

# A&B

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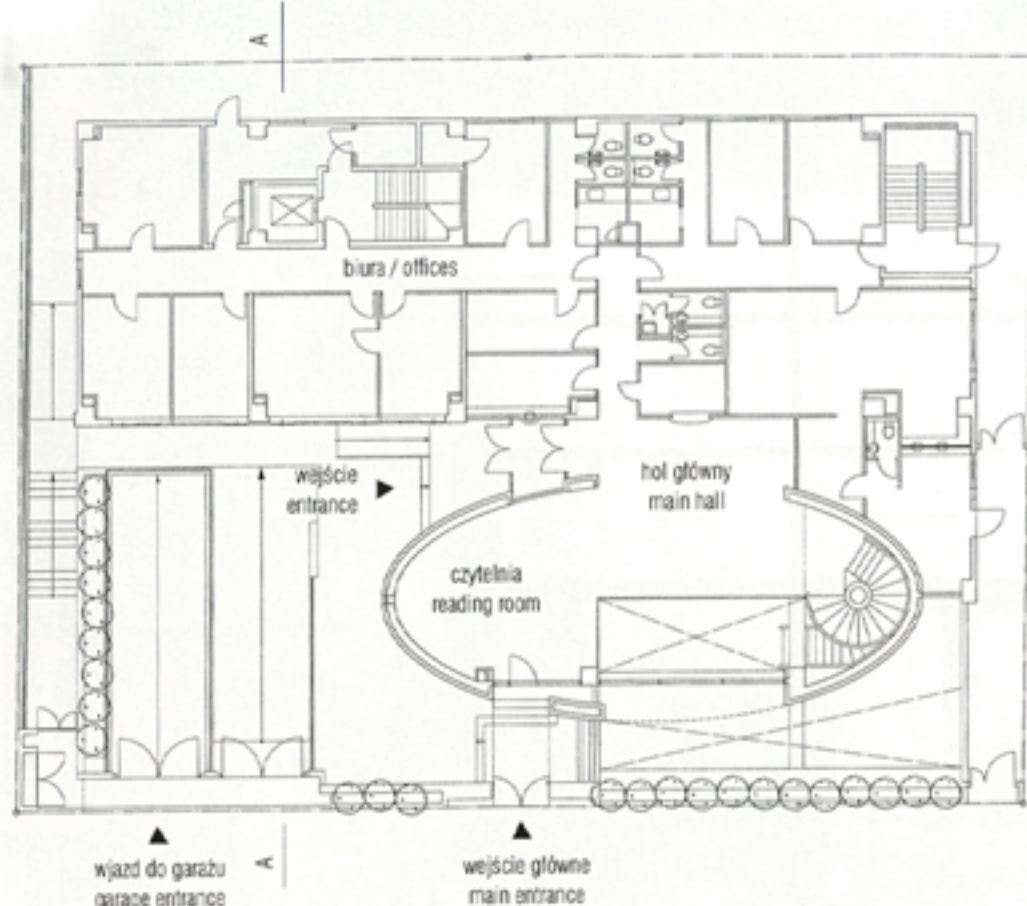


Architektura & Bi  
MIESIĘCZNIK OGÓLNOPI

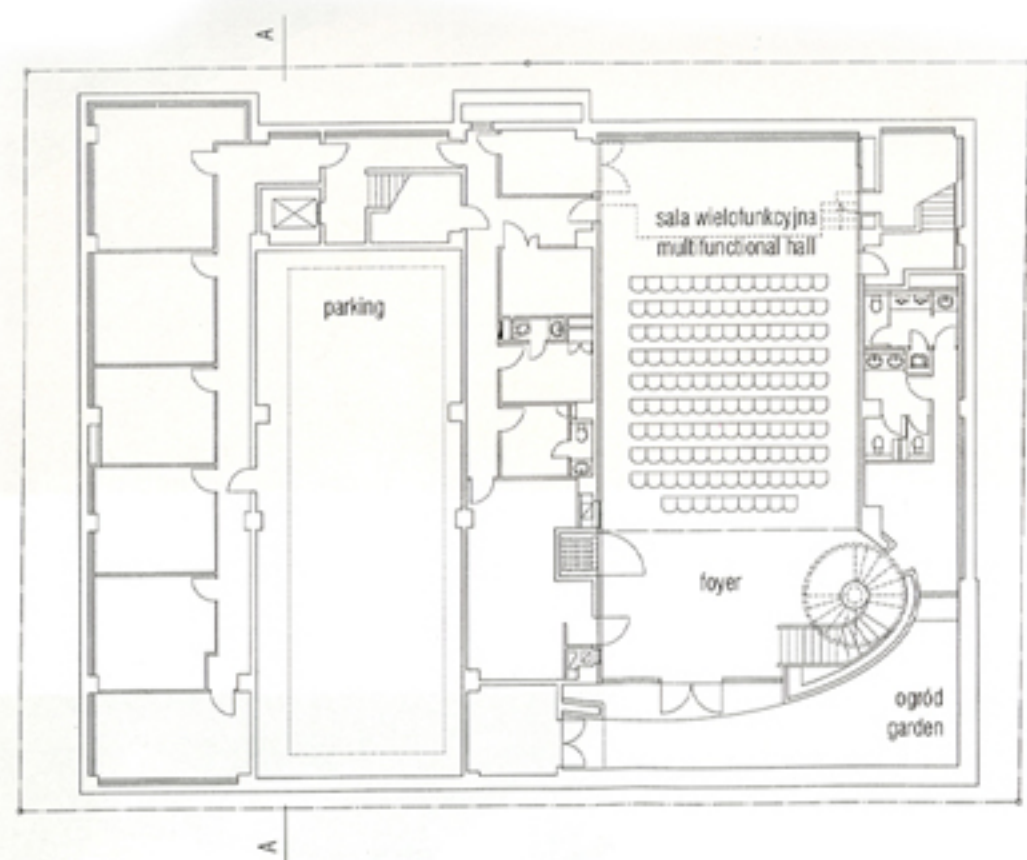
Nowa siedziba Ambasady RP w T  
Lotniska na progu trzeciego tys  
realizacje i projektowe wizje  
Humanizacja *faveli* w Rio de Jan  
Konkurs na przebudowę budynku  
dawnej Biblioteki UW  
Geniusze, artyści, rzemieślnicy –  
dyskusja we wrocławskim Muzeum  
Architektury



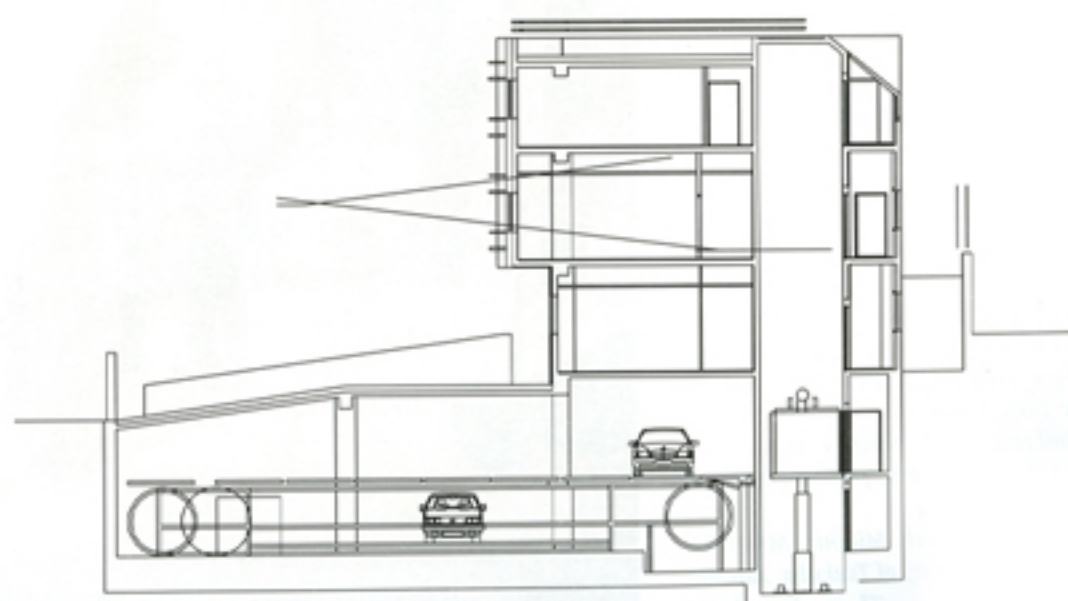




rzut parteru  
ground floor plan



rzut przyziemia  
underground floor plan



przekrój A-A  
section AA

## To see and touch Poland

In the early nineties, the condition of the embassy building in Tokyo became a hazard to the staff. The damage suffered by buildings with reinforced-concrete structures during the earthquake in Kobe forced the relevant authorities to realise the inevitability of renovation. The old structure of the embassy did not meet structural standards, being too weak to sustain a major earthquake and cracks actually appeared on some walls, letting water in. The cost of renovation proved unfeasibly high, so that the old building had to be replaced. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited the largest contractors in Japan to tender their offers to build the new embassy, while in Poland architects with some Japanese design experience were invited to take part in a competition. The preparation of the design required an analysis of the local regulations and conditions.

Our team started work by obtaining the maps and Japanese catalogues through Japanese architectural practices (A. Isozaki & Associates, Hori Architects). We gathered data on the sunlight standards and conditions, and also on technologies for the construction of mechanical car parks (Mitsubishi). Great importance, even at the competition masterplan stage, was also attached to the preliminary consultations regarding the anti-seismic structural design, and this enabled us to start our work on planning the functional layout in full awareness of these issues. The client selected our team's architectural masterplan on the Polish side, and then in Japan, a firm called Taisei was chosen for both construction and design work. The Taisei design practice prepared the construction design and at that stage our structural layout was only slightly modified. Close cooperation between both practices during work on the documentation, and our architectural supervision over the construction process, made it possible to select finish materials of adequate quality without exceeding the limited project budget. The embassy building, which is





a prestigious public facility, was erected very economically, and the cost of one square metre was kept down to the level of regular apartment houses.

The rather small plot held by the Polish Government had to be developed in such a way as to ensure that the size and shape of the new building suited the scale of the street on which it is located, creating as large an open public space as possible in front of it. The local planning restrictions were very harsh: maximum height—12m; maximum ratio of interior space to total plot area—200 percent; maximum percentage of land coverage: 60. Due to the small throughput of the narrow road on which the plot is located, the size of the car park was limited to 300sqm. A mechanical car park was the only solution that would accommodate 16 cars on such an area.

The residential nature of the Meguro-ku district had to be respected, and then the new building required some official character, although not ostentatiously showing demand for prestige. We proposed an open space in the entrance zone of the plot to afford some breathing space amidst the cramped structures along the street. A real puzzle to be solved was the wide range of functions that had to be placed up front: three separate entrance gates (to the Consulate, the main entrance, and access to staff apartments); then the driveway at the main entrance, the gate leading to the underground car park, and also the garden; greenery and additional lighting for the foyer of the multifunctional auditorium. Our analysis of the possible arrangements of these functions made us conclude that the only layout that would meet all the requirements was an L-shaped building opening onto the south. The prestigious/representative and public zone was situated in the front, oval part of the 'L'. This oval building accommodated the main entrance, a reading room, a foyer and a cloakroom, as well as a spiral staircase leading upwards to the ambassador's office and downwards to the foyer of the multifunctional auditorium. The embassy functions were generally divided into office and representative ones, and then into those that

can be situated above ground or under ground. Office spaces were placed in the building based on an elongated, slightly trapezoid plan, situated in the rear part of the plot. The top storey of this part contains staff apartments and guest rooms, with easy access to the roof terrace, partly covered with greenery, affording them the only opportunity (within the plot) for some recreation in the open air and for admiring the panorama of Tokyo. The underground part contains the mechanical car park and the multifunctional auditorium with about 120 seats plus a foyer which can be opened up by shifting the acoustically-insulated partition walls; the space of the foyer is continued by that of the garden designed in a slightly lowered part of the plot. The multifunctional auditorium has a conference audio-visual system, a movable stage, a fully-fledged stage-lighting system and adequate acoustics, all of which facilitate the organisation of conferences, concerts, banquets, film shows, promotional events, etc. i.e. a diverse presentation of Polish economy and culture.

Should a diplomatic outpost—aside from its official public and representative functions—also represent Poland by showing an affinity to Polish architectural tradition? If so, what is the 'Polishness' of architecture that could be legibly conveyed in Japan? "The question is not new, but it re-emerges with every new project, affording the architect yet another opportunity to find an answer. Poland is located on the outskirts of the sphere of classical architecture, yet the Polish motifs of the Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque styles are too weak in terms of expression to enable someone—by showing some affinity to them—to create a building that would be clearly Polish in its character. A definitely Polish type of building is e.g. the landed gentry's manor house, or rural houses built in regional styles. But this type of architecture is not feasible in the centre of Tokyo, on a small plot of 10a, without a proper driveway, a park or any surrounding space. And then these are not public types of buildings anyway, so it is not among these that the

architect should look for the right answers. Having failed to find an adequate model of reference, I decided to forego any iconic presentation of affinity with Polish architecture, but I did deem it important to present the connection between the new architecture and Polish tradition.

And, although the design rejects iconic representation, it does use an indirect affinity with Polish tradition through signs at the 'index' level (in Ch. S. Peirce's terminology). The idea was to make the building convey all manner of sensual information that can be encountered in Polish architecture through experience based on touch and perception of colour. The Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow was used as the symbolic point of reference for Polish architecture, in terms of the selection of finish materials. As a sort of homage to the castle, materials such as sandstone and creeper-covered brick were used. The colours of the finish work are based around the natural colour of brick (a material that is not used in Japan traditionally), light sandstone, oakwood in the spiral stairs in the entrance hall, raw concrete and black and black shale in the stone floor.

The design also includes a remote metaphor in the form of a brick building situated in the front part of the plot. Its oval form with a large opening of the front window and entrance, along with the drawbridge-shaped glass roof above the entrance, can be treated as a remote reminiscence of the historical barbican—a building that invites you to enter the town with its wide-open gate and drawbridge.

The combination of contemporary simple and legible forms with traditional materials is intended as a symbol of today's Poland—a country in reconstruction—as well as a means of conveying to the Japanese guests of the embassy the most immediate sensual information on the Polish tradition of construction which they are bound to encounter when visiting the former Polish royal capital.

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