

[www.kuskovo.ru](http://www.kuskovo.ru)

Ensemble Kuskovo originally owned by the Sheremetev family, as a specimen of a typical 18th century Moscow region residence. The estate was designed as a site for receptions, celebration and other festivities. More than 20 unique monuments of architecture with genuine interiors have been presented including a Dutch House, an Italian House, a Grotto, Greenhouses, others.

Another point of interest in Kuskovo Estate is the only regular French park to have survived in Moscow. There are ponds, canals and Russian and Italian sculptures in it.

The centerpiece of the estate is the Palace residence. Especially interesting is the original planning and ornaments of the interior. This includes superb works of Russian and European art, decorative arts and crafts and unique collection of 18th century paintings, primarily portraits of Russian emperors and several generations of the Sheremetev family.

The Museum possesses one of the largest collections of ceramics and glass from different countries dating from antiquity up to present days.

Old traditions of hospitality are being revived at the estate, and the museum organizes theatrical programs, receptions and other festivities. During the summer the Palace Dance Hall plays host to numerous concerts and musical festivals.

Magnificent architectural monuments, original interiors, a beautiful park and a unique collection of ceramics and glass will create unforgettable impressions, immersing you into the world of an old Russian estate.

**History of the Museum**

The museum opened to the public in 1919 on the grounds of Count Sheremetev’s estate, which had been nationalized in 1918 in accordance with the decree issued by the Council of People’s Commissars. This decree was intended to guarantee the protection of the country’s cultural inheritance and its valuable works of art.

In 1932 the Moscow Museum of Porcelain, which had been founded in 1920 from the collections of such famous Russian porcelain collectors as Alexei Morozov, Lev Zubalov, and Boris Shchukin, was transferred to Kuskovo. In recent years this remarkable collection has been considerably enlarged as a result of the transfer to Kuskovo of valuable exhibits from the State Museum Reserve, and leading museums in Moscow and St.-Petersburg. The museum has more than thirty thousand exhibits of ceramic and glass ware.

**Architectural Park Ensemble**

Kuskovo is first mentioned in documents dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was a small boyar estate only about seven kilometers from Moscow. The land was not good for cultivation, and was thus of little economic significance. The estate was however an ideal hunting ground, and it even attracted the attention of the Tsar. In 1715 the Kuskovo estate was bought by Count Borisn Sheremetev from his younger brother Vladimir. The elder Sheremetev was a well-known Field Marshal in the times of Peter the Great, a hero of the battle of Poltava, and a companion-in-arms to the Tsar. He was later given the title of count. His son and heir Piotr Sheremetev became, after his marriage to Princess Varvara Cherkasskaya in 1743, one of Russia's richest noblemen. The neighbouring Cherkassky estate, Veshniakovo, was added to Kuskovo, and in accordance with the fashion of the day, a huge country residence was built on the combined grounds for holidays and pleasure trips.

Kuskovo was built between 1740 and 1780. The bulk of the construction was carried out in the 1750s. The engraving of the estate by Pierre Laurent, which was based on Alexander Ivanov’s drawing of 1767-69, and on the plans drawn up by Alexei Mironov in the 1780s, gives us an idea of the special layout of the estate. The axis more than three kilometers long runs from the south-east to the north-west of the estate, and serves to link up three component parts – the ground beyond the lake, the formal park, and the landscape park.

The compositional centre is the one in the middle – the formal park, which retains to the present day its original layout. Elements of regularity were also introduced into the part beyond the lake. The three paths which dissect it are oriented towards the main portico of the Palace. The Great Lake and the island to the south-west of the estate are also designed in keeping with the overall geometrical scheme. The Great Lake together with the smaller ponds and the canal encircling the formal park make up the waterways of the estate. These are supplemented by a 300-metre-long canal which once ended at a rich ornamental sandstone wall decorated with cascade fountains. The wall has unfortunately not been preserved and we can only guess at its appearance from eighteenth-century engravings and drawings. The canal opened onto the seventeenth-century Veshniakovo church, which played a significant role in the architectural layout of the estate. The maze, a square of winding passages bordered by high hedges, introduced an element of regularity into the English landscape park.

The central feature of the estate, the Palace with its splendid forecourt and magnificent formal garden, is the best preserved part of the estate. The forecourt is combination of the designing principles of the old boyar estate and the resplendent eighteenth-century country residence. The asymmetrical, irregular arrangement of the buildings gives the forecourt a picturesque quality, while the positioning of the Palace on the main axis emphasizes its centricity.

**Palace 1769-75**

The Palace was built on the site of an old manor – house under the direction of the Moscow architect Karl Blank (1728–1793). The Palace was built in 1769-1775 in the style of early classicism. The Palace is built in wood, the traditional building material used by Russian architects, but the stuccoes walls imitate the lines of stone-work. The lower floor is built in brick with a white sandstone cornice surrounding the socle. The main entrance is made in the form of a high six-column portico with the monogram *PS* incised on the central pediment. Two gently sloping sandstone ramps lead from the entrance and end with sphinx figures on their parapets. The Palace was intended solely for receptions and this accounts for its layout and décor which have been preserved almost intact since the 18th century.

**Palace Interiors**

The Kuskovo country estate was built in full compliance with the tastes and rules prevalent in the life of the Russian nobility and the 18th century art. This is the compositional center of the Kuskovo ensemble, one of the earliest examples of the summer countryside residences in Russia. According to the design of its owner, count Pyotr Borisovich Sheremetev, the Kuskovo country estate was intended to be larger and more beautiful than the estates of other nobles, and to be no inferior to the tsar’s residences. The construction of the estate was carried out in the 1730s-1790s on an area of over 300 hectares, including three parks: the French regular park, the English landscape park and the pond portion, a system of ponds and channels, small and large architectural and park ensembles. The Kuskovo estate was intended specially for guest reception and mass outdoor fetes. The most solemn receptions were held in the Palace.

The Kuskovo Palace was built in 1769-1775 by Moscow architect Karl Blank in the style of early classicism. The Palace was built from wood, the traditional material for Russia, plastered and painted in soft rosy colors. The entrance is made in the form of a high six-column portico with a front staircase and ramps decorated with the sphinx figures. The one-storey building with mezzanines rests on a high stone socle. The Palace’s layout represents an enfilade arrangement of its interiors. All the rooms are consistently grouped into three compositional groups. The largest group of the interiors is located in the western portion of the Palace and consists of 12 state-rooms. The other two groups of the interiors are concentrated in the smaller eastern portion of the building.

1. VESTIBULE.The vestibule opens the interiors of the Palace and its main enfilade of state-rooms. The walls are painted in oil spread over a coat of plaster and imitate marble. The niches accommodate vases made of plaster of Paris by renowned decorator Johannes Justus.

2. ANTECHAMBER – RECEPTION ROOM. The antechamber that is also a reception room reveals the basic principles of the artistic decoration of palace interiors in the 2nd half of the 18th century. An exquisite fireplace and an oven with multicolored tiles demonstrate the European trends and Russian traditions.

3. SECOND RECEPTION ROOM (TAPESTRY ROOM). Tapestries-verdures made in Flanders at the end of the 17th century depict European specimens of parks and gardens and seem to remind visitors of similar analogues in Kuskovo.

4. CRIMSON RECEPTION ROOM. One of the front rooms got its name from the color of its wall drapery and furniture upholstery. The room’s ornament combines the elements of various styles of the 18th century - baroque, rococo and classicism.

5. STATE BEDROOM. The interior decoration is borrowed from France. Exquisite and festive, state bedrooms served as a sort of reception rooms demonstrating the owner’s individual taste.

6. CABINET-BUREAU. It opens a series of intimate chamber rooms for personal use. The study was made in honor and memory of Emperor Peter I. The note table is one of the most unique objects in the Kuskovo collection, which has preserved with documentary accuracy the look of the country estate of the late 1780s (marquetry technique).

7. PERSONAL DRESSING ROOM. During festive receptions ladies and gentlemen used this room to make their exquisite toilets. At the center of the room there is a table with the mirror in the modeled porcelain frame. An enameled shaving receptacle and a jug with the handle in the form of a dragon are located nearby The furniture specimens testify to the fact that Chinese art was the object of passion in Europe.

8. DIVAN-ROOM. This room with one window and a high divan was a room designed for rest. On the reading desk there is the famous book entitled: *The Letters of Peter the Great to General-Field Marshal, Count B.P. Sheremetev* compiled and published in St. Petersburg in 1774 by the son of the field marshal.

9. LIBRARY. As a compulsory room in the palaces of the enlightened nobility, the library in Kuskovo acquires the meaning of a study of rarities. The four bookcases kept only favorite books and items linked with science and art.

10. EVERY-DAY BEDCHAMBER. The every-day bedchamber was designed for rest. To the right there is a fireplace faced with marble and featuring insertions painted by French artists in the Pompeian style. The portraits of the Sheremetev family stress the intimate nature of the interior.

11. PICTURE GALLERY. As in all the galleries of the time of Catherine II, the pictures in the Kuskovo country estate are arranged by the color, theme, and size, and almost completely hide the flat walls.

12. DANCING HALL. The dancing hall is the artistic and essential center of the Palace’s composition. The dancing hall is undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of Russia’s estate art. The silvery of mirrors and the crystal glitter of lighting devices complement the festive magnificence of the white and gold pattern of the interior.

13. CARD ROOM. This room was intended for entertainment. Carved card tables were designed both for card and chess playing.

14. BILLIARDS ROOM. The center of the composition is the billiard-table made in England in the I770s. The plafond *Allegory* with the medallions featuring *The Seasons of the Year* by an unknown Russian artist, the panel *Ruins* above the fireplace by Italian decorator A. Perezinotti reveal interest in the mythological and biblical themes typical of pictures in the homes of the 18th century Russian nobility.

15. DINING-ROOM. One of the most ceremonial rooms was designated for festive dinners of selected guests. Each element of the decor is reminiscent of the valor and significance of the Sheremetevs.