

KLAS RESTAURANT

Cicero



Credit: Sean Reilly

“Adolph and Ella Klas hired artisans from here and abroad to complete their restaurant that served as an anchor for the Czech community, attracting everyone from dignitaries to working families.”

IRENE HOGSTROM

GRANDDAUGHTER OF KLAS RESTAURANT ARTIST GENNADI GORDEYEV



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Joe Vosicky, member of the Bohemian Lawyers Association (left) & Irene Hogstrom, granddaughter of artist Gennadi Gordeyev. Credit: Sean Reilly

LOCATION

5734 W. Cermak Road
Cicero, Cook County

YEAR BUILT

1922

ARCHITECT

Adolf Klas/Unknown

CURRENT OWNER

Privately owned

WHY IT'S ENDANGERED

The Klas Restaurant, a 12,825 square-foot, two-story building along Cermak Road in Cicero, is vacant and [currently up for sale](#). With its fate undetermined and the building unprotected, it faces possible demolition.

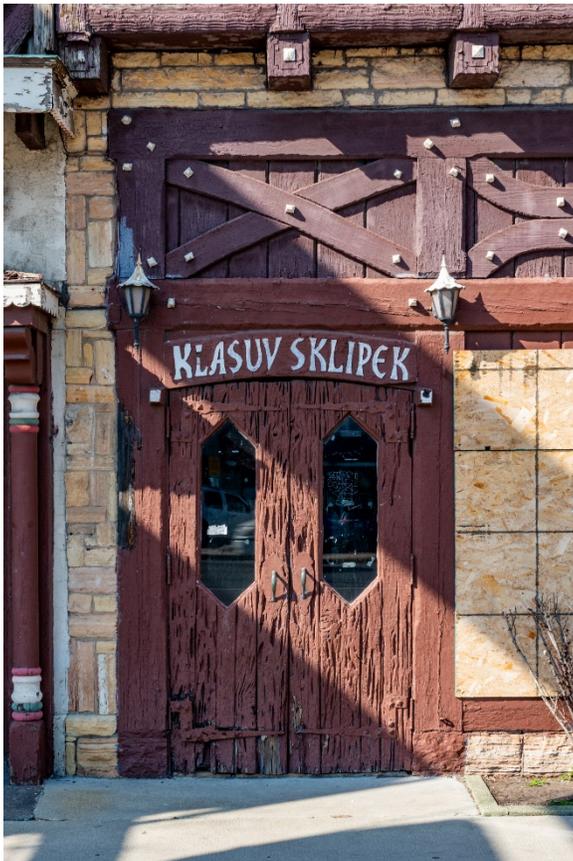
The current owner listed the property for sale as a restaurant. However, the building itself is deteriorating due to lack of investment, and inside there is water damage and subsequent mildew and structural issues due to water leakage in the roof over the past few years. Its adjacent

parking lot and interior courtyard are also both overgrown as the property sits vacant. These conditions require major rehabilitation to bring the restaurant up to current building codes, which could be cost prohibitive to a potential buyer. Despite its cultural significance to the Cicero community, Klas Restaurant has no historical designation or protection, and a future buyer could pursue demolition instead of refurbishing and reusing the building.

In August of 2019, an architectural salvage crew removed much of the interior ornamentation, canvas murals, paintings, wood carvings and some limestone details. The frescos painted directly on the plaster walls remain, but their present condition is unknown. The building was purchased in September of 2019, but the extent of work done by the new owner is unknown. The exterior continues to show deterioration. There is an extraordinary amount of support from residents, the Czech and Slovak communities, local businesses and Cicero's leadership for the reuse of the Klas Restaurant. Once revitalized, Klas would be a vibrant destination. A demolition permit was issued in 2020, but the six-month period expired and a new permit would need to be issued before demolition can occur. The building needs an owner who wants to preserve its historic character for a reuse that can hopefully be enjoyed by the public. The organizations dedicated to the region's Czech and Slovak history stand ready to partner and assist.



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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE & BACKGROUND

In 1922, Adolf Klas built Klas Restaurant in Cicero to replicate elements of traditional Czech culture. The restaurant served as a representation of Czech traditional culture and a meeting place for the sizeable Czech population in Cicero at the time. Having operated for over 90 years, Klas Restaurant is recognized by the Town of Cicero as the country's longest-running Czech restaurant. Klas served an anchor in the community, hosting many public and private events and drawing in visitors from all backgrounds who wanted to try the Czech fare and experience the fantasy the restaurant created through its architectural and artistic details. Al Capone and President H.W Bush frequented the restaurant, and in 2012, Madeline Albright visited to help honor the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. Over time, Klas Restaurant's representation of Czech tradition created a welcoming atmosphere that became a part of Cicero's history and identity.



During its construction, Adolf Klas wanted to replicate the architecture and design elements of traditional Czech buildings. A portion of the exterior is meant to mirror gothic architecture seen in Prague. This portion features limestone construction with a polished granite base. A different part of the exterior is meant to replicate a medieval European village-style using timbers and stucco. Exterior decoration depicting harvests of produce and various instruments alludes to the highly ornamental and decorative interior elements that create a near-fantastical atmosphere for those who dined there.

The Klas family invited Czech artists to develop custom, hand-made furniture, stained glass, architectural accents and paintings on the restaurant's interiors. Notably, a series of murals painted in 1938 by Gennadi Gordeyev decorate several of the restaurant's themed dining rooms. Other paintings by Gordeyev exist in Chicago's Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Cathedral, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The architectural and artisanal details both inside and outside of Klas Restaurant are unique. Klas Restaurant's use of Czech artisans represents



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its community in ways that are not commonly seen today. Many would like to see Klas Restaurant's dedication to Cicero's community and the Czech population remembered and honored through its protection.

Although there is no single effort to save Klas Restaurant, many individuals and organizations are concerned about its survival. Several reuse suggestions have been made, such as reopening Klas as a restaurant and a public event/music space like Thalia Hall in Pilsen. In 2018, members of the Bohemian Lawyers Association and American Sokol prepared a "Vision for Klas" hoping to raise funds to purchase the building. The comprehensive plan suggested two opportunities: Create a Czech Campus in Cicero and convert Klas into a multiethnic museum that also would pay tribute to Cicero's Mexican community. The Czech Campus suggestion includes integrating the Klas Restaurant with the adjacent Czechoslovak Heritage Museum and Library and the 90-year-old T. G. Masaryk Czech School, just two blocks away. Connecting the museum to a larger coalition would provide resources to build a renowned museum. The T.G. Masaryk Czech School provides language, culture and history classes for people of Czech ancestry. Klas could provide catering and event space as well as additional exhibit and office space for the museum.



Credit: Sean Reilly



The idea of turning the Klas into a multiethnic museum would focus on the similar paths of Czech and Mexican migration. The location of Klas Restaurant on Cermak Road provides an opportunity to connect the many ethnic groups that have used this road as a center of community life. While the team that is working on the multiethnic museum idea has developed a plan, it has not been able to raise the projected \$2 million needed to do the work.

[Cicero's 2017 comprehensive plan](#) includes preservation incentives that would apply to Klas. Chapter 6 suggests that the city "support the rehabilitation, preservation and reuse of Cicero's traditional buildings, especially along Cermak Road."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Parties interested in possibly purchasing the Klas for rehabilitation and reuse are encouraged to tour the property. Check the [real estate listing here](#).

Reach out to advocates to see how you can support the preservation of Klas Restaurant:

- Jean Hruby, President, American Sokol: JeanHruby@american-sokol.org, jean.hruby@gmail.com or 708-420-7589
- Irene Hogstrom, Granddaughter of Gennadi Goreyev (Regarding the history of the murals), i_hogstrom@yahoo.com or 312 -607-2566

FURTHER READING

[Facebook discussion thread](#)

Forgotten Chicago Discussion Group, April 6, 2021

[Chicago Area Murals](#)

Chicago Sun-Times, September 6, 2019

[Czechs in Chicago Documentary](#)

WTTW

[Cicero's roots entwined in restaurant](#)

Chicago Tribune, February 27, 2008



Credit: Sean Reilly