



Russia



Moscow 1980

MUSCOVITE ORIGINALITY



It is doubtful whether anybody will ever object to the fact that food is an important part of the Olympic programme. It is vital for the athletes, but pretty momentous for the guests too. For this very reason: in order to work out a varied Olympic menu, the Olympiad-80 organizers invited not only culinary specialists but also scientists, physicians and national experts. Cooks from many European states would come to Moscow for consultations. Approximately one year prior to the Games, an All-Union review of the public catering establishments was organized in Moscow under

by Alexander Ratner

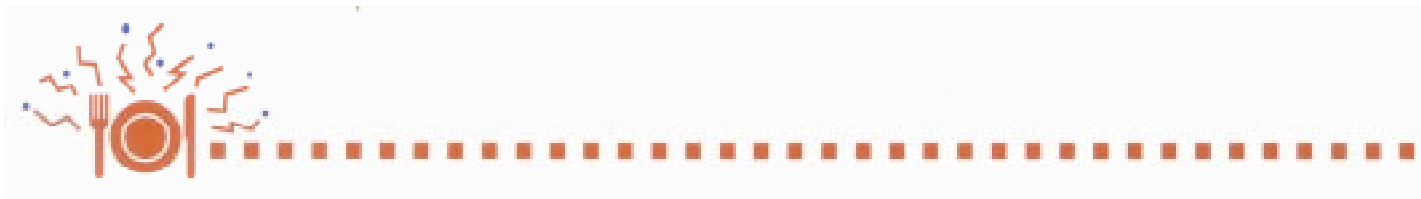
the motto "Top-Level Service for the Olympiad-80's Participants and Guests". It became a kind of test of their professional readiness for the Olympic Games.

Admittedly, one cannot really describe Moscow as a culinary capital. Nevertheless, traditional Russian cuisine has always been carefully preserved here and there is a ready availability of popular foreign food. In general, restaurants offered the Olympiad-80 guests a rich variety of hors-d'oeuvres, soups, fish and meat dishes.

The history of hors-d'oeuvres in Russia is interesting in its own way and is closely connected with the construction, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, of St. Petersburg which is bidding today for the 2004 Olympic Games. Peter the Great used to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and had Russian government departments at work by 4 am. He kept a personal eye on developments in the still sparsely populated capital which had been built, as we all know, in the middle of a wasteland, far from any village or agricultural centre. So it was hopeless to crave for a traditional dinner, and besides, there was no one available to cook hot food at that

The self-service counter.





time of day. Most of the inhabitants of the young city were bachelors, So Peter the Great had them provided with a slice of rye bread and a glass of vodka on two occasions between 4 am and 12 noon. There were also places to buy cold food - dried, salted and smoked fish, sauerkraut, pickled mushrooms, butter, curd cheese, stewed apples and cranberries - throughout the city. All the available food was ready to eat without further preparation, it could be made and delivered well in advance, and it remained edible for a long time, even if kept in the open air.

This was the kind of food Peter the Great ate during his bachelor years, cooking hot food only once a day. Thus Russian hors-d'oeuvres appeared as a special type of dish that could be served at any time one wished, or even included with lunch.

Russian cuisine has always been famous for its soups: cabbage and sauerkraut *shchi* (soup), pike and perch *ukha* (fish soup), *pokhlyobkas* (meat and potato soups) and especially *solyankas* (thick cuts of meat or fish). But, Kiev borscht (beet soup), the crown of Ukrainian national cuisine, long considered a national dish in Russia, was much in demand among the Olympiad-80 guests. To cook it is a real art, because Kiev borscht calls for up to 25 ingredients. The meat part usually consists of equal parts of beef (brisket) and mutton, but many people do not consider it a sin to add a good piece of goose meat and fat or pork fat.

Real borscht, if the cook does not want to simplify it, is always made not with water but with beet and rye *kvass* (a grain beer) which adds a distinctive sourness to it that can quench one's thirst even in hottest summer. All the varieties of vegetables that warm weather and fertile soil can provide find their place in borscht: potato, cabbage, beet, turnip, tomato, carrot, onion, parsley, celery, horse-radish, vegetable extract, beans, red pepper, garlic, fennel, apples, This abundant dish, served with

cool fresh sour cream, delighted the Olympiad guests and participants with its aroma and, of course, its bright colour.

Among Moscow favourites there have always been "red fish", i.e., sturgeon and salmon in their various forms: osetrina, sevryuga, syomga, keta (Siberian salmon), gorbusha (humpback salmon): chavycha and, of course, sterlyad (sterlet) which the Russian poet Derzhavin praised back in the eighteenth century. There is for example, "Moscow baked fish", one of the authentic dishes that the Olympiad-80 guests were able to sample and that, in principle, is not difficult to cook at home. Its recipe has been known since long ago, but in olden times it was called "monastery baked fish" and prior to the discovery of potato porridges it was used as a garnish. For the base, any filleted fish may be used, cut into medium size pieces, rolled in flour and fried in oil. Then slices of fried potato are placed on an oiled frying pan sprinkled with bread crumbs. The fried fish is placed in the middle covered with fried onion and sliced hard-boiled egg and, if available, boiled dried mushrooms as well. The entire dish is poured with cream sauce and oil and baked in the oven.

Ancient roasted meat recipes have been less well preserved. The fact is that meat was not popular among the ancient Muscovites, who preferred lighter fare. On high days and holidays they would eat fowl and game: wood grouse, black grouse, grey partridge, quail or willow ptarmigan. But the modern generation has lost the art of ancient cooking and recipes. For this reason the accent at the Moscow Olympics was mainly on traditional international meat

dishes. As for the Russian foods which were widely represented on the Olympic menu of the Moscow restaurants, *pelmeni* (dumplings), *blini* (pancakes) and *pirogi* (pastries) should be mentioned.

Where could the Olympiad participants and guests taste all these special dishes? For extremely refined gourmets 137 grand restaurants were open. Less demanding diners enjoyed their food mainly at the hotel restaurants, bars and buffets.

For example, in the Olympic Village there were four dining/restaurant halls that each could seat a thousand guests where, in addition to the "standard" Olympic menu, each day one could try dishes prepared on the request of individual delegations. Besides dining/restaurant halls there were a number of cafes for athletes, including an ice-cream parlour and a Russian tearoom. For accredited officials, referees and journalists, restaurants, cafes and buffets were open in their main area of activity, i.e. at the Main Press Centre, Subpress-centres at all Olympic venues, and at the Olympic Broadcasting Centre. Olympic competition visitors could snack at fast-food cafes and buffets located at all sports facilities of the Russian capital and at all the hotels.

Around 90,000 staff from the country's catering and trade establishments, 56,000 of whom were located in Moscow, were involved in providing services to the participants in the Games as well as to guests and tourists.

As everyone knows, tastes differ. And since to provide generous hospitality is the main duty of any host, the Moscow catering establishment staff did their best. They did things in such a way that each guest could choose what corresponded best to his taste. Hence during the Games in Moscow the cuisine of the host country was fully represented with great originality and yet the international dishes that are traditionally enjoyed in many nations were not forgotten.

