

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2022)

Heft: 40

Artikel: Evrodom : imagining the West, dreaming of a home

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1037205>

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Evrodom: Imagining the West, Dreaming of a Home

Furqat Palvan-Zade

I wrote down this note during the first months of the pandemic in the summer of 2020. At that time I decided to spend this uncertain situation with my parents in their house in Tashkent. For this issue of trans magazin, I have revisited this short text and rewritten it.

I have spent a record amount of time at my parents' place during this pandemic. I do not believe I have ever stayed here for such a long time. My parents built this house when I was already studying in Moscow. I remember I visited them in 2006, when they were already half-way through the construction process. My dad chose to build in European style; in Uzbekistan we have a special word for this type of house – Evrodom.

I remember my dad planting trees; or at least he was managing the process. The saplings were so small and miserable, it was hard to imagine they would ever grow as tall as they now stand. The garden is my favorite place in my home and it is strange that I spend so little time there. Maybe the reason is because it mainly serves decorative purposes. It exhibits itself rather than invites someone to live in it. Maybe this Western objectivisation and alienation of nature bothers me.

If you ever find yourself in the old city of Tashkent, you will notice that all the private houses are enclosed by walls. Sometimes the old city even looks like a labyrinth of walls. It may appear that Uzbeks are very closed off and that they put strict borders between public and private spaces, but this is a little too simple to be true.

When you enter a traditional Uzbek house you find yourself in the courtyard. You can say that the garden, not the house, is in fact the center of the Uzbek home. The living area is located around the edges of the patio. Given the climate, it is only natural to want to spend your time in a shady garden. There you can work, celebrate weddings and other events with the family, and receive guests. So, Uzbeks tend to expand their homes and include the gardens in their domestic space.

After the collapse of the USSR, when millions of my compatriots were met with the new conditions of a free market and the possibility of rebuilding their everyday life, they started using their imagination. «Evroremont» (which can be translated as «Euro-makeover») has become quite a famous concept in post-Soviet space. It is a new style of renovation or revamping that

A



B



AB Examples of Eurodoms, built around Nikitin street, Tashkent, 2010s. Image: Timur Karpov

became possible in the 90s when Western construction materials first became available. I think people wanted to distance themselves from the Soviet imagery that was associated with the depressing 70s and 80s.

Besides Evroremont, in Uzbekistan we also have Evrodoms. It is the same phenomenon but describes small architecture and private houses. I find Evrodoms odd, primarily because in my country people often combine them with the local custom of building blank walls around the property. And if we used to have a garden in the center of a home, now it is an Evrodom.

In her book *Mushrooms and Other Mutants*⁽¹⁾ Daria Paromonova explains the roots of aesthetics of post-Soviet architecture in Moscow. She claims that the main engine for architects, their clients, and city planners became the will to put personal over public. The city became the space for expressing private opinions, statements, and tastes. This turn from central regulation of the late-socialist system to the plurality and freedom of everything private was considered a synonym of being progressive, modern, and anti-Soviet.

If one looks closer at the extravagant parade of experimental aesthetics of private architecture in Tashkent, one will notice the stubborn presence of weird occidentalism. My city is full of the buildings that imitate the Western architecture. Not only in form and architectural details, but also in branding. Manhattan, Italiansky Kvartal (Italian quartier), Parisien, Nukus Avenue – these are examples of how our developers are naming their projects.

I think a lot about the imagined West these days. I came across this term in Alexey Yurchak's book *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*.⁽²⁾ It is a helpful concept to understand contemporary culture in my country. We construct ourselves through imagining and imitating the West – in everyday life, in our communication with others, in art, in building institutions. I wonder where this process will take us and lead to. Would it be possible to invent a new, Eurasian aesthetic that combines the imagined East and imagined West? Or will it be just a lower-quality version of the West?

I think about this so often that I arrived at the absurd thought that I myself am, in a way, a Evrodom. It is hard to formulate which culture is closer to me now and where my home is. But it seems I need to embrace my hybridity and live with it.

Furqat Palvan-Zade, born 1986 in Tashkent, is an independent curator, researcher, and filmmaker. In 2014 he co-founded the syg.ma project – a community-run online platform and an expanding archive of texts on society and art. In 2020 he joined the Sandberg Instituut's «F for Fact» program in Amsterdam. As a filmmaker and a researcher, he is working on a series of experimental projects investigating the transient geographies and overlapping cultures of Central Eurasia.

