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Step Back in Time at the Museum of Moscow

Catch the “Old Apartment” show before it closes

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A kitchen in a communal apartment. **Museum of Moscow Press Service**

The exhibition “Old Apartment” at the Museum of Moscow opens a window into the everyday lives of Muscovites over the 20th century. Through the collection of carefully reconstructed apartment interiors, the exhibition explores how people lived and tells an expressive story of the city.

To enter the exhibition, you ascend a wooden ramp covered in black graffiti and find yourself in a typical Moscow apartment stairwell with metal post boxes mounted on the wall. The long narrow hallway brings you right into Tsarist Russia, where you find pictures of Romanovs above an intricately decorated fireplace — only to find them replaced by a picture of Vladimir Lenin in the next apartment interior.

The exhibition is split into three parts: the apartment interiors are located on the second floor, while the first floor recreates the unique atmosphere of Moscow courtyards. A separate part of the exhibition is dedicated to scarce household items of the Soviet period.

Alina Saprikina, the Museum of Moscow director, told The Moscow Times "All the exhibits are taken from the collections of the Museum of Moscow. These are items that were given to the museum by ordinary Muscovites, who brought personal items and family relics to the Museum of Moscow. Many items are imbued with family memories, which makes the exhibition even more interesting."

Walk Down Memory Lane

The show lets visitors immerse themselves in the everyday lives of several generations of Muscovites as they pass through the cubbyhole of a pre-revolutionary Moscow factory worker, communal apartment interiors of the 1920s, a Khrushchev-period apartment, and a perestroika-era kitchen. Clothes dry above the sink in the communal kitchen and the radio blasts out the Soviet anthem early in the morning. Excerpts from diaries posted on the walls tell fascinating stories of people who lived in similar settings.

Each apartment evokes feelings of nostalgia in the visitors. "This couch is just like the one our grandma had," a young woman tells her partner. "Everyone had a collection of these lapel pins," a mother tells her son as she points to a large, colorful panel covered with Soviet lapel pins. The visitor's book for the exhibition is filled with nostalgia: "I sent pictures of the exhibition to my mother and she wrote back 'I wore a similar dress to the 30th birthday of your father, and he wore a red jacket'."

The Heart of the Apartment

The rooms that especially attract people are the communal kitchens. Communal flats appeared in Moscow right after the Revolution, when Bolshevik government transformed private apartments into shared spaces for newcomers. The communal flat neighbors shared the kitchen and bathroom and lived with their families in rooms that were sometimes only seven or nine square meters. The best apartments were the ones where the inhabitants agreed on day-to-day things such as storing appliances in the kitchen and hanging personal clothes in the bathroom. If an agreement could not be reached or people didn't trust each other, kitchen appliances were taken back to the rooms after use, and clothes were dried over the beds.

Rare household items from the past add to the atmosphere: an ironing machine, a television set, an old piano, and a sewing machine. You can see one of the first television sets that appeared in 1949, called KVN-49, with a 20-cm screen. In the 1950s, the more affluent population had televisions with screens of about 30 cm — Temp or Vanguard — which could be switched on by raising the cover. You can see these as well as the first color televisions that appeared in the early 1960s.

"The 'Old Apartment' exhibition is interesting to everyone who wants to learn about the 20th century. Many visitors will recognize the interiors — Soviet furniture, a long communal corridor, kitchen set and gas heater in the bathroom — all these items were once in the homes of Muscovites, and now they are on show at the museum. This is a very important milestone,

which we would like to note as everything that surrounds us today will be in the museum tomorrow," Alina Saprikina said.

Be sure to see this this unique exhibition before it closes on April 15.

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