

# REPORT ON FREE PLAN APARTMENTS IN MOSCOW

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The beginnings of the FREE PLAN APARTMENTS in Moscow appear to be in the mid-90's. At that time, according to architect Vladimir Plotkin, he was asked to design a luxurious condominium building, for a certain development company, with the highest standards of finishes and equipment. Immediately after units were sold, the owners of the units demolished everything and did their own thing inside. Developers got the idea, and thought they could make money – and reduce risk and headaches - selling empty units.

Now, 15 years later, many dozens of free plan apartment buildings have been built and more are built every year in Moscow, by many developers. Developers do not have a problem getting financing, and condo unit buyers do not have trouble finding loans for their own fit-out, or architects and contractors willing to do the work.

St. Petersburg's housing stock is being amplified with free plan apartments, evident by checking on-line advertisements for real estate. The same phenomenon is evident in middle-size cities such as Samara, Nizhniy Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Rostov on Don, where realtors have proposals to sell free plan apartments. Even in small cities such as Cherepovets we see evidence of this: there are three housing with free plan apartments there.

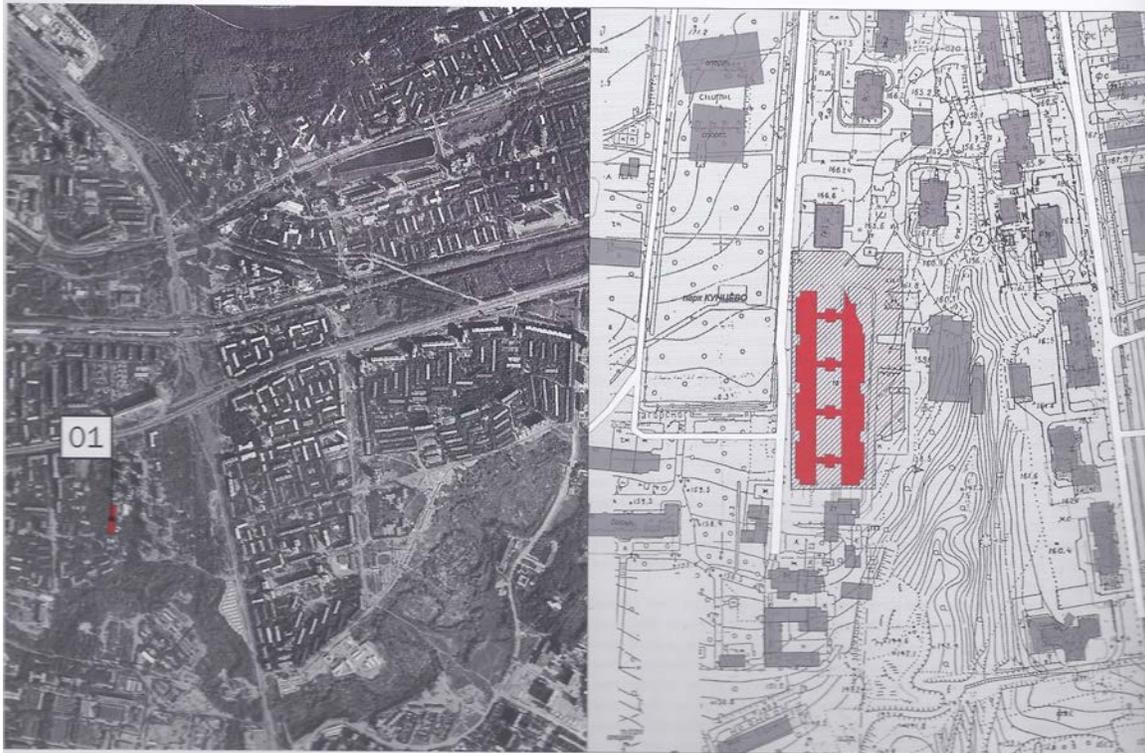
In a book published in 2001 called The Free Plan (Project Russia 20, edited by Bart Goldhoorn), the evidence for and rationale for this development is discussed. Little else has been written about what is now a way of developing real estate assets that is no longer controversial. A project by Mr. Plotkin was presented – the Catamaran House. I visited that project on a recent visit to Moscow (June 2013) and report briefly on it here. Other architects doing Free Plan Apartment projects include Mr. Skuratov – an architect doing free plan buildings (copper building in downtown Moscow) and Mr. Skokan – another architect doing free plan buildings (e.g. one near the Canadian embassy - <http://ostarch.ru/portfolio/realizations/0/2247/>).

## CATAMARAN HOUSE

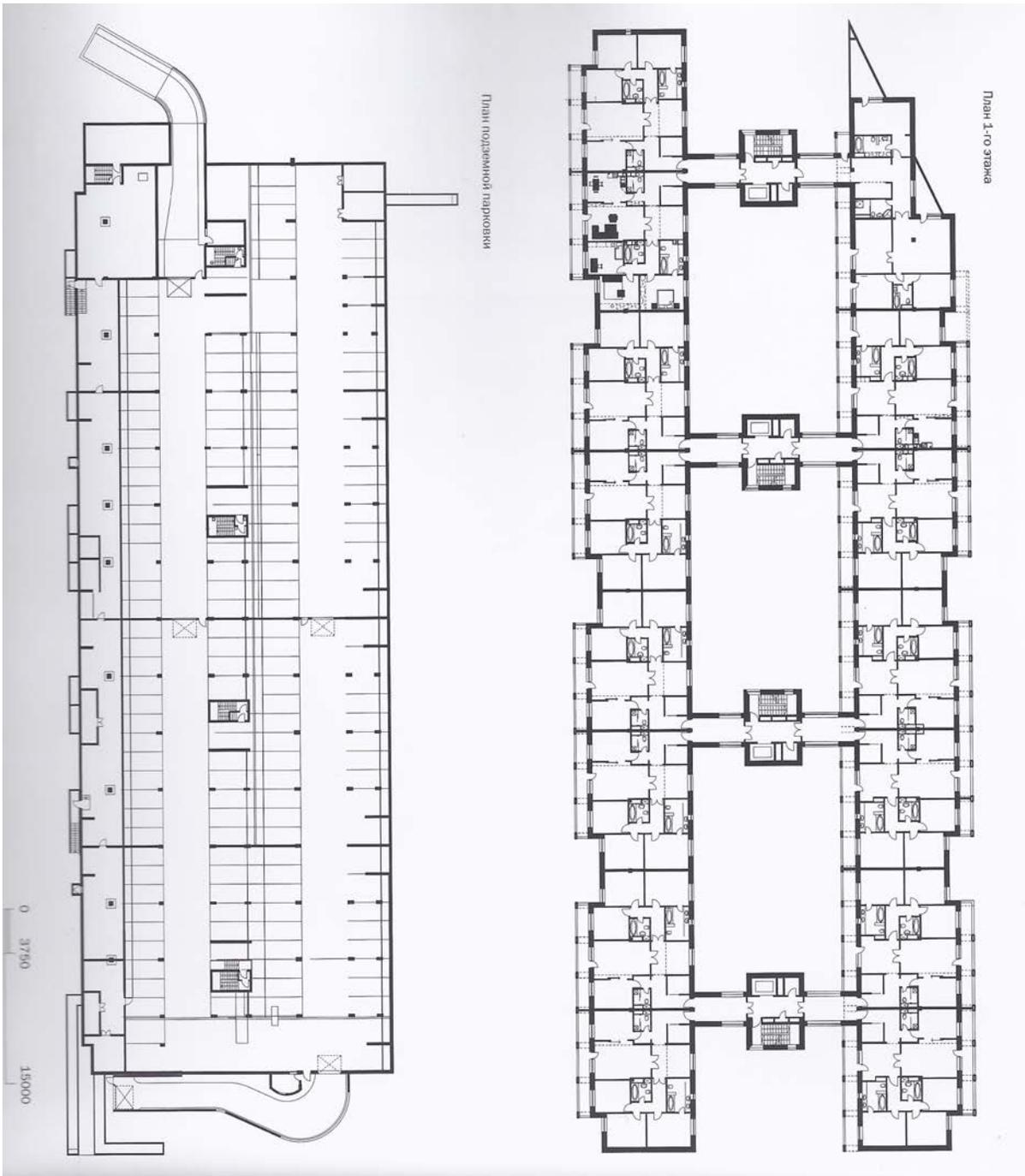
The Catamaran House is outside the center of Moscow, at Proezd Zagorskogo, 11. It has two main 7-floor blocks of residences, parallel to each other, each divided into four sections each of which is served by an elevator/stair core. Underneath the building is a parking garage for 144 cars. The first floor of the western wing is a leisure zone, while the ground floor of the other wing is occupied by a series of two-level dwelling units, with ground floor “front door” access to the public space. The building was laid out with 107 dwelling units, as approved by the city building

department. In fact, the number of units is different and is still evolving (some smaller units are being combined at present into larger units).

- Initially, Mr. Plotkin designed all units, in order to get official building permit;
- The contractor only had the empty building drawings;
- The agreement with the developer stipulated that Plotkin would approve all the condo unit plans, even when designed for each occupant by other architects;
- The base building design had balconies on all units; but no condo buyer (except Mr. Plotkin) used the balcony space. Everyone knocked out the separating wall and door and simply used the balcony space for interior space;
- The window-wall façade system made it very easy for condo buyers to replace insulated (opaque) window panels with glass, from the inside.
- In the first year, only 4 units were occupied; the occupation/fit-out of all the units took several years to complete. Average time to complete a fit-out is 6 months +.
- Construction materials went up in the passenger elevators.
- The condo fee is over \$1000/month, paying for grounds maintenance, 6 security guards, etc.
- Standard practice, like in Europe, is to pour the concrete slab (20-25cm) with a rough-unfinished upper surface; then lay the conduits for electricity, plumbing, radiators, etc.; then pour the topping of 10 cm or so with lightweight concrete.
- Partitions are then installed using either hollow clay tiles, gypsum block, or metal studs and gyp board.

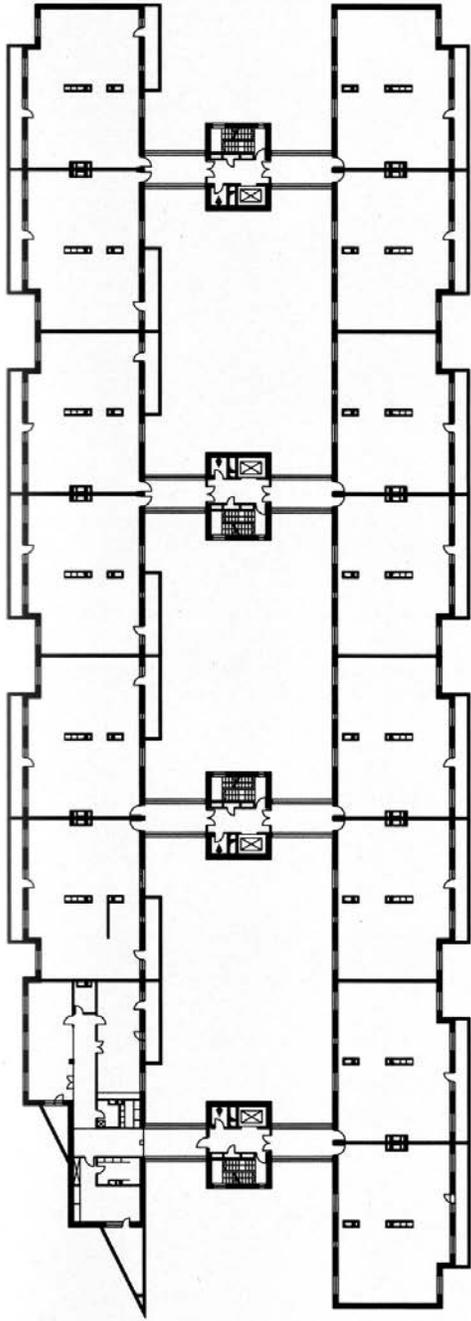


Location and Site Plan



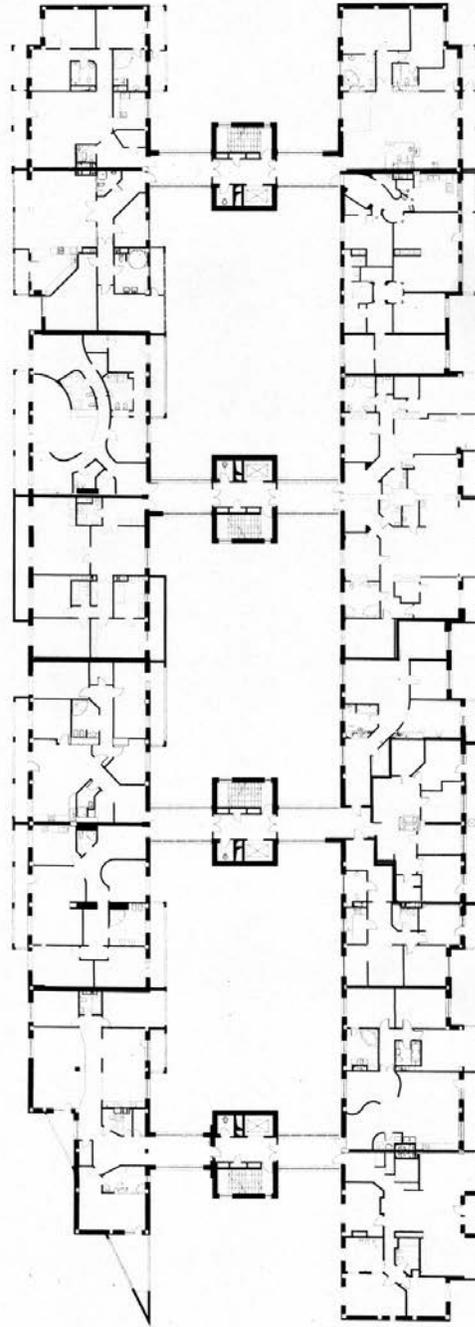
The underground parking

The floor plans as drawn by Mr. Plotkin and submitted for the building approval.



ТПО «Резерв»  
 Жилый дом в Москве. 2000  
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The drawing given to the contractor



ТПО Reserv  
 Apartment block in Moscow, 2000  
 plan of the building  
 plans of the apartments

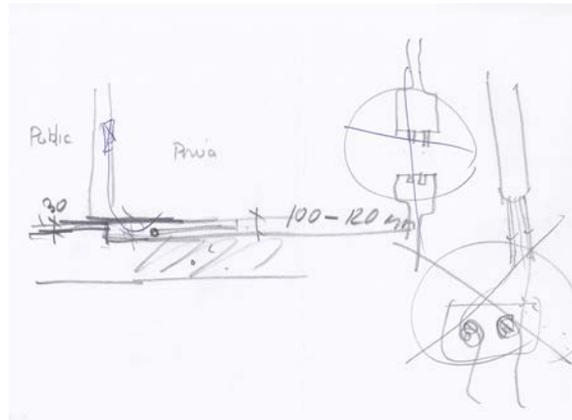
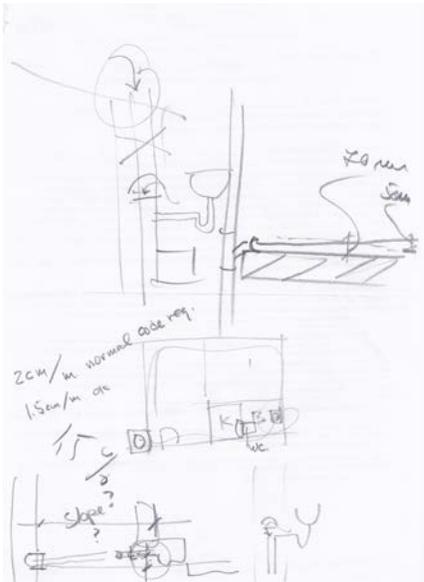
The actual floor plans as built originally  
 (some have changed since)



Mr. Plotkin's apartment with a mezzanine level inside.



Interior views of Mr. Plotkin's apartment on the top of the building



Sketches by an engineer in Mr. Plotkin's office of the required slope of the black water drain line (3%) and the connection to the vertical pipe shaft. Piping can run in the second floor layer (see below sketch) or along walls or in cavities between walls.

Another sketch of the depressed floor inside the private space; another sketch showing that traditional "wire nut" electrical connections are the norm.

## Club House Tverskaya

We were able to enter and photograph a new free plan project – Club House Tverskaya - developed by Capital Group (<http://www.capitalgroup.ru/>) at Tverskaya Street 4-10 in Moscow (<http://www.cg-deluxe.ru/tverskoy/>). This is a two-section, 11 story building with office premises on the first two floors, as well as an underground two-level parking structure for 65 cars. Two separate entrances each serve 22 dwelling units, built empty for customization by each owner.



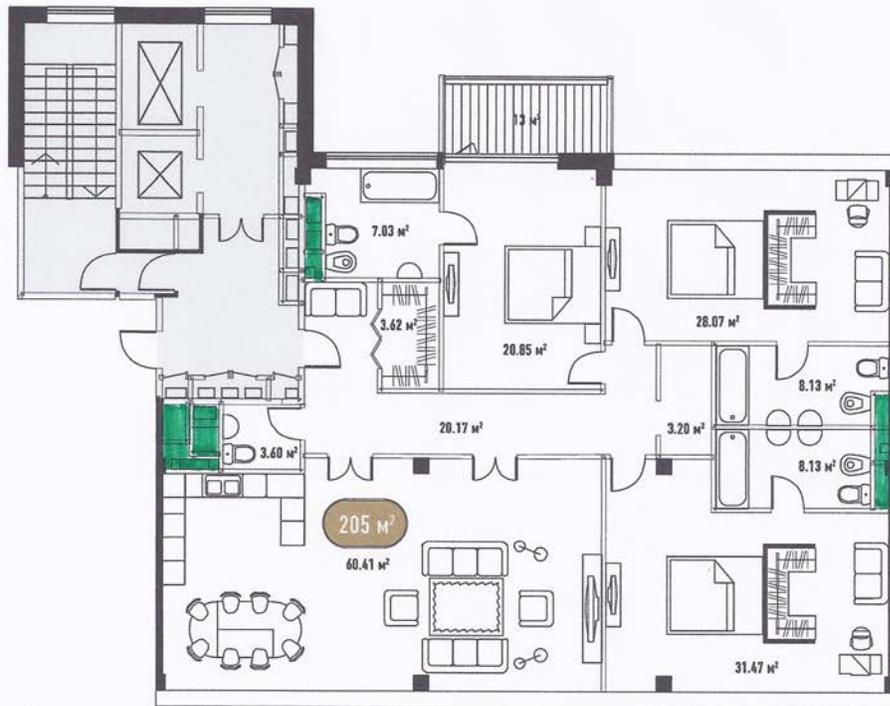


The garden side of the project with entrance to underground parking and main entrances to the apartment elevators





Area: **205 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Floor: **7**  
Entrance: **A**



Sample layout. The green toned areas are the vertical pipe and ventilation shafts inside the free plan area. Other vertical utility shafts are located in the elevator/fire stair core area, including the utility “meters” for each apartment.



Area: **157 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Floor: **7**  
Entrance: **A**



Sample layout. The green toned areas are the vertical pipe and ventilation shafts inside the free plan area. Other vertical utility shafts are located in the elevator/fire stair core area, including the utility “meters” for each apartment.



Empty unit/radiator lines already laid down; three vertical drainage pipes visible



High ceiling space (3.75m +/-) and entrance door are visible.



Eight vertical ventilation shafts (this is an 8<sup>th</sup> floor unit); entry with radiator piping and valves at the front door



An empty space ready for fit-out



This unit's partitions are made of gypsum block and plaster as finish. Electrical lines are buried in a conventional way in the walls, in conduits.

## SUMMARY

“Free Plan” is not an official term, according to the State Housing Inspectorate of the city of Moscow. It is rather a term of convenience used by developers, realtors and architects.

According to the current Russian building code, living spaces in one unit of a multi-story building must be above and below living spaces in apartments above and below it; similarly with bathrooms and kitchens. In fact, in practice, this is not followed in the FPA projects.

It is yet to be determined how projects gain official building permits because of this variance. Also to be studied are the lending and financing methods for both developers and the apartment buyers.