



↑ **RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX, BOULEVARD GENERAL KARBYSHEVA, BURO MOSCOW, 2004–2006**
 Buro Moscow is one of the new small firms that have entered the Moscow market. Architects Olga Aleksakova and Andreas Huhn were educated in Holland and Germany. While working at Rem Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture they (re)discovered Moscow and decided to take a chance there. Together with Julia Bourdova they now have a growing portfolio. Their background is visible in their approach to design questions, which is both conceptual and aesthetic.
 Their first major assignment was to redesign the facade of a building with a floor space of 41,000 m² that was already under construction. The possibilities were accordingly limited, but by exploiting the standard prefabrication process they managed to change the appearance of the block. The castings for the staircase screens were altered and a free-flower structure appeared. The facade panels were decorated with brick tiles in different colours, resulting in a wood- or even textile-like surface. This surface was further adorned with a pattern of small projecting balconies which the architects hope will avoid being built- or glassed-in. However minimal these measures may appear, they are very effective. The fact that at the moment the office has almost more work than it can handle is indeed no surprise.

Housing: 41,000 m². Client: Krost Konzern. Engineering: NABAD. Address: Boulevard General Karbysheva, 21



Moscow's mammoths

Moscow's new housing production doesn't do small or medium, only large and extra large.

RUSSIA — ANTON EGUEREV DE SILVA & BARRY VAN WAVEREN

Moscow is booming. A building fever has taken hold of the city. After two decades of stagnation, building production is now at full force. During the late 1990s, the political and economic situation allowed for huge investments in real estate. Since then, the sky has been the limit. The reasons for this growth are manifold. First of all, the collapse of the socialist doctrine clearly had its effect on housing. Secondly, the square metres per capita have increased. Under communist rule several families occupied one apartment, the so-called *kommunalka*. The (political) elite slowly started to gain privileges including 'elite' housing. This can be seen clearly within the central garden ring where the population decreased from one million in 1940 to 250,000 in the 1990s. The trend was further strengthened by the up-and-coming market economy claiming space for retail and offices.

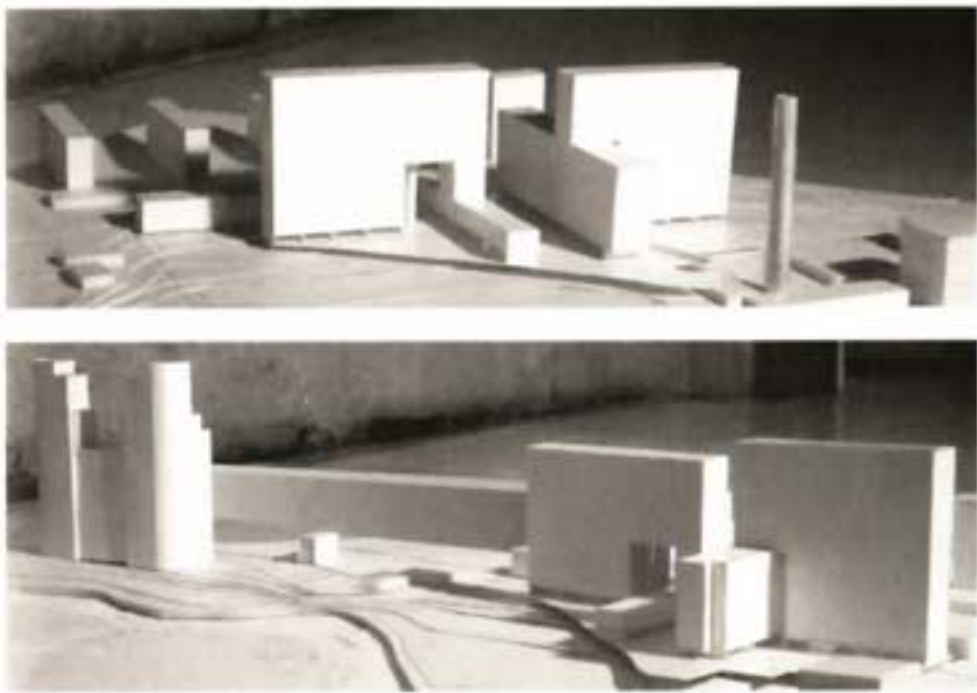
Still, seen from another point of view, this growth is remarkable: Russia has the world's highest decline in population – about 700,000 each year – and in Moscow itself deaths outnumber births. It appears that the main driving force of Moscow's growth is migration. Many Russians, including from former Soviet republics, are choosing to leave rural areas and head for the big city in search of a better life and living conditions.

In the 1980s, 90% of the Moscow real estate was state owned and all housing projects were centrally planned and developed. Each leadership period produced a distinctive style of architecture which came to be named after the leader concerned. Staliniski, for example, is the term used to refer to the neo-classical, monumental city palaces of the Stalin era. These buildings were well constructed but this proved to be a drawback, for mass housing and production levels under Stalin were far too low. Prefabrication was introduced in the 1930s but it was not until the Khrushchev period (1953–1964) that it was applied on a large scale. Starting in the 1950s, housing production was geared to quantity, from the earliest prefab systems under Khrushchev which resulted in monotonous five-storey blocks, to the vast estates of 24-storey beehives under Brezhnev (1964–1982). The use of decoration, so symbolic under Stalin, was abandoned. Throughout this period the basic unit didn't really change and people had no choice but to live in these two- or three-room, poorly outfitted apartments.

In the new century some, although not all, things are changing. The state is no longer the dominant player in property development and, as a result, central planning seems to have disappeared. The market is being controlled by a small group of investors, such as Capital Group, Krost and Donstroy. The massive shortage of new housing puts these developers in a very powerful position. In most cases apartments are sold before a single drawing has been made. Dwellings sometimes turn out to be smaller than people paid for, but a loss of 10 to 15% is generally accepted. Architects in particular find it very strange that people should be prepared to buy an apartment without knowing what it looks like, without any plans. And this brings us to another issue: Russia's underdeveloped banking system. This is one of the reasons why people prefer to invest their money in bricks and mortar. Real estate close to the city centre is seen as the soundest investment. Given that new 'clients' don't have high demands in quality after 70 years of communism, it is no surprise that developers don't really bother to improve standards, let alone care about architecture. For them, the most important factors are speed and quantity. Even though several realized projects have demonstrated the monetary value of quality and style, it is still a low priority with property developers.

The consequences for the architectural profession are self-evident. Architects are faced with increasingly impossible deadlines. One firm asserts that they wouldn't mind losing half their assignments if this meant they could spend double the time on the rest. The developers set the rules and all the firms featured here work for the same developers. The choice is a stark one: either you work for them or you don't work.

Few firms are managing to keep their head above water. They are engaged in a continuous battle and they need to be extremely creative, not only with respect to the design, but maybe even more in their endeavour to lure developers down the road to quality. ←



↑↓ 'THE ELEPHANTS' (LYZLOV ARCHITECTS, 2006-)

Most new apartment buildings in the Moscow region are quite awesome: an endless repetition of stacked containers. Inhuman blocks of up to one thousand dwellings are no exception. At first sight 'The Elephants' by Lyzlov Architects appears to be just one more such megalith. But this judgement would be too hasty for the huge 26-storey volumes have been manipulated in quite a subtle way. The central street bisecting the site is flanked by lower slabs of three to six floors, so as to create a classic street profile. Perpendicular to this street are the two main elephant volumes, facing the adjacent park. Connecting the two volumes was not easy, but it was achieved by cutting huge passageways and the result is even elegant.

Nikolas Lyzlov explains that the association with two elephants occurred during the design process and subsequently gave rise to the design of legs, feet and nails. Having a 'story' to explain the design is seen as a big plus in Russia. The national love for literature and poetry makes Russians very susceptible to such associations. This is in clear contrast to design explanations in Western Europe, where concepts tend to be based on more rational and analytical processes.

Total area: 131,000 m². Client: ZAO 'Mosozhcombinat'. Address: Krasnobogatyrskaya St. 38



↑ 'AEROBUS' RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX (GROUP RESERVE, 2005-2006)

This complex stands out by virtue of its scale. It is a physical statement: size matters. Its monstrous 420,000 m² makes it inhuman and awesome at the same time. The fenestration and white metal cladding seems to reduce the scale without denying it. Although the buildings contain offices, a fitness centre and a kindergarten as well as apartments, there is no sign of this in the facade. The only encroachment on this 'untouchability' is courtesy of the fire regulations. About halfway up the 35 floors, a horizontal slab juts out of the facade. It appears that fire regulations are different above a certain height.

Most of the work by Group Reserve, led by Vladimir Plotkin, reveals a modernist signature and a lot of self-confidence. Scale clearly doesn't matter to them, a no-nonsense approach that is certainly appropriate to the demands of present-day Moscow.

Total area: 420,000 m². Architects: V. Plotkin, S. Guzarev, S. Uspensky, E. Kuznechova, A. Vutuzov, S. Tchernicheva. Client: Capital Group. Address: Kochnovsky proezd 4

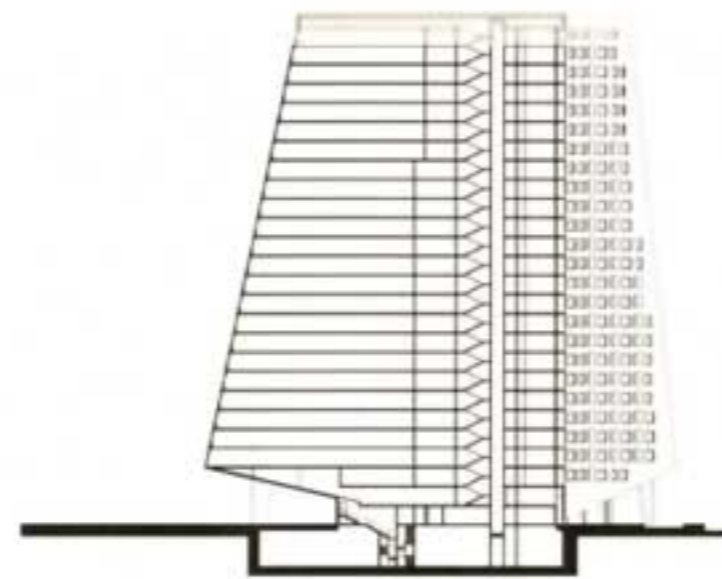


→ 'NIKOLSKAYA SLOBODA' SETTLEMENT (PROJECT MEGANOM/ANTON MOSSIN, 2006-)

Project Meganom is an ad hoc collaboration of individually operating architects. Anton Mossin has his office in the trendy Artplay complex, a former factory in Timura Frunze Street which also contains the offices of Project Russia, Art Blah and Tchoban. One of Mossin's projects illustrates a new trend in Moscow housing: the 'settlement'. Traditionally, Moscow has known only two categories of housing: apartments in the city centre and dachas outside it. The dachas have since been turned into luxury villas. The 'settlement' offers something in between and may well be what the growing (upper) middle class is looking for.

The aim of this project is to offer each inhabitant a private and luxurious apartment in green surroundings while also creating relatively high density. Parking space, a spa and service areas are hidden in a green, artificial hill, cut-through by the roads to the garages. The three blocks on top of this hill contain one apartment per floor, offering each dwelling a private entrance hall and a 360 degree view that is maximized by alternating the position of the blocks. This upmarket settlement is probably only the first in a long line.

22 dwellings. 1186 m². Architects: A. Mossin, S. Kuchenko, V. Kazachinskaya. Client: NorthWest Development



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HOUSING AND SPORT/HEALTH CENTRE, KIROV STREET (OSTOZHENKA ARCHITECTS, 2005-)

Although the principal architect, Aleksandr Skokan, is already in his sixties, the firm was founded as recently as 1992. Like many 'older' architects, Skokan's professional life under communism was confined to teaching and researching at the MARCHI, the Moscow Institute for Architecture. In the early 1990s it finally became possible for architects to set up in private practice. The name Ostozhenka refers to the firm's first assignment, the reconstruction of the neighbourhood between Ostozhenka Street and the Moscow River embankment. The new buildings conform to the scale and refinement of the historical surroundings. The area is now one of the most fashionable and expensive in central Moscow with buildings by, among others, Project Meganom and Skuratov. Context is also a very important factor in other works by Ostozhenka who have set a norm for responsible architecture in Moscow. They take all interests in account – the context, the client and the occupants – and so the style of their designs varies.

One of their recent designs is for a residential complex in Lyubertsy, a suburb in eastern Moscow. In contrast to the luxury of the Ostozhenka neighbourhood, this project has a very high density and small apartments. The location is a leftover space in a high-rise district. The main problem was how to realize the high density without compromising the daylighting and views of the existing housing. The solution was an open ensemble of three 25-storey towers. The towers are set on a base containing a sports and health centre. To maximize the transparency, the towers have a triangular shape and taper towards the top. With a lot of effort, the designers managed to soften the austere requirements and create an elegant solution for the site and for the buildings' future inhabitants.

Housing: 65,000 m². Sport/health centre: 5,000 m². Architects: A. Skokan, R. Baichev, A. Starostin, E. Merzlikina, M. Jelizarova, O. Soboleva. Client: ZAO 'City 21st Century'. Address: Kirov Street, Premise 12a