

# Vernacular Architecture in the Czech Republic

JIŘÍ LANGER



Photo courtesy Mr. J. Martinák

In Mr. Martinák's workshop in the town of Stárec u Třebíče, you can see a statue of St. John of Nepomuk. Mr. Martinák must create a copy of this statue.

Any mention of architecture in the Czech Republic may bring to mind the magnificent, centuries-old church towers of Prague. However, many other examples of Czech architecture exist, different from Prague's and lovely in their own right. Czech villages, each with its farms, wine cellars, bell tower, and church, are known for their diverse architectural styles, which vary throughout the country according to topography and date of origin. Neighboring Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Austria also have had a strong architectural influence on Czech structures. Some villages can boast relics of Renaissance architecture or impressive examples of the Gothic style from centuries past. In northwest Bohemia and other wooded areas, one finds alpine-style log cabin houses reminiscent of German mountain villages. These sturdy structures

cover under one roof the living quarters as well as the stables, barn, and hayloft. In other regions, construction materials range from clay to brick to stone. Houses are sometimes decorated with colorful paint or geometric patterns. Most notable, perhaps, is what is known as South Bohemian Peasant Baroque. Houses built in this graceful style are characterized by their gentle, rounded stucco facades standing in peaceful rows along the village green. They are often painted in subtle pastel colors with white stucco ornamentation on the facades, and are flanked by a wide portal leading to the courtyard within.

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Wooden belfries in Moravia were communal gathering places in small villages that did not have churches. Their bells tolled to announce births, weddings, and deaths. When Czechs came to Texas in the 1800s, they constructed belfries in their new communities to remind them of their homeland.



Photo courtesy Wallachian Museum



Drawing by Tony Svehla

Houses built in the South Bohemian Peasant Baroque style are typical of farms along the Austrian border. These farms often have separate living quarters, a main house and a barn or smaller building where the parents of the current farmer may live.