

RETAINING ORIGINAL LINES IN ARCHITECTURE...

February 28, 2006

НЕЗАВИСИМАЯ

Museums of Outstanding Architects Should Be Established in Moscow by All Means, Senator Sergey Gordeyev Believes

Sergey Gordeyev, a member of the Federation Council, with whom we spoke, has been for a long time earnestly keen on architecture. His private collection contains drawing and sketches by the famous 20th century masters. Sergey Gordeyev sees architecture not just as his main hobby but as an important social challenge in preserving the cultural heritage. He intends to take part in restoring and preserving masterpieces of the Russian constructivism.

– Mr. Gordeyev, exactly what appeals to you in architecture?

– My interest is drawn strongly to the Russian architecture of the constructivist era, first of all, to such names as Melnikov, Leonidov, the Vesnin brothers, Ginzburg, Lisitsky, Chernikhov. I think that the emergence in the 1920's of the whole pleiad of the names creating something really original in architecture was an amazing cultural upswing for Russia. After all, we have for a long time had no world-class architects comparable to Rastrelli, Rossi, Quarenghi ... We did have some interesting schools and trends but they emerged influenced by foreign architects. Even the Stalin Empire style, the famous high-rises are not something original but a certain response and replica to German and American models.

– In other words, constructivism is the only original line in the Russian architecture.

– Yes, it is undoubtedly true. Those people created without any backward glances at anybody, without trying to repeat or copy. That is why the Russian constructivism is the unique contribution to the world architecture. By the way, not all architects I mentioned have built anything. For instance, Leonidov never created real buildings but still his ideas are unique. Take his design of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry building alone! It was an outstanding, fantastic work. At the time they planned to raze the GUM department store in order to build that skyscraper.

– Can we talk about some special place now for Russia in the contemporary world architecture?

– Our contemporary architecture, unfortunately, gets no recognition outside the country, no Russian architects' names are among winners of Pritzker Prize, the blue chip among international architecture awards. I think that one of the reasons for such a situation is exactly that after the constructivist boom in the early 1930's a downturn started: all creative ideas in our architecture were strangled. Melnikov, after his famous house, was never allowed to implement a single project.



But I am sure that the Russian architectural school at the world level can and should be established. Maybe, starting with reforming the educational system in that field.

– How has your enthusiasm concerning architecture started?

– Long ago I got charmed by the Gothic architecture, interested in that school as a phenomenon. First I collected an extensive library on Gothic cathedrals: with descriptions and research by various authors, later I visited many of the European cathedrals (there are over a hundred of them). I think that it was the point from which my enthusiasm for architecture has started.

– They say you have a large private collection of architectural works. Can you tell us about it?

– I started collating my collection five years ago. Mainly it contains drawings and sketches of architectural designs. I do not collect graphics or paintings by popular architects. I think that most interesting are contest sketches. Mainly the collection includes foreign authors, including contemporary ones. As for the Russian architects, I have drawings by Shchusev, Chernikhov, the Vesnin brothers, Schehtel, Zholtovsky, Rudnev. Some of those works I have acquired abroad – it should be said that a lot of materials in the legacy of Russian constructivists found themselves in private collections in Germany, other European countries. In general it is not easy at all to collect sketches and drawings. They as a rule are not listed in official inventories, are kept by relatives, so there is no centralized information. Storage conditions do not always meet museum norms as well.

– Is there anything of the Russian constructivism that is of a special interest?

– As a connoisseur of architecture and just as a human being I would like to take part in preserving this layer of culture. Maybe, even engage in establishing house museums of the most outstanding masters of the Russian constructivism in order for most valuable items of that era to be restored, preserved and made available to the public. Surely, this should be done in cooperation with the architectural community, with ancestors of those people. First of all, I am talking about Melnikov's House and Ginzburg's House which are the masterpieces recognized the world over. It is quite indicative that most of my architect friends, when visiting Moscow, had one and the same request – to see Melnikov's House.

– And what were their impressions?

– I have managed to show them all the workers' clubs built on Melnikov's designs still existing in Moscow but, unfortunately, we failed to see his house in Krivoarbatsky Lane. The relatives of the great architect now residing there would not let us in. At the time I did not yet know about a protracted conflict concerning the title to that house. But when I learned that litigations and proceedings initiated by the heirs dragged on for over 17 years, I decided to make sense of all this and help if



possible. I went to the Moscow City Committee for Architecture and told them that I was ready to assist in establishing Melnikov's House Museum, being aware that it was in quite a sorry state.

– Have you already managed to accomplish anything?

– As far as I know, the idea to establish a museum in Melnikov's House has been supported by Iosif Kobzon, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Culture. He met the Melnikov's relatives residing in the house – the architect's son Viktor and his daughter Ekaterina, and discussed the matter with them. It should be said that Viktor, the son, who died recently, had deemed himself the only custodian of his father's cultural legacy and had repeatedly made public statements concerning his intentions to hand the house over to the state but with a number of conditions, including that the museum should be federally owned and named the museum of "the Melnikovs, father and son." The approach to the greatest cultural legacy of architect Melnikov on the part of those heirs cannot be termed correct. As far as I know, they would not admit to the house neither other heirs nor specialists in architecture and museum people. You realize that in such situation it is hard enough to do something for establishing the museum.

– Still, how do you see the museum, if it is ever established?

– If the title issue is cleared and all relatives take constructive positions, then the project for opening Melnikov's Museum will become quite feasible. It is especially important to join the efforts of architectural and museum organizations, the cultural community, sponsors in that cause. On my part I am willing to involve resources and first-class specialists in the restoration work and in organizing the museum that should be accessible to all interested. The acceptance rate for visitors will be surely determined with account of the house specifics, loads on floors and so on. Most important, it should be the memorial apartment of architect Konstantin S. Melnikov. It was Konstantin Melnikov who was the recognized genius on the world scale and his museum should be established by all means. I believe this project to be very symbolic for Russia, it is with resurrection of our domestic masterpieces that we can signify our contribution to the world architectural culture. ■

