

Eternal values on stone and canvas

The foundations of Bella Rosenfeld's home (Marc Chagall's wife) have been unearthed in Vitebsk. Meanwhile, the quarter in Pokrovskaya Street where the globally famous artist lived is due to be restored, and the Art College, where Chagall, Malevich and Dobuzhinsky lectured, is to be revived.

By Viktor Korbut

Many years ago, a quay was situated at the crossroads of Lenin and Tolstoy streets, leading to the Vitba River (from which the name of Vitebsk originates). From here, goods were delivered to trading stalls in the square by the Town Hall (which still remains). Today, a twin-deck berth is situated on the quay but, in the late 19th-early 20th century, the Brozi Hotel stood on the site — one of the best in Belarus.

Merchant Shmuel-Neukh Rosenfeld, the father of Marc Chagall's wife Bella, ran a shop selling jewellery and watches on the ground floor of the Brozi Hotel. With safes keeping gold and precious metals inside, he preferred to live nearby, renting almost a whole floor for his family.

The building is no longer standing but Professor Olga Levko, who heads the History Institute's Centre of Pre-Industrial Society History, at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, recently conducted the first dig at the site. Ms. Levko has been studying Vitebsk artefacts since 1976 and tells us, "During our dig, we discovered the foundations of the Brozi Hotel, which was situated at the crossroads of Smolenskaya and Podvinskaya streets, close to the Town

bowling alley and billiard tables. It also had some shops — selling jewellery, confectionery, furniture and artistic photos. Besides traditional hotel rooms, there were flats, such as Chagall's father-in-law lived in. We've also discovered iron doors, an iron basket, fragments of 19th-early 20th century glazed tiles (stamped by Lisovsky factory) and floor tiles (produced in Riga), and glass and pottery dishes. All the

written between 1935 and 1944. Although the original is in Yiddish, it was later published in French, under the title *Lumieres Allumees* (*Lit Lights*), in Paris. She tells us, "Jean Albert's confectionery shop kitchen was located under the Rosenfelds' windows. Bella recalled the scents which arose from below, often bewitching her. If she went out into the courtyard, the

confectioners sometimes allowed her to lick the big spoon they used to stir the chocolate being prepared. Her parents were always busy at their watch and jewellery shop and her brothers had their own business errands to run, so small Bella — called tenderly *Bashenka* or *Bashutka* by relatives and neighbours — was home alone all day. Sometimes, she quietly opened the door separating the shop from the living area and watched the customers or her par-



Draft of the quarter where Marc Chagall lived



early 1990s, Pokrovskaya Street lacked the status of being a protected site and the initial plan of Vitebsk's development envisaged the construction of a bypass to ease transport flow in the centre, passing directly through Chagall's house. In the 1990s, nobody realised that this was his former home; Ms. Khmel'nitskaya discovered it by accident.

"The Marc Chagall Museum was established 20 years ago," she tells us. "However, it was only in the 1990s that I discovered documents at Belarus' National Historical Archives stating that Hatskel and Feigalta Chagall owned 'a stone one storey house, with a small shop, in addition to a wooden house, two courtyard buildings and a wooden barn' in Bolshaya Pokrovskaya Street. As Chagall writes in his *My Life*, his father bought a house in Pokrovskaya Street 'for several Roubles'— after Marc's birth and the death of his grandfather. I also discovered a document specifying the date that Chagall's parents applied for permission to build their stone house: September 1900. They requested a license to 'build a one storey stone house, with a cellar' and their application was granted. The restoration of the house, with an exhibition launched there, was complete by 1997, becoming Vitebsk's tourist Mecca."

Ms. Khmel'nitskaya believes that the restoration of the Brozi Hotel will attract an even greater number of tourists to the city.

Meanwhile, the restoration of the former People's Art College has begun at 5 Gazeta Pravda Street. Headed by Chagall in 1919, it attracted Kazimir Malevich, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and other avant-garde masters from Moscow and Petrograd, who lectured there. Some time later, Kazimir Malevich established a UNOVIS (Affirmation of New Art) Group at the College. In April 1924, the College was renamed as the Belarusian Art School, becoming the country's higher educational establishment for the arts (until the Theatre and Art Institute — now known as the Belarusian State Arts Academy — was established in Minsk after the war).

At present, Vitebsk College's buildings belong to the Centre of Contemporary Art Museum. Its Director, Andrey Dukhovnikov, plans to join Ms. Khmel'nitskaya in inviting Moscow specialists to Vitebsk, to discuss how best to restore this unique building in authentic style. Workshops for young artists are also due to open there.



Vitebsk museum dedicated to the globally famous painter is among the most visited attractions

Hall and a stone bridge over the Vitba River. The house was decorated with arched windows on its first floor and had an open gallery with open-lattice metalwork. We know that the hotel housed a first class restaurant, offering Russian and French cuisine, in addition to a

findings are to be sent to the Marc Chagall Museum, showing visitors how Vitebsk residents lived in the past."

Lyudmila Khmel'nitskaya, the Marc Chagall Museum's Director, learnt about Bella Rosenfeld's life from her book of recollections,

ents. Bella described the shop in the following way: "Two big gas lamps burn under the ceiling; they're so loud that you might think they're groaning in pain. The flames sputter beneath the small iron net-like lamp-shades, which are hardly able to stop hissing sparks. In the

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