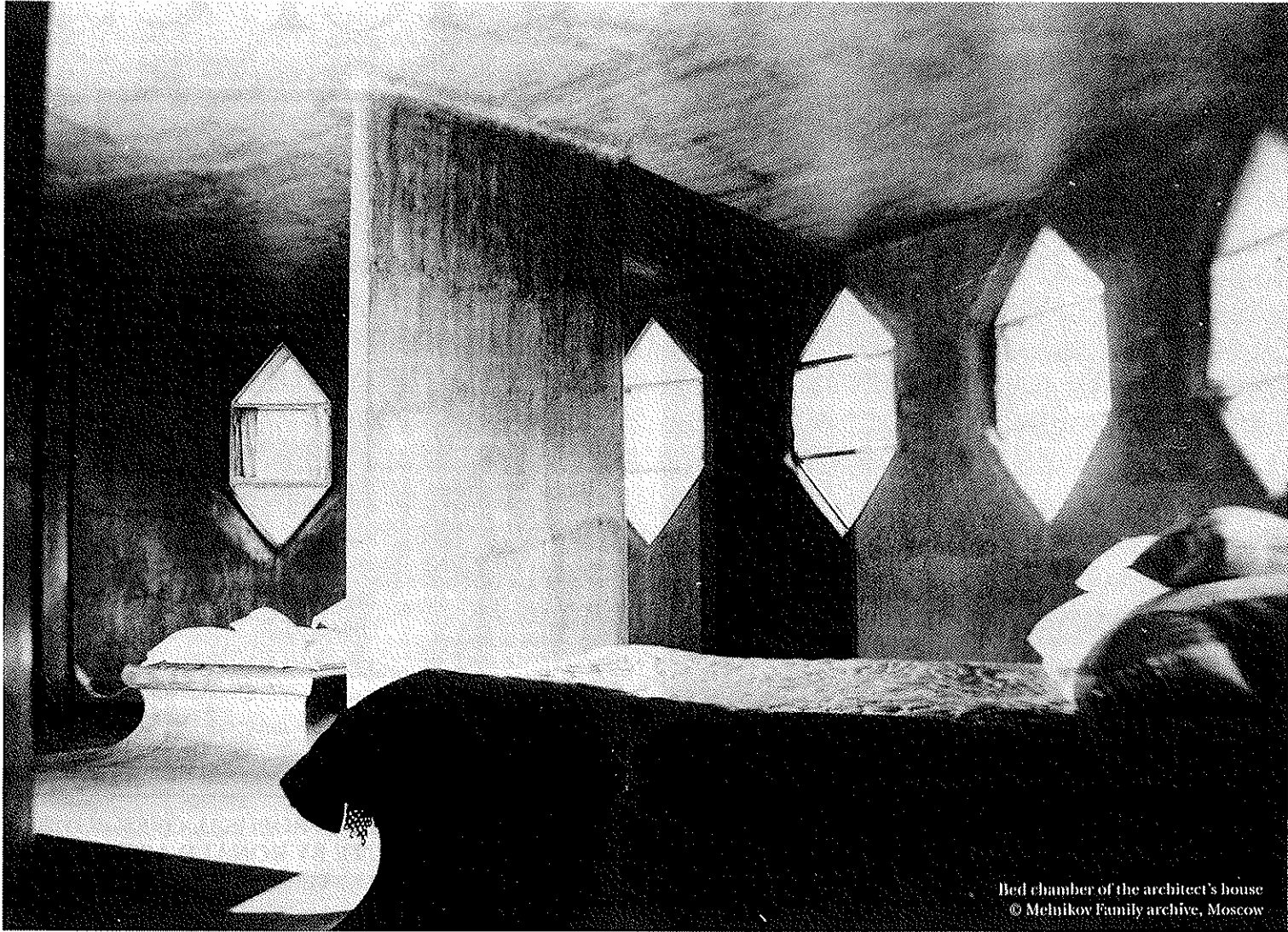


PICPUS



Arthur Lushington Vipan (1914-1944), Squadron
Leader RAF (Pilot Bomber Command) c.1944

KONSTANTIN MELNIKOV'S CYLINDRICAL HOUSE BY IAN KIAER

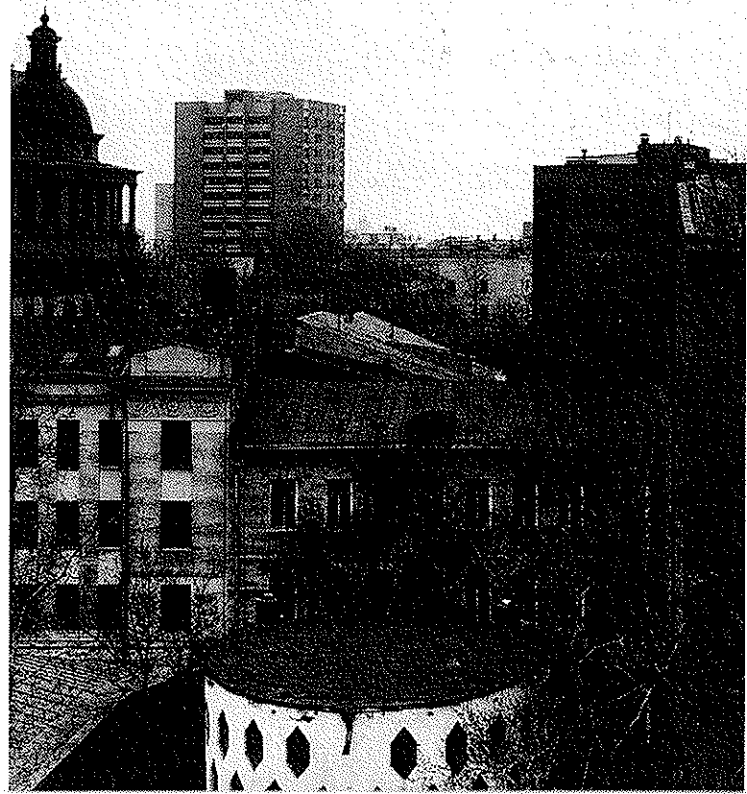
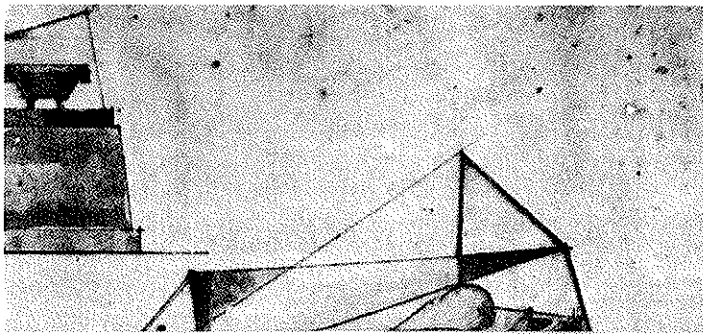


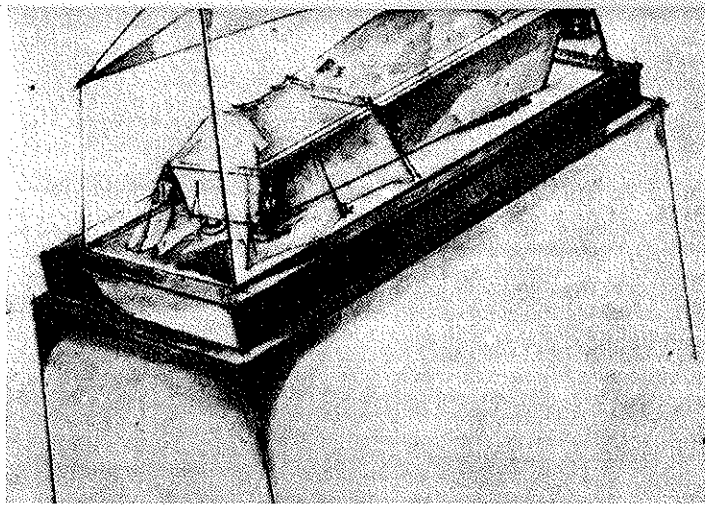
Bed chamber of the architect's house
© Melnikov Family archive, Moscow

The distinctive shape of Melnikov's two conjoined cylinders and strange hexagonal windows, speak of a structure beyond everyday dwelling. Its geometry, white surface, and remote, singular poise, appear designed to provoke rumour of more complex workings within; as if the circular solution and eclipsing diameters might conform to some mystical planetary alignment or map an overlapping design of halos for an icon of orthodox saints.

There can be few buildings with this many windows, over sixty in all, which remain so insistently insular. It may even be the quantity that works to deny any notion of view and emphasise their alternative function as luminaries. They absorb light from outside but hardly provide an inward glimpse in return. There can be no looking in.

It is somehow appropriate that their origin can be traced to a fortification surrounding Moscow's ancient Belgorod district as they affect to alienate and repel the world.





Preliminary variants of sarcophagus for V.I. Lenin (detail), 1924
© Melnikov family archive

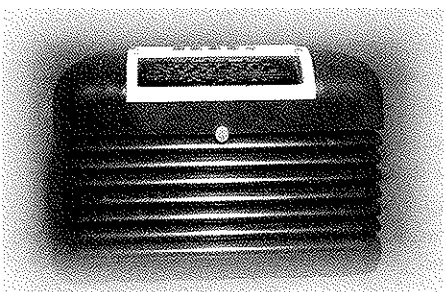
It's not only the windows' honeycomb shape that might prompt idea of bees but the way in which its smooth exterior wall, if sliced open, would reveal a complex of interlocking work and living spaces where the incubation of thought and sleep meet. The architect wanted to integrate sleeping and working, dwelling and thinking throughout his building; hence living-room, studio and bedroom alternate and dissect like a layered Venn diagram. It is said of the cylindrical motif, that he had the Russian hearth in mind - the hearth as core of the house with the notion of warmth enclosed, its most interior part. To conceive this notion of hearth/heart is to turn the whole building inwards. To think of Melnikov's building is to think from its inside.

In the house, work and sleep are curiously connected. The circular bedroom is directly below the circular studio. The walls are painted warm yellow, the beds are stone slabs that rise up from the floor like altars that render sleep an almost sacred *inactivity*. For Melnikov sleep was an area of intense study. He wrote about a life time of sleep,

twenty years of lying down without consciousness, without guidance as one journeys into the sphere of mysterious worlds to touch unexplored depths of the sources of curative sacraments, and perhaps of miracles.

Here sleep becomes a means of passing from one world to another, mysterious and indeterminate, a place for work's reserve to be restored and nourished. However, such spaces have a way of shifting tone, from sleep's place to death's space. From the thirties on, sleep's curative sacraments turned to restless slumber as Stalin's censure became the architect's incubus, frustrating any possibility for practice. In such light the warm glow darkens into night, and those concrete beds come ever closer to mortuary slabs. Without course to sleep Melnikov turned to dreaming, closing inwards to past projects and painting pictures.

POLYOXYBENZYL METHYLENE GLYCOL ANHYDRIDE



aka Bakelite. Invented 100 years ago by Belgian chemist Dr. Leo Baekeland.

A Bush Bakelite radio c.1940



The Melnikov House (1927-1929) designed by Konstantin Melnikov
(Photograph by Robert Oerlemans)

The beginning of those concrete beds perhaps lay in the commission the architect received to design Lenin's glass sarcophagus. In this, his first built structure, he had to provide a plinth of sleep for a cadaver forever preserved, a place of pilgrimage and peering—a windowed tomb. There is something determinedly circular in how this first work, which signals his professional birth, presents itself as a death work. As if some how opportunity demanded he earn through experience what he had conceived through commission. He could not know his cylindrical house studio, designed with such optimism, as an ideal space for living and work would become in time a place for sleep, a house for a corpse.

Ian Kiur is an artist living in London.

JEAN GENET IN NORFOLK BY MARC CAMILLE CHAI

Jacky Maglia loved cars. Jean Genet, in his fashion, loved Jacky Maglia. Jacky was the stepson of Genet's lover Lucien Séméand who had married Jacky's mother. Genet was generally attracted to heterosexual men, often delinquents or petty criminals... and Jacky stole cars (probably to win Genet's favour). Genet actively encouraged Jacky to take up motor racing and managed his fledging career. They grew very close, later travelling widely together and covertly entering the U.S (from where Genet was banned) to cover the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention.

Fame and critical success were sudden and violently echoed by financial gain. Genet was at one point Gallimard's highest earning writer. This having the converse effect in that the more rich and famous he became, the less he was able to write. For so long the outsider and now a literary celebrity it was as though he felt alienated from his own unique and cherished sense of alienation...

One notable concession to material wealth however was the forsaking of his customary leather blouson for that of ready-to-wear suits, and to now occasionally staying in luxury hotels such as the LUTECIA (where he'd surely once frequented German soldiers?). But he did spend big money... on others, financially helping current and past lovers and setting them up in business (there was, in South West France, as recently as the late 1990s a functioning car repair shop called *Le Garage Saint Genet* which was run by Lucien S.). He had houses built for the latter Lucien, Mohamed El Katrani, Ahmed and others, perhaps wishing on them a lifestyle denied him, that of domesticity. A room for his personal use was invariably allocated, but he rarely used it, preferring when visiting, to stay in local modest hotels.