

Proliv: Over the Channel... to Odessa

The man behind the Jean-Jacques and John Donne chains has gone bohemian

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Installation entitled “Seagull/Swallow” (Chaika-Lastochka) by Alexander Brodsky **Proliv**

Mitya Borisov, the restaurateur best known for the now ubiquitous chains Jean-Jacques and John Donne, has gone sharply left-field with his new venture Proliv, which he hopes will become a new magnet for Moscow’s intelligentsia.

Located right between the respective flagship restaurants of the above-mentioned chains on Nikitsky Bulvar, the name “Proliv” is an inside joke, as it means “channel” in Russian, while Jean Jacques and John Donne represent, respectively, France and Great Britain.

The restaurant’s main attraction is an installation by the Russian artist and architect Alexander Brodsky, known for his works of paper architecture. Brodsky came up

with the idea of an installation entitled “Seagull/Swallow” (Chaika-Lastochka) several years ago and it turned out that the space at the back of the restaurant fits his idea perfectly.

The installation resembles an open-air bar on a seashore somewhere. There’s a small table where visitors can have a drink, while looking around Mitya Borisov’s and listening to the sound of the sea and the screeches of seagulls. The soundtrack for the installation was made by Leonid Fyodorov, musician and leader of Auktsyon, a cult Russian alternative rock band from St. Petersburg.

The interior was designed by Mitya Borisov himself, with participation from Brodsky, and can be best defined as “shabby chic,” with decor reminiscent of a pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg apartment. Green paint is flaking on the walls, and the guests can glimpse their reflections in a double row of mirrors.

The crowd is what it has become fashionable to call the “creative class”: writers, actors, journalists, artists and the like. Borisov and Brodsky previously collaborated at now-defunct restaurants Ulitsa O.G.I. and Apshu, both very popular during the early 2000s.

Alexei Goribol, a celebrity piano player, is responsible for the music at Proliv, which is played on a vinyl record player. Currently, it’s mostly classical and neoclassical music.

Proliv’s chef is Nikolai Fedotov, who previously dished up Scandinavian food at wine bar Enebaer. Here, Odessa’s Ashkenazi cuisine is a major influence. Start with one of the appetizers, which taste like something from your grandma’s kitchen: “caviar” made of baked eggplant for 420 rubles (\$7) or forshmak, Jewish herring salad (250 rubles).

Some of the mains are fairly innovative, like the excellent stewed beef with a side of flavored barley (520 rubles) or the tasty pelmeni, traditional Russian dumplings with unorthodox fillings of guinea fowl (350 rubles) or shrimp (620 rubles). Finish your meal with one of the desserts, like almond cake with red orange (260 rubles) or chocolate mousse with salt and caramel sauce (320 rubles).

Alexei Zimin, a cult figure on Moscow’s culinary scene, has been drafted in to create a series of homemade vodka infusions, which are ideal chasers. Zimin, the former chef at Ragout and editor-in-chief of Afisha Eda magazine, has produced some rare concoctions for Proliv, like coffee and lemon or strawberry and basil (from 150 rubles). Looking to the future, Proliv’s owners promise regular tastings by guest chefs: Don’t forget to check the restaurant’s website for dates and details.

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