

On the Preservation of Konstantin Melnikov's Works and Heritage

We are approaching the 40th anniversary of the death of the architect Konstantin Melnikov, and the importance and value of his built works and the projects he drew has not stopped growing over all these years. Melnikov's visionary projects were decades ahead of their time: now, when new technologies are beginning to make them feasible, they exert an ever-increasing influence on today's architecture. It is no surprise that many people, not just architects, travel to Moscow each year to visit his extraordinary workers clubs or his remarkable house on Krivoarbatskii Lane, just off the Arbat.

However, despite the long period of time that has elapsed since Melnikov's death, and even the death of the state that first supported and then persecuted him, his legacy remains largely inaccessible. Extremely important drawings and documents both from Melnikov's private archive and from the holdings of official institutions are closed to researchers and scholars. Many of his extant buildings are in very poor condition or have been severely deformed by needless and destructive "modernizations," while others face the threat of demolition. His remarkable cylindrical home, situated in the very heart of Moscow, remains in the hands of the architect's granddaughter, Ekaterina Karinskaia. However, she lacks funds to maintain it, or to respond to the endless enquiries from official bodies, professional groups, and interested parties. Promises to restore the house, open a museum in adjacent buildings, and assist the family have been made, repeated, and then forgotten.

Because Stalin's Union of Architects cut Konstantin Melnikov's career short in the 1930s, his influence in Russia has been limited, at least until recently. But worldwide, many of his buildings and projects have become paradigms of modern architecture as a whole.

The signatories to this letter seek the preservation of the Melnikov house as a public museum and the fair compensation of the Melnikov family for their efforts to preserve it over the forty years since the architect's death. They seek, further, for all archival materials in Russia that relate to Melnikov to be preserved in one place, preferably at a museum adjacent to the house, where they will be open to architects, scholars, and the educated public.

We appreciate the complexities of ownership and control which both the house and archival documents present, but trust that a way will be found to resolve these issues. Only recently President Putin has spoken of the need for modern Russia to embrace, protect, and build upon its heritage. We believe that the work of Konstantin Melnikov offers a unique possibility for today's Russia to do precisely this. In doing so, Russians will also be embracing, and protecting part of the world's heritage, and enabling people everywhere to join them in appreciating and building upon it.

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