

Restaurant and Hotel Moskva

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INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE



Restaurants and Dining Rooms

Edited by Franziska Bollerey
and Christoph Grafe

ROUTLEDGE 

Restaurants and Dining Rooms

According to urban academic myth, the first restaurants emerged in the wake of the French Revolution. From the very beginning in the elegant salons of the latter days of the *Ancien Régime*, the design of restaurants has been closely related to ideas of how food should be presented and how it may be consumed in public. The appearance and atmosphere created by restaurant owners reflects culturally embedded ideals of comfort, sociability and the good life. As a product of the modern metropolis, the restaurant encapsulates and illustrates the profound change in how its patrons viewed themselves as individuals, how they used their cities and how they met friends or business partners over a meal.

The architectural design of environments for the consumption of food necessarily involves an exploration and a manipulation of the human experience of space. It reflects ideas about public and private behaviour for which the restaurant offers a stage. Famous architects were commissioned to provide designs for restaurants in order to lure in an ever more demanding urban clientele. The interior designs of restaurants were often employed to present this particular aspect in consciously evoking an imagery of sophisticated modernity.

This book presents the restaurant, its cultural and typological history as it evolved over time. In this unique combination it provides valuable knowledge for designers and students of design, and for everyone interested in the cultural history of the modern metropolis.

Franziska Bollerey is Professor Emerita of History of Architecture and Urbanism at TU Delft and Head of the Institute of History of Art, Architecture and Urbanism – IHAAU. Her fields of special interest are utopian concepts, metropolises and the urban history and architecture of the 1920s. She has been a visiting professor and researcher at various universities in Barcelona, Braunschweig, Berlin, Budapest, Istanbul, New York and Zurich. Further, she has published numerous books and articles, some of those are: *Architekturkonzeptionen der utopischen Sozialisten* (2nd ed. 1991), *Cornelis van Eesteren. Urbanismus zwischen de Stijl and C.I.A.M.* (1999) and *Myth Metropolis. The City as a Motif for Writers, Painters and Film Directors* (2nd ed. 2010). Among memberships in international boards and committees, she was Head of the Bauhaus Scientific Advisory Board of the Bauhaus Foundation Dessau until 2013. She is also Founder and Editor of the architectural journal *Eselsohren*, published at the University of Wuppertal.

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8 Restaurant and Hotel Moskva
Okhotny Ryad 2
Moscow, Russia
1930–1938
Architect: Alexei Viktorovich
Shchusev

In 1930, the municipality of Moscow – the Mossoviet – decided to realise a landmark hotel and restaurant in the centre of the city, close to the Kremlin. The new building was to provide an address for the sojourn of distinguished guests of the Communist Party and of the government, while also symbolising the pride of the Soviet regime. At the time, however, no one could have imagined that the building would face a singularly bizarre history from the beginning to its end (and a particularly unexpected sequel).

A design competition for the hotel and restaurant was launched in 1930, and was won by two young architects, Leonid Savelyev and Oleg Stapan. Their design had a grand urban allure: a geometric, glass-filled composition with a curved façade that seemed to evoke the metropolitan buildings designed by German architect Erich Mendelsohn (1887–1953). This modern design in reinforced concrete was to be set within the historical context of, and in close physical proximity to, the Kremlin.

Construction work commenced in 1932. This was not an auspicious moment for the launch of a forward-looking design. The communist party had tightened its grip on the country's cultural policy that year, and the regime's latent dislike of avant-garde art and architecture became manifest. The party intervened in the construction of the hotel and the renowned architect of the 'old' school, Alexei Viktorovich Shchusev (1873–1949), was commissioned with modifying the design to reflect the new cultural ideology, adapting the design to a neoclassical style. Thus, the transformation of the hotel became the embodiment of the change in architectural policy, from constructivism to officially sanctioned neoclassicism. In the words of Shchusev's biographer, the building marked the shift 'from the years of nihilistic pseudo renewal to the legacy of classicism.'¹ The hotel and restaurant opened on 20 December 1935, although construction work continued until 1938. Even then, the building never arrived at a definitive state of completion. Work on the back, which faced Teatralnaya Square, continued after the opening, and the façade on Revolution Square was only built after World War II (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

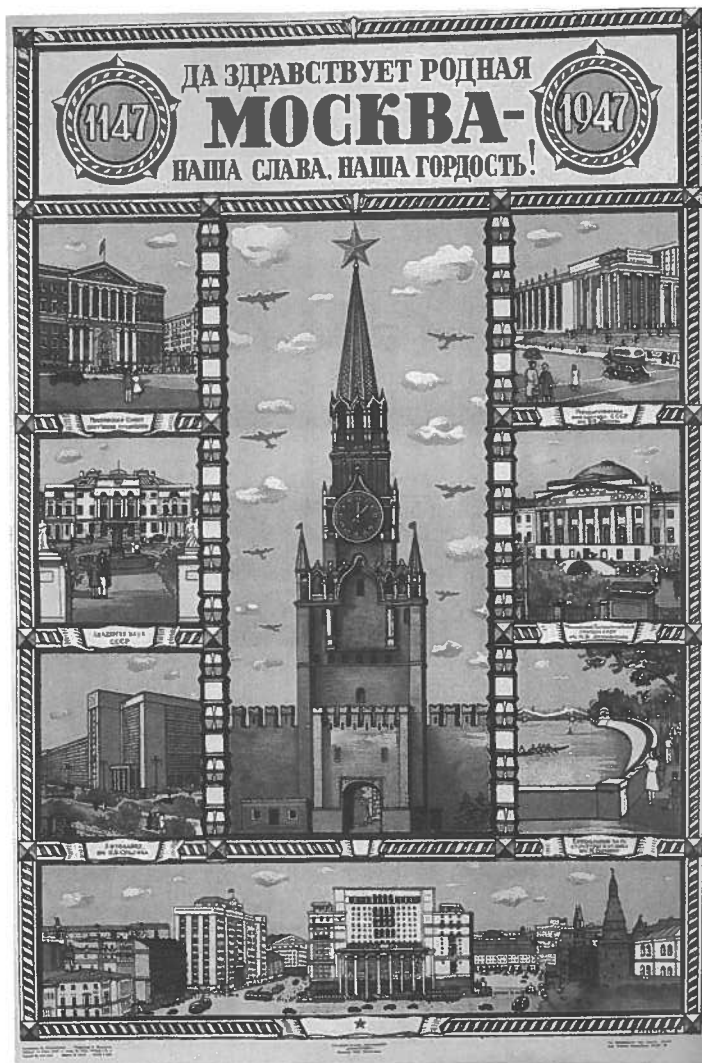
The building of the hotel marked the starting point of Moscow's reconstruction under the new regime. Even before the urban plan for a 'New Moscow' was launched in 1935, the surroundings of the Kremlin had undergone remedial work in the 1930s. Market stalls were demolished along Okhotny Ryad in the direction of Teatralnaya Square, and two new buildings were erected on either side of the street: on one side, architect Arkady Langman (1886–1968), designed the monumental, conventionally neoclassical complex for the Council for Labour and Defence (STO), which later housed the planning agency (Gosplan) and today accommodates the lower house of the Russian parliament, the Duma. The hotel and restaurant Moskva was erected on the other side, the intention being to develop a single large courtyard block on the 400,000 square metre site between Manezhnaya Square and Teatralnaya Square.



Emphasising their status as symbols of the Soviet era, the hotel and Soviet Palace are depicted in octagonal fields of the coffered ceiling of the banqueting hall.

This idea was only partly realised in 1935, most notably the Manezhnaya Square façade and the long façade on Okhotny Ryad that provided access to the restaurant. One entered the vestibule through a monumental portico and ascended a wide staircase to the first-floor restaurant, which was situated at a right angle to the longitudinal direction of the complex. A café with a terrace overlooking Manezhnaya Square was positioned above the portico. The hotel occupied the volume behind the restaurant, similarly at a right angle to the longitudinal direction of the building. Square columns punctuated the expansive ground floor lobby, which looked out onto the courtyard. The hotel also occupied the wing on Okhotny Ryad. An entrance to the hotel lobby was located on the corner of Manezhnaya Square, where a gate allowed vehicle access to the inner courtyard. There was also a direct connection to Okhotny Ryad metro station via a passage in the lobby.²

The monumental façade consisted of a protruding portico with eight colossal, rectangular pillars flanked by two corner towers. Both façades were slightly different. Behind the portico, and between the fourteen-storey corner towers, a central section arose comprising seventeen floors, with four central loggia arches on each floor. This centrepiece was crowned across the entire width with an open loggia. The impressive ten-floor façade on Okhotny Ryad was divided into four horizontal sections, finished with a jutting cornice surmounted by a balustrade and decorative vases. The first two layers were given both vertical and horizontal articulations, while the third was flush except for five pairs of framed balconies, topped



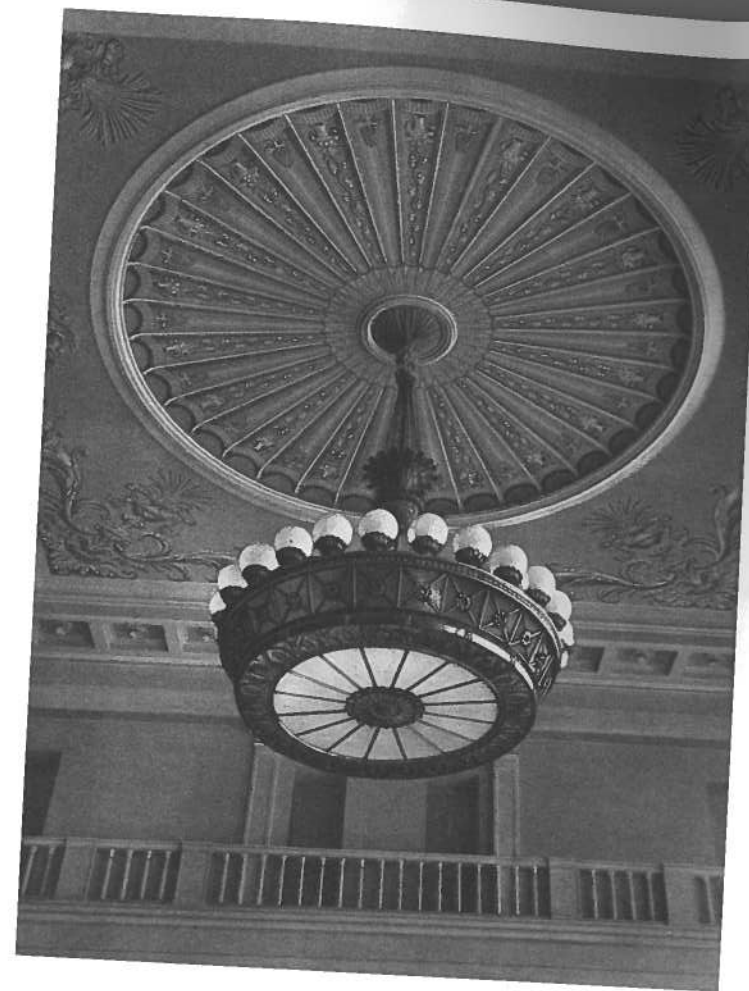
Poster marking the 800th anniversary of the city's foundation, showing emblematic buildings, including Hotel Moskva, 1930s.

with a window band. The asymmetry of the corner towers is somewhat unusual in a neoclassical façade (Fig. 4, Fig. 5).

According to urban legend two versions of the façade were submitted for Stalin's approval, but because both proposals were drawn on a single sheet of paper, he placed his signature in the middle. Consequently, it remained unclear which of the two was favoured by the leader, resulting in the execution of both. It is plausible, however, that Shchusev deliberately incorporated the variation in order to enliven the façade. Shchusev often used asymmetry in this period in which he worked in the 'Russian style' (1900–1914), as exemplified by his design for the Kazansky railway station in Moscow, where a sequence of different building types and architectural styles (1911–1926) unfolds along the 205-metre-long façade of the building. Shchusev and Alexander Kurovsky (1899–1959) had designed the angled rear façade on the east side of the complex, towards Teatralnaya Square, as a triumphal arch. The building of the latter only started in 1968, after its form had been simplified.

238 Alexei Viktorovich Shchusev

Candelabras hanging from a neo-classical stucco ceiling.



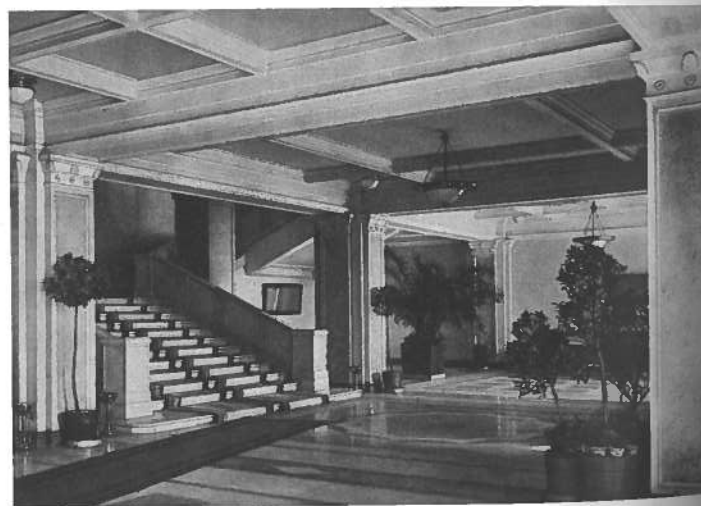
The rather arid detailing of the façades was counterpoised by the exuberance of the interior decoration. No expense was spared in the material execution: various types of exquisite wood such as mahogany, chestnut, pear and sycamore supplemented granite, marble, bronze and labradorite.³ The hotel rooms were furnished with modern-classical furniture. Photographs show contemporary desks with stationery, telephones and table lamps. The restaurant, which was also open to the public, was the height of elegance: a decorative bannister crowned the marble columns with Corinthian capitals and entablature, while stucco, chandeliers and elegant neoclassical furniture added to the ambiance. The ceilings were coffered or decorated with stucco and frescoes. Particularly noteworthy was the ceiling in the banquet hall, since the coffers contained images of the hotel itself, as well as depictions of the yet to be built Soviet Palace by Boris Iofan (1891–1976). This feature returns in another building of the period, the Northern (or Khimki) River Terminal (1933–1937) by Aleksey Rukhlyadev (1882–1946), where the hotel and Soviet Palace are depicted in medallions above the main entrance façade.

Yet the interior splendour failed to compensate for the architecture's overall lack of sophistication. The volumetric composition was rather crude, which could not be compensated for by the additional rigid detail

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Interior of the restaurant lavishly decorated by Corinthian marble columns.



Foyer to the restaurant on the first floor.

on the exterior. Shchusev's assertion that the profusion of windows would remind people of a festive house remained an empty claim.⁴ It is worth remembering that when the architect was reworking the design into something that resembled a natural stone building, he was also compelled to take the concrete skeleton of the first version of the project into account, as it was already under construction. Another issue was the emblematic nature of the hotel restaurant: it was intended to be the calling card for the 'new Moscow' and, as such, needed to distinguish itself from the great pre-revolutionary hotels in the city.

Shchusev was an 'old master,' an architect who was classically trained and had built his reputation before the revolution. After 1917, he was chosen to work for the new regime and his talents were appreciated. He was therefore appointed to design Lenin's mausoleum, a project he worked on between 1924 and 1926. During the heyday of constructivism, he even delivered a number of designs in this particular style. In 1932, he became leader of one of the five municipal building workshops and the hotel, which he adapted to the new climate, was one of his first assignments in this role. In that year, the cultural-political climate toughened: the second phase in the Soviet palace design competition was dominated by historicising designs that left little doubt about Stalin's preferences and those of the Soviet party. Avant-garde groups of architects were dismantled and a national association of architects was installed.⁵ Given that in the Soviet Union the government was the only client, this meant the assertion of unilateral state control over architecture (Fig. 6, Fig. 7).

The Moskva hotel restaurant was popular with the city's residents. The restaurant was exquisite and the hotel had exceptionally high standards. The building was one of the landmarks of the city, and even featured on chocolate-box lids. Its image still adorns the label of Stolichnaya vodka (*stolitsa* means 'capital'). During the war, guns were installed on the roof of the building in order to protect the Kremlin. Nevertheless, the

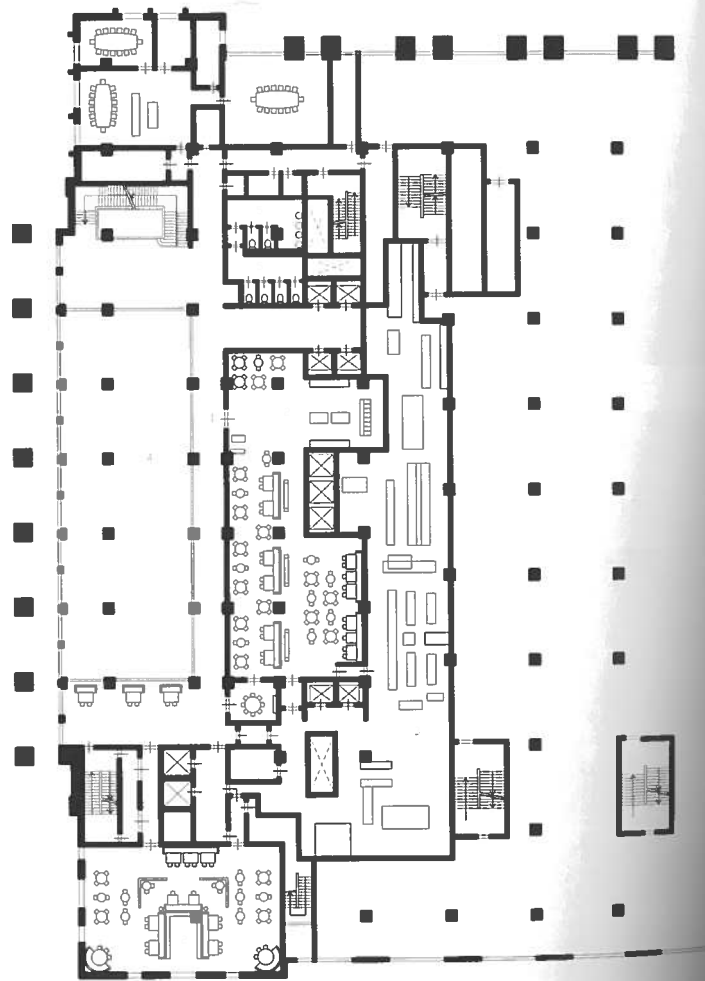
Exterior of the monumental Moskva complex with the main façade going onto Manezhnaya Square.
Hotel Moskva, depicted on Vodka Stolichnaya's label.



restaurant remained open at all times, even though food could only be purchased with coupons. Celebrated guests stayed at the hotel during this period, including Dimitri Shostakovich, who attended the premiere of his Leningrad symphony in the capital. The hotel reached its apogee after the war. In addition to party officials, international celebrities also lodged at the hotel Moskva: Yuri Gagarin, Frederic Joliot Curie, Marcello Mastroianni, Sophia Loren and Pablo Neruda, to name but a few. Elizabeth Taylor is said to have refused staying here because Gina Lollobrigida had already taken a suite at the hotel.

After the war, the complex inched towards final completion. Construction restarted in 1968, with the last section being signed off in 1977, although all work was carried out in accordance with Shchusev's scaled down plans. In the 1980s, the hotel entered a period of apparently terminal decline. It eventually closed in 2002 and was demolished in 2004, with the intention of recreating it according to the original scheme. In 2005, the Austrian firm Strabag began rebuilding the hotel Moskva as part of the Four Seasons hotel chain. Three quarters of the project were

Floor plan, Hotel Restaurant Moskva.



funded by Deutsche Bank, with the municipality of Moscow making up the remainder of the budget. The construction did, however, not progress according to plan and half of the municipal financial backing disappeared. A scandal erupted: a politician and consultant fled the country, and the Deutsche Bank was subject to a police raid.⁶ Ultimately, the remake of the hotel restaurant was finished and opened in 2012. The building partly recreates the appearance of the old structure, although new functions have been added: shops, offices and a parking garage. The original interiors were, however, not recreated and remain part of the convoluted history of the twentieth century (Fig. 8).

Notes

- 1 N. B. Sokolov, *A.V. Ščusev*, Moscow, 1952, p. 51.
- 2 The Okhotny Ryad metro station has been renamed more often than any other stop. While originally planned as Okhotnoryadskaya, it was opened as Okhotny Ryad instead. For a brief period between 25 November 1955 and 1957, the station was renamed Imeni Kaganovicha in honour of Lazar Kaganovich. The station's name was changed once more on 30 November 1961, to Prospekt Marksa. Finally, in 1990, the original name was restored once more.
- 3 A type of feldspar named after the geographic location in which it was first identified: Labrador, Canada.
- 4 Sokolov, *A.V. Ščusev*, p. 53.
- 5 Otakar Máčel, 'A.V. Stsjoesjev – Flexibele patriarch van de Sowjetarchitectuur', *Wonen-TABK*, no. 16–17 (1981), 18–28.
- 6 Sabine Spahn, 'Von Stalins Pracht zum Betrugfall' <http://kulturama.org/articles/view/145> (accessed 13 August 2012).

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