

# PASSPORT MOSCOW

JANUARY 2010

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1870

АБРАУ-ДЮРСО

Dangerous Places •  
Worth Visiting

Traffic-jamboree •

Wine and Dine (for a change) •

Beef at the BBC •

Icon-writing •



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36°N – Nagano, Japan

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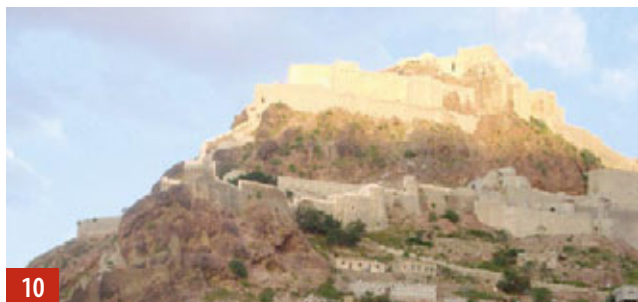
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## 3. Editor's Choice

*Alevtina Kalenina and Olga Slobodkina*



## 10. Travel

*Dangerous Places Worth Visiting, Luc Jones*

## 12. The Way It Was

*1992, John Harrison*

*Hot Spots, Helen Womack*

*Trophy Art, Helen Womack*

*Shocktroops, Art Franczek*

*The summer of 1992, Thomas Fasbender*



## 18. The Way It Is

*Icon Writing, John Harrison*

*Speaking in Tongues?, Scott Spires*

*In the Bleak Mid-winter, it's party time?, Stephen Wilson*

## 24. Real Estate

*Real Estate News, Vladimir Kozlev*

*Change-over at the top, Vladimir Kozlev*



## 28. Wine & Dining

*National Treasure, Charles Borden*

*More Fish (Peshi), Charles Borden*

*Sinatra Restaurant and Piano Bar, Leonard Nebons*

*Wine & Dining Directory*

## 34. Clubs

*New Year Nightlife Renewals*



## 35. Out & About

## 40. My World

*Bad Carma, John Harrison*

*Dare to ask Dare, Deidre Dare*



## 44. Family Pages

*Pileloops' Festival, Part III, Nantalie Kurtog*

*Puzzle Page*

## 47. Book Review

*California Preening, (review of Imperial Bedrooms), Ian Mitchell*

## 48. Distribution List





**John Ortega**  
Owner and Publisher

To all our readers throughout Russia, countries of the former Soviet Union, Africa, Eurasia the United States and Latin America, and to everybody I have ever had lunch with or taken out to Chicago Prime! We wish everyone a very happy Russian New Year, Russian Christmas and Chinese New Year!

As every user of WikiLeaks knows, PASSPORT is now incredibly popular throughout the entire world. To meet the insatiable demand for our magazine, we will be offering subscription and to the door delivery starting from the end of January. More details from: [subscription@passportmagazine.ru](mailto:subscription@passportmagazine.ru)



#### Guest Chef Series

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January 24–28, 2011

The gastronomic Kai Restaurant presents the Two Michelin Star guest chef Jerome Nutile, as part of its Michelin guest star series.

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#### "7 KRASOK at Kremlin".

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Shilov gallery, "7KRASOK" has opened new salon "7 KRASOK at the Kremlin".

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Our Nightlife editor Miguel Francis has brought his long time dream to Moscow. In Hollywood, Miguel used to produce all kinds of events for companies like SBE Entertainment, MUSE Lifestyle Group, Crème de LA Crème and others, working with some of the biggest nightlife players in town like Tony Benoit & Romain Rey-Chavent, Wilson Chueire, Costas Charalambous & Dean May. Starting this month Miguel will be organizing Passport Nightlife Tours, where he will gather a bunch of expats and tour them around the glamorous Moscow. Doesn't matter what age, sex or race you are, Passport Nightlife welcomes everybody to induce and indulge. Tonight Riccardo Oppi (Oppi Group), Andrew Kamnev (Brainpower) and Tyler Shenkel (Capital Investment Consultants) will all join Miguel to embark on a quest for sunshine. Stay tuned for the aftermath in the February PASSPORT issue! Please e-mail [miguel@passportmagazine.ru](mailto:miguel@passportmagazine.ru) for reservations.

Cover drawing by Artem Kostukevich, with special thanks to Abrau Derso. Artem Kostukevich was born in 1971 in Omsk. He entered the Leningrad Serova art school, and completed his studies in Hamburg. He has exhibited widely throughout the world from 2006 onwards.

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## Festival of sacred music



*Westminster Abbey Choir*

In January, the Moscow International House of Music initiates an unprecedented musical event: it will host a Christmas Festival of Sacred Music. Blessed by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia it will present leading choirs from different countries of the world, including the Choir of Westminster Abbey (London), the choir of St. Stephan of Decani Christ of the Cathedral of the Three Holy Hierarchs (Novi Sad, Serbia), the Cathedral Choir of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Moscow Synodal Choir, the Male Choir of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery, and the Choir of the Popov Academy of Choral Art. Vladimir Spivakov, Director of the House of Music, and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, are the artistic directors of the Festival and have selected the musical programme. Religious music is closely related to liturgical services in churches and is rarely performed anywhere else. The Svetlanovsky Hall of the House of Music with its fine acoustics will be an ideal place to present such sacred music to wider audiences. The festival also widens the boundaries of music that can be considered as religious. Along with compositions by "professional church composers", Dmitri Bortnyansky (1751-1825) and Alexander Kastalsky (1856-1926), there will be other pieces for choir and orchestra based religious texts. It is impossible to imagine Orthodox services without music, so this is a chance to delight in the musical side of Orthodoxy.

**9-23 January, Moscow House of Music**  
[www.mmdm.ru](http://www.mmdm.ru) and [www.passportmagazine.ru](http://www.passportmagazine.ru)

## Silver Camera: a visual archive for the megapolis of Moscow



Silver Camera is the title of an annual photographic competition initiated by the Moscow House of Photography. It was first held ten years ago and since then has become an important event for both amateur and professional photographers. After an initial selection, all the photographs are displayed anonymously and the winners are named by a jury at the end of the show in January. The jury usually has to decide from more than 12,000 submissions. 800 will be on display in the following nominations: Architecture, Events and everyday life, Faces.

Also in January on display in the new building of the Moscow House of Photography: Electrical Nights and Georgy Petrusov's retrospective. This is double bill with impressive video installations and work by some of Russia's best modernist photographers.

**December 15-January 25, 12:00-20:00 except Monday**  
 Moscow House of Photography, 16, Ostozhenka street

## Big artists, especially for children



A children's artist should be thoroughly kind, Victor Chizhikov, designer of the Moscow Olympic games emblem and contributing artist of the most popular Soviet children's magazine, *Merry Pictures*, once said. This exhibition of graphics from *Merry Pictures* celebrates the magazine's 55th anniversary. The exhibition at the Tretyakov displays graphics owned by the magazine's publishing house, which has printed an astounding five billion copies of *Merry Pictures*. Over three million illustrations were printed. But the most important thing is that almost every Russian child even nowadays remembers amusing stories and characters with names impossible to render in English: Samodelkin, Petrushka, Neznaka, Dyumovochka. These were the first Soviet "comics", though the word was not in use in the Russian. Today the magazine is known for its lively graphics.

**15 December-20 February, 10:00-19:00, Tuesday-Sunday,**  
 State Tretyakov Gallery, 10, Krymsky Val

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 to 13.00 on weekends

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## Celebrating Andrei Rublev



It is impossible to overestimate Andrei Rublev's influence on Russian culture. The greatest medieval painter of Orthodox icons and frescoes, a venerated saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, he created icons that helped Russia survive invasions, both morally and physically. Today his creations, and those attributed as his, are stored in several museums in Russia. Until the 17th century, Russian artists never signed their paintings, which is why attributions are usually based on literary evidence and style. Two major museums, the State Tretyakov Gallery and Moscow's Andrei Rublev Museum of Ancient Russian Art, collaborated to prepare this exhibition. Little is known of Rublev's life. Born in 1360, he was an assistant to the great Theophanes the Greek, who came to Russia from Constantinople. This means that he was trained in the Byzantine icon painting tradition where the spiritual essence of art is valued much more than naturalistic representation. Theophanes and Rublev are referred to as the initiators of the Moscow school of icon painting. Later Rublev became a monk in Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra near Moscow and then at the Andronikov monastery in Moscow. Written evidence confirms that Rublev also worked on the decoration of the wall paintings in the Dormition of the Virgin at Vladimir Cathedral, the Archangel Michael and the Saviour Cathedral in Zvenigorod. Some of frescoes are partially displayed in the Tretyakov gallery now.

**21 December – 27 February,**  
10:00-19:00 every day except Monday.  
State Tretyakov Gallery, 10, Lavrushensky lane

## Foreign orders of Russian Emperors

Insignias as Latin symbols of authority or power are interesting for experts and non-experts alike. Power, glory and precious stones come together in an aesthetically pleasing way. Orders are primarily to do with ceremonies and national traditions. The exhibition held at the One-Pillar Chamber of the Patriarch's Palace in the Kremlin highlights foreign orders and insignia awarded to Russian Emperors from the monarchs of European and Asian states. On display are more than three hundred artifacts created by renowned foreign goldsmiths, these are mainly insignia: stars, crosses and chains of different orders. Portraits of the emperors, their ceremonial costumes, interiors and historical documents are also on display. The project was initiated by the State Archive of the Russian Federation, State Archives of Ancient Documents, the State Historical Museum, State Hermitage Museum and other Russian museums.




**Until 9 March, 10:00-18:00, every day except Thursdays,**  
Kremlin Museums, One-Pillar Chamber of the Patriarch's Palace

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# Gorgeous Exhibition of Russian Drawings at the Tretyakov

Olga Slobodkina-von Bromssen

The Tretyakov Gallery has opened its archives to treat us to master drawings of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. The exhibition is called "From Orest Kiprensky to Kazimir Malevich" includes about 250 works of art created by such famous artists as Karl Bryullov, Pavel Fedotov, Aleksey Savrasov, Valentin Serov, Mikhail Vrubel, Konstantin Somov and others.

A pencil drawing is the beginning of all the fine arts. No artist can do without a pencil. The very word "pencil" (карандаш in Russian) is a derivative of the Turkic word "kara tash," which means a black stone. Its ability to react quickly, its portability give it a priority over other techniques and instruments. The pencil sketches ideas. At the same time a drawing exists as an independent kind of art, having its own language, its own specific laws and history.

There are different kinds of pencils—silver, lead, graphite, Italian, wax, coloured, lithographic and others, as well as a broad range of kindred materials for so-called dry drawing: charcoal, sauce crayons and sepia. The various devices of working with these materials reveal the individuality of the artist, his temperament, gift and the level of professionalism.

The Tretyakov Gallery has a unique collection of Russian drawings, which reflects the development of this kind of art quite closely. The current display allows us to follow this process step by step. The display shows rare 18th century drawings created using silver and lead pencils. The silver pencil, so popular during that time and which has fallen out of use now, leaves a weak silver trace on the paper while the lead pencil is recognizable by its dark-grey tone with a slight metallic shimmer.

In the first half of the 19th century, two kinds of pencils, Italian and graphite, were in broad use. The soft Italian pencil, which came to Russia from Italy, gives the drawing a lustreless, velvety quality and an intense black tone making the work look noble and warm. The Italian pencil reveals slightly blurred contours and tender light-and-shade. At the display





you will see pencil drawings created by Orest Kiprensky, Alexander Orlovsky, Vasily Tropinin, Fyodor Bruni and the whole galaxy of this genre's masters.

The graphite pencil can be of different degrees of solidity and intensity creating a greyish tone with a slight glimmer. The austere lines of the graphite pencil give the drawing hardness and precision. The display boasts perfect drawings created in graphite pencil by such renowned masters as Alexey Savrasov, Valentin Serov, Boris Kustodiev, Boris Grigoryev and Konstantin Somov.

At the end of the 19th century, coloured pencils appeared in the drawings of Lev Bakst, Konstantin Somov, Valentin Serov and Mikhail Brubel. Fillip Malyavin, known by his highly expressive drawings, paid tribute to the coloured pencils more than the others, for example in his famous work *Babi* (Бабы).

Close to pencils are charcoal, chalk, sauce crayons and pastel. The softness and looseness of these materials gives drawings special beauty. Free, sweeping drawings supplemented by charcoal and chalk look expressive and picturesque. Charcoal creates a deeper black tone than the Italian pencil and gives more opportunities to reveal various effects.

The exhibition shows a broad artistic variety of pencil drawings, so that the spectator, both professional and amateur, can enrich his or her understanding of the drawing techniques and enjoy the graphic masterpieces of more than two centuries of Russian art. **P**

*Tretyakov Gallery*  
*10 Lavrushkinsky Pereulok*  
*10.00 - 19.30*  
*(the box office until 18.30).*  
*Monday - day off*  
*Until April 26th*







# Experience the world of Samurai at the exhibition Samurai: the Art of War

by Olga Slobodkina-von Bromssen

Samurai: the Art of War is the name of an exhibition and a unique interactive project which has opened in Moscow. It presents the culture of the Japanese samurai: rich collections of ancient Japanese arms and armour, clothes and everyday items which will transport the viewer to medieval Japan.

The project's priority is to show the world through the eyes of the Samurai, a daring warrior, a refined poet and an inspired artist who is always ready to sacrifice his life for lofty ideals. The basis for this contemplation is the Bushido (the Warrior's Way), a philosophy of harmony between honest-to-God faith, absolute devotion, self-sacrifice, sincerity and the ability to appreciate beauty in all its manifestations.





Apart from showing items of the material culture, the project includes tea ceremonies, master classes by sword masters, films, master classes in ikebana, origami, calligraphy and many parts aspects of ancient Japanese culture.

Samurai: the Art of War is the first exhibition in Russia using 3-D technologies. The display presents a 3-D panorama of The Battle at Sekigakharu, a battle in 1600 in which 170,000 warriors took part. The battle has been recaptured in the finest detail.

The exhibition occupies 1,400 square metres of the restored architectural monument Meshaninovo Podvorye. It is divided into thematic zones, which allow guests to travel the way of a warrior in the direct sense of the word and observe all the stages of his life. Visitors can go from a medieval castle to a Buddhist Temple, wander Kyoto city districts and be guests in a noble samurai's house.

"Our exhibition is not an object, but an experience," says one of the project's creators, Georgy Aistov. "It presupposes total immersion: the guest becomes a participant. You can find yourself in the middle of a 17th century battlefield in 3-D and then take part in a tea ceremony performed in the ancient traditions. The choice is yours!"

History places the samurai in such an exalted position that one can imagine that they have existed as long as Japan itself. However, samurai began to form itself only in the 10th century A.D. The word samurai derives from the verb saburau, which means "to serve a person of a higher rank." In the 10th-12th centuries, during period of civil war, the samurai class was established, and the foundations of the samurai moral code took shape.

The moral image of a samurai was defined by the most important features of his individuality: fidelity, generosity, duty and honour. Apart from his professional qualities, a samurai needed to display mercy, compassion, forgiveness and sympathy. The key quality in the Bushido code is duty. A clear demarcation is made between one's own feelings and duty. Thus, we have the tradition of seppuku or hara-kiri, unthinkable in the West.

Every contemporary Japanese carries history around with him or her. One cannot understand contemporary Japan without its past. The past in Japan coexists with the present and sometimes even has priority.

One must pay tribute to the project itself. The organisers have tried to show various aspects of the life of samurai in the atmosphere of medieval Japan by using all forms of technology starting with traditional exhibition technology, up to the newest 3-D techniques. The display really makes one want to come back for more.

The exhibition Samurai: the Art of War is open until February 28 at the Vetoshny Art Centre (former Meshaninovo Podvorye behind GUM).

*Vetoshny Pereulok 13.  
Tel. 8-903-682-21-96.  
Nearest Metro;  
Revolution Square.  
Until February 28*





# Dangerous places worth visiting!

Text and photos, Luc Jones

Is the world we live in really so dangerous, or are we just falling for western propaganda aimed at scaring you into watching more news and being petrified at leaving the comfort of your own home?

As a student in Moscow in 1993, I spent a day with the BBC and asked Angus Roxborough why the western media portrayed Russia is such a negative light. His response was that people back home wanted to see something newsworthy that was out of the ordinary—an empty shop, preferably with a long queue stretching out of the door and with any luck a babushka waving her fist. If you really played your cards right, the Russian mafia might be trying to sell plutonium to Saddam Hussein, or an entire village going blind after an attempt at making samogon and distilling it at the wrong temperature.

Now *that's* news. Nobody wants to hear about the trains running on time. Well, I know a few London commuters who might beg to differ as that probably would make the news in the UK, but back to the main point of the article: how dangerous are some of the world's hotspots?

I thought I'd check a few out, mainly so that you don't have to, and I'm still here in one piece to tell the tale!

## Venezuela

There is a lot more to Venezuela than simply oil and Hugo Chavez's tub-thumping. The capital, Caracas, does suffer from spates of street crime—although much of this is either turf wars or opportunist—so take the usual precautions, dress down, don't make it blatantly obvious that you are a tourist, avoid flashing cash/jewellery around, and be on your guard at night; best to take taxis.

Having said that, this is a big country with lots to see without fear. Sun seekers head for Margarita island, whilst I flew down to Canaima in the middle of the jungle to see the famous Angel Falls, the world's highest.

One travel tip: you can get much better exchange rates than the banks offer by changing money on the black market—this is the norm and most hotel receptionists and taxi drivers will happily oblige. This is one place to avoid using plastic as you'll be charged the official rate, which makes for a more expensive trip. Likewise avoid ATMs (although I couldn't find any that would accept foreign bank cards). On

the whole it's an inexpensive holiday destination, and the Russians are now coming thanks to the recently installed visa-free regime—shame it's such a long way away or I'd be back again in a heartbeat!

## Yemen

You have to feel sorry for Yemen sometimes. How they didn't make it into Bush's Axis of Evil, Allah only knows. Their President might be firmly anti-terrorist and we were warmly welcomed by the locals that we met on a recent visit, yet there is more to this place than you'll read in the *Daily Mail*.

Yemen is poor, and has an exploding population, a problem not helped by an increasing number of Somali refugees. It also has few natural resources and even fewer friends. OK, this isn't Ethiopia in the 1980s, but it's a world away from the Skyscrapers of Dubai. This is a fiercely clan-driven society and the authorities don't have full control of some of the more mountainous regions up in the north where head-bangers are freer to plot to destroy the world's infidels.

So my simple advice is—don't go there! Stick to the beautiful capital Sana'a and get lost walking around the ancient buildings and markets, where you can





buy cheap spices to take home. You are unlikely to bump into many westerners here, the international media with its overblown stories of kidnappings has all but killed off the demand for anyone to visit Yemen other than as an absolute necessity. This is once of the few remaining places on earth where foreigners are actually a novelty and yet unlike Egypt or Tunisia you won't be permanently surrounded by hustlers trying to sell you junk. And one of the most pleasant surprises is that you will find the people and the southern half of the country

far friendlier and more welcoming than wherever you come from.

### South Africa

If someone back home gets shot, beaten up, knifed or glassed then unless a D-level celebrity was involved, it barely makes the papers. For some reason if the same thing happens to a tourist visiting South Africa, out come the headlines claiming that the crime rate there is worse than in Afghanistan. Black locals can tell the difference between a white Saffer and a white tourist within a split second, for the simple reason that there certainly are some dangerous parts of South Africa (downtown Jo'burg or some of the townships) but then again there's little to see there anyway so, go somewhere else!

South Africa is a beautiful country with beautiful scenery, a welcoming rainbow of different nationalities, plus everyone there speaks English!

My trip this summer was my first for a decade, and timed for the World Cup. All the pre-tournament hype about the high crime rate in the end predictably came to nothing. Hundreds of thousands of fans from all over the world enjoyed themselves without a hint of trouble—the country pulled out all of the stops and made it happen. Sure, they'll still got a way to go but it's worth it, even if just for the wine!

### Colombia

Most people associate Colombia with cocaine and the FARC rebel group, and they would be right, even if both are less than in their heyday. Sure, if you stride up to the head of the Medellin

drugs cartel, poke him in the stomach and tell him that his grandmother wears cowboy boots, then you're likely to finish up chopped finer than a line of the white stuff. In recent years former president Alvaro Uribe—with considerable assistance from the United States—has enjoyed success in disarming the paramilitary groups and making the majority of the country safer to both live in, and travel around.

You'll probably kick off a visit in Bogotá which, at 2,600m above sea level, is the third highest capital city in the world. With a population of over 8 million it sprawls out for miles and is prone to rain and mist due to the nearby mountains, but there are enough sights to keep you busy for a day or two. Stroll into the main square and then check out Narino Palace, the Presidential house. The safest and most convenient way around is by plane, and the national airline Avianca runs a modern fleet whose routes extend beyond this large country to much of the continent.

I buckled up and headed for Cartagena up on the Atlantic coast, which is now UNESCO World Heritage site, no less. You'll see why when you arrive; it's a beautifully walled city overlooking the sea, and stuffed full with Spanish, colonial, architectural gems. Get there early before the crowds, and the heat swallow you up and I promise you that your jaw will drop. Cartagena doesn't disappoint. Oh, and when you visit, just make sure that you pronounce (or spell) their country correctly—it's Colombia, not Columbia (as in the University in the USA)—or else you may well have a war on your hands! **P**





# 1992



John Harrison

1992 started with a new country and new hopes. As the pre-revolutionary Russian tricolour was hoisted above the Kremlin, it seemed that anything was possible. But the tidal wave which swept away the old system brought with it a lot of dead wood, and downright nasty deep-sea creatures which, once on the surface, clamoured for their share of the spoils. A right wing revenge was only to be expected after Yeltsin's astounding victory, but the strength and virility of the forces which aligned against Yeltsin in 1992 put even as tough a survivor as him on the defensive, forcing him to change tack and betray his alleged principles and colleagues.

Yeltsin could no longer play the anti-communist champion of the powerless. In chaos, everyone was powerless. According to VTsIOM statistics, Yeltsin's support was halved during the first three months of 1992. And yet somehow the man held on to power and the country continued to move further away from communism, albeit in a fragmented way.

What happened? Under his 'Great Leap Outwards' campaign, Yeltsin at first bulldozed ahead with shock therapy reforms. Yegor Gaidar (who died in 2010) was appointed first deputy prime minister on 2 March as Yeltsin was still officially prime minister. Prices of consumer goods were freed resulting in runaway inflation, and denationalisation of the country's assets continued. The crime rate doubled, corruption spread after privatisation, and tax evasion became rampant. The rouble depreciated on a daily basis; we bought German cooking-oil, French chocolates and British alcohol, watched Mexican soap-operas and American evangelists on TV. Russia's pride, the army, began its decline from 2.72 million men in 1992 to one million in 1999. The country suffered from losing its superpower status, and President Bush Snr was painfully slow in embracing the new Russia. The G7 was not interested in renegotiating Russia's Soviet debts.

Nevertheless, Russians remained in favour of reforms but realised just a little too late that mature capitalism is only possible with an independent judiciary and

regulatory system, both of which did not exist in 1992, and do not today. Foreigners flew in by the plane load to start businesses in the wild east. For many of them, if Russia's streets were not paved with gold, at least they glittered. Money was made, but the real winners were Russians who knew how to play the system from the inside. Oligarchs-to-be Khodorovsky, Smolensky, Berezovsky and others had already made their first fortunes. The old industrial elite tried to regain control of their empires and in desperation increasingly turned to nationalist and extremist groupings. According to a survey carried out in Moscow in 1993, only 26% of industrial enterprises were run by someone with a "professional" background. More than 68% were run by a former manager of a state enterprise.

To set the scene, a two thirds majority in the Congress of People's deputies was all it took to amend the constitution, which was changed several hundred times from 1990 to 1993. The constitution of the United States has been amended twenty seven times since 1791. The Supreme Soviet could strike down a presidential veto by a simple majority, and two thirds of the members of the congress could impeach the President. The legislative and executive branches of government drew further apart with even the vice-president siding against the President. The prospect of *dvoevlastie*, a duplication of power, raised its ugly head in Russia once again.

As Gaidar planned a second wave of price liberalisation, this time aimed at the oil and energy sector, criticism on the President grew acidic and intense. Although Gaidar was promoted to the position of acting prime minister on June 15. by that time Yeltsin had begun to distance himself from radical reform. Without the President behind him, Gaidar and champions of liberal political principles were severely weakened. Gavril Popov, mayor of Moscow resigned in 1992 after accusations of financial fraud. The few leading liberal survivors such as Sakharov's widow Yelena Bonner and Galina Starovoita became voices crying in the wilderness.

The President seemed to prefer a regal role of supreme arbitrator between war-

ring factions, allowing him to treat the democrats' problems and parliament as a whole with benign neglect. His periodic disappearances for a couple of weeks at a time did not help his image. In retrospect, Yeltsin's tactics, if one assumes that he had any, did work. He succeeded in uniting the country--against him. The threat of civil war was diffused, until 1993 at least. He attacked his enemies only after they had had time to expose themselves. Enconced in the Kremlin, the emperor had found some new clothes. This was the same person who had declared after the 1991 coup that: "Russia is a country in a transitional period which wants to proceed along a civilised path traversed by France, England the United States, Japan, Germany and others. It is striving to proceed precisely along that path through the de-communisation and de-ideologisation of all aspects of the life of society..."

Of the groups which appeared on the political front in 1992, the middle ground, which most closely resembled Gorbachev's democrats, were the "Atlanticists", made up of people like foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev who wanted Russia to adopt a Western course of development. Countering this position was a larger group of disillusioned democrats, the "democratic statist" who accepted that the general drift of Russia towards the West was natural, but pushed for a radically more assertive and right wing foreign policy, even as Estonia started pressing for a law on citizenship which would have isolated the Russians living there. Russians were being shunned from their adopted lands in Kazakhstan and eastern Ukraine. In Tajikistan, the outbreak of armed inter-clan struggle forced most Russian families to flee back to Russia in fear of their lives.

Then there were the "statists" who regarded all reforms as being negative. More extreme were the "Eurasians" who favoured an authoritarian form of rule that would consult but not necessarily heed the vox populi. For them, the West represented the devil incarnate and clearly out to enslave Russia with its consumerist society. Eurasia was to include Russians, Turkic-Iranian peoples, Balts, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Byelorussians, and would encompass Christianity and Islam. Articles



appeared throughout 1992 in the Russian press on the Eurasian theme, many written by Muslim authors who came forward to champion the newly resurrected "empire saving" ideology.

Nursultan Nazarbaev, the President of Kazakhstan attempted in mid-1992 to recreate the USSR by spearheading an effort to form a "Defence Union" of seven former Soviet republics, a "supra-national rouble" and "union bank". Arkady Volsky and his powerful industrial lobby, which allegedly accounted for 65% of industrial output in 1991 supported Nazarbaev, as did, not surprisingly, former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. Alexander Solzhenitsyn and a phalanx of other writers turned out to be secret Eurasia supporters, and one wonders how close the Eurasian point of view is to that of C19th philosopher N.A. Berdayev's vision of Russia being a bridge between the two worlds, in a country which has a double-headed eagle as its state symbol.

President Kravchuk of Ukraine bluntly rejected Gorbachev's initiatives, as did Vytautas Landsbergis, then Lithuania's Supreme Council chairman, who said Gorbachev was "speaking as a forthright imperialist." The Eurasian movement seemed to falter, however it diffused into at least two other movements, and Russia's dilemma between Slavophiles and westerners continued.

The "Civic Union" which was formed in June 1992 was a powerful right-centrist alliance and brought together the "democratic statist," which including Arkady Volsky, Vice-President Alexandre Rutskoi and Nikolai Travkin, chairman of the 50,000 member Democratic Party of Russia. Civic Union tried and succeeded in slowing down reform. Yeltsin had no intention of giving in to the demands of his Vice President and the increasingly outspoken Russian Supreme Soviet chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov who happened to come from Chechnya.

Whilst Yeltsin and his dwindling band of supporters were busy doing battle with the statist, a growing coalescence of the extreme right made its presence known. In October, the 'Front for National Salvation' aimed straight for the jugular and clearly stated its aims to unseat Yeltsin. Later that month, Yeltsin tried to outlaw the organisation, but newly established constitutional court ruled that a final decision should be postponed until February 1993. The arrest list that this group drew up replicated that of the KGB during the 1991 coup, but included a few more, such as Gorbachev, Volsky, Gaidar, Kozyrev,

Chibais, Sobchak and others. To National Salvation fanatics, all these people were de facto Western "fifth columnists." In October, one pro-democracy weekly Megapolis Express labelled the new salvation front "GKChP the Second."

The President began to show an authoritarian side. Slowly but surely, he awarded himself the very perks he had castigated before 1991. The absence of a stable multi-party system increased Yeltsin's freedom of manoeuvre in a country where the ruler or his party owns most of the land. Sergei Kovalev, the Russian government's human rights commissioner was increasingly isolated from ministers. Barely days after Vaddim Bakhtin, a loyal Gorbachev reformer was appointed head of the KGB in August 1991 with the mission of "presenting proposals for the radical reorganisation," but not its closure, he explained that the KGB could not open its 10 million KGB dossiers for fear of "splitting the country apart," and anyway, going public would make it impossible to recruit informers again.

One of Yeltsin's first acts in power was to create a new super ministry which encompassed the rump of the KGB and the ordinary police (the Ministry of the Interior). This meant the creation of an enlarged agency of social control which at least on paper would resemble Stalin's NKVD. Yeltsin started out trying to dilute the power of the KGB by mixing its officers with ordinary police who were more corruptible and therefore easier to control. This super ministry was unanimously vetoed on 14 January 1992 by the constitutional court. This was either a victory for the people or the result of pressure from the KGB. In late January the KGB took back its vital function of monitoring the political loyalty of army officers, and in June once again became the custodians of the country's border guards, albeit temporarily. Yeltsin's new head of the KGB, Viktor Barannikov turned native as soon as he entered Lubyanka and started defending the KGB's record during Soviet times. The only real change was that the KGB no longer scrutinized the churches. As a power battle between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament intensified, each side competed for control over the security ministry, which allowed the security service to follow its own agenda. This time the KGB was also interested in the commercialisation of its services, particularly in the export of raw materials.

In November, the communists, whose party had been banned in Russia in August 1991, obtained a decision from the

Constitutional Court in November 1991 allowing them to re-found themselves and use some of their old premises under the name of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation under Gennadi Zyuganov. Gone was the atheism and internationalism, but the commitment to Lenin and even Stalin remained.

By the time of the stormy Seventh Congress of the Russian People's Deputies in December 1992, Khasbulatov's de facto clout rivalled that of Yeltsin. The man's ambition knew no end, and he toured around the country issuing statements and doling out cash, seemingly representing "all Rus and the CIS." He reached out to economic groups threatened by Gaidar's shock therapy.

Komomolskaya Provda rightly called the Seventh Congress, "a major political defeat" for the Russian President. At one stage, he was abandoned by the heads of the Russian Defence Ministry, the Ministry of State Security and the MVD who in effect sided with the Congress against him. More than 80% of the Congress's deputies were current or former members of the communist party. At the Congress, Yeltsin found himself facing a solid, aggressive majority of communists encouraged by the re-legalisation of their Party. Then there were the nationalists and go-slow-toward-reform centrists. All wished to reduce Yeltsin's powers, and if he refused then he was to be impeached. The attempted coup failed by just 72 votes out of the 689 needed. Yeltsin actually offered compromises on major issues, but the deputies did not. By surviving, Yeltsin lost none of his actual powers, with the exception that the Constitutional Court was empowered to approve or reject Yeltsin's candidate for prime minister, while Yeltsin would in turn be able to organise a referendum to be held in April 1993. Under this brokered agreement, Yeltsin was forced to surrender Yegor Gaidar as his acting prime minister and to settle for a compromise "centrist" candidate, Viktor Chernomyrdin who was already a deputy prime minister.

Yeltsin's battles were by no means over; in fact this was all only a prelude to what happened in 1993. Nevertheless, people began to get used to the new freedoms. The era of open politics, where Russians actually identified with their leaders, a period which only lasted a few short years under Gorbachev, was drawing to a close. Instead there were bickering, angry men who shouted at each other, and who called themselves politicians. They commanded less and less respect. **P**



## A minefield for objective reporting

1992

Helen Womack

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a number of "hot spots" of ethnic conflict. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Christian Armenians and Muslim Azeris fought a nasty little war over the mountainous territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Each side accused the West of bias in favour of their enemy. It was difficult for reporters to be objective.

In February 1992, news came out that something terrible had happened in Khojaly, an Azeri settlement in the disputed enclave, mostly populated by Armenians. Hundreds of Azeri bodies were said to be strewn across a snowy mountainside. Were they battlefield casualties? Or had there been a massacre?

With a group of Moscow-based correspondents, I flew to the Azeri border town of Agdam, to which refugees from Khojaly had fled. We arrived in the middle of the night, tired, but instead of being taken to lodgings by our Azeri hosts,

we were bussed straight to the mosque to examine four mutilated corpses.

At three in the morning, I didn't know what to make of this. My rational mind said: "Four bodies don't equal a massacre." But at the deepest level of my being, I was shocked. "So when we are dead, we all look like broken dolls," I thought. I was young then and all I had seen of death was the closed coffin of my grandmother at a stiff English funeral.

The next day, we went to the cemetery, where Azeri women were wailing over 75 freshly dug graves. Following tradition, they had scratched their cheeks bloody and were producing a ritual, high-pitched howl. Graves decorated with dolls were those of young people due to have been married, we were told. More bodies were still out on the mountainside, waiting to be retrieved.

This was beginning to look like a massacre, I had to admit.

At the Agdam railway station, a train had been turned into a makeshift hospital, full of women, children and old men with gunshot wounds. The survivors



spoke consistently of how Armenian forces had attacked their town, of how civilians had fled into the forests, of how they had been trapped in a mountain pass and fired upon indiscriminately.

"A terrible tragedy has taken place but the world is silent," said Dr. Eldar Sirazhev. "The West has always supported the Armenian side because they have a large, eloquent diaspora."

I drew my conclusions and filed a report that on this occasion, the Azeris had indeed been the victims. Other times, it was the other way round. "Six of one and half a dozen of the other," as my mother used to say about playground fights. But the victims of Khojaly were Muslim.

I did my job, went home and unraveled. Some correspondents become war junkies but I had a kind of nervous breakdown. Having seen death like that, I suddenly became afraid of everything. Alcohol helped but it wasn't a long term solution. Mediation was better medicine, enabling me in middle age to embrace life. **P**

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# Hunt for painted prisoners of war

1992

Helen Womack

In 1992, the hunt was on for so-called "Trophy Art", paintings and other artifacts that Soviet forces looted from Berlin at the end of World War II. Had the treasures all been German, the scandal might not have been so great. But many were European masterpieces that the Nazis had grabbed from collections in occupied countries, such as Holland. The West hoped that newly independent Russia would come clean about the hidden pictures and return them to their rightful owners.

Two art historians, Konstantin Akinsha and Grigory Kozlov, first blew the whistle on Russian museums that were holding the treasures in dark vaults, keeping them from public view. The authorities flatly denied that thousands of priceless works by artists from Durer and Rembrandt to Goya and Manet were in Russia, having been taken from Berlin by Stalin's special confiscation squads, as well as ordinary soldiers helping themselves to "souvenirs".

I got a tip-off that the long-lost Koenigs Collection of Old Master drawings, sold under duress to the Nazis by a Rotterdam museum, was being kept at Glebov's House, home to the Pushkin Museum's department of graphics.

"Oh yes, they're here, they're definitely here," a young curator told me pleasantly. "I'll just fetch the Dutch expert for you." Two minutes later, the woman returned with a stony face and said: "No, there's nothing here. You misunderstood."

I felt the thrill of the chase.

The story developed when a video came to light, showing 17th and 18th century French paintings hanging at Uzkoye, a sanatorium on the edge of Moscow enjoyed by scientists from the Academy of Sciences. I went to the estate, which had once belonged to Prince Trubetskoy, and pretended an interest in the Russian aristocracy. The manager wouldn't let me in, for fear of disturbing the scientists, but she did walk with me in the grounds.

She volunteered the information that the local church contained rare books from German libraries. "Oh really," I said, "and I've heard that you also have French paintings in the main house." She was aghast. "Where did you get that information from? I don't like the look of

this. There's too much interest in those pictures. I won't tell you anything."

That really whetted my appetite.

Then Akinsha and Kozlov came up with documentary proof that ancient gold, excavated from the site of Troy by the 19th century German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann and before the war exhibited in Berlin, was among the plundered treasures in Moscow. They gave me access to the inventory that accompanied the crates of gold from Germany and a paper confirming receipt in Moscow, signed by a certain Lapin on 9 July 1945.

This was dynamite. And still the authorities were denying everything. Of course, I was desperate to find some trophy art myself.

By chance, I attended a wedding. It was a fashionable affair and the bride and groom, film makers with an eye for Soviet kitsch, had hired a Palace of Culture in the countryside outside Moscow for their reception.

The guests mingled among potted palms or played billiards in what was effectively a country club. I wandered into a ground floor sitting room and saw two fine landscapes hanging on the wall.

I didn't recognise the pictures but asked the director, a cheerful old Communist called Vladimir Davidov, where they came from. "Oh, that's trophy art, taken from Germany at the end of the war," he said without batting an eyelid. "I got them from Uzkoye when this club was built in 1954 and we needed something to decorate the walls."

He allowed me back to photograph the paintings, which were later identified by experts as Vespasian's Temple in Rome and The Narni Valley by Wilhelm Schirmer, a German romantic artist who lived in Italy in the 19th century.

It was becoming difficult for the Russian authorities to stonewall any longer. And they had their point of view, too. The Nazis had destroyed much of Russian cultural heritage during their occupation of Soviet territory. Russian treasures, such as icons, that had found their way to Germany had been sold on the open market, making it virtually impossible that they would ever be returned. Surely Russia deserved some compensation, they said.



In October 1992, the Russian Culture Minister, Yevgeny Sidorov, admitted the existence of the trophy art and invited the Dutch ambassador, Joris Vos, to see the Koenigs Collection.

It would be another three years before the Pushkin Museum put on an exhibition of trophy art entitled *Saved Twice Over*. Director Irina Antonova said the world should be grateful to the confiscation squads who "saved" the paintings from the ruins of Berlin, handing them over to museum staff, who "saved" them again through painstaking restoration.

Did the trophy art then go back to Western Europe? In fact, not; most of it is still in Russia. In 2004 Ukraine, which was holding half of the Koenigs Collection, did return its drawings to The Netherlands but the rest remain in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, their fate still "under consideration" by a very slow-moving Russia. **P**





## Shock Troops (part I)

1992

Art Franczek

We were ushered into a large dark auditorium located in one of Stalin's wedding-cake buildings. A group of Russian officials headed by the deputy Foreign Minister gave speeches to a sleepy jet-lagged group of Peace Corps Volunteers. They thanked us coming to Russia in these arduous times and they disavowed the rumors that the US Peace Corps was a CIA front. The Los Angeles Times referred to us as "Shock Troops" sent to Russia as part of an economic aid package from the US. The Russian officials emphasized that this group of PCVs came to help Russia develop its battered economy, not to build wells and teach hygiene in a Third World country!

Fifty PCVs would be assigned to the cities along the Volga such as Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Saratov and Togliatti. They were a high-powered group that included the graduates of Harvard, two from University of Chicago, three from Kellogg, fifteen bankers, lawyers, a couple of PhDs and me, a CPA with a couple of Masters degrees.

During the months prior to our arrival we had read that Russia was moving towards boiling point. Yegor Gaidar implemented a shock therapy for the Russian economy which meant the prices of goods were no longer controlled and the value of the rouble was no longer kept artificially low, inflation for the year was 2300%. GDP in 1992 had decreased by 19% and would decrease by a total of 48% during the years 1992 to 1996. The West-

ern press was full of stories about Russian shops with empty shelves, and long lines of people waiting to buy sausages. I recall a story about a sign in the Producty that said, "There is no meat and there won't be any". The day I left Chicago for Peace Corps training in November 1992, tank movements were reported around Moscow in anticipation of a coup. I wondered what had I gotten myself into and how will I survive in Russia.

When I arrived in Saratov (a military industrial city that was closed until 1992) I saw no evidence of starving Russians or long lines. The markets were full of fruits, vegetables, eggs and meat. Trucks containing Snickers, soap and other Western goods were parked at the markets and Russian consumers had a choice of more than one soap or toothpaste (Russian toothpaste also served as caulk for bathtubs). I recall that in the meat section the butcher wielded a huge, medieval axe to dismember the poor cow. By late 1992 the "chelnoki" (shuttlers) were highly visible at airports and train stations. These people would make trips to places like China, Turkey and Poland. They left home with empty bags and returned with bags stuffed with clothing, leather goods and many other items. This was the beginning of a retail market in Russia.

I remember that making a phone call home was quite an ordeal. Peace Corps training was held at a sanatorium in Saratov located on top of a hill covered with ice. First I had to negotiate a kilometre of ice that led down to the tram and into "tsentr gorod." At the "pochta"

I reserved a time for my phone call at least three days in advance. On Sunday morning when I arrived I paid and received my 10 minutes on the phone and was cut off in mid-sentence.

The Russian people were supportive of the Peace Corps and regularly invited us into their homes. It was there I learned how people coped. Many had dachas which were not simply used for relaxation. In almost every home I visited, the balconies were full sacks of potatoes, cucumbers etc. Most Russians had a big freezer filled with frozen berries, cherries and other items grown at the dacha. Kitchen shelves were full of jams, pickles and "kompot".

During the Soviet period, money was virtually useless. Soviet citizens had lived their lives in endless informal barter deals. People gave "gifts" to get anything from a nice cut of meat to western cosmetics. These gifts usually weren't monetary. They ranged from theater tickets to supplies of scarce goods. I knew a number of doctors who traded their services for meat. Russian production plants refused to fire their employees and simply asked for more credits from the state or paid wages late. Many companies paid their employees in goods. The road between Samara and Togliatti was full of people selling towels, glassware, bras and whatever their companies gave them as payment for their services. Fresh fish was readily available on that road and could be purchased directly from the fisherman.

In these early years of Russian capitalism barter was a way of life that helped people cope on almost every level. As a result we never witnessed the kind of crash that had been predicted by the Western analysts. I know, I was there, I witnessed how Russia muddled through its first economic crisis. **P**



# The Summer of 1992

1992

Thomas Fasbender

It was a summer of smells. The air outside the Metro station, loaded with the fragrances of human sweat, added to the odours that emerged from the Soviet retail stores. Greenish pieces of thawed meat at the bottom of broken freezers, the putrid remains of tuna, stinking mackerels. I learned to inhale consciously, savouring every breath like strange erotic scents.

I arrived in Moscow on the last day of May. For the first three months I had booked a room at the Mezhdunarodnaya hotel, today the Crowne Plaza. From one in the morning the girls would call: Do you want a little sex? Three nights in a row I turned them down, then I moved out. The breakfast was unbearable anyway.

The new, old country, Russia, had been in existence for a bit more than twenty weeks. Inflation was spiralling, finally amounting to 2,500% for the year. The last thing you wanted was roubles. Each day we exchanged a few and discussed whether the black market was legal or not. Nobody knew for sure.

Nobody knew anything, but all the while there were some among us who anticipated the future, clear as if cut in stone. Derk Sauer started a twice-weekly publication called the *Moscow Times*, a stapled pack of xeroxes reminiscent of a newspaper. Arkadiy Novikov opened his first restaurant, the Sirena on Bolshaya Spasskaya. It was a few steps from my apartment and considered hellishly expensive even by ex-pat standards.

The Gaidar government frantically tried to come to grips with the economy. I remembered them from a bizarre little conference in Lausanne called "Meet the Government of Russia", that spring. Chubby Gaidar was the obvious mastermind.

At dinner I sat opposite Chubais, sharp and blue-eyed. Shokhin with his white face and thick glasses, bright and melancholic, sat to my left. They were young and unpretentious. They had ideas, enthusiasm and their boss's trust, and they knew that the chances of them breaking apart that communist monster economy without destroying it, were pretty close to zero.

Nights in the city were dark. No neons, no ad posts and few vehicles.

Hardly any locals in the scattered restaurants and no shops to speak of. At least there was parking space.

The foreign community and the blessed who owned dollars frequented the large new supermarkets. There was the German one in the yellow building around the corner from the Beijing Hotel, the Italian right on the open lot behind the Aerostar, a French one somewhere, a Finnish. There was no talk of oligarchs in those days, and the term Novye Russkie had not yet been invented.

We lived the life of the quintessential American in Paris after the Great War, grand theatre for the observant foreigner, safely lodged in a guarded UPRK apartment, watching through the tinted windows of chauffeur-driven limousines. Sometimes, in the evenings, we mixed with the mortals.

And it was a summer of death. The old society, what was left of it after years of decaying perestroika, was rotting by the day. I remember the lifeless bodies on the MKAD and on Yaroslavskoye chaussee, then about the only roads fit for speeding. There was no concrete barrier dividing the MKAD, and pedestrians used to cross it day and night, trusting in God.

I remember the engineer from Sweden who suffered a stroke in the toilet at our office. I spent the night with him in the run-down intensive care unit at the Botkin hospital, body-guarding the slim, sun-tanned man of fifty, brain-dead on life-support, until the sleek Swedish doctor arrived at dawn.

Years later, when re nascent Moscow quickly grew into a fad, people flocked in from around the world. Californians, Londoners, all hungry for decadence in the face of doom. They enjoyed watching naked teenage girls dance on the bar at the Hungry Duck and they read, still later, about their oh so wild, wild life in the eXile magazine.

In fact by then it was long over. Gone like the smells and odours. People were already making money, playing urban games. But in the summer of 1992, when you opened the limo door and exited into non-reality—there it was. Moscow, raw: a world spiralling downward in free fall, a maelstrom composed of the stark, blazing white light that only the dying could see. **P**

## How to rent a flat in Moscow

### A confusing start:

Я хочу снять квартиру.  
*I want to rent a flat.*

Хозяин хочет сдать квартиру.  
*The landlord wants to rent out a flat.*

### Refining your search:

Я ищу двухкомнатную квартиру.  
*I'm looking for a two-room flat*  
(NB, NOT two-bedroom, just two rooms)

Мне нужна трехкомнатная квартира.  
*I need a three-room flat.*

Мне нужна квартира в центре.  
*I need a flat in the centre.*

Сколько стоит аренда в месяц?  
*How much is the monthly rent?*

Это мне слишком дорого.  
*That's too expensive.*

Дороговато.  
*This is a cool word for bargaining 'oooh, a bit on the expensive side'.*

### Extra details:

Какой этаж? *What floor is it on?*

Есть балкон? *Is there a balcony?*

Есть лоджия? *Is there a closed balcony?*

Есть охрана? *Is there a guard?*

Эта квартира с мебелью или без?  
*With or without furniture?*

Есть стиральная машина?  
А посудомоечная машина?  
*With a washing machine? A dish-washer?*

Какая станция метро рядом?  
*Which metro station is nearest?*

### And don't forget to find out:

Кто платит за коммунальные услуги?  
*Who pays the local taxes?*

Кто платит за электричество?  
За газ и телефон? *Who pays utilities?*

Есть интернет? Кто за него платит?  
*Is there internet? Who pays for it?*

Соседи хорошие? (мирные?)  
*Are the neighbours nice people? Peaceful?*

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# Icon Writing

Text and photos by John Harrison

*Irina Vorfluseva*

For some years now, a group of foreigners has been studying icon drawing, as it is called, in Moscow under the auspices of the Prosopon school. I caught up with them in the Philippine embassy of all places in November where Irina Alexevna Vorfluseva was taking a group of ten students through the basic stages of icon writing. During a break for lunch, I talked to Irina and some of the other students about the course. This was their 4th week, and some of the icons were already incredibly beautiful.

**How long has this group been functioning for?**

About 16 years.

**What is the school called? (Irina)**

The school is called the Prosopon School of Iconology:

[www.prosoponschool.org](http://www.prosoponschool.org)

Prosopon is a Greek word that means image, or action of God. We use this Greek word because icon drawing came to us from Byzantium. The word means image, or mask of the unseen face of an unseen God. Some of the traditions are pre-Christian.

**How do you teach this? (Irina)**

There is a very well worked out method established in Russia by Vladislav Andreev who was born in 1938 in St. Petersburg. After finishing art school he travelled around Russia in search of groups of religious believers who still kept the traditions of icon drawing going, in the depths of Soviet Russia. He emigrated to America in 1979 and taught icon drawing in New York for ten years, and has become something of an icon master in the west, and in Russia too. At the present time, as art of the Prosopon School, about 20 icon draw-



ers are working on various projects in Kostroma and Moscow. The classes we have here today are specially organised for foreigners to familiarise them with icon art and with the traditions of Orthodoxy.

Icon drawing is more than simply an artistic experience, it is spiritual in that it isolates a person from the material world and helps that person attain spiritual qualities. I can't say that we do an awful lot on the spiritual side with this particular class, it is specific. Usually we hold all day classes where we spend half of the time studying Orthodox theory,





The mere fact that students are drawing from a template and not from their imagination indicates that they have accepted that God cannot be imagined or portrayed directly, and in this the drawer is automatically accepting his or her place in the spiritual hierarchy of things.

## **Why is your group made up of women only? (Irina)**

The majority of students are women at the moment, which is a reflection of the current level of spirituality of humankind at the moment. Women generally speaking have more time, and icon drawing takes a lot of time.

## **How much does it cost? (Irina)**

1500 roubles for each lesson, which includes everything apart from the boards and the gold leaf used to complete the icons, because these are expensive. On the site there is a list of shops where the materials can be bought.

## **How do you, Davina, as a painter handle the discipline of icon painting? (Davina Garrido De Miguel, one of the students)**

Icon writing is based on writing, not painting. When I said I was a painter, they said: "Oh, you'll have problems, because you'll try and do your own thing instead of just following the course. It's about not expressing yourself and following the discipline." Maybe it is, but for me, I gain a lot from doing this, about techniques, about many things which I can take back to me own work. It's like learning another language, especially the language of writing colour. There is also the spiritual aspect which is interwoven into this, and which is amazing.

## **What was the most interesting stage for you? (Davina Garrido De Miguel).**

The initial stage when we chose which face we were going to do. The end is lovely, but then you're done.

**Irina added:** There is nothing wrong with individuality, and you can add that at a later stage, when you have mastered the basics of icon writing. The Church has an understanding of the spiritual meaning of each colour, which existed in monasteries in ancient times.

If you want to find out more about the icon writing groups which meet in Moscow, contact Irina Vorfluseva, on home +74997423845, cell +79153291138, or at <http://www.raaad.org/prosoponschool.org/new/about.html> **P**

and only then go on to the practice. Here the classes last for 6 hours, with a break for lunch in the middle. We spend most of the time drawing icons.

Most people here are Christians, but there is a substantial difference between the different confessions. It is easier to teach Catholics than Protestants because most Catholics have undergone some kind of religious training in childhood, and the canons of Church Orthodox belief are therefore closer to them.

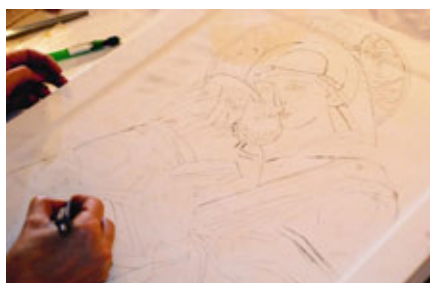
## **How do you actually teach? (Irina)**

There are 29 stages of icon drawing. Some of these are technical and some relate to invisible internal spiritual changes. Of supreme importance is the spiritual state of the icon drawer. There are seven visible steps which are deduced from the seven kinds of praying in the ancient religion, and 22 invisible steps as we call them. The Prosafon school does not distinguish before the 7 different kinds of prayer carried out by Orthodox monks and icon drawing.

None of what we are doing has anything to do with fine art. All we demand from the student is that he or she carries out the instructions of the teacher. Of course we would like students to understand that it is not possible to portray the face of God, but it is possible to portray an interpretation of God through action.

Our studies are based on icons drawing of the 15th century and beginning of the 16th century in Moscow and Novgorod. We use only natural materials such as wood, organic glue and mineral pigments.

There are 6 lessons in this course. During the first lesson, the outline of the face is transferred to the board, using templates of ancient icons. During the second lesson, the icon is "opened", that is, colour is added. As we draw, the basic spiritual idea behind this is explained.





# Speaking in tongues?



Text by Scott Spires; illustration Nika Harrison

Walk around one of the Moscow markets. If your Russian's good enough, you should be able to understand at least some of what the sellers are saying. But even a good understanding of Russian might not clear up another source of confusion: the chance that you won't understand anything at all when the traders begin talking not to you, but to each other. Because there's a good chance that they are not speaking Russian at all, but some other language that you can't identify, or didn't even know existed.

Ex-pats who find learning Russian difficult may not know, or care, that there are more than 100 other languages spoken in this country. They represent the whole spectrum of language groups in Eurasia: Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, Turkic, Mongolic, Caucasian.

In a certain sense, therefore, the Russian Federation can be viewed as a "linguistic preserve", a habitat for specimens of many of the world's language families. Although Russian is the only federally-recognized language, the country's constituent entities grant 24 other languages official status. Some of these languages, such as Tatar, Yakut and Buryat, have sizeable speech communities numbering the hundreds of thousands,

or even more. But occasional signs of liveliness conceal the fact that Russia's linguistic preserve is in danger of turning effectively monolingual within a couple of generations. The Russian language is similar to English, Spanish, and Portuguese in its status as an imperial language, covering a vast region and eroding smaller, pre-existing speech communities.

In fact, the process of language death has been going on in Russia for centuries; the land itself attests to this. Many of the place names of northern Russia (such as Lake Ilmen and the Neva River, and arguably "Moskva" as well) are derived from Finno-Ugric dialects that died out, or migrated elsewhere, long ago. Many languages of Siberia or the Caucasus have disappeared, or are in severe danger of doing so. They include such curiosities as Ubykh, spoken long ago in the Krasnodar Region, which had a jaw-breaking 81 consonants and only three vowels; the Tungusic languages, which are related to the speech of the Manchus, who conquered China and produced its last imperial dynasty; and the Ob-Ugric languages, spoken by a few thousand people in western Siberia who are the closest linguistic relatives to the Hungarians, thousands of miles away.



An acquaintance with Russia's linguistic archeology thus gives us a range of perspectives on Eurasia's history and geography that we might otherwise miss. For instance, it may seem strange to consider that today's thoroughly European Hungarians are part of the same language family as the shamanists of the Ob-Irtysh forests; but no stranger than to realize that Londoners and Parisians every day speak the same root words—day, night, sun; mother, father; one, two, three—as members of isolated hill tribes in the Indian subcontinent.

This situation raises a couple of questions. The first is whether these minority languages can be saved. The second is whether they *ought* to be saved. There is no clear answer to either of these questions.

The best region for understanding the threats to small languages in Russia is probably Siberia. Many of the phenomena that lead to the demise of minority languages are especially apparent there. Geography, politics, and culture all interact to create a space in which it is difficult for such languages to thrive.

The lack of linguistic compactness, for example, is a problem that especially affects the survivability of a language. Siberians live sparsely scattered across a vast territory, which makes communication in the form of sizable communities difficult. This contrasts with, for example, the situation in the Northern Caucasus. It remains, in an expression that goes back to Roman times, "the mountain of languages," a region of densely packed and clearly demarcated tongues. A striking example of long-term survival on the head of a pin, as it were, is furnished by Archi, a language of Dagestan. Archi is an extreme example of compactness: It is spoken in a single village of 1,200 people, but everyone in the village speaks it. As long as this situation persists, it is likely to survive.

Policy choices have contributed to the withering of some languages. The family is one of the most important forces in ensuring the survival of a language—if parents are able to hand it down to their children, it will continue for at least another generation. In the last century, however, it was common for children of minority-language speakers to be taken away from their parents and raised in boarding schools together with children of other small nationalities. The inevitable result of this situation was that everyone grew up fluent only in Russian. In many cases, only people born before approximately 1940 have preserved knowledge of a language. Once that happens, language death becomes almost inevitable. When the younger generation drops the baton, the race is over.

Standardization can also present a problem. If a language has never been equipped for use in any official sphere, deciding where the standard ends and dialects begin can be problematic. The Nenets language, for example, comes in two distinct varieties: Forest and Tundra. Should one of these be chosen as the basis for the standard; should a hybrid language be created; or should each be recognized as a separate language and treated accordingly?

These are the sort of questions that can keep a language out of classrooms, radio stations, and newspapers, and promote its eventual extinction. Even standardization does not guarantee a continued use, since elderly or longtime speakers rebel against using the new standard.

This brings us to another fact that language romanticists seldom mention: the speakers themselves often see little value in holding on to the language. For them, there is nothing exotic in their native language, because it's a familiar everyday presence. And its connotations can be anything but romantic. Instead of

conjuring up ghosts of ancient wisdom and cultural tradition, it suggests poverty, backwardness, and a restricted life. Viewed from that perspective, there is no mystery why many people find the attractions of the major world languages irresistible.

Arguably, however, there are good reasons to preserve minority languages, although those reasons are rather prosaic and may not appeal to people who perceive endangered tongues as something exotic and magical. Culture is really the key factor. Mark Abley, in his book *Spoken Here*, quotes an activist for the Celtic Manx language as saying: "The language is almost like a peg to hang the culture on. The music, the Gaelic way of storytelling, the folklore—all these things come out of the Manx language."

Cultures can survive the translation to a new language, but in the process they lose something unique and essential. Poetry, folklore, songs and customs have a unique sound and shape, and possibly a unique meaning, in one language that they don't have in another. Abley also quotes the graphic words of MIT linguist Ken Hale, who says that losing a language is like "dropping a bomb on the Louvre."

The outside world tends to take little notice of the small peoples of Russia. Akira Kurosawa's Siberian epic *Dersu Uzala* featured a Goldi hunter who befriends a Russian explorer; the Tuvan throat-singing group Huun-Huur-Tu has enjoyed success around the globe, singing songs in their native language that simply couldn't produce the same effect in Russian, or any other language. But it is hard to think of much beyond these admittedly esoteric examples that have made it into the wider world. Linguistic homogenization is one of the factors that could blur the peoples' distinctive cultural profile. **P**

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# In the bleak mid-winter New Year



# it's party time!

Stephen Wilson

How enchanting and alluring it all is! The festive spirit of Christmas is haunting the streets. It seems so wonderfully spontaneous! You can even smell the excitement. We can be children again! In celebrations, Russians loathe exactitude. There is no precise beginning or end to parties. Wonderful!

As I write this article in December, fir trees (Yolki) are being hoisted by cranes on elegant squares, Christmas lamps are flickering on and off as if winking at some well-kept secret. Tinsel lavishly adorns window panes and even a polite "fat" model Santa Claus bows to me. Snow gently drifts down. We are no longer dreaming of a white Christmas. We are in the middle of one!

Ex-pats don't have to whitewash their Christmas with Bing Crosby songs. And we get to celebrate two Christmases (one on the



25th and another on the 7th of January) and two New Years; (the 1st of January and the old New year on the 14th). Russian New Year is reminiscent of a European Christmas. Or is it? Appearances can be deceptive. The Russians are not actually celebrating Christmas at all, but New Year in a slightly Christmassy way.

When you look more closely, illusions are broken. Everything appears awkwardly upside down. Firstly, you discover New Year is celebrated before Christmas and afterwards New Year again. Then don't forget that some people still pay homage to old pre-Christian pagan customs, (Svyatki, a time of revelry and fortune telling from January 7th to 19th). You may ask, "How can you celebrate the old New Year?" Isn't it an oxymoron? We need a brief historical explanation.

## HISTORY

The date of New Year has constantly changed over the centuries. This is because it was originally celebrated as part of the winter solstice which marked the shortest time of year. This represented a major turning point, when the life-giving sun returned. The problem is that the precession of equinoxes changes over the centuries. So although the solstice has moved from the date of the 6th of January to the 25th of December, many religions preserve the old dates. If we followed the solstice with fidelity we would currently celebrate Christmas on the 22nd of December!

Up until the 14th century, New Year was originally celebrated from the first of March, then later from the first of September and finally, in 1700, along with imported Yolki from northern Europe, on the first of January.

Before Peter the Great, the peasants celebrated New Year not only according to the winter solstice but according to their locality in Russia. It was celebrated unsystematically. So there was a lot of confusion as to how to celebrate. Peter the Great sought to impose order. He issued the following edict:

"Due to the New Year being celebrated so differently around the country, a date has been chosen to end this idiotic confusion: the first of January. As a sign of a good start to the year; people must cheerfully greet each other on New Year's Day and wish each other good fortune and in families, wish each other prosperity. In honour of the New Year, people must make decorations from fir trees, entertain children and sledge down hills. Adults should refrain from fist-fighting and getting drunk-there are enough days for this already."

Yet even after this order, New Year, wasn't a truly national holiday. It largely remained the prerogative of the rich. Most of the poor couldn't or wouldn't celebrate it until the 19th century.

After the Revolution, the celebration was banned as "bourgeois nonsense" and only revived in the mid-1930s. Ded Moroz (Father Frost) was outlawed until being "rehabilitated" in the 1930s. The Bolsheviks switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian, which had been used in most of western Europe since the seventeenth century, thereby transferring the celebration of Christmas to the 25th of December from the 7th of January—except that most real Russian Orthodox Christians paid little attention to what the atheist Bolsheviks wanted.

## PAGANISM

Paganism remains remarkably resilient in this country. Russian peasants called upon many deities to save them from the long remorseless winter, and well they might. For instance, a peasant might worship the goddess Poludnitsa for a fa-

vorable harvest, or Lada (not just a car), to assure a safe journey through a largely roadless country and the god Vlas to protect his cattle. The sun god Dazhbog was highly popular. From Dazhbog we derive the Russian phrase, "Dai vam Bog zdoroviya", which means, "God give you good health."

The Russian peasant poetically viewed the sun as a father who was married to a female moon. All the stars were their children. In the spring, the sun courted the moon but in winter the sun vanished. This left the peasants vulnerable to an evil deity called Morozh. This evil deity threatened to freeze to death any peasant who offended him, so peasants celebrated the New Year by leaving apples under a tree to appease his anger! The origins of Ded Moroz lie with a more literal translation as evil "grandfather frost" who represented winter. Only later, as a literary reinvention, was he transformed into a benevolent figure with his charming granddaughter Snegurochka.

Peasants would also hang animal shaped biscuits on a tree to honour the harvest Goddess.

From the 7-19th of January during "Svyatki," the peasants might indulge in fortune telling; gadaniya, and parading through the streets in animal costumes, which all sounds like a lot of fun. Bonfires were lit to woo back the life-giving sun and to warm the dead!

How is New Year celebrated now? It is still largely a warm, cosy and vibrant family occasion where people gather at home around a table of caviar sandwiches, olives, potato and fish salads, and of course bottles of Soviet champagne and vodka. Many of the pickled vegetables you enjoy are grown by families at their dachas. Fortune telling and partying are not unheard of. There aren't so many animal impersonation sessions these days, publicly at least, but nevertheless the pagan side is there.

Yet the influence of western trends can be discerned. Nowadays, the festival is being celebrated beyond the family hearth. More and more Russians are celebrating it in Prague or London, for example. How you celebrate it largely depends on your character and current bank account.

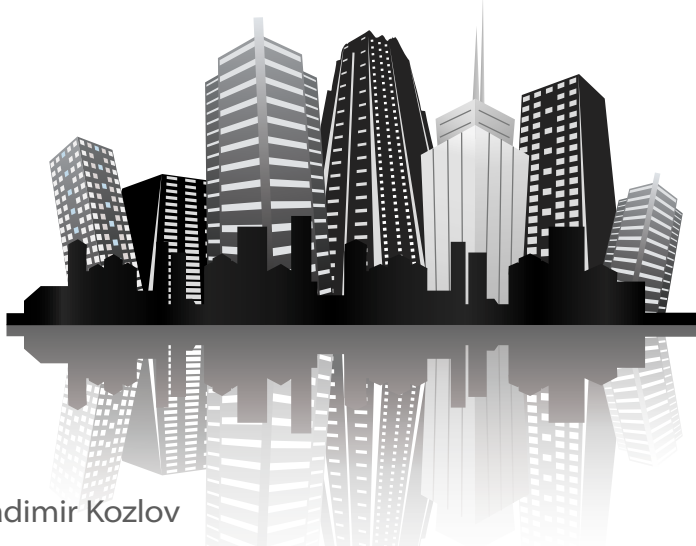
## RUSSIAN CHRISTMAS

When you watch an Orthodox Church service it seems sombre. This may betray the imperceptible influence of paganism. There is a notion that in order to distinguish themselves from a pagan "laughter cult", the Orthodox decided to forbid laughing.

From November 28th until the 6th of January, Russian Orthodox Christians fast for 39 days! On the night of Christmas (the 7th of January) they mark the event by walking around the church holding lit candles (called a Krestnyi Khod). This event itself recalls how pagans would walk clockwise in the direction of the sun to summon its energy. The choirs sing movingly, the incense smells sweet and the chanting of the liturgy is other-worldly. Here you are entering a world unaltered for centuries.

Incidentally, the red star you see on some New year Yolki is an emblem of Christmas. It symbolises the emergence of the morning star which guided the three Kings to the new born Christ. Boris Pasternak in his poem Christmas Star, describes the star as a flash of arson soaring through the sky. It is the spiritual beauty of this fire, whether in bonfires, the eternal flame or candles which best sums up how the Russians love to greet Christmas. **P**





By Vladimir Kozlov

## City Hall plans to move offices from the city centre

Moscow mayor, Sergei Sobyenin, has called for the building of office centres on the city's outskirts and residential buildings closer to its centre, *Novye Izvestiya* reported. That move is meant to improve the traffic situation in the city as the lion's share of rush hour traffic is currently from the outskirts to the center in the morning and in the opposite direction at night. Mikhail Blinkin, head of the Transport and Road Economy Research Institute, told *Novye Izvestiya* that currently 40 per cent of all jobs in Moscow are located within 4 kilometers of the Kremlin. However, he added that moving offices to the outskirts would be a challenging task, as public transportation in the city's outskirts is poor, and getting to a work-place located outside the center could be difficult.

## A provincial developer steps in Well House

Universalnaya Kompaniya, based in the south Russian city of Pyatigorsk, has joined the residential project Well House at Dubrovka, initially developed by Mirax Group, and is ready to invest \$100 million, *Kommersant* reported. The construction of 25,000 sq. meter Well House, located near Dubrovka and Avtozavodskaya Metro stations and consisting of two 18-29 store-buildings, was suspended in 2009. The project's total value is reportedly \$355 million, and the \$100 million which the new investor says it will pump into it, is just enough to complete the project. However, individual investors in the project are skeptical. "We think that this is just a front company that stepped in not for the purpose of completing the object but to act as a bumper between the government and us," Vladimir Zhossan, head of

the initiative group of Well House individual investors, told *Kommersant*.

## Moscow lags behind in residential construction per person

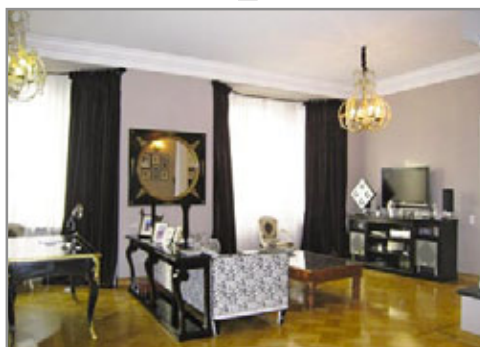
Although the Russian capital is predictably the leader among all of the country's cities in the number of residential sq. meters built every year, the construction per person figure is much less rosy for Moscow. Based on analysis by the Gde Etot Dom real estate analytical centre, Moscow is near the bottom of the list of the Russian cities compiled in terms of the volume of residential construction per person per year. Surprisingly, Krasnodar, Tyumen and Stavropol top the list. "[Moscow] is a unique case, as high demand for residential property doesn't lead to an adequate increase in supply, but only triggers further price hikes," reads the centre's report.

## Residential property prices up, demand down

November saw a decline in demand for residential property in the Moscow market, according to an analytical report by MIAN realtor. Meanwhile, according to the report, prices for all kinds of newly-built property, except economy class, went up during the period in question. The highest price increase was reported in the elite property segment, by 1.5 per cent to 516,300 roubles (\$16,655) per square meter. Business class property became more expensive by one per cent, to 172,000 roubles (\$5,550) per square meter, and prices for economy class property stayed at the October level. **P**



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# Traffic-jamboree

By Vladimir Kozlov

Last autumn's sacking of Moscow's mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, and his replacement with Sergei Sobyenin is likely to have an impact on the city's real estate market, which, industry insiders and observers hope, is going to become more transparent and efficient.

"It is already clear that [Sobyenin] acts very fast," Georgy Dzagurov, general director of Penny Lane Realty, told PASSPORT. "He has not only been able to stop the rapid development of projects whose impact on the city's infrastructure has not yet been examined, but he has also waged a tough war on traffic jams."

"And while at the beginning I was skeptical about such 'war-like' activities, now nearly all Muscovites have been able to see a radical improvement in the traffic situation," he added, controversially.

Since Sobyenin took office in late October, he has taken some steps aimed at improving the traffic situation in the city. The most drastic measure was a ban on street parking in the city center, including the main shopping street Tverskaya. He also introduced the earlier beginning of the work day for City Hall officials so that their cars wouldn't be on the streets during the rush hour.

According to Dmitry Khalin, head of the strategic consulting and evaluation department at IntermarkSavills, the economy class residential segment is likely to get a boost under the new mayor.

"This is in line with both the current structure of demand in the capital and the policies of federal authorities who pay special attention to the issue of affordable housing," he told PASSPORT. "It is quite likely that within the next few years, there is going to be a substantial increase in the amount of annually-built residential property."

Khalin explained that more transparent regulations over access to land and engineering networks, as well as active development of the transport network are likely to be the main factors contributing to the sector's growth.

Although observers have been pointing out to inefficiency of the city government's policies regarding construction and development, head of the Moscow government construction block, Vladimir Resin, wasn't immediately replaced under the new city government. Only in early December, Marat Khunnullin was appointed mayor's deputy in charge of construction issues, basically taking over from Resin.

But this kind of gradual transfer of control over the construction sector was necessary "to avoid the disorganization of the construction complex and global issues, such as deceived individual investors in residential construction," Khalin explained. And the fact that some key figures in the Moscow government's construction sector under Luzhkov didn't immediately lose their jobs should not be considered as recognition that city development policies in Luzhkov's era were effective, he added.

"Luzhkov worked under pressure of his earlier promises and in an entourage made up by people who were hardly free from their own past, either," Dzagurov said. "Sobyenin, at least to this day, has not been burdened by any vows from the past or people responsible for their own areas. He proceeds only from tasks that were clearly set up even before his appointment as mayor, and from the interest of the city."

Observers say that Moscow's construction and development market is likely to face major changes, as its leaders enjoying direct or indirect support from the city's previous government will have to make room for new players. For years, Inteko, the company of Luzhkov's wife Yelena Baturina, has occupied a special position in the city's development market, but now things are likely to change.

"It is quite likely that regulations over access to plots of land are going to become more transparent and clear," said Khalin. "In that case companies from the country's other regions, primarily Moscow Oblast and bigger cities, like St. Petersburg, would be able to enter Moscow's market."

According to Dzagurov, changes are going to be positive for the market, attracting new developers not burdened with financial problems. "In a situation where Baturina will no longer be able to dictate to them the rules of the game, some [developers] are likely to return to the capital," he said. "The [market shares are] likely to change. Those who were in an advantageous position exclusively due to their connections—which are being broken now—may not be able to continue to work in a situation of tough competition."

"Inteko's role as a company, a conflict which meant pulling out of all construction projects in the capital [for a developer], is to change," he went on to say. "Inteko's positions are to weaken, which will lead to the strengthening of all other players' positions, and especially those not linked to Inteko."

Meanwhile, observers are also concerned that the changing of power in the city may lead to delays in the execution of some previously announced development projects.

"I do think that there will be an impact on the real estate market," Michael Bartley, General Director of Four Squares, told PASSPORT.

"Each real estate development requires a large number of approvals and licenses. A change in the senior levels of the city government creates uncertainty for both developers and the bureaucrats. Why spend considerable money and time (for developers) and planning reviews (bureaucrats) if the key decision makers may no longer be in their posts in 6 months time?"

"I am sure that some slowing down is set to take place due to objective factors, but the new mayor's task will be to avoid serious delays," said Dzagurov. "Luzhkov was concerned about the city, and Sobyanin will make any effort to make sure that effective work is not jeopardized and the best of what is planned, the most important, is implemented with maximum speed, regardless of who the author is. Sobyanin already has an established reputation, and expecting populist steps from him would be silly, I think."

However, Dzagurov added that developers in the Moscow market are still to face a difficult period of between six months to a year, during which obtaining applicable permissions is going to be difficult, while they'll still have to spend cash on projects already launched and pay interest on loans taken.

One issue that the city's new government will have to tackle is the exorbitant prices for residential property. "The price/quality ratio in our situation couldn't be compared with not only developed Western countries, where prices are generally lower than in Moscow, but also with developing nations, where one square meter of elite property costs \$2,000 to \$3,000," Dzagurov said. "In our situation, the main reason for the high prices is the market, in which there is a shortage of supply."

"In Russia, Moscow is the political, business, cultural, financial, judicial and educational centre, unlike the United States, where, for instance, the intelligence is in Langley, the film industry in Los Angeles, casinos in Las Vegas, the car industry in Detroit, politics in Washington, business in New York, the aerospace industry in Seattle, mafia in Chicago and oil in

Houston," Dzagurov went on to say. "And, despite all that, our supermegapolis has only between 25,000 and 30,000 apartments of truly high class. But, some three years ago, Moscow became the world's leader in the number of billionaires living in the city."

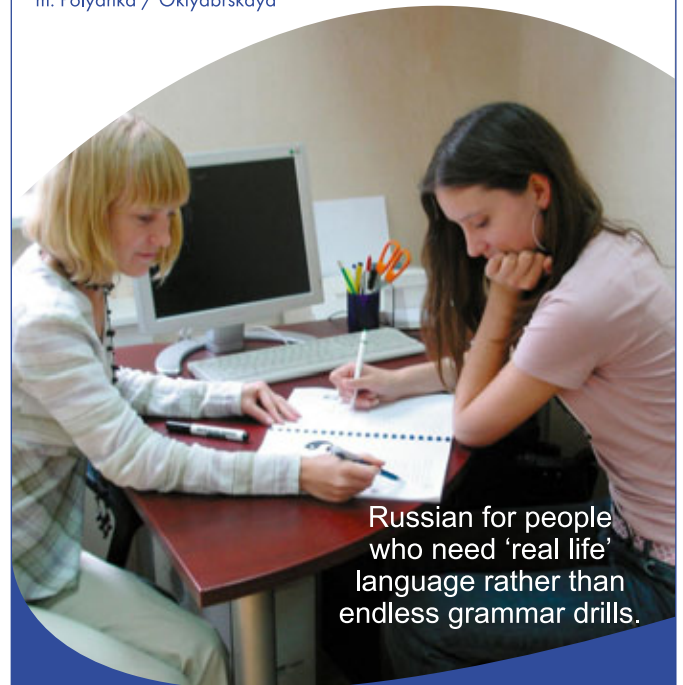
But, the main problem, according to Dzagurov is not the high prices for elite property but the fact that just about any type of property is overpriced. "Frankly, I am not really frightened or upset by the exorbitant prices for high-end residential property, which are justified by the existing shortage," he said. "What causes unpleasant surprises and disappointment are high prices for business-class and economy class property."

"With regard to the effect this will have on prices, the issue is muddled by the continued drag on construction due to the lack of financing in the market. Any restriction on supply will inflate prices. My own opinion is that we can expect a short-term property bubble in 2012-2013 due to lack of development 2009-2010, then stability as more stock comes to market," Bartley said. "The impact on the end user depends upon which sub-segment they choose—some are more profitable than others."

Other experts believe that no major changes in property prices in Moscow are likely. "In the near future, a balance between demand and supply could be achieved," Khalin concluded. "In such a situation, property prices remain quasi-stable and increase only adjusting to inflation." **P**

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# National Treasure



Charles W. Borden

Georgy Nepranov

The sharp pop from a bottle of Shampanskoye echoes across every almost every home, restaurant and park in Russia at midnight on New Year's eve, followed by a fizzy pour into any handy container. To the chagrin of winemakers from France's Champagne region, shampanskoye has long been the generic term in Russia for any sparkling wine, whether produced by Champagne's classic *méthode champenoise*, or the shortcut reservoir (*charmat*) method and even simple CO<sub>2</sub> gas infusion.

*Méthode champenoise* (though not the name) is used for premium sparkling wines around the world. Abrau Durso, a 140-year-old Russian winery near the Black Sea, has produced *méthode champenoise* wines for more than 100 years. Abrau Durso is truly a national treasure, and it has fortunately had a renaissance in recent years. Based upon a recent tasting, the Abrau Durso classic sparkling wines are well worth a try by serious wine consumers.

## Russia's love of sparkling wine

Russian interest in bubbly is dates back centuries. The Cossacks made a sparkling wine in the middle of the 17th century on the Don River in the Tsimlanskoi and Kumshatskoi villages in southern Russia. This wine was even mentioned in Pushkin's poem, Eugene Onegin. A red sparkling wine is still made according

to "old Cossack methods" in this area at Tsimlanskoye Winery.

The Russian aristocracy became the largest foreign market for French Champagne, and French winemakers even produced a sweet version for the *goût russe* (Russian taste). This prompted interest in sparkling wine production in the sunny and warm south of Russia.

In 1799, under the authority of Emperor Pavel, winemakers made sparkling wine at his palace at Sudak on the Crimean peninsula. By 1812, several companies were making sparkling wines in Crimea. During the Crimean War (1854-1856) wine production ceased when English and French invaders tore out vineyards and destroyed equipment, a large laboratory, and extensive documentation about winemaking and grape production.

Prince Lev Sergeyevich Golitsyn, the patriarch of modern Russian winemaking, restored the tradition of Russian sparkling winemaking. He founded Novy Svet winery near Sudak on the southeastern Crimean coast (now in Ukraine), and helped develop Abrau-Durso on Russia's Black Sea coast near Novorossiysk.

In 1892, Golitsyn started to experiment with sparkling wines using the *méthode champenoise*. By 1896, his wines were served at the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II, and in 1900 they received the Grand Prix medal in Paris. Novy Svet and Abrau Durso remain the region's most famous sparkling

wineries and they continue the tradition of making wines using *méthode champenoise* today.

*Méthode champenoise* wines receive a second in-bottle fermentation to produce the sparkle. This requires heavy bottles to withstand the pressure and a number of labour-intensive techniques over a period of months or years. Early in the Soviet era, winemakers sought a means to dramatically increase sparkling wine production. The answer was the reservoir or charmat method, which produces secondary fermentation in a series of vats at an accelerated pace, and results in a sparkling wine that can be bottled after three or four weeks. The even cheaper and faster “gas infusion” method is now also used in Russia and worldwide for very inexpensive sparkling wines, or for that matter soft drinks.

Charmat and gas infusion methods enabled the construction of a vinzavod (wine factory) close to the end user but far from Russia’s wine grape producing regions near the Black Sea. It is these methods that are used for the inexpensive Sovetskoe Shampanskoye that is greatly in demand at holidays.

It is a sad fact that there are no where near enough white wine grapes produced in Russia to meet demand, despite great potential for grape production in the country’s south. For this reason, the large majority of sparkling wines made in Russia use “wine material” imported from other countries—fermented white wines that are ready for secondary fermentation. Quality varies depending upon the origin of the wine material, handling and temperatures during transport, and the final process before bottling. These are the methods used to produce.

## National treasure

Despite more than seventy years as a Soviet enterprise, and the difficult times that followed the end of the Soviet Union, Abrau Durso continued to produce classic sparkling wines. During a tour of the winery a few years ago, I enjoyed one of the best brut wines of my life with veteran Abrau Durso winemaker, Georgy Nepranov. The winery and the tradition it has maintained make it truly a national treasure.

Emperor Alexander II decreed the development of Abrau Durso in 1870 on land found by agronomist Feodor Geiduk in a small, rugged valley about 20 kilometers north of Novorossiysk, Russia’s main Black Sea port. Abrau Durso is named after two streams, the Abrau that forms a small, natural lake (the largest in the North Cau-

casus) in front of winery, and the Durso, which falls to the Black Sea two kilometers distant and 84 meters below. In 1896, the winery was turned to sparkling wine and Prince Golitsyn, joined by French specialists, quickly began to develop it. An extensive series of tunnels and caverns were dug into the hills and the Prince established a school to train young Russian winemakers. These young winemakers continued the Abrau Durso winemaking tradition after the Revolution when the winery became a *vinsovkhoz* (state wine farm).

Businessman Boris Titov, chairman of *Delovaya Rossiya* and reportedly a billionaire now controls Abrau Durso, with remaining shares still in state hands. He appears to have the money and desire to see that Abrau Durso continues to sparkle, and even more brilliantly.

Beginning in 2007, Mr. Titov embarked on an extensive modernization program with the assistance of Herve Justin, a talented Champagne winemaker who helped rebuild the Champagne house of Duval-Leroy. Winemaker Nepranov continues to lead the Russian winemaking contingent. Abrau Durso planted additional grapes to supplement their 300+ hectares of vineyards. Facilities have been renovated and a small hotel has been built near the winery. Apparently some vineyards will be devoted to biodynamic wine production.

Abrau Durso’s product line has been updated with new labels. The winery recently held a juried poster contest that attracted dozens of entries from artists around Russia and internationally. The winners were announced during recent celebrations of Abrau Durso’s 140-year anniversary.

Abrau Durso now produces about one million bottles a year of classic *méthode champenoise* wines, which are entirely made with local grown grapes. It also produces another ten million bottles of charmat method wines, which are apparently made with imported wine material, primarily from South Africa.

Abrau Durso L’Art Nouveau Imperial Brut made from Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Riesling and Pinot Noir grapes tops the line. The flagship line includes Imperial Vintage Brut (Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay) and Imperial Vintage Brut Rose (Pinot Noir). Other classic sparkling wines are labeled “Premium” and include brut and semi-sweet. I tried a delightful Cabernet Sauvignon semi-sweet classic wine, as well as several brut wines at the art exhibition. They definitely hold their own among the best of sparkling wines from other world regions. **P**

Aubrey Durso has a shop on the Garden Ring near its crossing with the Arbat:

**Abrau Durso Atelier**  
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**+7 499 252 2701**  
**www.abraudurso.ru**







Charles Borden

# More



# Fish

Luxury restaurants continue to open in Moscow despite generally sparse post-crisis patronage. On the near-west side alone, there are four new establishments at the refurbished Ukraina Hotel (now Radisson Royal), two at the Lotte Plaza Hotel, and more in the neighboring Lotte Plaza.

Peshi, a large two-story, exceptionally well-appointed fish establishment, has joined the other west side newcomers at Kutuzovsky Prospekt 10, just past the Radisson Royal. Peshi's amiable chef is Moroccan Safir Aziz, a veteran of sister establishment Bouillabaisse on Leninsky Prospekt, and ten years in Moscow.

Peshi's décor consists of beige distressed wood wall panels, trim and tables, light natural fabric cushioned chairs, with accents throughout of the slightly orange red that is fashionable these days. Numerous large monitors continuously replay selected ocean themed videos. Peshi is essentially a La Maree knock-off with similar ambiance and the ocean-depleting display of fresh fish and shellfish on ice, priced per 100 grams. Customers can have their catch prepared in more than a dozen ways: grilled, baked in parchment, salt or foil, or Moroccan style to name a few.

Pavel, familiar to us from Nedalny Vostok, was our waiter. The staff was attentive, as might be expected since our host,





PASSPORT publisher, John Ortega, is also a familiar figure and generous patron. The chef sent out a delightful “amuse bouche”, a spoon of chopped fresh tuna with a tall shot glass of gazpacho. We went over to check out the fresh catch-of-the-day. John selected a Dover Sole, to be prepared a la Meuniere, cooked whole in butter, lemon juice and parsley. Live shellfish sat out their last hours in a large multi-level aquarium: Brittany lobster (1150r per 100g), Kamchatka crab (790r per 100g), clams, and oysters including some huge Kurile Island fellows, as much as 20 centimeters long. I decided to try a couple of the Kuriles (220r each).

I ordered from the menu: Canadian Lobster Salad with Lyonnaise Sauce (1650r), Crispy Roll-ups Stuffed with Kamchatka Crab and Madagascar Shrimp (990r) and Black Ravioli with Crab Meat and Sweet Pepper Sauce (1250r). The oysters were out first, and needed to be separated into several pieces to get down. I found them a little too “tasty” to finish. The Canadian lobster was firm and wonderful, and as good as anything I’ve had in Maine or Massachusetts. It was well matched with the fresh greens and perfect Lyonnaise sauce. The crispy roll-ups were essentially small triangular, fried spring rolls, very good, and the homemade black ravioli was also very pleasing. John was very satisfied with the Dover Sole, a real compliment since he is a regular at Le Dôme in Paris, the masters at this dish.

The menu has a few non-fish entries: Duck Leg “Confit”, Angus Fillet with Foie Gras and some meats for the grill. Surprisingly the menu lacks sushi and only has a sparse collection of shellfish sashimi.

The wine list is predominately white. We enjoyed a very good New Zealand Villa Maria Cellar Select Sauvignon Blanc (3100r). I saw Italian Cervaro della Sala listed, which I use as a wine list price index, at 8100r, for an index of 4.05.

The setting at Peshi is perfect, the service very good, the fish fresh and well and properly prepared. But I left with one nagging thought: Peshi, like many “elitny” restaurants in Moscow, reminds me of a doll at GQ Bar: she looks perfect, but will she love me, and can I love her? In this city does it matter? **P**

**Peshi**  
**Kutuzovsky Prospekt 10**  
**+7 499 243 3312**  
**[www.peshi-restoran.ru](http://www.peshi-restoran.ru)**

*Charles Borden is the Passport magazine wine and dining editor and publishes The Big Onion, a blog about the Moscow restaurant scene ([www.the-big-onion.com](http://www.the-big-onion.com)).*



# Sinatra: Restaurant and Piano Bar



## Leonard Nebons

**Recommendation:** A place worth going to, Sinatra is located beyond a small parking lot off Pushkin Square. Located at 5 Bolshoy Putinkovsky pereulok. You take a glass elevator, large enough to fit a Mercedes 600, up 4 floors and upon entering immediately think Russian Rococo, and Hoboken New Jersey. The reception staff downstairs and as you enter are wonderful, friendly, attractive and you get a feeling that they really are there because they enjoy working at Sinatra. The décor is quite shiny, white leather, silver candelabras, mini light shows, and lots of smiles. The main room fits 150, and karaoke seats 40. The name is a product of the American owner, a fan of Frank's. Sinatra is open from noon until 6am.

There's a bar on the left, as you enter, and the main dining room is to the right. There is a karaoke room on the 4th floor, which opens at 2am.

Sinatra features 3 cuisines, Italian, Russian, and Asiatic. The chef, Monica, comes from Portofino, Italy, and despite her lack of Russian and English leads her kitchen team of 15 in a wonderful blend of culinary delights. There are 4 bar areas in total, with 2 in the main restaurant

area. The head barman circulates, and favours some vintage cocktails, such as manhattans, sidecars, martinis, and other old classics. Drinks start at 250 roubles for beer, 230 for vodka, and 300 for whiskeys. The wine list is complete with Italian, American, German, Australian and French selections. The wine list is expensive for the choices, mostly at around 3000 roubles and up. But if you get a glass the cost is 400 roubles. Head Sommelier, Sergei, knows his wines, and has picked out an international sampling to complement the dishes.

Dinner started with the Russian salad Olivier (690r). This was the standard Russian salad, but topped with crab and red caviar, a beautiful site, and quite tasty. The Italian dish was Black pasta with an assortment of seafood (mussels, shrimp, crab, Scallops) and zucchini and basil (500r). It was also tasty and a beautiful sight to look at. The seafood and vegetables, and chesses are all flown in fresh from Italy, and are fantastic. All the pasta is made in the restaurant, as is the bread and desserts, and is fresh and tasty. The Asiatic dish (950r) was Asian see-through red noodles with various fresh seafood (scallops, shrimp), with fresh sliced bell peppers. It was very tasty, and slightly

spicy. Monica has a "no salt added policy". She believes that salt is naturally found in the ingredients and is not needed to add to her dishes. A sampling of 5 desserts (230-350r) all were delicious, Tiramisu, Kostata, and the others were all home-made.

Entertainment was two-fold, with a great sound system, and state of the art light equipment. The singer was American Soul (and she can really do Aretha). Diners would get up and dance between tables, and the waitresses would dance while keeping an eye out for needs. People at the bar all seems to be dancing in place. And there are three dancers that pop up on small platforms in different costumes from time to time to keep the diners alert.

Smoking is allowed everywhere, and the ventilation is superb. Cigars are coming, but in the interim bring one and enjoy it with the various after dinner drinks (300r and up), and coffees (150r and up).

Toilets are unisex, 10 rooms, each with sinks and mini-shower bidets, and shiny. Sinatra is a place worth going to, whether for the food, entertainment, or the pleasant relaxed atmosphere and great service. **P**

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

## Your restaurant should be here

Please phone or write to PASSPORT sales manager:  
+ 7 (495) 640-0508, v.astakhova@passportmagazine.ru

### NOTE:

\*\*Indicates Passport Magazine Top 10 Restaurants 2009.

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NOTE: For restaurants with multiple locations the most popular location is given – see the website for others. All phone numbers have city code 495 unless otherwise indicated. Reservations suggested for most restaurants.



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# New Year's Nightlife Renewals

Miguel Francis

Welcome to another amazing year of unforgettable nightly adventures in Moscow. PASSPORT continues to bring you, the expat, the best venues, best events and best times that Moscow has to offer. The cold weather has been biting us hard over here in this cold town but remember, Moscow nights bring captivating warmth and passion that will heat you up, guaranteed.

Let's jump right in with the latest grand opening in Moscow. Ladies and gentlemen, all welcome Sinatra. This place is a

mixture of glamorous surroundings with a very easy breezy feel to it; once you enter you feel engulfed in luxury. The place is a mixture of a karaoke bar, restaurant and a club. You can always enjoy a delicious dinner here, but be warned you won't be able to sit for too long with the tunes that are spun here. The music here is very light, easy to dance to and positive. Lots of disco house and Freemasons being spun and those guys are the biggest British house remixes of all time in my opinion. Sinatra also has very uplifting live singing done by ex-pat divas! To top it all off, this place is filled with ex-pats, and that's always a good find in Moscow. The place is definitely pricey 15-20 US\$ per drink and no less than 50 US\$ average light food bill. (Bolshoi Putinkovskii 5, Metro Pushkinskaya, <http://www.sinatrarestaurant.ru/>)

Now back to the future and more playful glamour, although that could be good in some cases can't it? Posh Friends is an extension of Friends Bar that used to operate in 2009. The place derived its concept from Opera Club, which burned down a couple years ago. The best comparison for Posh Friends is a mixture of Opera and Imperia, fun and sophisticated. This club is filled with very positive energy and very interesting people, sometimes rendered as "kids". Nevertheless the club's design is very common, stretching from the design of the old giants like Dyagilev and First. The face-control man is none other than Dyagilev's very own Sasha. Anyone who's been in Moscow in 2005-2006 will recognize the man at the door. The pricing is very standard, about 12-15 US\$ per drink.

If you're looking to cut through the night with some child-like passion then this is the perfect destination for your night! (Pushkinskaya Ploshad 5, Metro Pushkinskaya, <http://www.poshfriends.ru>)

It's January, Moscow has its official 10 days of holidays starting January 1st. The place is half full. Where did most of the Russians go? Well, they love going to Courchevel, France. The amount of partying, drinking, snowboarding, dancing and fine dining that is done by Russians in Courchevel probably surpasses any tourist group that visits those snowy Alps. The more prominent organizer of these "group goings to Courchevel" is the Titan Event Agency operated by DJ's turned into businessmen Vengerov&Fedoroff <http://djstyle.ru>. If you want to join the pack all you need to do is call the number on their website and they will let you know when is the next trip. The trip is worth the networking that's for sure. Regular attendees of these exclusive Courchevel gatherings are mainly local celebrities like Timati, DJ Smash, Zhanna Friske etc. as well as major businessman of Russia. But if you want a local Courchevel then don't hold back, Moscow just recently grand opened the Courchevel karaoke lounge/restaurant, a bit pricy about 2000-5000r average bill for dinner but so good and cozy it'll make your head spin. Located at Kuznetskii Most 7, Metro Kuznetskii Most.

Happy New Year everyone, let's make this a good one! For feedback and comments, advertising, joint PASSPORT nightlife events, please write to [miguel@passportmagazine.ru](mailto:miguel@passportmagazine.ru). **P**



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Open 18.00-05.00

## A Simple Thing: celebrity brunch at Prostye veshi

Some things are “relativitily” confusing, some things are absolute. Having a full English breakfast is an absolute pleasure. Having an English breakfast in Moscow, in mid-afternoon, with tea in a wine bar, is apt to stir a few senses. Prostye Veshi, “Simple Things” is a delightful wine bar and bistro, handily placed for the flats or offices of the well-heeled, at 14 Bol. Nikitskaya Ul, but a step from St Andrew’s Church or the Kremlin walls. Owner Elena and manager Anastasia are always looking for inventive new ways to broaden diners’ experiences. Celebrity chefs knocking up their favourite concoctions is the current cunning plan: John Warren of Warrens’ Sausages is one of those.

But what is a sausage? A philosophical question, easy to pose, harder to digest. As unsolvable as “how long is a piece of string (of sausages)?” Traditionally, a simple Englishman would have only a half pound of answers: normal, Cumberland, chipolata and a Frankfurter for the exotic traveller. And in the bad old



days of mass production, the easy to spot, colourless, tasteless and odourless packaged sausage. Dull. And thankfully not part of our menus today.

Sausageur supreme, John Warren, has a mission is to lift the humble banger to exalted heights. With his culinary chum, Mike Gibson, the pair were the stars of Prostye Veshi in late November. Warren’s sausages contain only the finest beef, pork, spices and fillings. A ceaseless search for new expressions and newly discovered recipes give a mouth watering hamful of 30 choices. Who

could resist a plate filled with his finest bacon, mushrooms, scrambled egg and tomatoes, and a side slice of toast and Marmite? All washed down with a decent pot of Russian tea. Perfect! But it gets better still. Kedgeriee, porridge and over a score more possible flavours await the ravenous. All wolfed down by happy families, while being served with great cheer by John, Mike and the regular staff. If this left the sense of space confused, while every space was filled, it made for a timeless pleasure. Do simple things well. Good idea! RDH **P**

## AEB 15th Anniversary

The Association of European Businesses has seen Russia change enormously since 1995, and has itself been one of the major agents of that transformation. This was the clear message broadcast across the new Lotte Hotel for the AEB’s huge birthday bash. Social networking opportunities were plentiful, while guests chatted in the long, snaking queues for registration, name badge and cloakroom. Then a tricky choice. Into the cavernous hall for the speeches, or to the buffet. There wasn’t enough space, oxygen or food for both.

Your correspondent missed the fill-up and dutifully joined the listening throngs. The AEB warm-up speeches reviewed progress, bestowed awards to long serving colleagues and basked in the glow of hopeful tidings from the recent EU-Russia summit. “WTO: here we go!”, in summary. The Russian trade and industry minister Victor Khristenko welcomed us and thanked AEB for their best efforts. There were diplomats there by the dozen, and the Belgian Ambassador rounded the formal proceedings off with commendable brevity. Between these, tall, urbane former French Prime



Minister, Pierre de Villepin, gave the keynote speech. This was a veritable *tour de force*, as he ranged far and wide on the world’s problems and opportunities. He certainly got everyone’s attention early on when he declared that the West had a lot to learn from Russia’s sense of purpose, optimism and dynamism.

A succession of gripping and contestable declarations followed sequentially. It was pure Gaullism, with a ringing endorsement of greater state involvement to promote growth and stability. That

will have sounded interesting in Russian. From such an experienced statesman, one must assume that his persistent treatment of “Europe”, “the Euro Zone” and “France and Germany” as synonyms was deliberate. Aside from one Lord Cardigan-like arc of the arm to encompass the Mediterranean littoral and another to bless “Eastern Europe”, none of the other 25 EU members showed up on his radar. All in impeccable English, the *lingua franca* of the age. A fascinating glimpse of the view from the top. **P**





## Ireland survives

Despite all the stories of doom and despair on the currency front that have been circulating about Ireland in the last month or two, the Irish Embassy recently held two events which went against the trend (how very Irish!). The first was a lunch-time degustation, of both food and drink, organised by Bord Bia (the Irish Food Board) at which the star was the Irish beef supplied worldwide (including to H.M. The Queen, it was emphasised), and now also in Moscow. All the meat is hung for three weeks, and we had samples from off the

bone and on it—both equally delicious. Afterwards a bottle of Tyrconnel went west so quickly that the last-ditch diners had to be rescued with a wonderful dram which was new to me: Kilbeggan. I tumbled out into the Moscow slush glad there was no ditch, or sheogh, to trap me in for the rest of the afternoon.

The other event, on Friday 10 December, was the European launch of the Ambassador's book of poetry—his second—entitled *The Song the Oriole Sang* (Dedalus Press, Dublin). Philip McDonagh's poems have a lightness and grace which I, personally, find very beguiling. Many are about India, where he was posted for a

long time, and where his wife and children were born. He is as "cross-border" as his work. Philip read accompanied by Lily Neill on the Celtic harp. Afterwards, she gave a striking solo performance which combined both traditional and some elegantly modern playing. Also reading was Joseph Woods, the Director of Poetry Ireland, who managed to raise a number of laughs with his witty verses about life both in the sheogh and out of it. Clearly there is cultural light at the end of the gloomy Euro tunnel. To paraphrase Stalin on Hitler, currencies may come and go, but the Irish people remain. **P**

Ian Mitchell

## Estonian Embassy party

On Thursday 9 December, the Estonian Embassy hosted its normal Christmas Party for friends of the tiny, ex-Soviet republic. The Ambassador, Simmu Tiik, welcomed the guests, emphasising that the building we were being entertained in had been the home of the Es-

tonian Embassy for ninety years. This was a reminder that from 1940 to 1991 the country was not legitimately part of the Soviet Union but only occupied by it. None of this was to imply any anti-Russian feeling. The Ambassador spoke alternately in English and Russian—not in the language of the Estonians, who all

seem to be bi-lingual. The evening featured a concert by a modern six-piece jazz band from Tallinn, called Ajavares. The music was wonderful, but the CD on display illustrated the language difficulties. The only worlds in the sleeve notes that I could understand were "Paul Daniel". He is the one who plays the "mängib kitarre", while Ahto Abner plays "lööb trummi". Of course! Later, at the sumptuous buffet, Mingo Rajandi told me that her Russian was actually very poor, and she regretted that fact. In perfect English she said that she was one of the "lost generation" who were discouraged from learning the language of the oppressor, and that now they are no longer oppressing Estonia she wishes she spoke their rich and interesting language. As it is, she can only communicate across the frontier by means of her mängib kontrabassi, and by selling the group's CD, which is called *Armas-tuslaul Rändinnule*. Конечно! **P**

Ian Mitchell



## St Andrew's Day Ball

Scotland's patron saint is popular in Russia—possibly because he is also the patron saint of Russia—and well honoured by his eponymous Society. This year's Ball welcomed 370 guests, who packed the Renaissance Hotel at Dinamo to the gunwales. We were magnificently wined and dined, with a superb salmon and seafood starter and an exquisite steak. Between them, the star of the show: by popular consent the best haggis tasted for many a day. The wee beastie had been flown over, expressly to join us, and accompanied by two magnificent pipers and his mentor, Mr Rabbie Burns (born 1759 and still going strong) who's sprightly and impassioned address belied his advancing years, as he filled us in before filling us up.

After the meal, the dancing. Scots band, The Big Shoogie, were welcomed to Moscow with a six hour battle at DME to be allowed to get their kit off the apron. But all well worth it as the tempo ebbed and flowed with the evening's moods. The dancing was intimate, thanks to plenty of affection and liquid succour, but also due to there being more square feet akimbo than square feet of parquet. Apologies to the many toes I twinkled over.

The whole event is not just great fun and a demonstration of Scots culture, it is in a good cause. With raffles and sporran-wa-



tering art auction prices, the Society raised a staggering Euro 200,000. For local charities Maria's Children, Taganka Children's Fund and Kitezh. Well done, and thank you! RDH **P**

## Russian Book Fair

Between the 1st and 5th December the 12th International Book Fair was held in the Central House of Artists, or New Tretyakov Gallery, opposite the Park of Rest and Culture in central Moscow. This is where the best of Russian publishing shows off its wares and also where foreign publishers interested in the Russian market gather to buy Russian titles for translation and sell their own titles into the Russian market. Unlike most such fairs—the biggest in the world being New York, London and Frankfurt—the Moscow one is also open to the general public, which adds a literary aspect to the otherwise commercial atmosphere. The special guest this year was France, which had a huge stand in the central hall, but many other countries were also present, from Ireland to Finland, including the Czech republic, which was last year's special guest. They hosted a number of parties, the best of which was at the Café Mart in Petrovka where a mix of poetry reading and jazz music was helped by a supply of Czech beer (see picture). This was Moscow bohemia old-style, as it existed before the "cul-



ture" of Malls laid its dead hand on the life of what was once a great literary city. Don't miss next year's event. **P**

*Ian Mitchell*

## The Italians are Coming

On Wednesday 1 December the Associazione Italiani a Mosca (ItaM) held its launch meeting in the Renaissance Monarch Hotel on Leningradsky Prospekt. Following, I understand, in the footsteps of the British Business Club, the idea is to hold regular networking meetings. If this event, and the summer's inter-business club regatta which the Italians organised, are anything to go by, these events will be well worth attending. The Club is open to non-Italians, and even accepts members without elegantly tailored suits. The President is Giovanni Stornante. Potential members should contact him through the website, which is [www.itamosca.ru](http://www.itamosca.ru) I doubt you will be disappointed. **P**







## British Business Club: Christmas Drinks

On Wednesday 15th December the Marriott Aurora Hotel on Petrovka hosted the BBC's annual Christmas Drinks party. "Drinks" was a misnomer because there was a spectacular array of food on offer as well. There was turkey for those who were already in Christmas Day mood, curry for those who wanted a taste of traditional British eating, and roast beef for those who were wise enough to have what, in the opinion of everyone I talked to, was the best beef they had ever tasted in Russia. I had three helpings. Not only that, the champagne did not run out until after 9 p.m. and the other drinks, including promotions by Parliament vodka and Famous Grouse whisky, were still going strong at 11. The Marriott Aurora has some claim to be, as one guest said to me, "the best hotel in Moscow". Perhaps PASSPORT will start a competition. A



subsection might be "best hotel guest" of the year, an award which this time must surely go to Don Scott, OBE, who presided with his usual booming aplomb over the proceedings, distributing raffle prizes and inviting everyone who is not already a member to join

what is surely the most sociable, relaxed and entertaining club in Moscow. If you think life is short, can often be sweet, and should at all possible times be amusing, then visit [www.britishclub.ru](http://www.britishclub.ru) See you there in 2011! **P**

Ian Mitchell

## Overheard in the Starlight Diner

A clean-cut, young-ish American in a suit is telling a friend how much he likes being in Moscow. "Here, it's like, everybody touches your butt. I was riding the Metro the other night and someone touched my butt. I said to my wife, 'Honey, did you just touch my butt?' And she said, 'No, I did *not* touch your

butt.' I said, 'Well, *someone* just touched my butt.' See, that's what I like about this place. It's 6.30 in the evening, you're all crammed into this carriage together and someone touches your butt. It's not like back home in the States where everyone has their own ideas about personal space. It's great!" **P**

"Earhole"

# Happy New Year thrice from all at **PASSPORT** magazine

Our New Year resolutions:

- Don't sleep in the subway
- Don't seek logic where there is none to be found
- Don't believe in tears - Moscow doesn't
- Don't forget PASSSPORT when travelling.
- Be nice to people, especially those who think Deidre sucks
- Don't give up your day job
- Give up smoking
- Remember to take my brown trousers when travelling with Luc Jones
- Forgive the bank clerk for losing your documents again



Good  
luck!

From the  
**PASSPORT**  
team





## IWC Winter Bazaar Breaks All Records

Text and photos

John Harrison

On the 27th of November, the IWC held its 27th Winter bazaar at the Radisson Slavyanskaya. Actually the hotel was taken over by the IWC for the day. Expecting the event to occupy the usual one large hall, I was staggered to find that this year's bazaar stretched over no less than two vast halls and three large rooms where the food was laid out.

This wasn't a jumble sale, with cups of tea served in plastic cups held on a rainy Sunday afternoon. Here one could sample and buy delicious food from literally all over the world, made by real people from each country, who are temporary resident

in Moscow. Here, for humble fees, you could sample and buy Hungarian "pogacsa" (scones) and apple pie, handmade by Hungarian ladies in true traditional style; traditional Italian LaLasagna (Bolognese, al Pesto and vegetarian), "Pasta al forno", Christmas desserts and cookies, and Tiramisu. Here you could scoff real Canadian maple syrup, Columbian Tamal with hot chocolate, stuffed potato, coffee and natural juices and other interesting small dishes, and about ten thousand other dishes.

The two halls selling items offered an awe-inspiring display of goods, people and languages. For example, in one corner of the hall there were leather goods from Madagascar, Montenegro wines, Columbi-

an coffee, Estonian umbrellas and so on. All served with a smile and a contagious inner warmth which I sometimes feel when I am in the presence of people who are doing something truly good. I bought most of my Christmas presents in one morning, at a price which I could handle. Buying presents for the family in Moscow is something I never look forward to.

The facts and figures speak for themselves:

3158 guests, up from 2748 in 2009. Proceeds increased substantially over last year.

The event was organised by only 6 people, and some 60 volunteers who were mainly IWC members, their friends and families.





The stands were managed and manned by some 650 volunteers from 60 Embassies, 4 associations and 3 sponsors, who sold their traditional and typical goods, which were mainly imported by them for the bazaar. Everybody worked on a voluntary basis

Where does the money go? Proceeds go to a whole range of people-orientated charities. The IWC's plan includes the following areas: nourishing the homeless in and around Moscow through soup kitchens, provision of emergency funds on a case-by-case basis, food, clothing and supporting a rehabilitation project. They also work in orphanages, in particular by preparing children and

young people for an independent life by providing them with clothing, school materials and specialised training.

In hospitals, the IWC funds specialised medical supplies and equipment. In 2010, the IWC additionally provided a number of hospitals with prostheses and food to individuals. The IWC continues to help its "Star Ball Kids". These are amputees who are provided with artificial limbs, given payment for treatment, transport costs and medical help.

Support for deprived children attending day care centres is provided by supplying food support and educational and social activities, such as computer and English lessons, arts and

crafts lessons and independent life-skill projects. Very poor foreign students and needy families are helped on a case-to-case basis. Women and girls recently released from detention centres are helped to retrain and reintegrate into society.

In addition to all of these causes, the IWC Donations Office distributes reusable clothing, furniture, household items and toys to projects that need them.

The IWC does not seek headline news, preferring to get on with the job. But the group does make the point that expats, the female half at least, are not a miserly group, given a framework within which to organise. **P**





John Harrison

It is quite difficult to find a place to park near the Raddisson Slavyansky Hotel. The car parks outside Kievsky Station fill up quickly, and a mysterious one-way system leads you in zig-zags ever further away from the hotel. I eventually found an empty parking space in 2nd Borodinskaya Ulitsa, which runs along the side of the huge Evropeysky mall. There was no yellow line and other vehicles were parked there. As I left my vehicle a man stepped out from a doorway and for some reason offered me some roses. An hour and a half later I returned to my car. It had gone. I walked up and down the road twice, in the hope that it would suddenly appear. It had either been stolen, which was unlikely, or it had been kidnapped by the dastardly evil car parking police.

The latter was indeed the case, as a friendly uniformed security man from the mall informed me. "Don't worry, I know somebody who can take you to the police pound to pick your car up." A man appeared out of the same shop door where the flowers seller had appeared, and dashed across the road towards us. I agreed to everything, that all it would cost is 5,000 roubles, and that would include a taxi journey to the uttermost ends of Moscow and that he would wait at the GBDD office whilst I paid a fine. Then I felt an eruption of anger starting deep down in my belly. I tried to control it and prevent myself from pulling his eyes and hair out and leaving him in bits in the gutter. Then I remembered that Russian prisons are bad. Pride had its own stupid way and I refused his services, thinking I'd sort it out myself.

I turned the corner onto Bolshaya Dorogomilovskaya Ulitsa. There I met a GBDD officer who didn't want to talk to me. It was suddenly very lonely, and cold, without my little car. Further up the road, there was another uniformed man who gave me the number of the department of the GBDD which deals with kidnapped cars: 504 1724. After the recorded message the voice informed me that you have to have your driving license, car registration document and passport with you to get your car back. Then a calm female asked where the vehicle was picked up from, and the number plate.

Walking back to the scene of the kidnapping, I did in fact see a no-parking sign at the end of the street; I must have been blind not to have seen it. I cooled down sufficiently to hear a bespectacled man asking politely whether I needed a taxi.

I said no, er, yes. He said the whole trip would take two hours and cost 5000 roubles plus a 350 rouble fine, I haggled the price down to 3500 plus the fine and felt good about that at least.

In most cases, apparently, when your car has been kidnapped in central Moscow, you pay your fine in the GBDD office on Ulitsa Pobeda 9, in Reutov which is in the back of beyond, beyond MKAD on the far western part of the city. The nearest Metro is Novogireevo, but it's about an hour walk. Bus 15 goes from Metro Pervomaiskaya, and takes about 30 minutes, although you may end up waiting at least that long for the bus, so my driver told me. Once there, try to keep your cool in the office, which is a one-storey Portakabin affair within a large GBDD complex. Everyone is in a predictably bad mood. The drivers because they are being blackmailed, and the police because they have to deal with these delinquents.

There is a line of pre-perestroika-type wooden windows which are opened from the inside by gruff men and slammed shut. Most of the drivers were civil, to each other, which helped. I didn't have my passport, but when my turn came the officer asked me why I wasn't in London with Berezovsky and I answered that I wasn't quite in the same league, and if I was, I wouldn't be standing in line to pay a fine. He laughed and seemed to forget about the passport. You have to pay a 350 rouble fine in a machine right there, although the officer seemed happy to take the cash from me direct. Ten minutes later the window opened again and I was handed a release order for my precious vehicle.

Then another mad dash through Moscow. Kidnapped cars are taken to whatever "spetsparkovka" place is nearest to wherever they are picked up. In my case, in another inaccessible place on Ulitsa Ryabinova VI. 71a, near the junction of Mozhaitskaya Shosse and MKAD. You show the release document and you are allowed inside the "spetsparkovka" to pick up your car which is stuck with bright yellow self-adhesive stickers all over. It is best to remove these straightaway, otherwise they become almost impossible to remove. The hardest part of all this was subduing my anger and accepting the services of drivers who are clearly working hand in pocket with the GBDD. I speak Russian, but as it happens, most of the drivers seem to speak some English and seemed used to what must seem to them childish antics of foreigners. **P**

# Dare to ask Dare



Photo by Maria Savelieva

Ex-pats and Russians alike ask celebrity columnist Deidre Dare questions about life in Moscow.

**Dear Deidre:**

*I find life so painful: everyone is so selfish and always hurting each other. How do you stand it? It is almost too dismal for me and I feel disconnected from everyone. It is all just suffering.*

**Dear Fyodor Dostoyevsky:**

I agree with you. However, I have a way of dealing with it. I'll share it with you and that should help a bit.

Larry Flynt (of *Hustler Magazine* fame) took a lot of painkillers for many years after he was shot and then, when he was cured and out of agony, he stopped.

I take Larry's approach: I'll stop stopping the pain when the pain stops.

Drugs, booze, reckless sex, over-eating, perusing *Hustler*: these are all ways to alleviate the pain. Keep using them until the agony stops.

This, I'll warn you right now, will be never.

xxooDD

**Dear Deidre:**

*I went out with a real loser guy a few times and he just changed his Facebook status to "In a relationship" and I know he means me!!! Can you be in a relationship and not know it?*

**Dear Jean-Paul Sartre:**

Yes. And I've recently discovered something even worse.

You can be broken-up with and not know it.

Now that can really cause an existential crisis of unprecedented proportions, let me tell you.

And a few benders as well...

xxooDD

**Dear Deidre:**

*I have a huge fear of commitment and this is keeping me (obviously) from having a girlfriend. I don't know what to do about it. Any advice?*

**Dear Stephen King:**

No.

Anyone rational would have a fear of commitment.

xxooDD

**Dear Deidre:**

*Why do these New Zealanders use the word "wee" for little? They sound like Munchkins and it drives me crazy. And there are so many of them here. I wish there were wee-er!*

**Dear Frank Baum:**

We can get some useful assistance on this question from Seinfeld:

"Why does Radio Shack ask for your phone number when you buy batteries?"

I don't know.

xxooDD

**Dear Deidre:**

*Why are Russian men so ugly?*

**Dear Naomi Wolf:**

Are they? I hadn't noticed.

xxooDD

**Dear Deidre:**

*I am desperately in love with a Russian girl but she speaks hardly any English and I speak no Russian. What should I do?*

**Dear Andre Breton:**

I have a friend in Moscow who, like you, is always "desperately in love" with some Russian or Ukrainian chick or another, although he can't communicate with her.

I think of these women of his as more like pets than girlfriends. This is a little surreal when you're out to dinner with them, because you feel like ordering them a water bowl and a Milkbone.

You're not in love, mate, you're in heat.

Take Russian lessons—that will cool you down as much as a cold shower

would, I promise.

At any rate, it always works for me. That or ordering a bowl of water.

**Dear Deidre:**

*In bed: Putin or Medvedev?*

**Dear Eduard Limonov:**

Putin v Medvedev, eh?

Medvedev.

Medvedev.

Medvedev.

Always: Medvedev.

**Dear Deidre:**

*What do you want from 2011?*

**Dear Dale Carnegie:**

Medvedev.

Medvedev.

Medvedev.

Always: Medvedev.

**Dear Deidre:**

*I find the holiday season in Moscow to be depressing since Christmas isn't until January and there's not really the normal Western fanfare. Any suggestions on how to get out of my no-Holiday spirit funk?*

**Dear Charles Dickens:**

I find it a relief not to be bombarded with the "fanfare."

Look what happened to the Jews in the West when Christmas became such a ridiculous extravaganza there: they turned Chanukah (in reality, the President's Day of Judaism) into a big thing just to keep up with those merry Christian gentlemen.

And don't get me started on Kwanza. Just don't.

Someday, the Russians will do the same for their Orthodox Christmas, but until then let's enjoy the Peace on Earth, shall we? Or do you really want to listen to Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer about 4000 times between now and New Year's? Think hard about that.

Really?

xxooDD

PS Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom Rozhestva i s

Novim Godom to all my Russian Passport Readers!

**Do you have a question for Deidre Dare? If so, please email her at [Deidre\\_Clark@hotmail.com](mailto:Deidre_Clark@hotmail.com).**



# Pileloops' Festival Part III

Written by Natalie Kurtog, illustrations by Nika Harrison

## Chapter 8

### Searching for the hat

Peter heard some voices and movement in the bushes behind him. He looked round and perceived a multitude of different colour Pileloops; yellow, red, blue, grey, violet and pink ones.

"Good Day! Glad to see you again after such a long time! How wonderful that you've flown in!" They proclaimed loudly.

The old man bowed and replied: "It is truly wonderful to see you. May I introduce my friend, Pileloop Peter. Peter, this is Yellow Pileloop, Red Pileloop, Blue and..."

"Why are they different colours?" The boy asked quietly.

"They are flower dust," the old man answered, just as quietly. "Tonight, when the flowers get covered with Pileloop-dust pollen, dust flies in from everywhere and the Pileloops' Festival begins." The old man stopped talking. "The hat, oh, we've got to find the hat, now!"

He shouted to the guests: "Friends! After the last festival I left something very important behind. Do you remember the hat tricks?"

"Of course we remember!" hundreds of voices chimed in. "No hat, no festival!"

Then Pileloop said: "I have lost the hat! Maybe one of you has seen it? I left it on that pine tree during last year's festival."

Everyone joined in and started to search the area.

Sometime later, Yellow Pileloop flew up to Peter, shrugged his shoulders and whined: "It's not here, not anywhere! Not in

the trees, not on the field, not... what's that?"

Everyone looked round. Swaying from side to side, something black flew towards them. It was the hat.

"My dear old friend, I haven't seen you for a long long time!" it said.

Peter's mouth opened wide in surprise. "You old bungler you, how could you have just left such an amazing thing as this behind?"

A black little old man with a long black beard poked his face out of the hat. "I picked it up a year ago and took it to my castle."

Pileloop replied: "Meet my new friend, Peter."

Black Pileloop looked closely at the boy. "What attic has this young Pileloop fallen from?" he asked.

"Peter is the new master of our hat." Pileloop replied.

Black Pileloop screwed up his eyes in a cunning way and said: "Fly over to my castle, and leave your attic to your Pileloop. He will guard the hat. It's high time you came and stayed with me. We've been dreaming about this for a long time, remember?"

Peter bent over to his friend and said: "I don't want to live in granny's attic instead of you." He felt ill just thinking about this.

Pileloop said: "Don't worry, he's been trying to get me to go and stay with him for ages, he gets bored and he's an old grumbler." Then Pileloop turned round to the old man: "Thank you for the hat. I thought that I had lost it forever."

"Always ready to help an old friend," smiled Black Pileloop and winked at Peter.

## Chapter 9

### Tricks

News that the hat had been found travelled fast. The Pileloops surrounded Peter and the old man.

"Show us some tricks. Show us some tricks!" they all shouted, and applauded. Dust rose into the sky from the clapping, creating multi-coloured fireworks. "Oh come on, please, we've been waiting for long enough!" they said.

Pileloop flew over the field and slapped his palm against the hat. A cloud oozed out, from which rings, ear rings, coins, necklaces, watches, broaches, nuts and bolts, springs, cogs, hooks and screws flopped out. There were hundreds of bits of bric-a-brac. Peter watched, astounded, as they disintegrated and then materialised again into various Metal, Gold, Silver, Bronze Pileloops. The flower Pileloops greeted them warmly.

"Now you do a trick," said the old man and pushed the hat over to the boy. Peter didn't even manage to get hold of the hat when various guests one after the other, climbed out of it. There were Flour Pileloops which had flown in from bakers and windmills. But to begin with, they appeared as buns, cakes, tarts, loaves of bread and pretzels. Sugar from a sweet factory at first appeared from the hat in the form of hares, hedgehogs, spheres and plain old lumps of sugar, then transformed into Sugar Pileloops.

"And now wave the hat!" The old man shouted at Peter. And that is exactly what Peter did. Peter felt cold and shivered. Snow started pouring out of the hat. It quickly covered the clearing and created a series of snow drifts from which snowmen, snow ladies, sleighs





and sleighs runs magically manifested themselves. Snow-ball fights started and the Pileloops shattered into a multitude of coloured particles when they were hit by a snowball, then they reformed.

"Snow Pileloops! Snow Pileloops!" the Pileloops shouted at the newly arrived guests.

Peter whispered to his friend: "I didn't know that snow is dust."

The old man smiled and said: "That doesn't surprise me, there's a lot you don't know. After the festival the snow dust will melt and will return only when winter comes."

Peter waved the hat again. This time sand poured out. Sand lay in waves around the clearing. Sand castles, little houses, fish, and other shapes that children make in the sand appeared. The shapes dematerialised and formed into Sand Pileloops.

When all the Pileloops had gathered, the old man shook his head and said: "You are so like your great grandfather." The boy smiled.

A very beautiful girl in a pink dress flew up to the old man. She whispered something to him, turned to Peter and smiled. Pileloop gave the hat to Peter. "This is yours," he said. "The tricks are over. All the Pileloops are here. Here is your hat. You can go back home. Do you remember the way?"

Peter didn't know what to do. He wanted to stay very much. The boy nodded his head and hesitatingly took the hat.

## Chapter 10

### The Pileloop's Festival

Peter thought up an excuse to stay, but he didn't need to because the old man flew up to him and said ceremoniously: "We invite you, Pileloop Peter, to attend the Pileloop's Festival as our guest!" The old man screwed his eyes up and smiled broadly.

"Yes, great!" Peter said, other Pileloops clapped.

The boy flew up into the air and shouted: "People give pres-



ents to each other at festivals. I want to give you the hat!"

The Pileloops all clapped so much that the whole clearing was covered with multi-coloured dust. Bees were jolted out of flowers and joined in, a ringing sound from thousands of bluebells filled the air. The old man hugged Peter. Then he started to jump around, and broke into a jig.

The Pileloops merged together in one huge dance-cloud. Peter couldn't conceal his amazement. The Pileloops danced, danced and danced. The old man, who still couldn't believe his good fortune, flew up to the boy. "Thank you, this is a present fit for a king!"

Pileloop held his hands to his heart.

"Now I have a reason to look after the hat year after year. But how did you decide? Didn't you tell me you wanted to own it?"

Peter turned to his friend and said: "It's me who should be thanking you! My dreams have come true! I am so happy that I was able to do some tricks, and what tricks they were! Now I know what it's like to be a magician. Pileloop and Peter hugged each other.

## Chapter 11

### The Pink Pileloop

The festival roared along in high spirits. Peter stood to one side and shyly watched the Pileloops dance. The girl in the pink dress flew up to him. "This is Rose Pileloop," said the old man. "You have seen her already. She lives in a rose."

The girl took Peter by the hand and took him into the dance. The boy felt a bit awkward at first, but Rose Pileloop was so dexterous with him that he soon forgot that he couldn't dance. "Have you got a girl friend?" the girl asked. "N-no," Peter was embarrassed for some reason. "I don't either. I was only born very recently. In a rose. Maybe I can be your friend?" Peter's heart jumped with joy: "Of course!"

Peter was very happy. He soared into the sky, twisted and turned in a riot of light and colour. He couldn't believe that this festival was actually made of nothing but dust, the same dust that we come across every day at work, at home, in museums, on the roads, in the fields, forests, workshops, bakeries, windmills summer and winter, autumn and spring. The night slowly dispersed and the first rays of dawn appeared.

The old man flew up to him, gave him the hat and shouted: "Throw the hat upwards, for the last time!" The boy flung the hat upwards. The Pileloops raised their hands up. Peter's new friend raised her hands up. The hat shot upwards to the stars as if it was a rocket. When it touched them tiny flames began to fall earthward.

"Star Pileloops! Star Pileloops!" Everyone shouted. One by one, the Pileloops all took off to join the new guests. They dissolved into the light of the new day.

"Let's go!" Rose Pileloop took Peter by the hand. What could be more perfect than touching the stars hand in hand with such a kind and wonderful girl who was born of a rose!

Eventually, the Pileloops descended back down onto the clearing. Peter and his new friend held hands and smiled, looking at each other. It got light.

"Time to say goodbye," said Rose Pileloop.

Suddenly, without any warning, a grey shadow covered the clearing. It rose up and took the Pileloops with it. Everybody was thrown about all over the place. The shadow took the girl so quickly that Peter lost hold of her. The rose dress flashed and disappeared together into the grey matter. **P**

*Translated from the Russian by John Harrison*



## Puzzle page

Compiled by Ross Hunter

### Moscow indoors and Underground

Winter is a great time for indoor exploration. Moscow has a fantastic range of museums, galleries and well-heated special places. Four are show here. Which are they? Choose among the eight great names.

Tolstoy's House - Tretyakov Gallery - Pushkin Museum - Mayakovsky Museum - State Historical Museum - Museum of the 20th century - Gorky House - Museum of Archaeology



And here is a photo taken inside each of the above. Can you match them up?



**Metro Spaghetti. The average Metro line has 21 stations. In each list, which is the odd one out, and why?**

- A** Kalininskaya, Kropotkinskaya, Kurskaya, Kievskaya, Kutozovskaya
- B** Mayakovskaya, Pushkinskaya, Tretyakovskaya, Mendeleevskaya, Smolenskaya, Turgenevskaya
- C** Komsomolskaya, Taganskaya, Prospekt Mira, Belorusskaya, Oktyabrskaya
- D** Polyanka, Krasne Vorota, Sukharevskaya, Arbatskaya (Pale Blue), Kitai Gorod
- E** Novogireevo, Mitino, Rechnoy Voksal, Yugo-Zapadnaya, Ryananzky Prospekt
- F** Yellow, Dark Blue, Purple, Light Green, Red.

### Mini Sudoku

Usual rules: 1-6 in each row, column and box.

2		1			
	3			2	
		4			6
			4		3
	4			6	
5					2

### Answers to December puzzles

**Saints & Symbols:** St Mark's lion, St Matthew's angel, St John's eagle, St Luke's ox.

**Churches:** St Paul's London, St Peter's Rome, St Isaac's St Petersburg, St Mark's Venice.

Odd one out:

A Buddhism – the other three desert religions share the same heritage

B St Peter – the other four wrote the Gospels

C Rome – Jesus visited all the others

D Oranges – do not feature in Jesus' teaching

E Pontius Pilate – is in new testament, all the others are Old Testament people.

**Symbols:** Hindu 'Om', Islamism crescent moon and star, Buddhist wheel of life, Christian fish (Jesus was 'a fisher of men's souls'), Jewish Star of David.

**Mini Sudoku:** see [www.englishedmoscow.com](http://www.englishedmoscow.com)

# California Preening

Ian Mitchell

In the middle of a Moscow winter, there will be many who dream of California, the west coast American oblast which is run by The Terminator, and where white-collar desk-jockeys in sweats generate electricity for the local grid by peddling exercise bikes in their lunch hour. But that is not all that happens California. Los Angeles also happens.

Raymond Chandler once described the city as having "all the personality of a paper cup" and it would seem that Bret Easton Ellis feels much the same, despite the glitter, the sunshine and the slender, swaying palm trees, many of which are even taller than Naomi Campbell. And Mr Ellis should know: he has written two novels about the place.

The first of Mr Ellis's books, called *Less Than Zero*, was published in 1985, when he was still a brattish college kid in temporary exile in Vermont. He returns to his home-town for a socially-dysfunctional Christmas. The first sentence sets the tone: "People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles."

Two hundred pages later, the book ends without anyone having merged, on a freeway or anywhere else. They have passed in the night, exchanging body-fluids, joints and occasionally blows. But they have never merged because they, like the author, are too self-centred to be able to establish genuinely interactive relationships with other items in the city's human inventory.

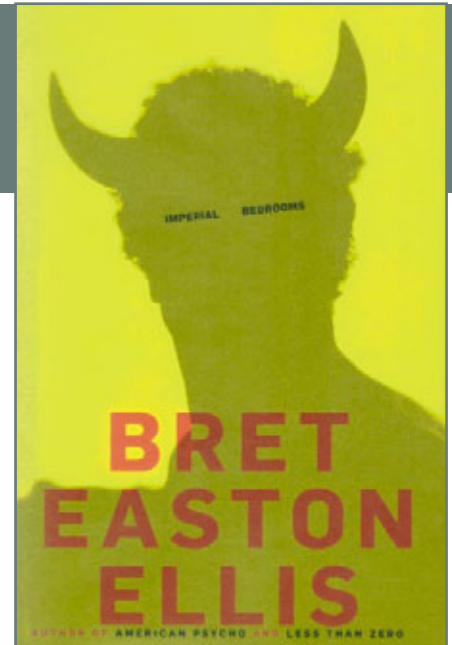
How dull, you might think, especially while sitting in the land of Leo Tolstoy. But Mr Ellis's books are not dull—that is the point. He has raised to a high pitch of art, the illustration of isolation. His stories do not really present a plot, except in very minimalist way. They are vehicles for the expression of a single self. All the characters in them are, at bottom, the same, or at least trying to be the same thing behind variations of wardrobe and lifestyle accessory. Complete freedom produces competitive conformity.

I mention *Less Than Zero* because the book under review, *Imperial Bedrooms*, published six months ago, revisits the same places, the same group of people and the same background cultural assumptions twenty-five years on. The powerful beams of self-absorption and narcissism are undimmed. Everyone is still projecting, preening and pooh-poohing all those who do not project so powerfully or preen so conscientiously. And still they do not merge. They have grown up without maturing.

In the intervening quarter of a century, Mr Ellis himself left college, got stoned several thousand times and published five books. One of them was, I thought, a dud; two were interesting; and two were brilliant. The first of the latter category was *American Psycho*, the book for which he is best known, and which, like *Less Than Zero*, was made into a very successful film.

Best of all was *Glamorama*, the book about the fashion/night-club world in New York. When I re-read it recently, I found myself thinking that it made Anna Karenina, which I was reading at the same time, seem lifeless by comparison. Granted, Tolstoy has a plot and a variety of interesting characters, whereas Bret Easton Ellis has little plot and really only one character: himself (again). But there is a vigour, a wit, a readability and a crispness of social observation that is far more entertaining than anything that the Sage of the Tuskaya oblast presents in his extended saga of social reportage.

In Anna Karenina people "merge", demerge, change and realise things. They regularly think about other people. In *Glamorama* they are more likely to stop on the staircase in night-clubs they are designing and ask: "Is this cool or useless? I'm not sure." Conversations fall apart: "A long, chilly silence none of us are able to fill floats around, acts cool, lives." (emphasis in original) The author-narrator's motto is: "The better you look, the more you see." So when someone unbeautiful "acts like an idiot without trying", he cuts him off by saying, "Oh sorry, my ass just yawned."



*Imperial Bedrooms*

Bret Easton Ellis

Picador £16.99

The central theme of all Mr Ellis's books is stated succinctly by the character in *Glamorama* who looks superciliously round the night-club the author-narrator has created and says: "I'm thinking, Jesus, the zeitgeist's in limbo."

Even the literary world is dismissed rather wittily. When a beautiful girl the narrator is trying to "merge" with while crossing the Atlantic on the QE2 is discovered sunning herself on deck, he eases himself down onto a towel beside her, "flexing my abs to get her attention". Unusually, he notices something not connected with himself: "She's reading a book with the words MARTIN AMIS in giant black letters on the cover and I'm hoping she's not a member of Amnesty International."

In order not to spoil the fun, I will say no more about *Imperial Bedrooms* than that, though quieter, it is an explicit continuation of all the above. The central theme is elliptically re-stated by the author-narrator, who is now a script-writer, and who repels the crowd at the after-party of a movie premier on Hollywood Boulevard with a neat reversal of a well-known cliché. Seeing the socially-greedy faces of unfamiliar people illuminated by the lights of their cell-phone screens as they preen and dream in the cavernous darkness, he declines to take verbal interchange into the unfamiliar territory of actual conversation. "I've been in New York the last four months is the mantra, my mask an expressionless smile." **P**



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