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Leveldva: Brave New World

Food, drink and nostalgia are on the menu for grown-up Moscow scenesters

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Glazed pork ribs with zucchini **Leveldva**

Situated above the famous Ugolek restaurant on Ulitsa Bolshaya Nikitskaya, Moscow's gastronomic mile, Leveldva is a restaurant by day and a dance club by night. Run by the same people as its neighbor, Uilliam Lamberty and Ilya Tutenkov, Leveldva (Russian for "level two") was closed for renovations for a while. But this April, after several trial runs and false alarms, it finally opened.

According to management, the improved Leveldva was conceived as a nostalgic refuge for 30-somethings who spent their youth at the legendary club Solyanka (now defunct), but who have grown up and started earning enough to chill out in more expensive and mature surroundings.

The interior decor is very well thought-out, with the straw lamps and vintage furniture perfectly matching the old wallpaper peeling off the walls. A glance upward reveals a mismatched ceiling, with patches of cheap linoleum next to tin plates and white plaster. A slideshow of some of the 20th century's greatest paintings by the likes of Basquiat, Miro and Kahlo are projected onto the wall in the back.

The person behind the new menu is Ilya Vasilyev, whose impressive resume spans from rooftop restaurant Karlson to 15 Kitchen+Bar, a favorite expat hangout. The menu is a mix of pan-Asian and auteur cuisine, with a slight Indian twist.

For an appetizer, try the wok-fried aubergine with yogurt mousse: The former is quite spicy, while the latter cools your tongue (520 rubles/$9). Another interesting option is agnolotti, a type of traditional Italian square-shaped pasta—but here it is filled with Indian paneer cheese and served in butter masala sauce (550 rubles). The popular Singaporean soup laksa comes with green tea noodles and forest mushrooms (350 rubles).

You can't go wrong with the mains—whether it's tuna tataki, a traditional Japanese dish prepared by briefly searing the fish, served with wok-fried vegetables in citrus-based ponzu sauce (980 rubles), mutton with biryani rice and baked pumpkin (650 rubles) or glazed pork ribs with zucchini cooked Korean kimchi-style as a side (690 rubles).

The cocktail menu is very inventive and at 550 rubles for most drinks, it's rather inexpensive by Moscow standards. Try La Premiere, a cross between an Old Fashioned and a Negroni, or British Expedition, a gin-based drink with ingredients like tamarind, a curry syrup and rhubarb bitter. Matcha Spritz is a twist on that popular light cocktail, with limoncello and tea liquor.

The desserts here are just as intriguing: waffles with green Nutella (350 rubles), mango mousse with cardamon cookies (330 rubles) or salty dessert based on miso paste (320 rubles).

A whole coterie of waiters is at your service, which sometimes gets confusing as you never deal with the same person twice, but everyone is very friendly and helpful, ready to explain each dish in detail.

Although not exactly an expat bar, you can hear plenty of chatter in foreign languages at cosmopolitan Leveldva, which could just as easily be in London or even Hong Kong.

After 11 p.m. on weekends, the chairs and tables in the back are removed to free some space for dancing, which goes on into the early hours. The owners say they also intend to organize lectures and film showings.

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