

# ART NOUVEAU IMAGES

Mansion on Malaya Nikitskaya

English

Moscow 2005



Fedor Osipovich Shekhtel



**The house on Malaya Nikitskaya was built for the millionaire Stepan Pavlovich Ryabushinsky in 1900-1902. Ryabushinsky came from a large family of merchants. He was an industrialist and a collector with an interest in art. Thus, it was no coincidence that the project went to close family friend and leading Moscow art nouveau architect Fedor Osipovich Shekhtel.**

Shekhtel creates a unique residence whose very architecture could have directed the lives of its inhabitants along the steps of higher spirituality. Everything: from the cellar to the fourth floor tower, where the universe opened out in its higher plane, reflected the struggle up the staircase to perfection. Thus, it is the staircase winding around the building's vertical axis that has become the visual symbol and primary architectural composition of the house. From inside and out the house develops around it. The composition is built of freely flowing dimensions, seemingly placed one inside the other, making areas move at times forward at times back. The walls seem to breathe out with their mass of bay windows and balconies. They are answered by ancient Russian portals and porches.

Large entrances and stained glass windows give the house openness. Each façade is original and unique, as is each plant-theme border drawing. The size of the windows, the beauty of the flowered frames and the balconies create the wonder of an artistic game. The changing decoration causes constant amazement with small discoveries and pleases with new impressions.

Over the wall projections one can glimpse a terrace hidden from sight, and a little further discover a gate leading to a small courtyard. The house is meant to be seen from different viewpoints. From Malaya Nikitskaya its resolute form and progressive waves are visible beyond its low patterned fences. Superseding each other in light sliding spirals, they roll from either side of a heavysset portal, gush over the iron balcony grid, turning it into an open-work, and lie on the window as a treelike casement. The building's light colours make the building radiant. An exotic garden borders its mosaic orchid frieze. The second-floor balcony seems surrounded by hanging gardens, through which small narrow windows peek. The game of quaint petals in mother-of-pearl shimmers creates wonderful scenery, captured within a pink frame. The wide frame reflects the neat borders of the walls, using arches it traces the narrow windows, repeating their stepped rhythm, and impelling one to turn into the side street. The house turns into another facade and entry. Over its threshold a real aesthetic utopia awaits, created by the romantic imagination of an artist.



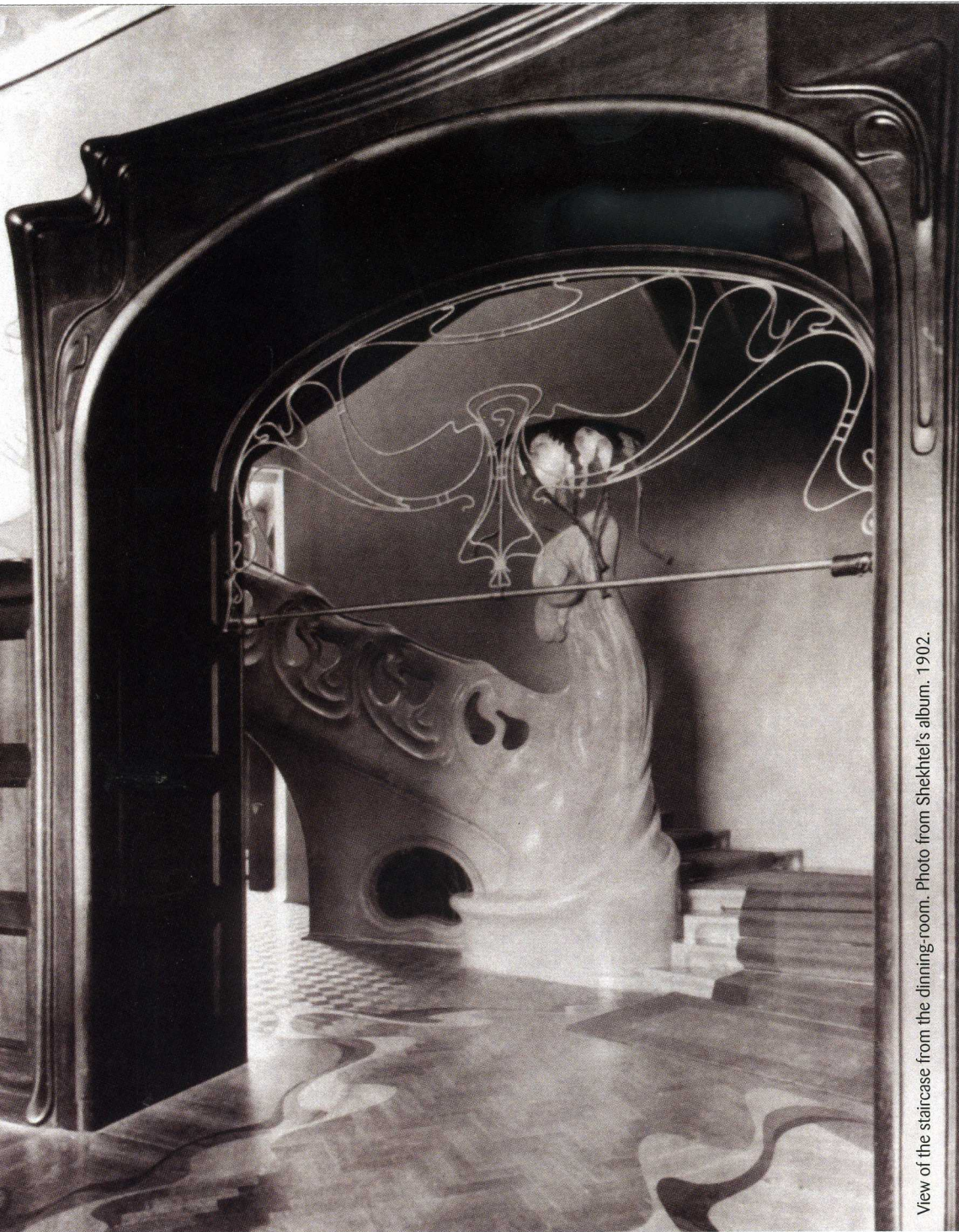
The live wave staircase, a symbol of the eternal movement of life, takes pride of place inside the house. The upraised wave represents the ideas of poetic and artistic symbolism: to live life beyond the limits. Thus, it takes all ideas and thoughts up like a pillar, as the tree of life, aspiring toward spiritual growth and light. And light opens up to it through a transparent roof that is crowned by a glass pyramid. Energetically curving drops spill out from the staircase and fall into the swirl of the growing marble wave, as if a sea horse has swam up from the depths bringing to the surface a mysterious radiant creature.

From the bottom one can see the jellyfish tentacles illuminated inside, behind the matt figures of the glass lamp. Above it the stirring tentacles of an octopus. Its back hardened in bronze and taken on the shape of a shell. Coloured geometrical patterns cover the shell making it look more like that of a tortoise. Art Nouveau, on the one hand imitating known natural forms, and on the other, bringing a great character to the stylisation of these forms, as if trying to put our fantasies to the test calling up different images in the empty space between plafond and lamps.

Wave staircase made of grey Estonian marble







View of the staircase from the dinning-room. Photo from Shekhtel's album. 1902.



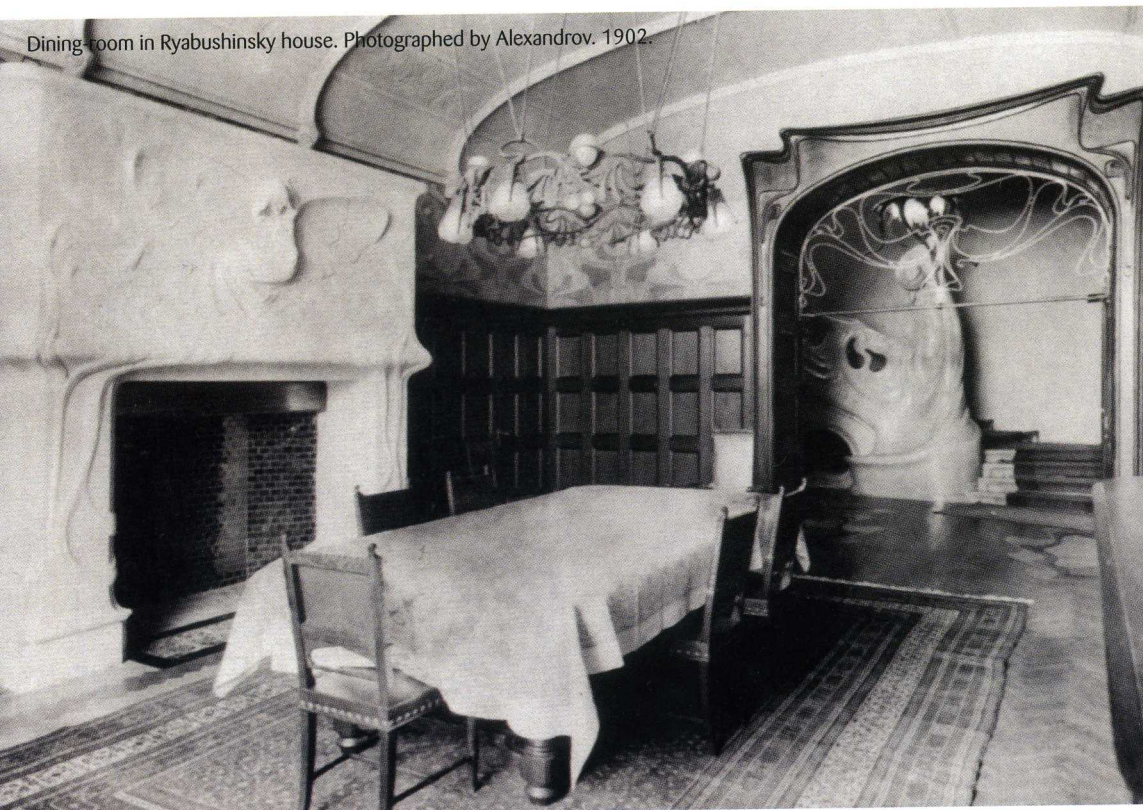


Present-day view of the staircase

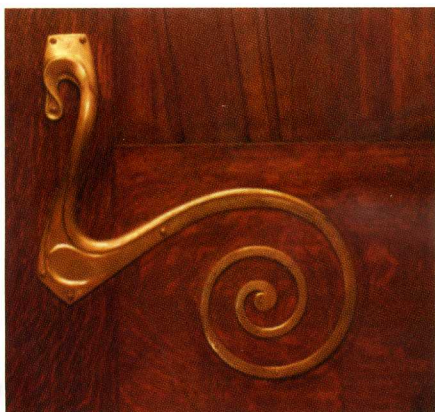




Dining-room in Ryabushinsky house. Photographed by Alexandrov. 1902.



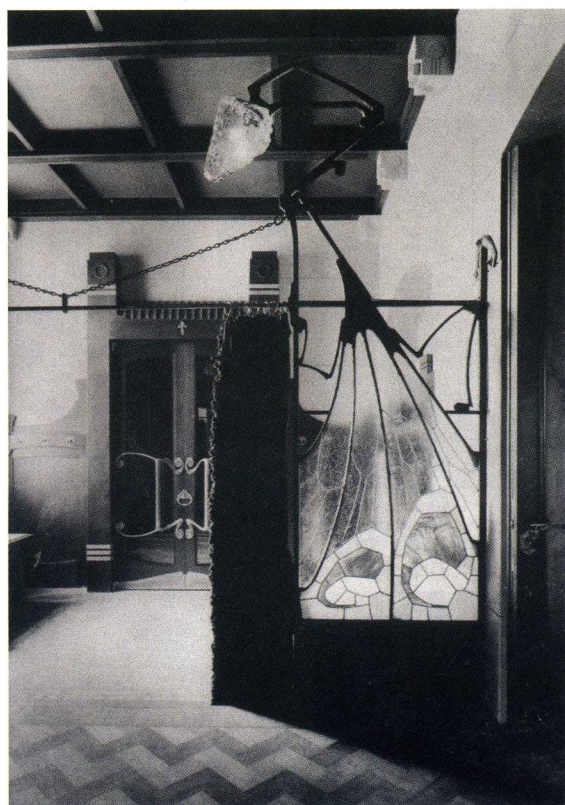




Dining-room door handles. Gold-plated brass.  
Drawn by Shekhtel. Made by Vishnevsky brothers



Fragment of dinning-room ceiling with wave  
pattern. Hand crafted.



Dragonfly lighting fixture in the vestibule. Cast iron, stained glass. 1902.





Large room fronton on first floor  
with bay leaves and fruit.



Dining-room doors. Walnut, pear.







Fragment of carving on dining-room door.



Wood is widely used in the interior décor. The polished surfaces of the cornices are mixed with the natural textures of the walls, floors and ceilings. The grooved surface of the rhombus placed floor in the room, fumed black oak, gleams mother-of-pearl, like fish scales. The shapes on the floor depict a build up of waves one minute, a moiré of different fabrics the next.

Walnut covers one side of the doors, pear the other. Fine artistic contrasts are felt throughout. The use of different types of wood attracts attention to the change from light to dark, from warm to cool tones.

The frontons display bay leaves, symbols of success and glory. The smooth panels of the doors are decorated with rose garlands. The composition created by the art of carving takes the place of paintings.



Door handle in the shape of an open shell with pearl.



Under the cliff ledge where unearthly flowers grow, light blue butterflies stir the transparent veil of the heavens, the depth of the universe opening beyond. The convention of the stained glass deprives the image of perspectives and it seems as if Eternity is breathing straight into one's face.

From the abyss of the future, indistinguishable amid the dark cinnabar, the river of time flows. The stream catches a butterfly and it is carried away in a delicate dance toward the unknown.

The wavy surface detains and scatters light along a moonlight valley. In a gentle radiance mysteriously brightening the blue firma-

ment, a low horizon lies. The shadows of the trees blend in with the clouds and fly in dark rows. Through the noisy groves and rocky ledges a small river crosses the mirrored plain. The

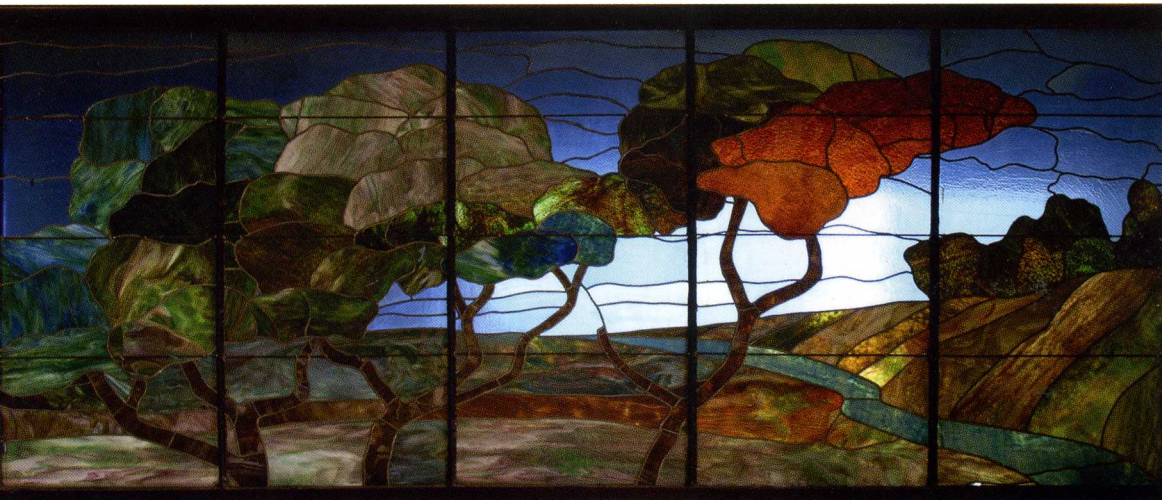
light cover of night envelops a dreamy calm in which vague daydreams are born. In the quiet stillness emerald and turquoise treetops are set. From here the soul strives toward the blue azure, here it returns, with lustre and radiance reflecting the glass vision of the sky. The light penetrating the stained glass shines through creating a light screen between the vestibule and the hall. And in the hall

the chandelier is alight and the whole picture seems illuminated by sunrays.



Stained glass between small and large rooms on first floor. Stained glass, lead.

Stained glass between vestibule and hall. Drawn by Shekhtel, made by Vinogradov brothers, stained glass, mother-of-pearl.



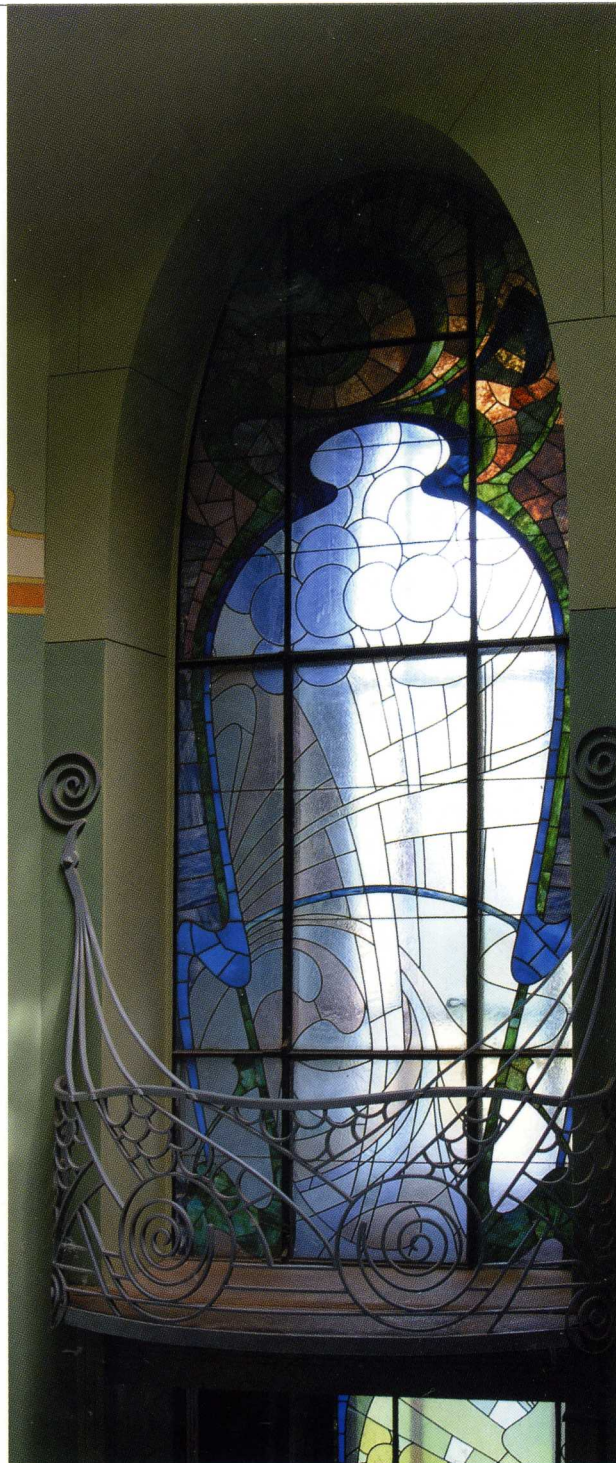


Stained glass windows replace internal and external walls. Light floods in through the stained glass and windows and pours through the pyramid crowning the transparent roof. There is a small bay window by the staircase and beyond it a stained glass window reaches up through two floors, seemingly creating a barrier from the rain depicted on it. It creates a dual feeling of closed and unified space.

The size and shape of the window is reminiscent of stained glass windows in a gothic cathedral. Through seemingly magical patterns a huge space opens out, forming the shape of a vase. Through the contours of the vase a cloud is visible, illuminated by shafts of strange light, rainfall lights up a rainbow and in a surge of light Aurora herself enters the house, taking on the form of an ancient amphora.

In the dawn rays, rain falls and shades the glass with interlaced vertical lines. Rain is a symbol of blossoming, a symbol of creative inspiration and spiritual rebirth. The 10-metre stained glass seems to move the walls away, opening the house up toward the light of divine grace.

Upper window showing rain. Made by the Vinogradov brothers based on a drawing by Shekhtel. Stained glass.







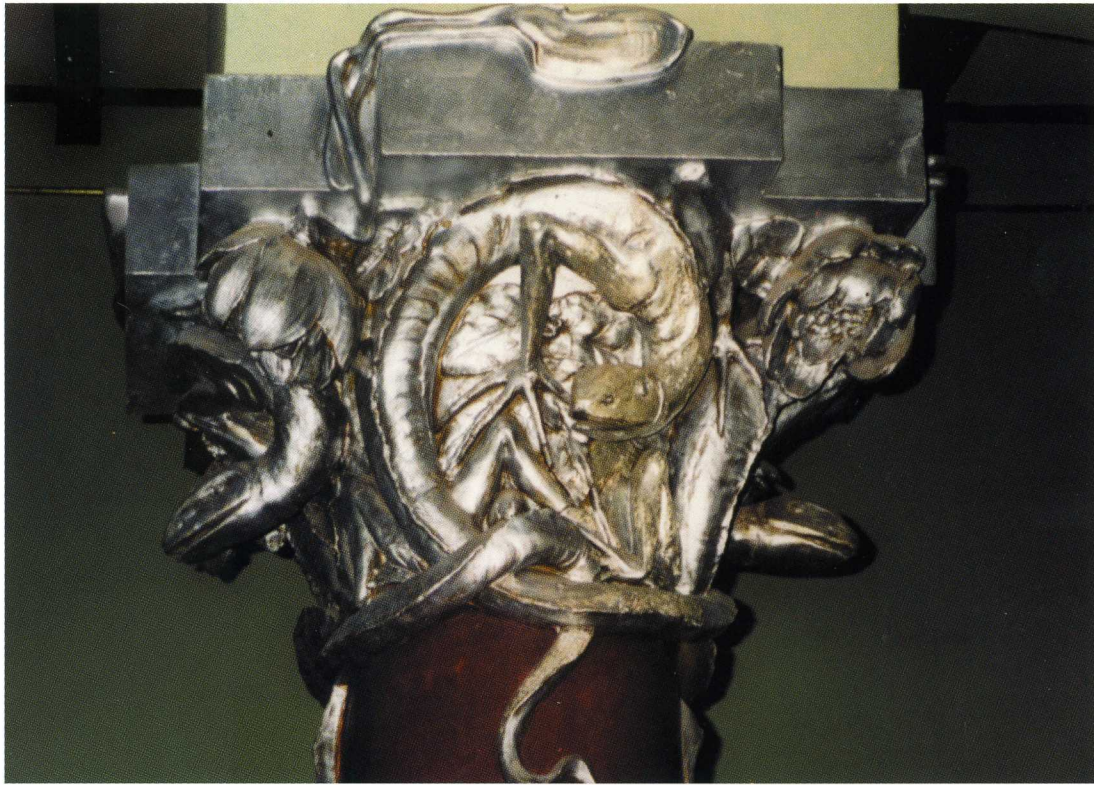
The tree of life, rising from the wave of the staircase, appears on a new turn in the form of a crimson column.

The style is that of a column of the Middle Ages that would have been placed, for example, at a cathedral entrance. The column head would be decorated with biblical themes, with chimeras and snakes ready to pounce on their prey. Above, the statue of a saint would trample upon all this evil.

The space in the house that surrounds this column puts to the centre this clear allegory. The concept behind the interior seems to develop according to the script of an architectural mystery. As the staircase twists it leaves behind it a thunderous crossing. The rainbow arch of the upper gallery is supported by the massive column impost. It stands under the chapel built in the fourth floor tower, as if it holds the Church of Christ above. The unseen presence of the chapel, as a relic of the Middle Ages turns the column into a multifaceted symbol. Thus, achieving the double conventions of the created surroundings

Second-floor column. Artificial porphyry, column head – silver leaf.





Column head, silver leaf.

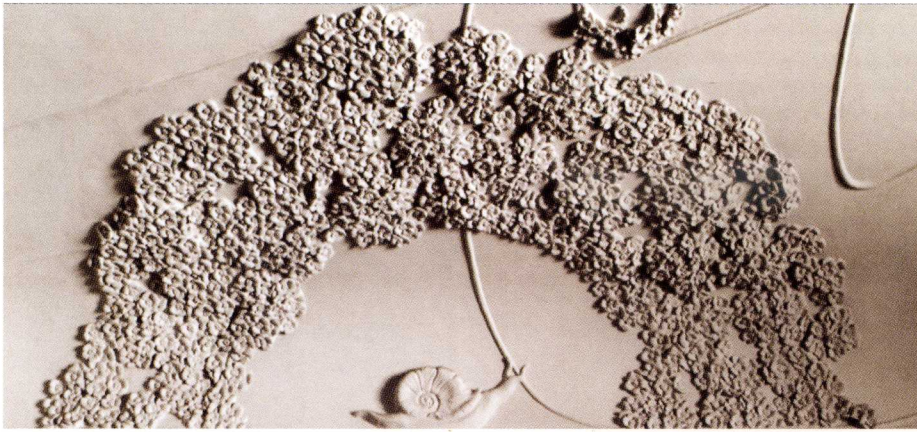
The flower decorated column head turns into a ball teeming with writhing beasts. Their strong tails attached to the column and tangled up in a closed circle – a symbol of life and death, heaven and earth. Inflated bodies, having climbed up high, wrap themselves below the flagstone. Bristling backbones and outstretched heads transfix with their menacing poses and with their long legs trample over wonderful creations.

In the battle with the beasts some flowers die and droop over the column, while others straighten triumphantly. Their stems flutter along the

upper ledge. Taking on the form of a sculpture the column head reflects the eternal struggle between good and evil. The collective flower forms, which look like water-lilies, lilies and lotuses, reflect the tragic destruction of good. Lizards are associated with biblical snakes and ancient themes. The winding leaves and twisting snake bodies create the effect of merging and interflowing plant and animal forms.

Although the forms are represented with all inherent and biological details, naturalism concedes to convention intended to include the imagination.





Fragment of stucco moulding on dinning-room ceiling. Hand crafted.

The cloud edges are like a scattering of white flowers, or perhaps, this is a duckweed covered pond, where the bank is overgrown with forget-me-nots and clovers. From behind the clouds the blueness of the sky shows, the sun glimpses its reflection in the water's mirror. The ceiling intricately displays winding blades and small flowers, collecting them into bouquets of fleecy clouds. The contour at times dissolves into the smooth surface, at times is discovered by the stucco forms. At the

very edge of a leaf a snail is slowing completing its journey. Life passes slowly entwining in the coiling spirals of its shell.

In a momentary clearance, rust-coloured chrysanthemums peep out and see themselves in a bordered cartouche frame. The flowers shiver in the breeze, illuminated by sunrays. From below they themselves seem like a flickering sun. The sun knows itself in the radiant petals. This double portrait was the work of the artist and decorator A.A. Timoshko.



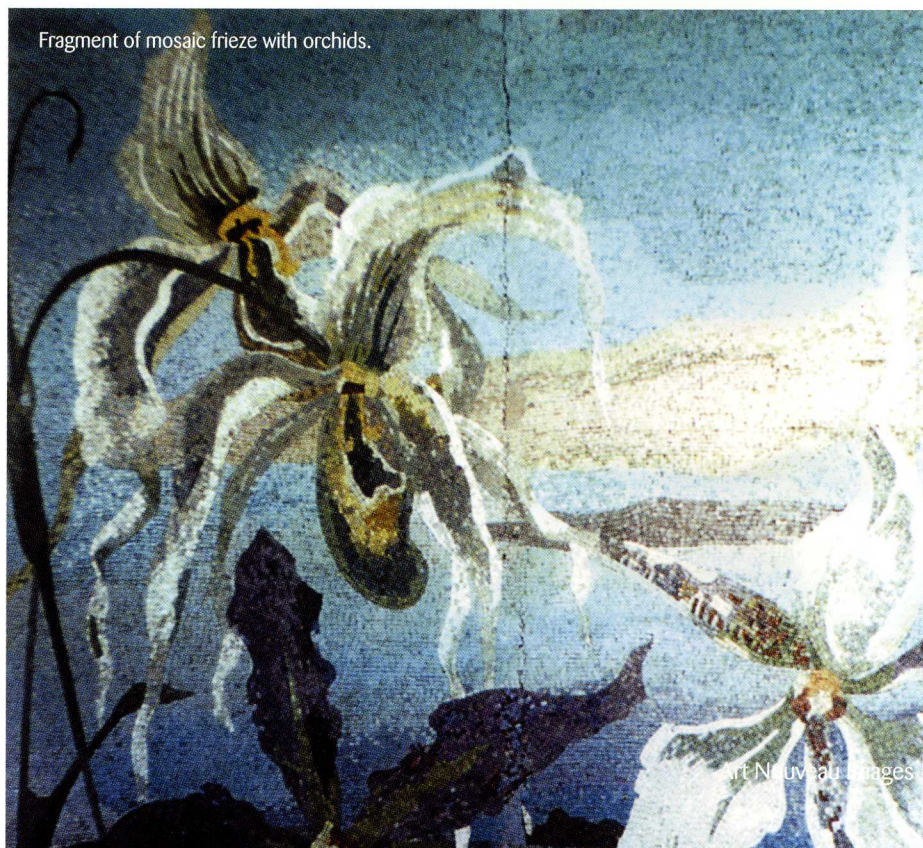


The art nouveau flower – the orchid reflects the elegant and precious nature of style. For the mosaic frieze Shekhtel paints a watercolour with various types of orchids. The frieze turns as the scroll of an ancient book. Profound azure without end and without edge, promoting the illusion of endless space, concealing within itself the deep secrets of the Universe., it calls after itself, and we move along the plane of the frieze. The sun shines on the rose, lily, lilac, and light blue smalt pieces. The play of light and flowers dissolves realistic images. In the light blue distance there is another life. Here the still-life changes into landscape, the landscape into a battle scene, and the stadium into a genre painting.

This is a different world in another dimension. Its inhabitants are flying flowers. Placed at the very edge of the frame they look ceremonious and representative as in a baroque portrait.

The square proportions of the picture enable a better view. Mysterious forms appear from nowhere, like random hallucinations, and sail into the immense space. Petals flickering up and down striving toward the light. It is difficult to guess from where and to where these creations fly. Light and ethereal, they are kept on the plane only by the conventional contour of the picture. The sophisticated play of pictorial forms is reflected in a magnificent breakthrough – raising life on earth to heights of fantasy.

Fragment of mosaic frieze with orchids.







English

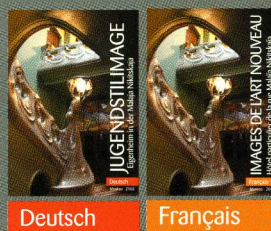
ISBN 5-7396-0069-3



9 785739 600691

**ART NOUVEAU IMAGES:  
Mansion on Malaya Nikitskaya**

© 2005 L.I. Younakovskaya  
Russian text L.I. Younakovskaya, translation M. Elvira.  
Photography: A. Okounev,  
photo on the page 5: V. Stolyarov,  
photo on the cover: V. Tugolukov.



Deutsch

Français