

Some people are already in the throes of acute “Armaniosis” when they arrive, and just have to do something about it. Then there are the fashion victims who, having seen it all, want to explore new territories. And then there are tho-

# Visokij Status

## High Class Russian-Style

SOCIETY

by Cristina Giuliano

se who just drop in “for a quick look” and then can’t resist a garment by a designer whose name they cannot even pronounce. But for the Muscovites the real problem is how to attend the Fashion Week. As for the Italian designers...

**T**he disease breaks out twice a year, in March and October. It’s a seasonal illness, though symptoms are clearly visible in other months too. But in those two weeks fashion fever increases. It seems as if Moscow’s *beau monde* thinks about nothing else and even non-Muscovites run the risk of catching the disease, whether they live there or are just passing through. A merry-go-round of fabrics, embroidery and stiletto heels. The craving-virus-desire that makes everyone say “When on earth will I wear that?... .. Well, it doesn’t really matter, I like it so I’ll buy it”. All this in a world of models with legs like a giraffe and the dazzle of the floodlights: it’s bound to make temperatures rise even further.

Some people are already in the throes of acute “Armaniosis” when they arrive and just have to do something about it. Then there are the fashion victims who, having seen it all – or maybe just because of this – want to explore new territories. And then there are those who just drop in “for a quick look” or because they’ve been given an invitation and end up leaving with an overcoat by Alina Assi and a skirt by a designer whose name they can’t even pronounce. But that’s not the point. The point is to be there.

In fact, Moscow’s Fashion Week is the time when this beneficial collective fever reaches its peak just a few yards from Red Square. It’s a catalyst for emotions, energies and individuals. Part high-society occasion, part Sunday stroll. And part *rinok* (market): most of the garments just paraded on the catwalk can be bought right here. And with a company like Visa among the event’s sponsors, it doesn’t take much imagination to decide to buy something. The famous faces – familiar especially to the Russians – are there, in Gostiny Dvor’s neo-classical hall. Including Kseniya Sobchak, the local equivalent of Paris Hilton and daughter of the late lamented mayor of St. Petersburg.

### The cure for fashion fever

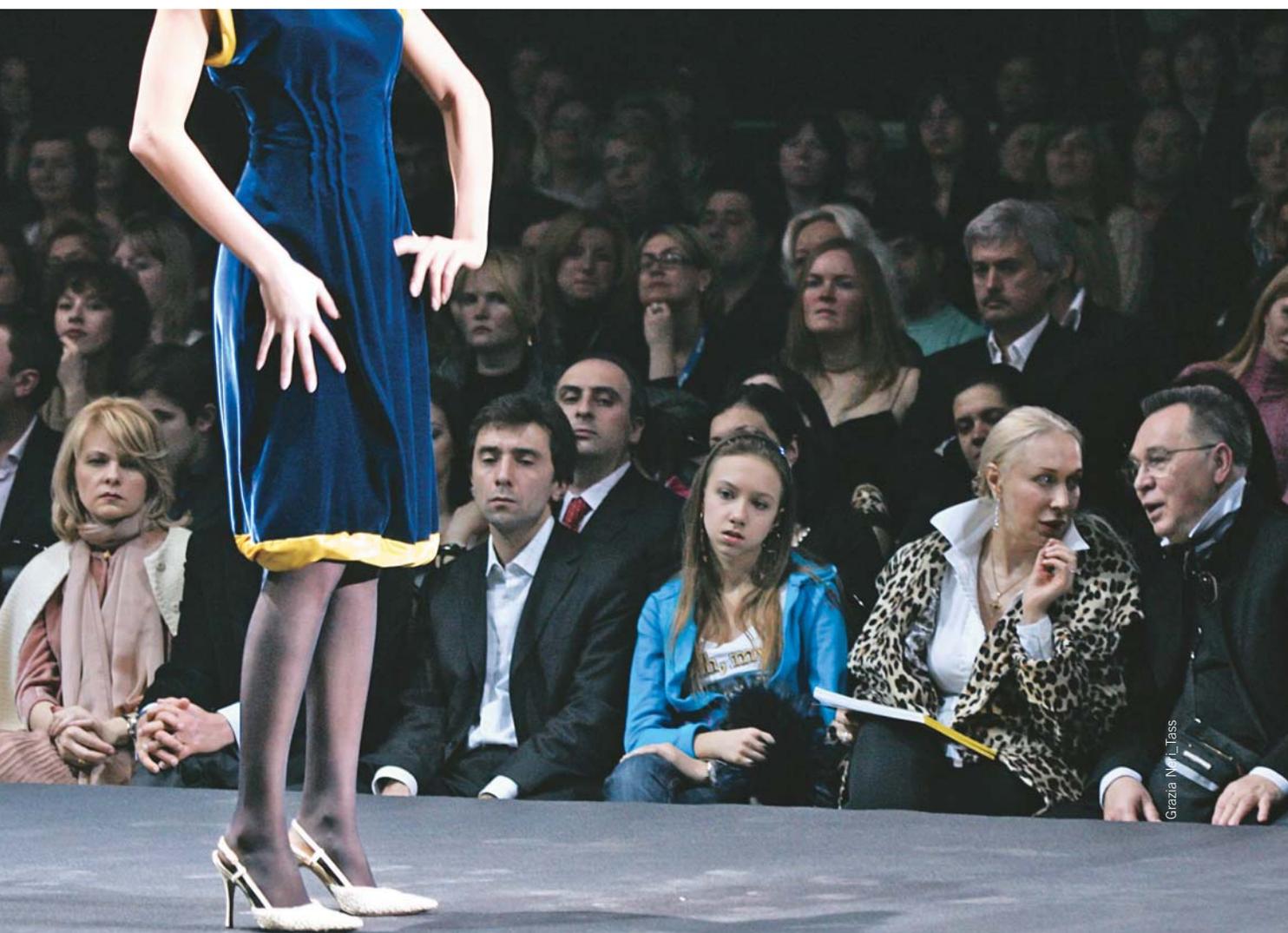
The days go by in quick succession: 10 shows a day is the recommended dose to lower your temperature, which will drop back to normal after 6 days. Start with Valentin Yudashkin, a well-established name in local fashion, as is the must-see Slava Zaitsev. Then Chapurin, Marmalade, Igor Sarukhanov. And Arngoldt, the local *enfant terrible* of the needle and thread. Attending the shows means shuttling between two parallel salons equipped with catwalks and lights. Also tiered seating for the media, who made the most of their

perch to flaunt their notebooks and flash their cameras. Celentano's songs, which several designers chose to accompany their models' long-legged swaggering, were evidence of a certain recognition of Italian culture and the fashion triangle. But everyone here makes a point of saying "We don't copy anyone: we work on our own ideas".

First Evgeny Yashchuk, Managing Director of the Fashion Week in Moscow, explains: "We made friends with Italy long ago", and goes on to say that he doesn't like divisions, regional rivalry or, worse still, national demarcation. "Fashion is universal and there should be no frontiers, because it is a way of expressing life". And in fact there are very few frontiers beneath the neo-classical columns of the enormous hall. Only the check-ins before you're allowed into one of the two salons. Those who get in have VIP or Press accreditation; or an invitation that's worth more than its weight in gold. Inside, there is a large dark room and the white "airstrip" which

forms the basis for the stately fashion parade. From Kalinka Morozov's fur creations, where denim and sable co-exist on the same skirt without clashing, to Natasha Glazkova's fabric constructions featuring fan-shaped open collars and elaborate forms with a look of Capucci.

"See these fabrics", explains Anna Kameneva, who manages the "Made in Siberia" fashion house with her mother, Olga: "It's true I've made a great play of black and white in this year's collection but we're not... how do you say it in Milan? ... minimalist. No, we like things that are a bit flamboyant. And if I really have to do without them, then I put everything into the lining". While she's talking, the young woman runs her hand over a figured beige silk coat costing 20,000 roubles. The embroidery is so exquisite and meticulous that the price is justified. And the colour is so delicate and transparent that it's a delight to the senses. It would arouse the passions of any woman with a credit card.





\_A Vivienne Westwood outfit on the catwalk at Russian Fashion Week, part society happening, part market, where the Autumn-Winter 2007-2008 collection was shown

This is a unique opportunity too. “Many of these clothes will never reach the shops: they’re not sold commercially”, says Katia, the editor of “Mod Zhurnal”, a Russian fashion magazine rather like “Burda”, which teaches women how to cut out and sew the styles immortalised in the photos. “Does the same thing happen in your country?”, she asks, settling herself on the little platform arranged for the journalists, right opposite the catwalk.

### **The Russian for high-class is *visokij status***

In fact, displaying a combination of designer imagination and fashionable taste, Russia’s two-headed eagle manifests a clear desire to adopt a less provincial style and attain the *visokij* (high-class) *status* it deserves. It also manages to respond well to the accusations aimed at the fashion world as a whole. “We don’t have any models dying from starvation”, Yashchuk says. “We make sure they’re well fed”, he adds, half-joking, half-serious. He’s obviously referring to the spate of eating disorders.

In Moscow too, like Milan or New York, the question of models who are “too skinny” is the subject of heated debate. To tell the truth, in the Russian capital healthy beauty seems to win out over crazy obsessions. Still, the

increasingly prevalent interest in bone structure should also be noted, in television and consequently in everyday life and thoughts. Two examples will speak for all: in one of the cafés most often used by Russian businessmen there’s a plasma screen presenting Fashion TV at all hours, cheering up the patrons with the sure steps of stunningly slender young girls on the catwalk. Meanwhile, on the TNT channel, younger viewers can watch TV’s window of the weekly magazine, “Cosmopolitan”: on the agenda are issues such as “Is it true that men only like thin women?”, or “Summer’s on the way: it’s time to bring out the bikinis – and time to lose weight”.

Fashion fever is something else altogether. It’s a delightful disease that needs to be accepted enthusiastically.

Russian women realised this ages ago. The proof lies in the vastly increased number of women’s magazines and the expansion of the advertising market in the specialist press. Since March, the Moscow edition of



### Made in Italy in GUM's Cherry Orchard

In the “Cherry Orchard” display in GUM, the huge, prestige department store overlooking Red Square, there’s a growing scent of Italy in the air. Moscow’s Chereshevy Les festival, which originated in 2000 and is organised by the retailer actually called “Cherry Orchard” will, “in 2007, for the first time, take place in Italy as well as in the Russian capital”. “There will be art exhibitions in Venice and a concert in Sorrento”, explains the Italian Ambassador to Moscow, Vittorio Claudio Surdo. The event has now become an international tradition, with 500 guests, including personalities from the worlds of theatre, cinema, television and the visual arts. And this year the bond between the Russian Federation and Italy will be even more “special”. For the diplomat, the choice of “our country as the twin centre of the festival” is “the nth proof that Italian and Russian culture and economies can work well together”. Thanks to the initiative – sponsored also by Ferrari Spumante – the Italian public will be able to see as part of this Biennial the monumental sculpture by Russian artist Georgi Frangulyan entitled *The Boat of Dante*, which will be on display in the Lagoon. For visitors to the Sorrento-Amalfi coast, there will be an exhibition of works by Sylvester Shchedrin and his contemporaries, Bryullov, Aivazovskij and Kiprenski, with paintings inspired by the beauty of the Apennines and the Mediterranean. “The bond between Mikhail Kuznirovich (the manager of the Cherry Orchard) and Italy – which also exists at a personal level – is an essential ingredient in arranging the event and making it a success”, said Surdo, referring to the Russian’s visit last week with Minister Emma Bonino, to the Made in Italy promotion at the GUM store, which is attracting a lot of interest from people in Moscow. Backed by ICE, this exhibition of our products, which are arranged to look as if they are in a network of Italian streets, will be on show for another two weeks. The route around *Sdielano v Italiy (Made in Italy)* provides a wide selection of tasters: from furnishings to fashion, from cars – a shiny Alfa Romeo Brera was much admired by Bonino herself – to scooters, a type of vehicle so far rarely seen in the Russian Federation, to Illy coffee or Technogym’s treadmill.



the Italian weekly “Grazia” published by Mondadori has also reached Russia. Its slogan is: for the woman who just can’t wait. In fact, the thirst for new collections is keeping pace with the growth in purchasing power. It is also the perfect mirror image of life in the fast lane, where everything has to be instant and where appearances express assertiveness.

Meanwhile, Moscow is looking forward to another visit from the Italian fashion gurus in October. Just as in previous years. “We’ve already had shows by Gattinoni, Trussardi and, next October”, adds Yashchuk, “we’re expecting more fashion parades: the ones suggested by ICE [the Italian Institute for Foreign Trade], in order to promote cooperation between the producers in this market”. In accordance with Yashchuk’s explanation, there is “a contract to train our employees with the Marangoni school, which already accepts our young designers on special work experience assignments”. Contracts apart, there is also an ambitious project in Italy, one that’s very much welcomed by local fashion labels: “A multi-brand showroom in Milan for Russian designers who don’t yet have sufficient resources to open an exclusive outlet”. All in all, Moscow-Milan is a two-way road.