

PASSPORT

MOSCOW

NOVEMBER | 2006 | ISSUE # 11

www.passportmagazine.ru

MOSCOW REAL ESTATE BOOMING
PARACHUTING A COUNTRY MANAGER INTO MOSCOW?
STANISLAVSKOGO THEATRE RE-OPENS



**NUCLEAR ENERGY
BACK IN FAVOUR**

WHEN A MILLIMETER OR TWO MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE



28

BY JAMES BLAKE

For those of you looking for a treat and something that borders on the surreal, take a trip to Ribniy Pereulok, one of the streets that border the Gostiniy Dvor center in downtown Moscow. An easy golf shot from Red Square, and down a cobblestone alleyway not 50 meters from the parade of BMW's, Audi's, and Mercedes that are trying to find somewhere to park in Birzhevaya Ploshad, there is a doorway, looking every bit the same as all other entrances to Gostiniy Dvor. As one steps inside however, one notices-impeccably dressed mannequins before descending the broad stairway to a wood-paneled interior that is a world away from the milieu outside.

It's a room of arched burgundy colored ceilings with paneled wainscoting around the lower part of the walls, and with dressed timber floors and carpets. Not to mention the leather couches and chairs, brass fittings and subtle lamps that are all from another world and time. Many would pay good money to belong to clubs in London with such surroundings, and every self-respecting university in the world would like its students to read in rooms such as these. But there's more here which alludes to something beyond that world. Stage curtains, antique sewing machines, a grand piano, necktie and collar displays reveal that this is really a tailoring store with fabrics and cutting tables. And finally, if all that isn't enough to stretch your concept of time and place, I can vouch for the fact that there is some first class Indian cuisine to be had there.

This is the world of Mr. Sammy Kotwani, proprietor of the Imperial Tailoring Company. This is possibly Moscow's finest tailor,

and certainly the tailor of choice for many of Moscow's elite, including politicians, businessmen, and media personalities. Imperial is the fruit of Mr. Kotwani's 15-year relationship with style and Moscow.

The consideration exuded by his rooms is no accident, given his mantra of quality customer service. He doesn't want those who come here to feel rushed; he wants them to feel relaxed, comfortable, at ease and desirous of chatting with him about what they want from their clothing. In exchange, the sense of confidence and knowledge that the room radiates comes into play. For Sammy's art is tailoring, and the knowledge he shares with clients comes from the experience of years, and the understanding and patience of one who thinks about the importance

'QUALITY TAKES TIME, CREATES A LASTING IMPRESSION, AND SELLS ITSELF'

of ironing at every stage of the tailoring process, and who knows the difference between a first class fit and a second rate fit is usually a matter of millimeters in just a couple of places.

He says that the customer is not king 'but God' and like a true believer of any religion, he tries to cultivate a relationship with those he considers it his privilege to serve. Sammy can play the role of family or a close friend, someone to turn to in a moment of need, and someone who is more than happy to help out in any way he can. Some of the stories he relates convey his views. One story concerns a client who had purchased a particularly expensive leather jacket from another outlet in town, but found the day after the purchase that the zipper was broken.

In the end he took it back to the outlet and got his money refunded, but with difficulty. Before he did so he called Sammy and asked if he could repair the jacket. 'Of course!' was Sammy's reply. And the cost? 'Nothing.' 'But I didn't buy it from you!' 'It doesn't matter, where you bought it. I have the equipment and facilities here to repair it, and anything I probably could charge is irrelevant to both you and me, but how you look is important to me!'

The story is underlined by the lengths Sammy will go to, to ensure the satisfaction of his clientele. Possibly most legendary is his lifetime guarantee. Should the client gain or lose weight so that there needs to be alterations, it is done free by Sammy and his staff. Every six months all of the suits sold

by Imperial come back for a pressing and dry cleaning, and the stitching and button work are given the once over. And client

care doesn't end there. Recently he managed to bring in a consignment of mangoes from his native India. Recognizing that this fruit is still not that common in Moscow, he thought it would be a nice gesture to send mangoes to all of his clients. Not so that they could get it on their clothing, but just a reminder to them and their families that Sammy Kotwani is thinking of them and sharing some positive *karma*.

Of the more conventional customer service he says:

'People buy an Audi or Mercedes, and expect quality maintenance and to be looked after long after they drive out of the showroom. Why shouldn't they expect such service, long after they walk from my rooms? Besides, this way I can make sure that every-



SAMMY KOTWANI

thing is done properly; that the stitching is impeccable and the linings and trimmings are just right. That the suit looks first class.'

Upon hearing about a recent discussion among some English journalists in which they concluded that Sergei Lavrov, of all Russian politicians, came across best in the western media largely because of his dress sense, Sammy nods with the reassured smile of one who likes to see his clients acknowledged. He speaks enthusiastically of the transformation of Russian fashions in recent years, particularly with men, which he believes are following in the footsteps of the legendarily style-conscious women. He notes that in recent years Russians have become far more discerning about what they wear, in particular the fabrics they choose, and finally the cut.

It's a long way from his early days in Mos-

cow, when he observed that too many Russian men liked to have their sleeves too long. Ever the diplomat, in a way that good tailors need to be, he now attributes the phenomenon to the poor office environments and architecture of the post-Soviet years.

Not a man who goes in for marketing, although one who feels pressure from the big brands, he says he is in some ways in a different business. In most shops, no matter how expensive, they take something off the rack, which is what they have in stock at the time and adjust it to the customer who chooses from what he sees on display. But Sammy Kotwani is one of Moscow's few bespoke tailors, and the time he shares with his clients is not time which starts with something off the rack, nor even a pattern. It starts with the customer, their measurements, their de-

sire for a piece of clothing, and the tailor. It ends not with a door closing or the ringing of the cash register, but somewhere in the future on the far side of many pleasant moments making sure the suit is as close to perfect as can be, for as long as it can be. And Sammy's greatest joy is when a suit, cut by him, inspires a friend or colleague to go to the wearer and ask 'where did you get that made?' **P**

James Blake is a business news presenter on Russia Today TV, the English language satellite TV channel launched by RIA-Novosti last year. It is available to Moscow subscribers of NTV Plus and Kosmos TV.