

The Wistful Gourmet

Stories & Recipes From Russia
By Lindy Sinclair



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The Author



LINDY SINCLAIR was born in 1964 and was educated in Sydney, Australia and Helsingør, Denmark.

She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Sydney University but has spent ten years travelling Europe in order to avoid finishing her law degree. Her long list of wanderings include working in Paris, eating in Arles, Basel, Copenhagen, Regensburg and Budapest; and shopping in all the cities in between.

She joined the editorial staff of *Moscow Magazine* in 1990, and became editor in 1991. Since then she has written a weekly food column for *The Moscow Times*, and was the editor of *The Moscow Times Guide*. She is currently food and travel writer for *The Moscow Times Weekend* magazine. When not looking for a decent meal in Syktyvkar, Saaremaa and Siberia, she lives in Moscow.

*For KAREN JOHNSON,
food critic extraordinaire, who braved
every bad restaurant in Moscow
and lived to tell the tale.*

Contents

Introduction	9
Acknowledgements	11
Metric Conversion	12
Ingredients	15
Brunch	17
Soups	51
Pasta Dishes	45
Vegetables	55
Meat, Poultry & Game	77
Desserts	105
Cakes & Biscuits	115
Christmas Dishes	155
Index	151

Introduction

I DON'T THINK anyone has ever said: "When I grow up, I want to be a food writer and live in Moscow." It never appeared on my list of dreams and ambitions, but it has happened to me.

I arrived in Moscow by train from Budapest on a wet thundery day in July 1990. I had \$200 tucked in my passport, a five kopek coin for the metro, a sketchy knowledge of the Russian alphabet and the address of the Australian Embassy.

I planned to stay for three months. Three and a half years later I'm still here. People ask me why and it is very easy to reply: "It certainly isn't for the cuisine."

Before arriving in Moscow I was a passionate eater, but an indifferent cook. You could get away with that in the West; there were so many cafes and restaurants and every street corner had a supermarket chock full of goods.

I realized with alarm that Moscow was not like that. If I was going to enjoy myself here it would take a lot of culinary imagination and perseverance. Each year I would bring back more and more tools and ingredients from trips. Woks, sharp knives, cookbooks, whisks and countless kilograms of food. If those airlines knew just how many pots of fresh pesto, lemon grass, cheese, wine, and sun-dried tomatoes came their way, they would be amazed.

Eventually, with the help of new-found friends, the mysteries of finding local ingredients and eating in restaurants were gradually revealed. I can still remember standing for almost two hours in line for lemons during my first winter. It was bitterly cold, and everyone had their eyes on the crates of fruit the young street vendor was offering. We were all anxious he would run out of stock before our turn. The tension was palpable.

The snow was falling and my feet were getting numb, but I couldn't give up. I took my share home with me feeling light-hearted and happy. The lemons sat in a bowl on my

kitchen table for almost a week; a brilliant band of color in a very gray apartment. Today, I cannot see lemons without remembering that same sense of pleasure and achievement.

And it makes me understand the spirit of this place better. Here simple things are treasured — finding food and sharing it with friends.

Like all cities, there is a community of foreigners living among the locals. Here in Moscow there are over 60,000 students, journalists, diplomats and businesspeople who temporarily call Russia home. We all have food, but we also like to have fun. For many people, dinner parties are still the best form of entertainment in town. To prepare them you need to do the rounds of hard currency supermarkets (of which Moscow has about 15) and visit a local farmers' market, called a *rynok* (ree-nock). With a lot of planning and improvisation according to the goods available you could have almost all you need in about four hours of shopping and sitting in traffic jams and haggling for fruits and vegetables.

Everyone appreciates the effort. The recipes in this book first appeared as weekly columns in *The Moscow Times* and are the result of these dinner parties. If you can make them in Moscow, you can make them anywhere. No dish is terribly difficult and if it is time-consuming, it is well worth the effort. Unless noted, each recipe will serve four.

Priyatnogo apetita.

Acknowledgements

I WOULD LIKE to thank all the staff at *The Moscow Times*, particularly Karen Dukess and Andrew Sussman who would come into work on cold wet mornings, no time for breakfast, nothing but leftovers in the refrigerator, and read through my columns about Veal Parmigiano and Lemon Poppy Shortbread, knowing if I didn't bring in the samples there wouldn't be any joy for the rest of the day.

A big thank you also to my large circle of friends who gladly came over, squeezed around my dinner table and tasted the latest creations: Jaap, Francesca, Robert, Jenny, Andrew, Helen, Kostya, Deb, John, Nanette, Jamie, Tjitske, Steve, Chris, Shaker, Wendy, Duncan, Carey, Sarah, Geoff, Louise and Marc.

Thanks also to Meg Bortin, Eleanor Randolph, Bronwen Coram, Susi LeMay and Annemarie van Gaal for inspiration, Igor Shein for his cartoons, Jana Janus for thinking this book would be a good idea, and last but not least, Derk Sauer, my publisher, who, in a moment of madness, employed me three and a half years ago and hasn't quite worked out how to get rid of me ever since.

Where possible I have acknowledged the authors of the recipes in this book. Unfortunately, in many instances I cannot do so and I apologize: some dishes were given to me by friends, some found in magazines, and many were sent to me by my wonderful mother who is even more enthusiastic about good food than I am. Without your pesto, Mum, I wouldn't have made it.

Metric Conversion

The recipes in this book use the standard metric measurements. To convert, use the following charts.

<i>Dry Ingredients</i>	<i>Metric</i>	<i>Imperial</i>
1 cup flour	155 g	5 oz
1 cup sugar	250 g	8 oz
1 cup butter	250 g	8 oz
1 cup honey	375 g	12 oz
1 cup rice, uncooked	220 g	7 oz
1 cup mixed fruit	185 g	6 oz
1 cup nuts, chopped	125 g	4 oz

<i>Metric</i>	<i>Imperial</i>
15 g	1/2 oz
30 g	1 oz
60 g	2 oz
90 g	3 oz
125 g	4 oz (1/4 lb)
155 g	5 oz
185 g	6 oz
220 g	7 oz
250 g	8 oz (1/2 lb)
375 g	12 oz (3/4 lb)
500 g	16 oz (1 lb)
1000 g	32 oz (2 lb)

<u>Spoons</u>	<u>Metric</u>
1/4 teaspoon	1.25 ml
1/2 teaspoon	2.5 ml
1 teaspoon	5 ml
1 tablespoon	20 ml

<u>Measuring Liquids</u>	<u>Metric</u>	<u>Imperial</u>
1/4 cup	60 ml	2 fl oz
1/2 cup	125 ml	4 fl oz
2/3 cup	170 ml	5-1/2 fl oz
1 cup	250 ml	8 fl oz
2 cups	500 ml	16 fl oz

<u>Oven Temperatures</u>	<u>Fahrenheit</u>	<u>Celsius</u>	<u>Gas Mark</u>
Very slow	250	120	1/2
Slow	300	150	2
Moderately slow	350	180	4
Moderate	400	200	6
Moderately hot	450	230	8
Hot	500	260	9

Ingredients

PLANNING successful meals isn't difficult as long as you have a good supply of ingredients. Here more than anywhere else, you need to be prepared. My groaning kitchen shelves in Moscow remind me more of the pantry at our farm in Australia than any suburban kitchen I have lived in since.

On the farm we had to have enough supplies to cater for unexpected visitors, floods, bushfires and the knowledge that the nearest decent shopping center was 16 kilometers away and the cheapest supply of goods a further 80 kilometers beyond that. Moscow may not be that extreme, but when you have a hungry hoard descending in just two hours you will rue the fact you aren't prepared. With the following ingredients you can make almost all the recipes in the book.

Spice rack: Bay leaves, black peppercorns, bouquet garni (thyme, bay leaf and rosemary tied together with thread) cardamon pods, chilis, cloves, coriander seeds, ground ginger, fresh ginger (stored in the freezer), marjoram, paprika, poppy seeds, star anise, thyme and tumeric.

Bottles: Dijon mustard, dry sherry, fish sauce, honey, olive oil, oyster sauce, red wine vinegar, sesame oil, soy sauce, sunflower oil and white wine vinegar.

Groceries for Savory Dishes: Bacon, chick peas, garlic, dried mushrooms, green onions, lemons, long-life cream, olives, onions, parmesan cheese, pasta, peanuts, potatoes, red kidney beans, spaghetti, (frozen) spinach, tinned tomatoes and walnuts.

Groceries for Sweet Dishes: Baking powder, baking soda, brown sugar, cornflour, dark chocolate, dates, Dutch cocoa, golden syrup, plain flour, powdered sugar, raisins, superfine sugar and vanilla essence.