

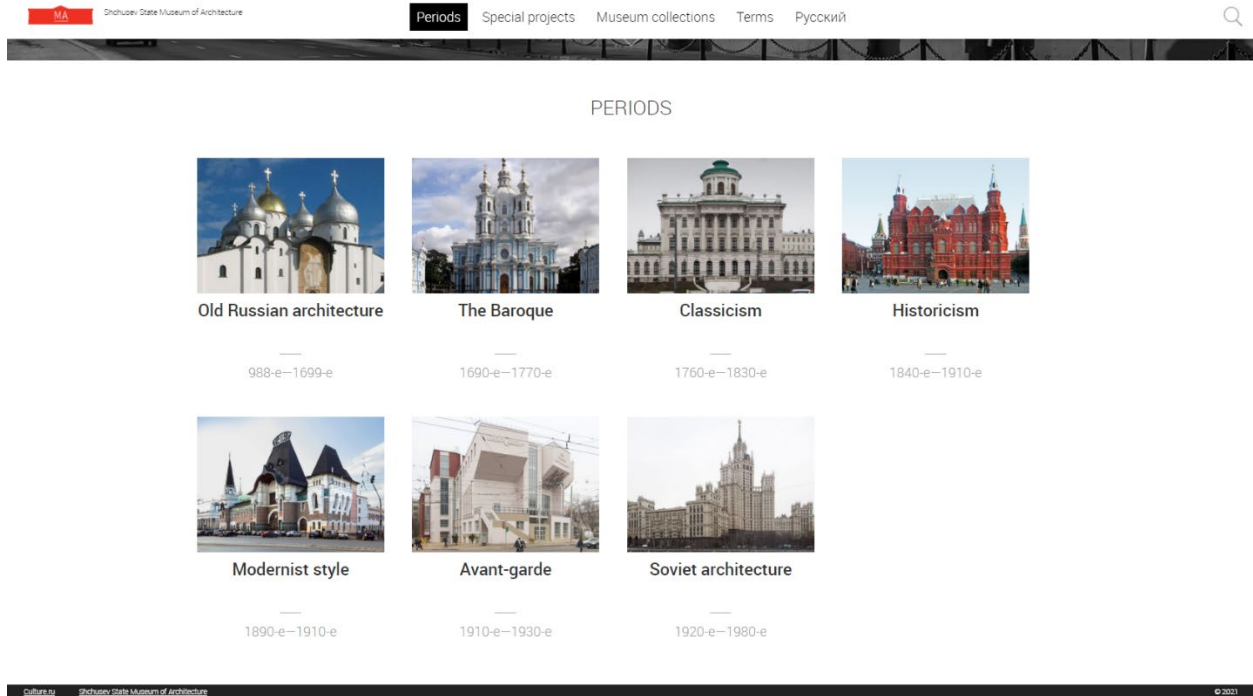
Virtual Museum - Shchusev State Museum of Architecture

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The [Virtual Shchusev State Museum of Architecture website](#) is a free digital annex of the Russian State Museum of Architecture, named after Alexey Shchusev, designer of Lenin’s Mausoleum in 1930 and one of Russia’s most well-known 20th century architects. While Shchusev was a Soviet architect, he worked in a range of styles, and like this museum, exemplifies the breadth and capability of a Russian architect. This ambitious project aims to maximize technology to represent architecture in a truer, more appropriate way, building by building. It is for the ‘non-specialist audience’ and is meant to stand in for those who cannot come to the museum by offering an interactive, experiential, multimedia opportunity to engage with, understand and take pride in this national resource. In addition to the website database, there is an app, not available in the US, and a ‘Time Corridor.’ The Time Corridor is an interactive exhibit physically at the museum, but is not accessible from the website. Research is encouraged and emphasis is placed on the importance of competitions, unrealized, and demolished projects, as well as the use of a variety of media from contemporary photos to period renderings, plans and sections.

The Virtual Museum is a dense collection of images of Russian architecture divided by Periods, Special Projects, and Museum Collections. Each section varies in terms of volume of material. Images of architectural details date from circa 600, and the category of “Old Russian Architecture” includes buildings from 988 to 1699. Museum Collections, sub-titled ‘Storage Units’ on its home page, contains hundreds of images of drawings, lithographs, photographs and watercolors with the name of the building as the sole identifier. Special Projects consists of eight well produced short films providing great detail about significant projects, such as [Melnikov’s Workers Club](#). There is also a dictionary of 87 terms referring fairly specifically to Russian architecture.



Supported by the Russian Federation Ministry of Culture, the project has the feel of a state-run and sponsored promotion of Russian Architecture. The only foreign language alternative is English and it is very clearly available, significantly broadening the possible audience. But the translation is inconsistent and often not only clunky, but difficult to understand and even absent. Within Special Projects: Project of the Grand Kremlin Palace, the translation nonsensically reads: “solemn pathetic of classical forms should have dominated.” There are also some instances of inaccurate information, like the explanation that Modern style is called [“tiffany” in the USA](#). Many of the images load slowly, appear cropped or are behind a text block that must be closed to view the entire scan. Generally the information is presented on one page and can be accessed by continually scrolling down. There are no links, which is unexpected and make navigation more difficult. Clearer or more standard organization of the site would allow the user an overview of available information and search options.

Despite quirky translations and some awkward image access and navigation, this is probably the most detailed online resource of Russian architecture available in English. This effort feels like an authentically Russian experience of the architecture of the country, which is complicated and enormously rich. Users will take joy in viewing this collection of films and images of amazingly beautiful architecture, and that, more than any frustration at the website’s idiosyncrasies, is the take away.