

Novodevichy Convent and Cemetery. Below: The State Historical Museum in Moscow as seen from Red Square.

NOVODEVICHY PHOTO BY VED GHIRAYATH; TAV AND RED SQUARE BY MIGUEL

Shoppers Welcome the New

By Alastair Gee

MOSCOW IS NO STRANGER TO REINVENTION.

First, Joseph Stalin demolished Tsarist-era churches and streets to build neo-Gothic skyscrapers. Later, Soviet leaders studied the city with cookie-cutter apartment buildings.

Now, fueled by oil profits and frustration at Russia's collapse in the postcommunist years, Moscow is having yet another makeover.

More than 100 skyscrapers, 18-lane highways and new onion domes will transform Moscow's landscape by 2020. In fact, some observers are bemused by city planners' apparent fondness for superlatives. Says Clementine Cecil, an architectural preservationist: "Are they feeling inadequate or something?"

In business and diplomacy, Moscow is used to grabbing world attention, even if it is not always the most favorable kind.

In fashion, Russia used to lumber with a reputation for being in a style vacuum. A small group of hometown heroes, showing collections abroad as well as at home, is slowly changing that.

And even if local brands aren't yet as recognizable as those in Western fashion capitals, as a haven of luxury, Moscow has few rivals.

Even in Soviet times, luxury was important: When the Bolsheviks moved the government from St.

Petersburg to Moscow after the 1917 Revolution, they nurtured a small luxury sector. Red Moscow perfume and Sovyetskoye Shampanskoye, or Soviet Champagne, were mass-produced, and still exist today.

Following the Soviet collapse, Moscow was notorious as the place where oligarchs partied, binged and dressed in branded clothes as the nation's economy and crime rate spun out of control. But as President Vladimir Putin, inaugurated in 2000, ushered in a calmer mood, Russia's finances improved — the average monthly wage rose from \$79 in 2000 to \$529 in 2007 — and fashion matured.

Today, retail is booming. More than 1 million square meters, or 10.7 million square feet, of shopping space will be built in Moscow over the next year, according to Swiss Realty Group. The Russian fashion industry is anchored by two competing fashion weeks held twice a year around the same time. There were 53 designers at the most recent fashion week in Moscow, and 58 at Russian Fashion Week. While the shows attracted little international attention, with few foreign visitors or buyers attending, organizers

aren't worried.

"Russian brands are beginning to get it together," observed Alexander Shumsky, head of Russian Fashion Week. "It's not fair to compare Russian designers with international competitors right now, but Russian designers have a big future."

Three Moscow-based designers are especially prominent: Alena Akhmadullina plans a \$30 million promotional campaign in the West. Denis Simachev shows in Milan, runs a hip Moscow bar and is opening stores in cities such as Sochi. Igor Chapurin presents collections in Paris as well as Moscow and is expanding outside the capital. "Appearing in the West is a very important ambition for us," said Chapurin. "We position ourselves as a design company trying to tell the West about modern Russia. But one of our more important [priorities] remains Russia."

A key benefit of the fashion weeks is that Russia's public as well as its fashion buyers now see local fashion in a more positive light, says Anna Lebsak-Kleimans of Moscow's Fashion Consulting Group. And only with a healthy customer base at home can brands expand abroad, she suggests. "To be dressed in clothes produced by Russian designers has become hip, not outdated. Before, these were clothes someone with a lot of money would never wear."

But success also comes from having wads of cash. One designer who already hit the U.S. market is Kira Plastinina, 16-year-old daughter of a milk and juice magnate, who opened stores in Los Angeles and New York. Paris Hilton was reportedly paid \$2 million to appear at Plastinina's Moscow fashion show in October.

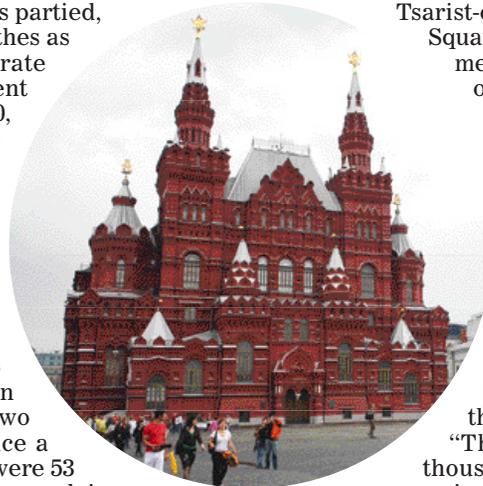
As for Western designers, it's easier to say who hasn't been to Moscow in recent years than who has. Marc Jacobs, Donatella Versace and Tom Ford are recent visitors, and most major Western brands boast stores here. Fur lines are particularly well received: Julien Macdonald has said Russia accounts for over half his fur sales.

It's the consumption of luxury, however, where Moscow comes into its own. Malls range from opulent, Tsarist-era confections like GUM, off Red Square, to the Barvikha Luxury Village, a megaexpensive center near an affluent out-of-town suburb. The quiet countryside location, rumored to be near Putin's home, means songbirds can be heard as shoppers browse for Versace frocks and Lamborghinis.

There are also unusual spending options in the capital: Although it's landlocked, Moscow's reservoirs and rivers have become yachting havens.

And if some of Russia's more than 100,000 millionaires are bored, they have activities such as those in the Michael Douglas movie "The Game" — they pay companies thousands to dress them as beggars and organize competitions to see who gets the most money from passersby.

Shrugs Sergei Knyazev, who runs one such company: "They have everything, and they want something new."



SCENE

Spots for eating, drinking, shopping and thinking in the Russian capital.

TURANDOT: Ever wonder what the inside of a Fabergé egg might look like? Add lots of gold, French-accented chinoiserie stylings, waiters in powdered wigs and 18th-century outfits, and you have Turandot, the most over-the-top restaurant in a city of over-the-top restaurants. The 400-seat venue now hosts the city's power brokers and dazzled tourists.

WINZAVOD: This is where Moscow's cool young crowd goes for intellectual stimulation. The converted wine factory contains nine galleries, and recently hosted a show of a well-known socialite's shoe collection, as well as photos by Terry Richardson. If visitors tire of art, they can slip into Cara & Co., the only store in the complex, which sells Belgian and Australian fashion and recently opened an intimate cafe.

SHYOLK RESTAURANT

TEAROOM: If you didn't know where this spot was, you'd probably never find it. Tucked

in a courtyard off a square by Belorussky Station, behind a virtually unmarked metal door and down some stairs, is the Chinese tearoom run by Shyolk restaurant (which has its more visible location upstairs). With fewer than 10 tables, the setting is dark, quiet and atmospheric, a favorite of celebs.

KAMERGERSKY PEREULOK:

This pretty street off the beaten path is the place to be in the summer, with many restaurants offering sidewalk service. Keep strolling in the direction of the Lubyanka (the landmark headquarters of the Secret Police) and Kamergersky becomes home to a branch of the exclusive TsUM department store and a Stella McCartney boutique.

RAI: If you get by the face-control — the Russian phrase for nightclub bouncers — then Rai's faux-diamond walls are a sight to behold. Expensive, ostentatious and tacky, it's as if the Moscow of the Nineties never went away.



Leg It Out

Colorful gams were all the buzz at a pair of recent exhibitions at the Winzavod center.




They Are Wearing®

VITAL STATS

POPULATION: 10.5 million
NUMBER OF BILLIONAIRES: 74, the most in the world.
AVERAGE WAGE: \$915 a month.
TYPICAL RENT IN DOWNTOWN WESTERN-STYLE SHOPPING MALL: \$400 a square meter (or about \$37 a square foot) a year for supermarkets to \$10,000 a square meter (\$929 a square foot) annually for small stores.
AVERAGE COST OF LUXURY TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT: \$4,000 a year, or about \$333 a month.
AVERAGE COST OF 1 KILOGRAM (2.2 POUNDS) OF BLACK STURGEON CAVIAR: \$863
AVERAGE COST OF 1 KILOGRAM (2.2 POUNDS) OF RED CAVIAR: \$43
NUMBER OF TOURISTS (2007): 4.1 million
NUMBER OF RIDERS IN THE METRO (2007): 2.5 billion
GOVERNMENT: Moscow is governed by a mayor elected for a four-year term and a 35-member Duma, or city legislature. It comprises 10 administrative regions divided into 128 districts. The prime minister's offices occupy the House of Government of the Russian Federation, known as the White House.
TRADE SHOWS: 100 international exhibitions and fairs are held in Moscow every year.
 ● Moscow was named the most expensive city in the world in a 2007 study by Mercer Human Resources Consulting. London placed second.
 ● Red Square was created when Ivan III cleared market stalls by the Kremlin walls, and originally was called Trinity Square. The Russian word for red, krasnaya, used to mean beautiful, and a more correct translation of the space's name is "Beautiful Square."

SOURCES: ROSSTAT, FORBES, MAGAZIN MAGAZINOV, SWISS REALTY GROUP, SYMBOL-MARKETING, MOSCOW TOURISM COMMITTEE, MOSCOW METRO, MERCER, MOSCOW-HOTELS.COM

— A.G.

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