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Founder of Meganom architectural bureau, Director of Education at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design, teacher at Moscow Architectural Institute (Markhi).

For the past 14 years the bureau has successfully implemented more than twenty projects. During this time, the range and scale of the solutions have grown – from private houses to urban planning concepts. But the basic method of operation has always been a careful analysis of the urban and natural landscape and integration of design projects in it.

"Project Meganom" is an active participant of the Moscow Biennale of Architecture and the Biennale of Architecture in Venice. It is engaged in many art and exhibition projects.

Grigoryan also runs international research "Archeology of periphery".

Born on August 13, 1965 in Moscow. Graduated from Moscow Architectural Institute. Member of the Moscow Union of Architects since 1994, Professor of Moscow Architectural Institute since 2006. Professor (since 2010) and Educational Program Director (since 2011) of Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design. Together with partners Ilya Kuleshov, Alexandra Pavlova and Pavel Ivanchikov, Yury Grigoryan founded "Project Meganom" Architectural Bureau in 1999.

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ARCHIDEA



INTERVIEW PROJECT MEGANOM

#33 / 2006

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ARCHIDEA

ArchIdea aims to be a mouthpiece for architects that by their work, opinions and ideas have significance for their fellow-architects, interior designers, and everybody with a special interest in the architectural horizon, from all over the world.

ArchIdea is a biannual publication and is distributed world-wide. The editors emphatically declare that they are not responsible for opinions and statements expressed in articles.

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COLOPHON

Editorial office:
ArchIdea
P.O. Box 13
NL-1560 AA Krommenie
www.archidea.com

Editor:
W. J. F. Burmanje

News editors:
T. Cole, J-C. Iversen, W. Rijkhoff, K. Toner

Production coordination:
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Interviews:
E. Mik, Amsterdam

Design & layout:
Dedato designers and architects, Amsterdam

Architectural & Aesthetical Consultant:
J. de Pauw

Typeset and colour reproduction:
Bloem Digital Imaging, Wormer

Print:
Kwak & Van Daalen & Ronday, Zaandam

Circulation:
96.330

Errata:

The photos of the Marie de Valenciennes city hall project on page 22 of ArchIdea #32 were made by Studio VDM.

The floor design of the UMC St Radboud hospital project on page 28 of ArchIdea #32 was made by Michiel van Nieuwland of Forbo Flooring, The Netherlands.

The architect of the Mencia de Mendoza school project on page 29 of ArchIdea #32 is Haverman Meiracker Vermeulen BV from Breda, The Netherlands.

The Badhuis school and day care centre project on page 29 of ArchIdea #32 was commissioned by Mr. K.J. Hol from Heteren, The Netherlands.

The building contractor for the Fukuoka Wajiro Hospital project on page 33 of ArchIdea #32 is Kumagai Gumi Co. Ltd.

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Alexandra Pavlova and Yuri Grigoryan of the Moscow-based architectural office Project Meganom aim to make Russian architecture stand out. To them, architecture is about more than just 'nest-building' and providing comfort; they like to create contrast.



12-15 FOCUS ON INTERIORS CONCERT HALLS

Concert halls are used as a means to create public spaces. The Opera House in Copenhagen and the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ/BIMhuis in Amsterdam introduce public spaces into what used to be docklands, while the Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles is giving public space back to the town.



16-33 PROJECTS

The interiors of several projects involving the use of floors and furniture surfacing from Forbo Flooring are included as a form of inspiration. The projects are located in various parts of the world and show the many possibilities provided by Forbo's products.



34-35 SUMMARY

The summaries of both interview and article have been translated into 14 languages. Four translations are included in this publication; for the remaining translations please refer to our website: www.archidea.com

'ARCHITECTURE IS LIKE A FLOWER THAT IS BLOSSOMING AGAIN'

For more than half a century, Socialism stifled nearly every initiative that emerged in Russian architecture. The work of the Moscow-based architectural office Project Meganom is evidence that architecture is beginning to open up again, like a budding flower. 'We want to continue the tradition of constructivism. We aim to give Russian architecture a strong position, to make it stand out.'



Villa Rose

Villa Rose was first made of wood and plastic. The architects built the life-size model in the woods just outside Moscow. They wanted their client to experience how fantastic their idea was: a house made of glass, semitransparent and surrounded by trees. Then they had it torn down. Alexandra Pavlova and Yuri Grigoryan of Project Meganom explained why they see buildings as fundamentally temporary: 'A hundred years, two hundred years, it doesn't mean anything. What counts is the form, the idea. A good form will survive for aeons. Architecture isn't tangible: it exists in the mind. You can destroy a building and build an identical one, as was done with the bombed-out buildings and churches in London and Berlin after World War II. In this project we wanted to promote a discussion about the difference between form and materialisation.'

The original Villa Rose was reconstructed in glass and concrete. The villa can be regarded as a contemporary dacha. Dachas - Russian country houses - became popular in the 19th century, when people used to escape from the town and spend the weekend in the country. In those days, a dacha was very small and simple. They were not at all comfortable; often they were no more than a wooden cabin - not what people in today's Russia dream of. Traditionally, however, the Russian people have a strong, deep-rooted urge to restore their contact with nature. This is why the architects have made Villa Rose mostly transparent and

irregular, with various angles that provide different views of the trees around it. The ground plan looks like a rose: the villa is in the centre of the settlement, surrounded by six other villas, which were also designed by Project Meganom. The rose-shaped plan emphasizes the villa's central position. It keeps the houses together; it "collects" them, so to speak.

Villa Rose clearly shows that Project Meganom *does* make architecture exciting. The house is outspoken and sculptural - a rock of ice. Inside, the space is open and fragmented, and its different functions confront each other. The entrance provides a view of the living area and the indoor swimming pool. The interior exudes one atmosphere, one spirit - sober, stately, relaxed - although each room has its distinguishing features; for example, one is in white stucco, while another is clad in wood. It is clearly not a house that aims only to provide absolute comfort.

- Do the architects of Project Meganom want to evoke these strong sensations also in the users of their buildings?

'Yes. We like contrasts, conflicts. We want architecture to be exciting, to provide different kinds of sensations. We don't regard architecture as a joke, as a commodity. Architecture, just like literature, cinema and music, is art. Not that a building shouldn't be comfortable: the living space should provide comfort. To us, comfort essentially



Villa Rose



Villa Rose

means good planning. But we also want the building's user to experience emotions. If life is too comfortable, it becomes less interesting. We don't build nests: architecture is not about saving people. Designing a house comes close to writing a scenario. You have to make a scenario for the resident: here you'll find this, there that, with different touches, different finishes for the living room, for the bedroom.'

- Isn't architecture primarily meant to provide shelter, to protect people from the outside world, the climate? Why is it so important to make architecture exciting for people?

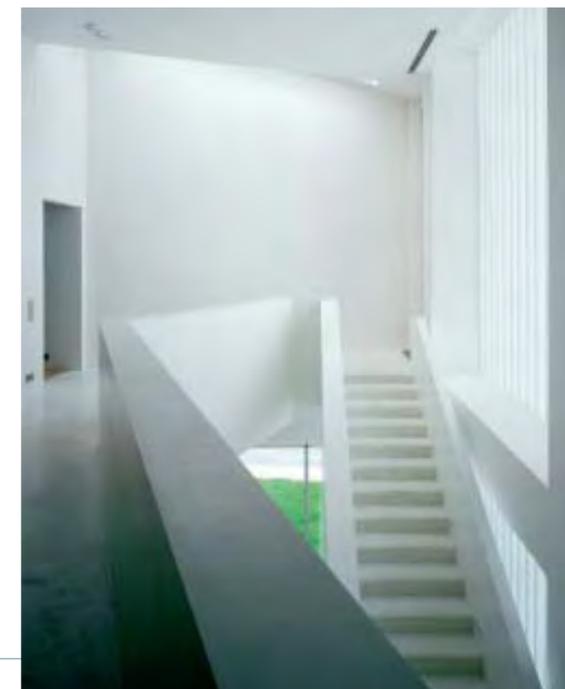
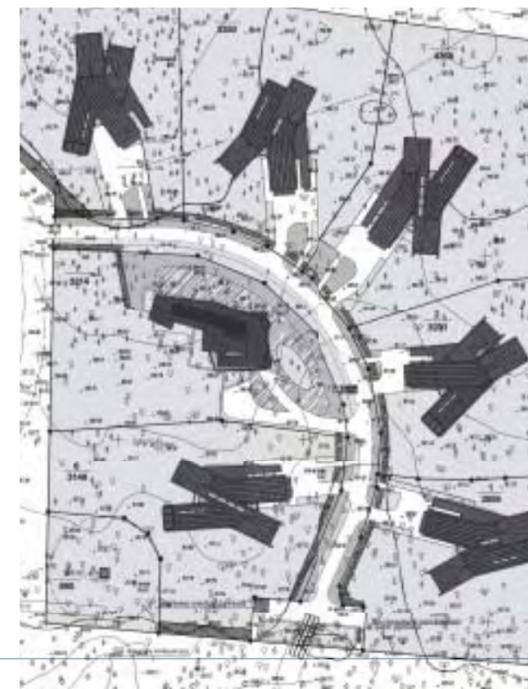
'We want to continue the tradition of constructivism, the architecture of Leonidov and Melnikov - architects who gave the profession a considerable boost in the 1920s. First, the Russian revolution stimulated every art form - poetry, painting, architecture - but ten years later,

Socialism started stifling nearly every initiative and it continued to do so for more than half a century. The State tried to stop everything; people were killed, put in prison. But now architecture is like a flower that is blossoming again. It's very exciting: a lot of things are happening. For the Russians, everything is new. There's a new feeling of architecture. But we're mainly preoccupied with the formal aspect. We aim to give Russian architecture a strong position, to make it stand out. We were raised and educated during the Soviet period. But being intelligent and reasonable, we kept well away from social and political issues. We tend to let them come nearer now, but we still keep them at a distance.'

- Is there any interest in architecture in contemporary Russia, any awareness of the importance of architecture?

'There was no real interest until very recently. People just

X-Park >





Villa Ostozhenka

< Private house in Pine's Village



wanted a fashionable, comfortable house. Then, about two years ago, property developers started to show more interest in architecture as an intellectual product. They became aware that there's an idea, a concept, behind the building that can help them sell it and gives them a story to tell potential clients, that they're investing in ideas! Design became more popular, as it is in the rest of the world. Look at Britain: ten, twenty years ago, they had nothing but 19th-century styles, such as the Victorian. Then foreign architects were invited to Russia, which helped to a certain extent and had the psychological effect that architects wanted to do more than just build ugly buildings in the centre of Moscow. Unfortunately, none of their designs have been built. Their mentality is so different. They aren't flexible: they have only one concept, think it's quite strong and just want to build it. Another problem is that not all technology is available yet in Russia. We try to use new technologies ourselves, as we did in Villa Rose with the special industrial glass, which we found in Germany. But sometimes it's difficult: one day we suggested installing a solar heating system. The client said we were crazy: oil is very cheap in Russia, and we wanted to bring in this very expensive solar system?'
 - You've built mainly for rich clients, the Russian nouveau riche. Aren't you interested in social or public projects?
 'We are interested, and we're qualified for it. We're looking for possibilities to do public or social projects, but we don't get the commissions in that segment. In Moscow,

public projects are the domain of government architects. Russian architecture has two faces: a private and a public one. The two are totally separated.'
 Villa Rose and the villas around it share the same form. The X-shape, like that of a chromosome, is pronounced and sculptural, almost organic.
 - Does Project Meganom regard architecture as just another way of making a sculpture? Why not make a simple and clear building?
 'The sculptural form is more natural. We always keep in mind what the context asks for. The idea behind the X-shape was to maximise the contact with nature. We gave the houses slightly sloping roofs to make them less visible in the woods, more harmonised with it, like small hills. Sometimes, we put grass on the roofs to bring architecture closer to nature. There are two ways to relate architecture to nature. One is what the Japanese architect Sejima does: use completely transparent but straight and straightforward forms. The other is to create a sculpture. We opt for the latter, although fundamentally they're both about making architecture more natural, bringing architecture closer to its natural environment. In the city, we of course take a different approach. You can make withdrawal from the city a theme. For example, we designed a villa in the centre of Moscow that can hardly be seen from the street. Inside, there's a winter garden. We brought nature inside its walls.'
 The buildings of Project Meganom are not only about



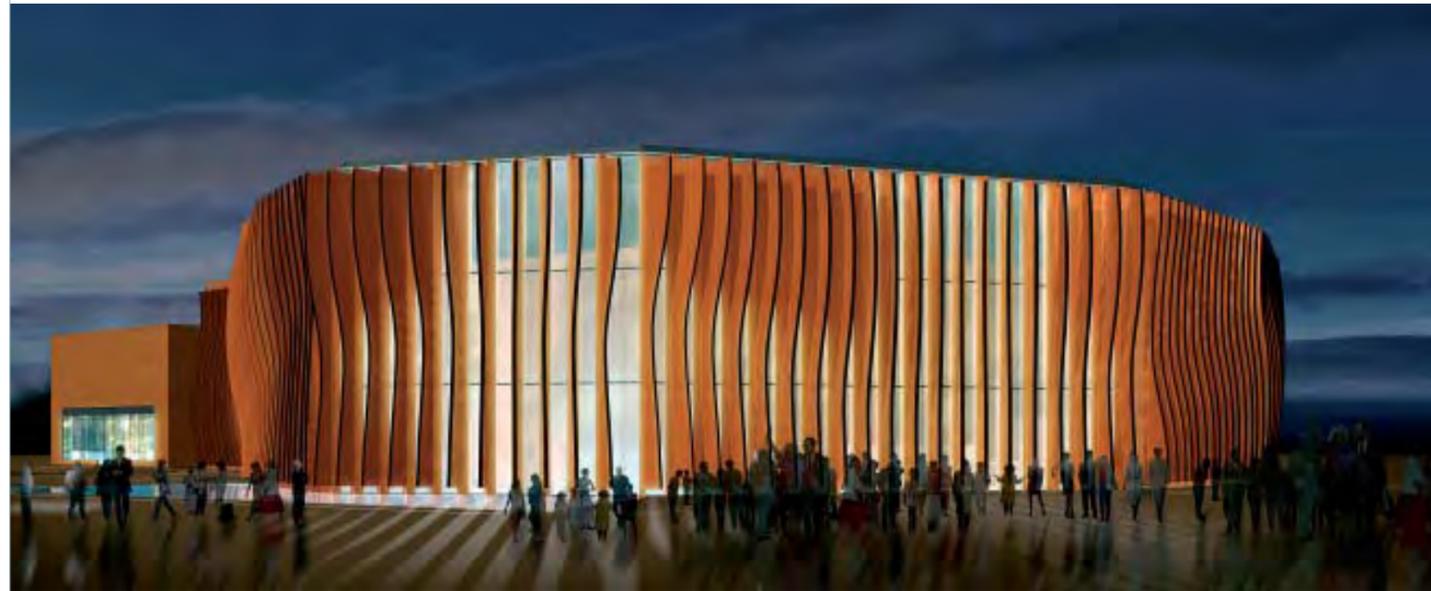
Central Market, Moscow



Project Meganom



Mercury Luxury Village



Mercury Theatre

adaptation. They also present strong contrasts, like the theatre just outside Moscow. It is built in the woods at the end of a street lined with fashion shops. Project Meganom designed the master plan and the shops. The street zigzags slightly, like a snake - a pattern reminiscent of the layout of old Russian villages. The shops are simple glass and concrete boxes clad in wood. The theatre, with its organic shape, glass curtain wall and vertical, irregular wooden lamellas on the outside, contrasts sharply with them. Again, it is basically a conceptual approach.

'Our first idea was to have a huge wooden jalousie that could be opened and closed, but it would have been too expensive. The lamellas in the current design allude to the stage curtain in the theatre, as well as to the trees around the building. They open and close visually as you pass by.'

- In your work, there's a contrast between abstract form and very tangible, natural materials. You almost expose materials. Why?

'We like to introduce "old style" materials in contemporary architecture: a contemporary form, but made of, for

instance, wood. We'd love to make something completely white, partly because old Russian churches are white. So we're not against "white and immaterial", but our clients tend to prefer natural materials. We're always in dialogue with our clients.'

- Your work seems to evolve towards immateriality, though.

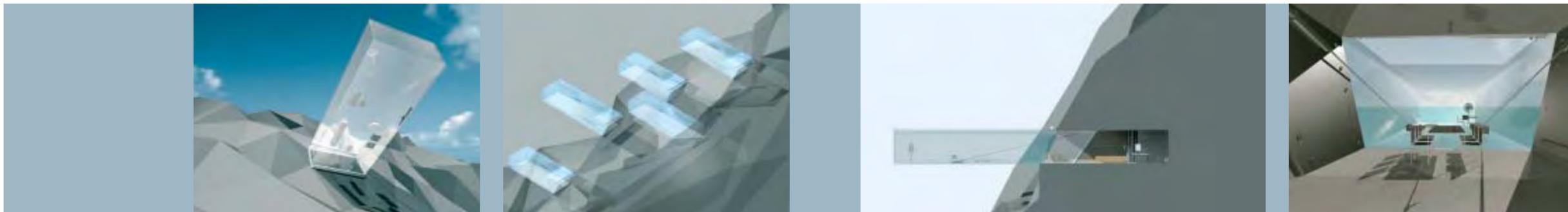
'Yes, it's like what the Russian poet Chlebnikov wrote: "architecture is going to disappear". We like the feeling of lightness, of the right proportion. This has nothing to do with glass. Glass can be very heavy, visually. For example, those glass boxes in the city catch the eye: all those reflections! And when they're dark inside, they look very dark from the outside too. Glass in a natural environment has a different effect and offers true transparency. Take Phillip Johnson's Glass House: it has no roof, and the light's the same inside and outside. Some of Palladio's villas also generate this feeling of lightness, not because of the use of glass, but as a result of the subtle proportions and the sensitive use of limestone.'



Reconstruction of the old printing-house on Stastnoy bulv

One particular house by Project Meganom can be regarded as a proclamation. It summarizes what the architectural office is striving for. It has not been built yet, and perhaps it never will be. It is a proposal, an imaginary project to be built on Cape Meganom, a promontory jutting out into the Black Sea in western Crimea (and the origin of the name of the architectural office). It is a rough landscape and hardly any building has been able to withstand the severe weather there. The house is simplicity itself: a glass bar protruding from the bare slopes. Half of it is inside the mountain. This cool, dark part provides the best conditions for the bedroom. The upper half is in the open air and accommodates the living space. Beneath it, breakers crash onto the rocks. It would be a truly spectacular and exciting

experience to be in House Meganom. 'It's so attractive to us because it's about negative and positive space. Dark inside, absolutely free outside, without walls, hanging above the sea. We also consider it a statement about architecture. The glass part is the future, the new technology. Glass doesn't need a supporting construction; it can be glued. The part inside the hill refers to the past. You'd come to the house perhaps once a week, not to experience the same comfort and convenience as you do at home, but to feel something else. To feel that you're able to fly, to feel nature, the sun, the wind, the water and the waves, and the darkness inside the hill. We wanted to liberate space. We wanted to make architecture immaterial.'



Cape Meganom