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READING RED

The Red Church Reconstruction
Olomouc, Czech Republic
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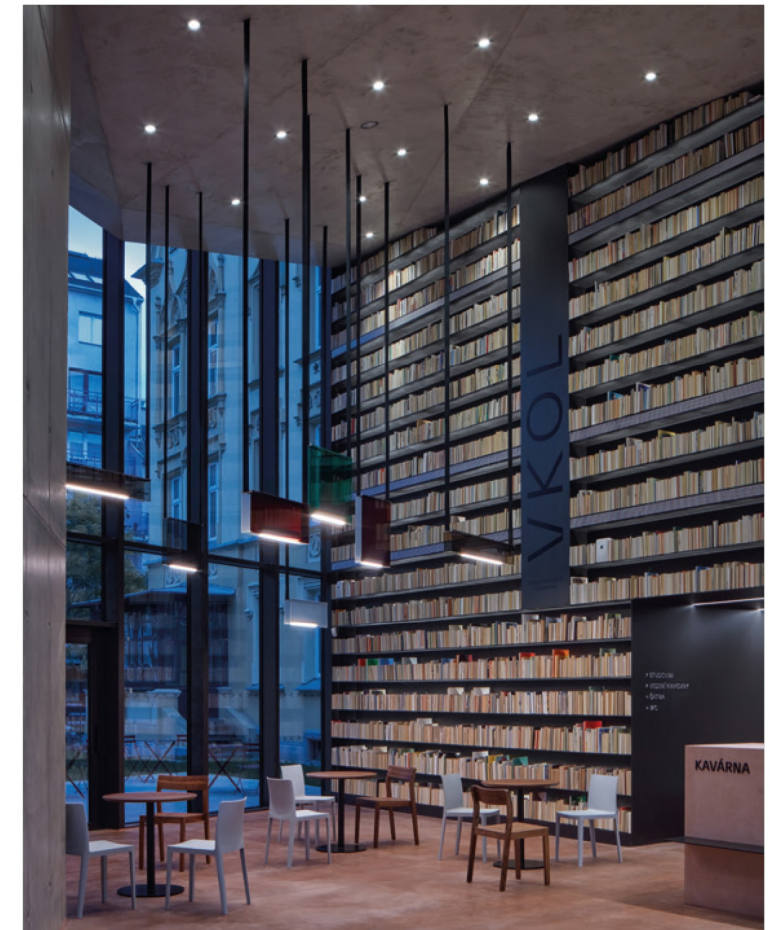


The town residents of Olomouc may have been rightly proud of their central neo-gothic Lutheran Red Church, but it was in a sorry state, and hadn't hosted religious services since 1959 anyway, when it had become the main Book Depository for the library. In an effort to salvage the building while still possible, revitalise it through programme enhancement, and deliver a social and cultural amenity to the community, this intensive scheme was devised.

Of most urgent importance was saving the dilapidated church structure itself. This resulted in major replacements and reinforcement of structural members, new roof and floor slabs, windows and so on. Works revealed a seriously compromised building that was at risk of imminent collapse. With that work underway, a new programme was introduced, utilising the inspiring interior of the church for cultural events, lectures and readings, exhibitions and presentations and the like. No longer devoted to storage of printed texts, the church was once again in service to citizens directly.

To house the extra needs of reception, gathering and repository etc, a smaller new addition on one flank of the main building was designed. This is a matte-black-aluminium-clad 'crystal' mass of metal and glass that takes its form from abstracting the neo-gothic lines and angles of the adjacent church. In plan, section and elevation it presents a crisp, angular linkage element with the library administration facility behind the church. This mediating space is a double-height reception and entry hall that invites visitors, organises circulation, and encourages social pause at its cafe. The hall is dramatic despite not being overly large. It features a tall wall of book display shelves, exciting suspended feature lighting fixtures and handsome casual seating arrangements near a dark-toned reception counter. The language of the interiors is in unison with the new addition externally; materials are sharply toned, details are minimal and contemporary, graphics are likewise and furnishings, artworks and lighting cap the whole as finishing touches.

The Red Church is now a place for books, yes, but especially for people. It has evolved into a social generator and community anchor. One that preserves local urban history, recalls its own functional inheritance, and turns both toward the near future. All this was accomplished by architecture, interior design, and a determined client.



Photography by BoysPlayNice

