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France and Belgium Take Top Honors at Vodka Culinary Competition in Moscow

By Hebe Foster

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A bartender takes part in the Mamont Mission II culinary competition.

Mamont Vodka hosted its second annual culinary competition in Moscow on Tuesday night, challenging chefs from across Eurasia to capture the essence of the vodka's Siberian heritage in a food and cocktail pairing.

The vodka brand, whose name was inspired by the discovery of the Yukagir Mammoth and comes in a bottle shaped like a mammoth tusk, hosted its first competition — named the Mamont Mission — last year on Russia's first official Polar Explorer Day, May 19.

The competition invites chefs and bartenders from France, Belgium, UK, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Ukraine, Georgia, Russia and Kazakhstan, to create a dishes using Mamont vodka and that "capture the Mamont vodka brand." Applicants take part in semifinals in London, Paris, Tbilisi and St. Petersburg. The winners then are invited to Moscow for the competition finals.

Participants are judged not only on how the food tastes, but also on its presentation.

French pair Clement Bappel and Valentin Calvel won the inaugural event with their Parisian-inspired cocktail "The Ice Floe" and accompanying "Drop of the Arctic" amuse-bouche, which featuring a hand-carved ice ball, osietra caviar and real gold flakes. Bappel and Calvel's prize for making their way through several rounds of competition against hundreds of other hopeful contestants, was a week-long trip along the coast of Greenland on board the wooden ship "Activ," one of the last such ships able to cross the Arctic Ocean.

This year's finale, which took place at the Farenheit restaurant just north of Red Square, was a face-off between nine pairs of finalists from across Europe.

During the event, at which guests were invited to try three different types of vodka cocktails and a wide range of canapés, several teams took the opportunity to promote their dishes.

One of the participating English pairs, from The Larder House in Southborne, England said that to create their "Taste of the Tundra" pairing, they infused cevice flavors into their cocktail to complement their dish — tagliatelle with squid and sea bass topped with lime juice, presented in an enormous ice floe that the judges had to split apart in order to taste the food.

The French team erected a tent in the middle of the tasting hall to create a "polar-style" environment, complete with sound effects, while the Russian duo paired a cocktail of vodka, pickles and honey with baked quail.

After an afternoon sipping cocktails and tasting tiny morsels of food, the judges were unable to declare a single winning pair, eventually announcing that the Belgian team of Arie Visscher and Dries Botty and the Sliyanie team from France would share this year's honors.

"There was such a huge range of different dishes and cocktails," explained David Hempleman-Adams, world-renowned explorer and one of the judges of this year's competition.

"We were so impressed by the creativity of the French Sliyanie team, whose creation received the highest points for its adherence to the Mamont spirit. But we also could not fault the refined technique and follow-through of the team from Belgium, Dries & Arie, who had prepared a s alad with king crab and caviar, accompanied by a cocktail named "Yukagir" in honor of the only mammoth of its type found to date."

The chefs and bartenders will take part in an all-expenses-paid expedition to Siberia to search for a mammoth led by a "professional mammoth hunter" and accompanied by travel-blogger, photographer and travel writer Sergei Dolya.

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