

Kotva gets a facelift

The long-anticipated overhaul of the Kotva department store at Náměstí Republiky, once considered the premier icon of Czech consumerism, is scheduled to begin next month.

Extensive work is planned for the building's interior and immediate surroundings. Store officials are hoping the reconstruction effort will help bring in more shoppers and gentrify an area known for its seediness.

Kotva will remain open during the construction, which is scheduled to last until 2011. Details on the project's cost weren't made available.

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Markland Group, the Irish company that has owned the department store since 2005, started the renovation process in 2008, installing new flooring, lighting and decorations. But crucial work on the building's facade, main entrance and on the space around the building is in the hands of Ian Bryan Architects (IBA).

The Prague-based firm has been crafting a new look for the outside of the building, its facade, upper floors and main entrance. Ian Bryan, IBA's director, says a 300 sqm area around the edge of the building will be filled with "new shop elements," as well as a coffee bar or restaurant that will spill directly onto the square. Markland is in negotiations with potential tenants for this site.

"The first thing is to raise the lighting levels, open the building in the summer months, look at the colors, replace the ground floor facades with a new glazing and create a new entrance, so that there will be very strong drawing elements for people who are around

the building," says Bryan.

IBA is also in charge of transforming the underused top two floors into about 5,000 sqm of high-end business suites with dedicated terrace areas and a rooftop restaurant with panoramic views of the city. The street-level passageway leading to the offices will be redone as part of the Kotva ground floor, with a new reception area and dedicated elevators for the offices.

"We will [install] bigger windows to get more daylight into the deeper areas of the office floors, and this involves quite detailed discussions with the heritage officials and also with the previous architects," says Bryan.

64 With the building slated for landmark status, the support of one of the building's original designers, Věra Machoninová, has been useful in getting renovation plans approved by conservation officials.

Markland is currently offering tenants short-term leases because of the impending reconstruction. Rent prices run between CZK 2,500 to 3,000 (€95 to €114) per sqm for the ground floor and CZK 200 to 250 (€7.6 to €9.5) per sqm for the fourth floor. This is considerably cheaper than Prague's high streets, where rental levels have stabilized at €170 per sqm, and in the shopping centers, where rents have dropped to €100 per sqm in recent months, according to the latest figures from CB Richard Ellis.

Major construction is set to begin on the historic Czech department store

Nina Fibigerová

IBA is working on changing the way Kotva looks to those on the outside



Conceived as multi-tenanted retail space rather than a unified department store, like Debenhams, Kotva markets itself toward what average people actually want and need, Bryan says.

"This is why people go there," Bryan says. "They know it's different from [Palladium] across the street, which has more of the same [goods found in other malls] and much more expensive prices. In Kotva, it's not as great a shopping experience, but it will improve radically."

It's this type of unique shopping experience that has helped make the department store stand out.

95 "In Kotva, the customer doesn't have to run around the whole shopping center to be able to look through the fashion on offer from various retailers. Our strategy is to offer the whole assortment in one place," says Jaroslav Petrů, CEO of Markland Kotva.