

Mezi lukami (Čeladná, Czech Republic, 2021)

architect, interior design & garden: Daniela Hradilová

*from book*

**Hauser & Menschen/ HOUSES & PEOPLE**

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*/ Not a conservation, but a conversation. Ulrich Stefan Knoll*

Irrespective of the majority of Europe, small miracles happen again and again at the foot of the Beskydy Mountains in the northeastern Czech Republic.

The western foothills of the Carpathians are, thank God, not yet visited by a large number of tourists, and here one is still below the radar of the international bucket lists.

Which in turn doesn't bother Czech designer Daniela Hradilova and her husband Petr much, quite the contrary. Like their guests today, they consciously sought peace and quiet and closeness to nature more than 20 years ago. And in return, they left the hustle and bustle of the city of Ostrava behind them. Her move to the 2800-strong resort Čeladná may have led her only 40 kilometres south, but definitely into a completely different world.

In 2017, they opened their boutique hotel Mezi Plutky (Between Fences) here, which has met with international approval from guests and the press alike. Why the hotel is so well received is easy to understand when you follow the renovation work on their new guesthouse: Mezi Lukami (Between Meadows). The new house for four (ev plus two more in the living room) guests is within walking distance of the Boutique Hotel and is open from June 2021.

### **Old places are able to live new life**

It all began with the fact that the former owners themselves could no longer take care of the building, which had been frequently rebuilt and thus distorted, and therefore entrusted it to Daniela and Petr three years ago.

House No. 33 is a rather simple wooden house from the beginning of the 19th century and was built in the typical style of Moravian Wallachia. The house was originally built in two parts: An entrance hall, which also served as a black kitchen, divided the house in the middle. On one side there was the main living room and on the other an agricultural area. It was not until later that small cow barn was housed in a separate building, so that this room could be used from then on as a storage room with access to the cellar. The main house itself sits on a stone pedestal in the middle of a meadow. So far, so unspectacular. But anyone who knows the owners and constantly observes the progress of construction will suspect that something special is being created here.

In numerous conversations Daniela and her husband gained first insights into the intricate history of the house, one of the oldest on site. And, even if some historical facts could not be recovered from the darkness of history and many stories remained partly without end or without beginning: The anecdotes made the building, the former everyday life and the traditional values visible like a silhouette.

This is one of the Czech designer's special talents: Daniela Hradilova obviously has a very pronounced, holistic feeling for the place itself and its individual history. From this and from the found objects on site, she develops its future materiality.

Her ability to create larger contexts from unspoken words and unofficially recorded facts through close observation, to read between the lines, as it were, requires a large portion of intuition, patience and patience again.

„An essential aspect that all my projects have in common is that they are created with a lot of thought and great peace of mind. I approach them as if on tiptoe - with respect and humility for the buildings and the people who lived there or who will live there. And somewhere "in between" continuity emerges. Emotions are the greatest good we have.

And then there is the unlimited BETWEEN itself is, which is what matters the most. The relations and touches of things, synchronicity. If we notice them, then the new we create can be "perfect", truthful and beautiful all at once.”

As with her first boutique hotel Mezi plutky and the other construction projects of the last 15 years, predominantly hotel and restaurant conversions, the individual way of approaching the respective buildings is immediately noticeable during our discussions and visible through the plans and conversion measures.

### **Design 1:1, on spot**

Especially Hradilova's approach is quite a bit. For example, she always designs in the 1:1 situation, i.e. on site, and exclusively with the pen. Only at a much later point in time do these results flow into technical drawings on the PC in an almost final form.

**Not only the knowledge about the history of the house has a great influence, but as well as the property and its direct and further surroundings.** Especially the latter, because it was there long before the project, holds many memories and tells valuable stories to those who can listen.

„To design is like to swing, to leave and come back, to compare.

To add and take the weight, on the very old scale.. To get close and look from a distance (or from underneath). It is a never-ending desire for balance and a children game as well.”

**She also describes (or understands) her approach as the respectful handling of old buildings, which never has a pure reconstruction as its goal, but is always designed as the retelling of the existing story. Her main focus is on continuity, which in her opinion is an essential aspect for our own peace and contentment. When this constancy merges with respect for the traditional, strength is created, she is firmly convinced of it.**

"I draw more than 'reality', I draw the vision of it”.

The aim of this vision is to create spaces or a place that not only makes the dignity of the building shine again, but also invites people to linger - quite no museum-ally.

Whether sleeping, dreaming, having breakfast, reading, cooking, simply being, switching off, reflecting or discussing - Daniela sees and develops the places for the simple and wonderful idleness of the future guests well in advance. Even while the house itself is still an untouched (half) ruin.

„The desire for adventure, which could happen here:

The pavement through which somebody walks with a glass of wine to an evening terrace, the terrace, to which somebody runs barefoot from the bedroom, to the bedroom, which faces the trees through the windows, the trees we planted, corner of the garden, to where a ball is rolling... I do not shorten the way - how will the guests perceive the place, use it? - I only inspire them, help them to connect with it, in their own way.”

### **Living craftsmanship**

**Last but not least - to feel materials**

In the case of Mezi Lukami, she will also revive the existing substance with high-quality traditional craftsmanship. And to transfer the house through subtle but effective additions into one of the present and the future.

Simple, found "ingredients" such as the dominating natural stone and wood elements are added selectively and in harmony with the materiality of the building: where once was the entrance hall, the central living area of the house will be created in the future, where will stand only the large couch from which the view wanders out through a discreetly integrated glass passageway. Former passageway will be discreetly covered by glass, so that there could appear "strong" dining table like a centre of family life with unlimited view to the meadows. This scene will be finished by exceptional light MOON by Davide Groppi. There are similar plans for the stone kitchen to stage the opulent in simplicity. Thanks to a few inconspicuous and ingenious interventions, it will in future not only become an island of tastes and smells, but - as it feels - more in the garden than indoors. In general, the garden: it will literally come to the house's body, inside and outside should merge as much as possible.

Thank God there are still representatives of the various trades in the Beskydy Mountains who understand the necessary traditional craft techniques. Because only in this way is the demanding task at the high level conceivable at all. It is good that Daniela Hradilova has been able to build up the best relationships for many years and can rely on her "team".

„If I did not have a team of long-time and experienced craftsmen, I could never have a go at renovating houses. I have known the joiners who actually work at Between Meadows for ten years now - we feel like at home in their workshop. And I am grateful for each of them, because especially at this time when the craft is mostly disappearing, their work and relation to it is like a miracle.

The biggest expert to my opinion is respect, virtuous work, pride in it, clear eyes and overworked hands...there is nobody I take more serious than people like this.

*from **interview with Ulrich Stefan Knoll**  
Concerning the house itself  
Do you know how old the building is?*

*The timbered house was built at the dawn of the 19th century under one of the very first street numbers of the Čeladná village. Searching for its history, for its story is a tale of its own within which the need to determine and mark events in space and time was interrupted by moments spent with people who - rather than remembering something specific and real - revealed what they really cared about.. they reflected and recalled, they spoke at length, mentioning tens of names, starting to tell tales without and end, ending up finishing tales without a beginning, complex tumbled stories of history. And somewhere "in between" continuity is born. Emotions are all we have.*

*We bought the house two years ago as the family who used to live here weren't able to keep looking after it. They entrusted it to us. It was deserted. Having undergone hundreds of modifications and neglected, as time and money came and went by. We will - enchanted by the beauty of the place and continuity of the moment - try to move on. We will do so with great respect toward tradition, slowly touch after touch. We will try to develop the colors and to remind ourselves of materials, to keep the plants in the garden, to come back, to carry on as good as we are able to.*

*To what extent is the building and its original structure (rooms) still in its original condition? Even though a lot disappeared and we had to put it back - beamed walls, shingle roof, all the time we were standing on our own feet, on the original foundations which we saved and repaired - the silhouettes from the old stone are what makes us go forward.*

*We recognized the house and the passage and the cow barn. We transformed them into house, passage and cow barn, actually the kitchen. Where used to be a shed, there appears the bathroom. We renewed the porch, so there is not windy at the entrance. The dining room can be found in the passage.*

*Everything that we have found in the house, we guard very carefully. And even more - we put the windows and doors, which were shifted during the previous reconstructions, back to where they belong. We yearned to find them, the old places. We put back even more, then we have found.*

*What are the main characteristics of this type of building in your area?*

*Our house like a typical house for this region is a timbered bungalow with a rectangular layout, divided into three sections, each of which was assigned its special role. The entry hall in the centre of the house also served as black kitchen - with the room on one side (which served as the main living and social space) on the one side and the farming space on the other. The farming and animal keeping area originally included a pen which - after an outer and separate pen had been built outside the house - was used as a storage room with access to the cellar. At the entry into/ exit out of the hall a patio used to be located as well as a shelter both forming a lee area and serving as a wood or tools storage area.*

*The house is situated along the longitudinal side and follows the slope, it coincides with the surrounding meadows.*

*((We very carefully record and reinstate all of the signature elements of a Wallachian building, the remnants is which we had discovered. We replace the damaged wooden parts by manually carved fir tree logs and beams - we connect them together in the old traditional way using no screws nor nails.))*

*And which of them will you be able to receive one to one or will you have to transfer carefully into modernity?*

*We preserve whatever we can..*

*Original - layout, stone foundations, whole stone cow barn*

*Renovated*

*- wooden beams - walls and roof beams, floors (painted exclusively by natural oils or waxes)*

*- stone flooring (we used 150 years old stones from another lost houses)*

*We put back the things, which even used to miss here for a while..*

*- shingle roof*

*- the sizes, styles and positions of windows and doors*

*& we continue..*

*We put new life into an old house, we start to live in it, that is why, on the original layout, there are 2 bedrooms for guests (there is the floor from old workbenches) and a generous living room - we opened it by doors to the passage and by wooden stairs to the top of the roof. In the attic, you can find unexpected space with two*

*cabins with many cushions and blankets for reading, relaxing and dreaming. In these rooms, the walls are painted by white natural color to remember the local old house atmosphere.*

*We separated the passage between the house and the cow barn from the surrounding meadows just by a glass - a minimalistic filling. Then we placed there a modern dining table and bench by designers from Studio Segers/ Czech brand Todus and we topped it off by the light MOON by Italian designer Davide Groppi. You can find other lamp by Davide Groppi, Neuro, in the living room.*

*We cleaned the stone cow barn and turned it into the kitchen (Reform Copenhagen), unexpected island for tastes and smells and fire thanks to modern wooden stove (Firebelly, England).*

*On the place, where used to be a shed, is a bathroom opened to the garden (Mutina, Zucchetti, Ceramica Flaminia, Villeroy & Boch). Outside the house there are terraces from old stone around the restored well and in front of the house, there are armchairs and sofas for dreaming. We are planting ancient sorts of fruit trees and flowers, including wild strawberries.*

*The building BETWEEN MEADOWS is not a conservation, but a conversation, mostly with us ourselves.*

*Is there a plan, what do the dimensions of the building look like?*

*the layout of the main house has the dimensions 7x19m and it includes a log part, a passage and a cow barn, which is connected to a renovated terrace (2x4m) and to a stone outhouse (instead of the original shed) (3x10m)*

*Are you working with traditional craftsmen?*

*Are there still many craftsmen in your area who master the traditional techniques? In what trades? And what are the special challenges there?*

*If I did not have a team of long-time and experienced craftsmen, I could never have a go at renovating houses. I have known the joiners who work at BETWEEN MEADOWS for 10 years - we feel like at home in their workshop. And when they stop by at any of our older projects to repair something they always say that it is beautiful.. And that they like working for me the most. Whether it is an exaggeration or not, there is nearly nothing that could make me happier. Same as the stonemasons or the plumbers, I am grateful for each of these meetings because at this time when the craft is disappearing, their work and relation to it is like a miracle.*

*And there is one more miracle: at the beginning of the project, I approached to one of the best firms, which has a specialization in renovations of log buildings in Bohemia and Moravia (at this moment they finished a reconstruction of a burned out building in Pustevny by the architect Dusan Jurkovic - Libusin). Even though they were very busy, their visit BETWEEN FENCES made them say YES: we will help you BETWEEN MEADOWS.*

*And then they brought hewn fir wood which smelled all around us. And they began to put them together, beam after beam, touch after touch, without nail nor screw, JUST WITH OLD JOINS, wooden pickets. And they did not talk, only concentrated. And the work grew under their hands and we had tears in the eye..*

*Will the restoration be carried out on the basis of an expert opinion?*

*The biggest expert is the RESPECT.*

*( I have experienced experts from the National Heritage Institute, which asked me about everything during the tour of our own reconstructed cultural heritage and the same way touched by it.)*

*The biggest expert is the respect and experience, virtuous work, pride in it, clear eyes and overworked hands. There is nobody I take more seriously than people like them.*

*We see the reconstruction of the timber cottage in the midst of a meadow at the foot of the Beskydy mountains ridges as an opportunity of a link with the original vernacular architecture.*

*Continuity is our focus and our topic. Continuity brings calmness to our lives. Respecting the old and valuable gives us strength.*

*In the mountains of Wallachia (a trilogy in the east of Moravia which is geographically difficult to determine precisely) pine logs were used a lot for buildings; spruce and fir trees from the surrounding deep forests. The technology used by the carpenters back then was referred to as kerb timbering - the round trunks of trees were manually chiselled down into logs and connected at the corners of the future cottage by a variety of ways.*

*We are preparing replicas of the original wooden scuncheon windows in heavyweight beam frames. We will place them at the very spots where the traces we found on the structure indicated the windows were originally planted.*

*The renewed roof trussing - which had recently been covered by metal sheets - will reunite with the manually split shakes made of larch. The local stones will revitalise the chimney and the foundation wall of the house.*

*The new story Between Meadows is about continuity. We respect what we found as well as whatever we shall find. We see the repairs as renewal, as a conversation nor a conservation. Old places are able to live new lives.*

*We will remember every place, every moment and we will transform the room, the hall onto a living room with a comfortable sofa and stairs, leading into the cellar where the wine is stored.*

*The pen and every piece of rock in the one will be cleaned, fixed, added, outspoken. So that the kitchen which smells and tastes great becomes alive, kitchen that is more in the garden than it's inside and a garden that is more inside than has ever been before .  
At the need and at the beginning - we connect everything. By the glass of a drive through which had not been missing in the past but won't be redundant in the presence. Space to stay, to sleep, to dream, to wake up, to have breakfast or to just stop for a while and just to be. Somewhere in between the entirety..*

## **PHOTO**

Romana Bennet

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