

REIMAGINING THE CASTLE



Two approaches of translating heritage

📍 Prague Castle, Czech Republic

Prague Castle, an UNESCO World Heritage site holds an “Outstanding Universal Value” which is undeniable. But how does one intervene in such a prestigious and sensitive context when new functions or additions are required? With over eight million visitors annually, Prague Castle inevitably requires carefully considered interventions. This studio explored ways of addressing the delicate interconnections between heritage and adaptive reuse, aiming to translate these values into contemporary design solutions.

Our project presents a revitalization of two key areas within the Prague Castle complex: the historic stables courtyard and the gardener’s house. A common intention was to bring the castle and its heritage closer to the public. Our collective approach focuses on removing or softening the physical and visual barriers that currently limit access, clarity, and engagement. By reopening views, reactivating forgotten spaces, and reorganizing circulation, the proposal aims to make the castle grounds more welcoming, legible, and culturally vibrant.

We approached the site by conducting site visits, examining the structures, hearing lectures from renowned researchers of the castle and visiting the Prague Castle archives, where we found and building archaeology survey to help us trace the ages of the structures. Then, we continued with a heritage evaluation, approximating to our best ability which structures hold architecturally, culturally and emotionally the most value. Although the site arguably holds those values already by mere age, the approach of the studio remained somewhat experimental, reimagining not only the boundaries of heritage protection, but the different ways to translate the value of historic structures to new generations.

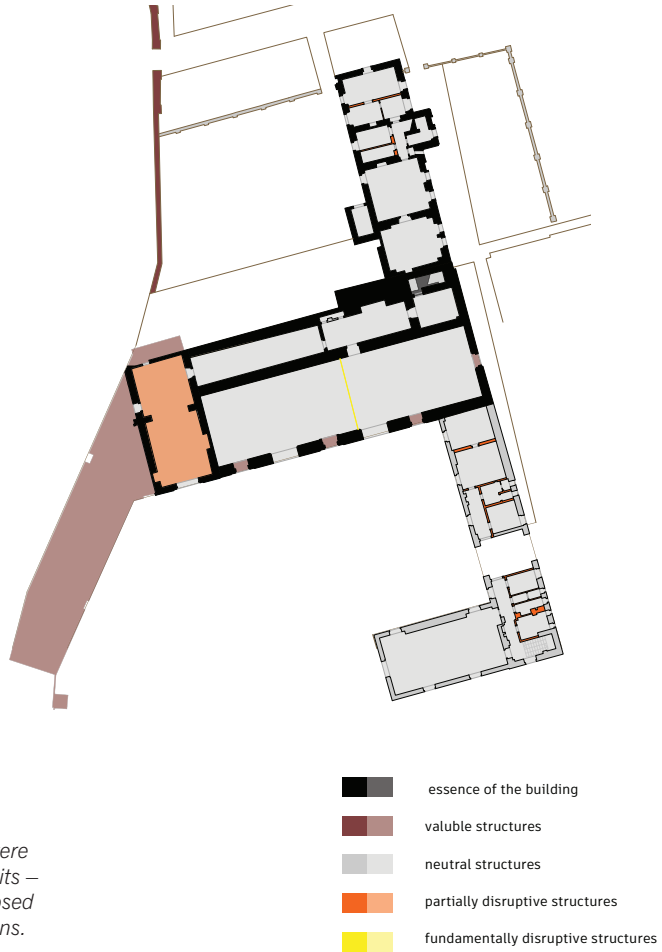
Within the shared framework, the two parts of the project developed distinct characters. In the stables courtyard (site 2), the focus is on restoring historic qualities, revealing original details, and framing the extraordinary view toward St. Vitus Cathedral. In contrast, the gardener’s house area (site 1) embraces more radical intervention to meet the current need for a visitor centre, while creating distinctive new layer to the heritage site.

Together, these two approaches create a renewed relationship between visitors and the castle grounds-honoring the past, enhancing the present, and making heritage genuinely accessible to all. By either a subtle or a bold approach, they shed light on overlooked parts of the castle and its heritage, translating them to today’s language.

BUILDING HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT



HERITAGE EVALUATION

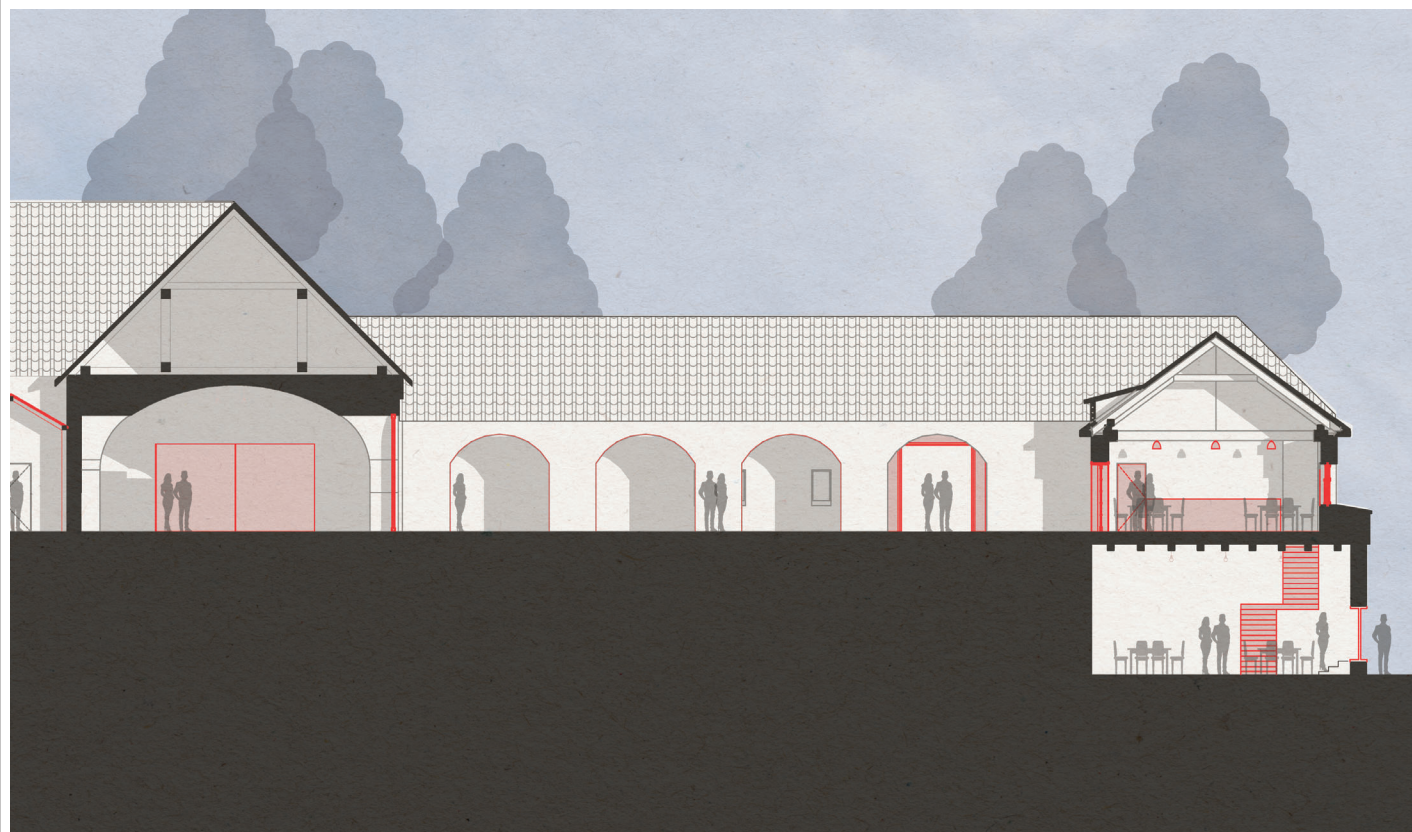
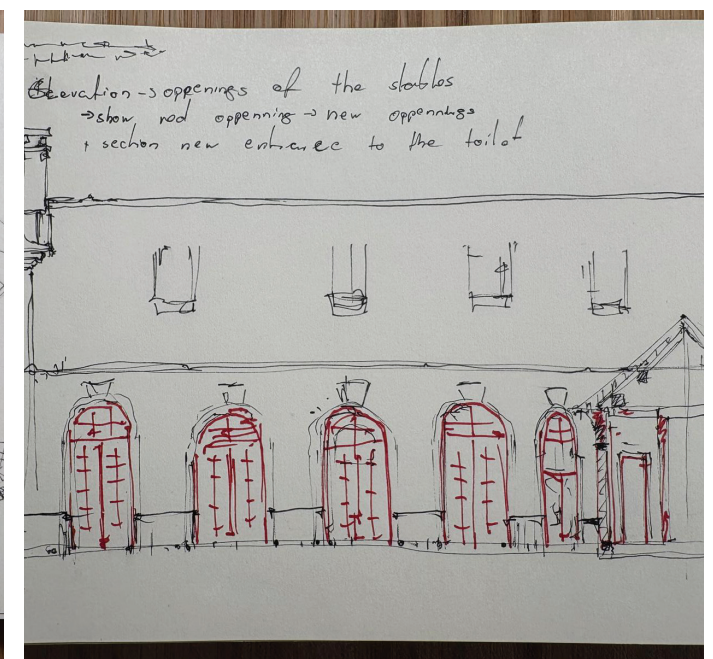
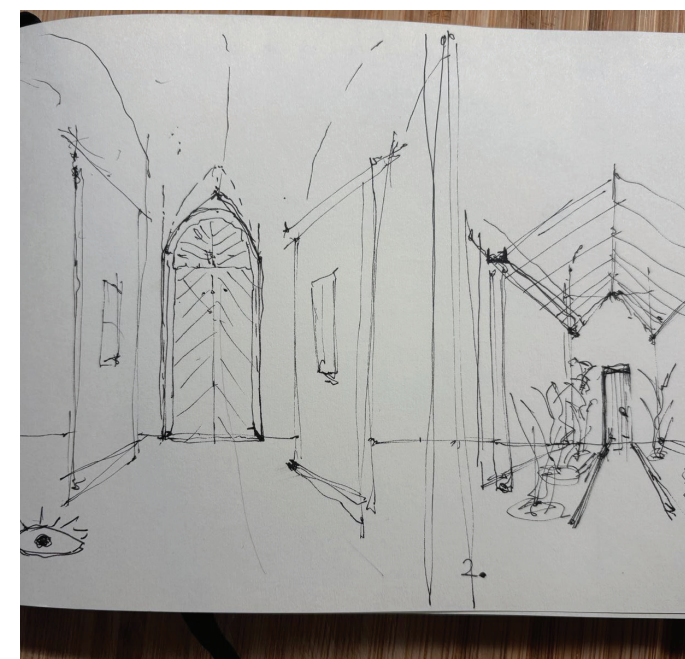
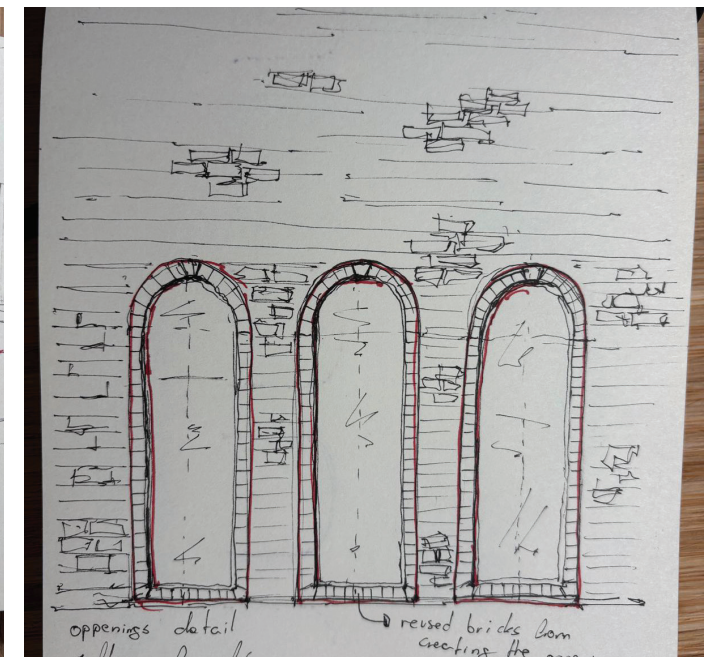
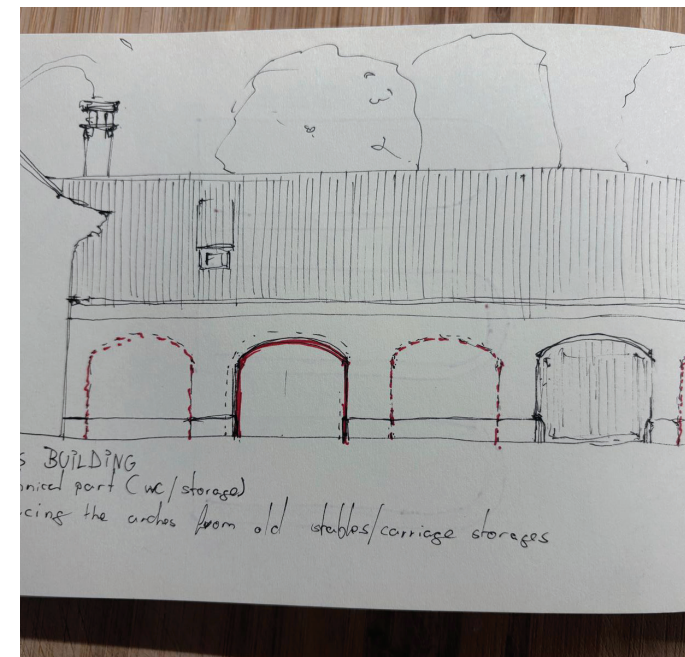
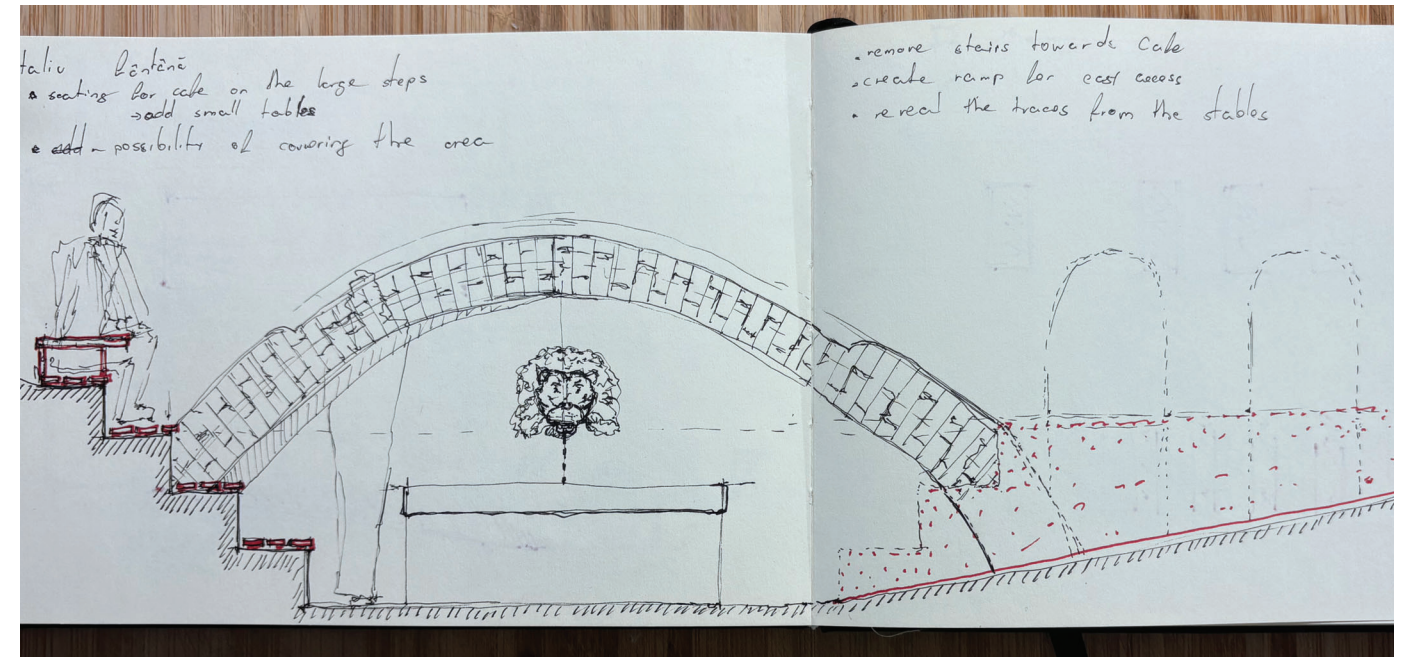




The hand-drawn details identified throughout the site form a second layer of translation, where heritage is not understood through monumental gestures but through fragments, traces, and material memory. Elements such as the stone fountain, the carved window arches, and the remains of earlier buildings embedded in the walls are treated as filters of historical meaning rather than decorative artifacts. By isolating, drawing, and reinterpreting these details, the project shifts attention from the scale of the castle to the scale of the hand, revealing how the cultural value of the site is carried by its smallest components.

These details act as physical records of successive transformations of the stables and their surroundings. Traces of demolished structures, blocked openings, and altered surfaces are not erased but made legible, allowing different historical layers to coexist within the same architectural frame. Through this process, the project translates accumulated time into spatial depth: the visitor is not presented with a single, fixed image of heritage, but with a filtered reading of multiple pasts embedded in material and form.

By preserving and re-activating these elements, the intervention resists the tendency to reduce heritage to a clean and idealized narrative. Instead, architectural detail becomes a tool for mediation between past and present, filtering what is preserved, what is revealed, and what is allowed to fade. In this way, the project does not merely protect historical fabric, but translates its meaning into a contemporary architectural language that remains open, layered, and continuously interpretable.



THE MANY LIVES OF THE STABLE COURTYARD

The Stable Courtyard at Prague Castle is a microcosm of architectural translation. Over 450 years, this compact cluster of buildings has repeatedly changed its purpose, form, and cultural meaning. Each transformation reflects political shifts, evolving technologies, and changing ideas of value at the Castle.

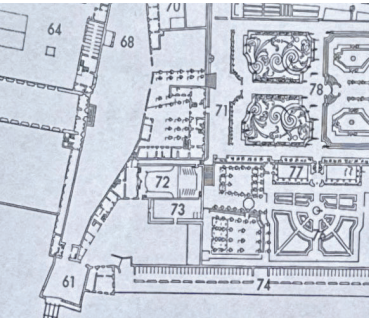
The courtyard's origins lie in the Renaissance: the Small Ball Game Hall (1567–69) and the Gardener's House (1572) introduced decorative sgraffito architecture and leisure functions to the site. By 1680, the area transformed as the hall was adapted into a court theatre, later known as the Comödienhaus and Opernhaus. These early 18th-century structures—connected through wings, secret corridors, and service routes—formed a lively performance complex that influenced Prague's emerging theatrical culture.

After the theatre burned in the 1757 Prussian siege, the ensemble entered a new life. The space was adapted into stables, then rebuilt in 1845, overlaying Renaissance foundations with Classicist façades. Meanwhile, buildings such as the Polír's House (Baroque) and the Renaissance House were altered to support the courtyard's new utilitarian purpose.

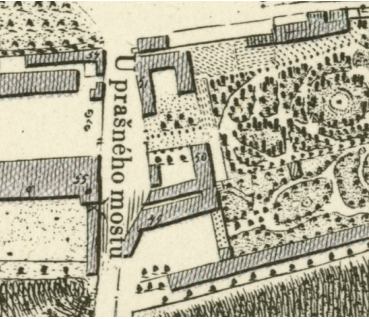
A new chapter began in 1918, when the independent Czechoslovak Republic was established. President Tomáš G. Masaryk initiated a symbolic and functional transformation of Prague Castle. As part of this modernization, the former Imperial Stables were redesigned to house Masaryk's presidential horses, signaling the shift from imperial rule to democratic leadership. Soon afterwards, as motor vehicles replaced horse transport, the same stables were translated once again—this time into garages for the presidential cars, marking the arrival of modern technology within the historic complex.

In the 20th century, further industrial needs reshaped the area: new Technical Houses (1950s) were constructed, and the boundary wall shifted along U Prašného mostu.

Today, the Stable Courtyard appears unified and calm, yet beneath its surface lies a history of movement, disappearance, reconstruction, and reuse. Its architecture embodies the idea of translation—from leisure to performance, from theatre to stables, from imperial service to presidential mobility, from utility to heritage. This panel reveals the many lives of a courtyard that has continually reinvented itself.



1.



4.

EVOLUTION



Renaissance
Ball Game Hall +
Gardener's House



Baroque
Theatre
(Comödienhaus /
Opernhaus)



18th-19th Century
Stables + Polír's
House + Renaissance
House



20th Century
Garages + Technical
Houses



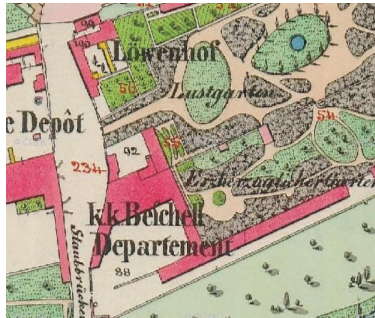
21st Century
Stable Courtyard is used today
for Castle maintenance
services and for the Police.



2.



5.



3.

- 1. 1725- Courtyard with "Comödienhaus"
- 2. 1743 - Opernhaus + surrounding buildings
- 3. 1845 - Stable reconstruction plan
- 4. 19th-century cadastral maps (wing missing/returning)
- 5. Today-Modern plan showing simplified courtyard

Translations of Space, Function, and Memory at Prague Castle

16th Century - Renaissance Foundations

- 1567–69 - Small Ball Game Hall built (Bonifác Wohlmut).
- 1572 - Gardener's House completed; Renaissance House established.

17th Century - First Translations

- 1680 - Ball Game Hall adapted into a court theatre.

18th Century - Theatre & Imperial Culture

- 1725 - "Comödienhaus" appears on plans.
- 1743 - "Opernhaus" noted in Royal Garden map.
- 1754 - Renovation for Empress Maria Theresa.
- 1757 - Theatre roof destroyed in Prussian siege.

- Late 1700s - Building repurposed as stables.

19th Century - Rebuilding the Courtyard

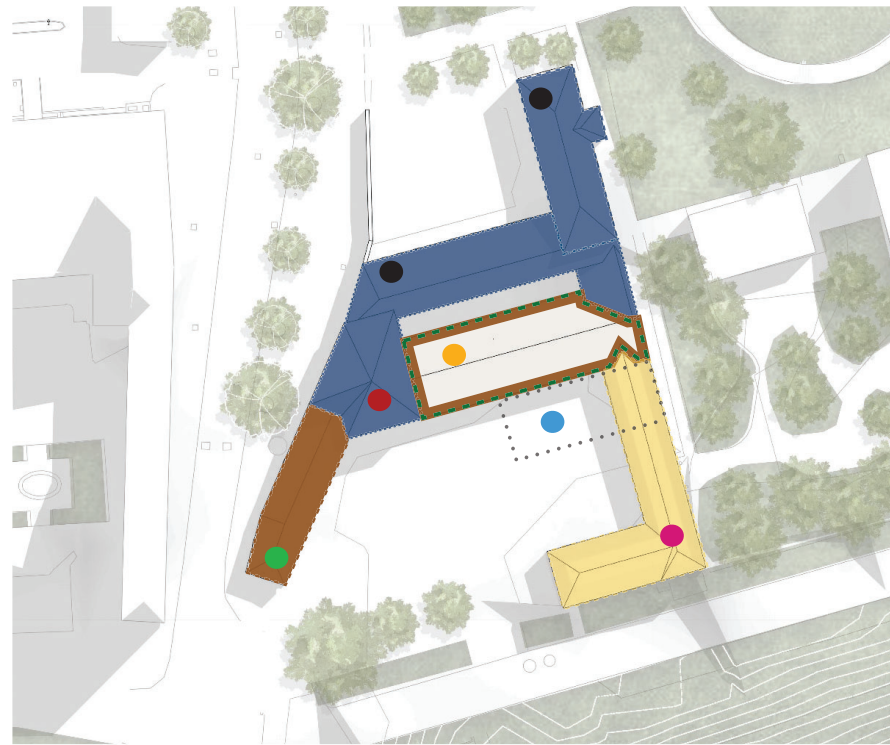
- 1845 - New Imperial Stables constructed on theatre foundations.
- 1852 - Polír F. Roubíček adds staircases, adapts Gardener's House.

- Mid-1800s - Courtyard wing of Gardener's House disappears from maps.

- Late 1800s - Wing reappears (reconstructed).

20th Century - Utilitarian Translations

- Early 1900s - Stable adapted to garages; openings reworked to match Renaissance House.
- 1934 - Stables along Deer Moat demolished.
- 1950s - Technical Houses built for Castle Guard.
- Post-WWII - Transformer wing added; boundary wall realigned.



BUILDING PORTRAITS

- **Gardener's House (1572, Renaissance → 1845)**
Original sgraffito; rebuilt in 1845, Courtyard wing disappeared/reappeared in cadastral maps, strongest surviving Renaissance element.
- **Renaissance House**
Renaissance massing preserved, in the early 1900s, garage adaptations aligned openings with it.
- **Polír's House (Baroque)**
Working-class service building, 1852 staircase and layout adjustments by Roubíček. Key to understanding daily life around the courtyard.
- **Imperial Stables (1845)**
Built directly on top of theatre foundations, Classicist façade; later modernized for vehicle storage. One of the most significant "translations" of use.
- **Technical Houses (1950s)**
Postwar utilitarian additions. Constructed for Castle Guard and technical infrastructure. Represent the industrial translation of the site.
- **Small Ball Game Hall (1567–69)**
Renaissance recreational hall → core of later theatre, now internally transformed; original function erased.
- **Castle Theatre (1680–1757)**
A major early court theatre in Central Europe. Burned in 1757; never rebuilt. Completely absent today—survives only in plans and memory.



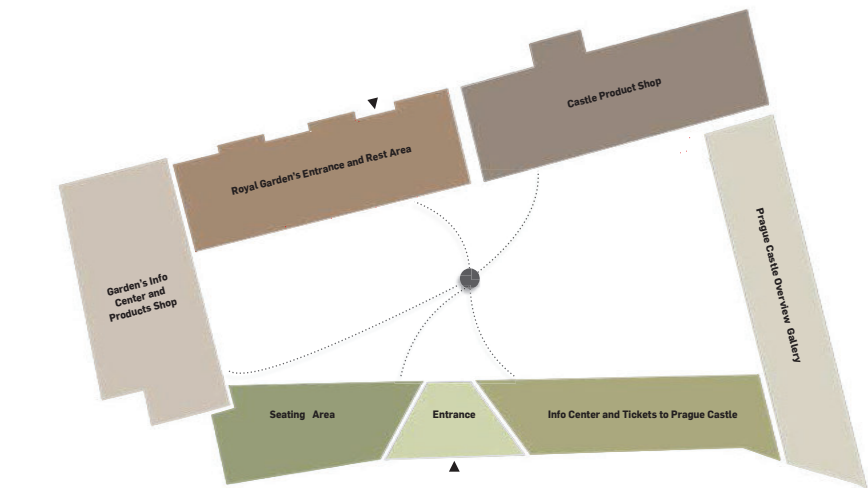
The Gardener's House as a Threshold - Translating Value within Prague Castle

Located between the Royal Gardens, U Prašného mostu, and the Stable Courtyard, the Gardener's House occupies a strategic yet overlooked position within Prague Castle. Historically shaped by service and maintenance functions, the building gradually lost its public role and visibility, becoming a back-of-house space within a World Heritage site. This project understands the Gardener's House as a threshold- spatial, cultural, and social, between city and monument, landscape and architecture, tourists and local residents. The intervention explores how architectural design can translate heritage value from static preservation into active, everyday use.

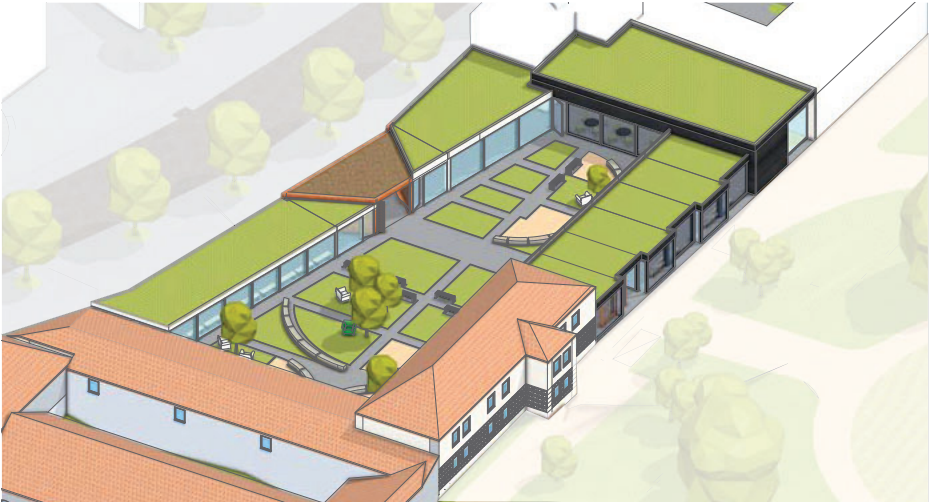


In its recent state, the Gardener's House functioned as a service edge rather than a public space. Despite its central location, it was excluded from the visitor experience and everyday life of the Castle, illustrating a loss of social and spatial value.

Over centuries, the Gardener's House shifted between garden service, storage, and technical use. While the architecture remained, its meaning and accessibility changed repeatedly, revealing how value within heritage sites is continuously translated over time.



The project reactivates the Gardener's House as a public threshold by introducing an Information and Gardener's Center, new gates, and a clarified street connection. The intervention translates the building's role from technical infrastructure into a civic interface linking heritage, landscape, and contemporary use.



The axonometric view shows how the historic Gardener's House and the new building additions form a unified courtyard ensemble. The new structures, with their transparent façades, open directly onto the courtyard and strengthen the connection between interior functions and outdoor public space. The green roof layer visually unifies the intervention, with the main roof using recycled crushed brick as a sustainable reference to the site's material history.



The gate frames a generous opening into the Gardener's House courtyard, establishing a clear and inviting entrance for visitors. Its material expression contrasts subtly with the historic buildings, using warm, earthy tones and simple geometry, while maintaining a respectful scale. The intervention strengthens the street frontage, improves legibility, and creates a coherent transition between the public space of the street and the interior of the courtyard.



The visualization shows the new main gate forming the primary entrance into the Gardener's House courtyard. The corten-clad structure creates a strong, warm contrast with the historic plastered walls, marking a clear and inviting threshold. The open frame guides visitors toward the new courtyard, while subtle material details-brick, wood, and stone, signal the blend of heritage and contemporary design.



The visualization shows the new main gate forming the primary entrance into the Gardener's House courtyard. The open frame guides visitors toward the new courtyard.

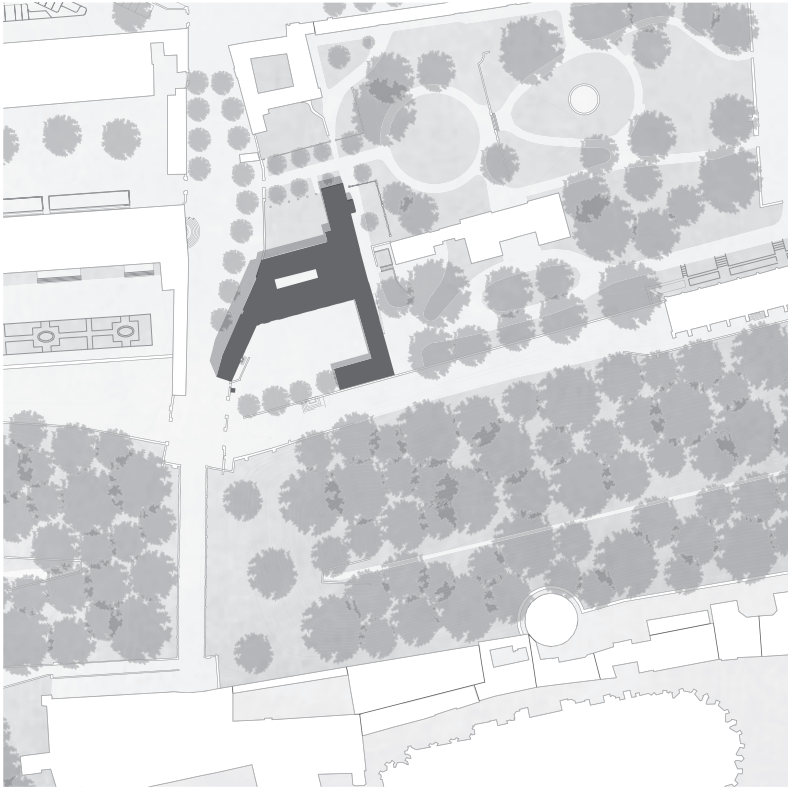


This perspective highlights the relationship between the courtyard and the main entrance gate. The surrounding volumes provide shaded seating and outdoor gathering options. The combination of greenery, hard surfaces, and curved seating edges creates a functional outdoor room that can adapt to everyday visitors as well as small events.

PRAG CASTLE

STABLES AND GARDENERSHOUSE

all the drawings, pictures and texts on these posters were made by the author Franziska Bauer during the 9th semester



siteplan

THE LOCATION OF THE STABLES AT PRAGUE CASTLE

The Stables are located in the northern part of the Prague Castle complex, in the area of the former Stable Courtyard. They are positioned between the castle plateau and the Royal Garden. This location lies along one of the castle's main access routes, connecting the historic core with the surrounding landscape and garden structures. Despite this strategic position, the area has long remained spatially and functionally marginal within the wider castle ensemble.

Characterised by steep topography, fragmented circulation, and a complex network of paths, the Stables area forms a threshold between monumental architecture and the landscape. Visitors tend to pass around the site rather than through it, resulting in a weakened sense of orientation and limited engagement with the surrounding heritage elements. Visual connections to key landmarks such as St. Vitus Cathedral are obstructed, and the relationship between the courtyard, gardens, and adjacent buildings is unclear.

As a transitional zone between built heritage and open landscape, the Stables have significant potential to function as a connective element within the castle complex. Their location offers an opportunity to improve accessibility, restore spatial continuity, and enhance the site's legibility transforming a neglected passageway into an active arrival point, offering orientation and interpretation within the World Heritage landscape.



gardenershouse



gardeners garden



view on prag castle from the stables



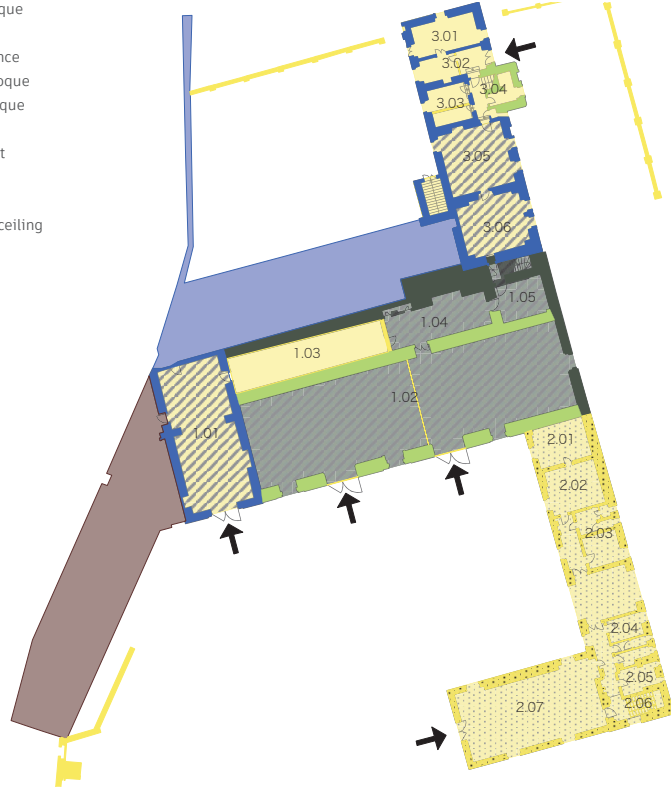
stables



stables

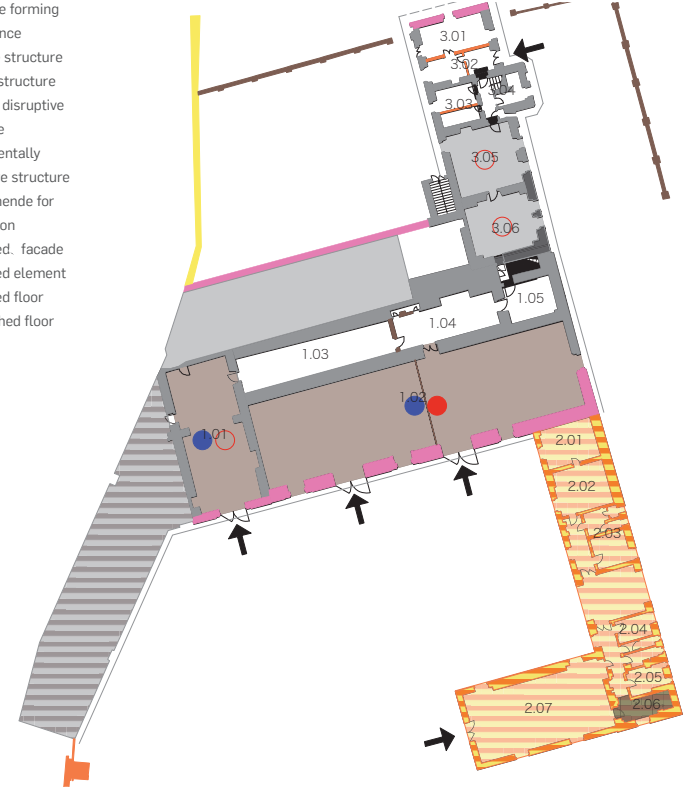
- Romanesque
- Gothic
- Renaissance
- Early Baroque
- Late Baroque
- Classicist
- Historicist
- Modern
- Valuable ceiling
- Unsure

building survey - development

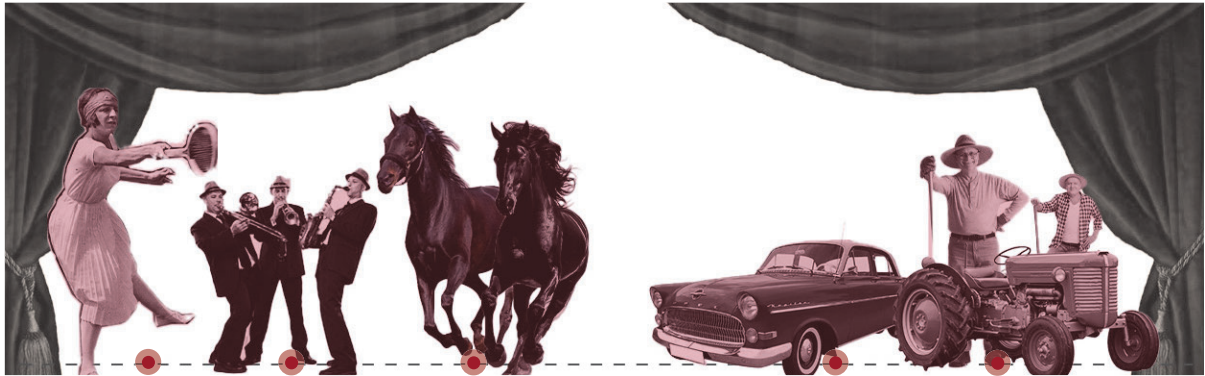


- Structure forming the essence
- Valuable structure
- Neutral structure
- Partially disruptive structure
- Fundamentally disruptive structure
- Recommend for restoration
- Preserved facade
- Preserved element
- Preserved floor
- Demolished floor

building survey - value



FRANZISKA BAUER



HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE STABLES SITE

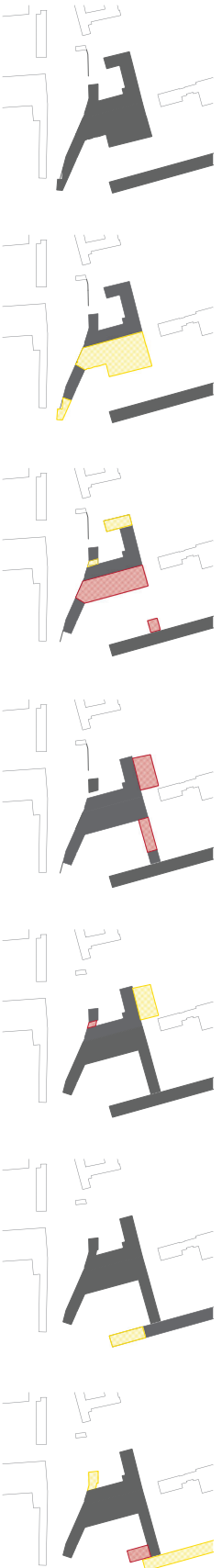
The Stables area of Prague Castle evolved over the centuries as part of the castle's service and auxiliary infrastructure. It is closely linked to the Royal Garden and the northern edge of the castle complex. Originally shaped by utilitarian needs, the site has accommodated a succession of stables, storage buildings, and service structures. This has resulted in a spatial fabric defined by adaptation rather than monumentality.

Throughout its history, the area has undergone multiple phases of transformation, reflecting changes in architectural style, functional requirements and planning concepts. Earlier structures contributed to the spatial hierarchy and visual relationships of the castle landscape, reinforcing the connections between courtyards, gardens, and key landmarks. Traces of these historical layers can still be seen in the alignment of paths, building footprints and changes in level that continue to structure the site today.

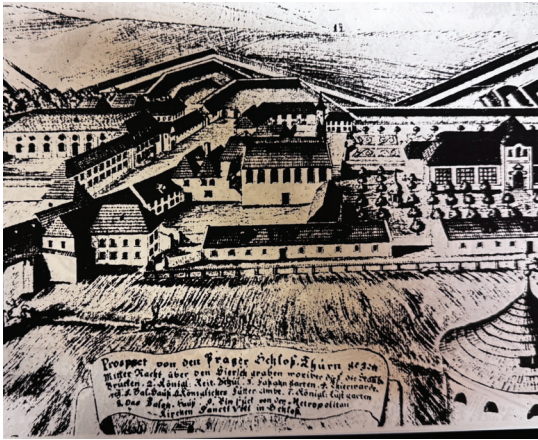
A later phase of development occurred in the 1950s, when a new building was introduced to address the functional requirements of the time. While this structure fulfilled its intended purpose, it lacks the architectural, historical and cultural value of the castle complex's earlier buildings. Its form, scale and placement reflect a utilitarian approach rather than a response to the broader heritage context.

Over time, the presence of the 1950s building has altered the spatial character of the Stables area. It interrupts established visual connections to the surrounding gardens and St. Vitus Cathedral, and disrupts the natural flow of movement through the courtyard. Consequently, the site's role as a connective space within the castle complex has weakened, and its layered historical relationships have become less apparent.

HISTORY OF STABLES



- 1755
- 1790-1830
- 1816
- 1869
- 1889
- 1920-1924
- 1950



A Narrative History of the Stable Courtyard at Prague Castle

Across more than four centuries, the Stable Courtyard at Prague Castle has lived many architectural lives. What now appears as a quiet, enclosed space has, over time, absorbed shifting political priorities, new technologies, and changing ideas about how a royal residence should function. Each generation altered the courtyard's form and purpose, leaving behind layers of memory that make the site a remarkable example of long-term adaptation.

Renaissance Beginnings (16th Century)

The story begins in the Renaissance when Prague Castle underwent major building campaigns that reshaped its gardens and service structures. During this era, the basic outline of the courtyard emerged, supported by the construction of early garden buildings and by the addition of a small ball-game hall in the late 1560s. Although the space was not yet linked to stables, this period established the structural foundation that later centuries would repeatedly modify.

Early Transformations (17th Century)

In the 1600s, the courtyard entered a period of constant change. Buildings were rebuilt, shortened, or rearranged as the castle's needs evolved. The ball-game hall, once used for recreation, was partially dismantled, changing the proportions of the courtyard and clearing the way for more practical uses. During this century the area shifted from a leisure zone connected to the gardens into a space increasingly devoted to service and circulation.

Imperial Expansion and the Rise of the Stables (18th Century)

The 1700s brought the development that would define the site. The stable complex was established, transforming the courtyard into a center of equestrian activity. As imperial life flourished, new wings and auxiliary buildings were

added, and older Renaissance structures were adapted for storing and caring for horses. By the middle and late 18th century the courtyard had taken on a more formal shape, enclosed by new buildings and organized around the needs of transportation, ceremony, and everyday movement at the castle.

Industrial-Era Adjustments (19th Century)

Throughout the 1800s, modernization encouraged the continued evolution of the space. Additional stable buildings were constructed, and earlier ones were renovated or replaced. The Riding Hall was rebuilt to accommodate more advanced forms of training and travel. By the end of the century some earlier structures were removed entirely, including parts of the Gardener's House, while others were reshaped to suit changing imperial requirements. Even as technology advanced, horses still played a central role, and the courtyard remained an important hub of equestrian activity.

From Horses to Machines (20th Century)

The early 1900s marked a turning point. As automobiles replaced horses, the courtyard's identity shifted away from equestrian life. Former stables were converted into garages, workshops, and storage rooms. Later political changes reinforced this shift, and the area became more closely tied to administrative and technical functions. What had once been an aristocratic service zone slowly transformed into a practical working area adapted for a modern state.

New Meanings in the 21st Century

Today the Stable Courtyard no longer houses horses, yet its long history remains visible. Renaissance foundations still anchor the space, the 18th century stables define much of its character, and the practical modifications of the 20th century are part of its layered identity. Contemporary conservation aims to preserve all these traces and to interpret the courtyard as a place shaped by centuries of continuous reinvention rather than a frozen moment in time.



HISTORY OF BUILDING

- Romanesque
- Gothic
- Renaissance
- Early baroque
- Later baroque
- Classicist
- Historicist
- Second half of 20th century

Current State of the Stable Courtyard

Today the former stables no longer serve any equestrian purpose. Instead, much of the complex functions as a storage area for the castle's gardening department. These rooms are filled with tools, equipment, and supplies that support the ongoing care of the surrounding historical gardens. Another section of the courtyard has taken on a very different role and is now used as residential quarters for members of the castle police, who occupy a building directly connected to the old stable wing. The historic Gardener's House, along with its small adjoining courtyard, continues to serve the gardeners themselves, providing spaces such as changing rooms and a kitchen. Although several areas have been successfully adapted for modern use, parts of the complex remain underused, offering potential for future restoration, interpretation, or new functions that could bring new life into the courtyard.



The project interprets “translations” through the lens of filtrations which is described as the process of selecting what is valuable historically, culturally or spatially and how those values can be revealed, transformed or preserved. The Prague castle stables are the site of the project with a focus on the north part featuring the gardeners house and dorms of military. The former inaccessible garden and its surroundings are reactivated through balanced architectural intervention and careful decision making which makes sure that important heritage is preserved. The design filters the different layers of the site and retains the essential historical fabric of the area while proposing new functions for the public. The existing buildings are kept the same and the facades are preserved with only a few new changes such as new openings and a window that contribute to an easier accessibility to the area, smooth people flow and daylight to the spaces. The interior spaces are rearranged to adapt to the new functions which are gardeners shop, book shop, gardeners area with changing rooms and an educational arts and crafts workshop for children. The garden shop is an essential space that will promote local produce, books, flowers and products related to the garden and learning more about its history and importance.

The garden itself is also a filtered layered heritage where the main purpose of it staying an intimate garden space is kept and at the same time new public functions emerge such as herbs garden that directly correlates to the inside of the garden shop and a small kiosk space for refreshments where people can grab a drink and explore the garden space around in more quiet area from the rest of the castle space. Through selective preservation, ecological renewal, and new public engagement, the project performs translation not by replacing history, but by filtering it — revealing the parts that can guide a sustainable, inclusive future. Filtering history into contemporary use means transforming a once utilitarian zone into a socially productive one.

The main focus is the proposal of the gardeners shop that brings back the local identity of the area offering fresh produce and products grown on site. The workshop for children will aim to give them direct contact of some gardening skills, history and arts and crafts- ensuring that heritage becomes a shared, intergenerational experience.

1. Filtrations of heritage layers-historical fabric which is kept, new elements added and removed elements that are filtered out

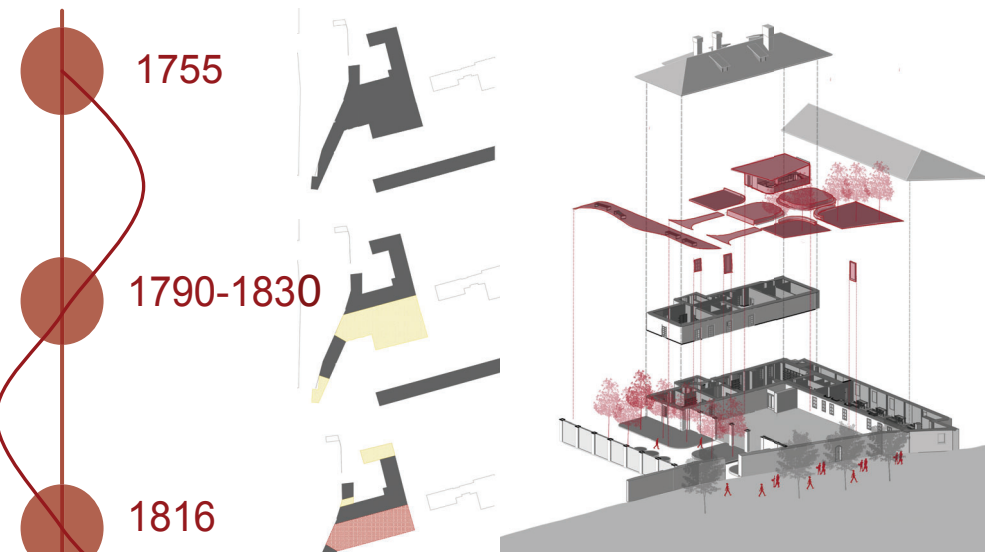
The selective process of choosing what to remain and what should not is a form of translation-filtering historical layers that get reinterpreted/ This allows respecting towards different time periods and the authenticity of the building fabric. New interventions are clearly visible from the existing and at the same time softly blending within their surroundings allowing for the historical character to remain dominant one.

- ## 2. Filtrations of space-accessibility

Previously enclosed and inaccessible, the garden is now filtered open to the public through a sequence of thresholds. The circulation is designed in a way to clearly guide the visitors to the main entrances of different spaces from the surrounding noise and crowd of the castle stables where the visitors centre is to a smaller complex focused on calm and intimacy. New entrances filter movement into the buildings, creating intuitive flows between shop, workshop, and garden. These flows are intentionally modest and relatively narrow fostering privacy and potential avoiding large groups of people clustering around the space.

- ### 3. Filtrations of nature

The reactivated garden becomes an expression of nature filtered through human care. The goal was not to create a historical design as all green spaces around but take nature to a contemporary reinterpretation offering island filled with greenery, herbs garden and pockets of wildness filled with trees and bushes that provide shaded corners for relaxation, intimacy and immersive experience. These islands filter light, views, and movement, creating varied atmospheres within a small footprint that respect the historical layer of the stables.



Exterior visuals of the garden

- Quiet and intimate atmosphere
- Islands planted with greenery and flowers
- People can sit around or explore
- Old materials are preserved with a slight retouch of bringing back the historical color of the facade
- New subtle additions that do not interfere with the existing heritage

The chosen "translations" through filtration is the most fitting to the project as the site of the Prague stables itself is standing between history and today, open and closed spaces, buildings and nature. Instead of proposing a radical change and deleting the historical and cultural heritage the aim of the project is to give new identity to already existing values of the space and filter the only relevant points and potential for development.

Filtration becomes a design ethic:

Less demolition, more bringing back to light.

Less addition, more reconsiderations.

Less spectacle, more delicacy.

In this sense, the project becomes a quiet act of translation — transforming without overwhelming, renewing without erasing.

