

# New life for ancient mansion

Reconstructed Minsk mansion, once belonging to the Vankovich family, ready to welcome culture-seeking visitors by autumn

By Daria Andreeva

## Rich life story

In the 19th century, the Vankovich estate gathered local high society at its boisterous parties. Guests included such prominent figures as composer Stanislaw Moniuszko, playwright Wincenty Dunin-Marcinkiewicz and artist Jan Damel. Noble host Valenty Vankovich is now considered a father of Belarusian pictorial art.

Guests were welcomed to Valenty's richly furnished apartments, in his beautifully located mansion. His estate included waterfalls created by the Slepynka River and walks through pinewoods. The house's luxurious interiors featured a rich decorated main hall, in addition to other ornate rooms, a salon, a dining room with tile-covered stoves and fireplaces, and a library with an archive system. Each room was furnished splendidly — featuring bronze chandeliers, candlesticks and pictures.

Sadly, the family moved away in the 1920s and the newly arrived Soviet authorities found their own use for the deserted mansion. At various times, it housed a school of officers, a potato sorting point and a hostel. In the mid-1980s, the building received the status of an architectural monument but, by that time, nothing of its unique décor survived.

## Back to the future

The mansion fell steadily into ruin until 2009, when restoration began, supervised by UNIVEST-M Group. Its representative, Natalia Tolstaya, tells us, "To understand the degree of complexity in restoring the estate, I can say that it's easier and cheaper to knock it down than to build anew. However, restoration works are now at their final stage."

The mansion has historical-cultural value, so is to be used to host exhibitions, musical parties and art auctions. Professional lighting and sound equipment has been purchased, as well as an open-air stage — suitable for catwalks and concerts. The attic floor is equipped to host seminars and conferences.

Architect Alexander Konovlenko is the general designer and scientific head of restoration work, responsible for reviving the ancient building so often repaired poorly in the past.

The estate has a large roof-terrace, which can seat up to 600 people comfortably, thanks to a dehumidifying system. The mansion's grounds offer shade and sunshine as suits your mood and work will continue, bringing the wider estate into repair. It's impossible to completely restore the Slepynka water system but the gatehouse and boundary have already received attention.



Beautiful Vankovich family estate

## Young ecologists and small rivers

### Disna River environmental project launched in Belarus

*The Small Rivers — Big Problems* project is designed to run for two years in the Glubokoe, Postavy and Sharkovshchina districts of the Vitebsk Region. With financial support from the European Union, it aims to establish a network of environmental posts and youth environmental inspectorates, helping to monitor and clean tributaries of the Disna River. It will also work to improve recreation areas and develop an action plan for the effective management of streams.

The project focuses on raising ecological awareness among children and adults, while drawing public attention to problems facing small rivers. Young people will be able to attend environmental activities in schools and to take part in various photographic and essay contests, with winners attending a special summer camp.

The main objective of the project is to strengthen environmental monitoring and promote the sustainable development of small waterways in these three districts of the Vitebsk Region.

## Toothless fish give gentle massage

### Vitebsk regional clinical dermatovenerologic dispensary using fish-therapy

The clinic has purchased over 200 Garra rufa fish (family Cyprinidae) to implement a new procedure, conducted in a 200-litre aquarium. The water is constantly purified by ultraviolet light, under the supervision of experts, explains Victor Spiridonov, the chief doctor of the medical institution. He tells us that the fish remove dead skin cells by nibbling, although they have no teeth. Healthy cells remain unharmed while infected or damaged cells are rubbed away, eaten by the fish. Patients feel a slight tickling and tingling sensation, while the fish's saliva contains enzymes promoting the regeneration and restoration of skin. The saliva also has sedative, disinfectant, anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects.

"Fish-therapy is an alternative treatment for patients suffering from eczema, dermatitis, psoriasis and other skin diseases," Mr. Spiridonov emphasises, telling us that in the Vitebsk Region alone, about 3.5 percent of the population suffer from psoriasis.

The dermatovenerologic dispensary in Vitebsk has been developing non-traditional methods of treatment for several years, including apiotherapy (bee stings), hirudotherapy (leeches), homoeopathy (plants), acupuncture and mud. Patients can also consult a trichologist, a psychotherapist and other medical services.

## Internet connection in squares and in parks

By Anton Ivanov

### About 400 new Wi-Fi access points launching around Minsk

Those touring the capital will soon have wireless access to the Internet at a range of convenient hotspots, including every hotel hosting guests of the World Hockey Championship, Minsk Arena and Chizhovka-Arena and the city's Sports Palace. Parks, main streets and squares will offer access, alongside cafes and restaurants.

According to Eduard Belokursky, the Director of the Minsk City Phone Network (part of Beltelecom), Wi-Fi is an essential element of 21st century city infrastructure. The 400 new paid hotspots will join about 450 already in existence around Minsk.

## Ensuring safety over our skies

Plans for a new air traffic control centre to be constructed near village of Sokol, Minsk Region



Modern technologies help air traffic controllers

"The decision to construct a new air traffic control centre has been taken, financed by Belaeronavigatsia enterprise, at a total cost of \$10-\$12 million," notes Vladimir Kostin, the Director of the Aviation Department. The enterprise is now working on design document for construction, with attention paid to safety of aircraft.

This enterprise follows the Civil Aviation Development Programme of Belarus for 2011-2015, involving technical re-equipment of radar and radio navigation facilities and aeronautical telecommunication sites, as well as the automation of air traffic control processes. "We're in the midst of realising our plans,

with much achieved recently," Mt. Kostin tells us.

Last year, Belarus completed a project with France's Thales Air Systems to deliver, install and commission radio locators at aerodromes in Grodno, Minsk-2 and Mogilev. "This unique equipment allows us to supervise the flight of aircraft over the air space of Belarus and to monitor plane positioning during landing. All information from the locator is delivered to the monitor of the aircraft control operator," he explains. In 2014, aerodromes in Brest and Gomel will receive the same equipment.

A monitoring system for aircraft movement is being installed at Minsk National Airport in the second quarter of 2014. "With the growing volume of flights, it's vital to supervise their movement as they approach. Such equipment is designed to help the air traffic controller in tackling this complicated task," Mr. Kostin adds.