

RAISED FROM RUINS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCIN KMIECIŃSKI

The restored Royal Castle in Warsaw includes original decorative pieces that link it back to its illustrious past from before WWII





Photo 1
Aerial photograph of the
ruins of the Old Town
and Royal Castle in
Warsaw, 1945

The Royal Castle in Warsaw, a historic symbol of Polish heritage and pride, endured very serious devastation during World War II. This architectural jewel, once a residence of Polish kings and the site of significant national events, lay in ruins following the systematic destruction by German forces. The castle's fate after the war became a subject of national debate, reflecting the broader struggle of the Polish people to preserve their cultural identity amidst political upheavals.

Several decades after the war, on 19 January 1971, the communist authorities made a historic decision to restore the palace. This marked the beginning of a monumental effort, led by the Citizens' Committee for the Reconstruction of the Royal Castle (OKOZK). The restoration team, under Prof. Jan Bogusławski, faced a mammoth task: to bring the Castle back to its pre-1939 glory, to reinsert all the surviving relics in their original places, and meticulously recreate all the lost portions based on historical records.

The most valuable point of departure for faithfully reconstructing the castle, especially its interiors, were the art objects saved in 1939 (246 paintings – including all works by Canaletto and Bacciarelli, four royal thrones, 40 pieces of furniture, seven textiles, numerous historical memorabilia and decorative artworks), fragments of architectural details and furnishing ele-

ments (paneling, doors, cornices, overdoors, fireplaces, fittings), and about 4,000 details recovered from the castle ruins just after the war. All original elements were conserved, and their locations in the old interiors determined based on iconographic materials. Although in qualitative terms the preserved elements constituted no more than about 10–15% of the overall interiors, they allowed for approximately 75% of the detailing of individual rooms' interiors and furnishings to be faithfully resolved.

After years of painstaking work, the Castle's reconstruction was officially completed in August 1984 and its doors were opened to the public.

Today's visitors to the Royal Castle in Warsaw will easily notice certain darker-shaded elements in the interiors – these are the original pieces, as intended by the designers. As Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor, the castle's first director, used to say – the originals that returned to their former places during the reconstruction are like a thin thread linking the old, prewar castle with the reconstructed one. The reconstruction of Warsaw's broader Old Town district, along with the Royal Castle, was recognized by UNESCO as an example of exceptional reverence in restoring this ancient city methodically destroyed by the Germans.

BOŻENA RADZIO
CURATOR, ROYAL CASTLE IN WARSAW



Photo 2
Ruins of the Royal Castle in
Warsaw, 1945

Photo 3
Great Hall, original doors
with standards

Photo 4
Great Hall, medallion
with a portrait
of King Stanisław August
Poniatowski by André
Le Brun, preserved
in September 1939

Photo 5
Great Hall, marble statue
of Apollo by André Le
Brun, 1778

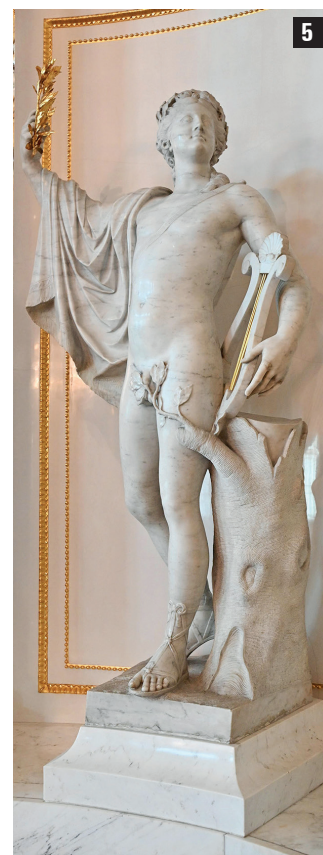




Photo 6
Marble Room, portraits of Polish kings
by Marcello Bacciarelli

Photo 7
Throne Room, fireplace assembled from
elements rescued during the war

Photo 8
Throne Room, throne chair by Johann
Christian Kamsetzer against a backdrop
reconstructed based on the original
eagle found in the United States in 1991

Photo 9
Knights' Hall, overdoor with
a portrait of Krzysztof Radziwiłł
by Marcello Bacciarelli





Photos 10, 11
Conference Room with
original fragments of mural
decoration by Jan Bogumił
Plersch, 1783

Photo 12
Green Room, with a bust
of Voltaire by Jean-Antoine
Houdon dating from
1778 visible in the corner

