



The Amber Room, St Petersburg

Created in Berlin in 1701, the amber panels that form the walls of the Amber Room were given to the Tsar of Russia by the King of Prussia in 1716. They were then looted by the Nazis in 1941, and were lost, never to be seen again. Their home in Russia was a room in the Catherine Palace at Tsarskoye Seloe, some 25 km south of St Petersburg. Fortunately, between 1979 and 2003, a complete replica of the Amber Room was made in its original position within the restored Catherine Palace. This was a massive undertaking, using amber from the same source area as the original, along the Baltic coast of Kaliningrad (now a Russia enclave between Poland and Lithuania). Based on old photographs, the copy is exact in every detail. The room is about 9 by 10 metres, with one wall of windows. The other three walls have a total of 55 square metres of amber mosaic in eight panels that reach from floor to cornice. Frames around the panels, and bas-relief ornamentation within them, are beautifully carved in solid amber. Pilasters, doorways and window frames are made of wood gilded with gold leaf. The total effect is stunning. The elements of the amber mosaic are mostly 50–100 mm across and randomly shaped, though they are fitted together perfectly. The carved amber is in larger pieces. Colours vary from yellow to red to brown, but there are almost no inclusions in the Amber Room material, and certainly no recognisable insects, as any mineral with inclusions was better used in jewellery or in museum displays. Around six tonnes of the best-quality output from the large opencast mines of Kaliningrad were used to re-construct the Amber Room, though less than half of that made it into the room after the raw material was sliced or carved. Now a part of the tourist trail around St Petersburg, the Amber Room is a must-see for any visiting geologist.

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