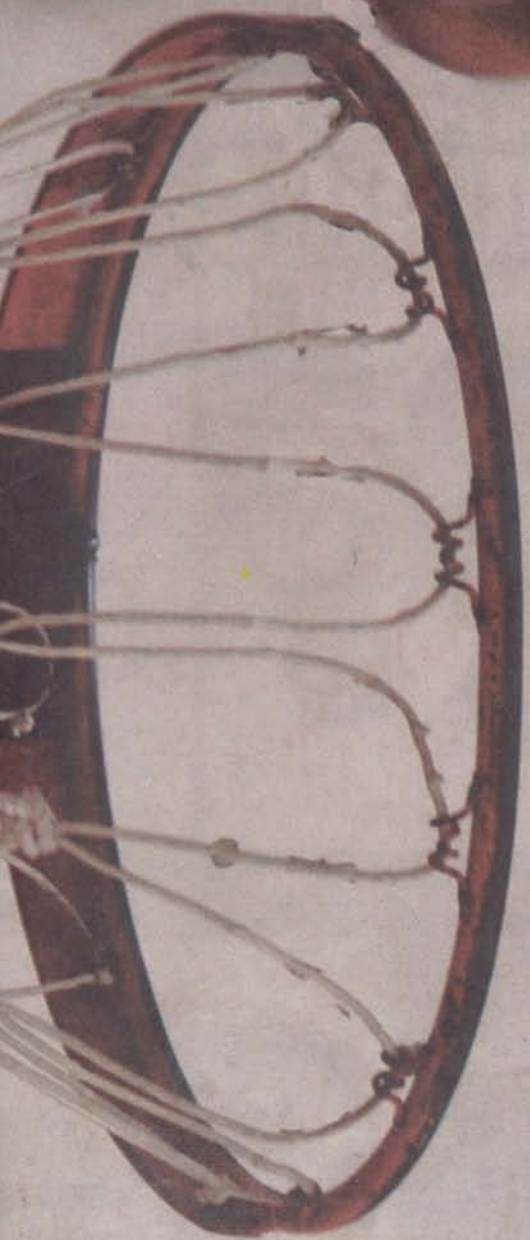


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The Avant-Garde Bar is located at 135 Besserer Street, close to the Arts Court. Their drink list is large, and be sure to try their "Red October." Creamy goodness.

# Welcome to the Avant-Garde

## Ottawa's most fabulous and beautiful place to grab some Russian cuisine, catch a great show, and generally have a good time

by *Jasmin Legatos*

It's five o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. Alexei Yugin is slowly preparing for later in the night when his cozy bar on Besserer Street will host a mix of university students, 20-something professionals and a tiny spat of Russian comrades.

He rifles through a CD case and pops in a Kraftwerk DVD.

"That is constructivism," he exclaims, pointing to the TV monitor that hangs over the bar. "It is international," he continues in his heavily accented English. His bar is also international he insists, both in clientele and vibe, despite the obvious Russian influence that pervades it.

The Avant-Garde Bar, one of the newest and arguably coolest additions to Ottawa's predictably banal scene of Irish pubs, was conceived primarily as an art bar in Bauhaus fashion.

Soviet-era propaganda posters and Kandinsky prints from Russia are scattered all over the yellow

and red walls that mix art-nouveau curved mirrors and lines with constructivist straight edges.

Along the back wall of the split-level bar, a row of painted women look over the few tables and couches in this cozy atmosphere.

Designed by Yugin's daughter, Alyona Iouguina, the bar is as much a drinking and eating establishment as it is an ode to design, art and history.

"The style is eclectic. It's a blend of eras; a transition from one to another," says Iouguina, a second-year industrial design student at Carleton.

This blend of eras translates well into a history lesson. Propaganda posters from the first Russian revolution of 1917 keep good company with newer ones from the end of the Soviet era.

The posters are all in Russian, which begets curiosity from many of the bar's patrons, who are not content with simply a good beer and bitt (a type of crepe with sour cream).

"People who come into this

place really learn something," says Iouguina.

For instance, while notions of Russia conjure opulent images of heavily tasseled, elaborate furniture of the deepest, darkest coloured wood popular in the Czar and Czarina epoch, Iouguina says that minimalism is actually associated with Russia — a concept that Alexei and Alyona were keen to portray.

Having moved from Halifax to Ottawa nearly two years ago, the Yugin family always wanted to open a bar in the vein of the avant-garde art movement.

There was no Russian spot in Ottawa, so Alexei just took the idea and ran with it.

Opened just over a year ago, the bar has grown from an art space serving a wide array of drinks — including what is reputed to be the city's best espresso — Russian and Uzbek fare, yummy desserts all at great (re: cheap) prices, into a much needed music venue for the city.

The bar is small, with a stand-

ing room capacity somewhere around 70 people, which makes for a good size space for bands that can't fill Barrymore's and want an alternative to the limited, smaller venues in the city.

"People in Ottawa are pretty desperate for places to play," says Rolf Klausner. His band, local indie folkies The Acorn, played at the Avant-Garde Bar last October and is quite enthused with the venue.

"The Avant-Garde is awesome, the atmosphere is great," he adds. The stage area is small and only slightly elevated from the rest of the bar.

There is no PA system but Iouguina says there are plans for a fundraiser that will help bring a better sound to the space, making the venue an even better draw for musical acts.

Already though, the Avant-Garde's calendar is quite impressive. Carleton poetry collective In/Words regularly hosts events at the bar, and in November an extremely popular evening with

Buck 65 was hosted there.

While the original concept for the bar didn't include live entertainment, when different artists from around the city approached Alexei, he thought he would give it a try.

The mood is eclectic. The Yugins don't discriminate. In the coming month, the smooth, jazzy sounds of Montreal's Amanda Mabro, a solo electric garage band, a Russian born singer-songwriter and the ever popular DJ Pho of Ottawa Disorganised fame, will all play at Avant-Garde.

In an attempt to be faithful to its moniker, "you will never hear anything mundane here," says Alyona.

So if you're in the market for something a little bit different, tinged with history, culture, foreign beer and snappy cocktail names from mother Russia, you just might want to check out the Avant-Garde Bar.

Just be sure to leave all your notions of what cutting edge really is at the door. □