

WALLPAPER RESTORATION OF EDUARDS SMILGI'S CABINET

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The new Riga Theater located at 25 Lacplesa Street (Riga) will open its doors in 2021. Currently, reconstruction works are held there to preserve the values of the Latvian theater history with its distinctive details and the cabinet of Eduards Smilgis.

In 1920, after returning from abroad, Eduards Smilgis founded the Dailes Theater in this building and on November 19 the history of the theater begins. The Dailes Theater was located in these premises until 1977, but until 1964 Eduards Smilgis was its artistic director, director of all significant staging and creator. As a result, the premises of this theater are unimaginable without the Smilgis cabinet. Our goal in this project was to save wallpapers of this cabinet.



Fig.1. New Riga Theater (Lacplesa Street 25, Riga) with a portrait of Eduards Smilgis, on the side of the facade.

ABOUT PAPER WALLPAPER

Paper wallpapers began their daily life in the 16th century when English merchants brought them from China. The first information about paper wallpaper production within the territory of modern Latvia dates back to the 17th century and is related to the reign of Duke Jacob. However, there are many different types of wallpaper, such as leather wallpapers, fabric lining: woven and embroidered, painted fabrics or paper wallpapers. Paper wallpaper was the cheaper equivalent of fabric decoration, but in the second half of the 18th century in Latvia paper wallpaper decoration was fixed in buildings belonging to one social group, wealthy German-Baltic merchants.

Commercially, wallpapers are categorized by their weight, components and surface coating on the wallpaper. Thick and embossed paper wallpapers with surface coating are found in Eduard Smilgis' cabinet.

The wallpaper design features a geometric abstraction with square and line layouts and their relationship in the pattern of the ornament, creating a restrained, businesslike and elegant tone. The design uses closer color shades that have lost their tonality over time. At the moment, the tonality of the wallpaper is dark red-brown as base tone with an accent of a red-brown tone. Wallpaper embossing and surface coating that has disappeared in some places in combination with wallpaper tonality creates a false impression of wallpaper base reinforced by the cold walls of the building.

Wallpaper has a good degree of preservation, with visible surface wear resulting from cabinet use. Where the furniture may have been placed, there is loss of wallpaper fragments and those loss areas are tinted with brown floor paint.



Fig.3. Wallpapers after dismantling and prepared for transportation.



Fig.6. Filling of losses, bonding and securing of fractures.



Fig.4. Mechanical cleaning.

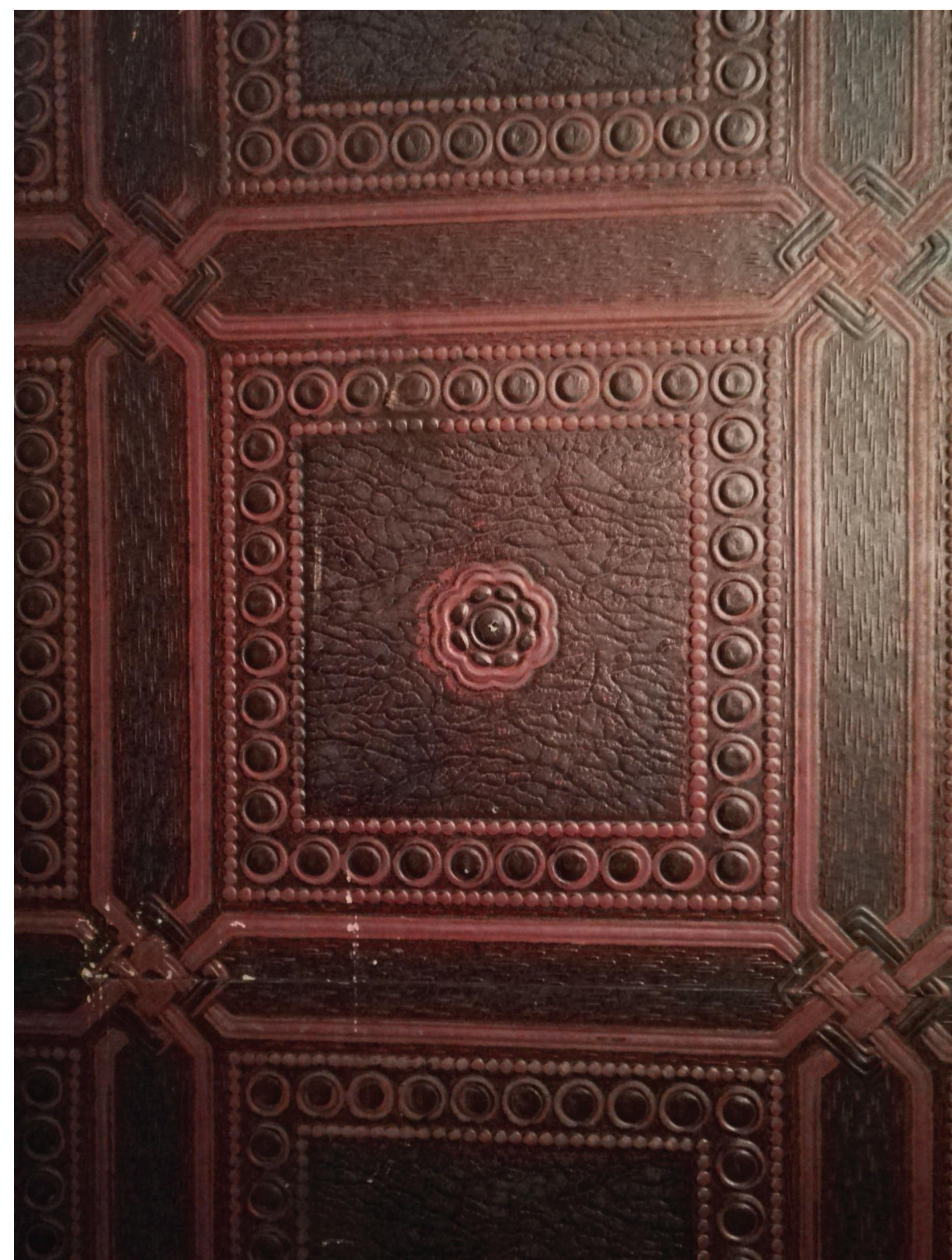


Fig.2. Wallpaper fragment from Eduards Smilgis' cabinet.



Fig.5. Wallpaper cleaning from the front side.

PROCESS OF THE RESTORATION

The restoration process began with the wallpaper dismantling. The wallpaper was taken off in a wet manner, completely moistened with water. Moistening was repeated several times due to the thickness of the wallpaper and partially preserved surface coating. Further restoration processes took place in the workshop.

After dismantling the wallpaper was dirty, covered with dust and plaster. During the dismantling minor tears occurred, material losses that occurred during the use of the room when the wallpaper was on the wall became more prominent.

The restoration work was started with mechanical cleaning. The plaster was maximally cleaned off the back of the wallpaper without leaving a thick layer of plaster. Scalpels were used; small parts of the plaster were collected with vacuum cleaner. The front of the wallpaper was cleaned of dust using moistened soft sponges.

After all wallpapers were cleaned, they were primed. Quelyd Special Vinyl paste was used for priming, which is suitable for all types of heavy wallpaper with paper and textile backing. It contains modified starch and anti-mold additives.

Immediately after priming, the losses were filled in, tears were glued and reinforced. For gluing the same glue was used as for priming. Mica coated paper was used to fill the losses, tears as well for reinforcement.

Currently the wallpaper restoration process is not fully completed, the wallpapers are fully prepared for gluing back to the wall for the foreseeable future. After assembly, tinting and waxing of the top layer of wallpaper are planned.