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Rethinking Pelmeni at Lepim i Varim Caf

By Guido de Boer

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Can a cafe in the center of Moscow selling just a few varieties of one of Russia's most common dishes draw in customers? At Lepim i Varim, the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

Lepim i Varim ("Shape and Boil") has been open for only two weeks and is already making its mark on central Moscow. This small café churns out more than 21,000 Russian dumplings — pelmeni — daily, proving that that this traditional dish is still very much in demand. In just 10 days, this "dumpling boutique" has surpassed all other shops and bars on Stoleshnikov Pereulok in numbers of visitors.

This isn't just an ordinary dumpling shop. Founders Nicholai Serdotetsky, Mikhail Fisher and Nikolai Rikhter have cleverly innovated the traditional dish — a successful business move. They make different colored and flavored dough with squid ink, turmeric and spinach, and stuff them with all kinds of fillings, traditional and otherwise. Then they give them whimsical names.

Right now the menu offers six different kinds of dumplings. There are, of course, traditional pelmeni with pork and beef, but their new creations are drawing diners: "fish of my dreams"

with salmon and cod; "Gentle Barbarian" with cottage cheese; "famous shrimp" with squid ink. If you're a vegetarian, you can order your pelmeni filled with suluguni (brined Georgian cheese).



Lepim i Varim
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There's a nice informality about the place. All the pelmeni are made in-house while diners watch, and sometimes one type proves popular and they sell out, and you have to choose something else. Diners can choose between a portion of 10 or 15, depending on hunger levels.

Although pelmeni are the main attraction, diners can also choose a salad or soup of the day. They offer a few desserts, including delicate dumplings filled with pot cheese and sprinkled with cherry sauce.

Lepim i Varim attracts guests of all ages, but the crowd is predominantly young professionals who enjoy trying a redesigned version of this iconic Russian dish.

The dumpling shop shares the same hipster aesthetic as its neighbors the Entuziast bar and the Chop Chop hair salon — that clean, unfussy style that seems to attract the modern Muscovite. Lepim i Varim is minimalist, but cozy, with black and white décor and homy wooden tables.

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