



WILL PRYCE. PARALLELS

Wooden architecture yesterday, today and everywhere

Moscow, State A.V. Shchusev architectural museum

22 February – 27 March 2011

Will Pryce – is an English architect, who travelled all over the world, exploring and photographing the wooden architecture. This is an unprecedented experience, in which the knowledge of an architect and skills of a photographer are combined. The result of the travel is a book «Architecture in Wood» issued by “Thames & Hudson Ltd, London” publishing house in 2005. In 2006 the book was published in Russian and very quickly became a bibliographical rarity. That is the reason we asked Mr. Pryce to «reissue» it – this time as an exhibition.

But because the modern wooden architecture occupies a rather modest place in a book, we, with the consent of Mr. Pryce, decided to amplify to some extent his collection and restructure it. Exposition of the exhibition is built on a basis of parallel couples, in which one of the components represents a traditional wooden architecture, while the second – the search of modern architects. The couples are united by one or another detail, method, function, theme, while its centerpiece is the wood as the most ancient and at the same time the most actual and ecological material.

Thanks to the uniting word, the exhibition turns out to be an original «vocabulary» of wooden architecture. It is not an «encyclopedia», but precisely an actual vocabulary: the reason for that is that there are no terms familiar to the old Russian architecture, just as there are no such terms in modern architecture – no “ochlupen” (highest log on the roof), no “prichelina” (verge board). The more interesting is to see how the meaning of the existing details is changing - «plough share» or «framework». For instance the framework keeps the same meaning, but is filled with the glass and no brick. As for the plough share, traditionally used in the covering of the curved surfaces of domes – now it covers half-round walls of country hotels.

Broader conceptions are also present on the exhibition. «Transparency», «flexibility», «a-tectonics» - one can only wonder that such modern themes are discovered in the architecture of the XI-th century! There is not only a demonstration of the antiquity (and therefore durability) of wooden buildings, but also an amazing impression and sense that the wooden architecture is just timeless. Unlike any other (stone, brick, iron, glass) it abides by its own laws. And it changes, of course: becoming higher, bigger, thinner, enriching with hanging consoles and is twisting in harnesses, yet retaining something invariable.

This «something» - is a correlation with the nature - forests, trees, plants. Here the word itself is an answer. At the same time the «wood» is a forest, a material and a house. The nature never dies and keeps living in it, breath - even its very ageing is beautiful. It is no coincidence that gallery resembles forest glades, pagoda – lotus flower, shingle – a cone. They are initially built on a same basis: roof – like mushroom, tiers – branches, and timber-framing – leaf of the

may-lily. But besides that, in case of the wooden architecture, these buildings also keep the same proportions – because they are made of the same material. And just as the size of the log determined the size of the log cabin (izba), the life span of the wood determined the life span of the house.

The couple to impress is the one illustrating the theme of «transparency». Two temples, both in Japan, one of 1053 year, the other – 2000! Of course we know well that wooden buildings are repeatedly overhauled and its dating at times is relative. Does not the fact that the logs had been changed, while the design was carefully preserved – speak alone for the unique possibilities of the wood? No less curious are common traits among national schools and the migrating of traditions – when for instance a Japanese Shigeru Ban builds a museum in France, translating the theme of Japanese pagoda...

It is significant that a wooden architecture rule applies to everything. It even has its own stars. Yes, recognized masters also appreciate the wood: Tadao Ando, Peter Zumthor, and Renzo Piano. Yet the first fiddle is played precisely by the masters of wooden architecture: Thomas Herzog, Edward Cullinan, Kaufmann, Sami Rintala. But Russian masters don't yield in respect of inventiveness: Totan Kuzembaev and Alexander Brodsky, Evgeniy Asse and Yuri Grigoryan, Dmitriy Dolgoy and Nicolay Belousov. The principal polygon for their experiments is a health resort «Pirogovo», in Moscow region, that quite logically became one of the exhibition partners. Another partner, following the existing tradition, is a company Honka – which is not only surely leading in a wooden house building market, but also combines the traditional image with the latest technologies thereby ideally fitting into the conception of the exposition.

Coordinator/organizer: ARCHI-WOOD (APXИWOOD)

General project partner: HONKA Co

Official partner of the exhibition: health resort «Pirogovo»

Cosponsor: PR-агeнтстBо «Communication rules»

Partners:

State A.V. Shchusev Architectural Museum

Russian Institute for Cultural Research

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