





# Tančící dům

## Iconic Buildings



**Jiří Chroustovský**  
[jchroustovsky@deloittece.com](mailto:jchroustovsky@deloittece.com)

The Dancing House, as one of the few Czech modern buildings, ranks among iconic constructions not only in the Czech Republic but also worldwide. In 1997, the building received the highest award in the prestigious design contest of the Time magazine. In a Czech survey conducted by the Architekt magazine, the Dancing House was listed as one of the five most important buildings in the 1990s. Because of its unusual shape resembling two dancers, the building is sometimes nicknamed "Fred and Ginger", at the initiative of one of the architects, Frank Gehry. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were an iconic American dancing couple in the 1930s.

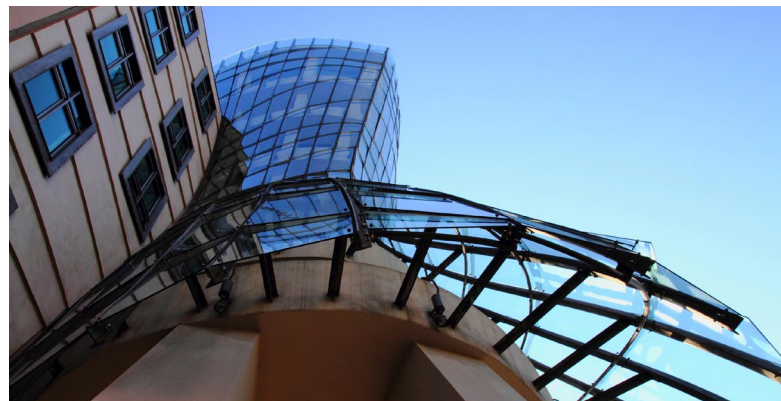
### The Dancing House was built in place of a bombed-out house

The Dancing House was built on a vacant site on the Rašín Embankment which resulted from the unfortunate U.S. bombing of Prague in 1945. This air raid also damaged the Emmaus Monastery and the synagogue in the Vinohrady district. Although a decision on the development of the site was already passed in 1963, the construction was only commenced after the "Velvet Revolution". The creation of the Dancing House is connected with numerous coincidences. In 1986, the architect Vlado Milunić was asked by Václav Havel to prepare a study concerning the division of an apartment in the adjacent house that belonged to the Havel's family. As part of the project, Havel and Milunić discussed the idea of building a cultural centre at the vacant site. After the Velvet Revolution, Václav Havel, the former "public enemy no. 1", suddenly happened to become the most renowned person in the country. Based on their previous discussion, Havel asked Milunić to prepare a study of a corner building intended for cultural purposes.

The building was designed jointly by Vlado Milunić and Frank Gehry. The project appealed to Paul Koch from the Dutch company Nationale Nederlanden (current ING). This company bought the plot in 1992. Although the original intention was to create a building that would follow a cultural link stretching from Rudolfinum to the Mánes gallery and house a library, café and a theatre, the investor, Nationale Nederlanden, insisted on the building's commercial utilisation. The original intention thus had to be abandoned. At first, Vlado Milunić approached Jean Nouvel with an offer for cooperation. Nevertheless, Milunić's offer was only accepted by Frank Gehry who, among other things, designed buildings for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in Spain. Frank Gehry, a world-famous architect as well as an ice hockey fan, allegedly said that he could never refuse to help the country where Jaromír Jágr was born.

### Parameters of the building

The foundation stone was laid down on 3 September 1994 and the building was completed in 1996. The construction lies on a ferroconcrete



board which is supported by a set of bored piles. A total of 99 original facade panels are attached to the ferroconcrete construction. The building has nine floors vertically divided into two parts and two underground storeys. Due to the round shape of the building, each floor is different. The total usable floor area of the building is 3,796 sqm which is allocated to office premises located on the first six floors (2,907 sqm), commercial premises on the first floor and on the ground floor (390 sqm), and a restaurant (492 sqm) on the top floor. The interesting architectonic design is certainly one of the assets of the Dancing House; nevertheless, the utilisation of its interior premises is rather difficult. The offices are as narrow as the building itself and the hallways resemble tiny ship corridors. However, this was cleverly utilised by the architect Eva Jiřičná whose interior design for the building features numerous nautical elements. The fame of the Dancing House is primarily attributable to Frank Gehry who claimed the house to be his favourite building. He even placed its picture on the cover of his monograph.

### Return to the cultural purpose

Since 2011, the building has been owned by CBRE Global Investors which acquired it as part of the takeover of European and Asian assets of ING Real Estate Investment Management. In 2013, the house was sold at CZK 360 million to Pražská správa nemovitostí owned by Václav Skala. The building thus had a Czech owner for the first time in its existence. At present, the Dancing House partly approximates the utilisation as originally intended. The building houses a gallery entitled "Galerie Art Salon S" presenting contemporary young talented artists from the Czech Republic and abroad. At the beginning of 2016, the glass bar and the gallery on the top floor were newly opened to the public, offering a beautiful view of the Hradčany and Malá Strana districts.

*[The interview with Paul Koch, a representative of ING in the 1990s and the man who promoted the construction of the Dancing House, is on page 8.](#)*