

Gunnar Asplund's proposal for furniture adapted to the architecture in conjunction with the extension of the City Hall in 1936. Drawn on sketch paper.

Museum of Architecture/Matti Östling

Higab

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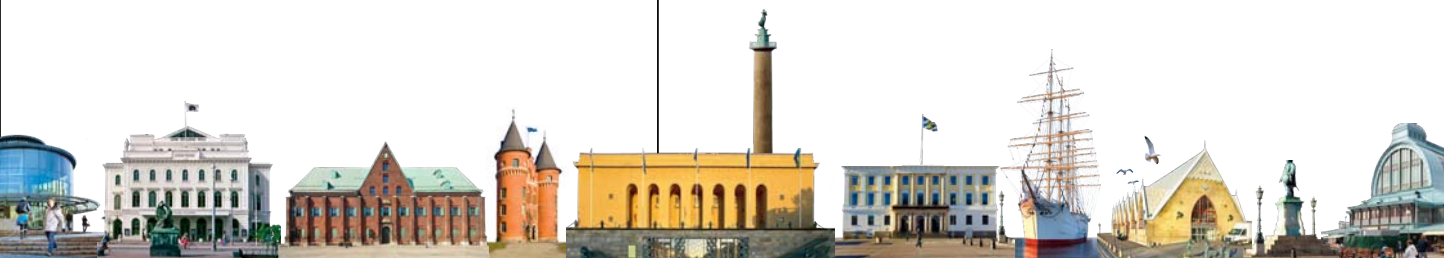
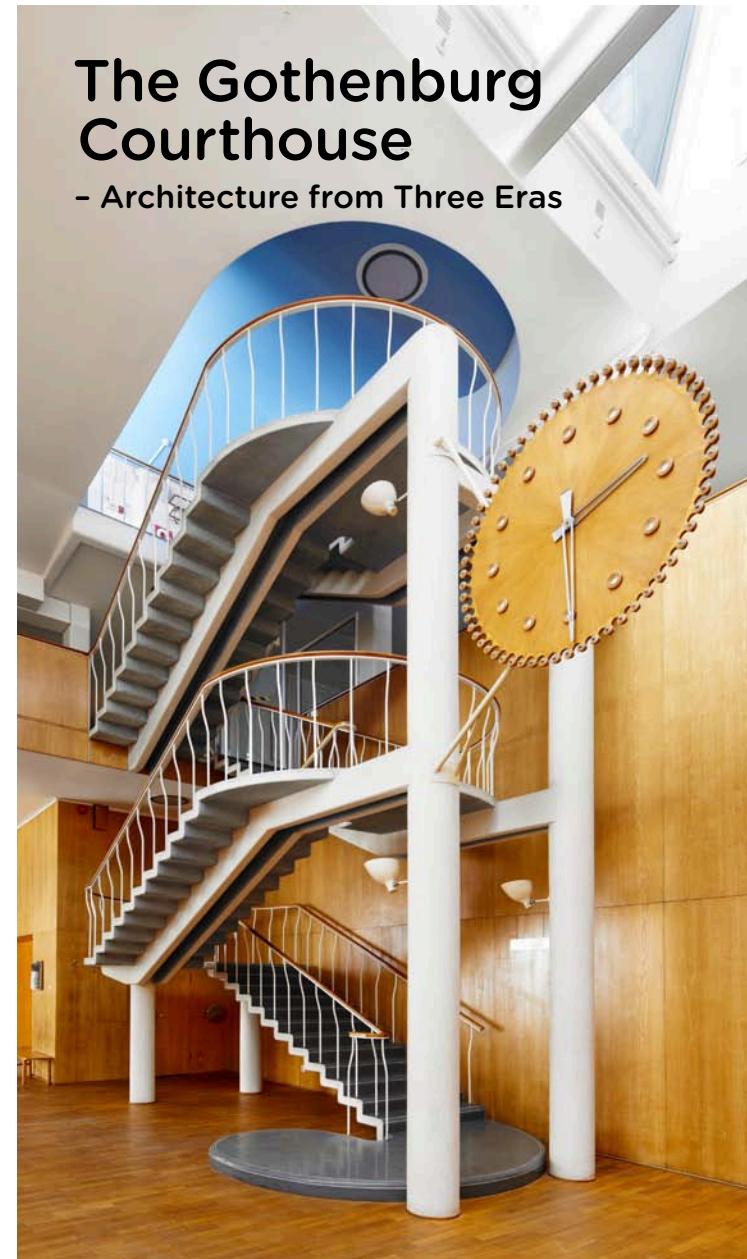


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The Gothenburg Courthouse

- Architecture from Three Eras



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History

The present Gothenburg Courthouse (“Rådhuset” in Swedish) is actually the third to be built on the same site on Gustaf Adolfs torg. The city’s governing body has been housed there ever since Gothenburg was first granted its charter and for some time the building served as both Courthouse and City Hall.

The first Courthouse was a small wooden building that had been relocated from Nya Lödöse. The building was removed from the square in 1624 and in its place a larger Courthouse was constructed, complete with towers. Also built of wood, it was inaugurated in 1626. The building was unfortunately destroyed in a major fire in 1669. In 1672, a new Courthouse was constructed, this time in stone and designed by Nikodemus Tessin the elder. The finest room in the building was the large assembly hall, which was used for concerts and festive events. A popular inn was housed in the cellar.

Extensive redevelopment of the Courthouse was planned in 1813 by the city architect at the time Carl Wilhelm Carlberg. His successor, Jonas Hagberg, prepared the final drawings and the redevelopment was completed in 1817. The plans included the construction of a third floor and to accommodate this, the building was clad in a brick shell. This resulted in the building acquiring its classicist design, which even today remains its most characteristic feature. The facades are rendered in Dutch brick and facing the square the exterior has a striking centre section with a balcony, columns and decorative features in natural stone. In 1835, a courtyard wing was constructed to the north and in 1869 a large extension was added towards the neighbouring church.

Asplund’s extension

By the beginning of the last century, the City Court and the borough administrators had outgrown the premises. Further expansion was necessary and in 1912 an architectural competition was announced. The winner was Gunnar Asplund with his proposal for an extension in classicist/baroque style. However, it took until 1934 before a decision was made to go through with the project. By then the original proposal had been amended several times and the style was now functionalist. The extension was completed in 1936. The facade is rendered and the internal walls are clad in wood. The interior is dominated by the large hall with its roof lights and glass walls facing the courtyard. In conjunction with the extension, the interior of the older Courthouse building was modernised. Gunnar Asplund was also commissioned to design furniture, lamps and fabrics for the extension.

The Courthouse extension is regarded as one of Asplund’s foremost works and it is nowadays internationally renowned. However, it was far from an immediate success at the time – the people of Gothenburg were appalled by the functionalist style and criticism of the building persisted for many years. Today the extension is a source of pride for the city and in 1982 it was declared a listed building. The older part was listed back in 1968. The Courthouse reflects the architecture of three different eras.

Redevelopment

In 2010, Gothenburg District Court moved to the newly constructed Judicial Centre on Ullevigatan. In 2012, extensive renovation and redevelopment of the Courthouse commenced to house the city’s political leaders. The vision was to bring

about greater transparency and accessibility. As the Gothenburg Courthouse is a listed building, the work required meticulous preparation and considerable care in its execution. Existing materials have acquired a new lustre and worn parts have been replaced. Rooms with significant cultural and historical value, and which are subject to a preservation order, have been adapted using modern technology. In the areas where changes were more accepted, new rooms were created and working environments were designed to satisfy modern-day requirements. Everything has taken place in consultation with the County Administrative Board and the City Planning Office. Wood and stone restorers are just some of the specialists who have been involved. Selected fittings and Asplund’s original furniture have also been inspected and restored.

A great deal of work has been devoted to research in order to reinstate the colour of the facade of the extension as envisaged by Gunnar Asplund. On the older part, certain natural stone features were painted during previous renovations. These have now been restored and the facade has been painted to harmonise with the extension as Asplund had originally intended. The redevelopment was completed in the beginning of 2014.

Main parties involved in the development, 2012-2014:

Commissioned by: Higab
Client: Gothenburg City Council
Architect: GAJD Arkitekter
Building Conservation: Lindholm Restaurering AB
Main Contractor: Tuve Bygg AB