

(俄) 巴特·高德霍恩 (德) 菲利普·莫瑟 丛立先 吴峻峰 译



# New Interior Design in Russia

## 新俄罗斯室内设计

辽宁科学技术出版社

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# **New Interior Design in Russia**

Bart Goldhoorn • Philipp Meuser



# introduction 简介

Bart Goldhoorn

∞ FREEING THE FLOOR PLAN 自由式设计

# interviews 访谈

Philipp Meuser

20 ANTON NADTOCHY, VERA BUTKO 安东·纳德托基 维拉·卜特高

24 BORIS BERNASKONI 鲍里斯·伯纳斯科尼

28 ALEXANDER BRODSKY 亚历山大·布罗斯基

32 ALEXEY KOZYR 艾力克赛·科西尔

36 MIKHAIL FILIPPOV 米哈伊尔·菲利普瓦

# architects 建筑师事务所

- 40 ABD ARCHITECTS ABD 建筑师事务所
- 54 LEVON AIRAPETOV LEVON AIRAPETOV 建筑师事务所
- 68 ARCH-4 ARCH-4 建筑师事务所
- 88 ARTPLAY ARCHITECTS ARTPLAY 建筑师事务所
- 96 YEUGENY ASS YEUGENY 建筑师事务所
- 102 ATRIUM ATRIUM 建筑师事务所
- 120 YURI AVVAKUMOV YURI AVVAKUMOV 建筑师事务所
- 132 MIKHAIL BELOV MIKHAIL BELOV 建筑师事务所
- 138 BERNASKONI BERNASKONI 建筑师事务所
- 150 BUREAU ALEXANDER BRODSKY BUREAU ALEXANDER BRODSKY 建筑师事务所
- 168 MIKHAIL FILIPPOV MIKHAIL FILIPPOV 建筑师事务所
- 182 ANDREY GURARI ANDREY GURARI 建筑师事务所
- 198 HAPPINESS CORPORATION HAPPINESS CORPORATION 建筑师事务所
- 208 ICED ARCHITECTS ICED 建筑师事务所
- 216 KONSTANTIN LARIN PROGRESS 88 KONSTANTIN LARIN PROGRESS 88 建筑师事务所
- 228 LEVCHUK ROMANCHUK YUYUKIN LEVCHUK ROMANCHUK YUYUKIN 建筑师事务所
- 242 PASTUSHENKO & SAMOGOROV PASTUSHENKO & SAMOGOROV 建筑师事务所
- 254 PROJECT MEGANOM PROJECT MEGANOM 建筑师事务所
- 266 INNA RANNAK/ELENA FRANCHAN INNA RANNAK/ELENA FRANCHAN 建筑师事务所
- 272 SAVINKIN/KUZMIN SAVINKIN/KUZMIN 建筑师事务所
- 286 SL PROJECT SL PROJECT 建筑师事务所
- 294 ELENA AND SERGEY TIMCHENKO ELENA AND SERGEY TIMCHENKO 建筑师事务所
- 304 SALAVAT TIMIRYASOV SALAVAT TIMIRYASOV 建筑师事务所
- 312 BORIS UBOREVICH-BOROVSKI BORIS UBOREVICH-BOROVSKI 建筑师事务所
- 322 VITRUVIUS & SONS VITRUVIUS & SONS 建筑师事务所







# introduction 简介

Bart Goldhoorn

∞ FREEING THE FLOOR PLAN · 自由式设计



# Freeing the Floor Plan

## The Rise of Interior Design in Russia

Bart Goldhoorn

### 自由式设计

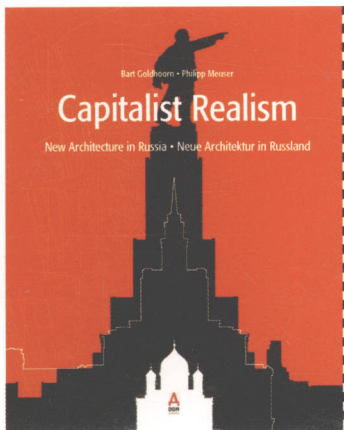
#### ——俄罗斯室内设计的崛起

巴特·高德霍恩

#### 中文摘要：

我亲历俄罗斯室内设计的发展始于1993年，当时我在荷兰文化部授权批准下来到了俄罗斯与一群年轻的建筑师一起工作。那时的俄罗斯由于受到体制的限制，建筑和室内设计的发展陷入窘境。建筑以实用为主，几乎谈不上设计。15年后，情况发生了改变，俄罗斯室内设计的鼎盛时期到来了，个性化的室内设计出现，紧追国际设计发展潮流。尤其特别指出的是俄罗斯自由式公寓设计，它不仅是自从1980年代纸面建筑之后俄罗斯向国际建筑领域的第一份重要的贡献，也是俄罗斯室内设计走向繁荣的原因之一。俄罗斯

绝对数量的室内设计作品已经导致了大部分建筑团体活跃在这个领域。这意味着不仅可以在自由设计公寓中看到这些成果，也可以在那些旧式建筑公寓、餐馆、俱乐部和精品店中欣赏到这种设计的辉煌。相比而言，俄罗斯“真正的”建筑看起来比较黯淡，这可能是俄罗斯文化特性的结果。总之，室内设计仅仅是个场景的布置——它不可能像建筑物一样长久存在，但是它更符合俄罗斯艺术、文学、戏剧和电影领域创造的亦真亦幻的传统成就。



Goldhoorn/Meuser:  
*Capitalist Realism.*  
*New Architecture in Russia,*  
DOM publishers, 2006

My personal experience with interior design in Russia started in 1993, when I came to Russia on a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Culture and worked together with some young architects that had just started their own architectural firm. At that time, nobody had money and virtually nothing was being built in Moscow. The only realistic clients were small businessmen who wanted their shops or showrooms fitted out. The work of the architect in this situation didn't have too much to do with design, let alone beauty – his main task was to be sure that at least something was built. In the absence of small construction companies and a transparent market for building products, architects found themselves organising a »brigada« and roaming the markets trying to find building materials. Often the choice for a certain material was dictated by availability rather than considerations of design. Thus it could happen that a shop interior was completely painted in metallic blue since this was the only colour the architect had been able to get hold of. Another example: when a small window was broken in our office, the handyman that did odd jobs for us at the time came back with a German do-it-yourself package for framing pictures he had happened to find in a shop around the corner. This was the only possibility to actually get a

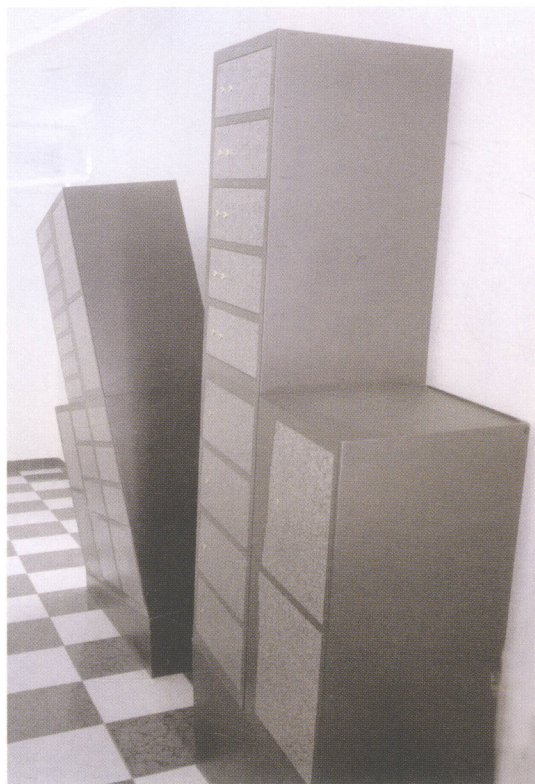
small piece of glass in Moscow – the only other way was to steal it or to order a truckload.

This illustrates the situation in architecture in Moscow at the beginning of the 1990s, and even more so the situation in interior design. Constructing buildings was an activity that was more or less compatible with the mechanisms of communist planning that were still operational by reasons of inertia. Interior design asked above all for a free market – a place where one can find a variety of different products to suit the taste of the individual consumer. And a market was exactly what was missing in Russia at that time.

15 years later the situation is practically the opposite – if architecture still suffers from the bad quality of design and construction inherited from the Soviet period, interior design is blooming and has caught up with international developments. Russian interiors are published in foreign magazines, Russian designers are flocking the *Milan Salone di Mobile*, Moscow's streets are dotted with foreign interior showrooms and yes, the first monography on Russian interior design (that is, this one) is published.







Igor Saronov's  
bank safes

failed because he couldn't find a market for them, in the beginning of the 1990s, he decided to produce a product he was sure would sell – bank-safes. He invited some young architects to make the designs, and as a result he was – and still is – producing the only design safes in the world.

His contact with the architecture world led to the development of another line of work – the production of custom-made furniture and interior fittings. The works produced by his firm and other small metal workshops (often started by former employees) can be found in many works by young Russian architects of that time. The most extreme example are the works by Alexey Kozyr, such as his »airplane apartment« – a 30 square metres one room apartment that is fitted out with a door made of an old Soviet bomber, a bed with a removable steel bridge used to reach the balcony and a bathtub with an aquarium around it.

However, one didn't have to go into high-tech to get hands-on experience with realizing ones projects. Any architect working in interior design had to deal with material supplies, project management, working drawings and explaining builders what he wants them to do. This is even the case with the most popular material in interior design: gypsum board.

Notwithstanding the practical skills needed to realize it, this is where the interior comes closest to its primary purpose as a décor for living. In this way Russian architects were very well prepared to this field of work. In the 1980s, the fact that architects were cut off from the construction process led to the emergence of the Paper Architecture movement: young Russian architects won many international competitions with their beautifully drawn architectural fantasies. These works are not primarily representations of buildings, with floor plans, elevations and sections – they are works in itself, objects of art that require a direct involvement with material, colour and texture. The step from paper architecture to gypsum board architecture was not that big. Many architects from that movement got involved in interior design. A special mention must be made here of Mikhail Filippov, who managed to realize his incredible Piranesi-like architectural fantasies on the scale of apartment interiors.

In 1998, a group of well-known interior designers established a society called *Moscow Architecture Society* (MAO) – a name lent from the organisation that had existed until 1939 and that included well-known constructivists like Ginzburg, Melnikov and Golosov. The aim of the new MAO was to establish an





Alexey Kozyr's  
»Airplane Apartment«

organisation that would serve the interests of professional interior designers and discuss problems faced by the profession at the time when professional organisations in the field of architecture such as the Moscow and Russian Unions of architecture completely ignored this field. The older generation of architects saw interior architecture as something superficial that shouldn't be taken too seriously. At the same time interior architects were making the most money – MAO established its own rate at 400\$ per square metre. Design costs – much higher than the prices that were to be received by their colleagues doing 'real' architecture, even not taking into account the fact that interior designers get percentages of the furniture they buy for their clients.

### The Demand for Interior Design

So if interior designers were so successful, where did the demand come from? In order to understand this, one should be aware of the situation on the Russian housing market. Under communism, no private houses had been built in Russian cities. Even the members of the Politbureau lived in apartments. Moreover, the majority of the apartments were built after Khrushchev's reforms of the 1960s, meaning

that they were constructed on the basis of standard floor plans that were virtually the same for the whole country. If the floor plans of the first generation of these buildings were small but still more or less OK architecturally – they were designed by architects who believed they were finally able to solve the housing problem in Russia – the later ones deteriorated under influence of the power of the building industry. This is the Soviet reality where everybody, including the wealthy oligarchs came from, and this is the reality from which they hope to escape. The contemporary Russian wants something unique and personal and is ready to pay a lot of money for this.

It is telling that the same does not seem to apply to the buildings the apartments and offices of these new Russians are located in. There is a big difference in attitude towards private and collective space. At the root of this attitude lies again, Soviet history: Soviet propaganda monopolized anything that had to do with the collective. Since architecture belongs to collective space, no high value is put upon it. Anything outside of the apartment building is generally seen as something alien that doesn't really concern the inhabitants. Building budgets are generally very low, materials used are cheap. In contrast, budgets for fitting out the private interiors are almost limitless.





apartment by  
Mikhail Filippov next to one  
of his architectural fantasies

### Why an interior architect?

The question that still remains unanswered is why you would actually need an interior architect. Although the demand for design furniture is also high in Europe, this doesn't mean that it is bought by interior architects. Consumers buy their furniture and interior decorations themselves, whereas for simple adaptations there exists a whole DIY industry enabling consumers to adapt their interior to their wishes by their own hands.

There is a number of reasons why the situation in Russia is different. First of all, it is the relative inexperience of Russian consumers with making choices. Well known is the story of the Soviet citizen who gets in a complete shock when he is confronted with the possibilities of choice in a Western supermarket. Although this is of course not the case with contemporary Russian citizens, some of this insecurity has remained. And if you feel uncomfortable in deciding what you want, you ask a professional designer to do it for you. Another factor related to the lack of choice in Soviet time is the absence of inherited or earlier bought furniture. In general, Soviet furniture was of bad quality and design, and when people can afford to move into a new apart-

ment they will bring nothing with them – they start from scratch. The interior architect helps them to reinvent their life style. In many apartments in Moscow that are bought as second or third homes this factor is even more important – people will not live there very often and their purpose is more close to a hotel than a personalized space.

Another big difference with Western Europe is that notwithstanding the high fees of the interior designer, the difference between high and low income in Russia are enormous. Once you can afford to buy a new apartment, you are not going to do any renovations yourself but you will hire some workers (mostly immigrant workers from the former Soviet republics) and a designer to tell them what to do. In a European context, with the majority of the population belonging to the middle class, hiring workers is much more expensive and people tend to do much more themselves, including decisions about decoration and layout.

Probably the main reason why people need an interior designer is the fact that there is the earlier mentioned lack of variety in the housing they can buy in the city.

Firstly – the city itself is very homogenous. Apart from a small historical centre most of it con-





group portrait of MAO, 1998

sists of the standard apartment buildings that have been constructed since the 1960s. Compared to European cities, where you can choose between neighbourhoods with buildings from different eras, various social constellations and housing typologies, in Russia different parts of the city barely differ from each other. A complicating factor is that Russians don't trust the technical state of old buildings. In the Soviet Union old buildings were neglected and new buildings were presented as the results of technological progress, meaning that they were by definition better.

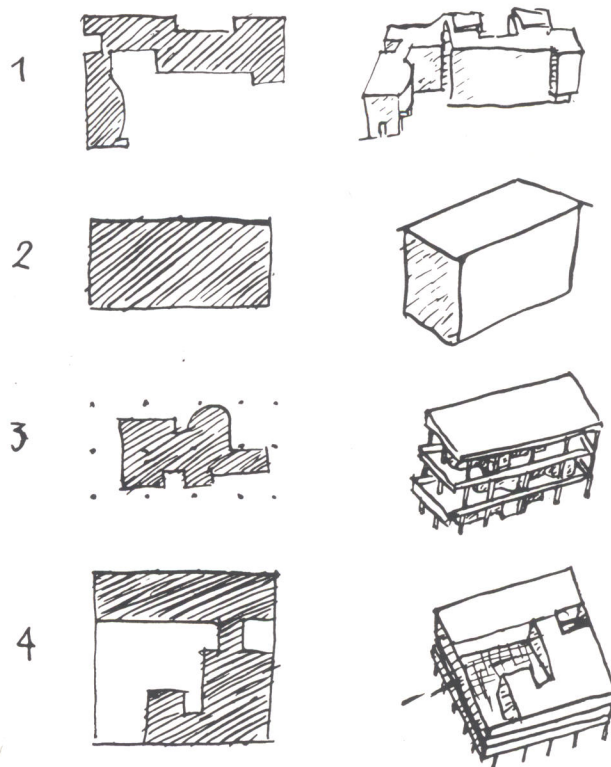
Secondly – all people live in apartments. If they have a house it will be outside the city and in general be a second home. In the big Russian cities you will hardly find any private houses, and if you do, they are generally wooden houses that are falling apart. Russian cities were almost completely constructed under Soviet rule, and Soviet urban design was based on the construction of apartment buildings surrounded by public space. Existing private houses were not taken care of – many of them even now have no proper sanitary and heating. Consequently, private houses in the city have a very bad name, as does living on the first floor. Private and collective space come too close.

If the supply of housing is limited to apartments, the architecture of the building has very little influence on the interior layout. In general, living in a private house will mean living on more than one floor. The limited size of each floor, the location of the stairs and windows dictates the use of the space. The architect that designed the house has for a large part decided how the space looks and how it can be used. This also means that the house already has a certain character that makes it different from others. An apartment layout is much less predetermined and consequently is much more anonymous.

The uniformity in both location and typology leaves consumers with not much choice in buying a place to live that is unique and with which one can identify. Then the only thing you can do in order to make your anonymous apartment into something unique and special is to invite an interior architect.

#### Free plan

Actually, the demand for individuality has led to a situation where in Moscow all expensive apartments are built with interior walls. »Svobodnaya planirovka« – free plan – is the term that is used to advertise these apartments. To architects this



Le Corbusier, 1930, sketch

1. Maison LaRoche-Jeanneret (1924)
2. Villa Meyer/Stein de Morzine (1926)
3. Villa Baiseau II (1929)
4. Villa Savoie (1929)

TPO Reserv  
apartment block in  
Moscow, 2000

plan of the building  
plans of the apartments

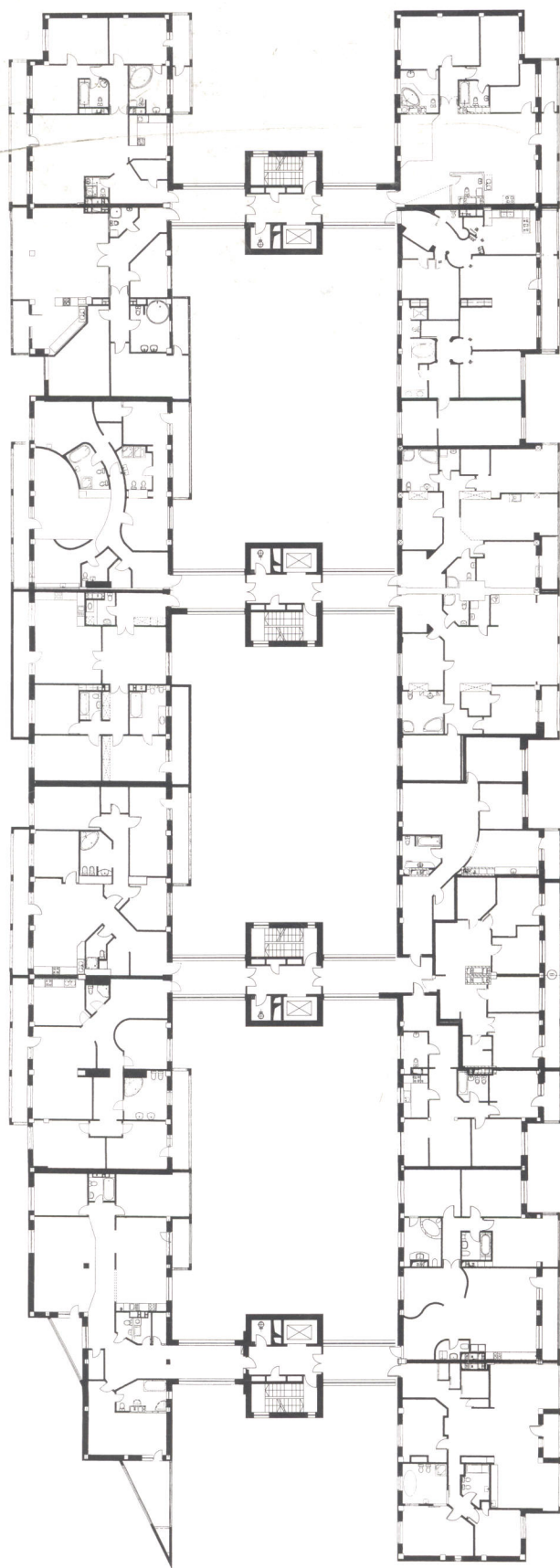
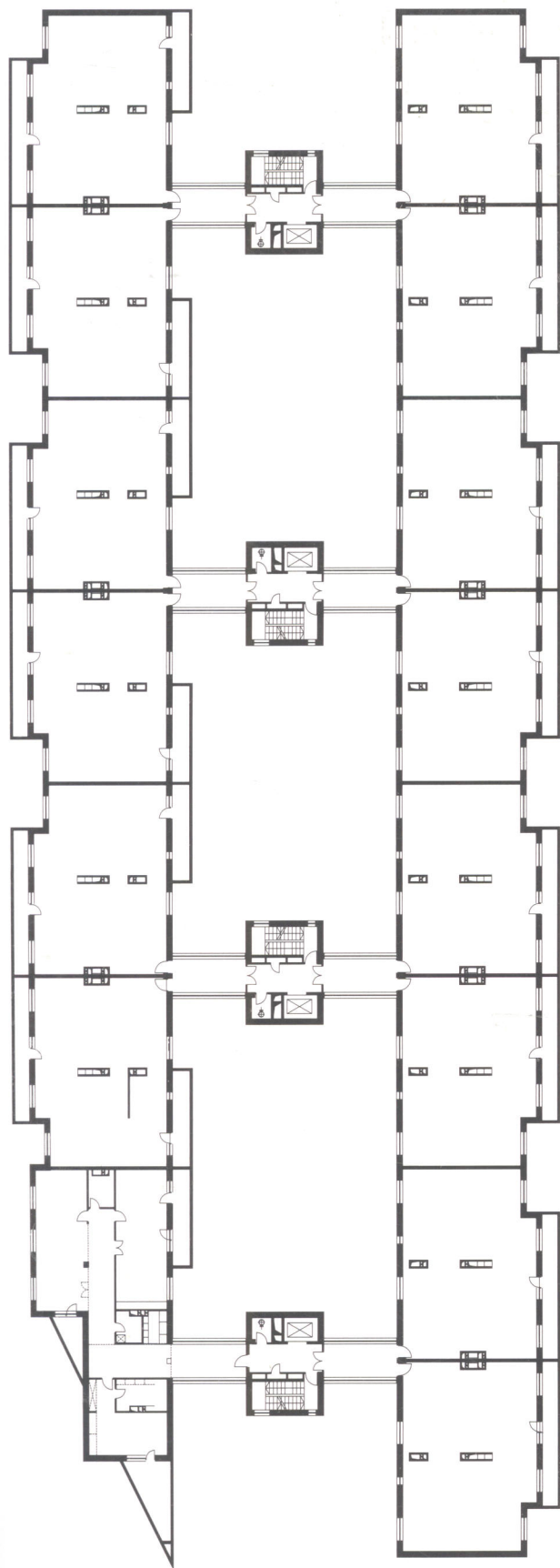
sounds familiar – wasn't this the term Le Corbusier used in his »5 points«: Le plan libre – with its interior walls independent of the column structure? At that time, this architectural concept was meant for internal use only: to free the architect from the harness of the load-bearing walls, enabling him to make free flowing spaces. It was not until the late 1960's that the idea occurred that this concept could actually be used to give the inhabitant of the dwelling more to say about his environment. Architects would develop »construction kits«, giving the inhabitants ample choices of room-sizes, placement of doors and even windows. Notwithstanding the unmistakably political agenda there was no question of giving up the position of the architects as the one to emancipate the people. Actually, an organization of architects with the name »Open Building« still exists, promoting the principle of the division of a »bearer« and »infill«.

So what is propagated by the idealist architects in Europe and America is realized by project developers in Moscow that don't have the least intention to improve the world but just follow the demands of the market. When they started to develop apartment complexes for the new rich in the beginning of the 1990's, they found out that the moment they would hand over the key to the new owner con-

struction workers would move in to remove not only kitchens and bathroom fittings, but also all interior walls. Seventy years of Soviet housing design had led the clients to the belief that any apartment layout that was not custom made would be not fit their individual taste or life style. Once developers understood this, they built all their apartments without interior layout.

Actually, the Russian model of shell and core apartment construction can be considered a real innovation in architecture: it finally has solved the problem of collective design and individual use that has been a central theme ever since mass housing has started to occur. It realizes on a big scale what has been tried in the West only in experimental projects. Of course this solution has a price: In Moscow, the price of an interior fit out including furniture can be close the price of the apartment proper. Also, the freedom to realize one's own interior might very well be limited to the first user. Considering the investment made by the first owner, the price of a finished apartment will be much higher than an empty one, meaning that it will be less opportune to destruct and replace it by a lay-out of one's own.

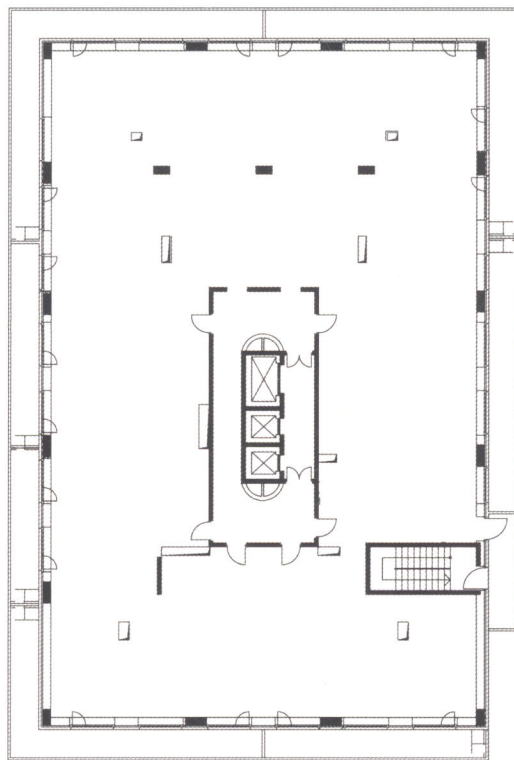
In any case the free plan principle leads to the solution of the problem of diversification: If all apart-





Ostozhenka Architects,  
Sokol apartment building,  
floor plan  
Moscow, 2001

Ostozhenka Architects,  
Sokol apartment building,  
Moscow, 2001



ment interiors are designed by different architects, the consumer will have an enormous choice of options, one of which will certainly fit to his taste. In fact it can lead to a market for apartments that will have more similarities to the art market than to the market for real estate. The name of the designer will decide the price of an apartment interior as much as the name of the artist is decisive for the price of a work of art.

the end, the interior is a stage set – it might not have the same permanence as architecture, but it fits much better in Russia's tradition of creating mesmerizing illusions in art, literature, theatre and film.

Not only is Russian free plan apartment the first serious contribution of Russian architecture to the international architectural debate since the Paper Architecture of the 1980s, it is also the reason for the flourishing of Russian interior architecture. The sheer amount of work in interior design in Russia has led to the fact that a large part of the architectural community is working in this field. This means that the results can not only be seen in the apartments with a free plan, but also in other interiors: those for apartments in older buildings, for restaurants, clubs and boutiques. That in comparison »real« architecture in Russia looks very bleak, is probably the result of the particularities of Russian culture: presentation is always better than performance. In