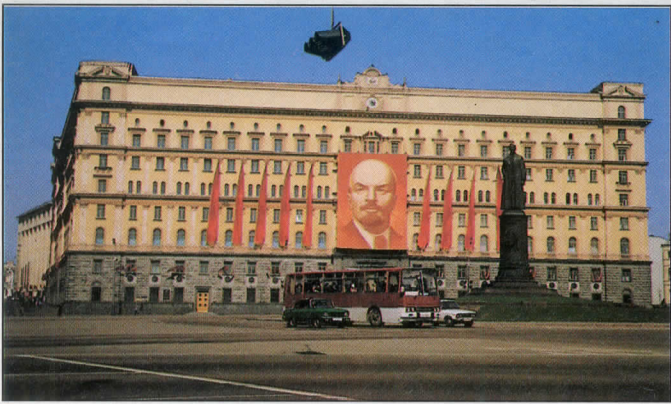


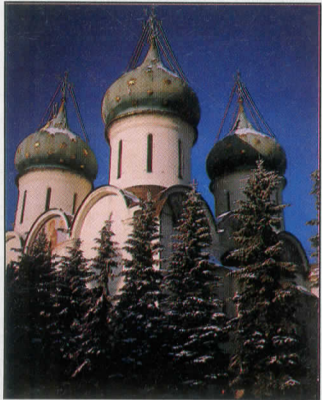
## Russia



Building with presence: the KGB headquarters, Moscow.



One of the new micro-regions: Strogino, near Moscow.



Above: church in Zagorsk. Middle: Stalinist wedding cake. Right: modern Uzbek housing, Tashkent.

family by the year 2000.

Out of 70 years of Soviet power, Stalin ruled for 30. But he is not the only figure in the history of the republics who has inspired, created, forced and killed to leave legacies in built form. It is always worth remembering that Russia is only one out of 15 countries in the Soviet Union, and that by the year 2000 Russians will number less than half of the overall population.

As for the generations of the Middle Ages in Central Asia, the list of masterbuilders is long and illustrious including Tamerlane the Great, Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent are fairy-tale names, blue domed shrines to Islam. Recently restored to their former splendour, there is only one *dukhovye uchilishye* (spiritual school) left working in Soviet Central Asia, at Bukhara on the Silk Road.

In the Russian republic, things are rather different. This year celebrates the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. The religious landmarks of Suzdal and Zagorsk are being restored, and some of the young are learning how to perform the sign of the cross.

There is a feeling of a cultural crisis in Russia, partly springing from the need to temper internationalism with nationalism. What is Russian and what is Soviet culture? When does nationalism become chauvinism? Tensions spark as ethnic groups struggle to maintain their language and heritage.

#### Tradition and modernity

Internationalism and nationalism are of course poignant questions for architecture and housing. I was a guest in Uzbek and Russian homes of both contemporary and traditional character. The traditional Uzbek home is an intimate affair. The first collective is the family. All generations live and eat together. The rooms enclose a courtyard, the heart of the home, where we find a well and a timber canopy that in summer supports a thick blanket of grapes. Construction is timber frame with brick and stone infill, rendered with a mud and straw mix, cool in the 45deg C of summer and warm in the winter.

The sense of communality runs very deep in the Uzbek consciousness. At one level families are united through interconnecting doorways and small modest communal tea-rooms. At another level the community is bound by what is called the "makhallia". The

"makhallia" dates from ancient times, a social centre where festivals took place, a sacred flame burnt, and people were born, married and remembered. This type of social organisation occurs in almost all Central Asian villages and towns. Transformed by the advent of Islam into a courtyard ensemble containing a prayerhouse, minaret and meeting rooms, they have survived into the present day and still function as communal social centres, though the advent of modern Soviet planning places many of them under threat.

In Tashkent I was the guest of an old Uzbek grandmother, the daughter of the first woman tractor driver in Uzbekistan, and life-long party member. She lived in one of the notorious five-storey Krushchev homes. These concrete blocks (no lift, no waste disposal) are littered along with their offspring, the 10- to 20-storey tower blocks, in every corner of the continent. Families in the more densely populated regions sometimes live in just one room.

Much of the system-building is a rather unfortunate manifestation of internationalism in architecture, paying little regard to indigenous needs as it spread like a virus. While satisfying the economists' demand for an increase in productivity, and meeting the post-war housing crisis, it has in Soviet Central Asia largely failed to embody either the cultural or climatic needs of the people.

Unbearably hot in summer, lacking the fundamental symbols of the Uzbek home, it is too small, wrenched from the ground, garden and "makhallia". Improved sanitation is one of the few achievements. The people and the grandmother eagerly wait, while research goes on and tries to transcend the crisis of paper architecture.

If we turn to the agrarian based settlements of pre-revolutionary Russia we find a similar kind of collectivised housing to the Uzbek *mir*. Any connection with this type of pre-revolutionary commune at such a local, fundamental level has been lost or transformed beyond recognition. In industrially based settlements like Moscow it is very rare to find the traditional timber house building of the wealthier peasants and the lower middle class. For this you have to turn to old towns like Suzdal. Ornate and romantic carved timber bungalows and two-storey housing, separated by fences, each house tied to the ground with garden and yard.

In the large Russian settle-

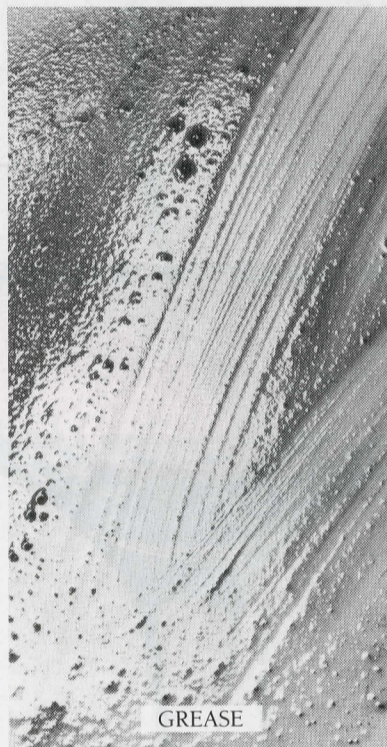
ments like Moscow or Leningrad, the people suffer from the same internationalism: housing that sometimes meets the climatic conditions of Europe, but is empty of any cultural expression distinctively Russian. It is a rather vulgar manifestation of the development of society's productive forces.

Another rumour starts. Since we are allowed to talk about socialist pluralism again, let us talk about cultural and architectural pluralism. Architects and builders can now open up co-operatives. In co-operatives architects can triple their monthly salary, which is significant given that in the state sector an architect's wage is rarely much more than half that of a building worker. On the design side it gives the architect the opportunity to select from a diverse list of projects for the state, co-operative and private sectors.

Other avenues for the pursuit of architectural pluralism can be found in the research taking place into the possibilities of flexibility in the production of prefabricated building components. More important than this though are the plans to

decentralise design and construction firms and to transfer all housing control to the local councils of people's deputies. This gives the architect more autonomy in the use of local building materials and labour, and meeting the needs of the various ethnic groups.

There are also plans to unite architecture and construction into design-and-build organisations, which should make each process more mutually responsive. It should allow the architect a closer connection with the actual fabrication of building details and thus a greater involvement in quality control. As of now, the Soviet architect enjoys few of the rights on site enjoyed by architects in the West. One friend showed me the manifestation of one of his designs where the curved profile of a brick wall had been built square. The builders decided they could not be bothered with what was drawn, the economist agreed, and the architect was left wondering why he was an architect! Like a lot of things at the moment, changing the law to give increased rights to an architect on site is just a tentative rumour.



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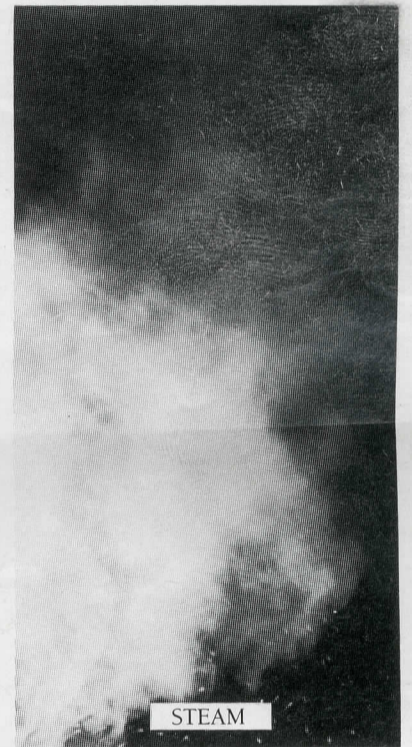
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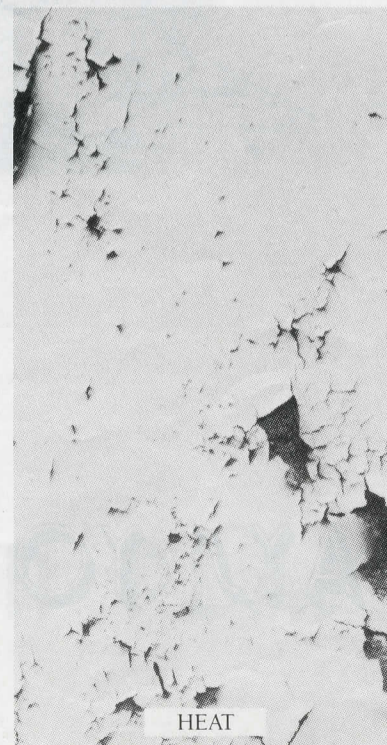
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STEAM

# Most kitchens have the same things on the menu. Isn't it time you hit the ceiling?



HEAT

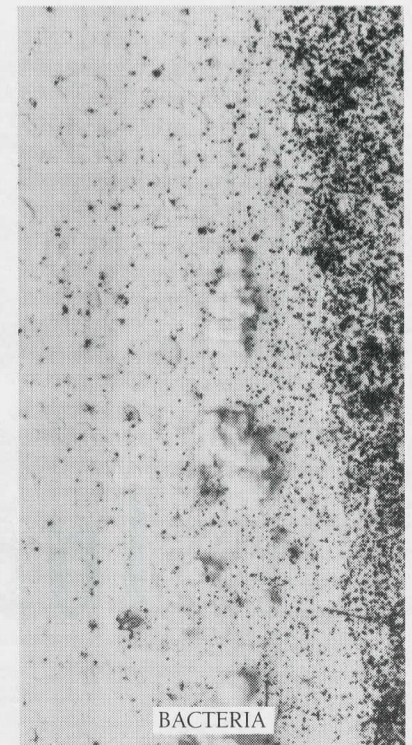
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