Origin

Folk architecture is a typical phenomenon of a nation's material culture. Material culture quite precisely and truthfully characterizes its creator, his possibilities and needs, wealth and poverty, his intellectual capacity, and sense for life's reality and poetry. In folk architecture, the people’s feeling for material, their skills, craftsmanship, ingenuity, and erudition are mirrored through concrete forms. The village is the oldest form of Central European settlement in which folk architecture has evolved in the course of several thousand years. The territory of Czechoslovakia, located in the heart of Europe, has served as a natural intersection of different ethnic groups which since antiquity exchanged knowledge and experience from all spheres of life. The cultural heritage of the Czech and Slovak peoples was shaped by local and national geographic, climatic, and societal conditions, as well as by constant human interaction with their neighbors.

Folk architecture in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia can be considered as a national and homogenous expression. This expression has molded together many of the aspirations of these peoples through their particular concepts, sensitivity, and creative realizations.¹

Folk architecture is not just a by-product of the historic styles. Often, it was the foundation of a guide to a stylistic period. Jan Vydra, a Czech expert on folk architecture, sees the factor of originality in Slovak folk architecture as greater than that in Czech. “Slovak folk architecture,” he says, “is less dependent on historic architectural canons. The people themselves were the carriers of architectonic ideas. The architectural expression stemmed from their needs and their notions of beauty.”²

The values of Slovak architecture are—owing to the built environment's sensitive coherence with the terrain, its harmonious proportions, poetic coloring, constructive ingenuity, richness of forms—considerably higher. The Slo-

¹. The best recent work on folk architecture in Czechoslovakia is the comprehensive book of Václav Menc, Lidová architektura v Československu (Praha: Academia, 1980). Organized by regions and by building types, the well-illustrated 630-page book is an authoritative analysis of indigenous architecture in Czechoslovakia. Menc started his field research, which is documented by scale drawings in the volume, in 1925.

vak architect feels indebted to preserve folk architecture not just because of the national heritage and historic values but also because of his desire for continuity in the contemporary creations of architecture. Looking at specific examples of these values, we see color richly manifested in the exteriors of houses in Ždiar (Northeastern Slovakia), in Čičmany (Central Slovakia), and in interior decorations of houses in Viničné (Western Slovakia). The villages of Šumiac, Vlkolinec (both Central Slovakia) and Jakubiny (Northern Slovakia) are good examples of sensitive siting in the natural environment. The houses in Horná Lehota in the Orava Region (Northeastern Slovakia) and in Veľké Borové (Central Slovakia) exhibit well-balanced massing of the whole as well as the proportional relationship of all architectural parts. The exuberant forms of the churches in Paluža and Hybe in the Liptov Region (Central Slovakia) and in Ladomírová (Eastern Slovakia) are the result of the ingenious structure and construction of these buildings.

The effort of learning from the indigenous architecture in Slovakia has been evident in a number of contemporary realizations. The Czechoslovak Koliba Restaurant built for the world expositions in Brussels and Montréal was designed in the overall form and the detailing intended to evoke the feelings of folk architecture in Slovakia. Similarly, designs of the hotels, cafés, cultural centers, and other buildings in the mountains of the High and Low Tatras draw from the forms and materials of the traditional peasant house and the homestead architecture of the region.

There are, basically, two types of folk architecture in Czechoslovakia: Wooden architecture (log, timber, post construction) located in the highlands and mountains, such as Krkonoše, Beskydy, Orava, and Tatras; and masonry architecture (sun-dried and fired bricks, stone construction) built in the lowlands, including Chodsko, Haná, the Danube region, and Eastern Slovakia. Folk architecture performs a variety of functions such as houses, buildings in the genre of homesteads, barns, hay, straw and corn shelters, fixed and floating water mills, inns, churches, belfries, cemeteries, and folk manufacturies. This by no means exhausts the examples.3

Slovakia

The beginnings of purposeful endeavors aimed at the preservation of folk architecture in Slovakia date back as far as the end of the nineteenth century, when the Slovak Museal Society was founded in 1893. The initiator of these ideas was Andrej Kmet’,4 a nestor of Slovak museology. These attempts re-