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Mumiy Troll Music Bar: A Bit of the Far East near the Kremlin Walls

By Ilya Krol

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With its name drawn not from the Tove Jansson children's book characters but rather the famous Vladivostok rock band Mumiy Troll, this spot at the beginning of Moscow's upscale Tverskaya street has the right look for the neighborhood. It features a spacious hall lined with light onyx panels, a 42-meter-long wooden bar and leather chairs so soft that you sink into them — along with your Bloody Mary, or your glass of something more exotic, like the Japanese whisky Yamazaki or a Korean Hite beer.

Mumiy Troll frontman Ilya Lagutenko gazes down at guests from the black walls.

"Ilya calls this place "the Far East headquarters," explained Alexander Mukhin, the bar's administrator. "And that's exactly the case. Although we are glad to support every talented musician, our focus is on bands from the Pacific region."

Mukhin, who is also from Russian Far East, tells me about his native city's rock festival, "V-Rox," which is organized by Lagutenko. This year, for the first time in its 3-year-history, the

festival's qualifying competition will be held in Moscow — on the stage of the bar. But young musicians play here every night and guests can hear them with no cover charge, Mukhin added, smiling as he speared another thin slice of delicately smoked Pacific octopus with his fork.

Although the food at Mumiy Troll ranks behind music and drinks in order of importance to the bar's managers, VVO Project, the cuisine is maybe the main reason Muscovites should check out this spot. In contrast to the venue's vague headliner concept, which opens the stage to "all talented musicians," the menu is carefully curated to highlight the best of the Far East.

Many of the items on offer are unknown to guests in Moscow restaurants, like Pacific whelk, fernbrake or cucumaria, the Far East sea cucumber. Portions of nerka — a Pacific wild salmon, and king crab are immediately frozen as they are brought into port in Vladivostok and then flown 9,000 kilometers to Moscow several times a week. Upon arrival at Tverskaya, the nerka is carefully defrosted and transformed into gentle, melting carpaccio while the crab is stuffed into squid ink ravioli and served with juicy mashed pumpkin.

The VVO project managers wouldn't reveal the chef's name, but say he's not a Far Eastern native. "He's from Moscow and quite experienced in working with us. He visits the Far East regularly, which allows us to expand and update the menu," Mukhin said.

In the opinion of the VVO project managers, the chef had to be from the capital. "Of course, the tastes of Muscovites are different from the tastes of Vladivostok people," Mukhin said, explaining that no one in Moscow would be surprised at having dishes like pappardelle or foie gras on the menu, as there are a lot of Italian and French restaurants. But it's the inclusion of ingredients that are commonplace in Vladivostok, like fernbrake and cucumaria, into typical European recipes that sets Mumiy Troll's menu apart.



Although this fusion concept sounds clumsy, its execution was impeccable. The stringy elastic cucumaria paired perfectly with pork belly slices and vegetables, while the subtle white meat of the Pacific whelk married well to a tiny piece of juicy red grapefruit. Far East coast fernbrake brought a taste of the Pacific to a veal-and-vegetable saute.

The combination of Asian and European ingredients in the dishes seemed perfectly natural — at least more natural than the combination of bands' named on the bar's posters.

Mumiy Troll Bar. 7 Tverskaya (Central Telegraph Building). Metro Okhotny Ryad. Open 24 hours. http://www.mumiytrollbar.com/

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