

BUILDING FOR THE BOURGEOISIE: THE QUEST FOR A MODERN STYLE IN RUSSIAN ARCHITECTURE

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THE QUESTION of architecture and middle-class identity in turn-of-century Russia involves two separate but closely related topics, each of which has a specific connection to the process of social alignment. The rise of a new sense of professionalism among Russian architects during the latter half of the nineteenth century—the development of architecture institutes, the foundation of professional societies, and the establishment of structures to supervise professional competence—suggests that architects must themselves be placed among the professional groups to be considered in forming a middle class. Beyond this relation between professional and class identity lies the much broader issues of the clientele served by the profession, the social definition of those who commissioned the buildings, and the status of those who lived and worked in them. Ultimately, one might include a broad network of relationships based on the specific social and economic needs that influence the practice of architecture: new building types, technological innovations required for their construction, new means of financing construction.

The challenge presented to architecture by the rapid growth of major Russian cities at the end of the century resulted in building projects whose scale and technical ingenuity were unprecedented. Although their function was not specifically defined by social class, in the majority of cases they were funded by private capital for purposes of financial gain, which in turn required a clientele willing to spend on a scale sufficient to guarantee a profit.¹ (An obvious indication of this mechanism appears in the most common Russian term for "apartment house" during this period: *dokhodnyi dom*, or "profitable house.") The traditional estate division of pre-Reform Russia was of little use in meeting these conditions, based as they were on the presence of an urban population with a reasonably stable level of disposable income.

¹ Among numerous studies of housing patterns in St. Petersburg and Moscow at the turn of the century (with references to contemporary census data), see James Bater, *St. Petersburg: Industrialization and Change* (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 1976), 370–79; and Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 229–36. Although the data reveal that the nobility comprised a significant part of the population of certain areas, the ability to pay rent, not class status, affected the quality and design of housing during the tremendous expansion of both cities.

To be sure, the growth in urban construction ranged from tenements to dwellings for the very wealthy; but architecture in the usual stylistic sense was directed primarily to that portion of citizens whose income and life-style placed them in a middle category, regardless of their legal status. Indeed, for certain prominent critics of the early twentieth century, architecture acquired a sense of purpose precisely to the extent that it served this group, whose existence—specifically mentioned in the architectural press—was viewed as axiomatic to the growth of the profession. In architectural criticism, building for this class meant building for a future with greater social and economic opportunity.

In examining the relation between architecture and class identity at the turn of the century, we turn to the work of the era's preeminent architect, Fedor Osipovich Shekhtel (1859–1926), whose buildings for bourgeois patrons such as the Riabushinskys represent the highest expression of the uses of private capital in support of a new architectural aesthetic. Quite apart from its stylistic innovations, Shekhtel's work projects in material form aspects of the economic order envisioned by politically active members of the Riabushinsky family—efficiency, practicality, innovation, *delovitosi'*. Without the order that the Riabushinskys, above all, so energetically promoted, the prosperity and survival of a middle class would become very dubious propositions, as would the architecture that served them. At the same time Shekhtel's work transcends the limits of class definition, in both its ability to experiment with new forms and its refusal to accept the clichés of "profitable" architecture.

One need not provide a sociological profile of architects to recognize the importance of professionalization to the issue of middle-class identity, not only reflecting a new social alignment, but also expressing the self-image of those entering the profession. The beginnings of such cohesion in Russian architecture date from the 1860s, when architects in both St. Petersburg and Moscow realized the need to create an association that would rise above narrow commercial interests to address problems confronting architects as a group. The reforms of the 1860s not only facilitated the economic development necessary to expand architecture beyond the commissions of state, court, and a few wealthy property owners, but they also created the legal conditions for the foundation of private associations. Although certain St. Petersburg architects had begun to explore the concept of a professional group as early as 1862, Moscow had the first formal organization—the Moscow Architectural Society, chartered in October 1867.² From the outset the society served as a clearinghouse for technical information and a center for the establishment of stan-

² For a detailed survey of the organization and early years of the Russian architectural societies, see Iu. S. Iaralov, ed., *100 let obshechestvennykh arkhitekturnykh organizatsii v SSSR, 1867–1967* (Moscow: Soizuz arkhitektorov SSSR, 1967), 5–13.

dards in building materials and practices. In addition to its advisory function in technical matters, the society initiated a series of open architectural competitions as early as 1868, thus establishing a precedent to be followed in the award of major building contracts during the latter half of the century. An attempt by the society to sponsor a general conference of architects in 1873 failed for bureaucratic reasons, and not until 1892 did the first Congress of Russian Architects convene.³

In the meantime, architects in the capital had obtained imperial approval for founding the Petersburg Society of Architects (October 1870), whose functions paralleled those of the Moscow society. At the beginning of 1872 the St. Petersburg group published the first issue of the journal *Zodchii* (The Architect), which appeared on a monthly—and later weekly—basis through 1917. For forty-five years this authoritative publication both recorded the profession's development throughout Russia and provided a conduit for technical information from Western Europe and the United States. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of *Zodchii* in its support of professional solidarity among architects and as a platform from which to advance ideas on architecture's mission in creating a new urban environment.⁴

The process of professionalization in architecture signified an increase in the demand for competent professionals who could construct various buildings for a diverse clientele in a way that would be cost-effective and reliable and meet certain aesthetic expectations. Whatever the limitations of tradition and a backward technological base, the architects of this period made considerable progress in meeting the requirements of the post-Reform era, with the construction of educational institutions, shopping arcades, banks and other financial centers, apartment buildings, hospitals, public theaters, exhibit halls, hotels, city administrative buildings, railway and industrial structures, and mansions for the newly wealthy (Figs. 13, 14).

At the same time some factors raised doubts about the goals of the profession, its social standing, and its aesthetic judgment. The profusion of styles characteristic of European eclecticism in general was the subject of ridicule in the Russian press, particularly in commentary on the housing boom in St. Petersburg.⁵ Suspended between the commercialism of private enterprise and the public scrutiny of the press, architects were subjected to a plethora of claims and opinions on their performance. The ensuing mood of frustration, if

³ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁴ Publication data on this and other prerevolutionary architectural journals can be found in the four volumes of L. N. Beliaeva et al., *Bibliografiia periodicheskikh izdanii Rossii: 1901–1916* (Leningrad: Publichnaia biblioteka imeni M. E. Salytkova-Shehedrina, 1961). See also Iaralov, *100 let obshchestvennykh*, 103–6.

⁵ A notable critical response appeared in Fedor Dostoevsky's extensive digression on architecture in an 1873 issue of "Dnevnik pisatel'a." F. M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), 21: 106–7.



Fig. 13. S. P. Riabushinsky house, Moscow (1900–1902). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. Photograph: William Brumfield.

not self-pity, is expressed by one of *Zodchii*'s architect-critics, V. Kuroedov, writing in 1876 on his impressions of architecture in Berlin. The contrast between the position of the German architect and the Russian does not favor the latter: "In our country an architect is a hireling, obligated for his remuneration to fulfill someone else's will without thinking; in our country, in short, architecture and its practitioners enjoy no respect, rights, or support on a level with other specialists."⁶ This observation is particularly interesting as a commentary on the problem of professional identity, with its reference to "other specialists." Just whom Kuroedov had in mind is unclear, but the sense of inferiority in both professional rights and artistic integrity is pointedly noted. The economic mechanism—that is, speculative capitalism—that had created a new professional basis for architecture had also become, in the view of many observers, the bane of the profession's existence. In the search for a solution beyond rampant eclecticism, critics, historians, and architects made claims for a "rational" or "national" style or some combination of both, thus placing upon architecture the additional role as interpreter of the nation's history (for example, Vladimir Shervud's Historical Museum, 1874–1883).⁷ New technological methods and economic demands, however, led to a greater emphasis on engineering in ways that ran counter to the advocacy of historicism and nationalism.

Although the profession as a whole remained largely untouched by the debates on stylistic questions that dominated the two architectural congresses in 1892 and 1895, the architectural societies and professional journals maintained a sense of confraternity among architects and engineers. In this they were supported by the expansion of architectural schools such as the Academy of Arts, which simplified its designation of graduates to "architect-artists" and "artist-architects," with the former more qualified in architecture.⁸ St. Petersburg's other major institution for architectural education, the Institute of Civil Engineering, experienced especially rapid growth: in 1892 it enrolled 222 students, while the total number of its graduates in the preceding fifty years was only 1,020. Those whose professional training came from the Academy, the Institute of Civil Engineering, or the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture were among the elite of the profession; and yet graduation from these and other institutions of higher technical education was

⁶ V. Kuroedov, "Berlinskaiia arkhitektura. Putevye zametki," *Zodchii* 7 (1876): 79.

⁷ See N. V. Sultanov, "Odná iz zadach stroitel'nogo uchilishcha," *Zodchii* 5 (1882): 71; A. L. Punin, "Idei ratsionalizma v russkoi arkhitekture vtoroi poloviny XIX veka," in *Arkhitektura SSSR* 11 (1962): 55–58. E. A. Borisova devotes much attention to the "national/rational" question in her book *Russkaia arkhitektura vtoroi poloviny XIX veka* (Moscow, 1979), particularly chaps. 4 and 5.

⁸ V. G. Isachenko et al., *Arkhitektory-stroiteli Peterburga-Petrograda nachala XX veka* (Leningrad: Vserossiiskoe obshchestvo okhrany pamiatnikov istorii i kul'tury, 1982), 4–5.

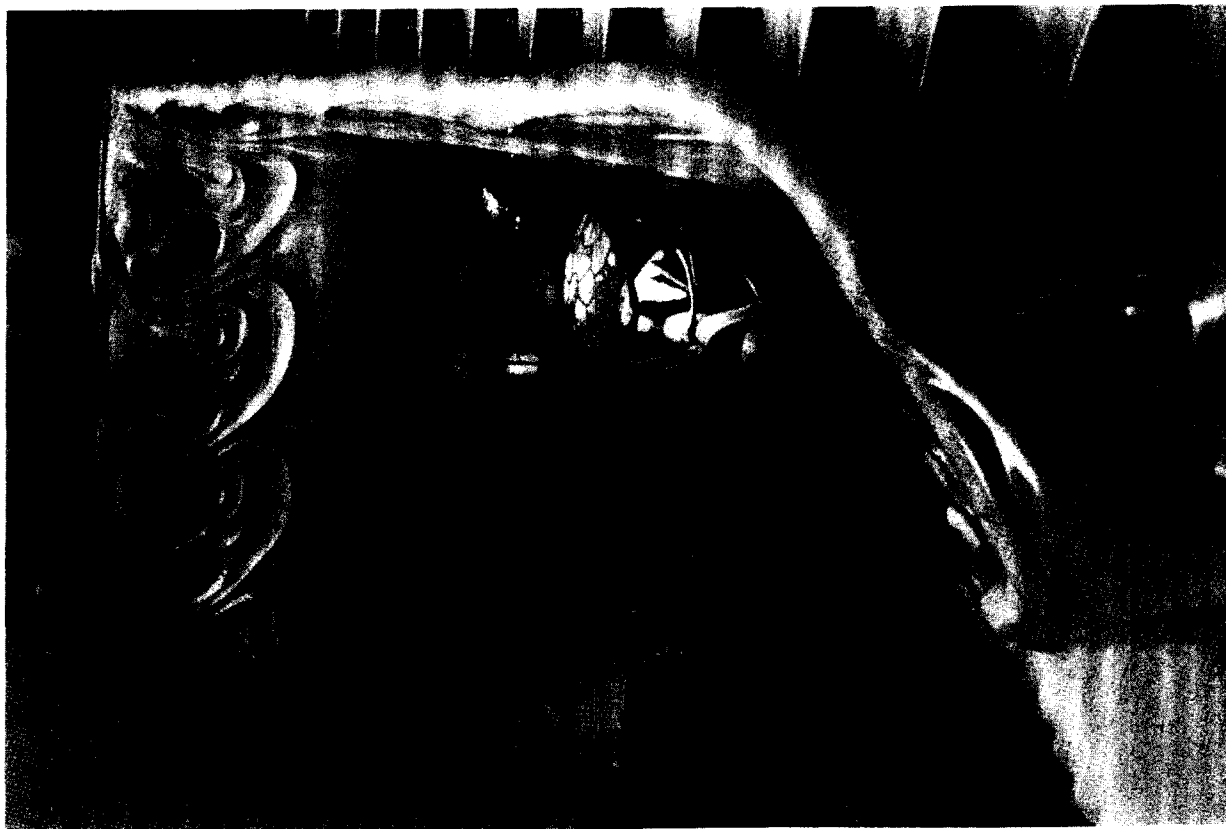


Fig. 14. Riabushinsky house, interior, main stairway (1900–1902). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. Photograph: William Brumfield.

not an absolute requirement for success in architectural practice, as the career of Fedor Shekhtel demonstrates.

The coexistence in architecture of art and engineering occasionally created a sense of divergent interests, noticeable at architectural congresses. By the turn of the century, however, it appeared that the profession had entered a phase of confidence in its position—at least to judge by the profusion of architectural publications that joined *Zodchii* in conveying to the public developments in contemporary Russian architecture.⁹ Lavishly illustrated with photographs of recently completed buildings, drawings from project competitions, and on occasion student work, these journals publicized, as never before, the accomplishments of members of the various architectural societies.

In surveying the architectural journals one gains the impression that Russia was indeed moving toward integration with bourgeois Europe, with tangible evidence in the form of a rapidly changing cityscape, created by and for the institutions of capitalism. Perhaps by the very nature of their content, most publications studiously avoided political or social commentary, even during the revolutionary years of 1905–1906; and there is little reason to suppose that architects were involved in these events. A notable exception was Aleksandr Glebovich Uspensky, son of the prominent populist writer and graduate of the Institute of Civil Engineering. Uspensky is said to have supported the uprising, and his death at age thirty-three in 1907 elicited an impassioned commentary on architecture and social justice.¹⁰

If one reads those few critics who commented in the professional press on the social ramifications of architecture, however, a curious, at times contradictory, picture emerges—one that leads to the issue of architecture as a bearer of bourgeois culture. An early, rather crude statement of the profession's priorities in building for a middle class appeared in a presentation at the Second Congress of Russian Architects (1895), which addressed the need for improved apartment housing. Of the four categories of apartment listed—luxury, mid-level (or *srednei ruki*), low-cost, and substandard—only the second offered the possibility for realistic improvement. The creation of adequate housing for the lower classes was viewed by the speaker as desirable for humanitarian reasons, but impractical (i.e., unprofitable) from an economic standpoint.¹¹ Given the lack of a coordinated housing policy on the part of city government, the speaker simply stated the obvious: the economic future for

⁹ Among the most comprehensive in terms of photographic documentation are *Ezhegodnik Obshchestva Arkhitektorov-khudozhnikov* (based in Petersburg) and *Ezhegodnik Moskovskogo Arkhitekturnogo Obshchestva* (Moscow).

¹⁰ P. Mjakarjov, "Aleksandr Glebovich Uspenskii, kak zodchii i khudozhnik," in *Izvestia obshchestva grazhdanskikh inzhenerov* 4 (1907): 110–11.

¹¹ S. Ia. Tirmokhovich, "Proekt blagoustroennikh kvartir v gigenicheskom i sanitarnom ot-nosheniiakh," in *Trudy II s'ezda russkikh zodchikh v Moskve* (Moscow: Izdanie moskovskogo arkhitekturnogo obshchestva, 1899), 179–85.

architects in housing construction lay not with the very rich or the poor, but with those in the middle.

By the turn of the century, this statement of economic reality began to acquire positive significance in the writings of Pavel Makarov, a graduate of the Institute of Civil Engineering and a prominent critic for *Zodchii* between 1900 and 1910. Makarov was first and foremost an advocate of the "new style," or the *style moderne*, which was related to movements in contemporary design such as Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession. For him the advent of the new style was so natural and inevitable a phenomenon that anyone who opposed it on aesthetic or other grounds was doomed to failure in the attempt to contain Russia within a "Chinese wall." Therefore the creative person should not fear "to rush to that principle which nature and the history of civilization demonstrate almost every day [!], namely to the eternal change of one order by another, i.e. to evolution."¹²

To Makarov's considerable indignation, some "Mandarins" rejected the rush toward progress. Of their number, he chose to attack Aleksandr Benois in the March 1902 issue of *Zodchii*. The pretext for the attack was Benois's defense—a defense that Makarov endorsed in principle—of St. Petersburg's architectural heritage in the January issue of *Mir iskusstva*. The thrust of the polemic, which would continue throughout the decade in St. Petersburg, derived not from a disavowal of the city's monuments, but from what Makarov saw as Benois's "aristocratic aestheticism," his disdain for all forms of modern architecture, and his refusal to comprehend the demands placed on architecture by contemporary urban development: "From the heights of aristocratic aestheticism—acknowledging and respecting only that which was created not less than a century ago, that which is not besmirched by contemporary materialism, and not vulgarized by the lack of taste of today's bourgeoisie—Mr. Benois points, not without haughty irony, at that undesirable metamorphosis that Petersburg is going through now."¹³ With his democratic ideal of art and architecture for the people, Makarov issued the challenge of social responsibility: "If mankind, by the will of fate, must now clamber up five or six stories, then art should hustle up there after them, if only so that the people there do not die from vulgarity. This is what the goal of a true and free art should be, to ennoble and beautify life everywhere—for the poor as well as for the rich."¹⁴

Already there is considerable confusion in the use of terms, for the "poor" mentioned in the preceding passage were not likely to be the tenants in the style moderne apartment buildings that were transforming certain areas of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Nor would the poor be included among "today's

¹² P. Makarov, "Novyi stil' i dekadentstvo," *Zodchii* 9 (1902): 105.

¹³ "Arkhitekturnye mechtaniia," *Zodchii* 13 (1902): 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

bourgeoisie," toward whom Makarov considers Benois unnecessarily condescending. Whether the issue is democratic art for the poor or contemporary design for the bourgeoisie, there is an unmistakable tone of class antagonism in his article, not only in the reference to "aristocratic aestheticism" but also in his frequent, derogatory references to the nobility (in Russia, "a genuine noble class never existed," he says at one point).

The term "bourgeois" reappeared in *Zodchii* at the end of 1902 with a vagueness of usage similar to Makarov's. On this occasion, Evgeny Baumgarten, an adherent of the style moderne and frequent contributor to architectural journals, strongly criticized the recently published third edition of Otto Wagner's major treatise, *Moderne Architektur*. His objection was directed primarily to Wagner's famous dictum: "Nothing that is not practical can be beautiful," a phrase construed by Baumgarten as nothing less than the destruction of aesthetics: "Under the guise of responsiveness to contemporary needs, the theory of Professor Wagner proposes aesthetic suicide. Of course it is necessary to build houses solidly, cheaply, quickly, and conveniently; but the beauty of a house has no relation to the technique of construction."¹⁵

For Baumgarten the fault of *Moderne Architektur* lies in its replacing of eternal values with what he calls the "fleeing views of bourgeois contemporaneity." Quite apart from the highly debatable critical assumptions, which have little to do with Wagner's grandiose claims for modern architecture, Baumgarten's repeated use of the term "bourgeois contemporaneity" again demonstrates a confusion in cultural interpretation. For both Makarov and Baumgarten, bourgeoisie had acquired negative connotations, yet both were dedicated to an aesthetics applicable to the modern world. In point of fact no Russian architect of the prerevolutionary period achieved the radical break with tradition advocated by Wagner and practised by Adolf Loos. The concern with beauty, as traditionally interpreted by Baumgarten, continued to play a major role in the design of buildings ranging from commercial structures to apartment houses: virtually all were intended precisely for the "bourgeoisie."

In view of the importance of the style moderne in creating a new environment for the middle class, there is an odd pathos in statements by critics supporting the moderne as an expression of revolutionary development. While Makarov wrote of the new style as part of the eternal and inevitable principle of evolution, his radical colleague Ivan Volodikhin, writing in the journal *Arkhitekturnyi muzei* (Architectural Museum), described the style in maximalist terms: "The stormy bursts of innovation in architecture, unfortunately manifesting their activities in often rude and thoughtless forms, represent as it were the beginnings of an uprising, the toppling of power based on an outmoded system that could not revive itself in time."¹⁶ The subtext is inescapable, and

¹⁵ "Sovremenniaia arkhitektura," *Zodchii* 50 (1902): 571.

¹⁶ "Zadachi arkhitekturnoi estetike," *Arkhitekturnyi muzei* 1 (1902): 3.

Volodikhin's extended metaphor of revolution appears throughout the concluding passage, rife with words such as "struggle," "reaction," and "revolution." While the old order may still view the Young pretenders with arrogance, the fatal decline has already begun, according to Volodikhin. Should his readers miss the message, he concludes: "As in the living world, so in architecture there is a struggle between the old and the new."¹⁷

Does such rhetoric suggest a significant voice among the professions, the middle class, that extolled modernism as part of a democratic movement casting aside the old order? Volodikhin apologizes for the "rude and thoughtless forms" of the "uprising." Yet what type of uprising did he envision—a bourgeois revolution? His aesthetic views were hardly revolutionary in any sense; but with such thirst for change, any innovation might portend the coming of the new order. Even so knowledgeable an architect-critic as Vladimir Apyshkov, whose *The Rational in the Latest Architecture* (1905) was the first successful attempt to assess the Russian moderne within the European context, expressed a belief in architectural aesthetics as a regenerative force in society. Less strident than Makarov and Volodikhin, Apyshkov welcomed the changes in the built environment and even the commercialism that they signified. Yet he, too, in the conclusion to this thoughtful work, adopts an extremist view of the moderne: "Not one person who values art is in a position to oppose this movement, whose force is not in the subjective views of individuals, but in a deep and solid bond with our culture, with our technology, with the best democratic aspirations of our century, and with the nascent demands of the truly beautiful."¹⁸

In retrospect one strains to understand how the style moderne could have represented a radical cultural phenomenon. The situation is complicated further by recent Soviet scholarship, which asserts that the style is profoundly antibourgeois. Evgenia Kirichenko, a leading interpreter of the *moderne*, has written: "The life-building illusions of the moderne are firmly rooted in its aestheticism, in an aesthetic rejection of *burzhuaznost'* and capitalism just as emphatic as its rejection of revolution. Bourgeois reality repulses by its lack of spirituality, its complacency, mediocrity, and fear of the bright, the strong."¹⁹ From a broad cultural perspective of Russia during the Silver Age, there is much to support this position, particularly in view of the contradictory elements contained within the moderne: rational use of new technology and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 (1902): 23. The conclusion to Volodikhin's article was never published "for reasons not of the editorial board's making." Kazhdan suggests that Volodikhin's revolutionary rhetoric may have been cut by the censor. T. P. Kazhdan, "Arkhitektura i arkhitekturnaia zhizn' Rossii kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka," in *Russkaia khudozhestvennaia kul'tura kontsa XIX-nachala XX veka* (1895-1907) (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 2: 275, fn. 1.

¹⁸ *Ratsional'noe v noveishei arkhitekture* (Petersburg: T-vo khudozhestvennoi pechatni, 1905), 65.

¹⁹ *Russkaia arkhitektura 1830-1910-kh godov* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1978), 284.

materials on one hand, and on the other a tendency toward a flamboyant expression of form and decoration. While exploiting functional approaches to the construction of apartment buildings and commercial structures, the moderne retained a romantic, aesthetic impulse that would indeed appear to contradict the conformity and alienation of the urban environment. Although these contradictions were justified in the critical excerpts quoted above as part of the democratization of art, they might just as easily have served as devices to increase the visibility—and therefore economic value—of buildings in a speculative market.

This duality of economic concerns and aestheticism is typical of twentieth-century architecture, but the intensity with which Russian architectural critics debated the proper relation between style, money, and urban development in the two decades before 1917 suggests a deeper polarization in society and culture. Indeed, the work of Fedor Shekhtel illustrates not only the creative blending of functionalism and decorative aestheticism but also the ultimate failure of the new style to survive in the rapidly expanding commercial environment of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Shekhtel's close working relations with members of Moscow's entrepreneurial elite—the Morozovs, Riabushinskys, Kuznetsovs, and others—convey the impression of an architect committed to the economic and cultural milieu of a developing bourgeoisie society in Russia.²⁰ Yet aspects of Shekhtel's career suggest something more complex than a remarkable talent in service to the marketplace, and the complexity increases as Shekhtel's career evolves. Its beginning stages—from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s—are devoted to building or remodeling mansions and dachas, usually in some flamboyant, eclectic style. Although not equal to the tastelessness achieved by many of his contemporaries, this is still the architecture of conspicuous consumption, cheerfully indulged by a young artist with a taste for the theatrical.

During the mid-1890s the flamboyance was still present (for example, in the mansion for Savva and Zinaida Morozov) but subsumed within a tectonic and spatial system of increasing sophistication. At the turn of the century Shekhtel created his most distinctive houses, for Stepan Pavlovich Riabushinsky (1900–1902, Figs. 15, 16) and Aleksandra Derozhinskaia (1901). The design of the former, with its chapel isolated from the luxuriant moderne decor of the rest of the house, demonstrates with remarkable clarity a tension between the Old Believer traditions of the Riabushinsky family and the desire to express a cultural identity representative of the wealth and aspirations of a new bour-

²⁰ The primary authority on the work of Shekhtel is E. I. Kirichenko, author of the monograph *Fedor Shekhtel* (Moscow: Stroizdat, 1973) and numerous articles on the architect. In English the best survey is by Catherine Cooke, "Fedor Ostipovich Shekhtel: An Architect and His Clients in Turn-of-century Moscow," *Architectural Association Files* (London), 5–6 (1984): 5–31.



Fig. 15. Riabushinsky house, main stairway (1900–1902). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. Photograph: William Brumfield.

geois elite.²¹ During the course of the decade, however, the focus of Shekhtel's work shifted to commercial buildings in a more functional style and to museums, churches and social institutions. Between 1910 and 1916 most of his projects remained unbuilt: few had any connection with his former patrons.

The English architectural historian Catherine Cooke has stated that Shekhtel's work projected a "conception of a bourgeois-industrial Russia, and a corresponding culture, through the medium of architecture."²² Like Kirichenko's treatment of the moderne as an antibourgeois phenomenon, this view has much to recommend it: yet both dramatize the situation. Shekhtel's architecture must indeed have represented the aspirations of certain of his bourgeois patrons, but it differs in significant ways from the work of other well-established architects in Moscow at the beginning of the century. He did not use an indiscriminate stylistic repertoire to cater to the demands of fashion—a practice common among many successful designers of speculative apartment buildings. Although his career spanned several styles, his mature

²¹ James West discusses the political views of the Riabushinsky circle in "The Riabushinskij Circle: Russian Industrialists in Search of a Bourgeoisie, 1909–1914," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 32 (1984): 358–77. For an analysis of the S. P. Riabushinsky house, see William Brumfield, "The Decorative Arts in Russian Architecture: 1900–1907," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5 (1987): 23–26.

²² Cooke, "Shekhtel," 27.

work showed a logic that would not be deflected by purely commercial considerations.

Furthermore, Shekhtel's use of the style moderne moved rapidly toward a rationalist interpretation of design, as in his Riabushinsky bank (1903) and *Utro Rossii* printing works (1907, Fig. 17), and his building for the Moscow Merchants Society (1909). This entailed a diminished emphasis on the decorative elements and, correspondingly, showed an indifference to the aestheti-



Fig. 16. Riabushinsky house, interior, stained glass window (1900-1902). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. Photograph: William Brumfield.

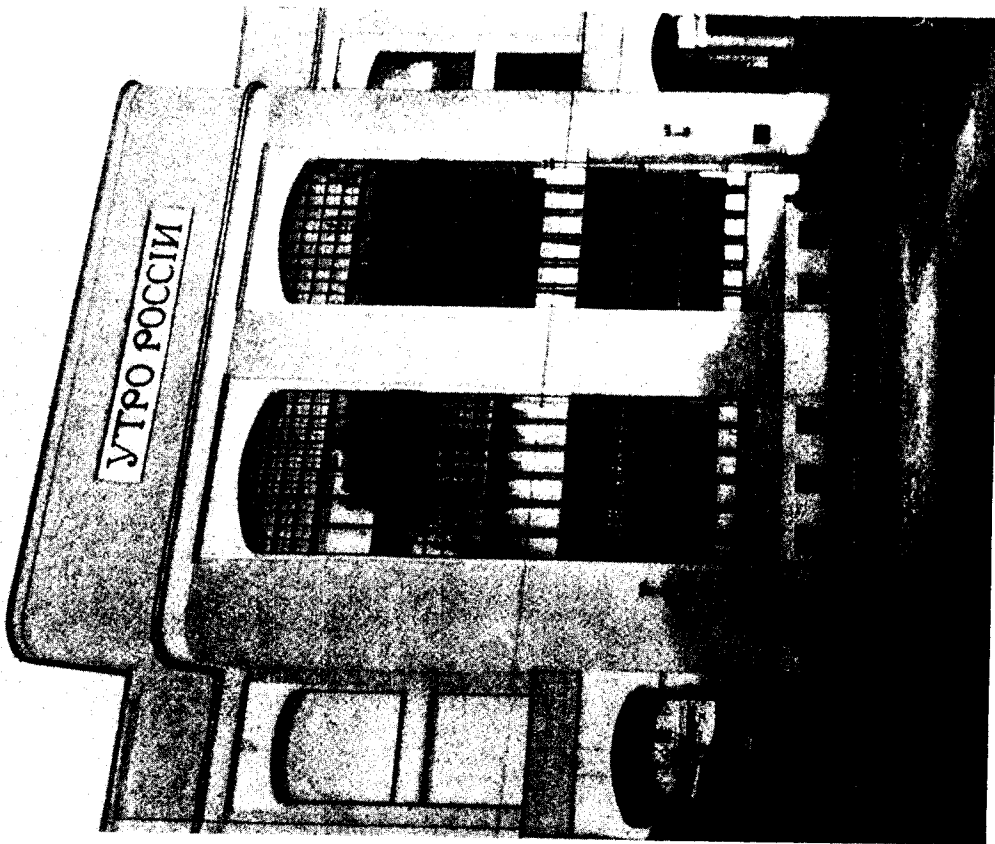


Fig. 17. *Utro Rossii* printing office, Moscow (1907). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. *Ezhegodnik moskovskogo arkhitekturnogo obshchestva* (Annual of the Moscow Architectural Society), 1909.

cism associated with visions of a new architecture for the middle class. To be sure, Shekhtel produced at least one apartment building (for the Stroganov School, in 1904) that combined brilliantly both the aesthetic and the functional: yet his Shamshin apartment house of 1909 is almost totally lacking in "beautifying elements," apart from a cornice frieze. Here, as in his commercial buildings, the structure creates its own, rational form of aesthetics (Fig. 18).

At the end of the 1900s, Shekhtel experimented with the neoclassical revival for his own house (1909) on Bol'shaia Sadovaia, and he also designed a number of projects in a "neo-Russian" style. Yet the fact that he built little in the 1910s indicates a cultural impasse, a loss of the moderne aesthetic in an era of large commercial structures (Fig. 19). The rapid decline of the style moderne toward the end of the first decade suggests that the pronounced dualism between functionalism and romantic aestheticism—with its emphasis on the individual character of each project—could not be reconciled, despite expectations of new forms capable of transforming the urban environment.

In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war, the style moderne aesthetic had been largely discarded by architects as well as architectural critics; and in its wake there appeared retrospective styles such as the neoclassical revival, which had its moments of brilliance in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the latter, some welcomed the demise of modernity and a return to a style more compatible with the St. Petersburg ensemble, without realizing the extent to which concepts underlying the moderne had penetrated all styles, particularly in large-scale commercial projects. A number of architects turned to city planning, which emphasized a regulated, instead of idiosyncratic, approach to style; and others looked to the New World and the American skyscraper as a model for the future.²³

Yet the rejection of the moderne involved not simply a change of styles on a common technical base, but an opposition to all that the new style represented on a social and cultural level for critics such as Makarov and Apyshkov. There could be no clearer statement of this opposition than Georgy Lukomsky's article "New Petersburg," in a 1913 issue of *Apollon*. Taking a frankly monarchist position in the year of the Romanov tercentenary, this devotee of Russia's artistic heritage insisted that great architecture derives from the power of the state and church: "Therefore, all efforts to present New Petersburg only on the basis of proposed conditions in economy and hygiene can

²³ In addition to frequent articles on aspects of city planning in architectural journals at the beginning of the century, a number of books on urban planning and garden cities appeared between 1910 and 1916. Reports on American skyscrapers were also prominently featured in journals such as *Zodchii*; see, for example, N. Lakhin's article in *Zodchii* 18 (1913): 203–11. See William Brumfield, "Russian Perceptions of American Architecture, 1870–1917," *Architecture and the New Urban Environment: Western Influences on Modernism in Russia and the USSR* (Washington, D.C.: Kennan Institute, 1988), 51–70.

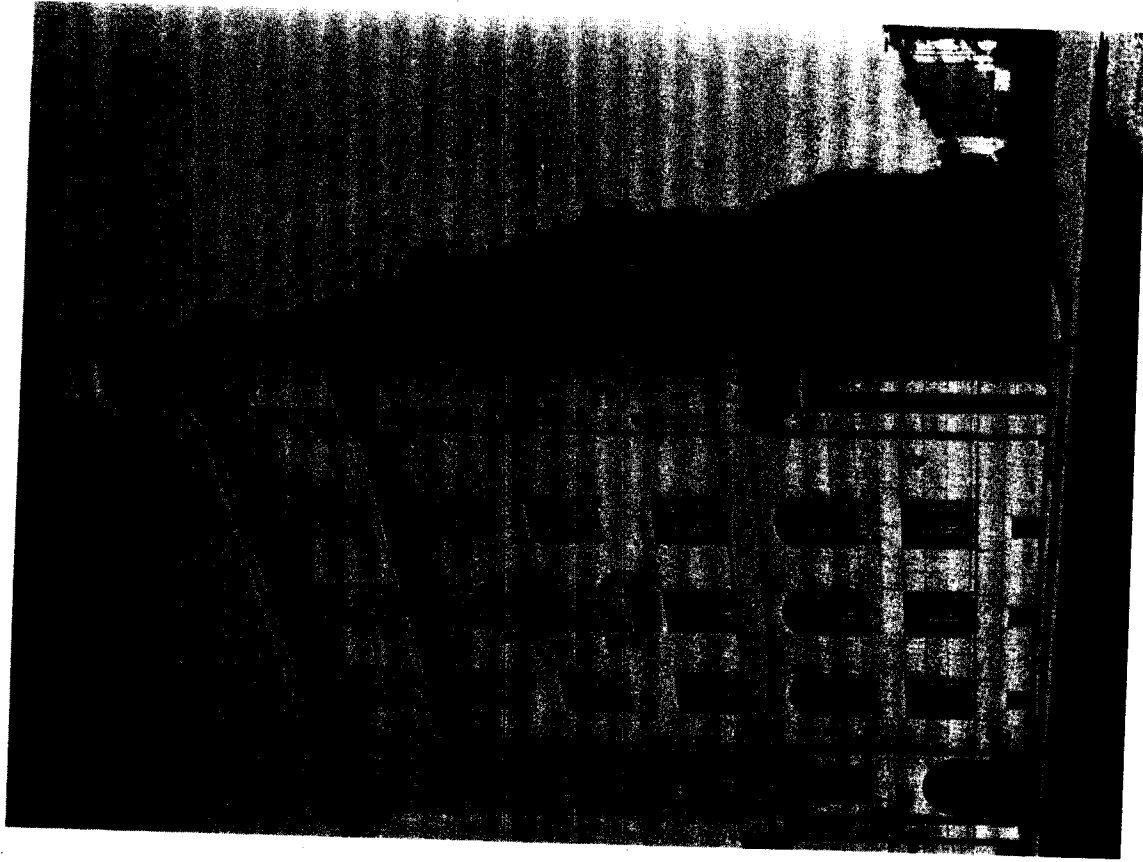


Fig. 18. Shamshin apartment house, Moscow (1909). Architect: Fedor Shekhtel. *Ezhegodnik moskovskogo arkhitekturnogo obshchestva*, 1910–1911.



Fig. 19. "Delovoi dvor" office complex, Moscow (1912–1913). Architect: Ivan Kuznetsov. *Ezhгодnik obshchestva arkhitektorov-khudozhnikov*, 1913.

lead to nothing other than pale, gray facades. For just this reason, the entire epoch of bourgeois and democratic modernism has given Petersburg *noth-ing*.²⁴ However contentious these views, they were widely held by architects and critics in both major cities—hence the rise of retrospectivism advocated by Lukomsky. The process of privately funded urban development would continue in Russia (for two more years), but the ideal of a new architecture expressive of the democratic ethos of the bourgeoisie had long since vanished.

²⁴ "Novyi Peterburg (Mysli o sovremennom stroitel'stve)," *Apollon* 2 (1913): 10. Lukomskii was to expand on these views in his survey of the neoclassical revival, *Sovremennyi Petrograd* (Petrograd: Svobodnoe Iskusstvo, 1916). By that time Ivan Fomin had already designed his neoclassical development "New Petersburg," intended for Golodai Island.

Chapter 20

A PLACE FOR US: EMBOURGEOISEMENT AND THE ART OF KONSTANTIN KOROVIN

JAMES M. CURTIS

NO ISSUE has caused more debate in Russian culture than that of the relationship between art and society—or, to formulate it more appropriately, the relationship between creativity and the society in which it arises. For more than a century now, various forms of the romantic assumption that we can best understand art if we study the artist's conscious intentions, ideology, and state of mind have predominated in this debate. However, autobiographical and ideological interpretations do not work well with artists such as the Impressionist painter Konstantin Korovin (1861–1939). A representative figure of late nineteenth-century aestheticism, and an inarticulate one at that, Korovin had no known social "views" and took no interest in what Russians call *obshchestvennaia zhizn'*. Korovin painted for the joy of it and would not have known how to define, much less use, the word "ideology."

It might appear, then, that Korovin's work has little to offer a discussion of middle-class consciousness in the last years of the Russian empire. Yet art styles often express a response to social processes without seeming to do so, and they often express this response most completely when the artists create without a conscious desire to give their work social significance. So one can ask whether Impressionism in Russia—and specifically Korovin's work—is also related to Russian middle-class consciousness, and if so, how. I believe not only that it is but also that Korovin's paintings can help us understand something important about the social processes of late nineteenth-century Russia, especially when we consider them in their European context.

It is useful to begin by characterizing, however briefly, the differences between the social structures of Russia and France at the time. Various contributors to this volume mention that Russia, unlike France and England, did not have a middle class with its own institutions and power bases, and thus we cannot use such terms as "middle class" or "bourgeoisie" without awkward qualifications. Yet how do we describe the appearance of railroad firms, banking conglomerates, and art patronage in post-Emancipation Russia? How do we discuss the substantial geographical and social mobility that undoubtedly occurred?

We can obviate such difficulties by following up Abbott Gleason's com-

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