

STORY OF PETRAŠIŪNAI COMMUNITY CENTER: HONORING THE PAST, SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Growing up in Kaunas, I often found myself spending time in Petrašiūnai. Those hours along the bend of the Nemunas, among the pine trees, meadows, and flowing water, shaped the way I saw the world. In the quiet rhythm of the river and the woods, I was reminded of times when, inspired by nature, the river, and the carved wooden patterns, people discovered Lithuanian ethnic symbols that became a language, a language that bound them to the land and to each other. The river, the meadows, and the woods gave rhythm to life here — a rhythm older than any street or chimney. But Petrašiūnai also changed with time. In the interwar years, when Kaunas became Lithuania's capital, a new landmark rose on the edge of the district: the Petrašiūnai power plant. Its chimney dominated the horizon, a proud symbol of progress and the industrial future. For generations, it shaped daily routines — the smoke, the sirens, the endless shifts that powered the city. Yet even at the height of industry, nature was never absent. Birds still circled above the river and across the water Panemunė forest kept its calm. Petrašiūnai was always a dialogue between these two worlds — craft and machine, silence and roar.

Now, walking those same paths, I see Petrašiūnai with new eyes. The power plant still stands, but its meaning has shifted. What was once a monument to progress is no longer only about labor. It has become a gathering place, hosting music and light festivals, where laughter replaces the sound of sirens. The industrial heart that once beat so heavily has found another rhythm.

And not far from it, the new *Petrašiūnai Community Center* has risen. From a distance, its tower recalls the silhouette of the old chimneys, linking past and present. Its heavy forms nod to industry, yet the stepped shapes dissolve into the landscape, like hills rolling down to the river. The tall pines remain untouched, standing as they always have. Up close, the building feels different — softer, warmer. Wooden shingles cover its roof, folk patterns are carved into its surfaces, and at night a glow spills through its skylights. Inside, life unfolds in new ways: concerts, workshops, shared meals, exhibitions. Here, the hum of machinery has been replaced by the hum of conversation. Right behind the building a wide set of steps leads down to the riverbank, inviting visitors to sit, relax, and watch the water flow during the day. The space feels calm and reflective, a quiet pause in the rhythm of the city. Yet in the evening, this same area transforms into an open-air venue, perfect for gatherings, performances, and festivals. I can only imagine what opportunities this place could bring in the near future, creating a small pier or even a floating stage on the river, hosting music nights, cultural performances, and community celebrations under the sky.

For me, Petrašiūnai has never been one thing alone. It has always been nature and industry, memory and renewal. Once, people were united by work; today, we are united by creativity and community. The landscape remains the same — the Nemunas still flows, the birds still circle, the chimneys still rise — but the meaning of this place continues to grow.