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Moscow's Legendary Hotel Moskva to Reopen

By Sam Skove

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Reconstruction work on Hotel Moskva began in the early 2000s, when the Moscow city government, the hotel's owner, decided to tear down the building and modernize it.

Hotel Moskva, finished at the height of Stalin's power and demolished a decade ago under Moscow's construction-happy former Mayor Yury Luzhkov, will open its doors again Thursday as the Four Seasons Hotel Moscow, an exact replica of its iconic predecessor.

The hotel's prominent position immediately next to Red Square on Manezh Square has long made it a landmark for both Muscovites and tourists alike, as has its asymmetric exterior — two different styles flank the facade, plain on the right and more elaborate on the left.

One story, likely apocryphal, goes that hotel architect Alexei Shchusev gave Stalin plans for two possible versions for the facade on the same sheet of paper. Stalin scrawled his signature over both, and Shchusev, too afraid to contradict him, simply combined the two styles.

After opening in 1935, the hotel played host to top party bureaucrats and distinguished guests throughout the Soviet-era. British turncoat Guy Burgess stayed here, as did Yury Gagarin soon after becoming the first man in space.

Today's hotel, however, will host only those rich enough to afford its prices. Whereas the original hotel's 15 stories housed 1,000 guest rooms, the current five-star incarnation at 180 rooms has some of the most spacious accommodation in Moscow. Rooms have a minimum of 430 square feet, with the hotel's cheapest room costing 28,500 rubles ($675) on opening night, Oct. 30.

General Manager Max Musto noted that there was already high demand for the hotel's corner rooms, which have views over the Kremlin and other Moscow landmarks. The hotel will also hold five restaurants and lounges and a spa.

The Four Seasons, a Canadian hotel operator, also operates a newly opened hotel in St. Petersburg. According to research released in July by real-estate analytics firm JLL, 40 percent of Moscow's branded hotels are either in the upscale or luxury segments of the market.

Reconstruction work on Hotel Moskva began in the early 2000s, when the Moscow city government, the hotel's owner, decided to tear down the building and modernize it. The tender for reconstruction went to obscure U.S. firm Decorum Corp. which agreed to finance the hotel's restoration for $350 million in return for a 51 percent stake.

Hotel Moskva's reconstruction, however, was, nothing new for then-Mayor Luzhkov. He presided over a sweeping range of construction projects, from the recreation of a massive former palace of Catherine the Great to the demolition of Hotel Rossiya, which was until 1990 the largest hotel in the world.

At the time, Luzhkov, whose wife Yelena Baturina became Russia's richest woman while heading a property development firm, was accused by critics of profiting off corrupt real-estate dealings.

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