

Moscow's being naughty

MOSCOW — How I came to be wandering around Gorky Park in total darkness with a group of cheer-filled Russian friends is a direct result of the new policy of glasnost and perestroika.

An important part of Mikhail Gorbachev's economic restructuring has been permission for small, private enterprise businesses to open. Here, though, they are called co-ops since private enterprise is a dirty word. At least 45 co-op restaurants have opened in Moscow, and more are popping up each week. They have brought badly needed relief for Moscow's long-suffering diners.

The food in state-run restaurants ranges from poor to unspeakable. Service is generally slow. Waiters don't come for an hour and when they finally do, you have to order everything at one time, from drinks to dessert, since they will only make one trip to your table.

Moscow's private co-ops offer a dazzling contrast. Often located in old buildings, they are attractively done up in traditional Russian decor. Efficient, even hip, waiters immediately appear, decked out in snappy French bistro outfits or wing-back collars and black bow ties — dramatic garb in this city where most people wear dreary, tacky clothing. Your table is quickly covered with small plates of Russian delicacies, followed by roast meats or blini and caviar.

Drink, however, is a problem. Co-ops have not been allowed to serve liquor by the party authorities who take a dim view of their proto-capitalist subversion. You get around Moscow's LLBO

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



by bringing your own vodka and wine in a bag which you then discreetly hand over to the waiter. Soon after, they reappear on your table in tea pots. Last night, I had champagne for the first time in my life from a tea pot. Take warning: Drinking vodka from tea cups makes it difficult to judge how much you are imbibing.

My favorite Moscow restaurant is Victoria's, hidden deep in Gorky Park — hence my nocturnal excursion in the woods. Next comes Taganka, the Italian restaurant Lasagna, Cafe Kropotinskaya and Traktir. This last offers not only a good dinner but a floor show. With a blast of music, out come male and female dancers in fantasy outfits, doing an act including overt references to bondage and other imperialist kinkiness which would make stuffy, old Leonid Brezhnev roll in his grave. It's very capitalist-decadent.

People here also favor going to just-opened co-ops because they have the reputation of being too new to have yet been bugged. This is where you take your Russian friends — so that lips loosened by vodka do not result in big trouble. I even went to a club run by the Georgian Mafia, complete with long-haired gangsters in white socks and their pretty molls. Also in evidence were gay men, who have long been the Soviet Union's most persecuted minority. Being gay in the USSR can still land you in prison, but it seems the laws are now being relaxed under reform.

So gay men are furtively surfacing, like frightened, hunted animals.

All this means that there is suddenly a vibrant underground night life in Moscow filled with revelers, normal diners, bad girls and bad boys. And high time, too, for a major world capital of 10 million to show a bit of life and even wickedness. In fact, it's amazing to see how quickly the co-op movement has swept away the cobwebs and sloth of old-time, creaky communist inefficiency. All of the USSR could wake up and follow this striking example — if the authorities would let it.

But they won't. Certainly, not yet. Just last week, the government announced a confiscatory tax of 75% on the profits of the co-op restaurants. Yet, incredibly, some co-op owners went to court and a judge actually ordered a review of the government decree. This unheard-of event has stunned Muscovites and given new hope to the co-op movement. Best of all, Gorbachev is still apparently promoting co-ops as a way of solving the USSR's chronic miseries with its service industries

So that's Margolis' Guide to Moscow Dining. When making reservations at Victoria, ask for Svetlana and tell her Eric sent you.