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A Heavenly Surprise from Hayastan Fund

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Recently a number of mass media outlets have literally burst with a new top theme and have shown concern over the destiny of the park, which is being reconstructed by Hayastan Fund. The park that was laid in 1940s at the moment of launching the reconstruction had completely drooped and was perishing in front of our eyes. And the saddest part is that it is located in the very center of the city- just in front of the Presidential Palace. Nothing of what is being done in this park by Hayastan Fund and the specially invited architect and specialist of landscaping and eastern gardens French-Swiss Pierre Rambach, who is both a theorist and a practicing architect, is to the liking of the reviles.

A common park, nothing special, which was established 60 years ago in a simplistic Armenian-soviet style: alleys, arbors, later-attractions. When the underground was being built, the station was stuck into this park, a huge metal and glass box, which for many years was considered a somewhat architectural accomplishment. And at that time the wide concrete alleys were built in the park. The park was greening and growing without any proper care. The greening specialists were working carelessly. The years of independence have completely disfigured the oasis, which was left without water and any agronomical expertise. Shortly after it turned into a mal-attractive place- stinky and dirty. The agreement regarding the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the park was signed with the Fund on the 18th of October 2006. For a whole year Pierre Rambach was studying the park and designing the draft project, which was later approved. The reconstruction works started in May 2007 and were expected to finish by May of the current year. Because of technical problems that occurred unexpectedly, connected with the underground station, cables etc., and their settling June and July of the last year were spent in vain, which resulted in the postponement of the completion of works up to the mid September.

1,6 hectares, called the Park of “սիրահարների”, which means of those in love, (in English- lovers) Rambach subjected to fundamental reconstruction. Some people claiming that the park’s real name is Pushkin Park were taken aback by the “new” name. This is not true. In 1949 the park was named after the poet to mark his 150 anniversary, however later due to unknown reasons it was renamed and called “Barekamutyun” Park and later in 1995 it was called “Սիրահարների” (lovers) on the order of the head of the city council, member of APD V. Khachatryan.

Rambach is creating a landscape park, and not a Japanese one as voiced by a number of “experts”. First of all, all the drain trees were fallen. There were 19 such trees registered, three out of which were preserved and two of which blossomed this spring. All the concrete and the alley tiles were removed. All this fuss begun last year when the public could not understand what could a park reconstruction possibly mean. They were convinced that the park is when trees, bushes and weeds grow without any grooming. Rambach is creating a park of a European style, where various landscapes, lawns, meadows, clumps, streams of water, waterfalls, a small lake with its small island open to our eyes. “We use deep-well (artesian) water” says coordinator of the works, architect Sarhat Petrossian. Part of this water in a closed circle will circulate by the streams, lake and the waterfalls, other part of it will be used for the automatic “computerized” watering. The tracks for the “stream-channels” were laid after a thorough check-up in order not to damage the rootage of the trees accidentally. The idea of Rambach is to combine three elements in a small space, i.e. greens, water and Armenian stones. To chose the stones, Rambach was specially traveling around Armenia to find what is necessary. Some are from Aragats, and they are used for the decoration of the White waterfall, made of travertine, the other black one- is made of polished granite. In some places the stones “step out” from the water onto the lawn, in other cases they “run into” the lake or the stream. Wild stones are setting the lake and the streams in a frame. In some places the bottom of the lake and the runways of streams will be covered by colorful pebble from Sevan, in some places there will be beautiful cobbles. There is a fish-stone, a frog-stone. Pierre several times has changed their places to acquire maximum effect. There is a small paddling pool for kids: they like to play in the water so much.

There are not going to be any special entertainments in the park. A self-service café (16 m2), amphitheatre with 200 seats, a few arbors, toilets. What is striking: there are no steps and stairs anywhere, so citizens in wheelchairs will also be able to enjoy the park. The alleys in the park are smooth, they repeat the relief of the place. They will be covered with crashed stone and basalt sand, and some of the small roads and the central alley will be paved with natural stone. No dangerous borders, only natural "borderlines", i.e. the line where the lawn and the road meet.

"Rambach has thought over all types of trees and bushes that will be replanted in the park. This process will start in September. Mainly this will be evergreen plants in order to make the park look beautiful throughout the year. He has also planned some flowering trees, like cherries for example. The lake will be decorated with water lilies," says Sarhat Petrossian. Five gardeners and one dendrologist will work in the park, and overall about 25 people will carry out its maintenance. And this is in conditions, when in other parks of Yerevan there are almost no gardeners or dendrologists, at list professional ones. Except for the Cascade of Gafesjian: here also everything is in tiptop shape. In the Lovers Park there will be flower-beds and curtains that will form a contrast with the green of the lawns. One of the critic-authors in a picturesque manner dramatizes the situation saying that the green plantations are being destroyed. If the wilted, partly bald areas with unknown grass are green spaces, then yes, they were destroyed. Degenerated, wild-looking bushes were also cut. Because a garden, be it ancient, Romanian, Mauritanian, Mongolian, Carolingian, Japanese, French or English it is always an artificial, cultivated environment. Therefore there is no need in lamenting, hysterically crying and bestrewing ashes on ones head at the sight of a reconstruction of a park that run wild. And also, no need to mislead peaceful citizens. No need to infuriate the masses. The garden is meant not only for taking dogs for a walk in them, even if it is a Dalmatian, it is also meant for quite contemplation.

Today under the vigilant watch of Honored Master Pierre Rambach (who by the way was the student of Ogust Perre) and his wife a small bulldozer and other machines are working, also people work here: they move the soils from one place to another, bring new ground, put the stones, they cut branches of threes that have drained long ago, lay down the watering system. One doesn't need to have great imagination to understand what it is going to look like, just a small effort- and everything is clear. If there is the willingness to do so, of course. At the opening there will be grass, water, flowers and greens here. But there definitely will not be dirt and garbage, broken benches and products of vital functions of our citizens. Sarhat even promises squirrels. Obviously, there will also be birds. There will be four types of lighting in the park: decorative lighting, standing lamps, surface lamps and spotlight soffits. As for the grass cover, it should be known, that owing to knew agro-technologies and different techniques it shapes in 2-3 weeks. Thus, for the day of its opening, on the 21st of September, the park will sparkle, let me use a cliché- by the emerald green of the real lawn.

This new park is a completely new shading on the space of Yerevan, and not a "dubious initiative" as defined by Lia Avetisyan. Thus the lamentations of our "home-bred" environmentalists accompanied by obsolete norms are not appropriate at all. An aged painter is humming concerning the issue, he is being extremely humorous, we don't need landscaping Lysenkos and Michurins, he says, we don't want a Japanese garden of stones. And summarizes: let it rejoice the people of Japan and not us. And We will find joy, as imagined by this painter of soc-realistic inclination, only and solely in pell-mell growing trees, that have not been touched by gardeners for ages, and in self-growing weeds and garbage. This is what we like. But eventually we must admit and know that the gardening culture has, alas, passed by us, let's not get into the reasons why. Now Hayastan Fund together with Pierre Rambach gives us a splendid lesson, and it should be mentioned not at all on the account of tax-payers. Overall this will cost about a million dollars. So why is this decuman wave of dilettantish outrage? Why do we need the opinions of people knowing nothing about landscaping architecture at all, and in general having seen very little in reality? The rejection of European and world practice is silly. Similarly civilized water closets can be rejected with the aim of returning to our native conveniences. Out of mere patriotism.. ...the Lovers Park will open on the 21st of September, however the works will continue. Parks are never handed in for turnkey- the work here is permanent and seasonal .In a few years it will look the way it was designed by a well-known theorist and practicing architect Pierre Rambach, Hayastan Fund and the Boghossians. They will continue the project "Boghossian gardens" in Gyumri. For 24 years they will realize the financing and maintenance of this park. Until we learn to treat it in a humanly manner. As even today every passer-by throws into the park garbage of different size and shape. It is not a secret that we have never had and we still do not have our landscaping specialists, not even such giants as Lenotre,

Brawn, Robinson, Milner, Jeckil, Packstone or Cleman, but contemporary ordinary landscaping specialists, that we could have invited from any European sister-city, that Yerevan has in dozens. At last the Master appeared. So why do we need to pick on him? To achieve what? The question whether the critics will visit the park remains open.
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