

Author: Petr Lhotan  
Diploma project: Bastiony

Oposing review: Dipl. Ing. Jan Bochmann  
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For his diploma project Petr Lhotan decided to work on a sensitive location in the historic city centre of Prague. The triangular site between the Jeleni street and the Prasneho mostu street is carefully chosen. A part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century fortification walls, known as the Marian walls, still exists on the site. The plot itself is at this stage not publicly accessible and the former fortification wall can only be seen from the park on top of the parking garage, the Prasny most. Potentially the chosen site seems suitable for a new development but obviously, any project on this spot should very carefully react to the historic fabric of the site and its surroundings.

Petr Lhotan decided to design a housing project on this location. He is taking a risk by proposing a rather large apartment building right in the historic heart of Prague. His courage to do so is much appreciated. Both from a functional as well as from an urban perspective the application of housing programme and a more active and public programme on the ground floor is a good and logic decision as it can potentially contribute to its surroundings and activate a large part of the Jeleni street. The choice to provide affordable and permanent housing in the tourist-dominated historic centre of Prague is an important statement and should be valued.

In the design of the U-shaped housing block just about half of the new volume follows the shape of the former fortifications as other parts of the former fortification wall have been demolished and are now covered by the Prasneho mostu street and by the military academy buildings on the other streetside. However, I agree with Petr Lhotans decision to design a U-shaped volume that as a strong urban object symbolically refers to the 17<sup>th</sup> century bastion without literally and fully being based on the exact position of the fortification wall. Furthermore, the decision to stick to a constant height for the new building in contrast with the sloping terrain is well-taken as it supports the idea of an independent object that, in a modern and non-literal way, refers to the shape of the former bastion.

I want to mention a few aspects that, from my point of view, would be relevant to discuss in relation to Petr Lhotans design:

1. As the project location is very close to the Prague castle and the cathedral and as the project has a height of seven floors facing the northern neighbourhoods it is essential to be aware of the impact that this project can have. There could potentially be the danger that the new building volume disturbs the historic skyline seen from the Svatovitska street. When defining the building height of


the new apartment building it would in my opinion be relevant to carefully analyse the impact on this skyline from Svatovitska street or other sitelines.

2. Given the profound historic analysis of the site I am surprised that the design doesn't pay much attention to the way the existing fortification wall is integrated into the project. In my opinion it is rather essential to work on the direct connection of the historic layer, the valuable baroque wall, with the modern addition, a building of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This architecturally interesting constellation is now just shown schematically in the overall sections. It would add an important dimension to the project to see a good solution for integrating this historic fragment and to work it out both on the detail level as well as in the visualisations.
3. By designing a U-shaped building Petr Lhotan creates an opportunity to work on two different atmospheres: the courtyard with the facades defining it and the outer facades facing the surroundings and overlooking various parts of Prague. Petr Lhotan choses to apply the same façade materials and composition principles on both sides. At the same time the building is in its volumetric composition slightly more differentiated around the courtyard. The arguments for a very bright and flat stucco façade in the historic context of the location are not clearly presented. Furthermore, I am asking myself, whether the contrast between the atmosphere of the inner world (the courtyard) and the outer world (the street facades) could have been stronger and more evident. In my opinion the project would have benefited by using additional architectural instruments and methods to increase the difference between those two sides.
4. I appreciate the subtle sequence of spaces from the very public Jeleni street into the semi-public courtyard, the more private communal garden areas and the very private gardens and balconies. However, given the importance of the transition between Jeleni street and the semi-public courtyard more attention could have been paid to the architectural expression of the two entrances on the south side. Furthermore, I have question marks about the walled enclosure in the corner of Jeleni street and Prasneho mostu street. Following the logic of public areas around the project it would in my opinion have been stronger not to enclose this leftover space by a wall.
5. In the presentation a lot of attention has been given to the overall floorplans, sections and facades among the other drawings and the very pleasant 3D visualisations. It is impressive to see this profound amount of work and I want to give my compliments to Petr Lhotan for achieving this level of presentation. However, in my opinion the project and its presentation could have reached another important level by showing a series of conceptual drawings that explain the main design decisions in a visual way. As I have discussed with Petr Lhotan during his online presentation it could be worthwhile to get inspired by architects like for instance MVRDV and their ability to visually explain a complex design in simple conceptual schemes. Doing so would not only have helped me to understand the main choices that have been made but I believe it would also have helped Petr Lhotan to take more conscious and clear decisions. Furthermore, his presentation would have been

more complete by providing extra information on the materialisation and the detailing of this apartment building.

Despite of my questions and my criticism I want to express my full respect for Petr Lhotans ability to work on this very complex and challenging site and to design this large and stimulating housing project.

I propose his diploma project for defence, and I apply the grade B.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jan Bochmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jan Bochmann

Amsterdam, 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2023