

A Food Fest for Intrepid Eaters

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Petter Nilsson, of the Paris restaurant La Gazzetta, is one of the international chefs participating in the Omnivore festival.

Moscow is a conservative town, gastronomically, with many diners seemingly stuck in cane-clutching old age, gumming their beloved risotto with porcinis and downing tuna sashimi by the bucket. But slowly, surely, a small contingent of food hipsters has formed, eaters eager to have Roquefort replace the cheddar on their burgers and to try purees of things other than potatoes, and this week a culinary event is coming to cater to their intrepid taste buds.

It's the [Omnivore Food Festival](#), an event begun in Deauville, France in 2005 that in feel looks to be a cross between a skate competition and a new age moon festival. That is, hardcore but nature-loving chefs get together and compete/celebrate, giving "master classes" that are really more like live food-porn shows and cooking special menus at local restaurants.

Omnivore is known as being a venue for the young and headstrong, a meeting place for rebels with the cause of creating innovative cuisine. (Maybe Kremlin bureaucrats should stop

by to observe their modernizing ways? The event is to be held at Gostiny Dvor, right off Red Square ...) The festival boasts many world-class alumni, among them culinary mega-star Ferran Adria, of the soon-to-be-closed gourmand mecca El Bulli in Spain, and Inaki Aizpitarte, who has developed a slavish following at Le Chateaubriand in Paris.

The inaugural Moscow edition has booked space behind the burners for the small clutch of cliché-eschewing chefs working here, as well as for a heavily credentialed crew of international toques to join them. Local attendees will be led by the bear-visaged Renaissance man Aleksei Zimin, who is co-owner of popular Belorusskaya-area restaurant [Ragout](#) and editor of the food magazine Afisha Yeda (and food columnist for newspaper Kommersant, and contributor to newspaper Vedomosti). Also taking the stage will be the self-taught chef of basement foodie haven Delicatessen, Ivan Shishkin, who in two years has gone from car journalist to one of the Moscow restaurant world's anointed few by turning out playful but well-prepared comfort food. Shishkin participated in the festival's first round of the year in February in Deauville, where he made rye wontons with fried pickles and somehow produced jam with the taste of pine cones. Shishkin will kick off proceedings in Moscow this Tuesday with, he promises, a perfected pine-cone jam and a mousse made from the Russian cheese *tvorog*.

Those flying in will include Carlo Mirarchi, a New Yorker just voted one of America's 10 best young chefs by Food & Wine magazine and a veteran of Omnivore; Petter Nilsson, another past Omnivore attendee, of the Paris restaurant La Gazzetta; and Ola Rudin and Sebastian Persson, a pair from Sweden, whose natives have suddenly become obligatory at food fests as Scandinavia has risen to Viking-like glory in the dining world.

Tickets to festival events are available to the public, both online and at the door, so don an apron and go learn the essential techniques they'll be teaching, such as how to make parsley-root chips. (Ragout chef Ilya Shalyev told Afisha this week that he will feature such chips at his master class.) For those who have to, say, work this week and won't be able to attend the master classes, you can still make reservations at the participating restaurants, which will have special menus made in concert with the visiting international chefs on certain days from April 20 to 24. The participating restaurants are [Ragout](#), [Delicatessen](#), [Bar Strelka](#), [Dome](#), and [Coffemania](#) at Trubnaya Ploschad; follow the links for details on each one's menu and how to make reservations.

And, of course, you can check out my updates from the festival on this page and on my Twitter account (BeyondBorscht)—so stay tuned.

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