

This walk through **Moscow** takes us through the history of Russian architecture of the last twenty years, a period of huge changes reflected in the architecture of the city. Not all of these differences are visible, at least not for those who visit the city for the first time. For new visitors, what the city looked like two decades ago, following Soviet neglect and combined with the period of post-Soviet chaos, is obscure. The developments of recent years have done their best to eradicate this legacy, at least in the inner city, but in back streets and courtyards the keen observer is still able to see its remnants.

Urban power play

RUSSIA — TEXT: BART GOLDSHOORN, ILLUSTRATION: SYLVAIN TEGROEG

One relic of the Soviet past is not difficult to miss: the New Arbat (by architect Mikhail Posokhin and completed in 1968), which can be seen from Arbat Square, the starting point of our walk. It is a radical modernist project with high-rise towers that cuts through the old city fabric. From the same square, we see the beginning of Arbat Street, the first pedestrian thoroughfare in the Soviet Union, created in 1986 as part of Gorbachov's Perestroika. This street reflects a shift towards postmodern urbanism, which was preceded by the famous Paper Architecture of the 1980s (see *Eurovision: Russia* in A10 #51). In that decade, Russian architects won numerous international competitions with their beautiful drawings featuring a rejection of modernist techno-

cratic planning and a love for the poetics of architecture in general, and for the historical architecture of the old city in particular.

During the 1990s, authorities were quick to embrace this movement. The first building on the left of Arbat Street, a bland historicist complex, was designed by the municipal architecture bureau, headed by Mikhail Posokhin Jr., the son of the author of the New Arbat. Still, some of the Paper architects also got the opportunity to realize their projects. Turning into Filippovskiy Lane behind the Posokhin building, we encounter the **Pompeii House**, a creation by Mikhail Belov (1). It shows a much more joyful and rich interpretation of postmodernism reminiscent of his Paper projects of the 1980s. A bit

further along, we find a building by another Paper architect, Mikhail Filippov, a true believer in classicist architecture. The **Lukoil Reception House** is one of his first realized projects (2). Alas, it lacks the patina of history that is present in his drawings.

Turning left at the end of the street, we come to the Boulevard Ring. In this linear park that stretches around the city centre, we see a well-designed public space with all the necessary attributes, such as benches, lighting, navigation, and even free bicycles. Continuing along the boulevard, we pass Kropotkinskaya metro station and walk on towards the river. Just before reaching the embankment, turn right into Kursovoy Lane and enter the Ostozhenka District.

This is where Moscow's urban development comes closest to the way Western inner cities have grown in recent decades. But, contrary to the association we might have with social housing, this is the most expensive real estate in Russia (nicknamed the 'Golden Mile'). Until recently, prices of €28,000 per square metre were no exception. Here, an almost European urban environment unfolds, with low-rise buildings, real streets, no fences or gates, well-kept landscaping, and sidewalks with tiles instead of asphalt. Ostozhenka Architects, led by Alexander Skokan, were at the forefront this development. They worked out an urban plan for the district showing that there is an alternative to Soviet greenfield planning, with **low-rise buildings** (3) that respect the historical context.

Another fine early example can be found on the first corner on the right side of Kursovoy Lane. At the end of this street, after passing some less successful examples of contextual architecture, we arrive at a recent project by Skuratov Architects that shows how Russian architecture nowadays is

'There is an alternative to Soviet greenfield planning, with low-rise buildings that respect the historical context.'



1 POMPEII HOUSE (2006)
Architect: Mikhail Belov
Address: Filippovskiy Pereulok 13



2 LUKOIL RECEPTION HOUSE (2000)
Architect: Mikhail Filippov
Address: Filippovskiy Pereulok 18



3 GLAVUPDK OFFICE BUILDING (2000)
Architect: Ostozhenka Architects
Address: Kursavoi Pereulok 4



4 BARKLI PALACE (2008)
Architect: Skuratov Architects
Address: Kursavoi Pereulok 19



5 COPPER HOUSE (2004)
Architect: Skuratov Architects
Address: Butikovskiy Pereulok 3



6 RESIDENTIAL BLOCK (2003)
Architect: Skuratov Architects
Address: Butikovskiy Pereulok 5



7 RESIDENTIAL BLOCK AND VILLA OSTOZHENKA (2004)
Architect: Project Meganom
Address: Molochny Pereulok 1



8 OFFICE BUILDING (2008)
Architect: Project Meganom
Address: Butikovskiy Pereulok 7



9 OFFICE BUILDING (2010)
Architect: Ostozhenka Architects
Address: Butikovskiy Pereulok 9w



10 CRYSTAL HOUSE (2003)
Architect: Project Meganom
Address: Korobeinikov Pereulok 1



11 INTERNATIONAL MOSCOW BANK (1995)
Architects: Ostozhenka Architects with Jahudi Pallasmaa
Address: Prechistenskaya Naberezhnaya 9



12 KHILKOV LANE MANSION (2008)
Architect: ABV Group
Address: Khilkov Pereulok 5



13 MOSCOW HOUSE OF PHOTOGRAPHY (2010)
Architect: Mosproject-4
Address: Ostozhenka Street 16



14 HOUSING COMPLEX
Architect: Kiselov & Partners
Address: Ostozhenka Street 11-17



15 STRELKA INSTITUTE (2010)
Architect: Wowhaus
Address: Bersenevskaya Embankment 14



16 KRYMSKAYA EMBANKMENT RECONSTRUCTION (2013)
Architect: Wowhaus
Address: Krymskaya Embankment



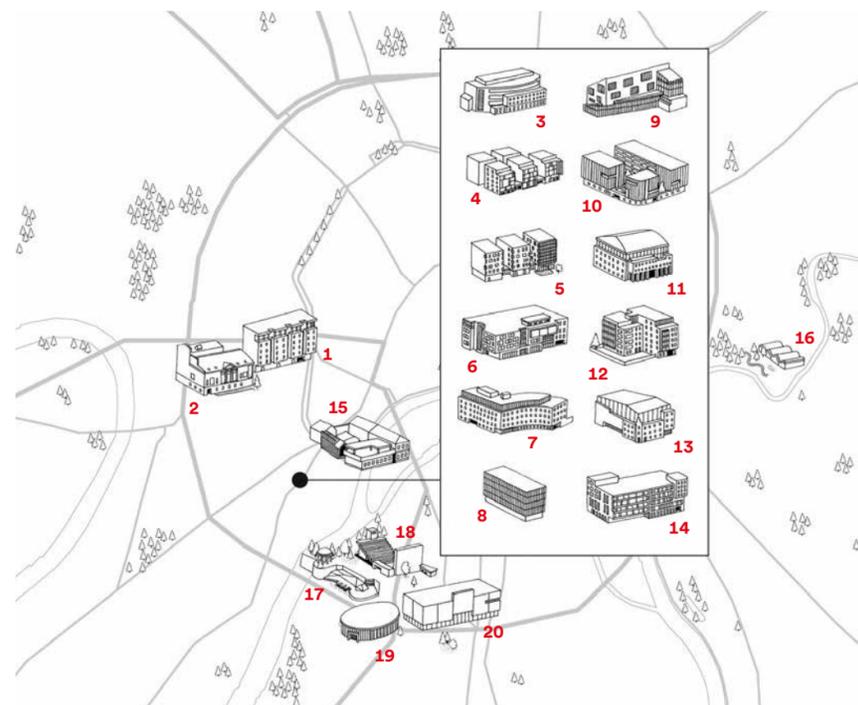
17 OLIVE BEACH WOODEN EMBANKMENT (2011)
Architect: Wowhaus
Address: Gorki Park



19 GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART TEMPORARY BUILDING (2012)
Architect: Shigeru Ban
Address: Gorki Park



20 GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (2015)
Architect: OMA
Address: Gorki Park



(Urban power play)

‘Gorki Park is the most vivid proof of the impact the revitalization of public space can have on quality of life in the city.’

completely on par with its foreign counterparts (4). **Barkli Palace** is oriented towards the river and, if we turn the corner, we can see the main facade along the embankment, reminiscent of the minimalist architecture of David Chipperfield.

Re-entering the Ostozhenka District and taking the second small alley on the left, we end up right in the middle of another Skuratov project: the **Copper House**, which derives its name from its facade material, and comprises a number of free-standing small towers united by a lobby (5). Its main entrance is on **Butikovskiy Lane**, which probably has the highest concentration of contemporary architecture in Moscow. Next to the Copper House we find another, more traditional housing by Skuratov, clad in dark brown brick (6), opposite a building by Project Meganom, one of the other leading Moscow architecture offices (7). With its rounded facade, it creates a pleasant urban square. In the courtyard on the backside, we find a little secret: **Villa Ostozhenka**, a private house with a swimming pool, and likely the first such private dwelling in the city centre since Konstantin Melnikov built his famous house in Kryvoabtsky Lane.

Turning back and continuing along **Butikovskiy Lane**, we encounter two more recent projects by Project Meganom and Ostozhenka. The first is completely abstract, with vertical glass ribs (8); the second features a multi-layered facade with louvers covering the glazed surface behind (9). It shows how the possibilities to use sophisticated architectural detailing have evolved over the years in Russia, at least in this luxury segment. At the end of Butikovskiy Lane is another large housing project by Meganom with glazed balconies, the **Crystal House** (10). Going left, we are confronted with a pioneering building in Moscow's contemporary architecture. The **Moscow International Bank**, facing the river, was designed in the early 1990s by Ostozhenka and Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa (11). Between 1994 and 1999, it stood out as the only example of state-of-the-art contemporary architecture in Moscow.

Turning right on the riverbank, we soon pass the most recent project by Meganom, a four-storey apartment complex with a zigzag facade. At the complex's middle, turn right to arrive at Khilkov Lane. To our right is the backside of the Meganom housing project (actually more interesting than the front), which shows a series of urban villas with concrete facades covered by glass. This is in strong contrast with the project opposite, one of Moscow's many **kitschy historicist buildings** (12) that supposedly blends with the historical city but, in fact, destroys the scale of the original neighbourhood. A different approach to historical architecture can be found further along the road at our left, the **Moscow House of Photography** by Mosproject-4 (13).

At the end of Khilkov Lane is **Ostozhenka Street**. Turn right and walk back in the direction of Kropotkinskaya station. Along the way are more infill projects. One of the more successful ones is halfway along, at our right. The **housing complex** by Sergey Kisselov & Partners consists of two parts (14), and features a neutral, abstract-classical architecture of natural stone that seems to have become standard in many European cities during the last decade.

The same cannot be said of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which stands before us upon reaching Kropotkinskaya station. It is a remake of the original, constructed in 1895 according to a design

by Konstantin Ton, which was destroyed under Stalin in 1934 to make way for the Palace of the Soviets, designed by Boris Iofan. It was never completed. In 1992, a decision to reconstruct the cathedral was made, and building was inaugurated in 1995. Four years ago, the church acquired international fame due to a performance by Pussy Riot.

Though the design of the new pedestrian bridge behind the cathedral might look a bit kitschy, this new urban space is a revelation. Unhindered by passing cars, it offers beautiful views over the Kremlin, the famous constructivist housing complex House on the Embankment (1931, also by Iofan), the cathedral, the Ostozhenka District, and the former Red October Chocolate Factory. The latter is located on an island in the Moscow River, and awaiting transformation into luxury apartments. In front of its red brick walls is the **Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design** (15). Founded and sponsored by a Russian oligarch, it opened its doors six years ago and offers postgraduate courses in architecture and design. The institute occupies several old buildings around a courtyard; most are former garages that now serve as studios. A terrace, served by a café underneath, sits atop the building and overlooks the river. It is one of the most popular venues in the city. A large amphitheatre steps down from the terrace to the courtyard, and can be covered in the summer to be used for concerts, summer schools, and lectures. Take the opportunity to walk around the old factory complex behind the Strelka Institute, which is now home to many cafés, clubs, and art galleries, and even includes architects' offices, like that of Project Meganom, located in one of the courtyards.

Departing the island via a bridge over the canal, you can continue along the river towards Gorki Park. On the way, you encounter one of the most important public space projects in Moscow, apart from Gorki Park proper: the reconstruction of the **Krymskaya Embankment** (16). This project, as with most of the public space in Gorki Park, was designed by Wowhaus, an office specializing in landscape architecture that also happens to be one of the founders of the Strelka Institute. In fact, it is the Strelka Institute which has been instrumental in the surge of attention to public space in Moscow. Now a major policy instrument for city authorities and developers alike, public space is seen as a means to improve the quality of urban life.

As this movement is spreading through Moscow and the nation, Gorki Park is the most vivid proof of the impact the revitalization of public space can have on quality of life in the city. Crossing under Krimsky Bridge, we can observe a seemingly endless series of well-designed pavilions and attractions. Highlights are the **wooden beach** (17) and the **open-air movie theatre** (18), both by Wowhaus, and two museum buildings by Shigeru Ban and OMA, respectively. These were commissioned by the **Garage Museum of Modern Art**, an organization financed by Roman Abramovich, the Russian tycoon who also owns the Chelsea Football Club. The first is a **temporary building** where Ban used his favourite carton tubes (19). The second holds the museum's permanent exhibition hall, for which OMA meticulously restored and repackaged an **existing concrete structure** from the 1950s (20).

In light of the increasingly repressive policies in Russia, how can these positive trends in architecture and urban space be considered? Firstly, one can conclude that there are developments in society independent of politics. Clearly, attitudes towards the inner city in Russia are changing, from a place of symbolism and power to one for living and leisure. For the younger generations, the city has replaced the *dacha* as the weekend getaway. Secondly, the analogy often made between democracy and quality public space is debatable. As Moscow shows, even when democracy is in decline, urban space can successfully be improved. ◀

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

EUROVISION: LITHUANIA

Local communities and city development, the (neglected) power of competitions, and the debate about how water could gain more importance in urban life are some of the trending architectural topics in Lithuania. The Architects Association of Lithuania and our correspondent, Rūta Leitanaite, will explore new initiatives in Biržai, Vilnius, and other cities while also looking into the dynamics of the interwar period and Soviet heritage, as well as cultural exchange with Western Europe, the Baltics, and Eastern neighbours Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.



↑ KTU Santaka Valley by G. Janulytės-Bernotienės studio

READY

CUBE, the first Dutch Design Museum in Kerkrade, is just as much a laboratory as a 'museum without boundaries'. With archetypes like the Cube, the Sphere, and the Beam, Shift architecture urbanism has created a new urban space with international flair. Away from Rotterdam and Amsterdam, but close to Cologne, Eindhoven, and Liège, it offers a new take on design for today and tomorrow. But does it have what it takes to compete with internationally renowned design centres?



↑ Expansion of Museum Square Limburg, Kerkrade

TOUR GUIDE

For some 25 years now, Litomyšl has been carrying out a unique fusion of historical landmarks and contemporary interventions in the urban realm. This relatively small town and UNESCO World Heritage Site is being systematically supplemented with exceptionally high-quality architecture. This tour guide explores the most striking public spaces, buildings, and a few private houses, which together reflect the latest trends, artistic approaches, and stylistic developments in contemporary Czech architecture. The density, variability, and plurality of these realizations in Litomyšl provides perfect insight into a culture that blends past and present.



↑ Indoor swimming pool by DRNH

SECTION

Brick

...and much more. A10 #68 will be published 1 March 2016.