



ESTONIA



**B**ALTIC REGION HERITAGE COMMITTEE

## Good practices on built heritage conservation/restoration

### *Haapsalu Castle.*

#### **Main idea/goal of the intervention.**

Haapsalu Castle is a unique complex among the Estonian castles. On the one hand, it is castle ruins; on the other hand, part of the main castle was reconstructed as a museum building in 1980s. Nevertheless, the whole complex is called ruins, both in official terms and in people's everyday language. By 2014, the castle walls were in emergency condition, the canopies and other 1980s additions were dilapidated. There were two options: either to close the building to visitors or to start developing a modern museum environment. Thanks to the financial support from the European Union Structural Funds, the latter was possible.

The goal was to create a modern museum, open all year round and accessible for everyone. Up until the point of renovation, the museum facilities lacked heating, ventilation and basic conditions for visitors and were used seasonally. The castle had to change from "ruins" into a modern museum with a more comfortable indoor climate.

### **Location.**

Haapsalu Castle is located at Lossiplats 3 in the resort town of Haapsalu in western Estonia. It is situated in the heart of the city, on a site of heritage protection.

### **Functions.**

Castle with cathedral, or more simply Bishop's Castle, founded in the thirteenth century, was once a seat of the Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek, which currently houses a museum.

### **Owner/manager.**

Foundation of Haapsalu and Läänemaa Museums / public institution.

### **Heritage category.**

Listed building / architectural monument.

### **Short historical background.**

First mentioned in 1279, the episcopal castle went through the twists and turns of history. It was heavily damaged in the Livonian war in 16<sup>th</sup> century and reconstructed into a garrison fortress under the Swedish king in 1581. The castle was then sold to Count Jacob De la Gardie in 1624, destroyed in a fire in 1688 and then used as a local quarry and until the restoration and re-consecration of the cathedral in 1889 (by architect Erwin Bernhard); the West Wing turned into a museum in 1980s (designed by architect Kalvi Aluve).



*Image No. 1, Restored Haapsalu Castle with cathedral (on the left) against the Haapsalu city and bay.  
Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*



*Image No. 2, View from the outer bailey to the cathedral (on the left) and restored main castle.  
Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*

### **Main issues.**

Since the 17th century, the main castle has been in ruins. There was never enough scientific data to restore the medieval volume of the castle, so it was not done in 1950s nor in 1980s. Still, the construction work in 1980s destroyed some of the strata of the courtyard as well as some historical structures. Now, the absolute priority was the conservation of the castle and its content to the highest level possible. From here, a number of fundamental issues emerged. How many of the previous additions and reconstruction works could be removed? How much new architecture could be added and what materials should be used? But

finally and most crucially, how can you create a sustainable and museum-friendly indoor climate in a building that was last heated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century?



*Image No. 3, Before the works. In 2014, the castle walls and later additions were in emergency condition. Photo SALM.*

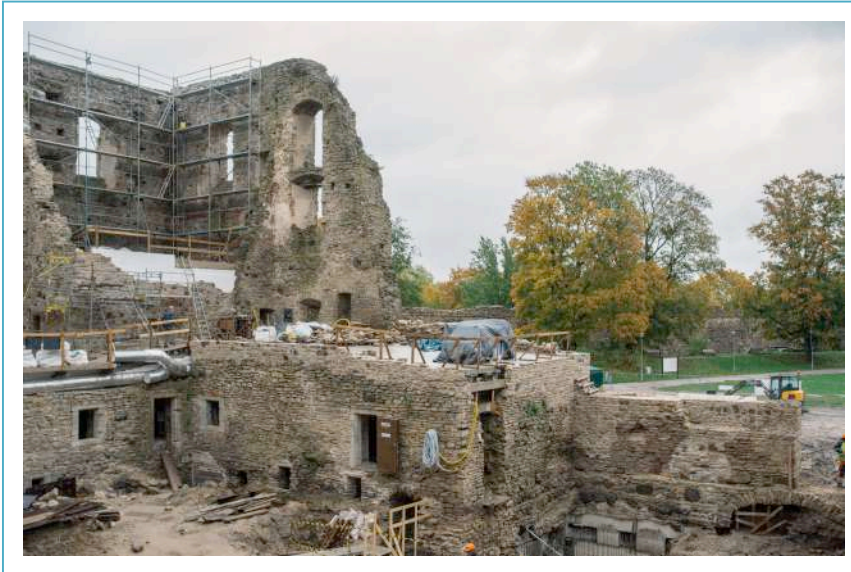


*Image No. 4, Cellar like interiors were dark and without heating. Photo SALM.*

## Research.

The creation of a modern museum environment in the medieval castle required a great deal of planning and research. For example, how do you create a sustainable and museum-friendly indoor climate in a building that was last heated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century? In order to solve this question a cooperation with the Institute of Building Design of Tallinn University of Technology was established, whose study on ensuring the indoor climate became the basis for further heating and ventilation design work.

Despite the careful preliminary work, in cases of historic buildings there are always surprises. An important part of the preliminary work is the ability to anticipate such situations and to compile a team that can react quickly. In Haapsalu's case, the museum had the competence of archaeology, building archaeology and restoration. The rest of the competencies were hired and a team with great synergy was formed.



*Image No. 5, During the renovation. Photo SALM.*



*Image No.6, During the renovation. Photo SALM.*

### **Conservation/restoration/renewal project.**

Architects: Margit Argus, Margit Aule, Elo Liina Kaivo, Laura Ojala (KAOS Architects OÜ)

Special conditions for heritage conservation: Elo Sova (OÜ Vana Tallinn)

Conservation project: OÜ Vana Tallinn

Landscape architecture: Kristiina Hellström

In 2015, the museum organised a design contest (architectural competition). It is standard good practice when commencing works on important and/or public objects. The winning design of KAOS Architects stood out with its bold and innovative solution. The metal staircase designed for the walls was the subject of major controversy both for the jury of the architectural competition and among heritage experts. The museum was determined to have the staircase and the architects together with the structural engineer found an even more discreet solution than their original proposal. At first, the structural engineer said that he did not know how the staircase would stay in the air, but finally came up with a solution.

The pathway is like a flowing band, guiding guests on a journey of impressions from the present and the past. Its bridge-like structure has been attached to the walls by means of steel cantilevers, which were placed to minimise any damage to the historical stonework. For example, architects made use of wall parts that already had anchorage points for the roof structure, originating from the renovation in the 1990s, or attached the bridge to those parts that had been reconstructed earlier. For the bridge to be lightweight, the pathway was made of sheet steel.

The inspiration for the new walkway along the walls dates back to a 1930s photo with visible pathways and greenery along the ruins – a romantic place to promenade and discover.

The work on the castle took place from 2017 to 2019.



*Image No. 7, renewed museum in 2019. Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*



*Image No. 8, the new entrance pavilion. Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*

### **Implementation.**

### **Contractor.**

Builder: AS Restor

Heritage conservation supervision: P.P. Ehitusjärelevalve OÜ

The builder was elected via a public procurement. According to Heritage Conservation Act architects, building companies and conservation supervisors working on architectural monuments must have a level of competence that is recognised by National Heritage Board.

### **Sources of funding.**

Main finances provided by European Union Structural Funds.

### **Main issues.**

The transformation of a medieval castle into a modern museum raised a number of questions. How much of the previous reconstruction work could be removed? Unnecessary demolition was not undertaken, because the floor plan created in 1980s was suitable for the museum. Some formerly added and dangerously outdated reinforced concrete and wooden constructions were removed, as were some secondary walls in the cellar. Most of the layers added during the previous construction work are now marked with plastered and painted surfaces in the interior.

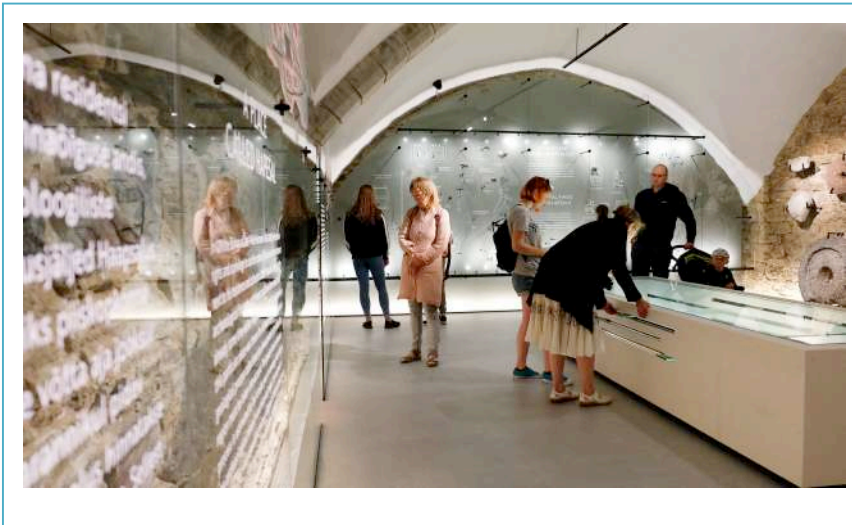
How much new architecture could be added and what materials could be used? The goal was to add as little as possible, just enough to open the walls of the castle to visitors. All the new additions are clearly modern, made of glass and metal. The biggest addition was the new entrance pavilion, the volume of which was determined by the previously reconstructed east wing of the fortress. This solution is also spatially justified: it connects different levels, ensuring access to the basement, ground level and the roof, thus serving as the beginning and end point of the museum visit.

In the interior, the new floors and lighting have given the interior a completely different look. The Interior design is discreet, providing background for the educational exhibition about the castle and the history of the city.

The most resonant detail was the new staircase running along the walls of the main castle, in both the design phase and in the building phase. When completed, it is perhaps the biggest change in the complex. The staircase on the walls has opened up new views of both the castle and the city and climbing the walls via the staircase gives a better idea of the castle's former size.



There were several aspects to the construction work: from the conservation of the ruins to the construction of a completely modern part of the building. Bringing 13<sup>th</sup> century ruins to the requirements of a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum requires many compromises. A sustainable and long-term view was decisive in both the case of construction solutions and in the use of materials. On the one hand, it was important that everything would be durable and easy to maintain. On the other hand, the aim was to keep the historical parts as much as possible and in a way that allows the removal of additions in the future. Thus, the largest ventilation chamber was moved from the originally planned underground location to the second floor instead, in order to avoid the destruction of the historic walls and the archeological layers in the yard. Giant pipes run inside the terrace and the parapet built to it. The wires are located in the floors and, if necessary, placed on walls in a galvanized pipe. Former chimneys are used for movement between the floors: one has an elevator and the other a staircase in it, both of which are autonomous constructions and can be removed if necessary.



*Image No. 9, view at the exhibition. Photo SALM/Hele Otti.*



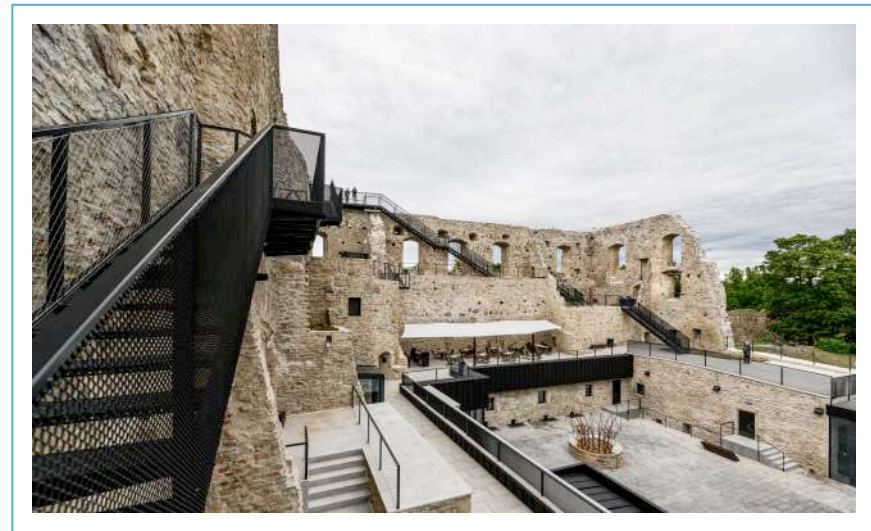
*Image No. 10, view at the exhibition. Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*

## Results/current situation.

Haapsalu Castle museum provides an overview of Haapsalu's early history and the living environment of the medieval castle in a traditional and hands-on format. The dimly lit atmosphere of the castle rooms helps to create an engaging experience of a medieval world through artefacts and interactive exhibits. Located in a large area where there was once a moat, there is a children's playground with equipment inspired by the Middle Ages. It is wheelchair-accessible and is suitable for visitors of all ages.



*Image No. 11, renewed museum. Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*



*Image No. 12, renewed museum. Photo SALM/Tõnu Tunnel.*

## Evaluation.

Recent years have been productive in the conservation of medieval heritage in Estonia. Haapsalu Castle stands out among these as the first to introduce bold and modern interventions to such delicate surroundings. The result has been praised a lot and the work has won several prizes:

- Annual Award of the Estonian National Heritage Board for ‘Best Project in 2017.’
- Annual Remodelling Award of the Architecture Endowment of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia 2019.
- Annual Award of the Estonian National Heritage Board for an ‘Outstandingly Restored Monument’ 2019.
- Estonian Museum Awards, Museum Development of the Year 2019.
- 2021 recognized at the European Museum of the Year Awards.
- 2021 nominated for the European Union Mies van der Rohe architectural prize.

### Why is it considered the best practice?

- Bold and innovative, yet sensitive architectural solution.
- The staircase floating along the walls is a constructive achievement as well as an artwork in its own right.
- All new additions are clearly distinguishable, yet reversible.

There is now a modern museum in medieval castle ruins. The architects’ sensitive approach to detail, respect for heritage and the professional combination of old and new architecture have been praised. The conservation work has resulted in a journey along the walls and within the castle, inviting its guests to take a look at the castle structure and the picturesque town of Haapsalu from an unusual vantage point high above, and to experience the medieval environment from another level. The pathway floating along the walls, the elegant entrance pavilion and gardens on the roof terraces bring in freshness next to the massive ruins and dimly lit exhibition rooms. The new modern additions respect the past and assist visitors in conceptualising it.

The work follows the principle that everything new must be clearly distinguished from the original and represent modern architecture in the best sense. All new additions must also be reversible, in case the restoration principles should change in the future. The gloomy atmosphere of the thick-walled castle has become light and bright, the rooms are connected together into a functional whole. It is exciting to move around between modern and medieval architecture – the glass pavilion offers framed views of

the castle. A dimly lit and closed interior alternates with light and openness. Therefore, visual pollution is avoided – the structural engineers have made the new constructions even more unnoticeable than initially designed; the ventilation engineer has made the pipes almost invisible. There is underfloor heating in the museum itself.

Against the walls of the episcopal castle, the new staircase looks like an artwork in its own right. It is a contrasting element in the ruins, which maintains tension and encourages visitors to reconsider the familiar image. The outcome provides an exciting synergy between the new and the old.

**More information.**

For more information, please contact Kaire Tooming, Head of the Castle Museum, or visit <https://linnus.salm.ee/en/>.