

US architect plans to make unique summer home at Jánosháza

Ruined castle will be rebuilt

A GLOBE-TROTTERING collector of unusual homes will be among the first beneficiaries of Hungary's recently announced castle giveaway.

Joseph Pell Lombardi, a New York architect specializing in historic restorations, was one of two winners in the giveaway's first tender, closed in June.

After legalities are ironed out, Lombardi will count among his global collection of vacation homes the magnificent Erdődy-Choron palace in Jánosháza.

As he has done with scores of properties around the world, Lombardi hopes to restore the centuries-old seat of long-departed Hungarian nobility based on painstaking research into building plans, pictures and historic accounts and documents.

Beautiful

This is part of the arrangement with the National Monument Protection Authority.

Some 70 castles and ancient aristocratic homes will be given away over the next few years, but only on condition that they are restored with historic exactitude.

Those strings were no deterrent to Lombardi, whose passion for historic buildings reaches from his professional into his private life.

Lombardi, 57, has run a New York architecture firm specializing in such projects for 25 years.

Although the company's 25 staff supervise projects around the world most of their work is in Manhattan where they have restored scores of old commercial build-

by Greg Spencer

ings for use as offices and apartments.

Lombardi's main residence is in one of his firm's projects, a 33-floor, gothic-style skyscraper in Manhattan.

While finalizing paperwork on the Jánosháza property, Lombardi is also pursuing an ancient chateau in France.

"It's not that I'm some grand lord," Lombardi said. "What I like to do is find old properties of particular architectural value, and restore them."

Lombardi discovered the Jánosháza palace when he came to Hungary five years ago on behalf of the World Monuments Fund.

"Hungary has lots of beautiful, old buildings that haven't been maintained because they have no obvious commercial use," he said.

"They're either in odd locations or their design prevents them from being used as hotels."

The Erdődy-Choron palace is a case in point. Jánosháza, a tiny town in Western Hungary, ranks far down the list of Hungary's travel destinations.

And though Erdődy-Choron has 24 rooms, a stylish tower and unique interior wall paintings, it is in very poor repair.

Derelict

It was last inhabited in the early years of this century and it lacks electricity, plumbing, windows, toilets and sinks.

It has a leaky roof and structural problems and even the floorboards have been taken.

But Lombardi sees its potential and is prepared to invest \$500,000 to restore it to



BRIGHT FUTURE: Erdődy-Choron in its ruined state.

its former greatness. When the restoration is finished — in five or six years Lombardi figures — he will have one of the most unique summer homes in Hungary.

Lombardi, who tried and failed to buy Erdődy-Choron in a previous tender,

expects he will take the castle on a 99-year lease.

Eventually he'd like to buy it outright, but Hungarian property laws do not permit him to do so. "Right now, I'll take what I can get," Lombardi said.