

# Architectural Aspects of Vladivostok Identity as European City in the Pacific Region

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**Abstract.** This article covers issues of European architecture influence on the urban environment style of Vladivostok– the main Russian port city in the Pacific Ocean. Recent transformations in the city's political, social, and cultural life, from establishment of the RF Navy Fleet Sea Base to development of an international Pacific cooperation center, in a new light refreshed its historical and architectural heritage making it an instrument for cross-cultural dialog between Russia and the APR. In this research we have made architectural and urban planning comparison between Vladivostok, Istanbul and San – Francisco. The research has revealed general trends of the European Art Nouveau style impact on Vladivostok urban environment. Existed at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, European architecture fashion has become a trendsetter for the beautiful exterior at the Pacific east coast.

## 1. Introduction

Vladivostok is the eastern Russian port located in the Pacific Ocean. The city is set on a complex terrain that significantly aggravates its real estate development, but, at the same time, makes the city a great natural amphitheater spectacularly spreading itself towards the sea. Elevation points of Vladivostok (at the level of 200 meters above the sea) are the perfect sites for sightseeing platforms arrangement as they may show case breathtaking city and sea panoramic views always impressing every visitor of the city. In recent years, the city of Vladivostok assumed its new important function of the Russian center for Pacific international cooperation that significantly impacted on new all-Russian and international status of the city. "To perform effectively such ambitious function the city should have its own substantial potential: economic, demographic, infrastructural, cultural, scientific-technical, and military; development of these capacities, as well as establishment of major international cooperation center, shall form a new stage for Vladivostok development" [1]. "Given the unique geographical position of the city and region, the prior development sectors shall include inbound international and domestic tourism fields"[1].



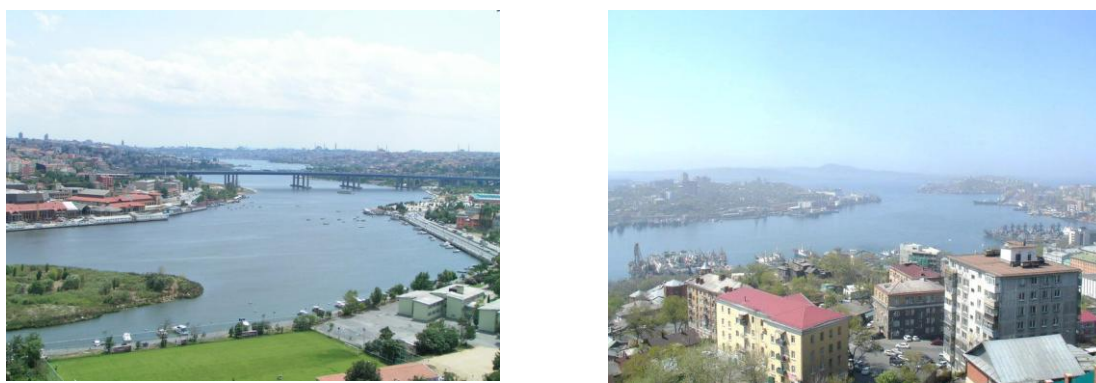
Due to its economic development and long-term international closure, the city was not turned into skyscrapers center as in Hong Kong and Singapore, and has always kept typical for the XIX-XX European architecture human-scaled and sculptural facade features in its urban environment. The city center is posturized by commercial buildings and residential houses built by Russian and foreign businessmen, who came here in the end of XIX century to explore and develop rich natural resources of the Russian Far East, and became an interesting version of the European architectural culture.

Positioning the city as the Far Eastern tourist center predetermines identification of all its attractive sides, among which are the features of European urban environment of the XIX-XX century and marvelous cityscapes and sea panoramas of Vladivostok spectacularly demonstrated from its high points. This suggests, first of all, focusing on such aspects for the city preparation to mass tourists visiting as improvement of its urban landscape environment and, particularly, development of the observation areas and their access routes. These areas shall be architecturally attractive and adapted for sightseeing in any weather and seasonal conditions. Arrangement of the observation platforms access routes beautifully paved and well - equipped with convenient and stylish fencing structures in combination with the compositionally interesting solutions in platforms design shall create a comfortable urban environment encouraging exploration of this unusual city from almost a bird's-eye view.

It often seems that the city lacks some quality in its urban environment since it has to deal with both complex and spectacular terrain.

"Vladivostok current condition faces its critical environmental degradation and loses its diversity in cultural, spiritual, intellectual and other features typical for a regional center, which, in fact, have never been common for this area and actually turned it to a center of business and commercial activity. The historical area of the city and its center are particular areas tended to the biggest risk of degradation "[5].

Our perception of the city is closely connected with its silhouette. To see the city means being able to find those observation points, from which it would be demonstrated for us the most. Vladivostok has its counterparts with a very similar relief, such as, for example, Istanbul, where the names of the Golden Horn Bay and the Eastern Bosphorus Gulf have associatively suggested to Russian sailors the names for the respective bay and gulf in Vladivostok, and San Francisco (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The cities of Istanbul and Vladivostok (on the left is the Golden Horn Bay, Istanbul, on the right is its Vladivostok analogue)

The last one was so similar to Vladivostok terrain that some of these cities streets seem to quote each other: the Revolution Victims Street (Vladivostok) and the “most winding street in the world” Lombard Street (San Francisco). Extraordinary beauty of San Francisco is determined by its location on a narrow peninsula completely surrounded by water (perfect analogy of Vladivostok) (Figure 2). Undulating relief of the city area has often challenged transportation of its first inhabitants. However, the next generations have managed to overcome these difficulties and in 1873 the city has launched a first cable car (in Vladivostok it has appeared in 1962).



**Figure 2.** San-Francisco streets concept partially traced in Vladivostok urban environment (analogues: on the left is the Revolution Victims Street, on the right is the corner of the First Morskaya and the Posietskaya Streets)

For a long time Vladivostok has remained a closed city primarily focusing on its construction and urban planning issues, but not paying so much attention to already existed sites improvement, excluding those belonged to residential adjoining areas.

Having received an open city status, Vladivostok started to position itself as a touristic center that already demands a higher degree of urban development. To demonstrate the gorgeous sea view sit is necessary to provide transportation of tourists to the city sightseeing sites, which shall be equipped with a comfortable place of stay for tourists in any seasonal and weather conditions. Such sightseeing places can be furnished with art objects creating memorable image of a sightseeing platform and making them a sort of navigation points helping to move around the upper city. Exploration of the city's complex terrain needs better level of its urban environment arrangement that would not only deal with utilitarian issues, but would also reflect all modern achievements in urban landscape development, such as, for example, various types of paving, retaining walls, slope decorative reinforcements, landscaping, recreation and communication places arrangement, paths lighting, and etc. In these circumstances it is recommended to avoid using of super graphics and wall painting as it significantly decreases the status of urban environment.

All of these aspects are covered in the course of students training in Design (Urban Design) Program. Citywide policy of Vladivostok image development as an attractive tourist center is, for the most part, related to the city amphitheater improvement and requires surveying and analyzing of the similar problems occurring in the cities with identical to Vladivostok relief. Not for nothing it is said that "the seas that divide us unite us."

Aesthetic value of Vladivostok architectural environment is the result of its establishment at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, when the city became a home for large number of foreign entrepreneurs tended to scrape up their fortune here and, therefore, hoped for a longer stay that considerably affected their desire to settle down in these areas and invest into business and commercial houses development, which were, in terms of architecture, similar to European buildings style and familiar to the entrepreneurs due to their active international business activity and marine communications. Hamburg, Vienna, Odessa, St. Petersburg were tightly bounded by the sea lanes. Meanwhile, Europe was embracing a new trendy style of Art Nouveau. Pursuance of respectable reputation of a businessman could not avoid pushing the successful entrepreneurs to demonstrate their good financial standing by investing their funds in construction that architecturally and technically was comparable to newfangled European models. Not only military engineers from St. Petersburg, but also European architects (Germany, Austria) were involved in this process. All that laid the foundation of the central part of Vladivostok as an architecturally attractive western European city.

"The term Art Nouveau is to define unique structural art movement emerged in Europe at the end of the XIX century and made, despite its short life, a very noticeable impact on all art of the XX century" [4].

Architectural practices of urban Vladivostok showcase some copies of European masters art works of and variations on the used shapes. It especially concerns the Viennese Art Nouveau style (Figure 3). "The architecture of Vienna's Art Nouveau era ... developed a special Austrian (or Viennese) version of Art Nouveau ... embodied, in some extent, the features of its national character with typical combination of exaggeration and businesslike seriousness. A set of typical motifs used for the facades composition was also developed. For the purpose of decoration, various lion and female masks, stylized floral garlands imitating hanging from balconies benches and brackets were used. Another popular decoration detail was downward wall channels that reminded cannelures, wherein a middle one of three or five cannelures was usually made longer than sideward ones"[4]. Viennese architecture tends to leave its baroque redundancy and focus on strict geometric shapes. "A headliner of simplicity and clarity trend was Otto Wagner - the architect, who has overcome nearly all his colleagues in terms of talent and level of impact on the contemporaries and, in one degree or another, was involved in the process of the European Art Nouveau development"[4]. Insertion (even in small quantities) of decorative elements into the architecture humanizes urban structures enriching "parterre" of the city and filling the environment with an artistic sense.



**Figure 3.** O. Wagner's decoration element (first two pictures), frequently shown in old Vladivostok architecture

Western architecture innovations became fast-known due to special literature promptly delivered to Vladivostok by sea. Wherein, the easiest borrowed and assimilated elements of decoration were facades of the buildings built in new style. Frequently, many architectural sites of Vladivostok were designed by civil engineers - graduates of the Institute of Civil Engineers in St. Petersburg. Held in late 1902, the Moscow exhibition of architecture and art industry raised a great interest and contributed a lot into development of the "Secession" experience for the Russian specialists. "The architecture of St. Petersburg buildings clearly shows presence of external decorative signs of Art Nouveau similar to its Austrian version and that was especially attractive for the St. Petersburg architects". [4].

"In terms of the structure difficulty, the era of Art Nouveau, perhaps, has no analogues among the other periods of the world architecture history". If the heritage left by European architecture of the new style was considered as a "core style", as proposed by V G Lisowski.

Vladivostok was an international city from the first days of its development. It used to attract many energetic Germans, Poles, Finns, and Englishmen. Considering a long stay in this area they put lots of efforts into settlement here. Presence of the Polish community in the city has predicated construction of the Holy Virgin Catholic church built in Neo-Gothic style and completed by 1921. "Neo-Gothic architecture continued its development in the early twentieth century, so the interest to it was high even during the Art –Nouveau era ... Sublime aesthetization of all the detail-spatial environment was an important postulate of the Art –Nouveau period. And the Neo-Gothics, as the style reflected the highest spiritual and moral ideals, was totally consistent with the above objectives "[6]. The Catholic

Cathedral in Vladivostok is an excellent example of the Eastern European Neo-Gothics. Another interesting example is the Lutheran St. Paul Church built in 1907-1909 and designed by the German architect G.R. Yundhendel. Its architecture tends to Gothic forms archaism. It reminds a lot the Cathedral of St. Michael in Turku (1900) designed by the Finnish architect L. Sonck [6]. Thus, the city may also offer to Asian tourists an opportunity to get acquainted with varieties of the European Gothic style (Figure 5).



**Figure 4.** European decoration in old Vladivostok architecture (stucco and concrete plastics): on the top – (from left to right) “Europe” hotel in Prague – décors hapés similar to Vienese Art Nouveau motifs; the Tirkkosen House in Tampere and the Forostovsky House in St. Petersburg – decorative molding concrete panels in facades; on the bottom: Vladivostok: facades windowsill decoration with Vienese Art Nouveau elements; decorative façade panels.



**Figure 5.** Examples of Neo-Gothic's in Vladivostok architecture: on the top – Catholic Church; on the bottom – Protestant Church

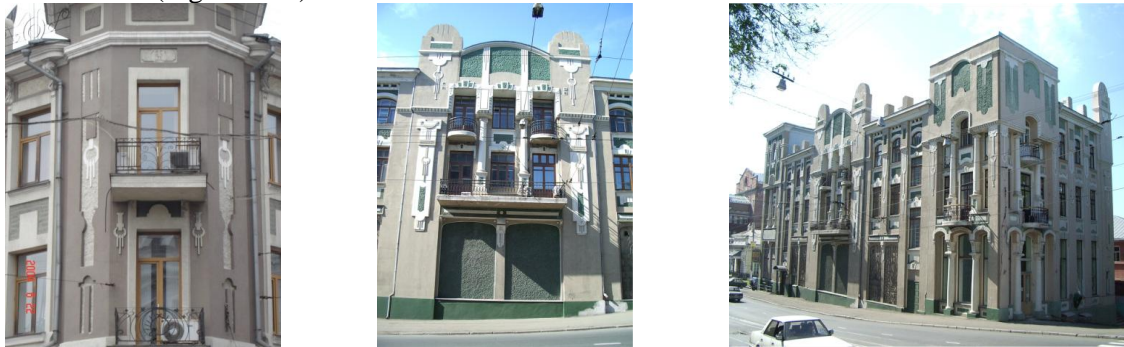
One of the typical Art Nouveau motifs clearly expressing the idea of duality is a mask. Most often it was represented by women faces or lion masks. Reflecting the influence of Asia some facades show the masks of Chinese Dragons (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Examples of the preserved Vladivostok mascarones

Although the Vladivostok mascarones are not as numerous as in St. Petersburg (in the course of the study we have revealed no more than 200), but they seem to be quite enough to enrich the urban environment and to spiritualize its aesthetic space bringing cold stone buildings to the emotional world of mankind. Vladivostok mascarones were placed on the private houses as parts of sculptural decoration. They were traditionally placed on the keystones of windows and door openings, on the pilasters, under the eaves of plane smooth walls. Specialized concrete and stucco plant by A.S. Lusakovsky was established for the production of decorative moldings.

Variations of the Northern Art Nouveau admitted in St. Petersburg can be also found in architecture of Vladivostok buildings: towers, tents, spires, and contrasting combinations of plastered surface textures (Figures 7-8).



**Figure 7.** Contrast combinations of plastered textures on Vladivostok buildings

Brick architecture of the Art Nouveau era is also a subject of interest, where in an artistic effect was achieved by using tin bricks and its plastic features.



**Figure 8.** Brick architecture of the Art Nouveau

## Conclusions

Therefore, the Art Nouveau style in architecture of the old Vladivostok is distinguished by diversity of various shapes and forms demonstrated in interesting interpretations of the European "international" style (and its "Art Nouveau" variety), in borrowed Petersburg "Northern Art Nouveau" techniques, and in development of local decorative forms. This ties Vladivostok architecture with European models and makes it informationally attractive for the eastern area of the Asia-Pacific region suggesting a certain synchronicity in cultural development of the eastern Russian and its European counterparts. Nowadays it is necessary to identify and preserve those extraordinary shape elements of Art Nouveau architecture, which were, at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, naturally developed as a manifestation of transition to new style aesthetics.

Vladivostok urban environment has a common tendency to the European Art Nouveau. "Heterogeneous, hardly paired patterns and trends are demonstratively connected, a concept of a broad synthesis takes grotesque shape. Synthesized elements can be not only dissimilar, but even diametrically opposed and polar separated - this is the general principle dominating over the suggested by the Art Nouveau common ideas and projecting on the system of its architectural and artistic forms" [2]. These are the visual signs of Art Nouveau style partially presented in Lvov architecture and fully shown in Vladivostok.

This architectural decoration makes urban environment attractive for a tourist, who is focused on discovering new places from general to specific - from sea panoramas to a city's high point, from a city view to individual architectural objects attractive by their shape and decoration elements that transforms them to the level of human – scaled perception. We get visual access to a city's "parterre" and its plastics that make walking around the city so attractive.

At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, as mentioned above, Vladivostok was intensively developing also due to active foreigners, who kept in touch with their homeland. Material well-being gave them a right for respectable position in the society and for a comfortable life without giving up any luxury or pleasure. European architectural fashion became the standard of beauty, and civil engineers educated in the St. Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineers were conductors for new-style art movements. Therefore, developed in the beginning of the century, architectural environment of Vladivostok, despite its low territorial covering, often elicit associations with St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Paris. This suggests that at the certain stage of development Vladivostok was set up as a European Russian city located on the eastern end of the country as the window to the Asia-Pacific region.

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