

The Omuli Museum of the Horse competition is tasking architecture enthusiasts with redesigning and reimagining a historical school building within the UNESCO-recognised North Latvia Biosphere Reserve.

The Omuli Primary School, originally built in 1936, is planned to become a museum to educate visitors about the nature and history of local horse breeds. The structure will also function as a guest house and artist-in-residence living and workspace.

Built between 1934 – 1936, the Omuli Primary School was designed by Voldemārs Bergkinds and was commissioned by president K.Ulmanis. The two-storey structure was constructed of stock timber with pargetted bricks, and the interior had a simple and practical layout. There were no fancy hallways or parquet floors, but the classrooms were spacious and light with a capacity of 75 students.

The Omuli Primary school has a 785 m<sup>2</sup> footprint, while the surrounding land totals 2.37 hectares. The last student left in 1975, and since then structure has operated as a post office, an apartment, and a lastly – a library which was relocated in 2014. The building remained vacant until it was purchased via blockchain in 2019 by entrepreneur Eva Cildermane who is dedicated to returning the school and the entire village to its former beauty.

The construction of the Omuli Primary School was a source of great excitement when it first opened in 1936, with the local paper detailing its inauguration by Minister of Justice Hermanis Apsītis. Commissioned by the President of Latvia K. Ulmanis in order to offer better conditions and better addition to the local children, the school accommodated 75 students until 1954/55 when the 5th, 6th and 7th grades were discontinued. Students were sent instead to the Ergeme School which was 7 – 12 km away, forcing students to either board or walk the distance every day. Finally, in 1975, the school was closed when the 30 remaining students completed their school year. In fact, the Omuli farm was also liquidated, creating Lenin's collective farm. The school building was then used as the Omuli Folk House, the Omuli library, a post office, and an Omuli branch of a household service complex, as well as a space of two apartments, before being devastated by vandalism.

When the residents of Omuli separated from the large Lenin collective farm in 1988 and re-established the collective farm "Omuļi", the old school structure was repaired, replacing floors and installing furnaces. The Omuli Primary School building continued to operate as a post office, library, office and apartments until 2015 when the municipality sold the building to the local agricultural holding.

The Omuli School is located within the picturesque North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, 4 kilometres from the Latvia – Estonia border. The North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve covers 457,600 hectares of land and 16,750 hectares of sea and is recognized as a protected territory of international importance within the framework of the UNESCO program.

There are several nearby historical attractions, such as the twin cities of Valka – Valga – which branch across the two countries' border – and Ergeme medieval castle which served as a powerful fortress to protect the Livonian Order. The North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve contains a complete mixture of terrains and habitats within its borders, including: 53 km of coastline within the Gulf of Riga, over 60 large lakes that take up over 3 hectares, glacially formed hills and rolling plains, sandy beaches, coastal meadows, and areas of bare rocks. There are also boreal coniferous and mixed forests; wetlands; raised bogs and open bog pools; fens and wet meadows; lakes and rivers; coastal dunes and littoral zones; and extensive agricultural and urban areas.

The Omuli Museum of the Horse project is tasking architecture enthusiasts with redesigning and reimagining a historical school building within the UNESCO-recognised North Latvia Biosphere Reserve. In the town of Oculi, the impact of regional art landmarks on local revitalization, the relationship between natural light and lighting for art exhibitions, and the dialogue between new volumes and historic buildings will be explored.

In this graduate design, will focus on urban design, landscape design and update the logic relation between the building, and to further explore how to through the update of historical buildings will artists, different needs and behavior of the foreign visitors and local residents coexist in one place, and explore a silent dialogue between architecture and nature, and historic buildings in the new era of new possibilities.

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