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Kukši Manor

Photo: Philip Birzulis

Latvia's got personality: Heritage hot Jahn

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Like the stately homes of England, old aristocrat haunts offer a taste of the bl
Baltics. Meet a man who has transformed a rundown Latvian mansion into a s
things in life.

For seven centuries, the Baltic German nobility ruled the roost in Latvia from elegant manor houses in the countryside. While many of these have followed their privileged class into oblivion, some are still standing thanks to new proprietors undaunted by generations of soot and epic renovation bills.

[Kukši \(or Kukšu\) Manor](#), about 90 kilometres west of Riga, is a magnificently restored example of a manor where the savior is a foreigner who cares deeply about his adopted homeland and its heritage.



Daniel Jahn, Kukši Manor owner

Photo: Philip Birzulis

"I don't have any aristocratic roots – I just came here and really liked Latvia and its people and Daniel Jahn. "And I wanted to restore this little corner of the country, far from the highway but drop by."

Peeling back time

The history of Kukši goes back to at least 1530, when Master of Livonia Walter von Plettenberg Jēkabs, Pēteris and Klāvs Kuksis as a fiefdom to one Bernd Tiedewitz. In 1695, he sold the place

Friedrich von Brackel, who built the delightful baroque- and classical-styled residence still stan

Like the aforementioned gentry, Daniel also hails from Germany. His relationship with Latvia b
he ran Riga's posh Hotel de Rome in a joint venture with Riga City Council. He got a practical ex
helping redevelop the Konventa seta quarter in the capital's Old Town, then discovered the Lat
by cultural historian Professor Ojārs Spārītis.

On one such jaunt to Kurzeme, he saw an opportunity for a new life at Kukši Manor. Having so
capital, he was ready for the quieter life of a country hotelier.

“ “I saw it, I loved it and I bought it!” he recalls. “Then the question
with it? It's a bit big for a summer cottage!”

Unlike many other grand homes, Kukši emerged unscathed from the 1905 Revolution and the
Soviet collective farm which had used it as an office building had done plenty of damage, at lea
concrete eyesores around the property. Daniel snapped up the house with 60 hectares of lanc
18,000 USD, then devoted years of his life and much more money to meticulously bringing it b



Kukši Manor interior
Photo: Philip Birzulis

With fastidious attention to detail, the original roof tiles were put back on and the old parquet, rejuvenated. Eleven layers of paint and wallpaper were removed to reveal rare historic wall paper and a personal collection of Meissen porcelain and paintings by Latvian, German and Russian masters on the first floor which closely approximates the way it would have looked in the glory days.

The guest rooms upstairs are a little more dashing, but it would take a hardened snob to quibble with the taste. And this oasis of old world charm just an hour from Riga has earned a loyal clientele, providing the backdrop to many a wedding, anniversary and corporate bash.

Small is beautiful

They come for Daniel's cooking, too. Alone in the kitchen, he whips up treats that have won accolades from local chefs. On a recent Thursday, lucky diners could look forward to cold cucumber soup with gingerbread, followed by veal cheeks with fresh vegetables from the estate garden (grown by guess who), rounded off with a cake.

Tours, rooms and meals are only available by booking ahead. But guests get the host's undivided attention.

“I’m part of the furniture,” he laughs. “If there’s a problem, I’m there from dawn to dusk every day, but I have the luxury of choosing my guests. In my stressful life, I deserve it.”

Daniel only has three other staff, part of a conscious decision to keep things manageable. This period without ruffling the serene atmosphere of Kukši. Local regulars stayed the night and even on the weekends. There was time for long-postponed repairs and giving the tableware (all silver) a thorough polish.

Most of all, it ties in with Daniel's plans to slow down and only do what he loves, even if a typical day is long.

“I’m 60 years old, and you can’t take anything with you to the grave,” he muses. “I want to enjoy life as much as I want. And then all will be well!”



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