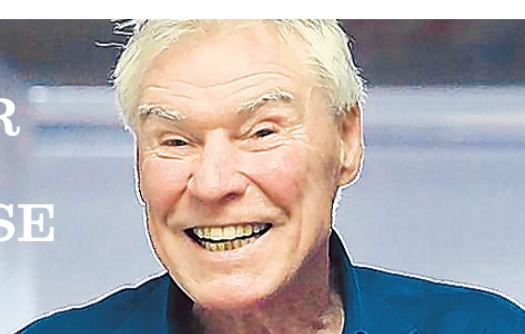


ARTS & BOOKS

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NO IDLE FEET FOR JACQUES D'AMBOISE
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JOHN FLECK CHANNELS HIS INNER JUDY
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GALLERY

Building up to a cosmic stage

Frédéric Chaubin's new book reveals the surprising freedom and futuristic leanings of Soviet architecture.

LIESL BRADNER

Photographer Frédéric Chaubin likes to believe he uncovered a fourth age of Russian architecture. In his book "CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed" (Taschen, \$59.99), Chaubin captured 90 unconventional, rarely seen buildings constructed in the 20 years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. These weird Modernistic structures reveal a surprising freedom after the strict controls in 1920s constructivism, Stalin's so-called Empire (or Gothic) style and Nikita Khrushchev's Modernism initiated in the '50s and '60s.

Chaubin's journey of excavation began in 2003 while waiting to interview Eduard Shevardnadze, then president of Georgia. Chaubin, chief editor of the French lifestyle magazine Citizen K, came across a dusty 20-year-old book in a Tbilisi bookstore that contained images of local architecture unlike anything he had ever seen. When he returned to seek out more of these astonishing structures, he met a Lithuanian woman who was married to an architect who worked on the Druskininkai Hydrotherapy Center, his ode to Barcelona's Antonio Gaudí. "She said it took nearly 10 years, and they were free to produce what they wanted, there was no more control," said Chaubin from his home in Paris. "I thought this was a subject that deserved further investigation."

For the next several years, he explored the landscape of 14 former republics, creating a game of sorts to find and photograph the craziest and most aberrant buildings. What he uncovered was a multiplicity of futuristic styles, many with grand, sweeping curves and flying-saucer roofs, often constructed in bleak, remote areas emanating a sci-fi vibe. Although a few structures have been razed, most remain in good condition or have been renovated and transformed.

Others continue to operate in their original intended purposes. The Institute of Robotics and Technical Cybernetics in St. Petersburg (1987) resembles a tower-like rocket ready to blast off. The Druzhba Sanatorium in Yalta, Ukraine, designed by Igor Vasilevsky in 1985, was once mistaken by the Pentagon as a launch pad.

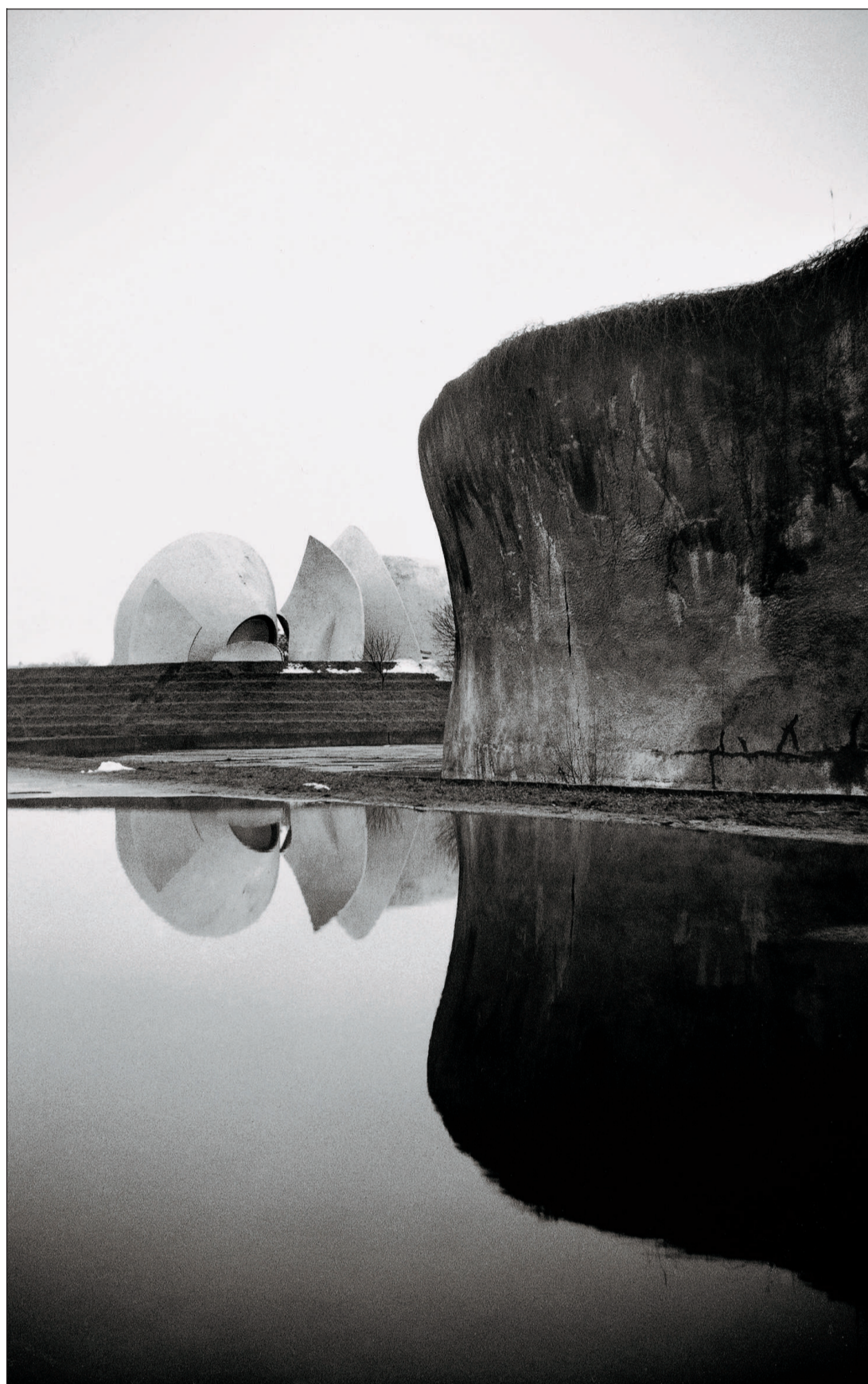
Many of the images dispel previous beliefs that there was little outside influence in the design of the USSR. One example is the Demirchyan Arena, Sports and Music Complex in Yerevan, Armenia. Completed in 1984, it bears a similarity to Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal in New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, built in 1962.

"In some ways, these architects had to be more skillful because of limited materials and economic conditions," said Chaubin. "I tried to understand how they were freer to express their own visions instead of sticking to an ideological formula."

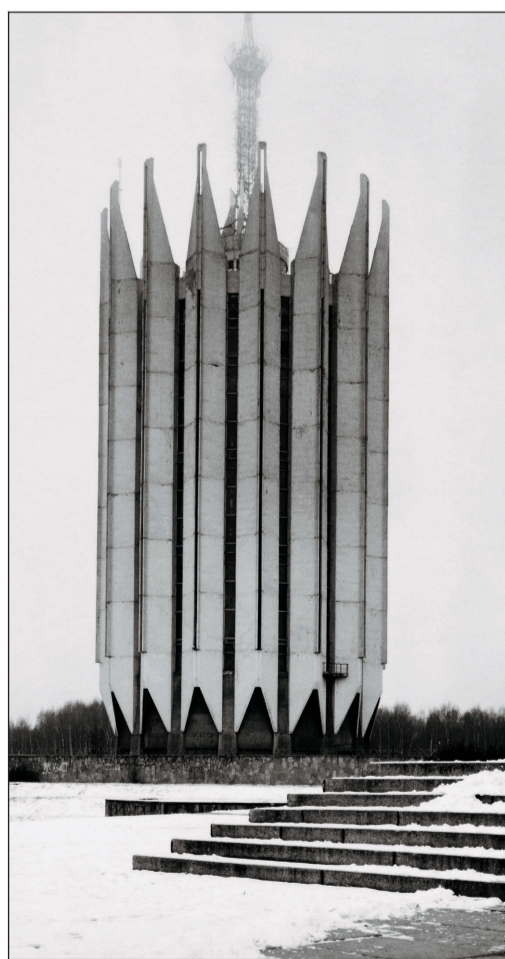
One of Chaubin's favorite stories is his discovery of the Prometheus Camp for youth on the Finnish border. What he found was not the ominous concrete structures he had previously encountered but a cluster of ramshackle beach-like bungalows with a Suprematist form. The buildings were constructed with sketches of lunar bases intended to be built on the moon. "The people in charge of architecture heritage in Russia told me it didn't exist, but I found it." Built with wood, the camp was already decaying.

In the end, these extraordinary structures represented dreams and hopes of a few innovators looking toward the future, a Space Age era with endless possibilities while their countries were collapsing around them.

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SWEEPING CURVES: A crematorium in Kiev, Ukraine, designed by A. Miletski in 1985.



SPACE AGE: Futuristic elements define the Institute of Robotics and Technical Cybernetics, clockwise from left, the Druzhba Sanatorium and the Georgian Ministry of Highways.



SUSPENDED: The Polytechnic Institute of Minsk features overhanging lecture theaters.

JACKET COPY

Kerouac pad houses writers

CAROLYN KELLOGG
 REPORTING FROM
 ORLANDO, FLA.

The good news is I found the Jack Kerouac house in Orlando. The bad news is I didn't get to see inside.

I know: Florida? Jack Kerouac lived in Florida?

In 1957, when "On the Road" was published, Kerouac came to live with his mother in Florida, in her Orlando bungalow in a quiet neighborhood called College Park. He stayed less than a year, but there, during a short and intense stretch not all that different from the one in which he composed "On the Road," he wrote "The Dharma Bums." The original manuscript of "The Dharma Bums" can be found in Orlando's Orange County historical museum.

To get to the house, I drove around a small lake fronted by lovely older homes in beautiful condition, many two stories tall. People in boats were fishing. Then I went across a two-lane commercial road onto grid-like streets with houses that were more modest, mostly one-story mid-century houses and older bungalows.

Not everyone in College Park knows the Kerouac house. One man told me I should go to a nearby Starbucks and ask them my questions about authors. Another, however, nodded to the gray bungalow where I was standing and said, "That's the writer's house."

The detailed "Do Not Disturb" note on the front door confirmed it.

The sign hadn't been posted by a private citizen tired of Kerouac hunters knocking on the door (although they do). It was put there by the Jack Kerouac Writer in Residence Project — informally, the Kerouac Project — a nonprofit that keeps up the house and funds three-month writer residencies there.

"I sit in the room where Kerouac wrote 'The Dharma Bums,'" said Ellie Watts-Russell, the writer who's been living in the house since March. She'd been leading a writing workshop while I was there and called me a few days later. "There's a picture of Kerouac working on 'The Dharma Bums' in that room where I get to write. I think one of the previous writers [wrote] in the goodbye book, she felt like Jack had her back when she was working."

A Brit, Watts-Russell is amazed by the support offered to writers in the U.S. with residencies like this — twice she marveled at not having to look at a utility bill during her stay.

Many writers' houses have been preserved so that enthusiastic readers can visit; the Writers' Houses website has a complete list. I would have liked to go inside Kerouac's Orlando house, but the Kerouac Project seeks to do something different. "So many of these writers' houses are just glorified museums, where the writer once ate their breakfast cereal," Watts-Russell said. "This house is living and breathing."

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ALAN SOLOMON Chicago Tribune

OFF THE ROAD: Jack Kerouac wrote in his mother's Orlando house.