СССР

CCCP COOK BOOK

TRUE STORIES OF SOVIET CUISINE

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FUEL


Чанах
Сулугуни
Брынза
Тушинский
Ереванский
Южный овечий
Осетинский
Сборно-крестьянский
Чайный
Копченый


Швейцарский
Голландский
Угличский
Алтайский
Костромской
Ярославский
Московский
Советский
Степной

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INTRODUCTION

Soviet cuisine is enjoying increased popularity both in Russia and throughout the world. A new generation of people in Russia have no knowledge of Communist Party meetings or long queues for basic foods – they view the era as enigmatic and appealing. The Soviet model was heavily promoted by the official propaganda machine as a panacea for all troubles and enemies. In this respect, Soviet cuisine is part of a greater nostalgia for the 1970s.

The study of Russian cuisine and its history offers a window into the private lives of Soviet citizens. Through this prism we can try to understand whether Soviet cuisine was a logical continuation of the great Russian gastronomy of the 18th and 19th centuries, or a unique phenomenon.

The benefits and flaws of Soviet cuisine were closely interconnected. Centralised government exercised total control over every aspect of Soviet life – and food was no exception. A policy of using standardised recipes was enforced in every public-catering establishment. At the time the Soviet Union was the largest country in the world, a multinational empire reaching from the Arctic Circle to the subtropics – so it was clear that such an inflexible approach was doomed to failure. Moreover, deficiencies in the trade and distribution systems led to losses and the plummeting quality of food. The entire public-catering system was based on under-investment and fraud. Because of cultural isolation the USSR was oblivious of culinary advances in the rest of the world – information about new technologies and products, as well as broader developments in gastronomy, simply failed to penetrate its borders.

Steady degradation meant that public-catering in the late 1980s was considerably worse than in the early 1960s. This transition is clearly apparent in the famous *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*: one can easily track the rise and fall of the Soviet model just by observing the variety of its recipes, the grade of paper stock and the quality of the photography. Public catering itself was not as dreadful as it might seem. It rigorously adhered to the state system of quality standards (GOST), whose unified and mandatory codes regulated aspects such as sanitation and quality control. Many ideas conceived in the public-catering system were appropriated by Soviet cuisine in general. Of course this was not a uniquely Soviet process. Throughout the 1930s Stalin's influential minister Anastas Mikoyan borrowed heavily from German and American expertise in the areas of food preservation, refining, the creation of ersatz products and nutrition.

Like many citzens of the former USSR, we are intimately familiar with the recipes in this book and continue to use them. Few, however, are aware that even the most iconic Soviet dishes: Stolichny salad, the Napoleon cake, dressed herring – have roots in Ukrainian, Jewish, Asian or Caucasian cuisines. These recipes make up the peculiar and original tapestry of our Soviet past, demonstrating the significant effect Soviet cuisine had on the world.

SOVIET CHAMPAGNE COCKTAIL
WORKING-CLASS CHAMPAGNE

The Soviet food-industry reforms of the 1930s had a human dimension. In addition to the establishment of bread-baking facilities, meat-processing factories and public-catering institutions, they also introduced technologies imported from the West to allow the mass-production of juices, ice-cream and cornflakes.

One of the most notable inventions was Sovetskoye Shampanskoye or 'Soviet' champagne. The authorities wanted a sparkling wine for the ordinary citizen that would be quick to manufacture and cheap to buy – a true sign that communism had indeed arrived.

In traditional champagne production the addition of yeast and sugar after the first fermentation and bottling causes a second fermentation within the bottle. The champagne is then stored for at least 18 months to allow the flavour to develop. In 1928 a Soviet team led by Anton Frolov-Bagreev devised a way of using large tanks for this process, significantly reducing the costs. The Soviet sparkling-wine industry was born.

A chemistry graduate from St Petersburg University, Frolov-Bagreev for many years headed the department of winemaking in the Moscow State University of Food Production. He was rewarded with the Stalin Prize for his work and so brilliant was his method that a version was licensed to Moët & Chandon in 1975.

Here is the recipe for a cocktail made using Soviet champagne that was often served at official parties.

For 6 glasses:

300ml Soviet champagne
300ml dry white wine
150ml white muscat wine
75ml Benedictine liqueur
75ml cognac
75g tinned fruit
150g ice

Mix the various wines and spirits and add the ice. Tinned fruit (such as cherries) may also be added. Serve as an apéritif.

BLINI AND CAVIAR
REVOLUTIONARY FOOD

As the Soviet leaders tried to build a new way of life following the 1917 Revolution, the country collapsed into poverty. In 1918 Elena Molokhovets, whose culinary bible *A Gift to Young Housewives* (1861) was reproduced in millions of copies, died of starvation in St Petersburg.

Under the new regime, the 'material luxuries of the nobility' were frowned upon. When the Minister of Food Supplies, Alexander Tsiurupa, fainted from hunger at a government meeting he was hailed as a symbol of communist asceticism and the new proletarian consciousness, and the scene was relayed widely as propaganda.

In fact, Party leaders complained less about the quantity of available food than the quality of its cooking. Leon Trotsky wrote in his memoirs of being fed corned beef instead of meat and of eating flour and cereals adulterated with grains of sand. The only plentiful food was red caviar, due to an export embargo: 'This inevitable red caviar coloured the first years of the Revolution, and not for me alone...'

Before 1917 caviar had been an everyday item, widely available from local grocery stores and a popular accompaniment to blini (pancakes) eaten in inns during Shrovetide. But under the new regime caviar became a symbol of inequality. Rumours spread that even during the harshest years, Kremlin leaders were consuming it by the spoonful.

These whispers were not entirely unfounded. In 1919 Fyodor Raskolnikov, Commander of the Volga-Caspian Fleet, brought several barrels of black caviar captured from former tsarist warehouses back to Moscow. At a dinner commemorating the second anniversary of the October Revolution, large bowls of this delicacy were served to every guest. Unfortunately the diners were only offered two thin slices of bread, not nearly enough to finish the caviar, so the contents of the barrels featured on Kremlin menus for months to come.

What the new regime lacked was culinary imagination. Previously caviar had been used in a variety of ways – for instance, to enrich kalia, a soup made with pickles. At the end of the 19th century Moscow restaurants used beluga caviar to clarify stock and make sterlet aspic. The caviar was mashed and added to the stock, which was boiled and then sieved. The resulting aspic was crystal clear, with the fish visible, almost undistorted, through it. Caviar was also an ingredient in many piquant sauces.

Soviet cuisine did away with all this and for decades the one delicacy that symbolised affluence was caviar on a slice of bread. Only rarely, at official banquets, could vestiges of the 'old world' be seen in the form of pastry shells with a measly amount of red or black caviar smeared inside.

Serves 4 (20-25 pancakes):

1 litre milk
25g fresh yeast
1 tbsp sugar
1 tsp salt
1 egg
200g butter
600g plain flour
3-4 tbsp olive oil

Warm 750ml of milk to 30-35°C, dissolve the yeast in it, add ½ tbsp sugar and the salt, the egg yolk and 75g of melted butter. Mix together, add half the flour and knead into a dough. Cover the bowl with a towel and leave in a warm place (25-30°C) for 2 hours. When the dough has doubled in volume, heat the rest of the milk to 30°C and add it in along with the rest of the sugar and flour. Beat the egg white and add it slowly to the mix. Knead again and leave to rise for a further hour.

Pour a thin layer of oil into a frying pan and add a soup ladle of the mixture. As soon as the bottom of the pancake begins to brown, flip it over. Place the cooked pancakes on a plate and spread the top of each with melted butter so the next one doesn't stick.

PIROZHKI
A VARIETY OF FILLINGS

Pirozhki were usually sold by plump street vendors from special carts. Thoroughly insulated, these could keep the pirozhki warm for a long time, even in the coldest weather. Several kinds of fillings were available: meat, pluck (referred to as 'ear, nose and throat'), cabbage, potatoes and (for the desperate) green peas.

Usually sold beside pedestrian underpasses or stations, meat pirozhki, with their brown, crisp crust, gave out an irresistible aroma. The vendor, in white oversleeves, would adroitly spear the pirozhki with a fork, place them in a piece of grey wrapping paper torn from a roll, and hand them to you. It was common Soviet practice to cheat on the amount of meat filling and citizens regarded this with the same silent indignation as the watering down of draught beer sold on the street. But at least in the Soviet era the meat could be 'trusted.' Following the collapse of the USSR, a popular joke ran: 'Buy six pirozhki and collect a whole dog!'

Restaurants served a more elegant version with a thinner crust to accompany fish soups or bouillons. The perfect filling for pirozhki to eat with hot fragrant bouillon is rice, eggs and chives, as described below.

Makes 10 pirozhki

For the dough:
6g dry yeast
225ml milk
400g flour
3 egg yolks
pinch of sugar
100g butter
salt to taste
1 beaten egg to glaze

For the filling:
200g rice
5 hard-boiled eggs
1 large bundle of chives
salt and pepper to taste

Soak the yeast in the warm milk. Pour half the sifted flour into a deep bowl, add the milk and yeast, mix thoroughly, cover with a tea towel and leave in a warm place for one hour. When the dough has doubled in size add the egg yolks and salt and sugar to taste then mix thoroughly once again. Soften the butter and add it to the dough with the remaining flour. Knead until it stops sticking to your hands. Put it back in the bowl and leave in a warm place for a further 1½ - 2 hours.

Wash the rice thoroughly and cook according to the instructions on the packaging. Chop the hard-boiled eggs and chives, mix with the cooked rice and add salt and pepper to taste.

On a floured surface, roll the dough into a sheet ½cm thick. Cut out discs 8cm in diameter. Put 1 tbsp of filling in each disc, roll up and crimp the dough together across the top of the pie. Place on a greased baking tray 3-4cm apart and coat each pirozhki with beaten egg. Allow to rise for 15 minutes then bake in the oven at 180°C/Gas 6 for 20 minutes.

Various pirozhki and tarts, suitable for both soups and snacks.

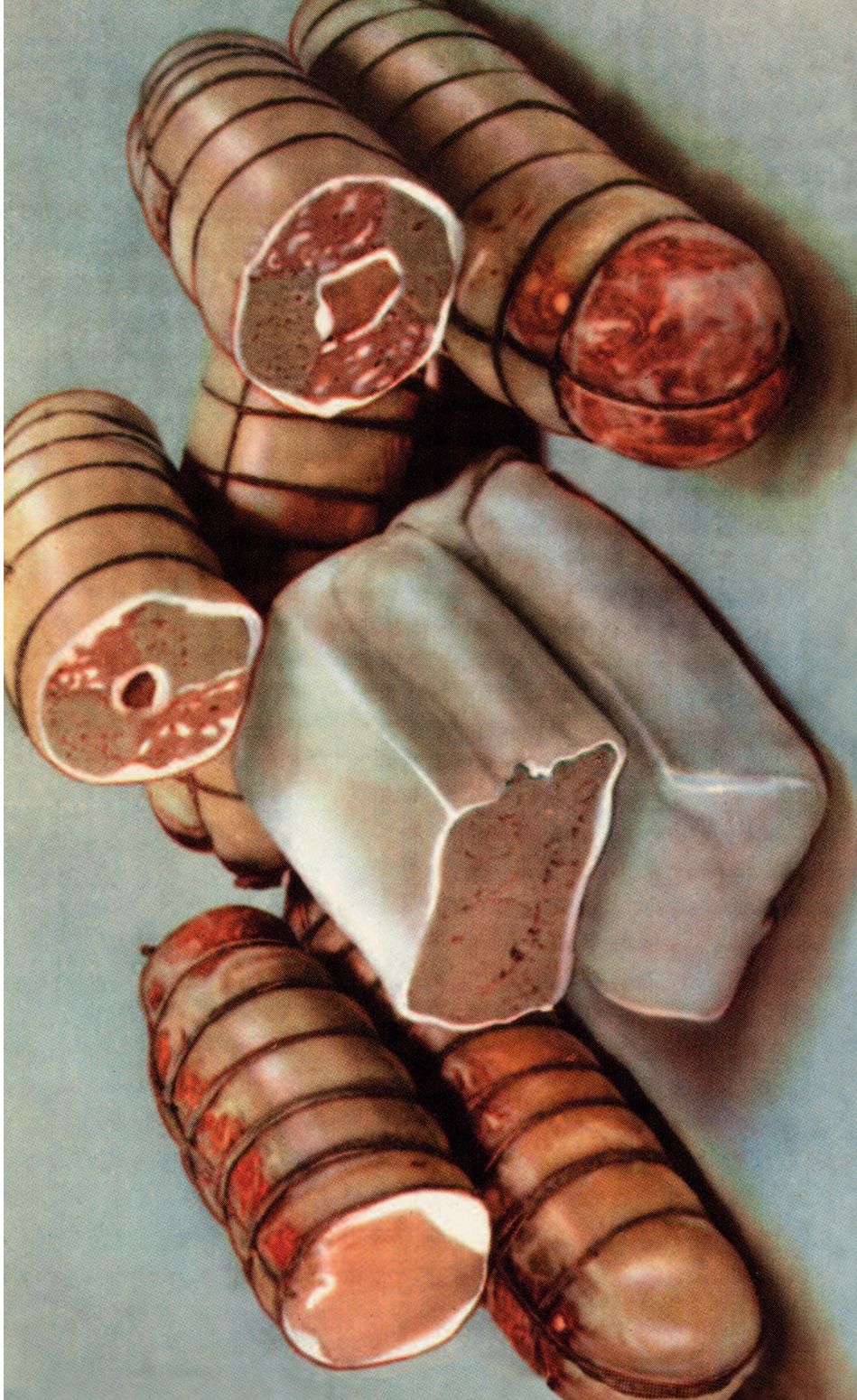
SALO
THE MYTH OF RUSSIAN VODKA

Only Vodka from Russia is Genuine Russian Vodka – today this advertising slogan is recognised throughout the world. But it was not always the case.

The topic of vodka was problematic within the USSR. Although viewed with national pride, the drink was not thought worthy of serious study and citizens had to rely on folklore for information about its history. That changed completely in 1991 following the publication of William Pokhlebkin's *A History of Vodka*. At last a renowned scholar had uncovered 'scientifically proven information' to shed light on the drink's origins.

After graduating from the Moscow Institute for International Relations in 1950, Pokhlebkin's career as a historian was derailed when he came into conflict with the administration. Branded a dissident, he decided to devote his life to researching and writing about Russian cuisine. In the 1960s and 1970s articles he published in newspapers and magazines attracted a wide readership. Pokhlebkin presented Russian cuisine not simply as a collection of dishes but as part of the national heritage. It was this success that led him to write his controversial book about vodka when the authorities surprisingly 'requested' that the dissident author take their side in an international debate about the drink.

In the early 1980s Pokhlebkin was suddenly summoned to the Kremlin to discuss an 'urgent matter' with the Minister for Industry and Trade. Knowing that the dissident scholar was touchy and difficult to deal with, the minister had decided to meet him personally rather than delegate the matter to his assistants. But Pokhlebkin had no phone and refused to talk to the messenger sent to summon him. So the minister ordered his assistant to drive his personal Zil (a Soviet-made limousine used only by the highest officials) to the writer's house some 60 kilometres outside Moscow. The assistant was to pass on the minister's personal request to come to his office to discuss matters of national importance. After spending an hour talking to Pokhlebkin through his locked door, the assistant persuaded him to make the journey. Some time later, a short, scruffy-looking man walked into the minister's Moscow office.



Various stuffed *kolbasi* (sausages) and venison pâté.

‘I was told the minister wanted to see me about an urgent matter. Are you the minister?’ asked Pokhlebkin.

He was offered vodka, which he declined, saying, ‘I don’t drink.’

When the minister insisted that he have some caviar, or at least some venison pâté, Pokhlebkin again refused: ‘Why develop a taste for foods you’ll never have the chance to eat again? Let’s just get down to business.’

The minister explained that the People’s Commissariat for Trade and Industry had run into problems marketing vodka abroad. The slogan ‘The Only True Vodka Comes From Russia’ had been questioned by socialist Poland, which had the temerity to claim that Poles had been drinking vodka long before it was known to Muscovy. What’s more, Western vodka manufacturers had followed suit. The matter had been submitted for international arbitration, which would settle who had the right to ‘own’ vodka as a national beverage.

Pokhlebkin listened with great interest. After a pause he said, ‘When did you say the Poles began making vodka?’

‘In 1540. Or at least that’s what they claim.’

‘Sounds about right. In the mid-16th century the menu of many Scandinavian royal courts underwent radical changes. The number of fatty and spicy dishes increased, as did the consumption of salt. Russia supplied salt to Sweden – there is an agreement to that effect from the year 1505. Therefore we can infer that something was introduced into the national cuisine that required greasy and spicy foods to go with it. It is reasonable to assume that this was vodka.’

‘Could Russia have supplied Sweden with vodka, too?’ asked the minister.

‘Yes, it could be Russia. Or Poland,’ replied Pokhlebkin. He clearly didn’t grasp how important the matter was.

‘We don’t want assumptions, Mr Pokhlebkin,’ said the minister. ‘We want proof. Proof that vodka was first invented and made by Russians. Proof good enough to serve as evidence in international arbitration. Proof that can be authenticated from multiple sources – indisputable proof. We are certain that with your expertise you will be able to handle the task.’

Pokhlebkin stood up. ‘I knew I’d be wasting my time here,’ he said angrily. ‘You’re asking the wrong person. If you need proof that Russians invented vodka, you should ask those who are good at furnishing such “proof”. The kind of “scholars” who convinced people that radio was invented by Popov rather than Marconi or the steam engine by Polzunov rather than Watt. Such fabrications may work for internal consumption but I doubt they would be worth anything on the international market.’

Despite his protests, Pokhlebkin became a perfect example of how such fabrications could be propagated. *A History of Vodka* contained its author’s thoughts and conjectures but was completely lacking in historical fact. Still, uncritical readers were left in no doubt as to the drink’s origins in Russia.

A German advertisement for Stolichnaya vodka from 1965, by the artist S. G. Sakharov. The label design remains the same today, including the legend ‘genuine Russian vodka’ around the neck of the bottle.

The truth turned out to be quite different. Modern-day vodka is essentially purified alcohol diluted with water to be 40 per cent proof. It was not sold in large quantities until the end of the 19th century, reaching the peak of its popularity during the Soviet era. The *true* Russian beverage, polugar, was a spirit distilled using similar methods to whisky, grappa or rum. Unlike its western counterparts, which use barley or grapes, polugar was made by distilling fermented wheat or rye. Its strength was determined though the crude technique of heating up and setting light to a measured amount: if half evaporated it was considered good quality but if more than half remained if had almost certainly been diluted with water. The Russian word *polugar* means 'half-burned'.

It was polugar, also known as bread wine or grain wine, that the numerous historical sources referred to, and the myths authored by Pokhlebkin didn't help the USSR to keep its international hold on vodka. Soon the slogan of Soviet exporters was altered to the now familiar, 'Only Vodka from Russia is Genuine Russian Vodka'.

Vodka is usually consumed with zakuski. These are hot and cold appetizers that help soak up the alcohol. Salo is a perennial zakuski favourite and the recipe below explains the simple steps for making it.

500g pork fatback or belly (with 3-4cm of fat)
3-4 large cloves garlic
½ tsp black pepper
3 tbsp coarse sea salt

Cut the fatback or belly of pork into pieces of approximately 10x20cm.
Rub the pieces all over with salt and pepper.

Slice the garlic and push slices into the meat, roughly 1cm apart.
Roll in paper and refrigerate for at least 4-5 days.

Serve as an appetizer.

VORSCHMACK
THE LEGACY OF JEWISH CUISINE

Jewish cuisine had an enormous influence on the nascent public-catering industry at the start of the Soviet regime, not least because the ingredients were usually easy to come by and the dishes easy to replicate. Vorschmack, a simple dish of herring, apples, hard-boiled eggs and butter passed through an old-fashioned mincer and eaten on a piece of bread, was a case in point.

Catherine the Great's prohibition on Jews settling freely in Russia was abolished just before the 1917 Revolution. As a result, Jewish cuisine travelled far beyond the Pale of Settlement in the East of the country, which for over a century had been the only place Jews were permitted to live.

Simple and tasty, Jewish food found many advocates. Although not officially recognised during the Communist era it was used as the basis for Soviet dietary recommendations since it was considered good for the digestion. The humble vorschmack is an indispensable part of this legacy. Some households added egg yolks to the recipe to make its colour more attractive. The final dish can be served in hollowed-out boiled eggs, with fresh tomatoes, as shown in the picture.

1 mildly salted herring
4 eggs
2 slices white bread
225ml milk
1 apple (green, Granny Smith type)
1 tbsp butter
1 small onion
1 tbsp vegetable oil (preferably unrefined sunflower oil)
salt and pepper to taste
a pinch of sugar
a little lemon juice or white wine vinegar

Choose your herring carefully, Russian style herring is slightly sweet and very mild. It can be found in Russian shops, sold in packs (in oil not vinegar). It should be the simplest mildly salted herring without any additional spices, herbs or other seasonings. (As more salt is added to herring it becomes softer. If your fish is too soft, it will disintegrate as you start to cut it. Mildly salted herring is firm, making it easier to separate the flesh from the bones.)

Fillet the herring and set the flesh aside.

Hard-boil the eggs and take out the yolks. Soak the bread in cold milk for a few minutes and then wring it out. Peel and core the apple and cut it into slices.

Mix the herring, butter, apple, onion and egg yolks together and run through a food processor. Add salt and pepper, the oil and lemon juice or vinegar, then a pinch of sugar. Mix again thoroughly with a fork.

Spread on brown bread or eat on its own as an appetizer.

SAUERKRAUT
HOW TO STRETCH A WARTIME RATION

World War II took an immense toll on the Soviet population, both on the battlefield and the home front. Looking back, it's hard to imagine how the defence industry functioned at all, let alone fed its thousands of workers.

At the start of the war, as food supplies became unreliable, workers were restricted to 2.2kg of meat per shift of 40-50 workers, which in fact was more like 460g once the bones had been removed and the fat had reduced during cooking. Soon a yeast protein was developed that intensified the taste and added calories. Hydrolyzed yeast was partially dehydrated then fried in vegetable oil and added to a soup made using the meat with frozen onions and other vegetables. The result, apparently, was both palatable and nutritious.

Potato peel was collected in a large tank and processed into starch, which in turn was used to prepare kissels, a sticky fruit dessert. The necessary equipment, together with pre-treated cherry juice in 200-litre barrels, was supplied by the UK. Usually the waste from peeling potatoes was around 30 per cent but when the potatoes were cooked whole and then peeled it dropped to under 5 per cent.

Finally, there was fermented cabbage. Several 15-ton tanks were filled with cabbages and – as in an ancient vineyard – female workers wearing rubber boots jumped in and stomped about to release the juice.

1 large cabbage
3 carrots
2 tbsp rye flour
1½ tsp salt
1½ tsp sugar

It is best to use a 3-litre jar as it is easier to refrigerate.

Discard the outer leaves and core then cut the cabbage into thin strips and place in a large bowl. Sprinkle with a couple of pinches of salt and a little sugar to increase fermentation and improve taste. Rub the cabbage with your hands for 5-10 minutes, until it becomes limp, releasing its juices. Add the grated carrots and mix gently.

Before you put the cabbage into the jar sprinkle the bottom with a little rye flour. Place layers of cabbage inside, pressing them down to compress them. When the jar is half full, sprinkle in a little more flour. Once the cabbage is packed to the top, place the jar in a bowl (as during the fermentation juice will flow over the lip) cover with a clean gauze and place in the refrigerator.

Active fermentation should start by the end of the first day. Over the next three days you will need to pierce the cabbage five or six times in several places with a wooden skewer, otherwise the result will be bitter. Preserve the juice released by the piercing and pour it back at the end of fermentation, otherwise the sauerkraut may be too dry.

After the third day there is less fermentation and soon it will stop completely. Pierce the cabbage and pour out the surplus juice, put the lid on the jar and and place in the refrigerator for two more days. Then it will be ready to eat.

VINEGRET
HOW A FRENCH DRESSING BECAME A RUSSIAN SALAD

Vinegret wonderfully reflects the way international cuisine was integrated into Russia. At the end of the 18th century, when French chefs began arriving in Russia, few could find apprentices who understood them well. In most cases they were assisted by peasant boys from the countryside. Being unable to comprehend French, these boys introduced a great deal of confusion and inaccuracy into their masters' recipes. Many of these errors remained uncorrected for decades to come.

Vinegret is one such example. While the name originates from the French dressing vinaigrette, in Russia it was attached to the dish that used it as a dressing. As a result, chopped game garnished with boiled vegetables and vinaigrette dressing was also called vinaigrette, transliterated as vinegret. The Russian term refers primarily to the method (finely chopped ingredients with dressing) rather than to a specific recipe.

During the Soviet era the dish was simplified even further. Meat was all but eliminated, leaving only sauerkraut, beets and pickles, and the intricate French dressing was replaced with sunflower oil. Some still remember the odour of unrefined sunflower oil in vinegret with affection.

3 medium-sized beetroots
4 medium-sized potatoes
2 carrots
300g sauerkraut
3 pickled cucumbers
1 onion
2 tbsp unrefined sunflower oil (as an option vinaigrette dressing made from oil, vinegar, salt, pepper and sugar can be used)
Peas and beans (optional)

Boil or bake the beetroot, potatoes and carrots (all unpeeled). The beets will take about 1 hour, the potatoes 40 minutes and the carrots 20 minutes. Allow to cool. Peel and cut them into medium-sized cubes (do not to dice the ingredients too finely, or the taste will be altered significantly). Cut the pickles in the same way and finely chop the onion.

Mix everything together with the sauerkraut and dress with unrefined sunflower oil. Peas and beans may also be added.

Text reads: 'National Food Industry Committee of the USSR. Management of the Vegetable Oil Industry', on the bottle 'Oil'.

TASHKENT SALAD
MOSCOW CULINARY INVENTIVENESS

The Party drive to create national unity meant recipes from the Soviet republics were incorporated into Soviet cuisine. Following World War II, many restaurants serving these dishes opened in Moscow. But while their menus listed traditional favourites, in reality the recipes had been adapted to fit the expectations of a 'standard' palate.

Traditional Uzbek cuisine contained no European-style salads. As a starter Uzbeks would have lobo (a variety of daikon radish) dipped in syuzma (fermented yoghurt). Eaten with the fingers rather than with a knife and fork, it was impossible to imagine such a dish on a Moscow restaurant menu. Also, syuzma had a short lifespan, which made it impractical as restaurant fare.

Instead a hybrid called Tashkent salad was created. It combined the traditional East-Asian dishes of loviya ho'rak (meat and kidney-bean salad) and anor va turplik (pomegranate and daikon salad) with Stolichny salad (see p.32). Easily produced in large quantities, it could be refrigerated for long periods and the liberal use of mayonnaise meant the fresh ingredients did not have to be of high quality.

In 1951, when the Uzbekistan restaurant opened in Moscow, a delegation of chefs from Tashkent were invited to help create the menu.

'What do you eat after the first shot of vodka in Uzbekistan?' asked the Moscow cooks.

'Lobo, usually, with cold meat, boiled or roasted, and syuzma and fresh herbs,' the Uzbeks replied.

And so a recipe was devised for the main Uzbek salad. The syuzma was replaced by mayonnaise and the result was a dish that became a Soviet classic. Even today it can be ordered in restaurants specialising in cuisines of the former Soviet Central Asian republics.

2 medium-sized onions
1 tbsp vegetable oil
500g lobo (white radish)
200g boiled beef
150ml sour cream (smetana) or mayonnaise
salt and pepper to taste
2 hard-boiled eggs
fresh coriander and dill to taste

Slice the onions into rings and fry in the vegetable oil until golden brown.

Slice the lobo into thin strips or grate on a Korean-style carrot grater for a similar effect. (If you use a regular grater the lobo will produce too much juice.) Squeeze out as much of the juice as possible.

Cut the meat into thin strips and mix all the ingredients together. Add salt and pepper and dress with sour cream, mayonnaise or a mixture of the two.

Pile the salad into a bowl and decorate with quarters of hard-boiled eggs and fresh herbs.

STOLICHNY SALAD
A SOVIET NEW YEAR

The Soviet New Year seemed the only holiday that required no pretense, lies or political speeches. It was a truly family occasion that transcended all ideology. The Christmas tree, by contrast, was viewed as religious and so was banned in the Soviet Union for several years.

In the 1920s the New Economic Policy introduced a certain latitude for businesses that extended to everyday life, including holidays. People began once more to celebrate Christmas and New Year, albeit not openly. Those who put up Christmas trees at home were laughed at, but the secret police did not pursue them and there was no official decree that forbade the celebrations. In 1929, however, a defamatory article appeared in *Pravda* aimed at small private enterprises that manufactured Christmas-themed decorations. It was a transparent hint that such businesses should close down, so when in 1935 the authorities decided to resurrect the tradition of New Year's celebrations and allow people to put up trees, there was nothing to decorate them with. The manufacture of Christmas-tree ornaments had been effectively destroyed.

By the mid-1930s the economy had improved, and at the 17 November 1935 Conference of Stakhanovites Stalin spoke his famous lines: 'Life has got better, comrades. Life has become more joyous.' The story of Lenin helping schoolchildren to arrange a New Year's party in 1919 was repeated endlessly and 'Lenin and children at a New Year's party' was a popular theme of Soviet propaganda from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Paradoxically, it was during 1937-38, at the peak of the political repression, that the main features of the Soviet New Year traditions took shape: the tree, Ded Moroz and the Snowmaiden. Ded Moroz, the Soviet version of Father Christmas, was based on Morozko, a character from Slavic mythology. The Snowmaiden (Snegoorochka), a character from non-Slavic pagan folklore who first appeared in Russian tales in the 19th century, acquired the role of Ded Moroz's granddaughter and helper. The Soviet authorities of the time seemed to object much less to pagan characters than to those from Christian tradition.

Once Ded Moroz and the Snowmaiden became official symbols within New Year's celebrations, their statues, made first from papier mâché and then from plastic, were sold en masse and traditionally placed together under the tree.

Local champagne and tinned ham, usually bought in October or November, was saved for the New Year's dinner along with other delicious and sought-after foods. But the mandatory dish at any festive occasion was Olivier salad. Invented in the 1860s in Moscow by Lucien Olivier, a Russian chef of Belgian origin, the recipe called for capers, grouse, crayfish tails and black caviar, among other ingredients. By the end of the 1930s capers had disappeared and grouse and crayfish were hard to come by. So in 1939 Grigory Ermilin, a chef at the Moskva Hotel, created Stolichny salad – a version of Olivier salad in which the grouse was replaced by chicken (or another boiled meat such as pork or beef), capers with tinned peas and crayfish with carrots (perhaps due to their similar colour).

Mayonnaise was a key ingredient in many dishes of the Soviet period, including the Stolichny salad.

Moskovsky salad was made with bologna sausage (boloney), which was more readily available in Moscow. The rest of the ingredients – potatoes, eggs, peas, dill pickles, carrots and mayonnaise – remained virtually unchanged. Sometimes green apples were added.

It may seem somewhat artificial to call this kaleidoscope of finely diced ingredients in mayonnaise Olivier salad as its more recent incarnation has little to do with the original. But in reinterpreting the pre-Revolutionary gastronomical legacy of Russia, it became a new phenomenon in Soviet culture and today it remains a symbol of Soviet cuisine.

4 medium-sized potatoes
1 carrot
4 eggs
1 sour apple (optional)
1 medium-sized onion
4 pickled cucumbers
200-250g cooked chicken (breast or thigh)
300g tinned green peas
200g mayonnaise
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Rinse the potatoes and carrot but don't peel them. Place them in a saucepan, cover with water, bring to the boil and simmer for 40-60 minutes, until tender. Remove the vegetables from the stock and allow to cool.

Place the eggs into salted boiling water and cook for about 8-10 minutes.Transfer them into a bowl of cold water to cool and peel off the shells.

Peel the potatoes, carrot, apple and onion and cut into cubes of about 5mm along with the eggs, pickled cucumbers and chicken. Combine in a bowl with the green peas. Add a little salt and freshly ground pepper.

Season with mayonnaise, stir, let it stand to allow the flavours to combine, then serve.

Tinned green peas – another vital ingredient of the Stolichny salad.

SQUID SALAD
SQUID AND THE PATH TO COMMUNISM

In the early 1960s Nikita Khrushchev announced that the current generation of Soviet citizens would live to see communism arrive by 1980. Many Soviets citizens remarked how wonderful it would be, to live to see that day!

However, the variety of available foodstuffs was dwindling, and the path to the abundance promised by communism seemed to grow longer and more winding every day. A joke of the time – that nobody had promised to feed people along the way to communism – was more a description of reality than humour. By the early 1960s the supply of items that for centuries had been staples of Russian cuisine – salami, meat, freshwater fish and cottage cheese – was becoming erratic.

Eventually a solution was found: ocean-dwelling fish would resolve the Soviet economic situation (see Cod Fish Sticks, p.88). But unfortunately the new varieties promoted by the regime (such as hake, sea bass and bluefish) proved unpopular. Only the cheapest specimens were available to the general public, and their taste left much to be desired. In addition, they were mainly sold deep-frozen and unfilleted, requiring the removal of their unpleasant-smelling guts once they had been defrosted. Finally, no one knew how the new fish should be cooked and following official instructions did not always produce good results.

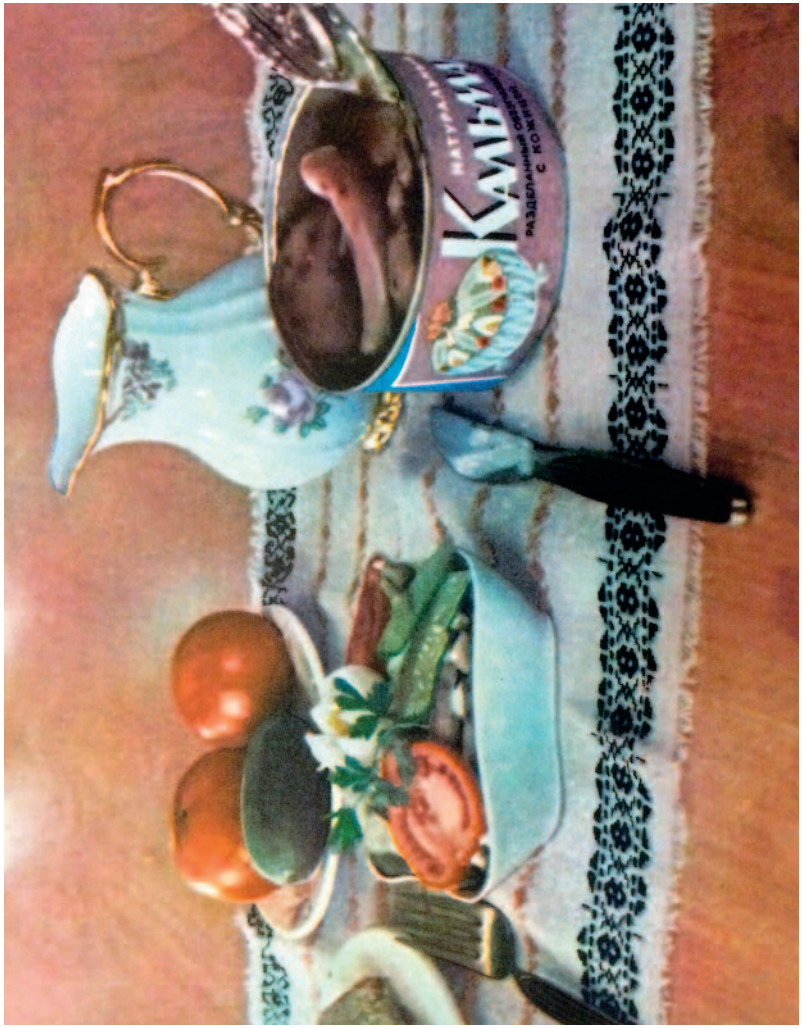
Squid also found its way into Soviet cuisine during these years. It was first caught in 1965, in the Sea of Okhotsk. Soviet fishermen landed 2,700 metric tons of squid during their first season but subsequent catches proved unreliable. Over a month in 1970, for instance, an entire fleet of trawlers failed to catch a single squid, despite the fact that the Soviet planned economy dictated that the total five-year yield should reach 75,000 tons.

Nutritious and easy to store, squid was welcomed by the Soviet food industry. It could be bought frozen, dried or tinned. Tinned squid was not so much popular as plentiful and diverse: you could get stuffed squid in oil, squid goulash with sea cucumber and mussels, smoked squid with mussels, and so on. It was used mainly in salads, although some public-catering establishments experimented with more traditional ingredients such as sautéed squid with vegetables and squid with baked quark cheese.

250g fresh squid
1 onion
2 boiled eggs
mayonnaise, salt and pepper to taste

Clean and prepare the squid. Cut the squid and onion into thin slices, place in a colander and scald. Dice the eggs into small cubes. Mix all the ingredients together and add salt, pepper and mayonnaise to taste.

You can also add boiled potatoes or rice and diced cucumbers or cabbage. If you use sauerkraut instead of cabbage then omit the eggs and use vegetable oil for the dressing. Tinned pineapples, sweetcorn, prunes, olives, walnuts or mushrooms can also be added.



Tinned squid became a mainstay for the Soviet food industry.

MIMOSA SALAD
A SYMPHONY OF TASTE

Polina Zhemchuzhina (1897-1970) was the wife of Vyacheslav Molotov, Minister of Foreign Affairs during the 1940s, and a close friend of Stalin's wife. A respected figure within the Soviet hierarchy, she worked under People's Commissar for Internal and External Trade Anastas Mikoyan (see p.88) until 1939, when she was suddenly given the newly created post of People's Commissar for Fisheries.

Her achievements in this role were considerable. She realised that the entire process needed to operate smoothly from start to finish: from catching the fish, through processing and deep-freezing, to finally shipping the goods to Moscow. Zhemchuzhina instigated the separation of the fishing and trading fleets, restructuring their management under new regulations. She even became embroiled in a conflict with Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's closest associates and head of the Organisational Bureau, after she used hard currency earmarked for the Moscow Metro to purchase refrigerators abroad.

Zhemchuzhina reasoned that tinned fish would be the answer to food shortages and recognised that processing needed to take place as close to the fishing grounds as possible. So large-scale canning works were built in Murmansk in the northwest, as well as in the Russian far east. Here factories and processing plants were set up at an unprecedented rate, accompanied by the growth of fishing and fish-processing towns and villages. Even before World War II there were more than 55 varieties of tinned fish available and as the industry expanded recipes were developed that would later become classics. Many of today's tinned -fish products – saury, sardines, spiced sprats, cod liver – are manufactured using methods evolved during this period.

Soviet citizens were initially resistant to buying fish sealed in tin cans. So the regime implemented a clever PR stunt. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Molotov delivered a sensational speech claiming that a large gang of smugglers trafficking contraband pearls to the West were hiding the precious jewellery in tins of fish. To illustrate his point, he produced a tin, opened it and to everyone's astonishment drew out a pearl necklace. The effect was instant. Many believed that Molotov was telling the truth and in a matter of days the shelves were picked clean of tinned fish. Whether anyone actually found any pearls is something we will never know.

Regrettably, Zhemchuzhina's 'fish revolution' did not protect her from Stalin's paranoia. In 1949 she was arrested and sentenced to five years in a labour camp (the 'traditional' sentence for associating with 'enemies of the people'). Reunited with her husband following her release, she remained an unrepentant supporter of Stalin until her death.

In the early 1960s fresh fish again became rare in Soviet shops and tinned fish once more came to the rescue. Simultaneously, another famous Soviet dish emerged – the Mimosa salad. In its simplest form it consisted of tinned fish (usually salmon or saury) mixed with finely chopped hard-boiled eggs, the yellow

of the yolks lending the dish the name of the mimosa flower. It was a clever way of combining foods that might otherwise have seemed incompatible to produce a harmonious taste that made it instantly popular.

Every household would put aside a few tins of fish to make a Mimosa salad for a special occasion. Although tinned fish itself is not particularly attractive to look at, once decorated with hard-boiled eggs, mayonnaise, onions and fresh herbs, a Mimosa salad could transform everyday ingredients into an uplifting feast – something that was always welcome during Soviet times.

Serves 4

4-5 eggs
1-2 carrots
1 small onion
350-400g tinned fish
(pilchards, sardines or mackerel in sunflower oil work best)
150g mayonnaise

Optional:

1 apple
100g cheese
100g butter

Hard-boil the eggs and boil the carrots. Finely chop a small onion and blanch in boiling water.

Drain the fish and mash with a fork. Shell the eggs, remove whites from yolks and grate each separately using a fine grater. Coarsely grate the carrots and place in a separate bowl.

To assemble the salad, lay the fish at the bottom of a flat salad bowl. Spread with mayonnaise and then add a layer of chopped onion. Spread that with mayonnaise and then add the egg whites (again spread with mayonnaise) for the third layer, followed by the carrots (again spread with mayonnaise) topped by the egg yolks.

This is the basic version of the salad but you can also add layers of grated apples, cheese or butter (frozen beforehand so it can be grated) and can pile up as many layers as you wish by repeating the ingredients.

You can also replace the tinned fish with boiled salmon or trout.

Front to back: sprats in oil, pikeperch in tomato sauce (tin and jar).

COD LIVER
A DREAM COME TRUE

In the early 1970s a system of food distribution was introduced to tackle shortages, which by now were hitting even the larger cities. Its implementation was linked directly to the economic reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, and to the adoption of *khozraschet* (economic accounting), a Soviet attempt to incorporate the capitalist notion of profit into the planned economy. Those who ran the system were suddenly expected to act on their own initiative, using incentives to strike deals with local factories, collective farms, retailers and storage facilities.

Every worker was entitled to participate in the food-support system, through which a basket of groceries that were not regularly available in the shops could be bought twice a month or before public holidays. The content of these 'rations' varied over time, depending on which items were difficult to find by other means.

'Independent' observers (government-approved journalists) regularly claimed that almost every family now had the ingredients to make a 'decent' festive dinner, whether for entertaining guests or celebrating a holiday. Yet the range and variety of the 'rations' continued to diminish. In the late 1970s the allowance of a Moscow government employee would consist of caviar, crabmeat, coffee, salami, chocolate-covered zefir (a confection similar to marshmallow) and tinned sturgeon fillet. By 1985 this had been reduced to a packet of roasted buckwheat, a tin of stewed meat (mainly fat), a tin of 'Camper's Breakfast' (assorted meats), 100g butter, a jar of pickles and a packet of Indian tea. By offering only processed food, the distribution system undermined the very foundations of home cooking. With no quality ingredients or spices, any attempt at quality cuisine was futile.

A tin of cod liver was one of the most coveted items and in the 1970s and 1980s it became a rarity, found only infrequently before holidays. Preserved in olive oil, cod liver was both tasty and nutritious and worked equally well for a modest supper with friends or a festive New Year's dinner. The simplest method of consumption was to eat a slice on a piece of bread and butter. It could also be mixed with peas, boiled potatoes or pickles, or used as a filling for tartlets or pancakes. Its most popular use, however, was in salads.

4 eggs
2 tins cod liver (490g)
2 spring onions (or a small bunch of chives)
salt and pepper to taste

Hard-boil the eggs and allow to cool, then mash with a fork. Pour out the oil from the tins of cod liver, transfer the liver to a plate and also mash with a fork. Combine the liver and eggs then add the finely chopped chives. Season to taste.

Text reads: 'I eat these [cod liver] tins'. On the hat: 'Excellent sea-cadet student'. National Food Industry Committee of the USSR. Management of the Fish Industry.

HERRING WITH GARNISH
THE IDEAL SNACK

Today it's possible for anyone to be a writer and to write about anything they want. But during the Soviet era the word 'writer' had particular cachet. Anyone who managed to become part of that elite caste could consider themselves very fortunate. And if they came to the attention of the Party heirarchy they would be well rewarded: luxury apartments, country villas, cars, medals and honours would automatically follow.

For many the first step along this difficult path was publication in 'heavyweight' literary magazines such as *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*) or *Oktyabr* (*October*). This was where the division between 'us' and 'them' was made. It was rumoured that *Oktyabr* had a system for dealing with different categories of writers. Unknowns, for instance, would not be allowed beyond the waiting room and would receive a standard response from the editor's assistant: 'We'll look at it. You'll be notified of our decision.'

If the author had been recommended to the editor, however, then he or she would be invited into the office and asked to take a seat. If the editor offered a cigarette, that meant the manuscript would be published: the writer was now a friend of the magazine. The cigarettes that conveyed this message were even called Friend, and the pack design featured the head of an Alsatian dog.

There were two more variations in the ways a prospective author might be greeted. According to the popular Soviet writer Anatoly Rybakov, occasionally the editor would produce a bottle of vodka from one of the drawers in his desk and pour half a glass for the writer. Pushing a small plate of biscuits towards him, he'd say, 'To success!' This meant a great deal. You were now more than just a published author and a friend. You were now 'an *Oktyabr* man', one of 'us'. You were trusted and would be offered support.

Finally, there was the ultimate accolade, experienced by only a select few. The secretary would be ordered to run to the cafeteria to fetch hotdogs, mustard, bread or – even better – a piece of herring with onions and boiled potatoes. The author and the editor would then proceed to eat, drink and discuss their plans. This was a dream come true. It meant you would be nominated for the Stalin Prize and presented with a luxurious flat in central Moscow as well as a dacha in Peredelkino, a rural settlement for writers just outside the city. As you drank another shot of vodka and ate the last piece of herring, you could almost picture yourself on the Kremlin podium giving your acceptance speech...

Salted herring with onions was a popular way to throw together a quick dinner for any occasion. It was enjoyed by the Party elite and workers alike. This may have been thanks to its simplicity and low cost or to the fact that herring almost never disappeared from the grocery shelves. Or perhaps it was because 'vodka and herring' had become inseparable in the minds of the Soviet people – just like 'Homeland and Socialism' or 'Party and Lenin'.

Text reads: 'Pacific salted herring. Herring is a good snack – it improves the appetite'.

1 or 2 heavily salted herrings

For the garnish:

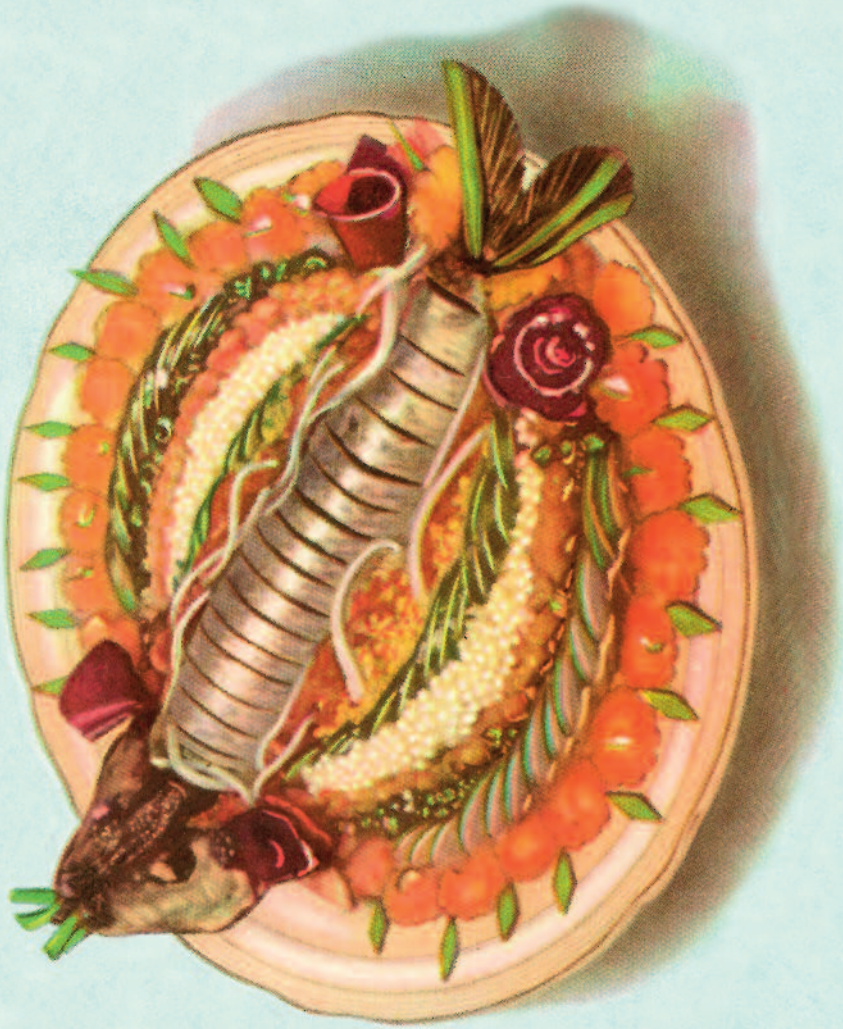
greenery (lettuce, herbs or green beans) for decoration
cucumber
tomatoes
pickled mushrooms
cooked beetroot
capers
2 hard-boiled eggs
40g salad dressing or mustard dressing

Presoak the herring in cold water for between 1 and 4 hours or for a stronger flavour soak in equal quanitites of milk and water for as long as 48 hours. Keep refrigerated while soaking.

Remove the head, fins and tail then slit the skin along the spine and peel it off from the head to the tail. Remove the guts and, if making fillets, the backbone.

Slice the herring and place it on a plate. Replace the head and tail so the dish resembles a complete fish. Decorate with greenery and garnish with finely diced vegetables (fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, pickled mushrooms, boiled beetroot, capers and so on) and slices of hard-boiled egg.

Dress with a mustard or salad dressing before serving.



SHUBA
HERRING UNDER A FUR COAT

Hors d'oeuvres and salads were extremely sensitive to the political climate of Soviet life. While cabbage soup or buckwheat survived virtually unchanged through wars, revolutions and even perestroika, salads and hors d'oeuvres disappeared at the first sign of trouble.

From the mid-19th century, salads made from finely chopped vegetables and meat with various dressings had become increasingly popular. An early pioneer was the Olivier salad, invented in the 1860s by the Belgian chef Lucien Olivier of the Hermitage restaurant in Moscow (see p.32). According to legend, the salad ingredients were originally served on a separate plate from their mayonnaise dressing. When Olivier saw that every single customer mixed them together on one plate, he conceded, 'If they wish to eat a mixture, let them have it.' From then on, the salad was always served pre-mixed with generous amounts of mayonnaise.

This gave rise to the Russian tradition of mixing finely chopped ingredients with salad dressings. But a key ingredient was missing: herring. During the Soviet era, herring was abundant and of high quality. Herring salads were invented as a way of enhancing the dish – to make it look 'rich'. While the origins of herring salad are pre-Revolutionary, its culinary transformation occurred in the 1960s. Instead of piling up the ingredients as a mixed salad on a plate, an unknown chef came up with the idea of forming the ingredients into layers, with copious amounts of mayonnaise in between. That was the birth of the dish called shuba (literally 'fur coat' in Russian), commonly referred to as 'herring under a fur coat'.

3-4 potatoes
2 medium-sized beetroots
2 carrots
2 pieces of large, fatty salted herring
1 onion
3 hard-boiled egg yolks (for decoration)
mayonnaise for dressing

Boil the potatoes, beetroot and carrots (all unpeeled) until cooked. The beetroot will take about 1 hour, the potatoes 40 minutes and the carrots 20 minutes. Allow to cool. To prepare the herring, remove the skin and bones (see p.46) and cut the resulting fillet into small cubes. Wet the bottom of a serving platter with water.

Cover the platter with the chopped herring to create an even layer. Finely chop the onion, scald with boiling water, drain, then spread evenly over the herring. Cover with plenty of mayonnaise.

Peel and coarsely grate the potatoes and use them as the next layer. Cover this with thin strips of mayonnaise to form a lattice. Peel, then coarsely grate the beetroot and carrot separately. Place the grated carrots on top of the mayonnaise lattice, then add a layer of beetroot.

Spread plenty of mayonnaise on top. The finished salad can be decorated by crumbling hard-boiled egg yolks on top, with rosettes cut from carrots, or fresh herbs such as parsley or dill. Allow the salad to sit for at least 6 hours in the refrigerator before serving.

Text reads: 'National Food Industry Committee of the USSR. Management of the Margarine Industry. Mayonnaise sauce. A great seasoning for all cold meat, fish and vegetable dishes' (1938).

AUBERGINE CAVIAR
A VEGETABLE DELICACY

While the rest of the world may have been in no doubt as to what type of watch James Bond wore or which car he drove, the concept of product placement did not exist in the Soviet Union. In socialist films the choice of objects was explained very simply: producers used whatever they could find.

Yet one product did gain nationwide recognition thanks to a film: aubergine paste. From the 1960s to the 1980s, despite being mocked by Soviet citizens, aubergine paste was ubiquitous on supermarket shelves. Vegetable paste is often called ikra in Russian, which translates as 'caviar'. In the famous comedy *Ivan Vasilievich: Back to the Future* (1973), this fact is used to great satirical effect.

After an experiment goes horribly wrong, a regular Soviet citizen swaps places with Ivan the Terrible. The impostor is Ivan's double and so deceives the entire court. An enormous table is laid for a feast, piled with exotic foods and delicacies: roasted swan, wild hare, giant dishes of black and red caviar. Finally, occupying the central spot is the most precious item of all – aubergine caviar. This is one of the funnier moments in the film, as Soviet people were sick and tired of this dubious 'delicacy'.

However, only mass-produced aubergine paste was generally derided and there were innumerable recipes for homemade versions. Using only top-quality seasonal produce, these were produced in large quantities and preserved in jars for year-round consumption.

1kg aubergines
6 red peppers
6 tomatoes
3 onions
vegetable oil
1 chilli pepper
1 clove garlic
salt and pepper to taste
parsley, coriander and dill to taste

Preheat the oven to 190°C/Gas 5.

Roast the aubergines for 30-40 minutes and the peppers for 20-25 minutes. Take the vegetables out of the oven and put them in a deep pan with a lid; the steam will soften the skin and make them easier to peel. Once you have removed the skin, finely chop both vegetables or run them through a food processor. Blanch and skin the tomatoes and cut them into small pieces.

Finely dice the onions and fry in vegetable oil on a low heat until browned. Add the tomatoes and finely chopped chilli pepper and sauté for 10 more minutes. Now add the aubergines and red peppers and cook for another 8-10 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste, as well as the crushed garlic. Cook for a few more minutes then add the finely chopped herbs and remove from the heat.

Aubergine paste is served cold as a garnish for meat or fish as well as a stand-alone appetizer.

Aubergine caviar is displayed on the top plate in this picture. The middle dish is golubtsy (stuffed cabbage rolls, see p.156) and at the bottom are stuffed peppers.

KVASS
A DRINK FROM THE DEPTHS OF TIME

Kvass is an old Russian fermented drink made mainly from water, malted grain, sugar and yeast (or another starter). There was no set recipe and ingredients such as honey, pears, berries or lemon were often added.

Today kvass is made with rye bread, but originally the process used grains that had been soaked until they began to germinate. They were then crushed in a mortar and dried, turning them into malt. Once a grain begins to germinate, its starches break down into sugars and its proteins into amino acids. Pure sugars were unknown in the Middle Ages, so germinating the grain was one way of sweetening a drink.

Kvass is mildly alcoholic and its preparation is not dissimilar to that of beer. In antiquity and the Middle Ages it helped solve the problem of the lack of potable water, since boiling water or adding acids or alcohol killed many of the pathogens that made it unsafe to drink. In Europe, wine, beer or cider were preferred but in Russia it was always kvass.

Anyone who grew up during the Soviet era will remember kvass street vendors. As soon as the weather got a little warmer, yellow cisterns mounted on two wheels would appear in the most crowded areas of the city. The kvass was poured from a tap into the iconic faceted glasses. For Soviet children there was no pleasure greater than paying three kopecks for a glass of cool, sharp kvass, especially after hours spent playing football in the street. Even on the hottest days the kvass in the metal cisterns remained cold. Perhaps it was just a childish fantasy, but kvass seemed like a magic drink that could refresh and revitalise you.

350-400g sourdough rye bread
4 litres water
100g sugar
30g fresh yeast or 2 tbsp dry yeast
1 tbsp raisins

Slice the bread and dry it in the oven until it starts to colour. Take care not to over-dry, or your kvass will taste bitter.

Bring the water to the boil. Place the dried bread in an enamel pot, add the sugar and boiling water and allow to stand until it is lukewarm. Pour out about a cup of the liquid, add the yeast to it, stir until the yeast has dissolved then return the liquid to the pot.

Cover with a tea towel, cheesecloth or a lid (if you use a lid leave a small gap for gases to escape otherwise you will end up with vinegar). Put the pot in a warm place and allow to ferment for 48 hours. Drain through a sieve or cheesecloth and add more sugar to taste.

Pour the kvass into a 3-litre glass jar, add the raisins, cover with a lid or saucer and refrigerate for 24 hours. Now pour the kvass into another jar, taking care not to disturb the white sediment at the bottom. Remove the raisins from the original jar and add them back to your kvass, which is now ready to drink. Keep refrigerated.

Text reads: 'Bread kvass. Sweet and sour taste with the aroma characteristic of freshly baked rye bread.'

BOUILLON
A BROTH OF RUSSIAN DESCENT

Soups, broths and vegetable stocks (such as cabbage and beetroot) are staples of Russian cuisine that long preceded the Soviet era.

The key feature of Russian stocks has always been the high fat content. The word 'soup' did not appear in Russian culinary literature until the 18th century; puréed soups almost always suggest a foreign origin while the presence of chopped cabbage or mushrooms testifies to true Russian descent, as do such iconic Russian additions as sauerkraut, pickles, and so on. The serving of soups with sour cream is also generally considered to be a Russian invention.

The base of almost any soup is stock or bouillon, which can be made from vegetables, mushrooms or meat.

800g brisket
2½ litres of water
1 small onion
1 medium carrot
half a stalk celery

For best results, use high-fat brisket. If cooking your meat from frozen, leave it in the fridge for at least 24 hours to defrost slowly. The stock is cooked in two stages: the first batch is discarded and only the liquid from the second stage of cooking is used.

Put the brisket in a large pot and cover it with cold water. Put on the lid, leaving a small opening for the steam to escape. Bring to the boil, skim off the foam floating on the top, turn down the heat and simmer for 7-10 minutes. This is the end of stage one.

Start stage two by taking the meat out and placing it in another pot. Chop the onion, carrot and celery, pour on cold water to cover, bring to the boil and then reduce to a gentle simmer.

Two points to note: don't close the lid completely, and keep the heat fairly low. Bubbles should rise slowly from the bottom of the pot. The more intense the heat, the tougher the meat and the more murky the stock will be. When cooked on a low heat, the stock will be crystal clear and fragrant and the meat tender and delicious.

As a time-saving alternative you can make stock in one stage. Put the meat in a pot, then add cold water. Bring it to the boil, skim off the foam and then add the vegetables. Keep the pot uncovered, and the heat at a low setting.

Stock takes about 1½-2 hours to cook. After approximately 1 hour, add salt to taste. When the meat is ready (prod it with a fork to check it), remove both meat and vegetables with a slotted spoon.

While the stock is cooking, you have time to prepare the ingredients for the soup of your choice.

Bouillon broth served with egg and toast.

SHI
THE FAVOURITE RUSSIAN DISH OF ALL TIME

Nikolay Kovalev was a founder of the Leningrad School of Public Catering Technology and a hero of Soviet cuisine. His contribution to the study of the history of Russian cookery is immense and he published papers on the subject as early as the 1970s. Kovalev delved into the origins and etymology of recipes, consulting linguists and philologists specialising in Finno-Ugric and Turkic languages. By the end of the 1980s he was a recognised authority and his work was familiar to everyone in the public-catering industry.

The book that launched Kovalev's career was the co-authored *Russian Cuisine* (1962). It was the first cookbook aimed at a general audience that contained the word 'Russian' in its title. Published soon after the 22nd Communist Party Congress, its tone could sometimes be excessively Soviet: 'In a matter of 10 to 15 years public catering should prevail over the consumption of food at home. It should exemplify the true Communist way of life. During the second decade it is planned that there should also be the beginning of a transition towards free meals (lunches) served at factories and kolkhoz [collective farms].'

Despite the obligatory Party rhetoric, the book covered modern dishes in an innovative way. The authors didn't conceal the fact that the range of ingredients had changed dramatically since the 1917 Revolution, affecting both recipes and techniques. They also noted the new abundance of seafood. 'The mass production and processing of shellfish into high-quality tinned products has broadened the variety of ingredients used in cold hors d'oeuvres.' A great deal of attention is devoted to mayonnaise. 'Now this sauce is mass-produced, mayonnaise dishes are enjoying a wider distribution throughout all public-catering establishments, as well as in the home.'

Our vision of old Russian cuisine as an endless stream of buckwheat, blinis and roasted swans was altered and broadened by Kovalev. He showed that Russian cooks had borrowed and adapted recipes from neighbouring countries, mastering new ingredients and techniques to create over time the varied cuisine we know today. And according to Kovalev's research, the favourite Russian dish of all time was shi (cabbage soup with brisket).

Shi soup with beef brisket, served with buckwheat.

800g beef brisket (ideally with bones)
2 carrots
2 large onions
3 potatoes
300g cabbage head
2 fresh tomatoes or 1 tbsp passata
1 large bunch dill and parsley
2 bay leaves
10g peppercorns
3 tbsp vegetable oil
1 bay leaf
salt and pepper

Wash the meat and place it in a saucepan. Cover with cold water and bring to the boil. Carefully skim off any foam. Add the peeled onion and carrot. Bring back to the boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cook for 2-2½ hours, until tender and season the stock to taste and discard the onion and carrot. Remove the meat and allow to cool. Separate the meat from the bones and cut it into small pieces.
Strain the stock through several folded layers of cheesecloth and pour into a clean saucepan (you should have about 2 litres of liquid).

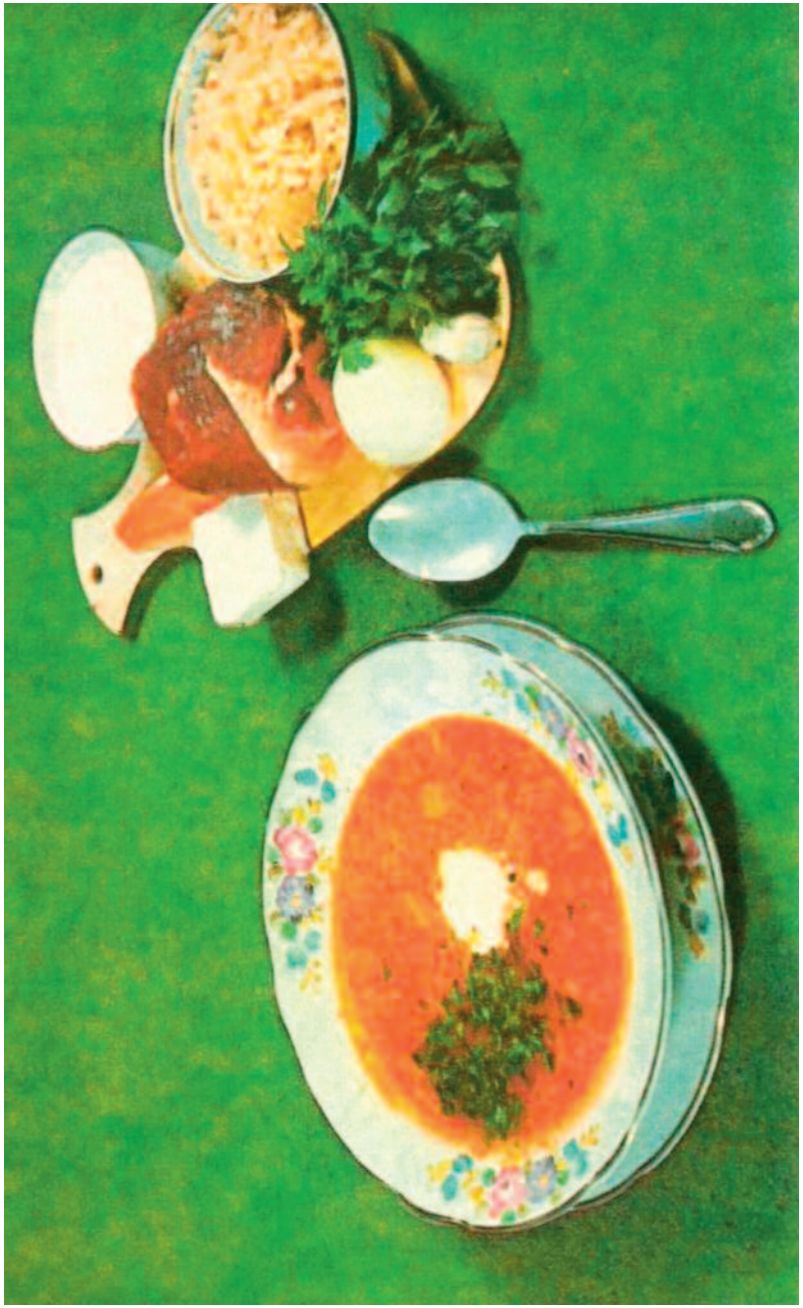
Peel the potatoes and cut them into strips or cubes. Finely chop the cabbage. Add the potatoes to the stock then add the chopped cabbage and sliced meat. Bring to the boil and simmer for about 15-20 minutes until the potatoes and cabbage are soft.

Peel the other onion and chop it finely. Peel the remaining carrot and cut into small cubes.

Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan, then sauté the carrots, stirring occasionally, for about 3 minutes. Add the chopped onion and fry with the carrots on a low to medium heat for 5-7 minutes. Place the fried vegetables into the pan of stock. Add the bay leaf and peppercorns, then stir on a simmer for about 10 minutes, until all the flavours combine.

Wash and chop the herbs and skinned tomatoes, keeping them separate. Add the tomatoes to the soup, stir and cook for 1-2 minutes.

Now add the herbs, while continuing to stir. If necessary, add salt and pepper to taste. Then remove the soup from the heat and cover the pan with a lid. Leave to stand for about 15 minutes before serving.
Serve with sour cream.



MOSKOVSKY BORSCHT
A FAMILY SAGA

A signature Russian dish, borscht became widely popular from the beginning of the Soviet era, both in the USSR and abroad. People have always argued about whether borscht is Ukrainian or Russian. Recipes from both countries have been passed down through generations, and most families have their own version.

Ukrainsky includes lard and garlic; Letny uses young beets along with their leaves; Flotsky (the spiciest version) incorporates smoked pork and chilli peppers. There is also some disagreement about whether borscht requires cabbage in addition to beetroot.

For 9-12 servings:

3 litres meat or vegetable stock (see recipe p.54)
2 tbsp butter
2 small onions
1 carrot
3 medium-sized beetroots (approx 500g)
2 large tomatoes (or 3-4 tinned tomatoes or 3 tbsp tomato purée)
juice from ½ lemon
2 tsp sugar
2 medium-sized potatoes
2 or 3 bay leaves
3 or 4 cloves garlic
salt and pepper to taste
small chilli pepper and a selection of fresh herbs (dill, parsley, coriander, etc.)
sugar and vinegar to taste
sour cream or horseradish to serve

Make a meat or vegetable stock (see p.54) and prepare the rest of the ingredients while it is cooking.

Melt the butter in a deep pan and add the onions and carrots, both sliced into thin strips. Cook until lightly brown then add the beetroot, sliced in the same way. Add the grated tomatoes or tomato purée, lemon juice and sugar and stir well. When the mixture comes to the boil, cover and simmer for 40 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. When the stock is ready, add the finely diced potatoes and 5-7 minutes later add the cooked vegetable mixture. It is imperative at this point not to let the soup boil – keep the heat low and simmer for 3 minutes.

Add the bay leaves, salt and pepper and chilli pepper if you want a more spicy soup, along with sugar or vinegar to taste. If you made meat stock, add the finely sliced meat. Add the sliced garlic and fresh herbs if required then remove the soup from the heat and allow it to cool for 30 minutes.

Serve with sour cream. If you use vegetable stock and sauté the vegetables in vegetable oil, the borscht can be served cold with sour cream or horseradish. Borscht reaches the peak of its flavour the next day, so it is often left to sit for a day or two in the fridge.

BORSCHTOK WITH SPICY TOAST

BORSCHTOK, WINE, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

No one knows where our politicians get their ideas from. But sometimes, years later, we might conclude that major historical events were triggered by conversations over dinner.

In December 1949 Chinese head of state Mao Zedong visited the Soviet Union for the first time. He was received by Stalin at his country residence, where the two leaders talked at length, often into the small hours. Food was served throughout, with the table filled with Stalin's favourite dishes. 'I recommend that you try the sweet and sour borscht,' Stalin suggested to his guest.

The only witness to these conversations was the translator Nikolay Fedorenko, who in the 1980s reminisced about Stalin's drinking habits. According to Fedorenko, vodka was out of the question; Stalin would drink nothing but Georgian wine. He personally mixed red and white together, saying, 'I always pour it myself. Only I know when, how, and how much to blend.'

As a waitress laid the table, Mao bent over and whispered in Fedorenko's ear: 'Why does Comrade Stalin mix red and white wine?'

'Why are you whispering?' asked Stalin. 'Are you trying to hide something?'

'Comrade Zedong wished to know why you blend different kinds of wine,' said Fedorenko.

'Then he should ask me directly. I've noticed that he seems a little suspicious of me. Perhaps Comrade Zedong doesn't trust me?'

'I beg your pardon, Comrade Stalin, but Comrade Zedong insists that addressing you directly on this matter would be a breach of good manners.'

'I decide what is or isn't a breach of manners here,' said Stalin with a smile. 'You see, it is an old habit of mine. Each wine, especially Georgian wine, has its own bouquet. So when I blend them I'm enriching the overall bouquet of the drink. I create a new taste, just like a bouquet of fragrant wild flowers.'

Perhaps Stalin's answer is what lay behind the Chinese Hundred Flowers Campaign, begun by Mao eight years later, which encouraged Chinese citizens to express their personal opinions and openly criticise the Communist Party. Then, following the example of his Soviet 'mentor', Mao had these individuals rounded up and eliminated or imprisoned.

But back in the snow-covered Russian countryside, the leaders continued their meal. The sweet and sour borscht reminded Mao of the spicy, pungent tastes of Hunan in southeast China, where he spent his childhood. Stalin knew very well how to please his guests.

For the borschtok:

2-2½ litres meat stock (see recipe on p.54)
400g beetroot
3 tbsp vinegar
1 egg white
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp sugar

Add the beetroot (finely chopped), the vinegar and the egg white to the stock.

Place over a low heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Add the cayenne pepper and sugar and simmer for a further 5-7 minutes.

Skim off the fat, then run through a sieve. The resulting soup should be red in colour and sour-sweet in taste.

Serve the soup in a bouillon cup or bowl with pieces of spicy toast on a separate plate. Alternatively, the soup can be served with pirozhki (see p.16).

For the toast (10 pieces):

2-3 slices white bread
25g unsalted butter plus butter for frying
200g semi-mature cheese (such as cheddar)
2 eggs
50g tomato purée or ketchup
1 tsp cayenne pepper

Heat the oven to 180°C/Gas 5.

Cut the bread into rectangular pieces (4x6cm and approximately ½cm thick) and fry lightly in butter.

Grate the cheese and mix it with the tomato purée (or ketchup), eggs and butter. For spiciness, add cayenne pepper.

Spread the mixture on the fried bread, place on a baking tray and bake in the oven for 10-12 minutes.

PITI
EXOTIC AZERBAIJAN

The Soviet authorities rarely missed an opportunity to promote the communist way of life, and the pages of cookery books were no exception:

> Carrying out the historic decisions of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the workers of Azerbaijan significantly increased the rates of industrial manufacture and building construction. In the city of Baku, a first-class Druzhba restaurant, a Zhemchuzhina fish-food restaurant and a Sputnik café have all opened their doors to welcome customers over the course of the past few years...

These trite words are taken from the preface to *Azerbaijani Cuisine* (1963), published as part of the propaganda campaign to promote the USSR's national cuisines. Written jointly by N. Alkhazov, A. Chabarob and N. Maleeve, the book is a grim testament to its times: numerous barely legible black-and-white photographs and a dozen or so full-colour images held together by a bland design. Yet despite these criticisms there is still something captivating about it. Beneath the drab surface it has striking splashes of national colour – the names of the dishes, the pictures of pomegranates and peaches, an entire chapter dedicated to local ingredients such as abgora (sour grape juice), lavashana (cherry-plum paste), narsharab (pomegranate syrup) and so on. How exotic it must have seemed to contemporary readers!

The book contains a short history of Azerbaijani cuisine as well as notes on the preferences of citizens in different areas of the republic. Apparently the people of Nukha favour dishes such as piti (soup, see recipe opposite) and kyufta (meatballs), those of Lankaran prefer fish dishes and the locals of Shamakhi are in love with pastries (mutaki).

The book combines professional cuisine and home cooking: 'By following the numerous recipes and descriptions of the process of preparing food in this book, professional cooks and housewives alike will be able to significantly extend the range, and improve the quality, of national Azerbaijani dishes.'

1kg lamb shanks
300g large dried chickpeas
300g potatoes or chestnuts
150g sheep fat
120g fresh or 50g dried plums
1 onion
1g saffron
250g tomatoes
1 tsp dried mint
salt and pepper to taste

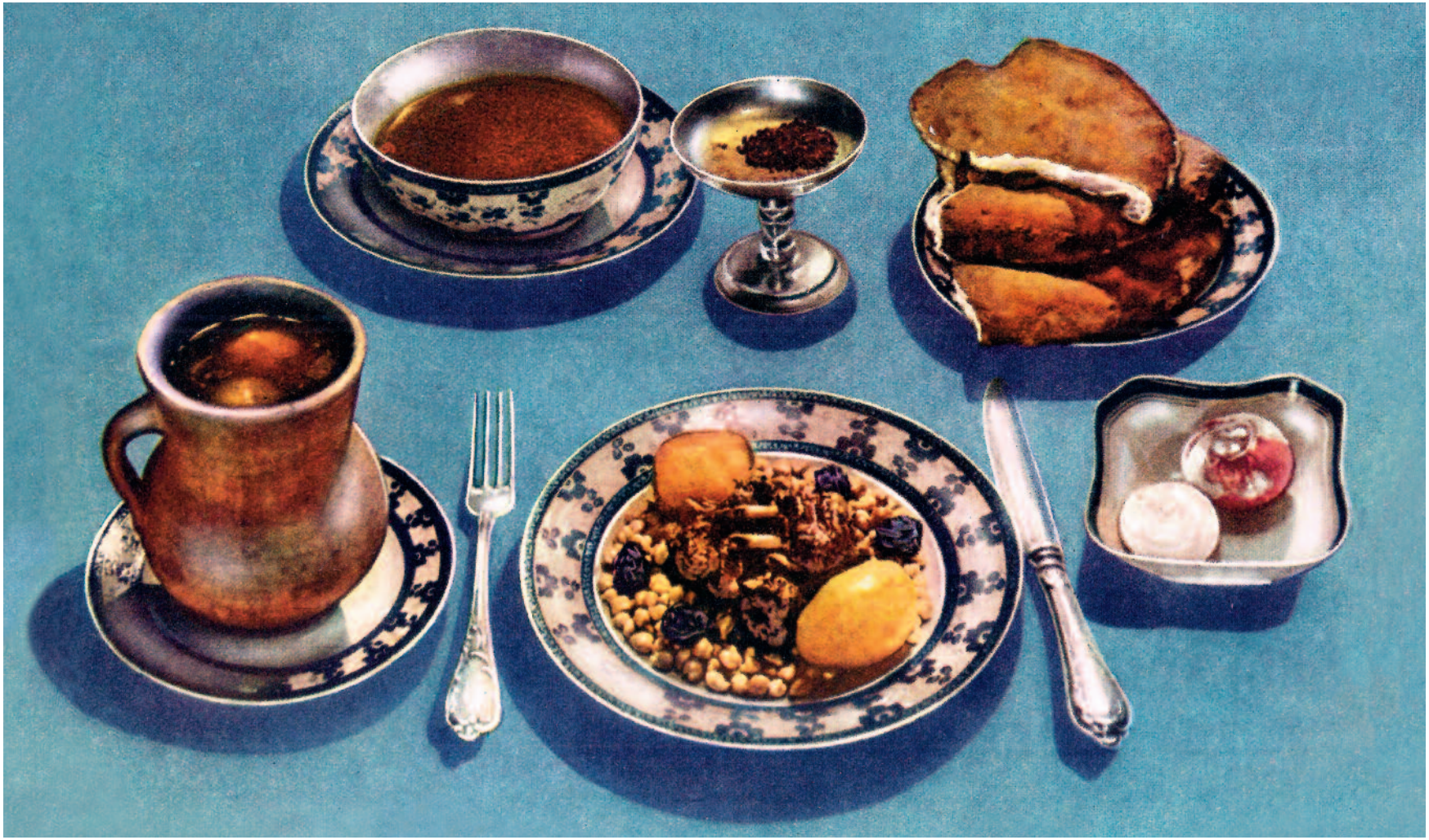
Soak the chickpeas in cold water overnight. Wash them, pour them into a pan of clean water and bring to the boil. Remove any foam, add salt, and cook for 15 minutes. Boil the chestnuts for 10 minutes, then crack them open.

Cut the lamb into pieces weighing 30-50g and place them in a large pot. Add the chickpeas and chestnuts or peeled and sliced potatoes. Fill with water almost to the top, tightly cover with a lid and place in a cold oven. Set the oven temperature to 170°C/Gas 3 and cook for 1 hour. During cooking, check for foam on the surface once or twice and remove if necessary.

Dice the onion and add it to the pot, along with the plums (if using fresh, cut out the stone), and the sheep fat (chopped and pounded). Mix the saffron with a spoonful of boiling water, then add it to the pot. Cut the tomatoes into 6 pieces, then add them, along with salt and pepper to taste. Cover with a lid and return to the oven for another hour.

Piti should be served very hot with a sprinkling of mint.

(overleaf) Piti served with other typical Georgian fare.



OKROSHKA
MYSTERY INGREDIENTS

Okroshka – an old Russian dish that contains finely chopped ingredients – enjoyed great popularity in the USSR. The reason for its success is simple: it is almost impossible to judge the quality of ingredients such as frankfurters, cucumbers or radishes when they have been diced into cubes and are floating in generous portions of kvass and smetanta (sour cream).

Before the Revolution the ingredients were quite different, typically high-quality boiled meat (usually beef) or white fish. Like most peasant dishes, okroshka combined two key qualities: it was a hot-weather dish that could also be served cold in the summer (the kvass was kept cold in a cellar) and it constituted a complete, filling and satisfying meal, its combination of green vegetables, herbs and meat ideal for replenishing your strength after a hard day's work.

Soviet food shortages served to mangle the pre-Revolutionary version of the dish to such an extent that only the name remained. As high-quality meats became scarce, the fate of okroshka took a turn for the worse. Initially the meat was replaced by tongue, offal and scraps. Then from the end of the 1950s finely chopped frankfurters or boiled sausage (a common meat substitute during the late Soviet era) became the primary ingredient. As food shortages peaked, a vegetarian variety appeared and occasionally the consumer was in for a further surprise as kvass was replaced with kefir (a fermented milk drink). There was some logic to this – traditional Russian cuisine featured a plethora of national dishes with fermented-milk ingredients such as Azerbaijani dovga (see p.76) or Armenian spas soup. However, this latest substitution changed orkoshka beyond recognition.

The recipe below forgoes all the innovations of the Soviet era and sticks, as much as possible, to the traditional method and ingredients.

150g boiled veal or ham
150g cooked and diced frankfurters
½ large cucumber
75g spring onions
4 large hard-boiled eggs
100ml sour cream (smetana)
150g diced red radishes
2 tsp mustard or horseradish
½ tsp sugar
1.5 litres kvass (see recipe on p.52)
4 tbsp chopped dill
salt and pepper to taste

Dice the boiled meat and peeled cucumber into small cubes or thin slices 1½-2cm long. Add a small amount of salt to the finely chopped green spring onions and mash with a spoon until the sap starts to emerge. Dice or finely slice the hard-boiled eggs.

Pour the sour cream into a bowl, add the eggs, chopped radishes, spring onion sap, mustard or horseradish, salt and sugar to taste. Mix thoroughly and thin with kvass. Add the meat and cucumber and mix again. Serve chilled with chopped dill sprinkled on top.

KHARCHO: GEORGIAN AND SOVIET
THE FLEXIBLE SOUP

Kharcho is a rich, fragrant and spicy red Georgian soup made from either beef or mutton with tomatoes or tomato purée. It is spiced with chilli pepper, garlic, khmeli suneli (a traditional Georgian mix of spices) and coriander, with rice used as a thickener. Kharcho was seen as a straightforward and easy recipe for the typical Soviet citizen.

One of the most famous Soviet-era Georgian cookery writers was Tamara Sulakvelidze, whose books were published in the 1950s and 1960s. In them she illustrates the great variety of Georgian cuisine: 15 types of satsivi (walnut sauce, see p.137), 10 versions of khachapuri (cheese-filled bread) and almost 30 other sauces made from walnuts, garlic, tomatoes, pomegranates, dogwood and more. The dishes themselves include mchadi (cornbread), adzhapsandali (vegetable stew), kebabs and tabaka chicken. Sulakvelidze adapted old recipes to contemporary available ingredients and made them as simple and accessible as possible.

In her 1959 book *Georgian Dishes* she describes no less than 11 different ways of making kharcho soup, including one version that requires green tkemali (sour plum) sauce. Demonstrating the flexibility of the dish, she points out that beef can easily be replaced by mutton, pork, chicken, goose, turkey or even sturgeon, and walnuts or pasta can be substituted for rice.

Tkemali sauce:

3kg plums (the more sour-tasting the better); can be replaced with sloe (blackthorn)
450ml water
1-2 dried chilli peppers
250g dill (if possible use dill that has gone to seed and include leaves, stems, flowers and seed heads)
250g fresh mint leaves
300g fresh coriander
4-5 cloves garlic
coarsely ground salt and sugar to taste (up to 2 tbsp)

Place the plums in a pan, add the water and bring to the boil. When the plums become soft and mushy purée them by pressing them through a sieve. Discard the stones. Tie the dill into bundles with thread and add to the plums with the chilli pepper and salt.

Simmer for 30 minutes on a low heat. Meanwhile, finely chop the herbs and garlic in a food processor. Discard the dill and then add the rest of the chopped herbs to the sauce and simmer for another 15 minutes. Add sugar to taste. The sauce is now ready.

Allow to cool and pour into sterilized containers. Add a few drops of sunflower oil to the top to seal the sauce before putting on the lids. Store in a dry, cool, dark place.

Kharcho soup with beef:

1kg beef (stewing steak)
100g rice
50g walnuts
3 onions
1 whole tomato or 1 tbsp tomato purée
1 tbsp butter
2 cloves garlic
1 chilli pepper
1 stem each parsley and coriander
1 bay leaf
khmeli suneli (see below)
salt and freshly ground black pepper
tkemali sauce (see left) or tklapi (lavashana) [if unavailable, replace it with tamarind paste].

Do not be intimidated by the number of ingredients – it's not as difficult as it might seem. Khmeli suneli is a mix of Georgian spices and herbs, such as saffron, dried coriander, basil, dill, parsley, celery, garlic, black pepper, chilli pepper or paprika, bay leaf and thyme. You can buy it online or in specialist grocers. Without it, you'll be making a generic tomato soup with rice, rather than kharcho. Tklapi is a sun-dried purée of tkemali fruit (cherry plum).

Start by making a stock: dice the meat into small cubes, place it in a pan and cover with 2-2½litres of cold water. Bring it to the boil and then simmer until the meat is cooked (approximately 2 hours).

Meanwhile, wash the rice, dice the onions and chop the herbs. Remove the seeds from the chilli pepper and cut it into small pieces. Crush the garlic together with salt in a mortar or garlic press. Run the walnuts through a blender. If you are using tklapi, cut a 7x7cm square into small pieces. Place them in a cup and cover with boiling water.

Lightly fry the onions in butter then add the tomato purée or fresh tomato. The tomato is mostly for colour and the tklapi or other plum ingredients give the soup its touch of sourness.

Approximately 30 minutes before the stock is ready, taste and adjust the seasoning as necessary. Once the meat is cooked, add the rice and simmer for another 10 minutes. Then add the onions and tomato, walnuts, tklapi or other plum ingredients, khmeli suneli and chilli pepper. Simmer for a further 5-7 minutes, add freshly ground black pepper, herbs and crushed garlic. Cook for a few moments then remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly before serving. The soup should be thick, fragrant and spicy.

(overleaf) The Soviet version of a traditional Georgian table.

DOVGA SOUP
ESCAPE THE HEAT

People in the West tend to believe that Russia is a very cold place. Yet in summer temperatures in Moscow can reach 40ºC. In this sweltering heat there is little incentive to eat, even less to cook hot soup. In the southern republics of the USSR, where they are used to hot weather, a solution was developed in the form of kefir soup, a drink made from fermented milk. Even doctors have recognised its soothing effects, as well as its capacity to cure both vitamin deficiencies and insomnia. It also goes very well with fresh vegetables.

'Multinational Soviet cuisine' was not just a term invented by the propaganda machine – it was a real, large-scale phenomenon and the incorporation of traditional dishes from the republics into the everyday diet continued unabated throughout the Soviet era. It was one of the great achievements of the authorities that dishes such as Azerbaijani bozbash, Georgian lobio, far-eastern lagman and Moldavian mitetei appeared on the menus of cafeterias and restaurants in every large town across the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s. Fifty years ago this was less apparent, as people resisted the new tastes and flavours, but today we realise how enriched our cuisine has become and unanimously welcome these contributions to our diet.

Azerbaijani dovga is one of the more common cold soups and is a perfect dish for hot weather. It is both delicious and filling yet does not give you a heavy feeling in the stomach. There is also a winter version, served hot, that incorporates chickpeas and lamb meatballs. The Armenian soup spas is very similar to dovga but substitutes steamed wheat for rice. Similar national dishes use a wide variety of other local fermented-milk products such as ayran, katyk or syuzma.

40g rice
50-60g bunch of spinach
a handful of coriander
a handful of dill and chopped sping onions (or chives)
a handful of mint
1½ litres matzoon (a fermented milk product of Armenian origin) or prostokvasha (or sour low-fat yogurt or buttermilk)
200ml sour cream
1 egg

Boil the rice in slightly salted water until cooked (10-15 minutes). Slice the spinach (leaves only) into thin strips and finely chop the herbs. Pour the matzoon into a pot, add the sour cream and egg and mix well. Put the pot on a medium-high heat and bring to the boil, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon. This usually takes no more than 15 minutes. It is imperative to keep stirring otherwise the protein will coagulate and you end up with a lumpy mess rather than a uniform creamy liquid. As soon as the mixture begins to boil, add the drained rice and herbs and simmer for a further 3-4 minutes, continuing to stir. Season to taste. Ideally you'll cook the soup the day before, allow it to cool and then refrigerate.

An advertisement for kefir from the 1970s. Text reads: 'Made from pasteurised whole or skimmed milk, fermented using kefir starter'.

PICKLED CUCUMBER SOUP
LENINGRAD RASSOLNIK

Rassolnik, or pickled cucumber soup, was almost certain to be on the menu at any Soviet café or restaurant and is inextricably associated with the era's cuisine. In the minds of many citizens the dish is also linked with Leningrad, though the city has no particular relationship with any of the ingredients.

The closest precursor of rassolnik was kalia (from the Finnish for 'fish'), made from fish, chicken, duck or mushroom stock with the addition of pickled cucumbers and brine. Rassolnik differed from kalia as it also included pearl barley or rice to bulk it up in an era when the other ingredients were in short supply.

Leningrad rassolnik was invented in 1918-19 by Nikolay Kurbatov, who worked at the Union of People's Food Service and Dormitory Workers (Narpit). He based the recipe on Moscow rassolnik, a traditional dish to which he added potatoes, pearl barley and carrots. For almost a century the result has retained its place as one of the classic soups of Soviet and Russian cuisine.

For 2½ litres of soup:

75g pearl barley
2 litres bouillon or stock
1 onion
1 carrot
3 pickled cucumbers
2 medium-sized potatoes
1 tbsp melted butter
bay leaf
salt and peppercorns

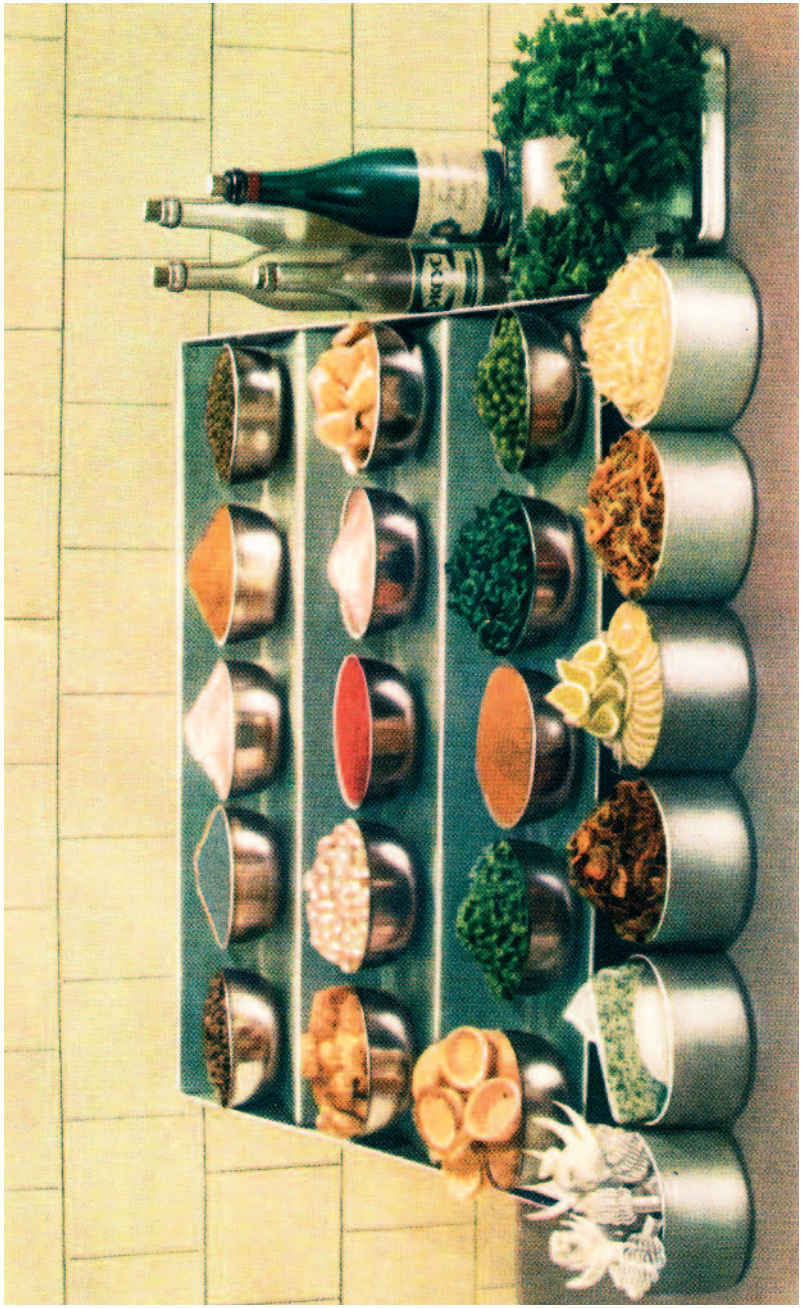
Soak the pearl barley in cold water for 2 hours. If you like clear soup, cook the barley separately by adding hot water at a ratio of 1:1.5. Bring to the boil and simmer for 25 minutes.

Prepare the bouillon with brisket (see p. 54) and add the barley 30 minutes before the end of the cooking time if you are not preparing it seperately.

Take the onion, carrot and cucumbers and slice them julienne-style. Heat some vegetable oil in a pan and lightly fry the onion and carrot, then add the cucumbers and cook over a low heat for 25 minutes. Pour in 100ml of bouillon and remove from the heat.

Once the stock is ready, add the potatoes, sliced julienne-style. Bring to the boil, cook for 10 minutes, then add the barley and mix the onion, carrot and cucumber. Simmer for 15 minutes, then add the bay leaf and peppercorns. Taste to check there is enough salt.

To make the taste sharper, add brine from the pickled cucumbers. Cut the meat (from the bouillon) into medium-sized pieces and place back in the soup. Let the soup rest for 15 minutes before serving, with sour cream and a generous sprinkling of parsley and dill.



Various ingredients used in the making of soups.

SOLYANKA
AN OLYMPIC RACE

By the late 1970s Khrushchev's promise to build communism in the Soviet Union by 1980 had virtually disappeared from official propaganda. The fantasy was replaced by a more concrete event scheduled for the same date: the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games.

In 1977-78 Alexander Kuprikov, Moscow's chief chef, was tasked with devising a menu for the games. He met with the German chef who had supervised the 1972 Munich Olympics but unfortunately his recipes were unrealistic for the USSR – artichokes and asparagus belonged to life on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, officials decided to experiment and ordered asparagus seeds to be sown in the Voronezh region. When they returned to inspect the results, the kolkhoz workers proudly showed them fields covered with lush vegetation: no one had told them that asparagus is harvested early, as soon as the shoots emerge from the soil.

Kuprikov and his chefs also met executives from McDonald's, who claimed they could build a 400-seat restaurant in just 14 days, complete with its own kitchen and imported ingredients. Food samples were delivered by George Cohon, chairman of McDonald's Canada, but he refused to divulge the list of additives, claiming the recipes were a company secret. That posed a serious problem: if the food-monitoring authorities found banned ingredients in the burgers, the Soviet chefs could end up behind bars. So Kuprikov was forced to decline the offer.

However, the idea of fast-food outlets stuck and it was decided to set up a number of temporary cafeterias, some of which still exist in Moscow today. The chefs were expected to cater for 11,000 athletes and about the same number of coaches, medics and militia. In the space of two weeks, two makeshift canteens capable of accommodating 600 people were erected at the Olympic Village. Just a few days before the opening ceremony, Kuprikov organised a dry run using soldiers, who were encouraged to push, queue-jump and do anything else they could think of to put stress on the system. Finally, after some adjustments, the system was proved to work, feeding 600 people in just 14 minutes 30 seconds. One of the favourite 'fast food' Olympic dishes was sterlet soup.

'Irina Ovchar, winner of a cooking contest. She will cook at the XXII Summer Olympics.' Ivano-Frankovsk, Ukrainian SSR. Photograph Vladimir Migovich, 1980 (TASS).

It is difficult to make a small number of servings of this soup, so the following serves 10-12:

1½kg sturgeon (or halibut)
500g pickled cucumbers
200g jar pickled capers
4 onions
450ml tomato purée
100g pitted green olives
100g pitted black olives
2 tbsp vegetable oil
2 lemons
salt, pepper, bay leaf
dill, parsley (optional)

Wash the fish thoroughly. Cut off the skin, spines, fins, head and tail. Place these offcuts into a large pot, fill it with cold water and bring to the boil. Once it is boiling add a whole onion. Then reduce the heat and simmer for 40 minutes. Skim off the foam regularly throughout the process.

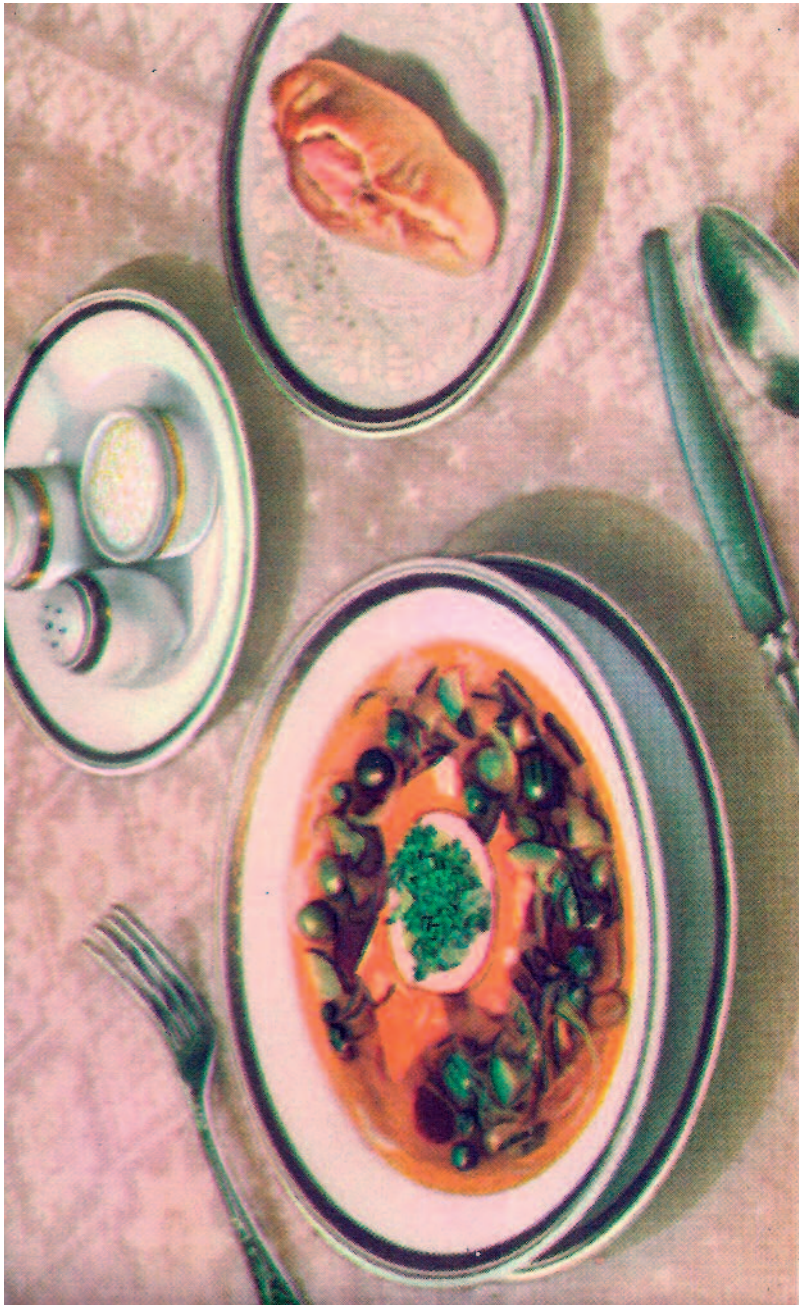
Cut the remaining onions and the cucumbers into julienne-style strips (see p.144). Place in hot oil in a deep frying pan. Add the tomato purée and a little stock from the pot. Simmer for 20-25 minutes.

Strain the stock through a fine sieve, and return it to the pot. Cut the remaining sturgeon into portions and place them in the broth. Cook for 20 minutes continuing to skim off any foam. Add salt as required (you will need less because of the salty pickles).

And then it's simple: place the contents of both pans into one large saucepan and bring to the boil, then simmer on a low heat for 7 minutes. Add the sliced, pitted olives and the entire contents of the jar of capers. Add a bay leaf and some peppercorns (to taste). Cook everything for about 5 minutes at a gentle simmer.

Turn off the heat and add the sliced lemon. Dill and parsley can also be added now if desired. Take the pot off the heat and leave to stand for about 15 minutes. Then take out the lemon slices and bay leaves, otherwise the solyanka may become bitter.

The soup can be served immediately or the next day, in a bowl with lemon (sliced just before serving). If you are warming it up on the following day, do not bring it to a complete boil or it will impair its flavour.



PIKEPERCH PATTIES WITH MAYONNAISE IN ASPIC
CULTIVATING A HIGHER SENSE OF TASTE

In the 1950s the idea of restaurants as places for 'democratic' recreation underwent a revival and they began to play a role in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens. 'For everyone, not just the select few', was the unspoken motto of the restaurant-reformation campaign.

The goal was to transform restaurants into affordable places for working-class people to eat with their families at weekends. Such a policy required the development of a new ethos of high-quality public catering and new attitudes on the part of restaurant staff. Following World War II a younger generation had entered the industry, bringing wartime experiences that made them radically different from the old 'restaurant servers'. The new wave of employees had a genuine desire to provide high-quality service, cook high-quality food and establish democratic relationships within the workplace.

Whether these noble ideals were achieved is debatable. In reality it was almost impossible to change the long-standing traditions of Russian public catering (both good and bad) through a single campaign. However, there were some obvious improvements.

Many restaurants – at least in larger cities – became more accessible while maintaining a high level of service. Even if factory or office workers could afford a family meal in a restaurant no more than once a month, that helped to cultivate an appreciation of good food and a demand for quality cuisine. The restaurant interiors were an integral part of the experience and designs had to strike a delicate balance, creating an atmosphere of ostentation and magnificence while rejecting the arrogance associated with the bourgeoisie.

The first hundred or so pages of *Kulinariya* (*Gastronomy*), published in 1955, are devoted to basic nutrition and the need to develop the art of cooking. The book describes the equipment, interior design and management of a typical public-catering facility, with 'science', 'technology' and 'rational nutrition' as the most frequently used terms. Down-to-earth instructions are juxtaposed with exhortations that the common citizen should expect sophistication in their food: 'The conviction of some employees of the public-catering industry that Soviet citizens do not need refined dishes or beverages is erroneous. It is equally erroneous to assume that a demand for such dishes is a vestige from the past or a manifestation of ostentatious tastes appropriate only to the factory owners, merchants and landowners of tsarist Russia.'

Perhaps the naïve, somewhat nostalgic design of Soviet restaurants was a reflection of the desire to 'live in prosperity and cultural awareness, while cultivating new demands and a higher sense of taste'. The new interiors required more than just snow-white tablecloths and crystal vases. An intrinsic attribute of the concept was that the menu should evoke aristocratic banquets in the minds of the restaurant's patrons. And a dish capable of fuelling such aspirations was pikeperch patties with mayonnaise sauce and jelly.

A view of the main dining area of a Moscow restaurant in the 1950s.

For 10-12 patties:

200ml single cream
4 slices white bread
700g pikeperch fillet (or cod)
2 onions
1 egg
1 clove garlic
1 tsp honey
150g breadcrumbs
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
vegetable oil (for frying)

For the sauce:

2 hard-boiled eggs
1 cucumber (pickled or salted)
1 clove garlic
150g mayonnaise
assorted vegetables and fresh dill to decorate
fish aspic (see p.92)

Pour the cream into a bowl, add the bread and leave to soak for 5 minutes.

Cut the perch fillet into pieces and run through a food processor. Add the chopped onion, crushed garlic, honey, egg and squeezed-out bread. Mix all the ingredients together and season with salt and pepper.

Form the mixture into 10-12 oval patties, roll each one in breadcrumbs, then fry in hot oil for 5-7 minutes on each side.

To prepare the sauce, finely chop the eggs, cucumber and garlic, add the mayonnaise and mix everything together.

Cover the prepared pikeperch patties with the mayonnaise sauce, decorate with shapes cut from different coloured vegetables and cover with a layer of clear fish aspic.

Pikeperch cutlets in mayonnaise sauce with aspic, presented on a tiered stand covered with decoratively cut vegetables.

COD FISH STICKS
FISH DAY

The Soviet government designated every Thursday an official 'fish day', when all the public-catering establishments served dishes made exclusively from fish. So you could forget about beef or chicken until Friday and had to make do instead with roast pollock or capelin patties.

Fish day was invented by Anastas Mikoyan, the People's Commissar for External and Internal Trade, in 1932, when the country was experiencing severe meat shortages. Mikoyan made several trips to the US during the 1930s and also introduced a number of typically American products to the USSR including hamburgers (nicknamed the Mikoyan cutlet), ice-cream and popcorn.

Back in the 19th century Russians ate several varieties of fish, and caviar, sturgeon, fish pies, pikeperch, carp, salmon coulibiac and cod fish sticks had a regular place on the menus of both peasants and city-dwellers. But following the 1917 Revolution, even though people were generally malnourished, fish had ceased to be considered 'real' food. Then suddenly in the 1930s, out of the blue, citizens had to accept that an entire lunch would consist of nothing but fish dishes: for instance, herring salad with herring soup with fried herring to round it off.

Up to this point herring had mainly been viewed as an excellent companion for vodka (see p.44). In an attempt to correct this perception, a large-scale propaganda campaign was waged. Posters of herrings could be found on every street corner and in central Moscow enormous billboards depicting the humble fish adorned the Polytechnic Institute and Central Telegraph buildings. Herring was served in factory and military canteens, maternity hospitals, even nursery schools.

At the end of the 1930s Muscovites could still enjoy sturgeon steak or sturgeon in aspic, which at 2.5 rubles a kilo was cheaper than its meat equivalents and was considered a food anyone could afford. The low prices were said to be thanks to Stalin's intervention. Legend has it that during one of his visits to Lake Riza in Georgia, he stopped at a restaurant where he was served a fine portion of sturgeon steak. After the meal, Stalin complimented the manager, asking, 'How much does a steak like this cost?'

'Ten rubles,' said the manager.

'That's a very good steak, but it's too expensive for an average working-class person. It shouldn't cost more than three rubles.'

'As you wish,' mumbled the manager, turning white.

From that day until Stalin's death, in every restaurant across the USSR, the cost of sturgeon steak remained just three rubles.

The sturgeon population was badly damaged during the early 1960s by Khrushchev's programme of hydroelectric power plant construction: for instance, the Volga river was blocked by a number of hydroelectric power-plants, preventing the fish from moving upstream to spawn. Since then stocks of sturgeon have been mostly restricted to the Lower Volga and their numbers have shrunk tremendously.

Yet with more than 3,000 species of fish in Soviet territorial waters, supplies of saltwater fish were still plentiful. Alexander Ishkov, who succeeded Polina Zhemchuzhina (see p.38) as People's Commissar for Fisheries and managed to retain his post for 40 years through the Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, requested hard currency from the government to build large-scale freezer trawlers in the GDR. Soon fleets numbering up to 20 vessels were trawling the oceans for periods of six months at a time, and the USSR was catching more oceangoing fish and whales than any other country.

However, the quality of food reaching the average citizen did not necessarily improve. Unappetizing whalemeat sausages were soon withdrawn from the shelves along with kelp salad, as rich in vitamins, iodine and other nutrients as it was unpalatable. Then came spat pâté, a disgusting-looking paste with an equally abhorrent smell. Produced in colossal amounts, it was made from residue from the manufacture of tinned sprats: waste products ground into a fine paste.

It was not until the end of the Khrushchev era that more or less edible species of fish found their way into the grocery stores and Soviet citizens became accustomed to their exotic names. The grenadier or rattail and nothothens might not have tasted as good as the more familiar burbot or sterlet, but they were better than nothing. People on lower incomes were offered pollock, commonly referred to as 'cat food' since by the time it reached the consumer it was so thoroughly deep frozen that it tasted and looked pitiable.

According to Soviet advertisements of the 1970s, grocery shops and public-catering establishments were brimming with fried fish, fish patties, fish soups, sturgeon in aspic and cod fish sticks. 'Choose the dish you like best. Our experienced cooks have prepared your favourites for you,' the commercials declared. In fact there were only two or three places in Moscow where you could eat the dishes depicted in the ads. When they were shown at the cinema, it was common to hear people grumble, 'Lucky them, those Muscovites'.

Fish sticks or telnoe combine old Russian and new Soviet cuisines. First mentioned in chronicles from the Middle Ages, they also appear in the memoirs of travellers to Muscovite Rus in the 17th century. Originally minced fish was packed into intricate copper moulds in the shape of pigs, ducks, geese and so on then fried in hot oil so the fish took on the shape of the mould. The dish was greatly simplified in the 20th century to create the more familiar fish sticks or fingers. That, however, did not diminish its delicious flavour.

For the outside:

2 slices sourdough rye bread
100ml milk
500g fish fillet (cod, pikeperch, pollock)
1 egg
salt and pepper
200g breadcrumbs

For the filling:

150g mushrooms
1 hard boiled egg
1 large onion
50g parsley
salt and pepper

For the coating: soak the rye bread in the milk while you run the fish fillet through a food processor, then mix it all together in a bowl with a spoon. Add salt and pepper to taste then run the mixture through the processor again.

For the filling: thinly slice the onion and fry in oil, slice the mushrooms and add them to the pan. Once cooked, remove from the heat. Chop the hard-boiled egg and add it to the mix, along with salt and pepper to taste.

Spread cling film on a table and place patties of fish mix on it, pressing with your fingers to make them flat and round. Place some filling on half of each round and use the cling film to fold it over, pinching the edges to seal. Chill in the refrigerator for about an hour until firm.

Dip every pattie in beaten egg and roll in breadcrumbs. Fry in vegetable oil for 3-4 minutes on each side until golden brown. Then put in the oven and bake for another 15 minutes at 160°C/Gas 3.

Garnish with parsley and serve with green peas or fried potatoes and tomato sauce.

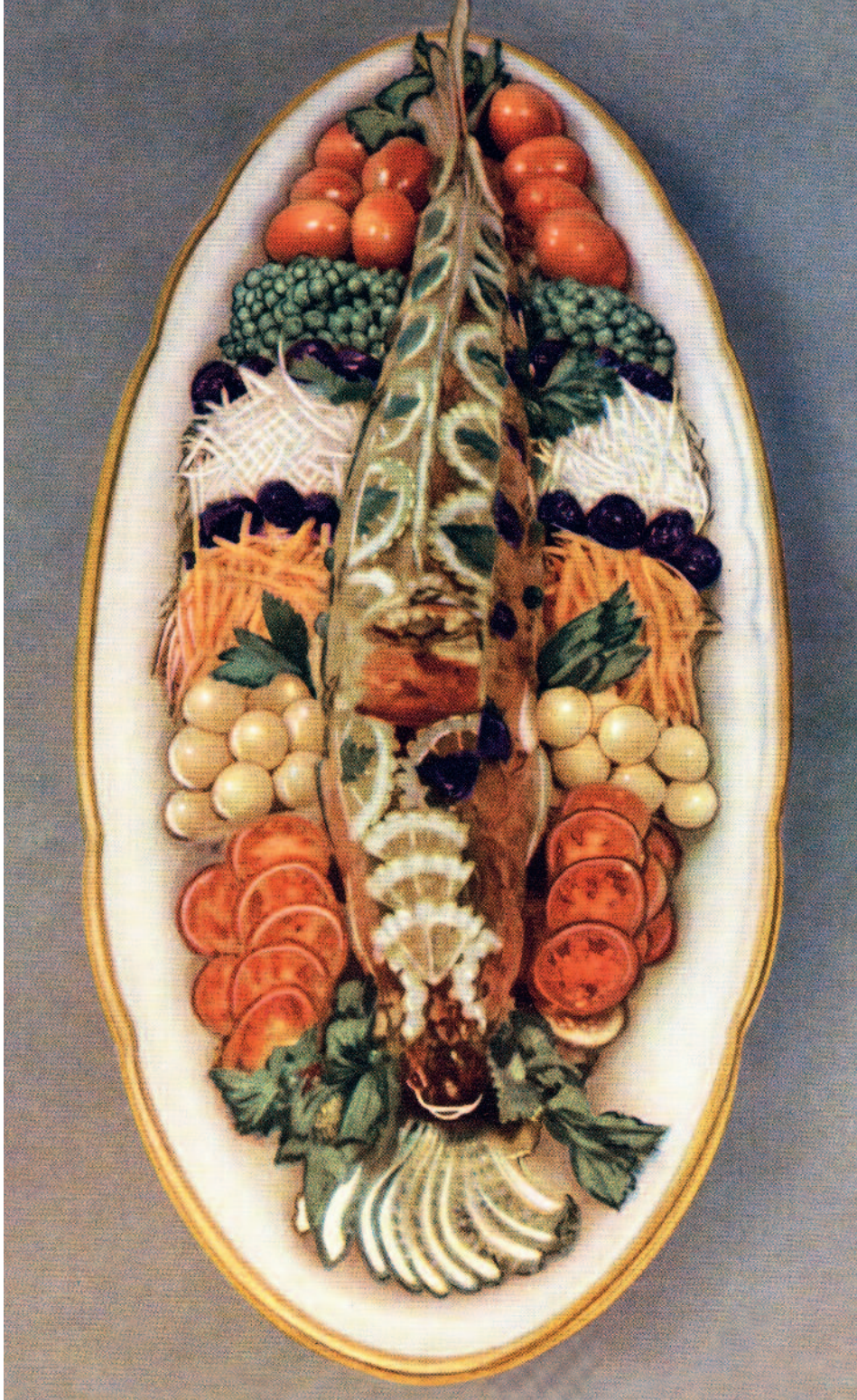
ASPIC
WILL IT SET?

Aspics were a quintessential part of any Soviet feast, in particular New Year's dinner. Each household would have its own trusted recipe for this cold appetizer: some used only pigs' trotters while others preferred beef shanks or cows' heads. True connoisseurs, however, always mixed different kinds of meat. The thick stock that resulted from cooking the meat would be poured into bowls and taken outside. A domestic fridge just wasn't cold enough for the aspic to set, but winter temperatures of minus 15-20°C were ideal. Minutes before the Kremlin clock struck midnight, the bowls would be brought back inside, placed on the table, and the party would begin.

Historically, Russian aspics were made not only with meat or fish but also with fruit and vegetables. Three centuries ago meat aspics were prepared from legs of pork or beef, with lips, ears, heads or tails added to the mix, and fruit jelly dishes were prepared using additional ingredients to help them set.

The galantine, made from boiled or roasted meat, fowl, rabbit or fish, is another type of cold dish served in aspic. During the Siege of Leningrad (1941-44) the Soviet authorities found 2,000 tons of mutton guts which they turned into galantine to feed the starving citizens. In their extreme hunger, people would make galantine from whatever 'ingredients' they could find, including wood glue (at that time made from bone and gristle) flavoured with bay leaves.

Pikeperch in aspic, garnished with vegetables.



For a meat aspic:

2 pig trotters
1kg beef shank
2 carrots
2 onions
5 black peppercorns
3 bay leaves
3 cloves garlic
salt to taste
2 egg whites (if you want a clear stock)

Place the trotters and shank into a large pot. Soak them in cold water for 3-4 hours then drain and scrub with a brush.

Place the meat back into the pot and add fresh cold water until it is covered by 6-8cm. Add the carrots, onions, peppercorns and bay leaves. Bring to the boil, skim off the foam and cover with a lid, leaving a small gap for the steam to escape.

Simmer for at least 6-7 hours, keeping the heat at its lowest setting to ensure the broth will be clear, thick and rich in flavour. Approximately an hour before the stock is ready, add salt.

The meat is cooked when it separates easily from the bone. Remove the vegetables and spices and allow the meat to cool just enough so you don't burn yourself when you take it out to debone it (the cooling may take as long as a couple of hours).

Now turn your attention to the stock. If you've used the right cuts of meat (trotters and shank) and simmered for the specified time, you will not need to add any gelatin. Dip your fingers in the stock and if they feel sticky when you pinch them, then the aspic should set.

Chop the meat into small pieces or run it through a food processor. Add the garlic, crushed in a garlic press. Put the meat and garlic into a single large bowl or mould or several smaller ones and cover with the strained stock. Taste and add salt if necessary. Cover the bowls or moulds with lids or clingfilm and leave in a cold place for 12 hours. Use a spoon to remove any fat floating on the surface.

The next day you'll be able to treat yourself and your guests to a tasty meat aspic. Serve with mustard, horseradish or chilli sauce.

To make galantine, place thin slices of tongue, beef, chicken or other meat or fowl on a plate with rounds of carrots, peas and hard-boiled eggs, then simply coat in aspic.

Stuffed venison fillet, set in aspic and garnished with vegetables.

BEEF STROGANOFF
A TASTE OF HISTORY

The origins of Beef Stroganoff can be traced back to the end of the 18th century. Though historians don't agree precisely which member of the aristocratic Stroganoff family invented the dish, the earliest mentions of it can be found in Russian cookery books of the 1870s. Following the October 1917 Revolution, émigrés helped to export the dish around the world and by the start of the Soviet era Beef Stroganoff enjoyed widespread popularity both at home and abroad.

There is something intrinsically Soviet about Beef Stroganoff, but it's not easy to pinpoint what has made it so popular. One factor could be the relative simplicity of the recipe: a short list of ingredients combined using straightforward techniques. Another reason, of course, is the distinctive taste. The dish can also be easily adapted to suit the ingredients at hand – fillet can be replaced with rump; smetana (a form of sour cream) with double cream; fresh tomatoes with ketchup or tomato purée. There are many popular variations, for example liver à la Stroganoff or beef with mushrooms. The thin ribs (or Jacob's ladder) can also be replaced by the inner part of the hind shank, as was common practice in Soviet restaurants.

Almost all the meat recipes in this book use clarified butter. While this ingredient is historically authentic, it is frowned upon by contemporary dietitians and most cookery books today recommend using vegetable oils to fry or sauté meat. Traditionally, Russians only cooked meat in animal fat and clarified butter. But by the start of the 18th century, plain butter and vegetable oil were sometimes used for vegetables, fish and mushrooms – and as an ingredient in salad dressings and cold sauces. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in tandem with the development of the food industry, margarines and other combined fats became more popular and these almost completely replaced natural fats in the Soviet Union's public-catering industry. But it is hard to imagine traditional Russian cooks roasting meat in olive, sunflower or nut oil – not so much because of their flavour and quality (then, as now, the quality of vegetable oils imported to Russia left much to be desired) as because of tradition and custom.

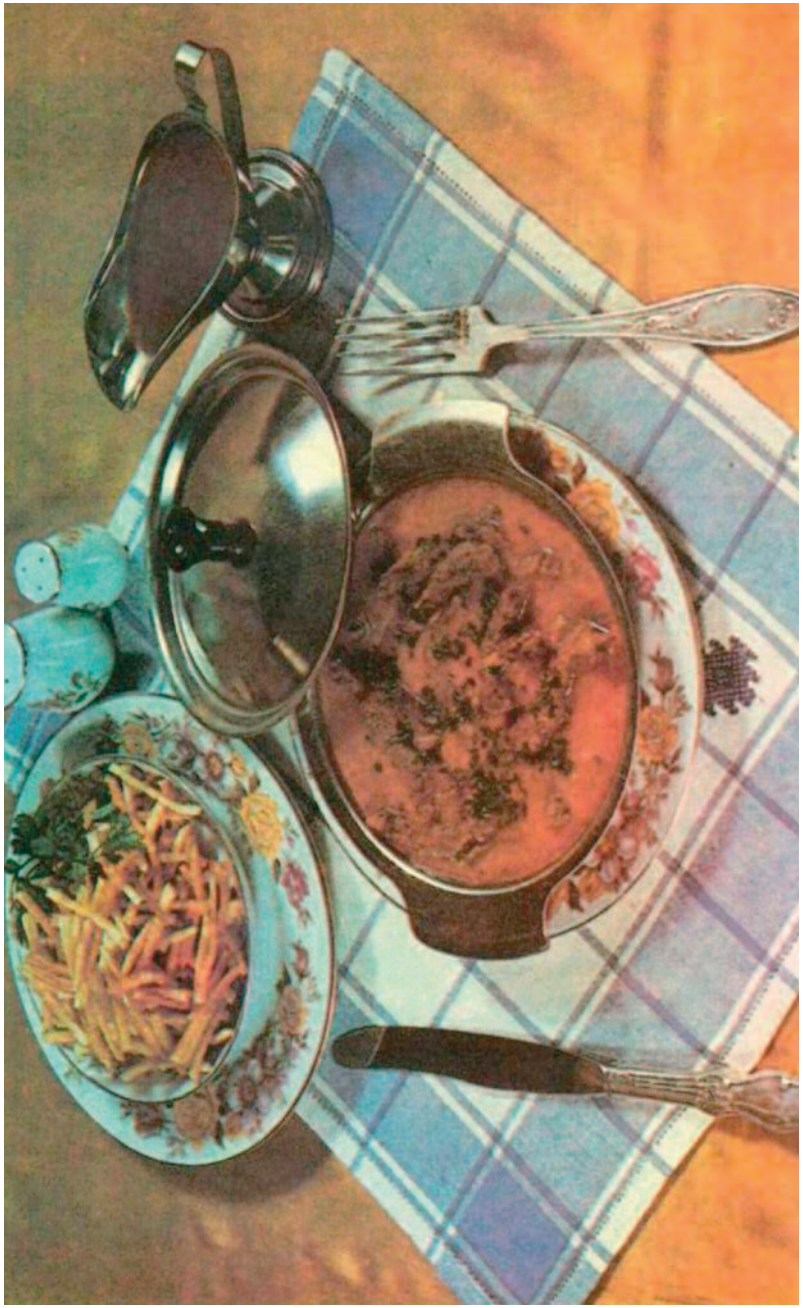
500g beef (fillet, thin ribs/Jacob's ladder or rump)
2 medium-sized onions
2 tbsp butter
1 tbsp plain flour
200ml sour cream (smetana)
1 tbsp tomato purée and a splash of Worcester sauce to taste
salt and pepper to taste

Cut the beef into 1cm strips, lightly pound with a tenderiser, then slice into even thinner strips. Half the onions and then slice them into thick semicircles.

Melt the butter in a hot frying pan and brown the onions. Add the meat (if necessary in batches), turn up the heat and fry until sealed and lightly browned, stirring continuously and making sure the onions do not burn. After about five minutes add salt, pepper and a sprinkling of flour, then turn down the heat and cook for another three minutes, stirring continuously.

Add the sour cream, tomato purée and more salt, mixing thoroughly until all the ingredients are incorporated. Cover and bring to the boil over a medium heat then turn down to a minimum. If the sauce seems too thick, you can add a little stock or water. Cook until tender (about 40 minutes), stirring occasionally.

The dish can be sweetened by adding a pinch of sugar or 3-4 dried apricots. This will enhance its flavour and improve the sweet-to-sour ratio. A tiny amount of sweetness brings out the flavours in many dishes, whether fish, meat or vegetables. Adding a splash of Worcestershire sauce and/or mushrooms of any variety will give a more modern taste. Serve with fried or mashed potatoes.



VEGETABLE-STUDDED BEEF
A VERY MODEST CULINARY HEAVEN

Soviet cookery books were designed to convey a sense of abundance and endless variety. In reality, however, things were not so rosy and their illusion of a 'socialist heaven' was easily shattered.

When *The Collection of Recipes for Dishes and Culinary Preparations* came out in the mid-1950s it was aimed mainly at the public-catering industry. Hygiene and technical specifications were key, affecting everything from ingredients and method to portion size, shelf life and storage conditions.

Recommended quantities were split into three columns depending on the target consumer. The first column referred to restaurants, the second to cafés and public cafeterias and the third to canteens for workers and educational institutions. The recipes in the third column were the least nutritious, using less butter and meat. For instance for studded beef, a single serving contained 125g of meat in the first column, 100g in the second and only 70g in the third. The shortfall was made up with increased amounts of pasta, rice or potatoes. In this respect, the 'culinary heaven' for workers was so modest it barely met the nutritional minimum.

800 beef (or pork, or lamb)
2-3 carrots
100g parsley stems
1-2 onions
100g tomato purée
50g lard or butter
30g plain flour
salt, peppercorns and bay leaf to taste

Cut one carrot and the parsley into small pieces. Force them into the meat by piercing along the fibers using a long, thin knife. Sauté the onions and the rest of the carrots until brown.

Fry the meat in a little oil or butter until brown. Transfer it to a deep saucepan and half fill with stock or water. Add the browned onions, carrots, tomato purée, 5-6 peppercorns and a bay leaf. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat, cover with a lid and leave to stew for 2-2½ hours.

Fry the flour in butter or fat in a hot pan until golden.

When the meat is ready, take it out. Strain the stock and vegetables through a sieve, rubbing the vegetables to force them through. Then pour this mixture back into the original saucepan. Add the fried flour and boil for 3-5 minutes.

Cut the meat into slices, spread them on a dish and pour the sauce on top.

STEAK AND ONIONS
THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

Leafing through the meat sections of Soviet cookery books inevitably leads you to the conclusion that the majority of recipes were not for whole cuts of meat but were more labour-intensive creations using various kinds of mince. Minced meat, of course, was easier to come by, while longer cooking times and added ingredients meant it did not have to be of such high quality.

Restaurants and cafeterias offered some dishes that used whole cuts, such as steaks, schnitzels or escalopes, but they were never very popular because the meat was often poor quality and tough. The thick coating of breadcrumbs made it impossible for diners to guess what kind of meat they were actually eating and so this section of the menu was mostly ignored. Choice in the way the meat was served was unheard-of: neither the patrons nor the chefs knew what 'rare', 'medium' or 'well done' meant and even at the best Soviet restaurants waiters would never ask how you'd like your steak done.

The standard fare was a tasteless and tough slab of meat from a cow that had yielded record-breaking quantities of milk for years before finally being slaughtered. Escalopes were a bit better in texture if not in flavour as they had usually been beaten to a pulp with a tenderiser. The only way to be certain of what you were eating was to buy a piece of veal or pork from a butcher you knew and cook it at home.

State-owned restaurants kept a close eye on the quality of their meat and chefs were fired or even imprisoned if they were caught substituting cheaper cuts. A continuous battle prevailed between good and evil, with each side looking for ways of tricking the other.

As chief chef in Moscow during the 1970s, Alexander Kuprikov (see p.80) had the responsibility of overseeing all aspects of food quality and preparation in every restaurant and food enterprise in the capital. He would often do his rounds at the weekend, when chefs were particularly prone to cheating. His 'team' consisted of himself (the 'expert') and a member of the People's Volunteer Monitoring Group (the 'citizen'), whose job was to check that he was not being bribed.

On one occasion he was sent with an accountant from the Department of Inspection and Revision (the 'citizen') to a café where he ordered a steak. He saw immediately that the meat was third-grade, containing fat and tendons. Passing the plate to his companion, he said, 'Hold this with both hands as if your life depended on it – they will try to swap it one way or another.' He then made his way to the kitchen, where he found first-grade cuts of meat on every plate.

Returning to his table, he saw that his companion's plate now held a choice cut of meat. 'Did somebody push you or try to distract you?' he asked.

'No', she replied. 'I've been holding on to my plate the whole time. But there was a man hanging around…'

Kuprikov marched back into the kitchen, asking, 'Do you know who I am?'

Of course, the chefs knew.

'OK, I promise I won't report you this time. In fact, I'll buy a bottle of cognac for the person that tells me how he did it.'

The employees admitted to distracting his companion and Kuprikov bought the cognac. As he left the kitchen they gave him a little advice: 'Next time make sure you bring along someone smarter.'

150g steak per person (fillet or rump)
150-200g butter
½ onion per person
125g plain flour
oil for deep frying
salt and pepper to taste

Cut portion-sized pieces (2-3cm thick) from a fillet of beef.

Tenderise the steaks lightly until they are only 1½-2cm thick and nearly round in shape. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Fry in butter in a small deep frying pan for 10-15 minutes.

Slice the onions into rings, dip in the flour and deep fry in oil for 2-3 minutes. When ready remove with a slotted spoon and transfer to a colander to drain. Sprinkle with salt.

Place the steak on a plate, pour over the melted butter and meat juice and top with the onion rings.

Serve with fried potatoes and grated horseradish.

VEAL KIDNEYS FRIED IN BREADCRUMBS
KIDNEYS À LA ASKOLD

St Petersburg's Grand Hotel Europa has had a chequered history. It was used as an orphanage following the 1917 October Revolution then as a hospital during the Siege of Leningrad (1941-44). After the war the hotel reopened, catering primarily for Soviet dignitaries and international tourists. It became famous for its top-floor restaurant, The Roof, and every significant deal in a city with a healthy trade in antique paintings and furniture was celebrated there.

In her later years, the former prima ballerina of the Imperial Bolshoi Theatre, Yekaterina Geltzer (1876-1962), often stayed at the hotel. She collected paintings by Isaac Levitan and one of her lovers – a young man only ever known as Askold – always made the purchases on her behalf. He would view a painting, ask the price and then settle the bill without ever haggling, despite the enormous sums involved. Each sale would be celebrated at The Roof.

Only under the Soviet regime could such a character emerge – a rogue made 'great' by circumstances. Every foreign-currency hotel had its own undercover KGB agent and Askold was the Europa's. Nonetheless, he carried himself with such aplomb that he instilled respect and admiration in all.

One day, after the purchase of another painting, Askold went to The Roof to celebrate. He entered the restaurant with his head held high and all eyes followed him as he walked to his table and sat down.

'What will you have, Mr Askold?' asked the waiter, offering him the menu.

'Kidneys à la me,' replied Askold. The waiter, struggling not to smile, realised that Askold thought of himself as a Stroganoff or Demidov, after whom famous Russian dishes had been named. Shortly, a plate of meat was placed on the table.

'Kidneys à la you, sir,' the old waiter solemnly announced. And so Kidneys à la Askold was born.

600g veal kidneys
1 tbsp plain flour
1 egg
50g breadcrumbs
30g lard or butter
600g fried potatoes
parsley or salad leaves to garnish
3 tbsp herb butter
1 lemon
salt and pepper

Flatten a raw veal kidney as if preparing to grill it, or slice it into 1cm thick slices (allow 2-3 slices of kidney per serving). Add salt, dip in flour, then in well-beaten egg and coat in breadcrumbs. Fry in lard until evenly browned on both sides, place in the oven and cook for 15 minutes at 170°C/Gas 3.

To serve, place the kidneys on a plate, garnish with fried potatoes cut into long thin strips and decorate with parsley and salad leaves. Serve with herb butter and a lemon slice on the side.

AZU À LA TATAR
AZU REPATRIATED

The question of regional variations was a complicated one for Soviet cuisine. Until the 1960s dishes from the Soviet republics were not accepted into the canon of Soviet cookery and attitudes towards them were ambivalent.

Azu à la Tatar is a good example of this phenomenon. The dish is similar to Hungarian goulash, but with a twist: the sauce includes pickled cucumbers, which give it a slight tartness. From the beginning of the 1930s the recipe appeared in Soviet restaurants and cookery books, but it was only at the end of the 1960s that it began to be referred to by its true national name.

The 1955 bestselling book *Kulinariya* (*Gastronomy*), which has survived in numerous editions, pioneered the renaming of regional dishes to reflect their origins. Moscow publishing houses began to print series such as 'Cooking Tatar Cuisine' and to promote Moldavian, Uzbek and Armenian recipes among others. Some of these books were created only to comply with the orders of the authorities and publishers even began to invent their own versions of national dishes.

However, there were also some excellent authors whose work has stood the test of time. One such scholar and evangelist of Tatar cuisine was Yunus Akhmetzyanov (1927-1984), a renowned chef and writer who is still highly regarded in Tatarstan and has a memorial plaque in the capital of Kazan.

Akhmetzyanov's research followed a well established path. He gathered tips from specialists, studied methods and techniques for preparing different ingredients, and sought out forgotten recipes from remote villages, resuscitating all-but-lost dishes. In addition, he created his own recipes: Kazan meat patties, hare Tatar, noodle soup with cabbage and many others. His classic series of books *Tatar Cuisine* have been reprinted dozens of times in Russian and the various Tatar languages.

Azu à la Tatar was an integral part of the Soviet public-catering repertoire as well as a popular dish for cooking at home. In his books Akhmetzyanov refers to the dish only as azu, but it is mostly thanks to him that it is now commonly known as azu à la Tatar.

In addition to his scholarly research, Akhmetzyanov is famous as the founder of the House of Tatar Cuisine in Kazan. As head chef, he cooked stuffed peremyachi (Tartar stuffed buns) for Nikita Khrushchev and treated Soviet astronauts Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova to azu à la Tatar. The restaurant still serves the finest food in Kazan.

The chef and author Yunus Akhmetzyanov during a cookery demonstration.

Serves 4 to 6 people:

600g sirloin or rump steak
2-3 onions
3 pickled cucumbers
2 tbsp butter
3 tbsp tomato purée or 3 skinned tomatoes (fresh or tinned)
250ml meat stock
9 large potatoes, diced
3 cloves garlic
salt, pepper and bay leaf to taste
fresh herbs to garnish

Slice the steak into 1x4 cm strips, with the shortest side running against the grain. Chop the onions. Peel the pickled cucumbers and slice into strips of ½x3cm.

Melt some of the butter in a thick-bottomed frying pan and lightly fry the meat in small batches. Once the meat is well done and brown, remove it to a plate and cover with a lid. Fry the onions in the same pan until golden brown. Top up the butter as necessary.

Return the meat to the pan, add the tomato purée or tomatoes and check the seasoning. Fry everything for a few minutes then add the pickled cucumbers and stock. Simmer for about 40 minutes, until the meat is fully cooked.

Fry the diced potatoes in butter in a separate pan until golden brown. About 10 minutes before the whole dish is ready add the potatoes to the meat along with the bay leaves and chopped garlic, and cook over a low heat.

Garnish with fresh herbs and serve.

Azu à la Tatar is a rich and filling dish suitable for all seasons.

SUCKLING PIG WITH BUCKWHEAT
HOW A PIG ANGERED KHRUSHCHEV

The USSR pioneered many new varieties of cereal, changing people's perceptions of this ancient ingredient and making it a popular choice for consumers. Soviet food technologists created cereal-based recipes such as Zdorovie (Health), Pionerskaya (Pioneer) and Sportivnaya (Sporty), as well as blends of cereals with a higher nutritional value such as Flotskaya (Navy) and Silnaya (Strong). These products would typically be small pellets made from powdered rice, buckwheat and/or oats mixed with skimmed-milk powder, sugar and soy flour. Once dried, the pellets would be packed and delivered to state-run grocery shops.

Even traditional grains such as buckwheat did not escape Soviet 'improvement'. In the 1950s, during the Khrushchev era, buckwheat was roasted and dried before it was packaged, a practice that is still followed today. The process means Russian buckwheat is dark brown rather than light green as in the West. The likely aim was to increase its shelf life by removing excess water while the high temperatures also killed micro-organisms that might otherwise have multiplied and spread during shipping and storage. Fortunately, many people liked the new richer taste and piquant aroma.

The new buckwheat was generally used in the same recipes as before, including sauces and baked puddings. But increased austerity meant some foods that had once been common became sought-after and expensive and were prepared only on special occasions. A pig stuffed with buckwheat was a perfect example. Previously a simple peasant dish, it was now available solely to the Party elite during official celebrations.

In May 1962 Nikita Khrushchev was on an official visit to Bulgaria. Arriving at a reception in the Soviet embassy, he entered the banqueting hall and suddenly stood stock-still. The numerous tables were crowded with delicacies: sturgeon, salads, fruit and at the centre of each a golden-brown roasted pig with buckwheat. Seeing Khrushchev's amazement, the ambassador anticipated praise, if not a medal. But that was far from the First Secretary's mind.

'Do you think communism has already arrived?' asked Khrushchev with a stern expression on his face. 'Who gave the order for this?'

The ambassador turned pale. He mumbled something about additional money being allotted by the Council of Ministers to fund both the reception and a charter jet from Moscow to bring in the exquisite food. Khrushchev frowned. Enraged, he proceeded to one of the tables where, to everyone's relief, he began to eat. The silence in the hall was broken only by the sound of clinking silverware. It was clear to the ambassador that roasted pig stuffed with buckwheat was not a feature of the communist menu.

Soviet cereals, 1950s (left to right): 'Puffed Rice'; 'Corn Flakes'; 'Puffed Corn'.

4kg suckling pig
100ml sour cream
200g stock (see recipe p.54)
200g butter (for basting the pig)
500g buckwheat
15g butter (for frying the buckwheat)
6 hard-boiled eggs
4 medium-sized onions (optional)
salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 220˚C/Gas 7.

Place the pig on a greased baking tray, skin side up and slather with sour cream. Turn down the oven to 165˚C/Gas 3 and roast for 50-60 minutes, occasionally rubbing with butter. Do not baste with the juice from the roasting or turn the pig over. You can check that it is ready by poking a skewer through to the bone at the thickest part; if the juice runs clear, the pig is cooked.

Remove the pig from the tray and pour 200g stock (see recipe on p.54) on to the juices in the tray. Season and strain.

To cook the buckwheat, first fry it on a low heat in 15g melted butter for 10-12 minutes, stirring continuously. Bring 850ml water to the boil, add half a teaspoon of salt, pour in the fried buckwheat and cook until it thickens. Cover with a lid and leave for 1 hour. Then mix with the chopped hard-boiled eggs and fried onion (if desired). Present on a platter (as shown in the picture, right).

Before serving, chop off the pig's head and cut the carcass lengthwise in half. Each half can then be cut into smaller slices. Re-assemble the carcass to form a 'whole' pig and place it on top of the buckwheat. Pour over the juice from the baking tray.

SHASHLIK
HUNTING TIPS AND TRICKS

Leonid Brezhnev was a hunting aficionado. Nothing gave him more pleasure than a trip to the national hunting grounds in Zavidovo, near Moscow, perhaps accompanied by colleagues from the Politburo or leaders from other countries. There was, however, one inescapable problem: age was taking its toll on the General Secretary. Even with the help of his security officers, it was becoming taxing for him to walk around the woods tracking game so he preferred to lie in wait and ambush an elk or deer. But the weather was often miserable – something that was beyond the control even of the most powerful man in the Soviet Union.

The local huntsmen devised an ingenious plan. By feeding the deer regularly, they were able to lure them to a particular clearing in the woods where they would catch one and tie its leg to a tree. A couple of weeks later Brezhnev would arrive with his retinue. A close aide would be told the story of a how a deer had been spotted nearby. He would then relay it in vivid detail to the General Secretary, who would grab his rifle, shouting commands left and right in his excitement, and emerge from his residence ready to hunt.

Carefully avoiding stepping on fallen twigs that might signal their advance, the group would follow the local huntsmen to the clearing. Moments later it was all over – after hitting his target, a smile would steal across the face of the leader of the Kremlin. Meanwhile, one of his security guards would discreetly cut the rope from the deer's leg.

Rumour has it that the first to notice the hoax was cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, who Brezhnev had invited to hunt with him. Gagarin was enraged and the huntsmen were unofficially reprimanded. Following this episode, the General Secretary always used a hunting tower, lying in ambush in the 'honest' way.

Whatever the outcome, the hunt would be followed by a dinner. The security guards would skin the animal and cooks brought in from the capital would turn it into kebabs.

Originally from the Caucasus, kebabs have always been popular throughout the USSR and millions of Soviet citizens have cooked them during camping or hiking trips. Arguments about the best way to marinade the meat could last for hours. At a time when good meat was scarce, sinking your teeth into juicy chunks of skewered lamb or beef was like a dream for many Soviet citizens.

Brezhnev was often told that his kebab had been prepared from the game shot during the hunt. But usually that wasn't the case. Before being marinated in red wine or kvass, the meat was always carefully examined according to the latest hygiene recommendations. The only exception was when one of the guests insisted on preparing the meat himself, but even then the process would be overseen by a professional chef.

Tables were laid with hors d'oeuvres, vegetables, salads, vodka and wine. Then it was time to serve the kebabs. Conversations and toasts over dinner allowed the party leaders to forget about their problems for a few hours. They were enjoying the fruits of their hunt and for that brief moment the plots and schemes of foreign imperialists no longer concerned them.

1kg diced lamb
700g onions
50g parsley
50ml lemon juice (or white wine vinegar)
3 cloves garlic
100g tail fat (or butter)
200g spring onions (or chives)
400g tomatoes
1 lemon
salt and pepper to taste

This recipe is quite simple, but may require some practice to get absolutely right. Marinade recipes vary from region to region, so feel free to expriment, adding ingredients to suit your taste.

Finely chop a large onion into rings. Place both in a large bowl with the lemon juice or vinegar and some pepper and mix thoroughly. Leave in the refrigerator for 12 hours, turning the meat 2 or 3 times to make sure it soaks up the flavour.

Thread the cubes of meat on to skewers, alternating them with chunks of onion. Roll in melted tail fat or butter and cook under an electric grill or over hot coals.

Kebabs can be served by constructing a small pyramid from the skewers or you can remove the meat and serve with sliced onions, spring onions (or chives), tomatoes and slices of lemon.

(overleaf) Armenian-style shashlik: (left) 'Ararat' and (right) 'Yerevan'.

TUSHENKA
TINNED STEWED MEAT: A SOVIET NOSTALGIA

Tushenka, or tinned stewed meat (from tushit, 'to stew'), found its way into everything during the Soviet era, whether as an accompaniment to fried or boiled potatoes or as an ingredient in soups and stews.

Tushenka had been part of the Russian diet since tinned-meat production for the military was introduced in the 1870s. After experimenting with a variety of meats and preservation methods, beef was chosen because it lost very little of its flavour during the canning process and was preferred by the soldiers.

In the late 1920s, following collectivisation, the USSR began to manufacture tinned meat and tinned beans. But from 1931 to 1933 the production of tushenka dropped dramatically. Compared to the planned 11.9 million cans for 1931, only 2.5 million were produced in 1932, less than a third of the requirements of the Red Army. Quality control was rigorous: the beef must not have been stored for longer than 48 hours after slaughter. All sinews, cartilage, tough connective tissues, large blood vessels and lymph nodes had to be removed. Tushenka manufactured to state standard (GOST) specifications contained only meat (at least 54 per cent), fat (less than 17 per cent), onion and spices.

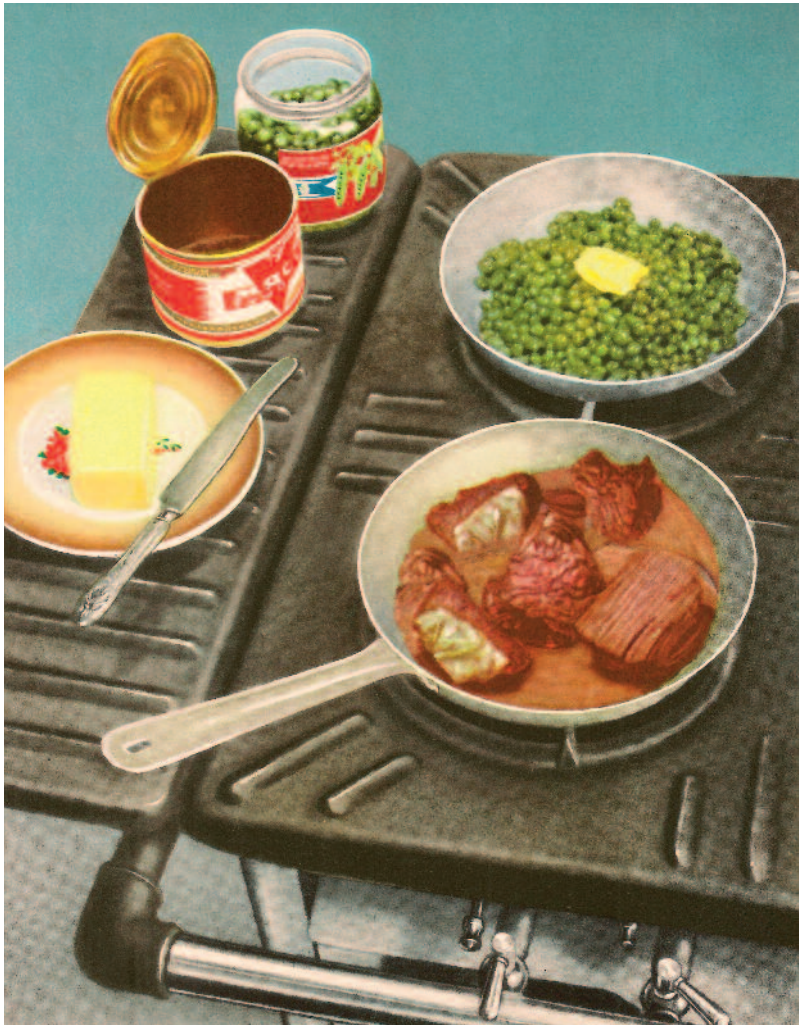
In the first months of World War II, Germany captured the warehouses that stored the military's tushenka. By 1943 supplies of locally manufactured stewed meat were exhausted. This meant that Soviet army rations relied on US-produced tushenka provided by the Lend-Lease policy (through which America provided supplies to the Allies in return for the use of their military bases).

According to the protocols of the policy, food had to account for more than 25 per cent of the total volume of supplies. Allowing for wartime nutritional standards, the supplies should have been sufficient to feed an army of 10 million for over three years. Unfortunately, shipments were irregular and initial volumes were much lower than stipulated. The US overcompensated at the end of the war, which meant that US-manufactured tushenka found its way into civilian households for many years to come, becoming extremely popular with Soviet citizens. It is estimated that around 600 million cans of tushenka were sold annually – though it was not uncommon for them to appear on grocery shelves only a short time before their expiry date.

700g potatoes
butter for frying
1 x 350g can tushenka (use corned beef if unavailable)
salt and pepper to taste

Peel the potatoes, cut them into cubes or thin slices and fry in a pan using butter, until brown.

Warm up the tushenka in a separate pan to melt the jelly. Once the jelly has turned to liquid, drain it off or leave in the pan for a more stew-like result. Mash the meat with a fork, dividing it into separate pieces, and add to the pan of potatoes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cover over with a lid and cook for 7 minutes.



MEAT PATTIES
THE ESSENCE OF THE CAFETERIA

Every household had its own recipe for the classic Soviet dish of meat patties. But in public-catering facilities and factories, the official cookbook had to be followed rigorously. A precise amount of bread, soaked in water, would be added to the meat and the mixture coated in breadcrumbs before frying.

Meatballs, rissoles, patties, croquettes: Soviet cuisine had a plethora of names for dishes made from minced meat. Kotletas and bitochki used the same basic ingredients and differed only in shape (kotletas were oval and flat, bitochki rounder and plumper). Bifshteks (not to be confused with beef steaks) also used minced meat, but these were larger and had no breadcrumb coating. Zrazy are meat patties with a filling supplemented with eggs, buckwheat, wild mushrooms or fried onions. Teftels are meatballs made from minced meat with added bread or rice; they are fried then simmered in tomato or sour-cream sauce. Shnitsel (not to be confused with schnitzel) was made from diced beef with added pieces of cured fat. This dish was referred to as Natural Diced Shnitsel on cafeteria menus and was served with a sauce.

Patties were made from beef, pork, mutton, poultry or fish as well as vegetables: there are so many variations it would be impossible to list them all. The recipe below, however, is generally considered a classic of Soviet cuisine.

For the outside:

125g stale white bread (crust removed)
500g minced meat
(any combination of pork, beef or lamb)
1-2 medium-sized onions to taste
salt and pepper to taste
45g breadcrumbs
4 tbsp vegetable oil for frying

For the filling:

2 eggs
1 tbsp butter
1 small onion
bunch of parsley
salt to taste
butter for frying

Soak the bread in water for 10-15 minutes (it is important to use stale bread – if you use fresh the patties will not be as light). Wring out the water and run the bread through a food processor along with the meat and onions. Add salt and pepper and mix thoroughly with a fork (using a fork aerates the mixture).

Now prepare the filling by hard boiling the eggs. Allow them to cool then chop finely. Finely chop the onion and fry in butter until golden. Chop the parsley and mix with the other ingredients adding salt to taste.

Roll the patty mix into tortilla shapes 1cm thick. Place a portion of the filling inside, then close and seal like a pie. Roll in breadcrumbs and fry in the oil for 5-7 minutes each side.

Serve with fried buckwheat (see recipe p.114) as illustrated.

MEATBALLS À LA COSSACK
TO ERASE THE MEMORY OF THE PAST

The phrase 'history is written by the victors', attributed to Winston Churchill, may not yet have been coined, but its truth was already being demonstrated by the Soviet authorities in the late 1920s. Everything associated with the Romanov regime was deliberately and methodically destroyed: churches and monuments were demolished, museums closed, streets renamed. It was inevitable that many of the dishes of pre-Revolutionary Russia would also fall victim to the process.

A new standard recipe book was published in the 1920s in which dishes whose names referenced Russian noblemen or merchants or contained foreign words or phrases were given new Soviet-style titles. These were used throughout the numerous public-catering facilities, so 'Boyar potage' became 'potato soup with fresh mushrooms' and 'coquille fish' became 'fish baked in milk sauce'.

In fact, it was sauces that suffered the most – if the new proletarian cuisine seemed ideologically opposed to sauces as a class, it was their names that caused most affront. From the 1920s on, sauces such as béchamel, piquant or supreme were simply referred to as 'white sauce', 'red sauce', 'milk sauce' and so on. No more of that bourgeois foreign nonsense!

Perhaps there is a reason why these new names were purely descriptive, with no attempt to introduce associations or imagery. At the end of the 18th century the famous French gourmet Laurent Grimod de La Reynière stated that the naming of new dishes was a 'procedure that contributes to the creation of stability in life, and is a reflection of our society's worldview'. If this logic is applied to Soviet cuisine, then it would appear that the revised names reflected a new utilitarian reality. Not only would it be ridiculous to serve 'steak à la Trotsky' or 'Lenin sturgeon', but with the ever-intensifying power struggle within the Party, it would also be unsafe.

The Bolsheviks' zeal backfired for the new Communist regime of the 1970s, which found it more difficult than anticipated to resurrect the traditions of haute cuisine. It was far from easy for a new generation of cooks to prepare recipes that had been purged from the collective memory.

Cookery author and teacher Margarita Kutkina recalls how, in 1974, she was assigned to teach a series of classes on restaurant cuisine. New restaurant menus featured dishes with names like 'sturgeon Florentine', 'lamb noisettes' and 'meatballs à la Cossack'. Puzzled by the nature of the dishes they referred to, she consulted her collection of cookery books. By chance her family had preserved a 1904 edition of Elena Molokhovets' culinary bible *A Gift to Young Housewives* (1861). Viewed as bourgeois and decadent by the Soviet authorities, somehow it had survived and even escaped being used for kindling during the coldest days of the Siege of Leningrad (1941-44). Night after night Kutkina studied the recipes, comparing them with the Soviet-approved standards in *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* (1952). As she did so, she came to realise that many Soviet dishes had a long history obscured by their new titles. Her most satisfying discovery was that her favourite dish, 'meatballs with rice', had originally been called 'meatballs à la Cossack'.

The Soviet authorities displayed an open dislike for the Cossacks, perhaps remembering that these slavs of Ukrainian or southern Russian origin, many of whom served as cavalrymen under the tsars, had fired on peaceful anti-imperial demonstrators in the revolutionary St Petersburg of 1905. The Cossacks retaliated to the hostility by organising revolts in the Kuban and Don regions. So it became a matter of principle for the Soviet regime to eradicate the memory of Cossack freemen, even in the kitchen.

Serves 4 or 5:

2 slices dry bread (with crusts removed)
235ml milk
500g minced lean beef
salt and pepper to taste
3-4 tbsp breadcrumbs
5-6 tbsp vegetable oil for frying
200g basmati or indica rice
235ml meat stock (see recipe on p.54)
3 tbsp tomato passata
300ml sour cream
150g semi-mature cheese (such as cheddar)
vegetable oil and fresh herbs to garnish

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

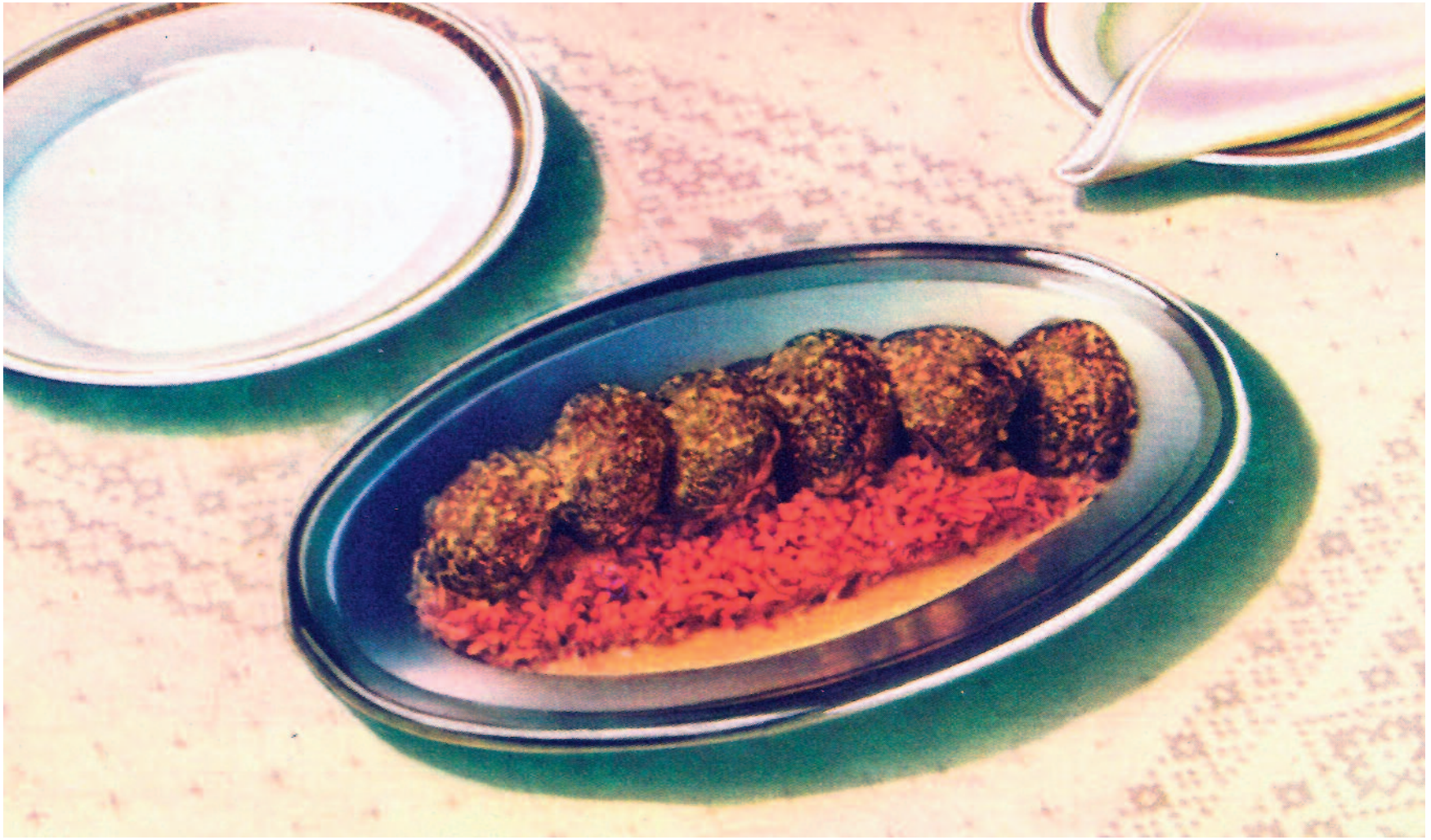
Soak the bread in the milk for 5 minutes. Mix the minced beef with the bread and milk, add salt and pepper, then run it through a food processor.

Divide the mixture into a series of small meatballs, roll them in breadcrumbs and fry in the oil, turning them from time to time until they are browned all over.

Place the cooked rice and stock mixed with tomato sauce in a shallow ovenproof dish. Add the meatballs and pour the sour cream over the top. Sprinkle with grated cheese and drizzle with oil then bake in the oven for 15 minutes.

Garnish with fresh herbs and oil before serving.

(overleaf) Meatballs à la Cossack.



CHEBUREKS
FROM THE CRIMEA TO MOSCOW VIA TASHKENT

Today the words 'fast food' immediately bring to mind chains such as McDonald's. These had no equivalent during the Soviet era, but fast-food restaurants were nevertheless ubiquitous. The USSR's many cafés and public restaurants were no match for today's outlets in terms of recipe standardisation and personnel training, but memories of the fast-food cheburechnayas still generate a warm feeling among many citizens.

The various ethnic cuisines of the nationalities that made up the Soviet Union were consumed across the country, but few people knew of the different dishes' origins. The cheburek is probably one of the more prominent examples of such ignorance and many people still believe that chebureks are part of Asian cuisine, originating in Tashkent or Samarkand. They first appeared in cafés and public canteens in the early 1960s and immediately became extremely popular. The outlets that served them were known as cheburechnayas – typically ordinary-looking public-catering establishments where patrons were offered a few salads and beer alongside the chebureks themselves.

The history of the cheburek is neither pleasant nor straightforward. For centuries chebureks were part of the traditional cuisine of Crimean Tatars. After the Crimean Offensive and the liberation of German-held Crimea by the Soviet Army in 1944, hundreds of thousands of Tatars were deported to Soviet Central Asia. The cheburek recipe travelled with them. In the 1960s the dish spread from Uzbekistan to Moscow and other large cities of Central Russia. At the time the details of the deportation of Crimean Tatars was not public knowledge, and only a few people knew the real origins of the cheburek.

In Soviet cuisine, chebureks were both an everyday dish and something enjoyed on special occasions. People would often pop into *cheburechnayas* after a university lecture or during a lunchbreak for a quick snack and prices were ridiculously low, even for someone on a stipend. I can't recall another treat from my childhood that was more fun, and for Moscow schoolchildren chebureks were an eagerly awaited part a visit to the All-Russia Exhibition Centre or Gorky Park.

You were considered to have mastered the art of consuming chebureks when you could eat one without spilling a single drop of the delicious juice from the meat filling. This was quite a feat, as the juice tended to squirt in all directions as soon as you bit into the casing. The filling was always scalding hot, so you needed to take gulps of cold air or lemonade to stop your tongue from burning.

A 1950s public canteen. At the rear is the serving area where the food was dispensed.

For 14-15 chebureks:

400ml cold water (300ml for the dough and 100ml for the filling)
1 tsp salt
1 egg
1kg plain flour
700g lamb
350g onions
1 beaten egg (for coating the dough)
vegetable oil (for frying)

Pour the cold water into a bowl, add the salt and egg, and stir well.

Make a small mound of flour on a flat surface and form a crater in the centre. Pour in the water, salt and egg mixture and knead by pushing the flour from the sides of the mound into the centre. Keep kneading until about one-third of the flour is incorporated into the liquid, then mix the semi-liquid dough with the rest of the flour, cutting it with a large kitchen knife until all the flour is incorporated.

Separate out a small portion of dough. Hand-knead it on the table until it is uniform in texture then form it into a ball about 4-4½cm in diameter. Work the rest of the dough into balls in this manner. Then roll out the dough balls into flat disks approximately 2-3mm thick and 12-15cm in diameter. Use a plate to cut the dough into a true circle.

For the filling, run the lamb and onions through a food processor, add salt and pepper to taste, then add 100ml cold water to the mixture.

Now spread some egg over the dough circles, add some filling to one half of the disc and fold the dough over the filling to form a semicircle, pinching the edges together to create an envelope.

Fry or deep-fry in plenty of oil or fat. Serve hot.

ROASTED RABBIT WITH GARNISH
'RABBIT IS STALIN'S CALF'

'…And a goat is a worker's cow.' These 1930s slogans featured prominently on the front pages of newspapers and were emblazoned on banners across buildings and streets. They captured the spirit of a time when food shortages were an ever-present problem.

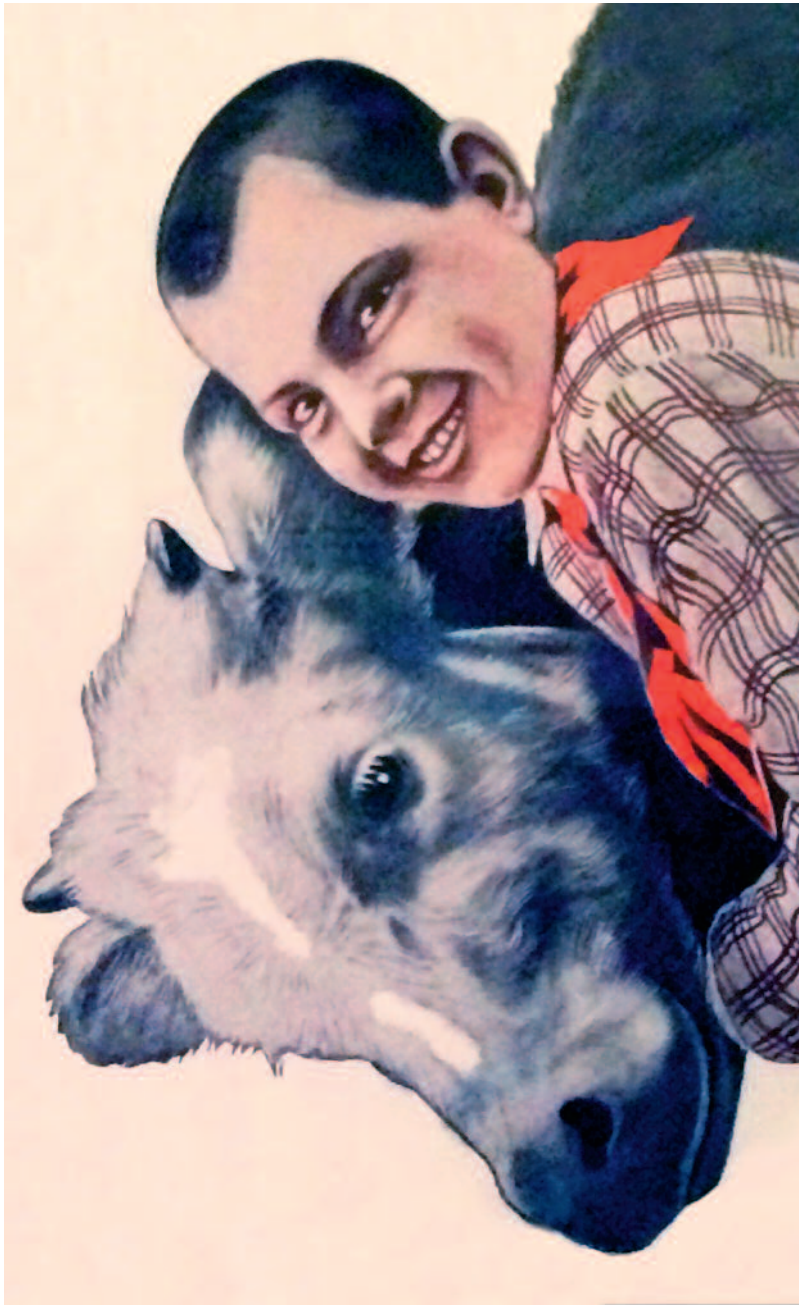
Only the few years following the Russian Civil War (1917-22) could be considered a time of relative abundance. The New Economic Policy of 1921 had stimulated entrepreneurship and encouraged food production, but the country still needed to be industrialised and the authorities had to find the means of financing the changes. The supposed solution was the establishment of kolkhozy or collective farms in line with the drive towards collectivisation that began in 1928. The negative results were almost instantly apparent: the following year rationing of bread, cereals, sugar, butter, eggs, meat and potatoes was introduced in Leningrad.

In 1931 new terms entered the national vocabulary. A closed workers' cooperative, for instance, was a grocery store managed by a factory or other government facility. Employees assigned to such cooperatives could use their ration books to buy certain foodstuffs at fixed government prices.

The authorities attempted to improve the situation by promoting alternative sources of food. One proposal was to mass-breed rabbits and in 1931 there was a plan to increase the population to 220,000 within a year. Party journalists immediately began to praise the benefits of this new and unusual food: 'Rabbit meat is white and delicious and can be salted or smoked for long-term storage. The head, skin and legs make excellent aspic.'

Cows transferred from private to collective farms had either starved or suffered dramatically reduced milk yields. So breeding goats for milk was another innovation. Posters in government buildings used colourful graphs and tables to compare the milk yield of goats with that of cows: 'A peasant's cow yields three times its own weight in milk, but a goat can produce 10 to 15 times its own weight!' The new Five-Year Nutrition Plan aimed to introduce previously unheard-of foods to the menus of public-catering facilities: soy milk, milk sugar, albumin marshmallow sticks and dolphin meat.

Workers' canteens, the only places where citizens could afford to eat properly, bore the brunt of the innovations. In 1931 the monthly quota of meat for workers in Leningrad was 1kg and office workers were entitled to even less. If a person's family had been nobles or merchants before the Revolution, they now belonged to a special 'deprived' social category. Ineligible for government benefits and barred from buying food at government-fixed low prices, their only option was to breed rabbits.



Detail from a Soviet-era propaganda poster depicting a young pioneer and a calf.

1 rabbit (about 2½kg)
200ml sour cream
salt to taste
5-6 black peppercorns
1 bay leaf
4 potatoes
2 carrots
200g green peas

Remove any traces of fur. Wash the rabbit thoroughly, dry with a paper towel and cut into pieces. Place the pieces of meat into a wide, shallow pot, making no more than two layers of meat.

Once you've placed the first layer in, brush each piece with sour cream and use the rest of the cream on top of the second layer. Add 5 or 6 peppercorns and a bay leaf. Close the lid and slowly bring to the boil. There is no need to add any oil or water, as rabbit already contains a lot of liquid and fat.

Reduce the heat, so the rabbit is just simmering. The sour cream will soften the meat fibres, making the pieces tender. After approximately 1½ hours the rabbit will be cooked. About 30 minutes before the rabbit is ready, add salt to taste. To check, try a piece with a fork: if it is soft and flaky, then it's done.

If you want your rabbit pieces floating in the sauce, then turn the heat off. If you want them a little browned, turn the heat up, remove the lid and allow the liquid to boil off, turning the pieces as they cook. The result will be rabbit covered in a golden brown sauce.

Garnish with boiled vegetables: potatoes, carrots, green peas.

SATSIVI
A KNIGHT AT THE CROSSROADS

Viktor Vasnetsov's 1878 painting *A Knight at the Crossroads* depicts a common motif of Russian folktales. The protagonist arrives at a fork in the road and finds a stone engraved with the words: 'Ride to the left and you will lose your horse, ride to the right and you will lose your head, ride straight ahead and you will lose both.'

For Soviet filmmakers, the 'dilemma of the crossroads' was symbolised by the equestrian statue of Yuri Dolgoruky (c.1099-1157), founder of Moscow, on Tverskaya Street (then named Gorky Street after the famous proletariat writer Maxim Gorky). Near the statue stood the headquarters of Goskino, the omnipotent USSR State Committee for Cinematography, which decided whether films were to be released to the public, censored or banned.

After the committee had announced its verdict the director and crew would exit the building, walk down Gorky Street until they came to the statue of the horseman and face their own moment of choice – though the decision, of course, had already been made for them. If Goskino rejected the film, the crew would turn left and go into the Otdykh Café, nicknamed the Vale of Tears and considered the best place in Moscow to drown your sorrows with a glass or two of cognac. Those who had the good fortune to receive approval for their film turned right to the Aragvi restaurant, the temple of Georgian cuisine.

Even atheist Bolsheviks conceded that the food in the Aragvi was divine! So perhaps the folktales were correct – if you turned to the right you would lose your head by eating food that confirmed the existence of Paradise.

Opening in 1938, the Aragvi quickly developed an aura of mystery. Standing immediately in front of it was the meeting place of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and just slightly behind was the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Yet the restaurant's proximity to two such prominent ideological establishments did not prevent the Party elite from devouring its offerings of Georgian gastronomy, which served as a substitute for haute cuisine in the state of workers and peasants. Needless to say, the very workers and peasants the party leaders so tirelessly cared for could not even dream of sitting at a table in the Aragvi at a time when the average monthly salary for engineers, doctors and teachers was a measly 150 rubles.

In the late 1950s the Aragvi's head chef was Nikolay Kiknadze. When he was sent to cook at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958, queues formed at the Soviet pavilion and he was awarded the Grand Prix by the fair's organising committee.

One of Kiknadze's most famous dishes was satsivi, meaning 'cold dish' in Georgian. Originally the name referred to a thick sauce made from walnuts seasoned with hot spices. Only the best walnuts were used: they had to be freshly picked and oily, with no trace of bitterness. The accompaniment to a 2-3kg turkey required almost 1kg of walnut kernels.

Such savory sauces are a key element of Georgian cuisine, used to give almost any meat or vegetable a distinctive flavour. Walnut sauce goes well with any type of game, poultry or fish – and the sauce served with chicken or turkey constitutes a classic Georgian dish that itself bears the name satsivi.

1 small chicken
2 tbsp butter
2 medium-sized onions
1 tsp plain flour
100g walnuts
salt and cayenne pepper to taste
1 tsp khmeli suneli (a traditional mix of herbs and spices, see p.72)
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp saffron
1½ tbsp white wine vinegar
1 bundle fresh coriander
4 cloves garlic

Wash the chicken and remove any excess fat. Place in a pot, pour on a small amount of hot water and boil for 30 minutes. Remove the chicken and reserve the stock to use later.

Butter the chicken with ½tbsp butter, add salt and roast in the oven at 190°C/Gas 5 for approximately 20 minutes, turning and basting at regular intervals.

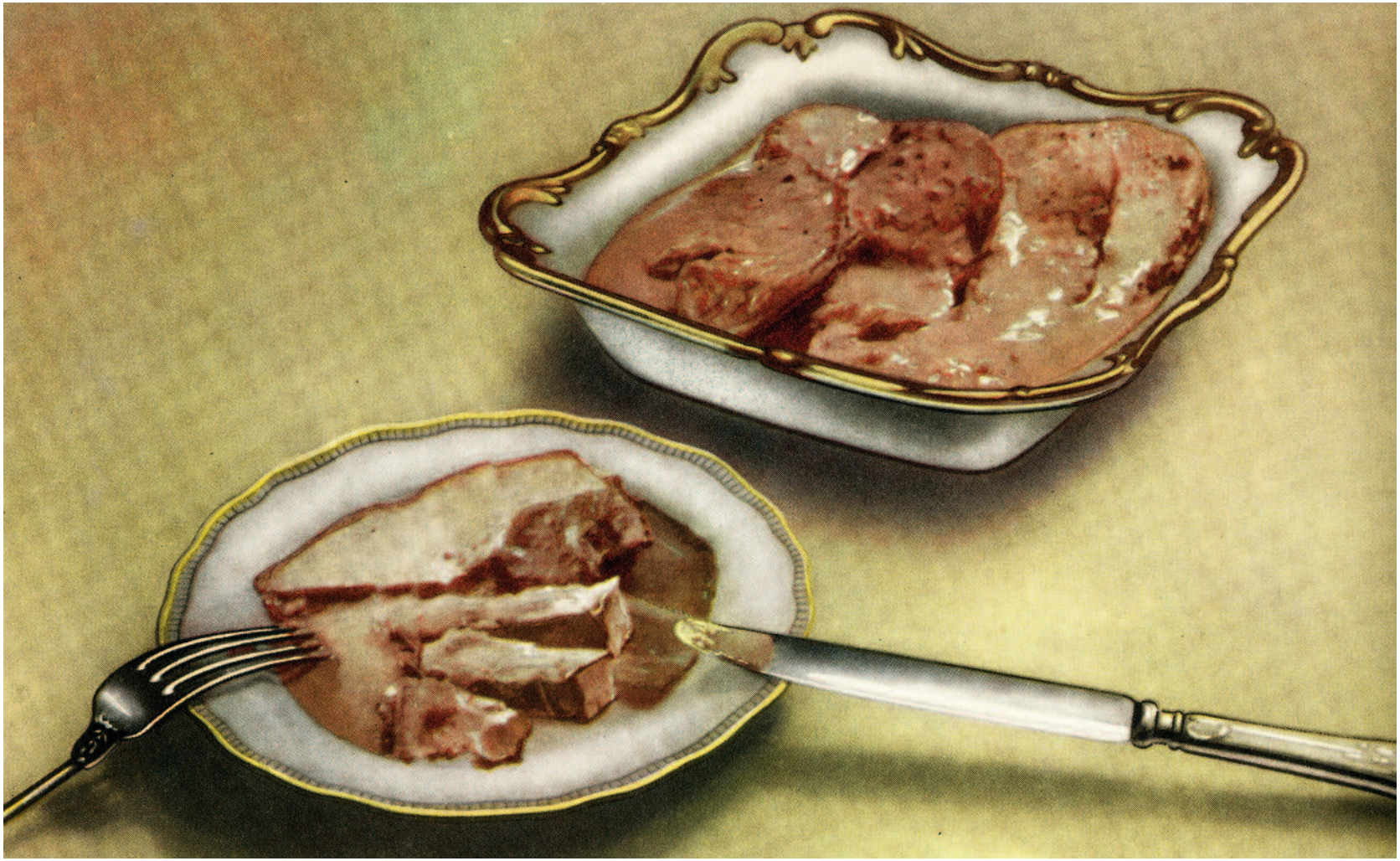
To prepare the sauce, finely slice the onions and brown them in a frying pan in the remaining butter. Add the flour and cook for a further 2 minutes. Then add the chicken stock and stir thoroughly.

Grind the walnuts using a blender, mix together with the dried herbs and seasoning then add them to the pan along with the vinegar. Cook for 7–8 minutes, keeping the heat low and making sure the sauce does not boil.

Skin and debone the chicken and cut into small pieces. Add to the pan and warm up for 5 minutes. Chop the fresh coriander and add to the dish along with the crushed garlic.

Place in the refrigerator and serve cold.

(overleaf) Satsivi with chicken.



POZHARSKY KOTLETY
ACCIDENTAL GLORY

The origins of this dish begin with Yevdokim Pozharsky, a 19th-century innkeeper in the town of Torzhok, on the main route between St Petersburg and Moscow. Pozharsky's homemade diced-veal patties were hugely popular with travellers and after his death his daughter Daria became famous for 'improving' his recipe by replacing the veal with chicken. The dish's reputation was further enhanced when Tsar Nicholas I praised it after staying at the tavern.

During the Soviet era Pozharsky kotlety underwent an ideological transformation. With the silent approval of the authorities, folktales associating the dish with Prince Dmitry Pozharsky, who led Russia against the Polish–Lithuanian invasion of 1612, began to circulate. The prince's role in driving the foreigners out of Moscow earned him the title of 'Saviour of the Motherland', but more significant to communist propagandists was his close associate and second-in-command Kozma Minin, a humble 'working-class' hero. Perhaps this is why Pozharsky kotlety were spared from the oblivion that befell many pre-Revolutionary dishes. Yet despite being well known during the Soviet era, they were not served in workers' cafeterias but were offered only in restaurants. Considered haute cuisine, their preparation requires skill and attention to detail.

There is another reason why these patties did not appear on the cafeteria or street-café menu: because there are so few ingredients, any cheating is immediately obvious. Bread is a crucial ingredient of meat patties, but the chef determines the amount used. While cooks could get away with using more bread than meat for most varieties of meat patty, this trick doesn't work for Pozharsky kotlety.

1 whole chicken
150g frozen butter
150g dry white bread (with crusts removed)
200ml single cream
breadcrumbs to coat the patties before frying
butter for frying
salt and pepper to taste

All the ingredients must be refrigerated, and the butter should be frozen before cooking. Grate the frozen butter and place it in the fridge. Soak the bread in the cream. Skin and bone the chicken and run the meat through a food processor twice – first on its own, then mixed with the bread and cream. Add salt and pepper to taste, then use a fork to combine the minced chicken and bread with the grated butter. Place the mixture back in the fridge for at least 1 hour. The colder the mixture, the juicier the patties will be.

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas 6. Shape the mixture into large oval patties. Coat them in breadcrumbs and fry in butter at a high temperature for 2 minutes on each side. Transfer the fried patties to the oven and cook for a further 10 minutes. Make sure not to overcook, or the butter will melt and the patties will disintegrate.

Serve with fried potatoes, peas, beans or mushroom sauce.

Image from *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* (1952). Text reads: 'Chicken ragù' and 'Chicken fillets'.

TABAKA CHICKEN
THE ARAGVI SPECIAL

In the Soviet era chickens came in two forms: local and imported. Local chickens were bought complete with giblets, heads and feet. Wrapped carelessly in grey paper, they could be seen sticking out of string bags known as *avoska*: a sign that the household would soon be treated to a tasty meal. Imported chickens (from Hungary or France) were usually bought as a back-up and kept in the freezer until a suitable occasion arose.

The bottle method of roasting chicken was considered the most sophisticated. The chicken would be slathered in mayonnaise and then placed cavity down on a half-litre milk or beer bottle filled with water. The chicken would be pushed down until it covered the bottle and the whole thing placed in the oven. The result was a bird with crispy brown skin which remained soft and juicy inside, thanks to the continuous evaporation of the water from the bottle.

But for most Soviet citizens, chicken meant tabaka. Because of its simplicity, this famous dish was always popular in holiday-resort restaurants. In a single shift a chef could make only 60 chicken de volailles but as many as 3,000 tabaka chickens.

At the end of the socialist era there was much debate about whether the dish was called tabaka or tapaka, named from the Georgian 'tapa' frying pan used to prepare it. As the debate rattled on, 'real' chickens disappeared from the shops to be replaced by tasteless broilers.

The basic recipe for tabaka chicken couldn't be simpler – it's the details and seasoning that matter. After some practice your tabaka chicken will be as good as the ones served in the renowned Aragvi Georgian restaurant in Moscow from the 1930s to the 1960s. Add a bottle of red wine, a simple salad or fried vegetables, and you will experience the delight for which Muscovites were prepared to pay a sum equal to an engineer's weekly wage.

1 small chicken
15g butter
2 cloves garlic
100ml of chicken broth (see recipe p.54)
7-10 leaves of basil (or equivalent of thyme)
1 tsp salt and pepper

Spatchcock the chicken – cut the carcass along the backbone, open the chicken, turn it over and press down on the breastbone to flatten it. Tenderise with a chopping knife or kitchen hammer to flatten further.

Fold the wings and legs flat (see picture), sprinkle with salt and pepper and place in a pan with the melted butter. Cover with a lid small enough to press firmly against the carcass, lay a heavy weight on top of the lid and cook on the top of the stove for approximately 20-25 minutes, turning occasionally.

Serve with fried vegetables and a seperate sauce made by combining the chopped garlic, chicken stock and herbs.

CHICKEN KIEV
THE FAMOUS INTOURIST DISH

Opinions about the origins of Chicken Kiev differ. Some claim the dish was invented in the Merchants' Club of St Petersburg in the early 1910s. According to the story, it was originally named Novo-Mikhailovsky Croquettes after the nearby Mikhailovsky Palace. Its form – chicken fillet filled with butter and rolled with a bone sticking out on one side – certainly made it a novelty. Others believe that Chicken Kiev is derived from a much older Russian dish made from fattened fowl or capons fried so the butter inside didn't melt.

The dish was resurrected in 1947 thanks to a cook at the Ministry of International Affairs, who served it to diplomats at a reception in Kiev. It then became popular in the restaurants on Khreshchatyk (the city's main street) and spread to other venues where it was known as Chicken Kiev. Worldwide popularity arrived soon afterwards and eventually the dish was included on the menu of every Intourist restaurant (the Soviet organisation responsible for accommodating international tourists). As a result, hundreds of thousands of visitors to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa were introduced to Chicken Kiev and disseminated its fame throughout the globe.

Garlic is absent from the recipe below – though it is a popular ingredient elsewhere, most Soviet-era recipes for this dish did not include it.

2 tbsp parsley
80g unsalted butter (for the filling)
2 skinless chicken breasts with bone
100ml milk
60g plain flour
2 beaten eggs
50g butter (for frying)
140g breadcrumbs
salt and pepper to taste

Chop the parsley very finely. Place in a bowl, add the butter (at room temperature) and a little salt. Mix thoroughly using two tablespoons. Place in the freezer for 3-5 minutes.

Cut open the chicken breast to form pockets, with two flaps on either side. Tenderise with a meat hammer, flattening the meat to create pieces of uniform thickness.

Place the butter mixture into the centre of each chicken breast and tuck the meat around it with a knife so it is completely sealed. Season, dip in flour, then egg, and coat in breadcrumbs. Then dip in egg and breadcrumbs a second time.

Fry the chicken in butter for 3-4 minutes each side. Remove from the pan and place in the oven for 15 minutes at 160°C/Gas 3. Place paper frills on the bones and serve immediately.

For a richer filling, the butter can be mashed with the crushed yolk of a hard-boiled egg and finely chopped dill. Chicken Kiev goes very well with French fries or green peas tossed in butter.

CHICKEN AND MUSHROOM JULIENNE
WITH A SPOON IN HIS HOLSTER

One of the most popular hors d'oeuvres of the Soviet era was the julienne. Internationally, this term is usually used to describe vegetables cut into long thin slices. In the USSR, however, it referred to a dish of finely diced mushrooms or chicken, either stir fried and dressed with a sour-cream sauce or baked with a crust of cheese on top. The julienne was a favourite dish for banquets, including those of the Communist Party Congress, where every four years some 80 delegates would gather in the Kremlin. Their menu included more than 7,000 hors d'oeuvres: juliennes, aspics, canapés and more.

Alexander Kuprikov, a former chief chef of Moscow, was responsible for the catering for these banquets during the 1970s. One year quantities of silver tableware went missing from the kitchen. His staff were the first to be blamed, though no evidence could be found. There were five separate guarded entrances and exits, so no one could understand how the silver was being smuggled out. Kuprikov held a meeting in the kitchen. 'If anyone gets caught,' he said, 'I'll make sure they go straight to the Lubyanka [an infamous KGB prison]. If you care about your families, think twice before stealing another spoon.'

One day, as a cleaning lady was mopping the kitchen floor, a checkpoint guard slipped and fell. Knives and forks cascaded from his holster all over the wet floor. The culprit was dealt with severely and the chefs, breathing a communal sigh of relief, proceeded to cook the best juliennes ever tasted by the Congress.

The julienne leaves space for the cook's imagination. The basic recipe can easily be enriched by adding boiled chicken, fish, shrimp or crabmeat, in which case you should reduce the amount of mushrooms accordingly. You can also use wild mushrooms to improve the flavour. During the Soviet era, cream with a high fat content was rare, so sour cream was used instead; you may wish to replace this with double cream.

500g mushrooms
2 tbsp butter
1 onion
1 tbsp plain flour
300ml sour cream
250g semi-mature cheese (such as cheddar)
salt and pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 160°C/Gas 3.

Cut the mushrooms into thin slices and fry in the butter until about half their juice has evaporated. Add the finely sliced onion and fry for a further 5-7 minutes. Stir in the flour and cook for another minute. Pour in the cream, add salt and pepper, and cook until the mixture thickens.

Pour the mixture into cocottes, sprinkle with the cheese and bake in the oven until the top turns golden brown.

FRIED EGGS WITH JAM
AN EXONERATION OF EGGS

'Do you know what shit is? Well, compared to my life, shit is jam.'

So said the great Soviet actress Faina Ranevskaya (1896-1984), famous for witty remarks and aphorisms that spread throughout Moscow. Despite being known for sayings such as 'optimism is simply lack of information', she managed to survive many Soviet regimes, dying at the age of 88 at the end of the Soviet era. Her longevity may have had something to do with the fact that she loved every aspect of life and did not deny herself any of its many pleasures – including gastronomic ones, which were few and far between during the socialist era.

Eggs were one of the first foodstuffs to disappear at the beginning of World War II. The Soviet authorities found a solution in the powdered eggs provided by the US under the 1942 Lend-Lease policy, through which America furnished the Allies with supplies in return for the use of their military bases.

Initially people reacted to powdered eggs with caution, and the government responded by taking coordinated action. One after another, Soviet newspapers featured articles claiming that while powdered eggs contained almost every nutritional benefit known to mankind, regular eggs were filled with pathogens and fats that weakened the body.

In the mid-1950s fresh eggs began to re-emerge on grocery shelves and powdered eggs ceased to be available. At first people were understandably doubtful, so the authorities immediately commanded the press to reverse their previous statements and a 'new' idea came into journalists' heads: fresh eggs are enormously healthy and nutritious.

Following the end of the war in 1945 and the death of Stalin in 1953, hundreds of thousands of political prisoners returned to their homes, officially 'exonerated'. And rumour has it that Ranevskaya, after reading about the rehabilitation of the humble egg, telephoned her friends to exclaim with delight, 'What joy! Eggs have just been exonerated!'

In Ranevskaya's time eggs were fried not only with ham and tomatoes (which were not always easy to come by) but also with jam. This was usually homemade in the autumn after the ripe berries and fruit had been picked at family dachas.

eggs (two per person)
jam (homemade if possible)
fresh fruit to garnish

Break the eggs into a pan and fry for 1-2 minutes. Put on a lid and continue to fry or place in the oven. Remove from the heat as soon as the whites are solid (the yolks should remain soft). Serve with strawberry or apricot jam, dressed with a few berries.

PELMENI
THE HEART OF A WAITRESS

In addition to his obvious literary talents, the writer Yuri Olesha was famous for his observation that sausage is a symbol of Soviet wellbeing. His novel *Envy*, published in 1927, was constructed around the conflict between Kavalerov, a daydreaming intellectual, and his more successful and well-to-do contemporary, the sausage-maker Babichev.

Many of Olesha's works are saturated with references to food. His fairytale *Three Fat Men*, written in 1924 but not published until 1928, describes the cornucopia of food the three fat rulers stow away in their palace. A poignant post-Revolutionary tale, it was rejected by most Soviet critics, one of whom complained that 'the children of the Country of Soviets will find neither a call for struggle, nor labour, nor an example of heroism here'. Critics had obviously noticed Olesha's subtle undermining of the socialist system, something that became more apparent as the regime gained momentum.

Perhaps it was thanks to *Three Fat Men* that Olesha's career went into decline. Many of his friends were murdered during Stalin's purges of the late 1930s including theatre director and producer Vsevolod Meyerhold, playwright and short-story writer Isaac Babel and politician and literary historian D. S. Mirsky. Despite his own freedom, Olesha felt no love for the realities of Soviet life. From 1936 to 1956 he was unofficially banned from publishing his work.

Olesha turned to drink. Yet many memoirs describe an episode that illustrates the quick wit for which he was renowned. When leaving the restaurant of the Hotel National in Moscow, he saw a man in a suit with epaulettes. 'Call me a cab, please,' he said. 'I'm not a porter,' answered the man, 'I'm an admiral.' 'Fine, then call me a motorboat.'

Struggling financially, Olesha was often taken out to dinner by other Soviet authors who considered it an honour to help a writer whose enormous talent had gone unrealised under the strictures of the regime.

Advertisement for Siberian pelmeni from the Order of Lenin Moscow Meat Processing Plant (Minister: A. I. Mikoyan).

His story had an unusual ending, described here by St Petersburg artist Anatoly Belkin:

> One of the greatest Russian writers of all time, Yuri Olesha was deeply troubled by what was happening in our country. He almost stopped writing. A very intelligent but bitter old man, he considered that he had been undeservedly forgotten.
>
> Despite the fact that he had no money, he dined at his favourite restaurant, the Hotel National, every day. After he died it turned out he owed them a considerable amount of money. Then something unbelievable happened – all the waitresses who worked there chipped in and covered his debt. Can you believe it? *All* of them. They used the money from their tips to pay the old man's outstanding bill.

One of Olesha's favourite dishes was pelmeni. His appetite for these dumplings – especially when homemade – was hard to satisfy. The author Mikhail Bulgakov described a visit from Olesha where he 'gobbled down two days' worth of dumplings that Tanya [Bulgakov's wife] had made.'

400g minced beef and pork
1 onion
1 egg
60g plain flour
salt and pepper to taste
2 tbsp butter or 115ml sour cream (smetana)

Run the meat (preferably beef and pork in equal proportions) and onion twice through a food processor. Add a little bit of water and salt and pepper to taste and mix well.

For the dough: beat an egg with a little water and a pinch of salt and mix thoroughly with the flour to make fairly stiff dough. Roll into a ball, wrap in clingfilm and place in the refrigerator for 40 minutes.

Then roll the dough into a 2mm thick layer and cut out circles with a round form 6-7cm diametre or the rim of a wine glass. Place 1 tsp of meat in the middle of each circle of dough, then fold the dough over and crimp the edges with your fingers.

Place the dumplings into salted boiling water and cook for 10 minutes. They should float to the top when ready. Remove with a slotted spoon and serve with melted butter, sour cream or smetana poured over them.

Advertisement for pelmeni from the National Commission for Internal Trade, 1936.

PASTA À LA NAVY
FIRE AT WILL

Soviet citizens didn't just daydream about food, they also invented myths about it. One of the most popular held that the same production lines that had manufactured gun cartridges were used for pasta during peacetime. The appearance of Soviet pasta – thick and rough – lent credence to the idea. In addition, the diameter of pasta as stipulated by the national food standards was 7.62mm – matching exactly the calibre of a Kalashnikov rifle. Even today new theories are continually developed in an attempt to explain this 'coincidence'.

What is certainly true, is that the hugely popular Soviet dish of pasta à la navy appeared in the USSR after World War II, with its first mention in print dating back to the book *Kulinariya* (*Gastronomy*) in 1955. But pasta within Russian cuisine has a much longer history.

Pasta was first manufactured in Russia by Italians 200 years ago, though it was not until 1883 that a factory with industrial drying facilities opened in Moscow. It seemed an enticing prospect: a quick and easy mass-market food with a long storage life. But pasta was expensive – a pound of pasta sold for the same price as a pound of meat, making it a luxury few could afford.

During the upheavals and food shortages from 1917 to the mid-1920s pasta disappeared completely. But as the food industry gradually recovered following a period of near-famine, the pasta factories reopened. Available only in Moscow, pasta came to symbolise the new-era Soviet life.

World War II changed thinking about food and convenience foods such as pasta became part of the staple diet. There were many ways to make pasta on the front line by adding tinned beef, tinned fish, tinned peas… It's quite possible that pasta à la navy was invented in a battlefront canteen, or even at the naval base in Murmansk, the headquarters of the Northern Fleet.

After the war this quick and easy meal became a staple in Soviet homes across the country. Not considered restaurant fare, it was neverthless popular in public-catering facilities. It was perfectly suited to postwar life for a population that had been deprived of luxury foods for so long. By the 1960s and 1970s pasta à la navy had come to exemplify everyday Soviet cuisine.

300g minced beef / pork / lamb (for 6 servings)
90g butter or lard
100g onions
100ml stock
360g bucatini pasta
2 litres water
40g salt

Fry the mince lightly in butter or lard. Remove the meat and lightly brown the chopped onions in the same pan. Put both ingredients into a deeper pan, add the stock and simmer for 45 minutes until cooked. Cook the pasta in salted water for about 9 minutes. Drain, and mix with the meat and onions.

Advertisement for pasta c.1930s. Text reads (top to bottom): 'Pasta Factories. Leningrad State Trust Food Processing Industry. Factory No.1 named after T. Vorovsky. Factory No. 2: Freedom. Macaroni. Vermicelli. Noodles. Pasta Trust Produce is made using the finest wheat flour'.

GOLUBTSY
THE KREMLIN DIET

In the early 1990s Russia was rife with rumours about the mysterious Kremlin diet, which supposedly helped with weight loss and longevity. Charlatans sold 'magic Kremlin pills', while newspapers examined the regimen of the Soviet elite. The menu at the Kremlin was actually a high-fat, restricted-carbohydrate diet (contrary to today's thinking). But not every member of the Party elite followed it.

Nina Khrushchev, wife of Nikita, lived to the advanced age of 84 – a decent stint considering her turbulent life. Perhaps the secret lay in stuffed cabbage rolls… The Khrushchevs' personal chef was Anna Dyshkant, who often prepared vegetable dishes for Nina (such as carrot rolls or aubergine and courgette pastes) but her favourite was golubtsy. Nina Khrushchev was overweight, but according to Dyshkant, she made no attempt to remedy this. She didn't follow any specific diet and, for the most part, Dyshkant's cooking conformed to traditional Ukrainian cuisine. It was her belief that a healthy appetite was equivalent to healthy eating.

For 10-12 stuffed rolls:

1 white cabbage head
300g beef or veal
300g pork (not too lean)
1 medium-sized onion
100g rice
230ml vegetable oil
1 tsp sugar
salt and pepper to taste
sour cream or tomato sauce to serve

Cabbage heads should be large and white with thin, sweet leaves without thick veins.

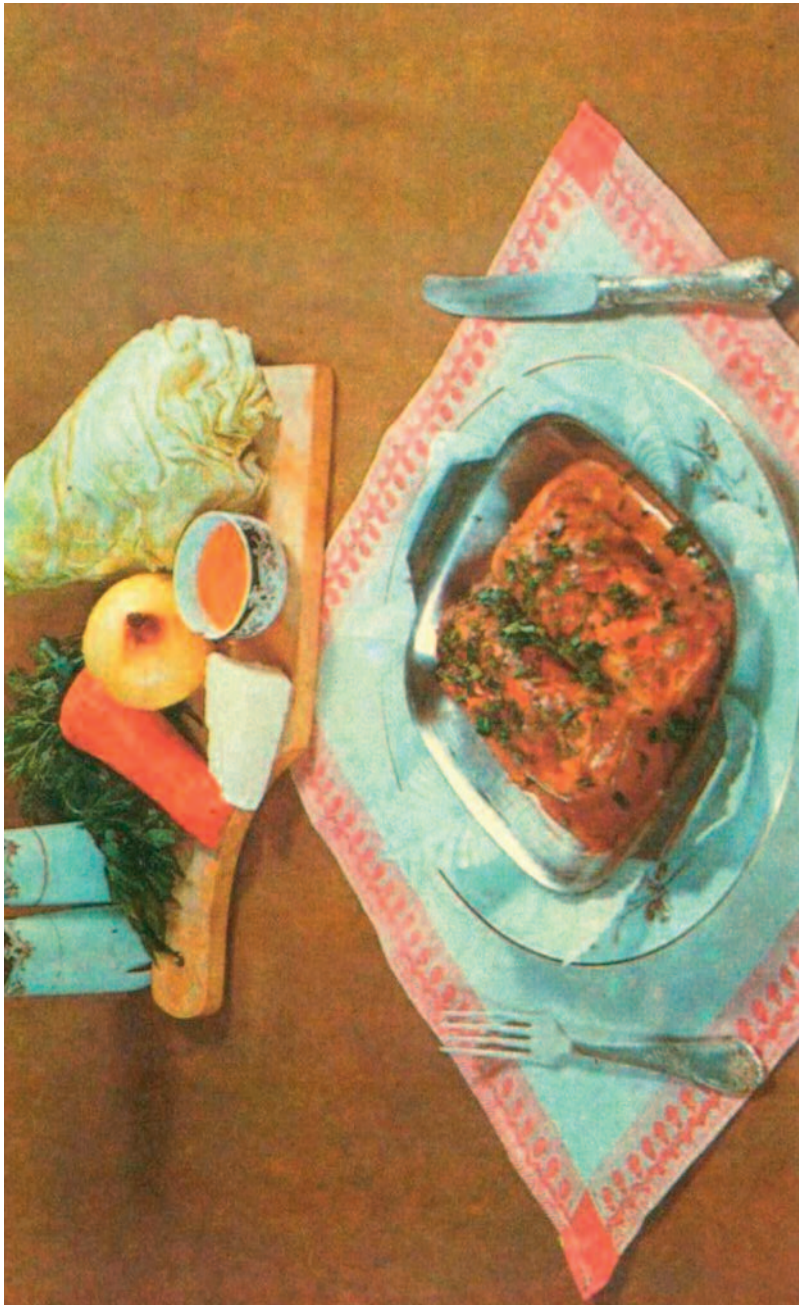
Run the meat and onion through a food processor. Aerate in a bowl by mixing with a fork. Add salt and pepper to taste, then refrigerate. Using a rice-to-water ratio of 1:4 put the rice into boiling water, add salt and cook for 7-10 minutes, until semi-ready. Drain in a colander and allow to cool.

'Undress' the cabbage, leaf by leaf making a small incision with a knife at the base of each leaf and slowly separating it from the head. If the stems are too hard, tenderise using a knife or cut out the hard parts. Place the leaves in a large pot and cover in hot water. Add a pinch of salt and 1 tsp sugar. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 10-12 minutes. Pour out the water, setting aside half a cup. Let the cooked cabbage leaves cool.

Take the meat filling and mix it with the rice. Heat a little oil in a pan and start stuffing the leaves by placing the filling on the thicker part of the leaf and then rolling it tight. Put the first row of rolls on the bottom of the pan and sprinkle them with oil. Repeat with a second row.

Pour in the cabbage stock until it reaches half the height of the bottom row. Cover with a lid and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to medium and let the rolls cook for about 2 hours, adding a little salt. The cabbage will produce quite a bit of juice and as the water evaporates, the leaves will thin and change in colour from white to light brown.

Once cooked, turn off the heat and let the golubtsy sit in the pan with the lid on for a while to absorb the flavours of the cabbage leaves. Serve with sour cream or tomato sauce.



NAPOLEON CAKE
THE HAT OF A DEFEATED EMPEROR

Despite its French name, the Napoleon was very much a Soviet pastry. For most citizens, it was associated with New Year's celebrations. During the New Year holiday (1-10 January) children would attend shows in clubs, theatres and sports complexes, after which they'd be given a plastic container in the shape of the Kremlin or a snowflake with chocolate, tangerines, marshmallows and walnuts inside. The combined aromas of these treats is a powerful memento of childhood festivities and the Napoleon is an inseparable part of the memory.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise origins of the Napoleon, though variations existed in many European countries in the early 19th century. The cake belongs to the mille-feuille (French for 'a thousand leaves') family, and similar items can be found in other Western cuisines. In Russia the pastry became widely popular in 1912, during the centenary of the Russian victory over the French in the Patriotic War of 1812, when Moscow confectioners created triangular-shaped cakes in an approximation of Napoleon's characteristic tricorne hat. Topped with a scattering of crumbs (in tribute to the snow of the harsh Russian winter that devastated his retreating army), the Napoleon has been a firm favourite ever since.

In the 1920s, when bakeries were forced to economise on ingredients, the recipe was simplified and the butter replaced with margarine. The layers became hard and brittle, making the cake difficult to slice, and the custard filling, originally made with plenty of eggs, was replaced with a cheaper version that used flour as a thickener. The cake was sold in slices pre-cut in the factory or canteen kitchen using a heated blade.

Perhaps it was these shortcomings that caused the Napoleon gradually to become a home baked item. No classic or regulated recipe existed, so Soviet families were free to experiment, creating different types of custard and laminated dough to match their personal preferences. As a result the Napoleon became a true people's pastry.

Dairy products, coffee and cocoa. Shortages of eggs and butter in the 1920s negatively affected the quality of Napoleon cake.

375g plain flour
250g cold butter
1 egg
180ml ice-cold water
1 tbsp lemon juice
½ tsp salt

For the custard (the ingredients will make a 'budget' custard similar to that used during the Soviet era):

100g caster sugar
600ml whole milk
60g plain flour
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla extract

Chop the butter and flour on a cutting board until the butter is in 5-8mm crumbs. Make a mound with a crater in the centre and pour in the egg mixed with the water, lemon juice and salt.

Knead into a dough then divide into 8 equal portions. Wrap each portion in clingfilm and place in the fridge. Leave for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas 7. On a lightly floured surface, roll out each portion of dough 2-3mm thick and use a plate to cut into a circle approximately 25cm diameter. Prick with a fork to prevent bubbles from forming, then bake in the oven for 10-15 minutes until light brown in colour. Allow to cool.

To make the custard, add the sugar to 350ml milk and bring to the boil. Mix the rest of the milk with the flour and egg and add this to the boiling milk, stirring continuously. Turn down the heat and simmer for about 8 minutes, continuing to stir, until the custard thickens. Add the vanilla and stir thoroughly.

To assemble, place a layer of the baked sheet on a plate and cover liberally with custard. Then repeat pressing the layers lightly into each other as you build the cake. Break one of the baked sheets into small crumbs for the 'snow' topping.

Sprinkle the entire cake with the crumbs (including the sides) and leave to stand for 2 hours before refrigerating for at least 12 hours. If you can resist eating it for two or even three days it will be at its best, as by then the custard will have soaked into the pastry layers.

Coffee and cakes. A slice of Napoleon cake sits on the small plate above the spoon.

MAY QUICK BREAD
PASTRY VS. RELIGION

Soviet-era cuisine included a vast array of cakes, breads and pastries. But if we were to pick out the most memorable single category of baked goods, it would almost certainly be quick bread.

Quick breads came in a wide variety of shapes using many different ingredients (raisins, nuts, candied fruit, and so on). Well known varieties included Stolichny, Moskovsky, saffron, Kurortny, twin-coloured, lemon and 'stuffed hair' quick breads – as well as classic homemade recipes. In its most basic form, a Soviet quick bread was a batter leavened with baking powder. The addition of creamed butter also helped it to rise and maintain its shape. The best results were obtained by baking in a cake ring (a round tin with a hole in the middle) or rectangular loaf tin.

Those who remember the USSR well may recall May quick bread. Baked only in spring, it resembled traditional Easter quick bread in shape but was an entirely Soviet invention, imbued with political ideology. The authorities constantly struggled to suppress all attempts at celebrating Easter. On the night of the Easter Procession, every television channel would broadcast popular films and programmes in an attempt to keep unenlightened citizens indoors. Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) patrols would stand by the church gates to shame any young people heading inside.

May quick bread – the authorities' version of an Easter tradition – was an integral part of this ongoing battle. Just before Easter it would miraculously appear in every bakery and delicatessen. The recipe was adapted from traditional Russian cookery books to a regulated state specification [GOST standard] that used water, margarine and freeze-dried eggs. Raisins were added – though these were only visible when the bread was sliced – and the end result was sprinkled with icing sugar. Many considered it bland, but much depended on the integrity of the individual baker: good pastry requires high-quality butter, eggs, sugar and milk. May quick breads came in different sizes from 100g to 1kg.

Replicating this Soviet-era quick bread recipe is simple – but why resort to outmoded government-approved recipes when every family had its own unique way of making quick bread? It was commonly accepted that the best pastries were the ones your granny baked! The version here is probably closest to the Stolichny variety, though not an exact match.

Text on the box reads: 'Moscow quick bread. Food Industry Ministry of the USSR. "Bolshevik" Confectionery Factory, Moscow.'

For the quick bread:

100g butter, at room temperature
300g sugar
3 eggs
200ml sour cream (smetana)
150g raisins
seeds of 1 vanilla pod or 1 tbsp lemon zest
315-375g plain flour
2 tsp baking powder

For the icing:

100g icing sugar
1 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp hot water

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4.

Cream the butter and sugar until white and fluffy. Add the eggs one by one, incorporating each one thoroughly before adding the next. Finally add the sour cream, raisins, vanilla seeds or lemon zest.

How much flour you will need depends on the consistency of the sour cream. If it is runny (which is better), you will need almost 375g. Sieve the flour and baking powder and add it to the mixture, beating thoroughly until it forms a thick, smooth batter.

Take a close look at your batter. You will see that already the carbon dioxide in the baking powder is working so that it rises and breathes.

Butter the inside of a baking tin, sprinkle liberally with flour and pour in the batter. Even out the top and place it in the oven. The total baking time is 60 minutes, but after about 40 minutes you will need to cover the loaf with baking paper to prevent the top from burning. When the crust develops a crack, the quick bread is ready. To be completely sure, you can test it by inserting a wooden skewer, which should come out dry and clean.

While the bread is in the oven, make your icing. Pour the icing sugar into a small bowl and add the lemon juice and hot water. Stir quickly with a teaspoon until the mixture is smooth (this usually takes a couple of minutes).

When the bread is ready, turn the tin over, take the loaf out and put it on a plate. Top it with the icing and leave it to cool. Slice it up and serve with tea.

SWEET SYRNIKS
LOCKED UP FOR TWO DECADES

Although 20 years in a maximum-security prison was a common punishment during Soviet times, it was rare for a restaurant to serve such a sentence. Before the 1917 Revolution the Praga restaurant in Arbat Street was frequented by Moscow bohemians including writers Ivan Bunin and Maxim Gorky and poets Alexander Blok and Sergey Yesenin. But the beginning of the Soviet era marked a darker period. While the restaurant's old-world menu irritated the new authorities, they took a liking to the building and commandeered its lower floors for various government institutions.

In 1929 a number of restaurants including the Praga were earmarked to cater exclusively for international visitors. Prices were fixed in foreign currencies and the premises were closely monitored by the secret police. Their rationale followed a predictable pattern: foreigners meant foreign currency which meant spies which meant saboteurs. Even when Soviet citizens were allowed to visit these establishments again, the high exchange rates made the food totally unaffordable.

In 1933 Stalin built a new country residence. The official route to it ran directly through Arbat Street and the area was transformed into a special surveillance zone. Secret police swarmed through every building and examined every resident. To look out of a window as Stalin's motorcade passed was tantamount to suicide.

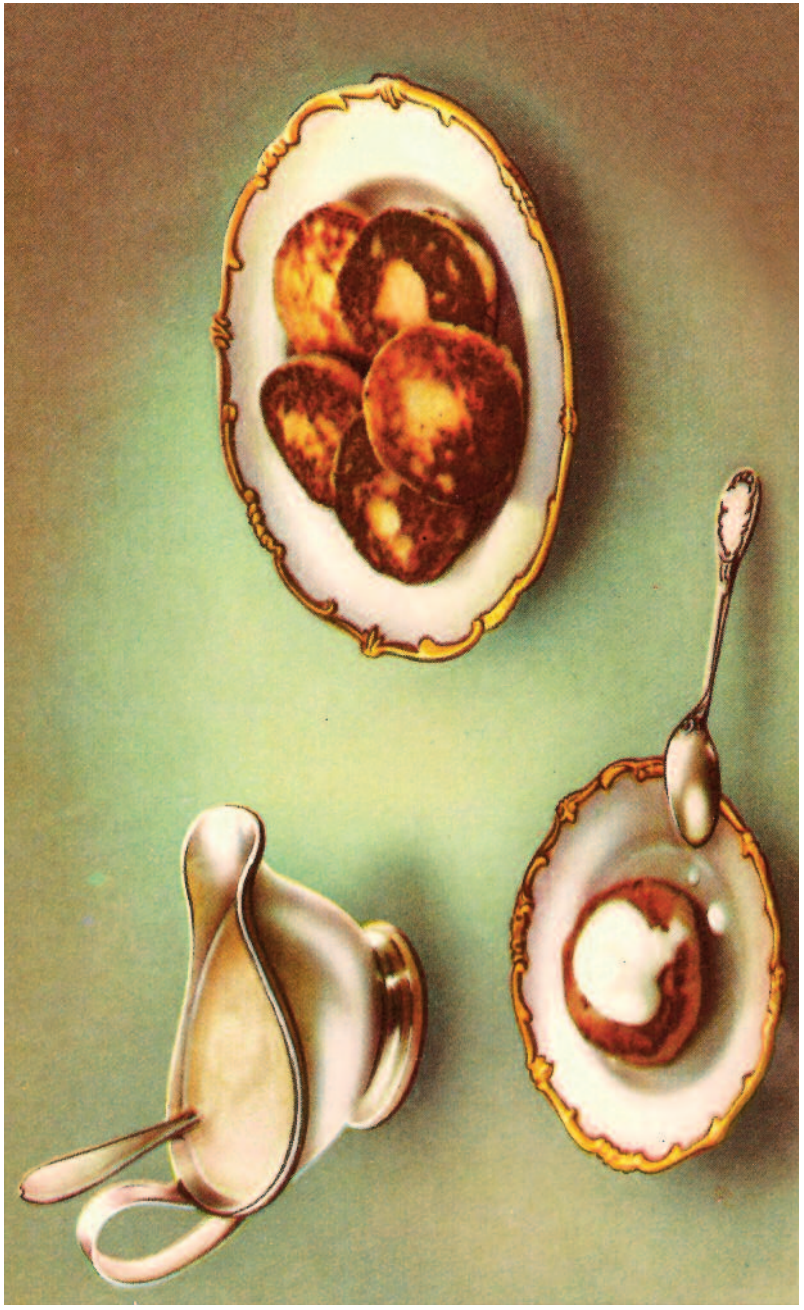
Finally, the strategic headquarters of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was installed on the restaurant's premises, remaining in the building for 20 long years. Only after Stalin's death in 1953 were the secret services completely evicted and in 1955 the restaurant opened once more to the public.

During the 1960s and 1970s the Praga blossomed, becoming famous for its Bird's Milk cake (see p.168). New rooms were opened and banquets and diplomatic receptions breathed new life into the old walls. But the Praga still offered plenty of simple Russian dishes. For instance for breakfast you might sink your teeth into some syrniks: fried quark-cheese pancakes garnished with sour cream.

For 12-14 syrniks:

500g quark cheese (tvorog)
1 egg
2 tbsp sugar
a pinch of salt
a drop of vanilla extract
2 tbsp butter
75g plain flour

Combine the finely crumbled cheese with the egg, sugar, salt, vanilla extract and half the flour until you have a uniform mixture. Shape into a roll 5-6cm in diameter, then cut the roll into slices approximately 1½cm thick and use the rest of the flour to coat each slice. Fry in butter until crisp on both sides. Serve with sour cream or fruit compote poured over them.



BIRD'S MILK CAKE
THE EVOLUTION OF A RECIPE

In the 1950s, following the abolition of food rationing, signs of prosperity began to emerge and new cakes such as the Fairy Tale and Cornucopia appeared on the shelves. The pretentiousness of these cakes corresponded perfectly with the approved style of architecture and art of the Stalin era. At that time, a cake was more than just a dessert: it was a symbol of wellbeing.

By the mid-1960s public taste had changed. Overly decorative confections had fallen out of favour, to be replaced with cakes intended to match the new socialist reality. Most of these political pastries have disappeared into oblivion, but one recipe has survived and become a classic.

In 1978 Vladimir Guralnik, head pastry chef at the famous Moscow restaurant Praga, led a group of confectioners to develop a recipe for a cake called Bird's Milk. A sweet of the same name, made from condensed milk, was already being produced by the Red October factory but all attempts to adapt the recipe into a cake had failed: the texture resembled marshmallow and stuck between the teeth. After six months of experiments Guralnik replaced the gelatin with agar (a rare and expensive jelly-like substance made from seaweed) to produce a soft mousse and the result became a standardised recipe. Guralnik found that for the recipe to work, the filling had to be boiled at exactly 117°C for an extended period of time, which is why it was necessary to replace gelatin (which coagulates at 100°C) with agar (which melts at around 120°C).

Strict adherence to fixed ingredients (egg white, condensed milk and agar) and construction (a spongy biscuit topped by the mousse, more biscuit and a very thin layer of chocolate glaze) helped to cement the cake's popularity. The recipe was distributed across the USSR, but Praga still produced the best version. Throughout the 1980s long queues formed down Arbat Street to buy it and the restaurant's initial output of 60 cakes a day soon increased to 500 to meet demand.

Mass-produced Soviet-era cakes were rarely made within the home for two reasons. First, recipes were only published using quantities suitable for industrial-scale production. For instance, the state standards (GOST) recipe book stated that '200g white flour, 250g white sugar, 393g butter, 430g eggs, 16g molasses' were needed to produce '28 slices of cake weighing 61g each'. Second, many essential ingredients were hard or impossible to find: nuts, poppy seeds, vanilla, and so on. In the late 1970s the Soviet-era cookery writer Robert Kengis reinterpreted industrial-scale recipes using readily available ingredients. The popularity of his books demonstrated the public interest in home cooking.

Today baked goods made following national standards have all but disappeared. The few that survive contain preservatives, stabilisers and artificial flavourings that render them quite different from their Soviet counterparts. As the biscuit cakes, layered sponge cakes, buttercream cupcakes, shortcakes, cottage-cheese patties, caramel-filled cookies and many more sweet delights become more difficult to find, so interest in the baking legacy of the past increases.

The queue for Bird's Milk cake outside the Praga restaurant shop, Moscow, c.1980.

For the sponge:

4 eggs
200g caster sugar
1 tbsp vanilla sugar
125g plain flour
butter to grease the baking tray

For the mousse:

10 eggs
1 tbsp potato starch, corn starch or arrowroot
400g caster sugar
3 tsp vanilla sugar
230ml whole milk
300g butter
40g granulated gelatin (in place of agar)
150ml water

For the icing:

50g butter
150-200g dark chocolate (60% cocoa)

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4.

To make the batter for the sponge, beat the eggs with the sugar and vanilla sugar until white and fluffy, add the sifted flour and mix until it is all incorporated. Grease a deep round baking tray (25cm in diameter) with butter, sprinkle with flour and pour in the batter so it forms a layer about 1cm thick. Smooth the top with a knife and bake for 7-10 minutes until golden brown. The sponge is ready when a wooden skewer inserted into the middle comes out dry. Slice the sponge in half horizontally.

To make the mousse, first separate the eggs. Mix the potato starch, corn starch or arrowroot with 230ml water. In a deep heat-resistant bowl mix the egg yolks with half the sugar and all the vanilla sugar until the mixture is a uniform consistency. Add the milk, stirring as you pour. Add the starch and whisk until it is all amalgamated. Set the bowl over a saucepan of boiling water and simmer until the mixture thickens. Let it cool, add the softened butter and then mix with a blender until it is smooth and fluffy.

Mix the gelatin with 150ml water and leave for 20 minutes. Then heat it up over a pan of boiling water or on a very low heat. Keep mixing until all the granules dissolve then run through a sieve. Beat the egg whites with the remaining 200g sugar. Slowly pour in the gelatin, stirring continuously. Now add the mousse and mix thoroughly.

Lay one half of the sponge into a deep tray (25cm in diameter), pour in the filling, cover with the second half of the cake. Place in the refrigerator for 4-5 hours.

To make the icing, melt the chocolate and butter over a pan of boiling water. Allow to cool slightly. Take the cake out of the fridge and cover the top and sides with icing. Return to the fridge for another hour before serving.

Bird's Milk cake and box. Text on the box reads: 'Cake. Bird's Milk with chocolate'.

DRIED FRUIT PUNCH
A PIONEER'S HARD CURRENCY

'Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood' was a headline that appeared regularly within virtually every newspaper in the Soviet Union. The happy members of the pioneer movement (based largely on the Scouts) carried placards emblazoned with this slogan, while Soviet radio continually informed its citizens that the children of the USSR were without exception proud and happy, day in, day out.

Virtually every schoolchild between the ages of 10 and 15 became a pioneer. The best students were the first to take the solemn promise and be accepted into the organisation, followed by the rest a few weeks later. Underachieving or troublesome pupils might have to wait a further year. While everyone was accepted eventually, each child secretly worried that they were not worthy to wear the coveted red scarf and badge that indicated membership.

Only a few years later, the same schoolchildren would laugh (in secret) at the worries of their 10-year-old selves. In that short time they had developed a sense of perspective that allowed them to mock the entire façade of Soviet life with its socialist parades and competitions such as collecting paper and scrap metal for recycling. This change in perception of the Communist Party was swiftly followed by jokes at its expense. Here is one:

During a May Day parade, a column of elderly people carry a placard that reads, 'Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood!'

'Is this some kind of mockery?' asks an official. 'Comrade Stalin wasn't even born when you were children.'

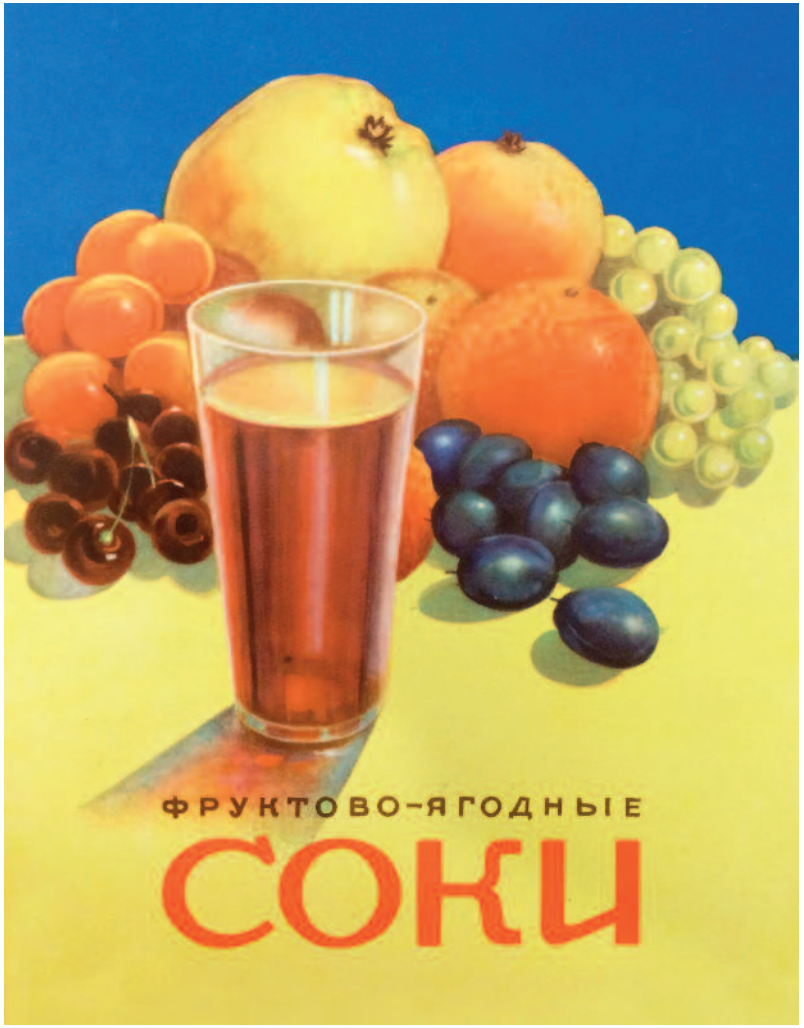
'That's exactly what we're thanking him for.'

The biggest event for any pioneer was a trip to a Young Pioneer camp. Every summer millions of Soviet children would travel to camps across the USSR, from the Caucasus to the Crimea. Falling under the jurisdiction of different local-government organisations, they varied greatly in size and importance, ranging from humble prefabricated wooden huts to multistorey buildings with cinemas and canteens.

As a child I spent a summer or two in one such 'palace' in the Crimea. I confess, however, that the architectural pomp of the setting passed me by. Of far more interest was the prospect of catching a crab in the sea and drying out its shell: the claws made excellent tiepins for your red pioneer scarf and the shells, after being scraped clean by ants (we left them on top of anthills for a few days), made great souvenirs.

Catching crabs was not a simple undertaking. Entering the sea on your own was strictly forbidden, and you stood no chance of catching anything during the designated 10-minute swimming time, when the entire troop made so much noise that it scared away all the sea creatures within a two-kilometre radius.

The older children somehow managed to circumnavigate these problems and we gazed on their crab claws with admiration and envy. As the time at camp (about a month) drew to a close, we felt the need to take action. If you hadn't



Text reads: 'Fruit and berry juice'.

managed to catch a crab on your own, your only option was to trade. And there was only one hard currency in camp – fruit punch.

This thick, sweet drink, made from dried fruit, had a slight aroma of smoked pears. But our scout lives were so simple and austere that it was hard to find anything else worth trading. As well as being universally accepted as the preferred method of payment, fruit punch could also be used to make bets: would they show a new movie tonight or an old war film? This free-trade commodity was the only unregulated element that our scout leaders turned a blind eye to. At the end of the day, everybody benefited: we could decorate our scarves with our very own crab claws and the older children ended up with extra portions of great-tasting sweet fruit punch.

3 litres water
100g dried smoked pears (use 100g more prunes if unavailable)
200g dried apricots
200g dried apples
100g prunes
juice of 1 lemon
sugar to taste

Bring the water to the boil and add the pears.

After 20 minutes add the apricots and after a further 15 minutes add the apples and prunes. Allow to simmer for 5 minutes then remove the fruit with a slotted spoon.

Add lemon juice and sugar (to taste) to the liquid and leave to cool.

Portion out the mixed fruit into serving cups or glasses and add the syrup.

Text on the labels reads (top to bottom): 'Ministry of Food Industry, USSR'; 'cherry compote'; 'plum compote'; 'apricot compote'.

ICE-CREAM
IT'S BETTER THAN COMMUNISM

On a particularly chilly October day in 1944 Winston Churchill's motorcade drove through the streets of Moscow. After crossing Kuznetsky Bridge it stopped at a traffic light and Churchill noticed a man eating an ice-cream. Shivering, he turned to the Soviet diplomat beside him.

'Is that man eating an ice-cream? It must be at least 25 degrees below freezing outside!'

'Indeed, he is,' replied the diplomat.

'A nation that can eat ice-cream in such cold weather will never be conquered,' Churchill stated prophetically.

The love of ice-cream was universal in the Soviet Union. But during the 1920s production methods were still those of a cottage industry and even in 1932 only some 20 tons of ice-cream was factory produced. In January 1936 a significant conversation took place between Anastas Mikoyan, the People's Commissar for External and Internal Trade, and Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the Central Executive Committee.

'I'm a big supporter of the development of ice-cream manufacture, even if some of our comrades seem to believe it's just a treat for children,' said Mikoyan.

'But everyone loves ice-cream,' declared Kalinin.

'Yes, but hypocritically they conceal it,' replied Mikoyan.

It was clear at once that ice-cream manufacture in the USSR had a bright future. In 1936 alone four dedicated ice-cream factories were set up and numerous ice-cream shops opened at dairy plants. The first ice-cream factory equipped with machinery imported from the US was able to manufacture 25 tons of ice-cream daily by 1938 and the total volume of ice-cream produced in the Soviet Union soon reached 46,000 tons a year.

Initially ice-cream manufacture was to be aided and overseen by Glavmasloprom (the main butter industry), Glavmargarin (the main margarine industry) and Glavmyaso (the main meat industry). Unfortunately this was to the detriment of the final product: the ice-cream made by the plants supervised by Glavmyaso, for example, had a distinct tang of lard.

Still, things moved along at a rapid pace and a completely new culture of ice-cream consumption was created. Traditionally ice-cream had been sold by street-vendors on specially equipped bicycles but now the authorities decided to expand and standardise the retail network. From 1936 all ice-cream vendors wore special uniforms – white caps, and aprons or white overcoats – dictated according to designs by the frozen-goods industry Glavkholodprom.

Individually packaged ice-creams first appeared in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s. Until then ice-cream was delivered to the vendors in bulk and divided into individual tubs at the point of sale. In 1935 foil-wrapped Eskimo bars (the generic name for a chocolate-coated ice-cream on a wooden stick) captured the bulk of sales and over the following years many new types of ice-cream were developed: full cream, ice-cream cakes, ice-cream sandwiches, sorbets, and so on. Originally the ice-cream season lasted only 'from the beginning of the warmer days until the onset of rain in autumn' but this restriction was soon abandoned in favour of year-round availability.

The catalyst for all these changes was Mikoyan, and ice-cream was the minister's true passion. Stalin once made a joke about this, saying, 'Anastas, you care more about ice-cream than about communism.'

It's quite possible many other Soviet citizens felt the same way.

1 large vanilla pod
300ml double cream
300ml milk
4 egg yolks
100g caster sugar

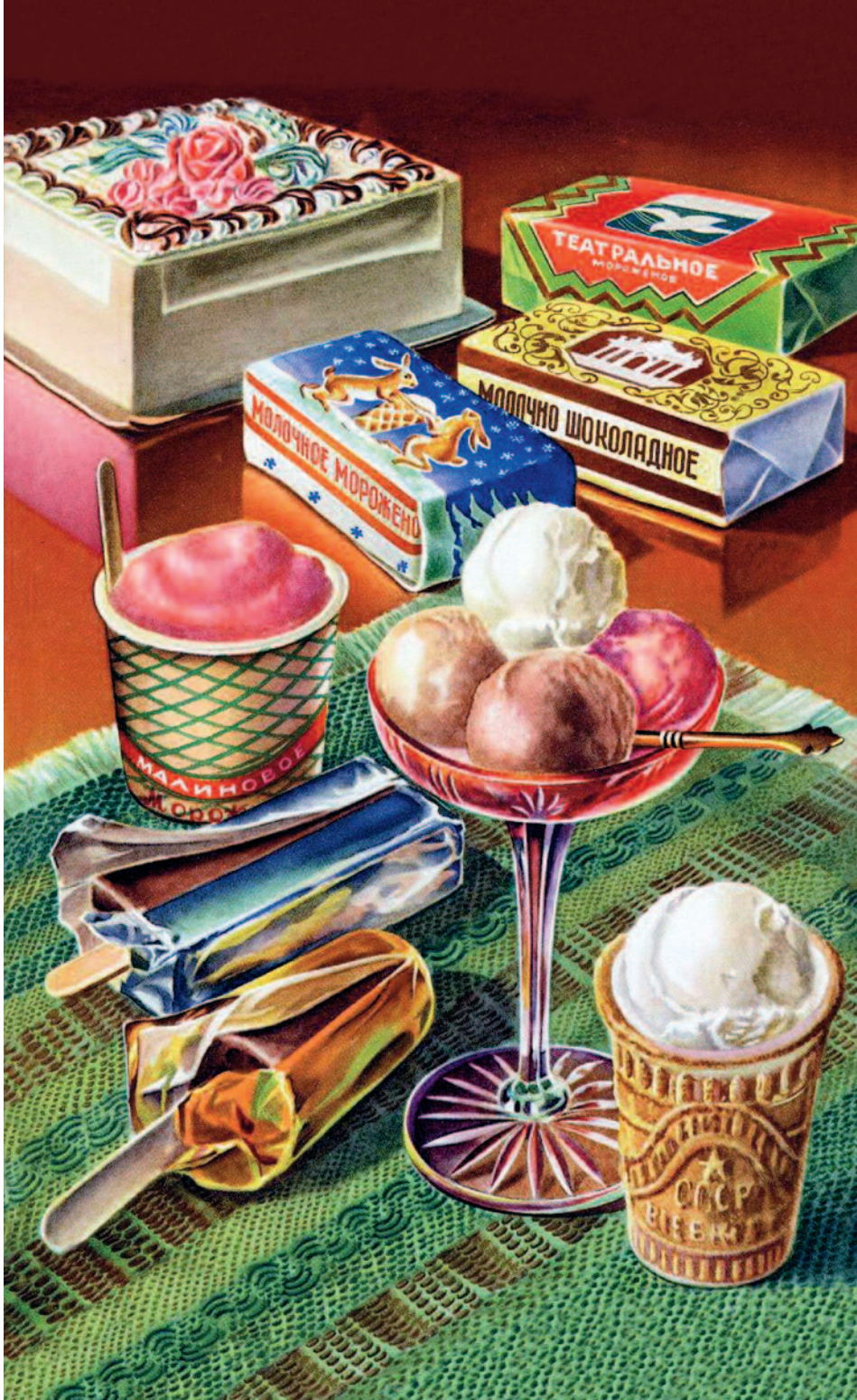
Cut the vanilla pod lengthways and scrape out the seeds into a saucepan containing the milk, cream and the pod itself. Bring to the boil, then remove from the heat and allow to stand for 40 minutes (the mixture should be completely cool).

Place a container for your finished ice-cream in the freezer.

Whisk the egg yolks and sugar in a large bowl for a few minutes, until the mixture turns pale and fluffy. Place the saucepan containing the vanilla cream back on the heat until nearly boiling. Sieve it, then whisk into the egg and sugar, until fully mixed.

Take a large bowl of iced water and place a smaller bowl inside it. Pour the ice-cream mixture back into the saucepan and cook on a low heat for about 10 minutes. Stir slowly and constantly, with the spoon touching the bottom of the pan, until the mixture thickens. Now sieve into the smaller bowl and leave to cool.

Once cool, churn the mix until it reaches a satisfactory consistency. Place the ice-cream into your container and freeze.



BARANKI
WORKING FOR BREAD

During the Soviet era bread came in many varieties. Yet despite the national standardisation of recipes, the same loaves could differ considerably depending on where they were made. This was partly down to discrepancies in equipment, but was mostly thanks to the skill and discipline of the staff.

While the specifications for ingredients were identical, the details of the method – for instance, the length of fermentation, amount of added water, and so on – were the responsibility of the bakery's chief engineer. Flour quality was also inconsistent, and while Moscow and Leningrad usually had access to high-quality ingredients other cities were not so fortunate. Occasionally the quality of the flour was so poor that virtually nothing could be made from it.

But the biggest issue in the 1930s was the lack of a trained workforce. In Moscow, for instance, peasants had flooded into the city to avoid collectivisation or to escape starvation. They were desperate, and would do any kind of work. A number of bakeries were still under construction and the available jobs required little in the way of qualifications: labouring, mixing concrete, hauling wheelbarrows full of bricks. Once the construction was over, many people simply exchanged building for baking, remaining as workers in the finished plant. Many of these bread factories managed to produce large quantities of high-quality bread, remaining in operation until the perestroika years of the 1980s and beyond.

Perhaps it is nostalgia, but these 'inconsistent' bread-based products seemed to taste better than the mass-produced, regulated goods of today. The recipe below tries to recapture some of that flavour.

400g flour
100g sugar
1 egg
120ml milk
100g butter
lemon zest and vanilla extract to taste

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4.

Pile the flour on the worktop, make a hole in the centre and pour in the sugar, followed by the egg, milk and butter. Mix it slowly, but don't knead it. Add lemon zest and vanilla as you mix.

Roll your mixture out into a thin sausage, cut it into pieces approximately 15cm long and roll each piece out a little more without flour. Connect both ends to form a bagel shape and place them on greased baking paper. Brush with egg, sprinkle with sugar and bake in the oven for 15-20 minutes.

OATMEAL BISCUITS
AN UN-SOVIET JUBILEE

Biscuits were very popular in the USSR, and Yubileinoe (Jubilee) biscuits were virtually ubiquitous. Pre-dating the Revolution, they were invented to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the House of Romanov in 1913, when confectioner and entrepreneur Adolf Sioux came up with a recipe consisting of flour, cornstarch, icing sugar, margarine, milk and eggs. It is said that the tsar liked the results so much he granted A. Sioux & Co. the title of Supplier of the Court of His Imperial Highness.

On 4 December 1918 Lenin signed a degree that nationalised Sioux's factory; after Lenin's death in 1924 its name was changed to Bolshevik. The Soviet history of Yubileinoe biscuits had begun! In the 1960s the Bolshevik and Red October, another famous Moscow confectionery factory, were among the largest in Europe.

Another type of biscuit made at the Bolshevik was oatmeal. Oatmeal biscuits, with their delicious aroma, intense brown colour and crumbly texture, remain fresh in the memory of every Soviet citizen. In Imperial Russia they were mainly produced in St Petersburg but during the Soviet era the best were manufactured in Moscow. Visitors to the city would regularly return home with a carton of 20 neatly packed biscuits as a prized souvenir.

200g butter
100g granulated sugar
2 eggs
200g plain flour
170g oatmeal
1 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
150g raisins or nuts
vanilla extract and cinnamon to taste (these are crucial to replicate the original Soviet taste and aroma)

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4.

Beat the butter and sugar until white and fluffy then add the eggs, one at a time, beating continuously. Add vanilla seeds or extract.

In a separate bowl mix the flour, oatmeal, baking soda, salt, raisins or nuts and cinnamon then combine with the butter/sugar/egg mixture. Using a teaspoon, scoop blobs of the mixture on to a buttered baking tray, leaving space for the biscuits to expand. Place in the oven and bake for 18-20 minutes.

A poster advertising biscuits from the Red October factory by the constructivist artists Aleksander Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1923). The text reads: 'I eat biscuits from the Red October factory, formerly Einem, and don't buy them anywhere else except in Mosselprom [The Moscow Association of Enterprises Processing Agro-Industrial Products]'.

‘POTATO’ CAKES
THE HISTORY OF THE SOVIET CHOCOLATE RUM BAR

Chocolate rum bars have distant Soviet cousins called ‘potatoes’. The recipe combines dry biscuit crumbs with butter and condensed milk which is then rolled into balls that are potato-like in shape. Once coated in cocoa, the resemblance is uncanny.

In the 1970s my sister invited some schoolfriends to a birthday party. The food was wonderful, but they were puzzled when ‘potato’ rum bars were served for dessert. The silent struggle between indignation and good manners was obvious on their faces: raw potatoes with tea? Only after scratching the surface (which they thought was skin) with a fingernail did they realise they had been given a sweet.

‘Potato’ rum bars first appeared in the early 20th century as a way of using up three-day-old cake and only during the Soviet era were they promoted to a treat in their own right. The public-catering system required all bakeries and restaurants to account for every gram of every ingredient and the ‘potato’ rum bar was a solution to minimising waste. Chronic shortages of ingredients, famine and deprivation soon made them an indispensable feature of Soviet life.

Most Soviet homes, of course, didn’t have enough leftover cake to make ‘potato’ rum bars so Yubileinoe biscuits or vanilla crackers were used instead.

800g Yubileinoe biscuits (or malted-milk biscuits, or sponge cake)
200g unsalted butter
400g tin condensed milk (made according to state standards: natural milk, without vegetable oil)
3 tbsp good quality Armenian cognac (or vodka, liqueur or rum)
50g raisins
50g dried apricots (chopped to the same size as the raisins)
100g walnuts
5 tbsp cocoa powder

Let the butter warm up to room temperature and soften.

Crush the biscuits or cake in a blender, then mix with the butter. Slowly stir in the condensed milk, then add the alcohol, dried fruit and walnuts.

Mix until uniform (the mixture should be moist) and shape into oblong bars or ‘potatoes’.

Roll in cocoa and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Serve with tea, coffee or hot chocolate.

Yubileinoe biscuits. The packaging bears the State quality mark of the USSR (the CCCP ‘star’ symbol), which indicates that the goods should be of the highest quality.

KIEV CAKE
THE NUT CAKE

At the beginning of the 19th century there were no modern-style desserts within Russian cuisine. Sweet dishes were restricted to berries and fruit, pastila (small squares of pressed fruit paste), pirogi (pies), gingerbread, 'twigs' (pastries shaped like twigs), baked puddings or kissels (sweetened juice thickened with starch).

Gradually more elaborate, sugar-laden desserts became popular and by the start of the 20th century cakes were an integral part of any festive occasion. While not reflecting the everyday eating habits of the majority of the population, their popularity in pre-Revolutionary Russia was nevertheless enormous.

Initially the Soviet authorities took a cautious attitude towards confectionery – not least because in the 1920s high-quality butter and cream were hard to find. The 1939 edition of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* contained just two recipes for cake – shortbread cake and quark cheese cake. But by the 1953 edition the range had broadened considerably: biscuits, almond cake, lemon cake, shortcakes and vanilla cake are all included.

The late 1950s and 1960s was the era when Soviet cakes and pastries truly thrived. In 1956 Konstantin Petrenko and Nadezhda Chernogor, workers at the Karl Marx confectionery factory in Kiev, created the legendary Kiev cake. At that time the soft, nut-flavoured (up to five different types of nut were used) layers of sponge could not be made at home as its production required specially calibrated industrial ovens and fermented egg whites.

Kiev cake is a great representative of the luxury-style Soviet dessert: a single kilogram of cake required 600g of custard and 400g of egg whites mixed with nuts. A symbol of abundance in an era of austerity, the creation consisted of two layers of nut-flavoured sponge with custard between them. The sides were sprinkled with crushed nuts and the top was decorated with piped rosettes of chocolate and plain custard.

The official recipe used cashew nuts, which gave the cake its distinctive flavour. An expensive ingredient, cashews were untypical of Soviet cuisine. But the mid-1950s was a period of developing cultural and economic ties between the Soviet Union and post-Independence India, which found in the USSR the perfect ideological ally in the struggle to establish its economy in the aftermath of colonialism. And cashew nuts were a commodity India had in abundance.

The USSR helped India mostly in the development of its heavy industry. (In 1961 alone the Soviet Union contributed to the construction of eight large-scale factories and provided $681 million in economic aid.) Of course, India made repayments not in US dollars but in rupees, a currency that was useful only for buying Indian exports such as textiles, tea and – naturally – cashews.

The Soviet confectionery industry was soon awash with cashews, which it used in a wide variety of dishes. But as soon as India realised it could sell cashews for hard currency, the glut was over. It withdrew from its bartering deals with the USSR, leaving only the least competitive commodities available for trade. As a result, the cashew nuts used for Kiev cake were gradually replaced

The Kiev Cake Produce Facility, Ukrainian SSR. During the soviet era this factory produced 324 types of confectionery. Photograph by G. Kaminskiy, 1986 (RIA Novosti).

with hazelnuts and later with (even cheaper) peanuts. In the 1970s the custard from the original recipe was replaced with buttercream, which was heavier, denser and had a longer shelf life. Finally, at the end of the 1980s, Kiev cake suffered the fate of many other buttercream cakes when its butter was replaced with cheaper ingredients such as hydrogenated fats or palm oil.

For the sponge:

6 eggs
150g cashew nuts (or hazelnuts)
45g plain flour
240g sugar
3-4 drops of vanilla extract

For buttercream/custard:

1 egg
150ml milk
250g butter
200g sugar
a few drops of vanilla extract
2 tbsp cognac
10g cocoa powder

Note this cake can take 2-3 days to make. Approximately 24 hours prior to baking, separate the egg whites from the yolks and let them sit at room temperature.

The following day lightly roast the cashews (or hazelnuts), crush them (not too finely) and mix with the flour and 185g sugar.

Preheat the oven to 150°C/Gas 2 and line two cake tins (20-22cm in diameter) with baking parchment.

Beat the egg whites until they form soft peaks, add the remaining sugar and continue beating until dense and uniform. Gently fold in the vanilla and the combined flour/sugar/nuts.

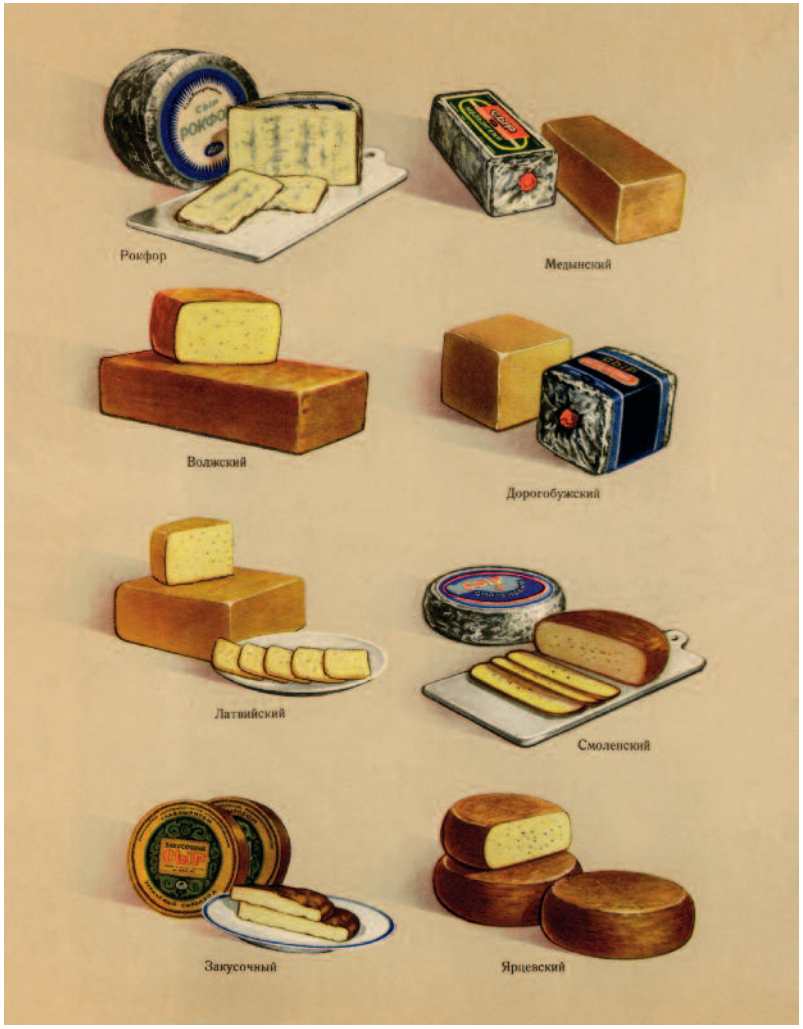
Divide your mixture between the trays and bake for 2 hours. Turn off the oven and allow to cool without opening the door. Take out the trays, but leave the cake undisturbed in them for another day.

For the custard, mix the egg with the milk and strain through a sieve into a saucepan. Place over a low heat stirring continuously as you add the sugar. Bring to the boil and cook for 1 minute continuing to stir. Remove the pan from the heat, cover with a lid, allow to cool completely.

Beat the butter at room temperature and gradually add the egg-sugar syrup. Pour in the vanilla extract and cognac. Take approximately a third of the custard and mix it with the cocoa powder.

To assemble: spread most of the plain custard on top of your first layer of cake (you need to reserve some for decoration). Place the second layer of cake on top of this. Cover the top and sides with most of the cocoa-flavoured custard. Decorate with white and brown rosettes or leaves made from the remaining custard.

This image from 1971 shows a variation in the design of the original Kiev cake. However, the most important element – the chestnut-leaf decoration – is still retained.


Рокфор
Медынский
Волжский
Дорогобужский
Латвийский
Смоленский
Закусочный
Ярцевский


Любительский
Деликатесный
Томатный
Сливочный сладкий
Зеленый
Советский, швейцарский, голландский
Новый
Шоколадный, с орехами

Olga and Pavel Syutkin are historians and culinary experts who specialise in traditional Russian cuisine. Through their shows on television and radio (as well as newspaper articles and internet blogs) they are committed to a simple principle: to offer an objective perspective on the achievements of Russian national cuisine. They strive to tell the authentic culinary story of Russia, with all its dramas and victories, and to remember culinary experts of the past, who contributed and enriched Russian national cuisine throughout the centuries. They live in Moscow.

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