

Harmony of glass, metal and traditions

Outstanding architects from St. Petersburg — acknowledged as global leaders in architectural fashion — look closely at Minsk

By Viktor Korbut

On looking at new buildings springing up in Belarus, which incorporate the dreams and imagination of architects, I can't help but feel that I've seen something similar before. In fact, this game of glass, concrete, curves and iron existed a century ago — as seen in the architecture of the USA, Germany and France. The trend has arrived in Belarus but our national style of modern architecture is still in its infancy. Not long ago, Minsk was visited by architects from St. Petersburg, who proposed joint work on original projects.

"The St. Petersburg school has deep roots. As Italy is the world's cradle, St. Petersburg is an architectural cradle for Russia and Belarus," stresses Anatoly Nychkasov, Belarus' Architecture and Construction Minister. People's Architect of Russia Vladimir Popov is confident that our traditions mutually influence one another, saying, "Minsk is close to us in spirit; the Belarusian architectural school was probably the closest to St. Petersburg of all the former Soviet republics."

Naturally, it's difficult to be original in our modern world, since we have a shared legacy of Gothic, Baroque and Classic styles. Style once dictated fashion but it's now more fashionable to

experiment with construction materials. In fact, our time is unique in accenting architectural names rather than a particular style: Kramarenko (who designed the National Library's 'diamond' in Belarus) and British Foster (in the West). We can call Mr. Foster a global artist, since his ideas transcend national identity. His genius is apparent in Kazakhstan's capital, where his urban palace in the form of a pyramid is both classical and contemporary, featuring a theatre and a greenhouse inside. Even the



Modern technologies of construction are especially interesting for professionals

lift is unique, moving diagonally from the bottom to the top of his pyramid (cleverly, those inside cannot feel any ascent). Modern architecture relies on accurate mathematical calculations and the laws of physics, of course.

No one has yet invited Mr. Foster to Minsk but the delegation of leading St.

Petersburg artists, who recently visited the Belarusian capital, can undoubtedly rival him. Alexander Korbut, the Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Architects, notes that drastic changes have occurred in construction technologies and architectural aesthetics in recent years, much influencing the St. Petersburg school.

Looking back through history, we can recollect that St. Petersburg (Leningrad) architects helped build the Belarusian capital — both before the war and a f -

terwards. In the 1920 and 1930s, Iosif Langbard (born in Poland's Białystok Voivodeship of Belsk, near Belarus) studied at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. His works include the House of Government, the House of Officers, the Academy of Sciences and the Opera Theatre. Meanwhile, in the 1940 and 1950s, Minsk was



St. Petersburg architects share secrets of their mastery with Belarusians

rebuilt anew, with the help of St. Petersburg architects.

St. Petersburg combines old and modern architecture carefully. Not long ago, there were plans to build the Okhta Centre (Gazprom-City) in Russia's northern capital: a 400m tall skyscraper. Against this construction, St. Isaac's Cathedral



would have looked like a dumpling. Wisely, UNESCO and President Medvedev advocated the protection of the city's true image and the experimenting architects were ignored. Those who commissioned the bizarre project have had to rein in their ambitions. Architecture envisages not only art but huge sums of money of

course. With this in mind, St. Petersburg residents choose which new buildings grace the city's historical centre with care. Minsk can certainly learn from their experience.

Honoured Architect of Russia Nikita Yavein heads the Studio-44 architectural bureau and joined the group of Russian architects in Minsk. As mentioned, Astana is eager to create original architecture in its city and Mr. Yavein was among those invited to implement two projects: a children's palace of arts and a railway station. The St. Petersburg masters easily won the tender, competing against the Germans, Chinese and Australians. In fact, rather than focusing on 'winning', the Russians 'played' with their ideas. For the new History Museum of Kazakhstan, they suggested a hill with a green site at the summit; the jury loved this but placed it in second position. However, the Kazakhs understood that the Russians understood their 'steppe soul', realising what the newly born nation's capital needs. Astana is revamping itself on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the country's independence. Later, the Russians proposed their idea for the new railway station: a woven arc made from 'kerege' — wood-

en framework (tied whips which resemble straw plaits, as used in Belarusian souvenirs). Each morning, the sun would rise behind the arc, sending its rays through the blue background (yellow and blue are the colours of the Kazakh flag). Unsurprisingly, the design was well-received. The Kazakhs' warm attitude to their capital can't but impress.

Meanwhile, at present, Studio-44 is designing a building shaped like the 'Vostok' rocket (which sent the first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin into space) for London residents. The construction area already neighbours Gagarin Square and the new building will supplement Norman Foster's many works, such as his egg-shaped skyscraper and Millennium Bridge. The unique skyscraper is to be decorated as the Faceted Chamber (Granovitaya Palata) at the bottom, while having rings on top (like the Cathedral of Vasily Blazhenny). The remaining features of the 90m tall building will resemble Gagarin's spacecraft, while hosting a hotel, a restaurant and a theatre. It will be a true Russian miracle. Will Russian wonders ever appear in Minsk? St. Petersburg's architects have promised to return...

Educational routes to promote tourism

By Olga Kobayakova

Over the last two years, the number of tourists to the Brest Region's reserves has risen 5-fold

Last year alone, the region's reserves were visited by over 3,000 tourists — five times more than in 2008. There are seven Republican reserves in the Brest Region, each developing their tourist activities.

Six reserves have already received licenses for tourism and are welcoming tourists, with environmental education centres operating at five of them:

Zvanets, Sporovsky, Vygonoshchanskoe, Srednyaya (Mid) Pripyat and Luninsky, as well as Srednyaya (Mid) Pripyat and Olmanskie Bolota. These reserves offer tourists over 30 educational excursion routes.

The Brest Region's reserves are taking part in international technical assistance projects, such as that to develop Pripyat Polesie. The 2011-2015 national tourism development programme in Belarus should also inspire further development of tourism in the Brest Region.

Return from kingdom of cold

This season, two Belarusians worked in the Antarctic: Alexey Gaidashov and engineer-ecologist Yuri Giginyak. They spent almost two months on the continent, arriving in late December and returning in February

During the exhibition, the polar researchers spent much time studying the ozone layer. For the first time, it was investigated along a length of the Antarctic shore, on board the Academician Fedorov ship. In addition, geological samples and water samples were taken from Antarctic lakes. Mr. Giginyak observed cetacean, pinnipeds and fish,



Unusual meetings in the Antarctic

making several visits ashore, where he collected samples of moss and lichen.

The expedition differed from the usual tours, being

conducted outside the Belarusian permanent base: the field camp by Vechernyaya Mountain. Last December, Belarusian polar researchers

visited for a while, to inspect the site, and were pleased to discover that our equipment had been almost untouched by snow storms — unlike that of the Russians at Molo-dezhnaya Station.

Such visits to the Antarctic are of major significance from the point of view of scientific research and national prestige. "Owing to the achievements of our Belarusians on the sixth continent, in logistics and science, we now enjoy respect in the Antarctic," stresses Mr. Gaidashov.

Belarusian polar researchers have the ultimate goal of establishing a permanent seasonal base.