


Soviet Design

A yellow halftone graphic of a chair is positioned in the background, centered behind the text. The chair has a simple, functional design with a high back and four legs.

From Constructivism
to Modernism

1920-1980

Scheidegger & Spiess



Soviet Design

From Constructivism
to Modernism

1920-1980

Kristina Krasnyanskaya
Alexander Semenov

Scheidegger & Spiess



1

Soviet Design of the 1920s

LIST OF ACRONYMS

VKhUTEMAS	Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops
VKhUTEIN	Higher Artistic and Technical Institute
ASNOVA	Association of New Architects
OBMAS	Combined Workshops
OSA	Organization of Modern Architects
ZHIVSKULPTARKh	Commission for the Synthesis of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture
GINKhUK	State Institute of Artistic Culture
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Russian Federation)
VSNKh	Supreme Council of National Economy
NTU	Scientific and Technical Institution
RGALI	Russian State Archives of Literature and Art
OKhOBR	Department of Arts Education

Significant events and dates: the 1920s

1920 Creation of the Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops (VKhUTEMAS), an educational institution established in Moscow by merging the First and Second State Free Artists Workshops, which had been formed earlier on the basis of the Stroganov School of Art and Industry and the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture

1923 The All-Russian Agricultural and Handicraft Industry Exhibition opened in Moscow, the predecessor of what would become the VSKhV (All-Union Agricultural Exhibition), and later VDNKh (Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy)

1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, held in Paris between April and October

1928 In his report, “Artistic Preconditions for the Standardization of Civilian Furniture” (for the Standardization Section of the Scientific and Technical Institution of the Supreme Council of National Economy), El Lissitzky analysed the factors and conditions influencing current processes in the search for new forms in the object environment, which essentially provided the basis for the expressive qualities of new furniture

1930 El Lissitzky’s text “Equipping the Living Space with Furniture” was included in the collection of articles titled *Standard Projects and Construction for the Building of Residential Housing Recommended for 1930*, published by Stroykom (Construction Committee) RSFSR and based on the materials of the Typification Section

1930 Closure of the Higher Artistic and Technical Institute (VKhUTEIN)

HOUSING COMMUNES

Elizaveta Likhacheva

Strange as it may seem, the concept of housing communes does not have its origins in communist ideology. The idea of creating communal areas in a building designed to house several families arose long before the October Revolution. For example, architect Richard Nirnsee's house built in Moscow in 1914 at 10 Bolshoi Gnezdikovsky was designed as an "accommodation for bachelors", with no stoves, only primuses, which was quite unheard of in Russian kitchens at the beginning of the 20th century. This multi-storey building in Moscow was at that time intended for single employees who could dine in the in-house restaurant on the 11th floor and avail themselves of the services of manservants and chambermaids.

By the dawn of the 20th century, the process of urbanization had created a class of urban bourgeoisie. Working all day, they had no time to cook meals, take care of their children or do the family's laundry, and there were no refrigerators or washing machines in everyday use then. Whereas in the 19th century it had still been possible to employ servants, in the 20th, real incomes fell and a whole class of families appeared who could no longer afford them.

Parallel with this, there were the consequences of female emancipation in the wake of the First World War, something that was especially marked in Russia. The country had suffered horrendous human losses in the Great War and the Civil War that followed the Revolution, and there were simply not enough people to restore the country's economy. The period of the New Economic Policy laid bare this problem even more starkly and explains why female emancipation in the USSR was the most advanced of any country in the world. But in order for a woman to go out to work, she had to be free from household chores. The concept of housing communes provided the ideal solution, with their small residential cells and the entire domestic side of life located in the communal areas: the dining-room, laundry room, bathhouse, kindergarten and so forth. But the development of this kind of infrastructure required considerable financial investment, and money was short in the Soviet Union at that time. As a consequence, housing construction in the 1920s had to make significant savings on finishes and winter insulation. The housing communes that were built then cannot be called successful in terms of their design, though it should be noted that, as regards construction proper, they were very well thought-out and solid. They are still habitable, even a century later, though in need of refurbishment.

So, why is it that a concept so fortuitous and correct from the point of view of communist ideology did not take root?

First and foremost, because of the trend in household appliances, which were making their appearance from the West, primarily from the United States. In 1937, Soviet architects

brought back with them from the United States the four-volume edition of construction standards, and almost all post-war Soviet construction was carried out in accordance with them. The kitchen provided was small (only 6 square metres) but it had to be equipped with an electric oven and a refrigerator. Washing machines, electric irons, electric lighting, toasters, coffee-makers, coffee-grinders and electric kettles appeared next, and by the 1950s every Soviet apartment was decked out with household appliances.

Second, there was a lack of a well-designed, high-quality infrastructure. And third, because by its nature the Soviet Union was not a communal-minded country and it lacked the developed horizontal societal ties that existed in Europe. The main reason for the absence of such ties lies in the unfinished process of urbanization, which was interrupted by the October Revolution. The first stage of urbanization is characterized by the supremacy of the individual, followed by the emergence of horizontal connections and communities within the individual's apartment building or condominium, or across the same floor. But in the USSR, the initial stage was passed over, largely as a result of accelerated industrialization and collectivization driven by the Soviet regime.

The authorities' attempt to force people artificially to share communal spaces failed, of course, without the natural development of horizontal, or neighbourly, connections between them. Much later, due to the shortage of urban housing, communal flats did emerge, with several families housed in one large apartment of pre-revolutionary "bourgeois" buildings, all sharing the same kitchen and bathroom. This sort of communal housing was for many years viewed by the Soviet population as the most terrible of options. Paradoxically, in the Soviet Union, a country defined by its socialist system, an enduring aspiration to individualism developed, which is still rather strongly felt in modern Russia.

Today, the idea of housing communes is again of interest within the context of the new megacities. Modern inhabitants of large Russian cities are autonomous individuals who work and travel a lot. They want to live in the city centre in functional housing, which can be very minimalist.

One of Moscow's famous housing communes, on Gogolevsky Boulevard, was restored and many duplex residential cells were reconstructed on the basis of Constructivist principles, using modern materials and accommodating people's new requirements. The incredible projects of avant-garde architects have once again been imbued with new life! An excellent example is the duplex studio apartment with compact built-in kitchen unit, bathroom, bedroom and living area designed by international design Studio Bazi.



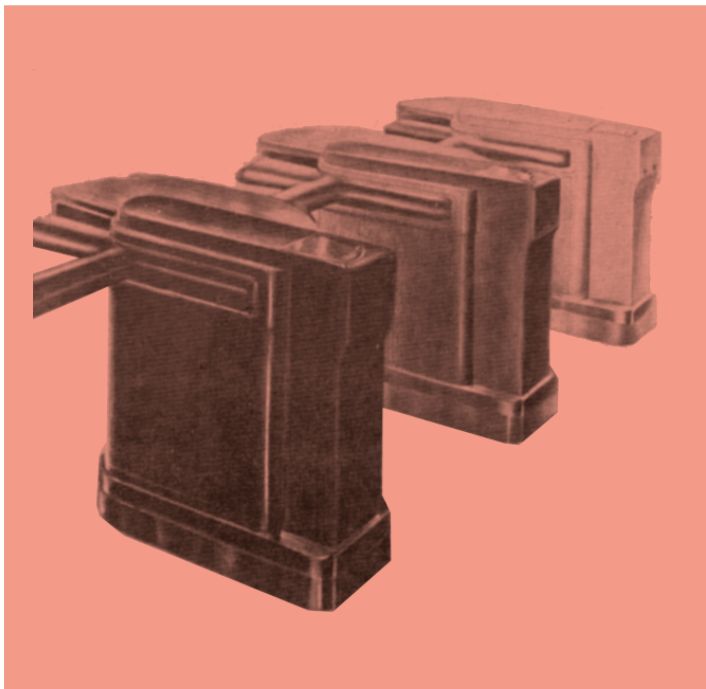
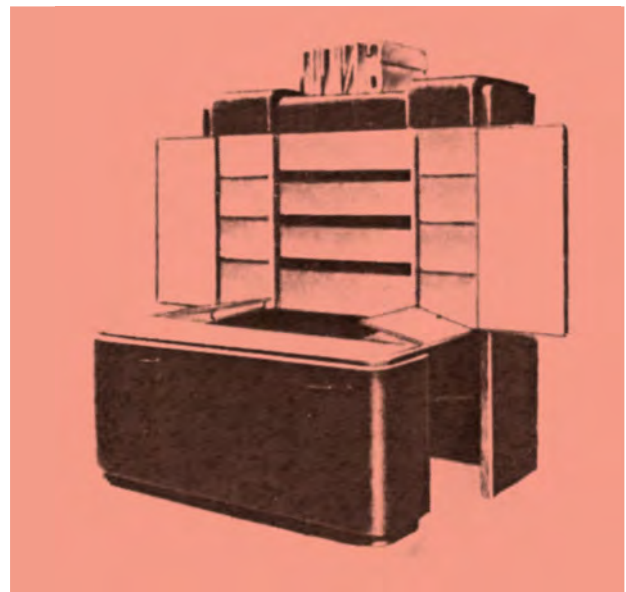
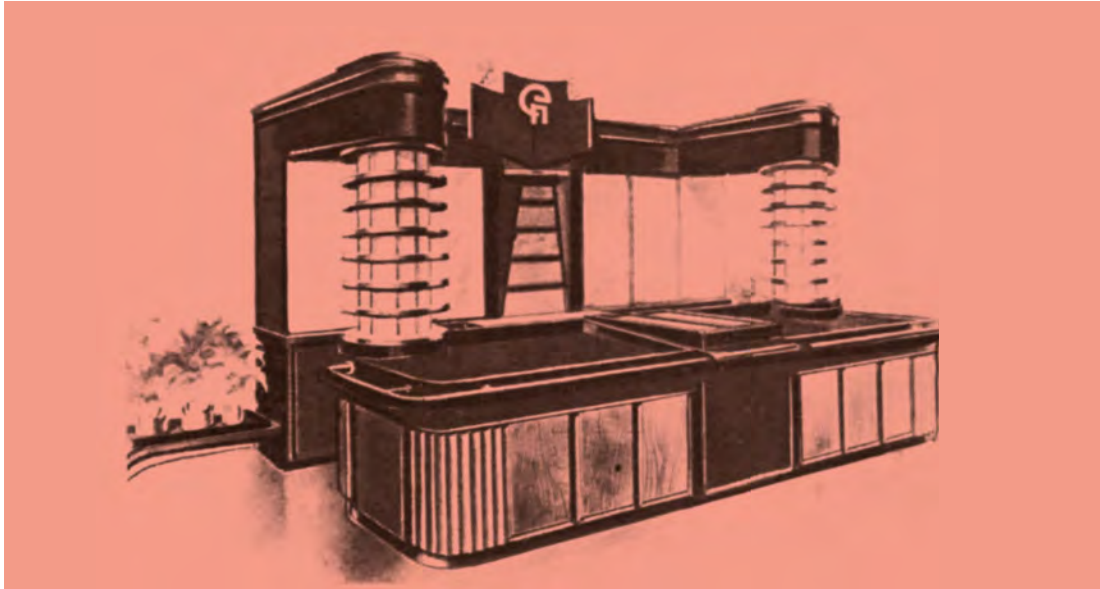
YURI REVKOVSKY, NAUM BOROV,
GRIGORY ZAMSKY.

176

Platform hall of Okhotny Ryad Moscow metro
station. Mossovet Architectural Workshop No. 12.

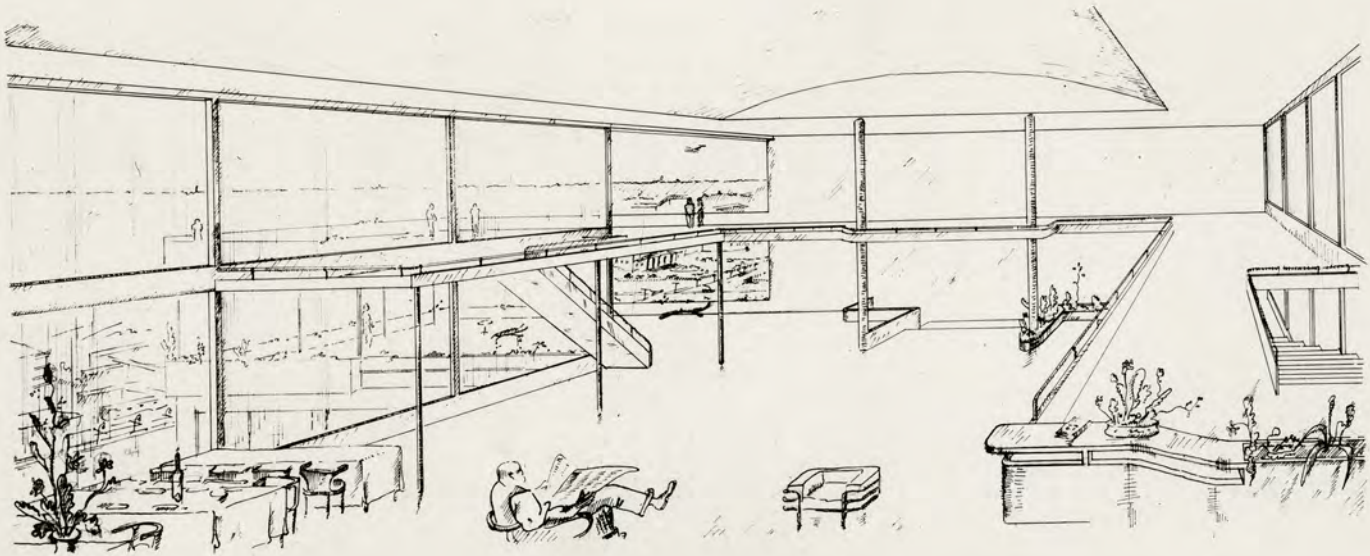
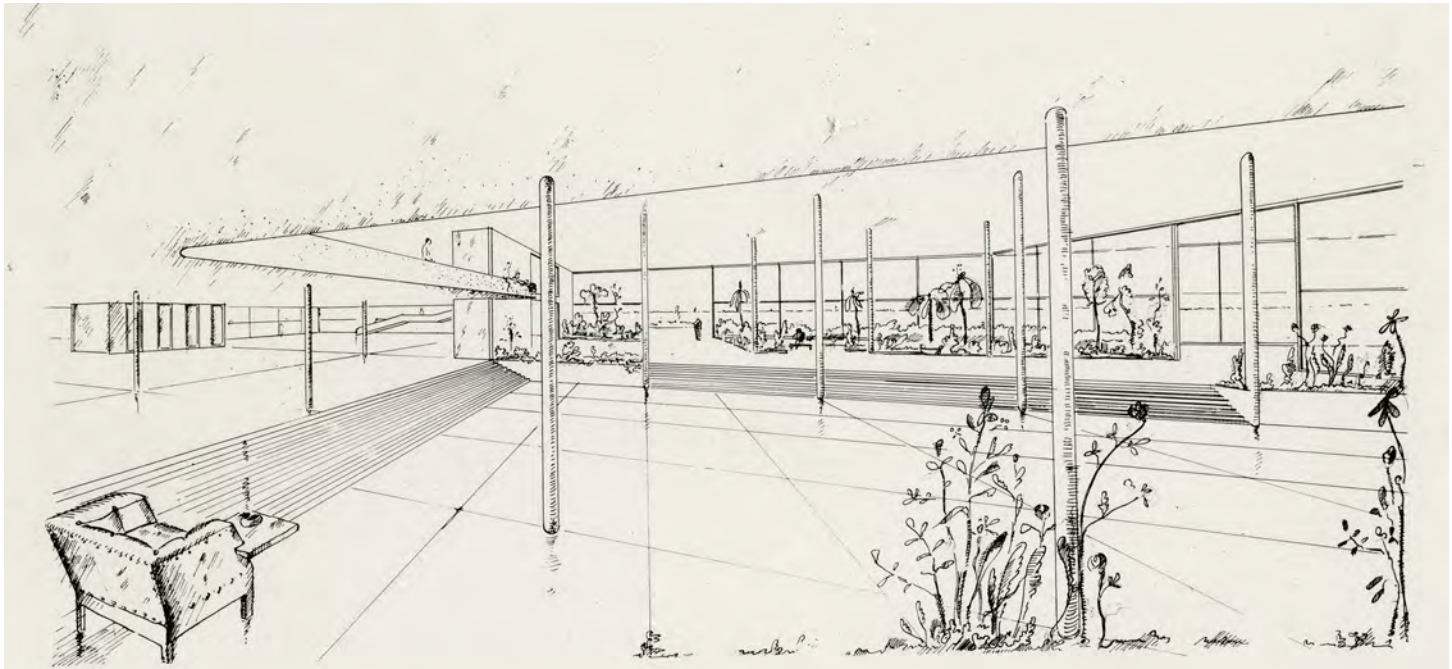
1933–35. Photo Botov, 1935.

Museum of Moscow collection.



Kiosks for Okhotny Ryad Moscow
metro station. Mossovet Architectural
Workshop No. 12. Mid-1930s.
Technicheskaya Estetika [Technical Aesthetics]
magazine, no. 6, 1985.

177



Арх. А. Заварзин
Арх. В. Косовичев 21/2 21.

ALEXEI ZALTSMAN,
JACOV KORNFELD.

219

Interior project for Hotel
Moskva. 1931. Photograph.

Shchusev State Museum of
Architecture collection.



example of the convergence of various design trends of the 1930s (Constructivism, Art Deco and Soviet Neo-Classicism) in one architectural project; the influence of these styles was clear to see in both the external appearance of the building and its internal decor.

Stalin had signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in 1939, which had kept the Soviet Union out of the war until Germany's surprise attack on 22 June 1941. When the Soviet Union went to war against Germany, joining the Allies in 1941, its huge landmass became the largest theatre of military operations in the 20th century and the country's furniture factories were reassigned for several years to the production of military equipment. Under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, Germany had given the Soviet Union free rein to occupy the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and these small nation states were subsequently incorporated into the USSR. They would later become an important centre of the Soviet furniture industry.

With the end of the war in 1945, Yuri Solovyev pushed his idea for the creation of the Specialized Architecture and Art Bureau, the Soviet Union's first organization entirely dedicated to industrial design. Solovyev would go on to

LEONID SAVELYEV, OSVALD
STAPRAN, ALEXEI SHCHUSEV.

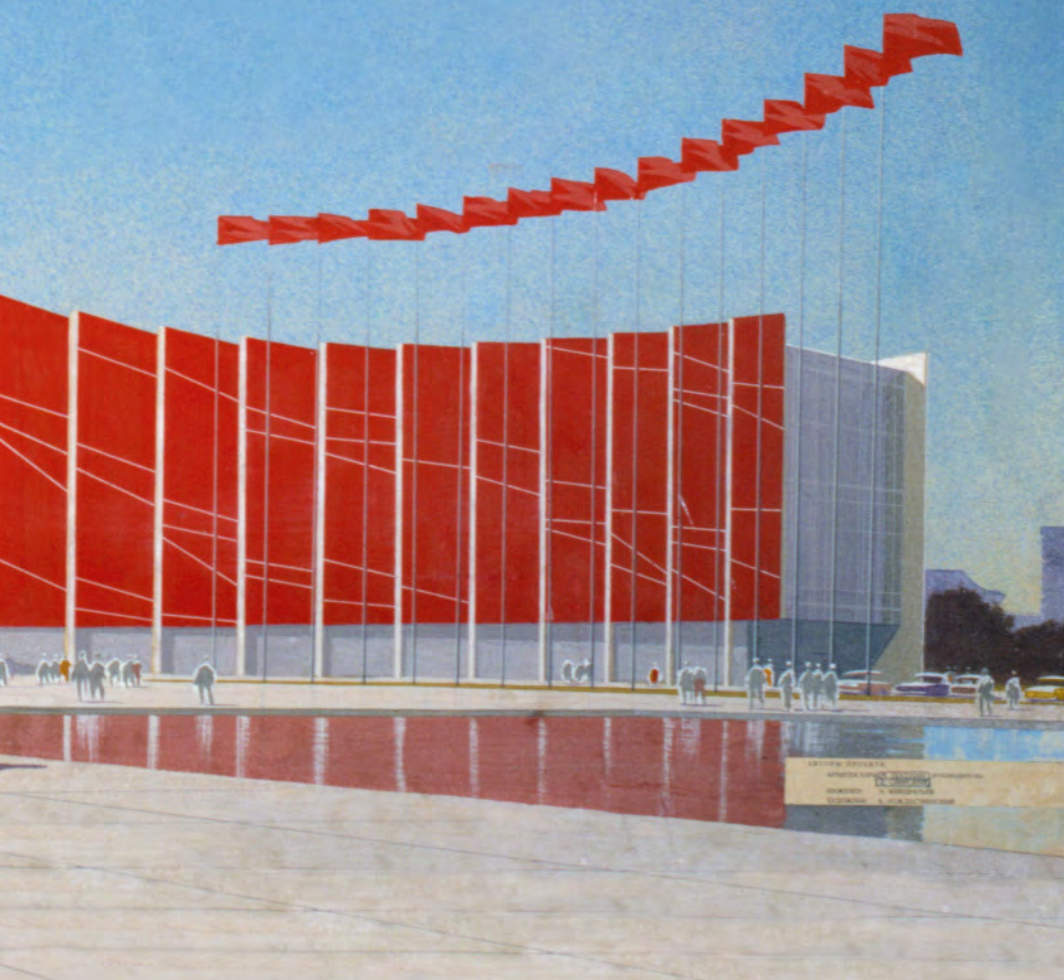
220

Interior project for
Hotel Moskva. 1930s.



USSR

ПАВИЛЬОН СССР НА МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ ВЫСТАВКЕ
В ОСАКО ЭКСПО-70



1970

MIKHAIL POSOKHIN.

USSR pavilion project for the
Osaka International Exhibition.

Shchusev State Museum
of Architecture collection.

Concept

Kristina Krasnyanskaya

Texts

Kristina Krasnyanskaya

Alexander Semenov

Christina Lodder

Elizaveta Likhacheva

Anastasia Dokuchaeva

Project Management

Giuseppina Leone

Project Coordinaton and Image Research

Alina Reshetova

Translation from Russian

Teresa Cherfas

Tom Birchenough

Copy Editing

Teresa Cherfas

Emanuela Di Lallo

Special thanks to Teresa Cherfas for her work and advice.

Design and Typesetting

Sabine Hahn, Berlin, sh-gd.de

Prepress, Printing and Binding

O.G.M., Padua

© 2020 Heritage Gallery, Moscow and
Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess AG, Zurich
© The authors for their texts

Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess
Niederdorfstrasse 54
8001 Zurich
Switzerland
www.scheidegger-spiess.ch

ISBN: 978-3-85881-846-1

Scheidegger & Spiess is being supported by the Federal Office
of Culture with a general subsidy for the years 2016–2020.

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior written consent of the publisher.

Photo credits

Heritage Gallery Collection

Shchusev State Museum of Architecture collection

Museum of Modern Art – Costakis collection (MOMus, Thessaloniki)

Bakhrushin State Central Theater Museum

Museum of Moscow collection

State Tretyakov Gallery Collection

Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts collection

Mukhina Leningrad Higher School of Art and Industry collection

(today Stieglitz Academy of Art and Industry, St. Petersburg)

Maxim Gorky Museum collection

Central Naval Museum collection

Museum of History of the City of Sochi collection

Studio Bazi

TASS photographic archive

Collection of Aleksander Lavrentyev

Collection of Maria Mayastrovskaya

Collection of Olga and Elena Kiseleva

Collection of Natalya Oltarjevskaya

Collection of Alex Lachmann

Dust jacket:

BORIS IOFAN. Armchair from the House on the Embankment.

Early 1930s. Heritage Gallery Collection.

VLADIMIR STENBERG, GEORGY STENBERG. Sketch of scenery for the
play *Scirocco*. State Chamber Theatre, Moscow. 1928. Bakhrushin State
Central Theater Museum collection.

ALEXANDER RODCHENKO. Design of the chess table for the Workers'
Club, shown at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative
and Industrial Arts in Paris. 1925. Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts
collection.

YURI SLUCHEVSKY. Project of sofa. 1960s. Heritage Gallery Collection.

NIKOLAI LANCERAY. Sofa, 1932. Heritage Gallery Collection.

IVAN TARANOV, NADEZHDA BYKOVA. Project of Moscow metro
station Sokolniki. 1934–35. Shchusev State Museum of Architecture
collection.

SERGEI SPERANSKY, NIKOLAI KAMENSKY, VICTORIA STRUZMAN.

Interior of the bar in the Hotel Leningrad (1967–70). Photo Mikhail
Churakov, 1970s. Shchusev State Museum of Architecture collection.

VARVARA STEPANOVA. Costume sketch of personage Polutatarinov
for the play *Tarelkin's Death*. Meyerhold Theatre, Moscow. 1922.

Bakhrushin State Central Theater Museum collection.

ILYA GOLOSOV. Zuev Workers' Club in Moscow (1927–29). Photo

Ivan Panov, 1930s. Museum of Moscow collection.

