technical transactions

No. 2026/006

architecture and urban planning

Paradigm

Problems of preservation and restoration of former tenement houses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (using the example of Kyiv)

Yulia Ivashko

yulia-ivashko@ukr.net | https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4525-9182

Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture,
Faculty of Architecture

Dominika Kuśnierz-Krupa

dkusnierz-krupa@pk.edu.pl | https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1678-4746

Cracow University of Technology,
Faculty of Architecture

Scientific Editor: Mateusz Gyurkovich, Cracow University of Technology
Technical Editor: Dorota Sapek, Cracow University of Technology Press
Typesetting: Anna Pawlik, Cracow University of Technology Press

Received: January 26, 2026
Accepted: February 17, 2026

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Citation: Ivashko, Y., Kuśnierz-Krupa, D. (2026). Problems of preservation and restoration of former tenement houses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (using the example of Kyiv). *Technical Transactions, e2026006*. https://doi.org/10.37705/TechTrans/e2026006

Abstract

The article examines the stylistic features of Kyiv's tenement houses from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. It is noted that the then urban planning requirements for street development led to unevenness in terms of architecture, which creates problems today, as secondary streets ended up in the central districts of Kyiv. The main features of tenement houses are identified, and it is argued why pseudo-styles (pseudo-Gothic, pseudo-Renaissance, pseudo-Moorish style) and neo-styles (Art Nouveau) usually remained "facade styles" without manifestations in the layout and interior. The main problems of preserving and using former tenement houses in today's conditions are characterized.

Keywords: problem of preservation, restoration, tenement house, 19th–20th centuries, Kyiv

1. Introduction

The main part of Kyiv's historical development consists of residential buildings from the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries. There are several reasons for this. Only a few churches have survived from ancient Russian times to the present day. After the Tatar-Mongol invasion of 1240, Kyiv lay in ruins for centuries, with the population almost nonexistent, so the Middle Ages and the Renaissance did not significantly influence the city. Kyiv's revival began actively only during the Cossacks' period, specifically in the 17th–18th centuries. During this time, there was active reconstruction of Kyivan Rus' churches in the Baroque style, along with the building of new Orthodox churches and educational institutions. However, most buildings remained wooden, which is why the fire in Podil in 1811 was so devastating. From the times of Classicism and Empire style, only a few churches, palaces, educational institutions, and several residential buildings have survived.

With the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the population of large cities, including Kyiv, began to grow rapidly. These phenomena stimulated architectural and urban development processes, and Kyiv experienced several rounds of so-called "construction booms". At the beginning of the 20th century, a new type of housing replaced the traditional low-rise and medium-rise buildings – an apartment building with rental housing. The emergence of medium- and multi-storey residential buildings on small land plots was due to three main factors: first, the need for maximum profit from the use of the plot, second, the growing demand for housing, and third, the development of technologies and engineering networks, which allowed the construction of larger-scale objects with a higher number of floors. Today, former tenement houses are the main objects of the monument protection register in the central districts of the city; some of the buildings are classified as newly discovered objects or as valuable background buildings.

Even before the full-scale invasion began, there were problems associated with the preservation and restoration of former tenement houses:

- their apartments with an enfilade layout do not meet modern needs;
- apartment owners massively glazed balconies and loggias, which gave the facades a chaotic appearance;
- the original interiors of the apartments were practically destroyed;
- during unprofessional restorations of the facades, decorative elements were lost or distorted, and emergency decorative elements were not restored according to existing samples;
- if the building did not have the status of a local monument and was privately owned, the practice of its deliberate destruction to free up land for new construction became widespread; often, the destruction was carried out contrary to the instructions of the city authorities;
- in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a practice of building a plot with a "façade" house with a beautiful facade and a courtyard wing. When the facade house was not preserved, the inconspicuous wing became visible from the street.

During the full-scale war, some of the former tenement houses in Kyiv, like the buildings of other cities, suffered from blast waves, hits from drones, missiles, and their debris. Residents of damaged and destroyed houses are temporarily relocated to hotels and hostels as needed, and experts inspect the houses. The problem arises when the city authorities issue a conclusion that a partially destroyed house is unfit for habitation, and the residents order their own expert examination, which issues a different conclusion. Since the apartments are privatized, the residents do not consent to the demolition of the building in the central part of the city. This is exactly what happened with the former late 19th-century brick-style tenement house at 116a Zhylianska Street, half of which was destroyed by a drone strike in October 2022. An expert examination initiated by the city authorities concluded that the building was

https://doi.org/10.37705/TechTrans/e2026006

in a state of emergency and that it was impossible to rebuild it. Still, since the apartments are privatized, it is impossible to start dismantling without the consent of all owners.

The purpose of the study: to characterize the features of tenement houses in Kyiv and the problems of preserving and restoring such objects.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- to provide a general description of Kyiv's tenement houses built in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries;
- to identify the objective reasons that led to the unequal architectural character of the historical buildings of various streets in Kyiv;
- to provide examples of applied stylistics in tenement houses.

2. Objective, method, and state of research

The purpose and objectives of the study determined the choice of general scientific research methods. In particular, the method of statistical analysis was used to confirm the conclusions about the dynamics of profitable construction in different periods. The method of historical analysis determined the influence of external factors that contributed to the intensification of construction processes in Kyiv and the history of individual example objects. The method of art historical analysis allowed us to determine the cultural and artistic preferences that led to the dominance of historicism-eclecticism and later the emergence of modernism, and allowed us to analyse the applied figurative techniques. The method of comparative analysis allowed us to compare objects with each other, and the method of systemic and structural analysis allowed us to argue the thesis about the "facade character" of styles without manifestations in planning. Graphic-analytical, iconographic methods, and the method of photo fixation provided a visual evidentiary basis for judgments.

Sources were processed in the following areas:

- general issues of monument protection and restoration activities (Molochko, Borowczyk, 2025: 555-566);
- features of the development of historical cities of Ukraine (Chernyshev et al., 2023: 16-23; Dyomin et al., 2021: 26-36);
- stylistic features of the construction of Ukraine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Dyomin, Ivashko, 2020: 79-84; Ivashko, Dmytrenko et al., 2020: 953-964; Ivashko, Korovkina et al., 2021: 935-960; Ivashko, Tovbych et al., 2021: 117-127);
- restoration technologies (Molodid et al., 2025: 555-566; Orlenko, Ivashko, 2019: 171-190; Orlenko et al., 2025: 1321-1334);
- the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the state of historical heritage (Kozłowski et al., 2022: 391-408).

3. General characteristics of trends in tenement houses' construction in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries

According to statistics, in 1901, there were only three five-story tenement houses in Kyiv, and in 1911, there were already 45 of them, and another 30 six- and seven-story buildings were under construction. Thus, the number of floors in apartment buildings increased from 3–4 floors at the end of the 19th century to 5–10 floors at the beginning of the 20th century. These were single-bay and multi-bay buildings, where single-bay residential buildings had two or four apartments per floor and front and auxiliary stairs located in the centre. It was at the beginning of the 20th century that the transition to enlarged four- and six- apartment sections with a complicated configuration was outlined.

One of the features of single-section apartment buildings was the placement of stairs in independent volumes that protruded from the planes of the main and courtyard facades. At the same time, the corridor layout of the single-apartment section, which was designed for wealthy tenants, became widespread.

Multi-bay tenement houses with 2–3 sections were of three types: two--bay ones elongated along the street, corner ones on the corner of streets and compact one-bay ones with a closed courtyard.

There were three types of apartments in tenement houses: small-sized, medium-sized, and large-sized. The first two types were quite typical, while the third type of apartments was distinguished by various options for the room layout.

4. Examples of stylistic solutions for tenement houses

The second half of the 19th century was marked by greater freedom in the style of private houses. Especially starting from the last quarter of the 19th century, the trend that scholars call Historicism or Romanticism spread, as well as Eclecticism and "brick style". The fascination with historical novels by Walter Scott, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Bolesław Prus contributed to the fashion for "castle houses", "Moorish houses", which was expressed in the specific decoration of facades. However, comparison of pseudo-Gothic or pseudo-Renaissance elements with prototypes proves that they were only a simplified imitation of a certain style. In addition, historicism allowed the free arrangement of elements in any combination, and eclecticism was characterized by combining elements of different styles with each other. Analysis of the facade solution without decoration and typical layout proves that usually tenement houses were built according to a certain model, which could be decorated in different historical styles. There were typical designs of tenement houses, which the famous Kyiv architect Andrii Krauss became famous for. He became famous not because of the originality of his author's style, but because of the huge number of designed objects, which allowed him to become the richest architect of his time. Krauss earned such a fortune by successfully applying the example of typical design, that is, simply changing the order of the decor on the facades and alternating certain figurative techniques.

Today, historical tenement houses in Kyiv are usually used for housing, and the ground floors can accommodate shops, offices, restaurants, and even cultural and artistic institutions. This period is represented by houses in the style of pseudo-Renaissance, pseudo-Gothic of the late 19th century, and neo-Gothic (Gothic with elements of Art Nouveau) of the early 20th century, pseudo-Moorish style, pseudo-classical and neo-classical, the so-called "brick" style of contractors, when the decor was arranged using specific brick laying methods, and from the beginning of the 20th century – Art Nouveau of several varieties – decorative, rational, and classicized. Some individual tenement houses were built in the style of the so-called Ukrainian national romanticism.

Given the large number of stylizations, we will give a few examples.

4.1. Pseudo-Gothic

As already mentioned above, pseudo-Gothic and neo-Gothic were one of the most popular styles of expensive apartment buildings. The directions of pseudo-Gothic and neo-Gothic are represented by objects of three types:

- houses with main facades with restrained decor;
- houses with a large amount of pseudo-Gothic decor on the facades;
- houses with a simultaneous combination of Gothic and Art Nouveau elements on the facades.

Here is one example. The apartment building at 60 Honchara Street was built in 1908 on the territory of the former estate of Baron Rudolf Steingel, but in the

https://doi.org/10.37705/TechTrans/e2026006

years when the estate already belonged to the Kyiv neuropathologist Professor Lapinskyi. According to the existing version, the new owner preserved the pseudo-Gothic style of the new house, modelled on the pseudo-Gothic mansion of the baron built nearby (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. General view of the house at 60 Honchara Street. Drawing by Y. Ivashko

Thus, the conditional visual axis between the pseudo-Gothic mansion on Bulvarno-Kudriavska Street and the pseudo-Gothic apartment building on Honchara Street was preserved. However, this axis no longer exists, as part of Rudolf Steingel's estate is built over with modern medical facilities.

Baron Rudolf Steingel's mansion in the pseudo-Gothic style was a fairly well-known object, but very little information about the tenement house on Honchara Street has been preserved in the archives. A romantic mood was created already on the approach to the tenement house, which imitated the drawbridges of medieval castles, and the house itself was located deep in the block, set back from the street. It has a compact, single-section T-shaped plan, symmetrical, with a central location of the staircase and lift. The courtyard stairs and technical rooms are placed in a separate volume on the courtyard facade. The side wings protrude slightly on the main facade in order to express the plasticity of the volume.

This is an eight-story building made of traditional yellow Kyiv brick, where the central balcony of the upper floor and the side corners of the protruding parts of the main facade are flanked by small turrets. The plastic of the upper floors has a refined and refined character, while in the lower floors it becomes more massive to emphasize the principle of wall tectonics. The cornice is stylized and has an eclectic character; pointed and semicircular arches are used in the window framing, the main entrance is accented with two stylized turrets and a strip of ornament.

The mansion-castle of Baron Maximilian Steingel at 1 Yaroslaviv Val Street (Fig. 2) was also built in the pseudo-Gothic style. Art historians and historians still argue about the authorship of this object, since no archival drawings have

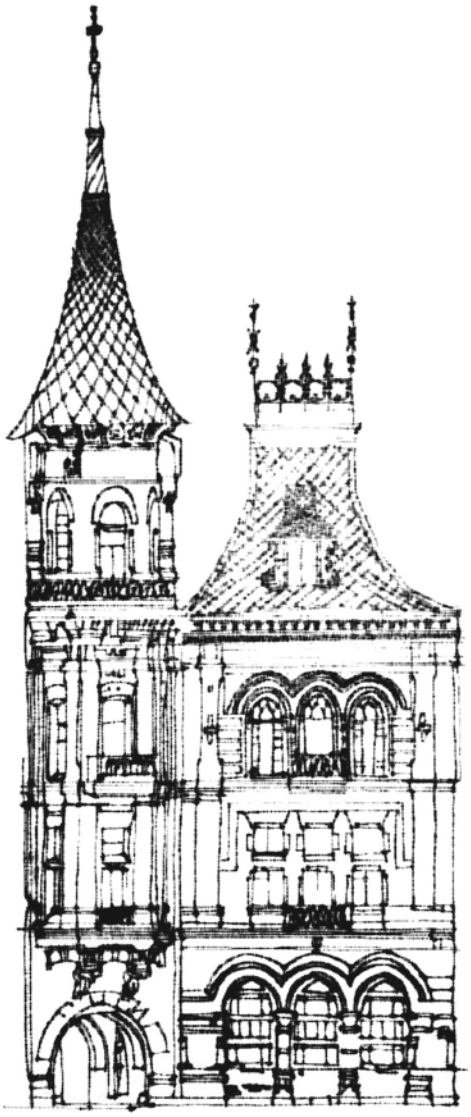

Fig. 2. Sketch drawing of the main facade of the building at 1 Yaroslaviv Val Street. Prep. D. Kuśnierz-Krupa

https://doi.org/10.37705/TechTrans/e2026006

survived. The historian Kalnytskyi expressed the version that the author of the project of the mansion-castle was engineer Dobachevskyi, but this is only an assumption.

An unusual apartment building crowns a steep hill and is a significant urban dominant. From the courtyard facade, distant perspectives open up. The house has a complex plan configuration, which determines the plasticity of the volumetric and spatial composition. It is essentially composed of several volumes, which differ in height and outline of the roofs.

The main entrance is located through a low massive arch. Two winged monkeys-chimeras seem to be attentively bending over the visitor. Unlike other apartment buildings in Kyiv, where only the main facade received an original style solution, the angular location of the house determined its all-facade character, so all its facades are original.

The plan of the tenement house was a combination of several rectangular volumes connected, so it was irregular in shape. One or two apartments opened onto the main staircase. Unlike other apartment buildings of the same period, the rooms were large and had good proportions. However, some disadvantages are unacceptable in modern apartments: for example, walk-through enfilade rooms and inconvenient access to the room in the bay window, which had a round shape in plan.

The most original is the exterior of the castle house with an openwork pseudo-Gothic decor from the bottom to the high roof. The most original was the decoration of the bay window, which was variable, faceted on the 1st and 2nd floors, and round on the 3rd. The main entrance through the arch with monkeys was emphasized by a vertical dominant on the entire height – a bay window, completed by a tower with a conical ending.

In 1910, construction of a 5.5-story apartment building in the neo-Gothic style began at 10 Malopidvalna Street, designed by architect Karl Szyman. The building is located on a steep slope of the street, so it has a variable number of floors in different parts and a passage to the courtyard in the lower part of the building. The plan is T-shaped, single-bay, with two apartments per floor, and the courtyard stairs are located in the risalit protruding from the courtyard.

The main facade of the tenement house is somewhat overloaded with details, in the symmetrical composition of the main facade, with an emphasis on the main entrance with a grand staircase, vertical divisions prevail, which are emphasized by a stepped attic. The brick and stucco decoration of the house is made in the Gothic style. The architect made windows of different shapes on different floors – rectangular on the lower floors, semicircular, wide and elongated narrow of two types on the middle and upper floors. The tectonics of the main facade is expressed by contrasting the massive windows of the lower floors and the elongated windows of the upper floors.

Until recently, the unique interiors of expensive apartments were preserved. The ceilings were decorated with stucco decoration and paintings, and the rooms had tiled stoves. In one of the apartments, there was a monochrome stucco frieze, the stove was faced with two colours of ceramic tiles and had a finish in the form of a cornice and an attic two-figure composition with putti angels. A decorative arcature was applied to the plane of the wall, the decor used Byzantine-Moorish motifs with stylized floral ornaments and a patterned relief in the corners of the ceiling.

The main staircase was decorated with a decorative cornice, and stucco decoration was used in the form of plant motifs, rosettes, meanders, and rusks. In another apartment, until recently, stucco decoration was preserved in the form of borders, plafonds, frieze ribbons, stylized pseudo-baroque medallions, the stove was decorated with a plot composition “Hercules, leaning on a staff, with a lion”.

4.2. Pseudo-Renaissance

If pseudo-Gothic was to some extent an "elite" style of profitable construction, then pseudo-Renaissance turned out to be one of the most mass stylizations. Pseudo-Renaissance decor was often applied to eclectic houses.

The four-story corner building on the corner of Prytysko-Mykilska and Khoryva streets (Fig. 3) belonged to the tenement development and was built in 1899. It was also built of traditional Kyiv yellow brick, had an L-shaped plan and consisted of two residential sections. The style of the facades was Eclecticism with pseudo-Renaissance elements, which was typical for private buildings in Kyiv in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The compositional structure of both facades was not the same: for example, the facade on Prytysko--Mykilska Street had a central-axial composition, while the facade on Khoryva Street was asymmetrical in relation to the location of the entrance; the central axis was accented by vanes and completed with an attic with a round dormer window.

Fig. 3. Project for the reconstruction of the facade of the building on the corner of Prytysko-Mykilska and Khoryva (Main architect of the project S. Yurchenko). From the stocks of Y. Ivashko

On the facade along Prytysko-Mykilska Street, pilasters marked the axes of the entrances, the corner part with the entrance to the store was cut off, above the entrance to the store there was a balcony on massive brackets with lion heads. The corner part at the level of 2–4 floors was distinguished by columns with Corinthian capitals, balconies with metal railings, and was crowned with an attic. The high frieze was decorated with stucco inserts, the facades were decorated with inserts of phytomorphic and meander ornaments, lion heads, palm branches, garlands, and wreaths.

As of 1998, the house was abandoned and in need of restoration. After the restoration (chief architect of the project was Serhii Yurchenko), an attic floor was added, the facade decor was restored, and the floor plan was reconfigured according to modern standards.

4.3. Art Nouveau

Since the beginning of the 20th century, tenement houses in the Art Nouveau style have been actively built in Kyiv (Dyomin, Ivashko, 2020: 79-84; Ivashko et al., 2020: 953-964; Ivashko et al., 2021a: 935-960; Ivashko et al., 2021b: 117-127). Compared to earlier tenement houses of Historicism style, they had an improved layout, modern structural schemes, and materials for that time, which together allowed the construction of higher-storey buildings. As already mentioned, quite a few tenement houses have survived in Kyiv that demonstrate

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varieties of Art Nouveau, but often this style manifested itself only as facade decor, without manifestations in the layout.

An example of a tenement house in the Art Nouveau style is the house at 15 Liuteranska Street (Fig. 4). A plot was allocated for its construction opposite the estate of a famous Kyiv patron with a house whose architecture combined features of oriental architecture and classicism. Thus, architect Verbytskyi had to take into account the factor of the neighbourhood with an eclectic mansion and the peculiarities of construction on a steep slope.

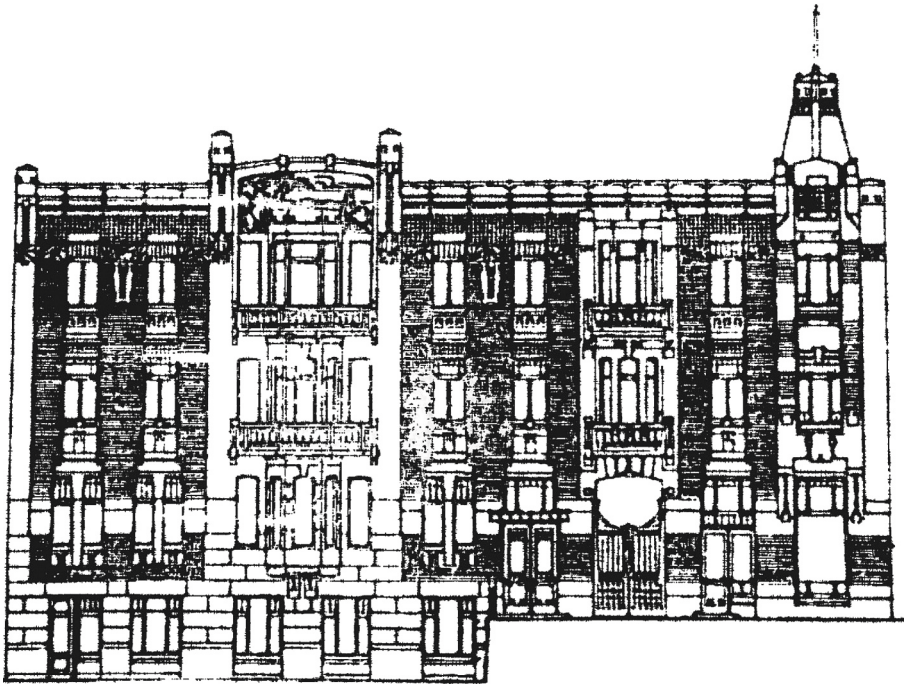

Fig. 4. The main facade of the building on 15 Liuteranska Street. Prep. D. Kuśnierz-Krupa based on an archival drawing

As a result, the facade received a stylistic solution in the style of rationalist Art Nouveau with fragmentary decor. The tenement house has a U-shaped plan, which was determined by the needs of better insolation, and is four--story. Originally, three floors were residential, the lower one was a basement, and it was the basement floor that emphasized the steep line of the relief. The main facade was arranged in the general line of the development of this side of Liuteranska Street. Despite the rational appearance, the architect was able to arrange accent elements in the form of stucco decoration and a majolica panel "Pan and Syringa" in the plane of the main tongs. The planar decor of the blue-green majolica panel and small-relief stucco elements are combined with the plastic of the brick wall of the main facade with a bay window and window frames of the 1st and 2nd floors. Decorative elements include a strip of finely embossed floral ornament and patterned balcony railings. The effect of tectonics is expressed by the contrast of the visually rough basement floor with the rustication of rough stone and the plastered upper floors.

5. Summary and conclusions

Former tenement houses constitute a major part of Kyiv's historical heritage. The main problems associated with the preservation and restoration of these objects are as follows:

- urban planning requirements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries divided streets into four categories, respectively, attention was paid to the development of higher-category streets, and today streets of the 3rd and 4th (lower) categories ended up in the central districts of Kyiv;

- in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, no attention was paid to the comprehensive development of estates, so the buildings in the yard were not very aesthetic, which creates problems today;
- inconsistency of the legal monument protection status of the object, when the developer-owner of the site can destroy it despite public protests;
- inconsistency of some facilities with the modern needs of the city: the question of financing such a building often arises if it is in a dilapidated condition and does not meet the requirements of modern housing;
- during times of war, a requirement was introduced to arrange shelters in buildings, which also poses certain difficulties;
- even those commercial buildings that were considered high-rise at the beginning of the 20th century are not today an economically profitable use of urban land in the centre of a city with a population of millions, and the processes of an acute shortage of land for modern high-rise construction have intensified against the background of an increase in the population of Kyiv due to immigrants from the front-line eastern and southern regions of Ukraine.

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