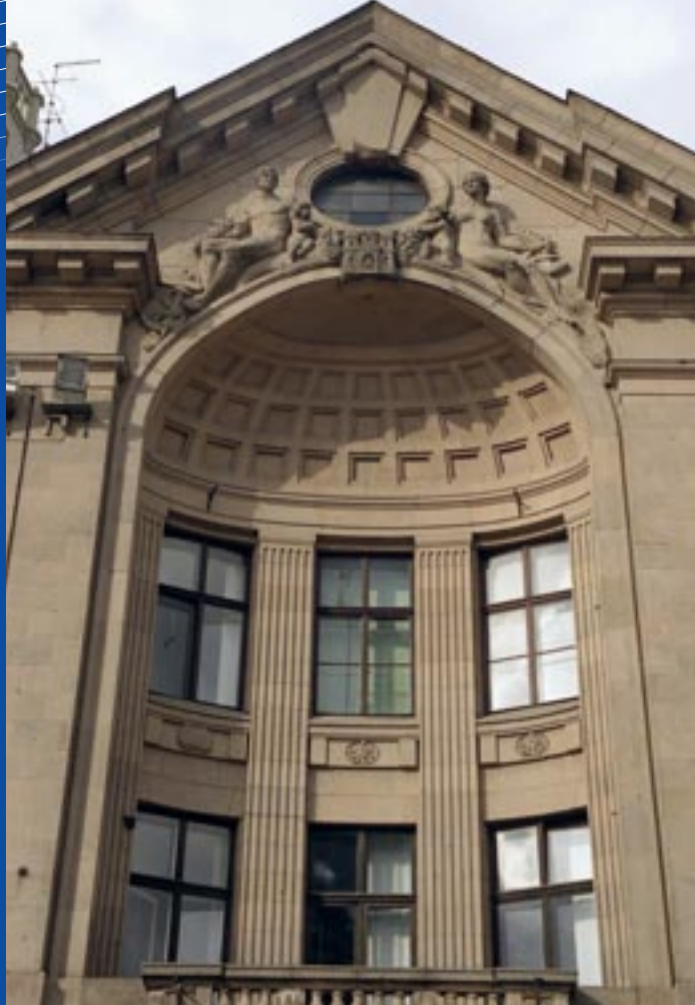
One-half of the buildings on the street were built by Mikhail Eisenstein, father of the legendary film director Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein père designed the buildings at Alberta Street 2, 2a, 4, 6, 13 and 8. All of the buildings are U-shaped. Bedrooms were in the garden wings of the building, and at the end of the halls there were kitchens with an exit to the servants' stairwell. All of the buildings are of the same height, which creates the impression that there is just one building there.

Of interest is the building at Alberta Street 2a, which has an additional story used only for the placement of decorative elements. Ceiling and wall paintings in the entrance hall and stairwell were restored in 1993.

After restoration, the Eisenstein buildings at Alberta Street 13 and Strēlnieku Street 4a have regained their former glory. These house the Rīga School of Law and the Rīga School of Economics. Along with these noble universities, the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences of the University of Latvia is housed at Alberta Street 10 (P. Mandelstam). Alberta Street, in other words, could be called a street of students.

A bit different is the building at Alberta Street 12, which was designed by one of the first ethnic Latvian architects to be educated in Rīga, Konstantīns Pēkšēns (together with Eižens Laube). Pēkšēns owned the building until 1909. Here we see the style of National Romanticism, with pine cones and squirrels. The building has an impressive stairwell with a spiral staircase and vivid paintings on the ceiling. Museums commemorating the great Latvian painter Jānis Rozentāls and the distinguished author and playwright Rūdolfs Blaumanis are housed here.

Opposite is the building at Alberta Street 11, which was designed by E. Laube. Specialists see this as one of the best examples of National Romanticism in the Art Nouveau architecture of Rīga.



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