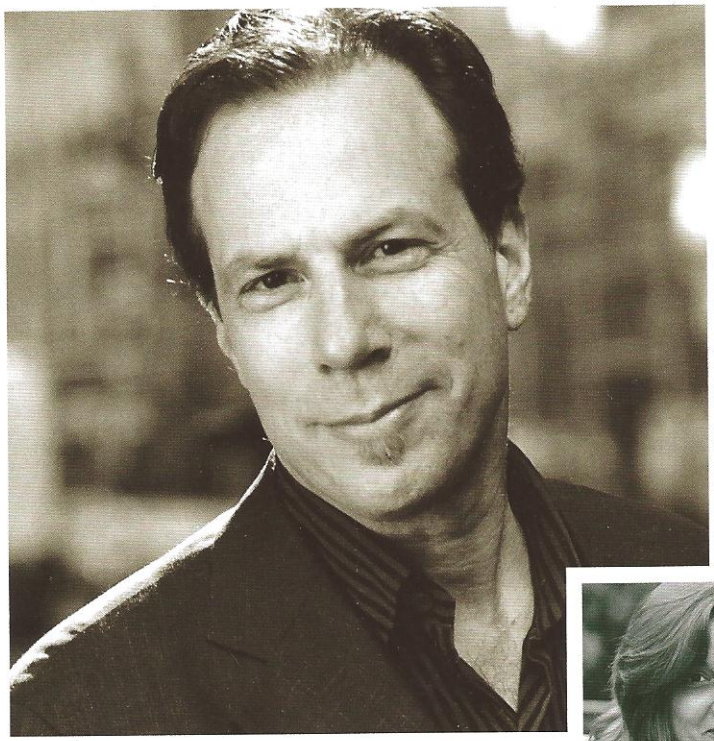
Contributors



{WRITER}

Steven Beschloss

Steven Beschloss (**"Moscow's Literary Life,"** page 136) writes about culture, cities and international affairs. An award-winning journalist and filmmaker, he is a co-author of the recently published *Adrift: Charting Our Course Back to a Great Nation*. His writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *The New Republic* and *National Geographic Traveler*. His fiction and non-fiction film work, including *The Miracle*, shot in St. Petersburg, has been seen in more than 20 countries and translated into more than a dozen languages. Find out more at *www.stevenbeschloss.com*.

{PHOTOGRAPHER}

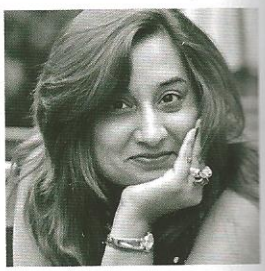
Art Streiber

Art Streiber (**"Natural Beauty,"** page 95) is a Los Angeles–based photographer specialising in reportage, travel, portrait and entertainment photography. His work has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Wired* and *Rolling Stone*. He has lectured at the International Center of Photography, and his photos have been lauded by industry professionals. He has been named to *American Photo Magazine*'s list of "The 100 Most Important People in Photography," and he has received the Pacific Design Center's "Star of Design" Award for Photography.

{PHOTOGRAPHER}

Lauryn Ishak

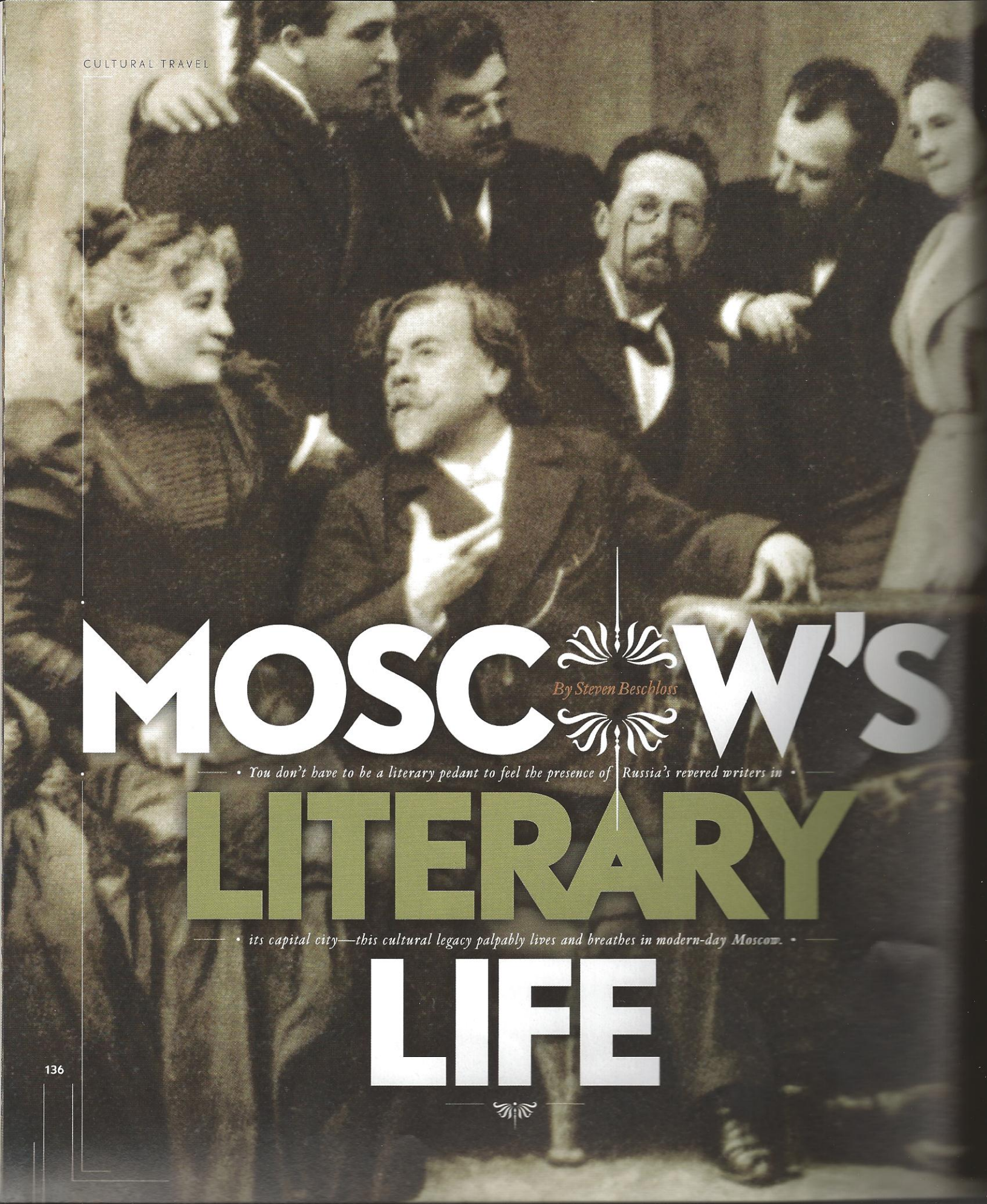
Lauryn Ishak (**"Shopping Singapore,"** page 74) has always loved travelling. Her formative years were spent in Germany, Indonesia, Hong Kong, New York and Singapore, where she is now based. For this assignment, Ishak photographed shopping establishments ranging from well-known brands to emerging home-grown talents. "Singapore is a city where change is a constant," she says. "It has been especially exciting to see the growing diversity in the arts, fashion and dining." Her photographs have appeared in publications such as *The New York Times* and *Travel + Leisure*.



{WRITER}

Monica Bhide

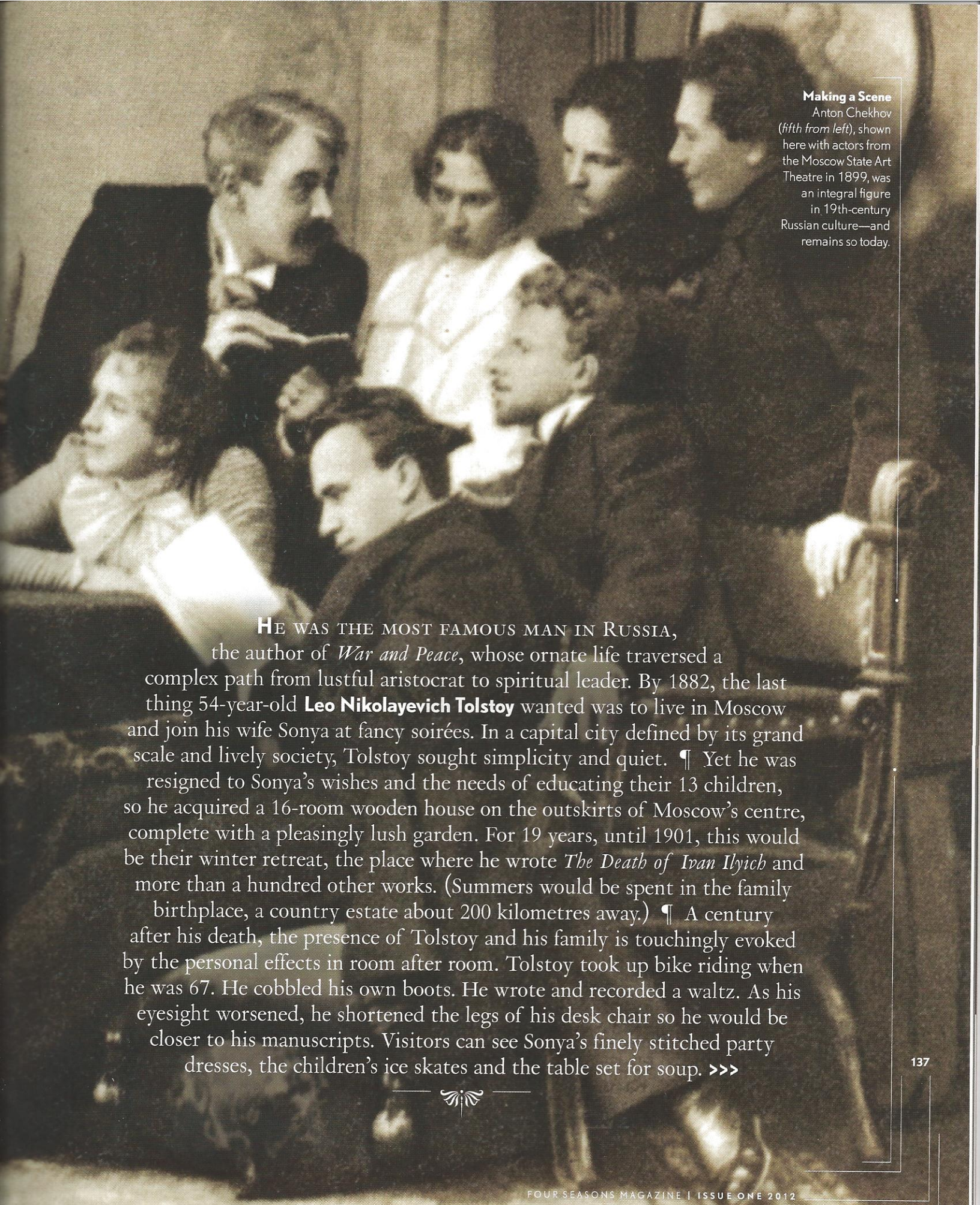
Monica Bhide (**"Seven Seasonings,"** page 112) writes about how food and culture affect our lives for global publications, including *Food & Wine*, *The New York Times*, *Bon Appétit*, *Saveur* and *Christian Science Monitor*. She is a frequent contributor to public radio's *Kitchen Window*, and her food essays have been included in *Best Food Writing* anthologies (2005, 2009 and 2010). She has published three cookbooks. Her newest book, *In Conversation With Exceptional Women*, was published last December.



MOSCOW'S LITERARY LIFE

By Steven Beschloss

You don't have to be a literary pedant to feel the presence of Russia's revered writers in its capital city—this cultural legacy palpably lives and breathes in modern-day Moscow.



Making a Scene
Anton Chekhov (*fifth from left*), shown here with actors from the Moscow State Art Theatre in 1899, was an integral figure in 19th-century Russian culture—and remains so today.

HE WAS THE MOST FAMOUS MAN IN RUSSIA, the author of *War and Peace*, whose ornate life traversed a complex path from lustful aristocrat to spiritual leader. By 1882, the last thing 54-year-old **Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy** wanted was to live in Moscow and join his wife Sonya at fancy soirées. In a capital city defined by its grand scale and lively society, Tolstoy sought simplicity and quiet. ¶ Yet he was resigned to Sonya's wishes and the needs of educating their 13 children, so he acquired a 16-room wooden house on the outskirts of Moscow's centre, complete with a pleasingly lush garden. For 19 years, until 1901, this would be their winter retreat, the place where he wrote *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and more than a hundred other works. (Summers would be spent in the family birthplace, a country estate about 200 kilometres away.) ¶ A century after his death, the presence of Tolstoy and his family is touchingly evoked by the personal effects in room after room. Tolstoy took up bike riding when he was 67. He cobbled his own boots. He wrote and recorded a waltz. As his eyesight worsened, he shortened the legs of his desk chair so he would be closer to his manuscripts. Visitors can see Sonya's finely stitched party dresses, the children's ice skates and the table set for soup. **>>>**

It's hard to overestimate Tolstoy's impact in Russia. As biographer and translator Rosamund Bartlett notes, his stature exceeded that of the tsar at the end of the 19th century. Extraordinary, indeed.

Yet he is not alone among revered Russian writers with outsized roles in the everyday life of Moscow in the pre-Bolshevik period, during the Soviet era and today. Think Pushkin, Chekhov, Bulgakov, Gorky, Mayakovsky and Pasternak, to name a few. They lived here, walked the city's streets, captured it in prose and verse—often blurring the line for Muscovites between the real Moscow and the imagined.

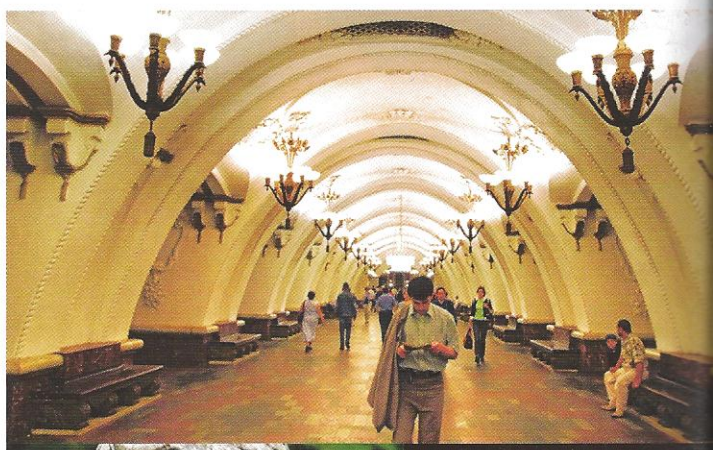
This literary heritage "is part of the fabric," says Bartlett, the British-born author of *Literary Russia*, an Anton Chekhov biography called *Chekhov* and the new, highly praised *Tolstoy: A Russian Life*. "The cultural legacy is the best thing the country has ever produced." And what about Moscow? "This is a city I've loved passionately."

Stroll the streets, ride the metro, visit the homes and museums, and it's hard to miss the literary influence. Consider Alexander Pushkin, born in Moscow in 1799, who is considered the country's greatest poet and father of modern Russian literature with the infusion of everyday speech. Far from forgotten, he's remembered in Pushkin Square, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Pushkin statues, Pushkinskaya (the underground metro station), Pushkin Cinema and Cafe Pushkin. "People place such a value on these writers," says Michael Beckelhimer, an American documentary filmmaker completing *Pushkin Is Our Everything* in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Even today, "when people are describing the weather or nature, they often are quoting Pushkin."

You can visit Pushkin's turquoise home on the Old Arbat, a bohemian, pedestrian-only street that is just a short walk from Red Square and a lively focal point for street artists and musicians, souvenirs and antiques. While he and his new 18-year-old bride Natalya Goncharova lived in the five-room, second-storey apartment only for several months in 1831, this was where he described himself as happy and reborn. They soon left for St. Petersburg—where he was later killed in a duel after challenging a Frenchman who openly pursued his wife.

Up along the city's main commercial street, Tverskaya, Muscovites often rely on Pushkin's monument at Pushkinskaya Ploschad (Pushkin Square) as their meeting place. The statue, standing on a tall pedestal, was originally unveiled in 1880 in a three-day public event, with Fyodor Dostoevsky among the honorees who laid a wreath at its foot.

To experience those times in Moscow, visitors today can stop in at the popular Cafe Pushkin, just around the corner on Tverskoi Boulevard. Opened a decade ago, Cafe Pushkin is styled after a 19th-century nobleman's mansion and is renowned for its tasty Russian fare and service that's reminiscent of the pre-Bolshevik



clockwise from right: **L**eo Tolstoy, one of the most influential figures in Russia in the late 19th century; statues of literary luminaries, such as this portrayal of Pushkin, can be seen around Moscow; a modern metro passenger catches up on his reading at Arbatskaya Station.

Plan Your *Visit*

Want to follow in the footsteps of Russia's famous literary figures? These are the sites to see around Moscow.

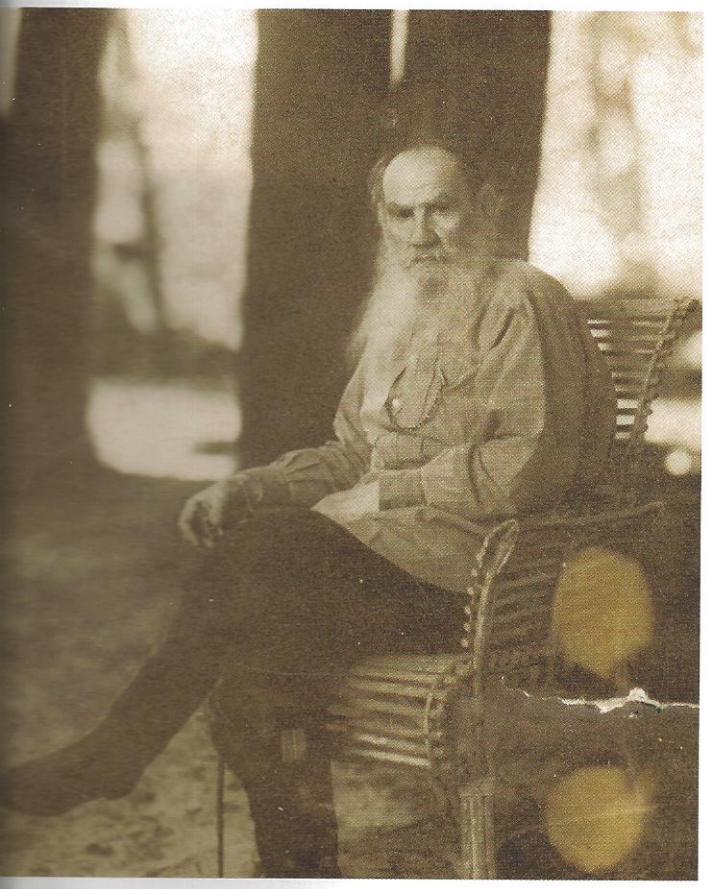
IN MOSCOW

• Tolstoy House-Museum
Reflects the home as it appeared in the 1890s, with around 6,000 objects that belonged to the family, making this one of the most interesting and authentic house museums in Moscow. Don't miss the piano played by Rachmaninoff and Rimsky-Korsakov. *Ulitsa Lva Tolstogo Dom 21; metro: Park Kultury; 7 499/246 9444; www.tolstoymuseum.ru*

• Pushkin House-Museum
Items on display include period furnishings, portraits and manuscripts. Also look for the statue across the street, which depicts Pushkin and his wife. *Ulitsa Arbat 53; metro: Smolenskaya; 7 499/241 9293; www.pushkinmuseum.ru*

• Cafe Pushkin
Dine on caviar appetisers, soups, homemade baked pies or dishes such as quail stuffed with duck in the first-floor "pharmacy" or the second-floor "library." *Tverskoi Boulevard 26A; metro: Tverskaya; 7 495/739 0033; www.cafe-pushkin.ru*

• Chekhov House-Museum
Period and reproduction furniture, paintings, photographs, and manuscripts offer a sense of the writer's time here. *Ulitsa Sadovaya Kudrinskaya 6; metro: Barrikadnaya; 7 495/291 6154*



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era, with ruffled shirts and close attention. The first floor, open 24 hours a day and a magnet for the late-night club crowd nursing a hangover, is patterned on a pharmacy, while the second floor serves more elaborate meals in an elegant library room decorated with telescopes, globes and shelves lined with faded leather books.

Only minutes away, along the Sadovaya (or garden) Ring, a sign still hangs on the door to this famous resident's two-storey red home: Dr. A.P. Chekhov. Inside, where the revered story writer, playwright and practising doctor lived with his parents, sister and younger brother from 1886 to 1890, visitors can see his consulting room and study, bedroom, dining room, and ornate family salon. In addition to exhibits of playbills and original manuscripts from such masterworks as *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*, the walls are adorned with photographs of Chekhov with Tolstoy, whom he revered, and Maxim Gorky.

"People place such a value on these writers," says Michael Beckelhimer, a documentary filmmaker completing *Pushkin Is Our Everything* in Moscow and St. Petersburg. "When people are describing the weather or nature, they often are quoting Pushkin."

Perhaps no home showcases the contradictory forces that swept up the lives of honoured Russian writers more than the nearby Art Nouveau mansion of Gorky, originally built for Russian banker and arts patron Stepan Ryabushinsky. With its stained-glass windows, carved door frames, mosaic frieze of irises and sculpted limestone staircase, it's no wonder that this yellow brick Moscow landmark is recommended by author Bartlett, translator Arch Tait and Lyudmila Ulitskaya, a Moscow novelist and Russian Booker Prize winner whose recent works include *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* and published correspondence with jailed tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Yet Gorky's years there provide insight into the ways that Josef Stalin and the Soviet regime championed writers for their own propagandist purposes. Stalin is said to have personally chosen this house as a gift to Gorky, who was closely associated with Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution, when he returned to Russia from Italy in 1931. Despite declines in both his health and his literary skill, Gorky was selected as president of the Union of Writers and made a chief proponent of Socialist Realism; while countless other writers faced suppression, arrest and worse, he was trumpeted to the masses, with parks, factories, schools, theatres and even Moscow's main Tverskaya Street named after him. (Gorky Street changed back to Tverskaya after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.) The house became a frequent

Gorky Museum (Ryabushinsky House)
...ee gorgeous Art ...uveau décor, ...otos and the ...thor's library. ...itsa Malaya ...itskaya 6/2; ...etro: Pushkinskaya / Arbatskaya; ...495/690 5130

Central House of ...riters Restaurant (...entralny Dom ...erator)
...our an elegant ...eal while possibly ...bbing elbows with ...ssian authors. ...itsa Povarskaya 50; ...etro: Barrikadnaya; ...495/291 1515; ...w.cdlrestaurant.ru

• Cafe Margarita
An intimate, casual and fun spot to grab a drink and a snack, with live folk or jazz music in the evenings. *Ulitsa Malaya Bronnaya 28; metro: Mayakovskaya; 7 495/699 6534; www.cafe-margarita.ru*

• Mayakovsy Museum
Poignant and imaginative displays feature archival documents, manuscripts and paintings. *Lyubansky Proyezd 3/6; metro: Lubyanka; 7 495/928 2569; www.mayakovsky.info*

NEAR MOSCOW

• Pasternak's Dacha Museum
Opened to honour the writer's centenary in 1990, this museum about 50 kilometres (30 miles) southwest of Moscow displays Pasternak's library, his collection of ceramics and paintings by his father. The writer is buried with his family in the cemetery next to the village church nearby. *Ulitsa Pavlenko 3, Peredelkino; transport: accessible by commuter train from Moscow's Kievsky Station; 7 495/934 5175*

destination for informal meetings of writers mixed with Stalin's NKVD secret police—and for Gorky, it became a veritable prison, before his death (likely murder) in 1936.

That same contradictory experience can be felt over a fine dinner at the nearby Central House of Writers Restaurant. Housed in an 1890s mansion with ornate wood panelling and a massive chandelier, this has been for more than 70 years the elite club for Russian writers. While the public today savours such exquisite Russian dishes as grilled venison or pelmeny stuffed with smoked duck, they may also get a feel for the atmosphere dating back to the 1930s, when NKVD (and later KGB) head Lavrenti Beria and Stalin were occasional visitors.

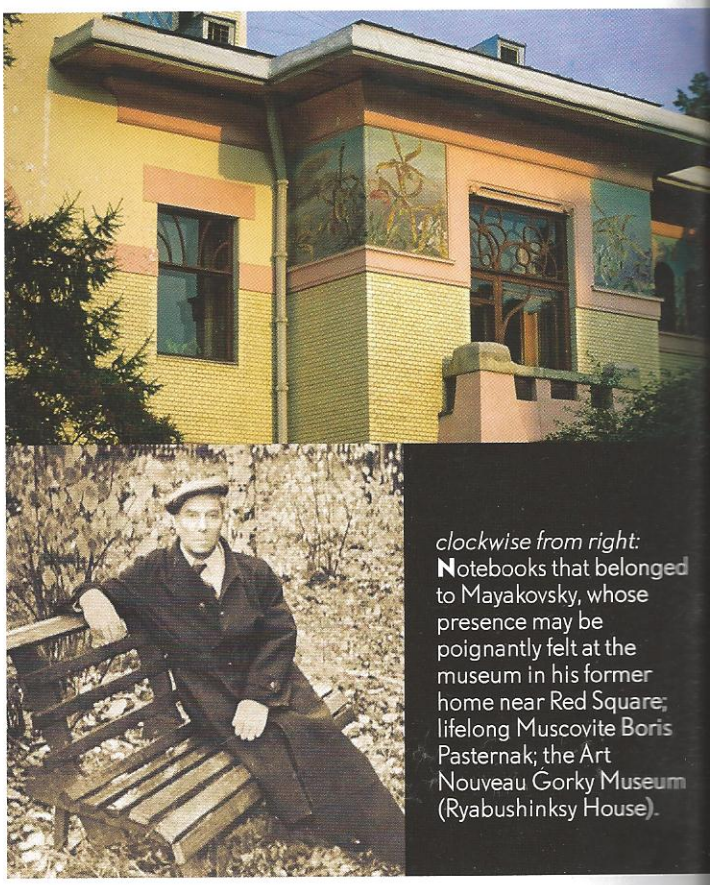
This, too, is the literary heritage that influences the reality of contemporary Russian writers. As translator Tait notes, "Russian writers and poets who ignore social issues are often regarded as renegades shirking their duty." Tait's translations have included Ulitskaya's *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* and several books of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered. "Writers continue to have a strong social conscience," Tait says, "and to write about the big problems of life and social justice."

For her part, Ulitskaya, trained in genetics and biochemistry at Moscow State University, acknowledges the influence of her Russian predecessors. "Maybe I use an outdated and a bit more complicated language than my reader would prefer," she says, "but I suppose I do it subconsciously, only because my way of thinking—and explaining myself—is overfilled with linguistic and intellectual clichés created by the great Russian literature of the 19th century." As for her relationship with Moscow? The self-described "authentic Muscovite," despite being born in the Ural Mountains, admits that this, too, is complicated, perhaps best understood when she travels: "There are other cities where I feel more comfortable, but I should confess that wherever I go, after one month I feel homesick, and want to return to Moscow."

Perhaps these contradictory emotions are the writer's plight, often enriching the dramatic depth of their work, but there's little doubt that Russian writers tending to their craft during the Soviet era faced especially intense pressure to give voice to their perceptions. Mikhail Bulgakov opens his satiric and surreal masterpiece *The Master and Margarita* in Patriarch's Ponds, the elegant neighbourhood where he lived, with the Devil meeting a Moscow literary editor and his poet friend.

Today you find swans in the summer and ice-skaters in winter, a peaceful setting with cafés, boutiques and embassies. But in 1929, Bulgakov was suffering bans by the authorities of all his plays and, facing personal crisis, burned early drafts of *The Master and Margarita*. Devotees of the book, which was finally published in Russia in 1966 (a quarter-century after its author's death), can be found nightly in Patriarch's Ponds at Cafe Margarita, a hearty mix of Bulgakov-inspired murals and live music.

While Vladimir Mayakovsky also wrote about the Devil, it



clockwise from right: Notebooks that belonged to Mayakovsky, whose presence may be poignantly felt at the museum in his former home near Red Square; lifelong Muscovite Boris Pasternak; the Art Nouveau Gorky Museum (Ryabushinksy House).

Today's *Talent*

The bigger the talent, the bigger the prize—each year, top Russian authors enjoy a prestigious and lucrative award.

Tolstoy, Chekhov, Pushkin and the like may be literary giants of the past, but literature remains a highly prized staple of Russian culture. So much so that the Russian government and the country's oil and commodities oligarchs have banded together to encourage its creation and recognise talent with a literary award known as the Bolshaya Kniga. The Big Book Award, as the name translates to English, is the second-largest literary award after the Nobel Prize for Literature, with the current first prize valued at 3 million rubles (around $95,000). The award ceremony is held each November at the Russian National Library's Pashkov House in Moscow.

2011 WINNERS

• First Prize (3 million rubles)
Mikhail Shishkin, *Pismovnik*, or *Letter-Book*
A series of letters exchanged between star-crossed lovers is the focus of this epistolary novel. Shishkin, a former Moscow teacher and journalist, has four novels to his name. *The Taking of Izmail* (2000) won the Russian Booker Prize and *Maiden Hair* (2005) was awarded the National Bestseller Prize. Shishkin's books have been published in 14 languages.

Photography (clockwise from top left) Lonely Planet Images/Alamy, ©RIA Novosti/Alamy, ©ITAR-TASS Photo Agency/Alamy

Second Prize (1.5 million rubles) **Vladimir Sorokin, *The Blizzard*** Chronicles the travel experiences of a doctor treating those with Bolivian hemorrhagic fever during a blizzard. Sorokin is also author of *Day of the Oprichnik*.

Third Prize (1 million rubles) **Dmitry Bykov, *Ostromov, or The Sorcerer's Apprentice*** A tale of the freemasons in St. Petersburg in the 1920s. The author also won the National Bestseller Award in 2006 for *Boris Pasternak*.

2010 WINNERS

• First Prize (3 million rubles) **Pavel Basinsky, *Leo Tolstoy: Flight From Paradise*** Reconstructs Tolstoy's secret escape from Yasnaya Polyana and other key scenes from his life. Basinsky, also a literary critic, is the cultural editor of *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*. His other works include *Maxim Gorky: Myth and Biography* and *A Russian Romance, or The Life and Adventures of John Polovinkin*.

• Second Prize (1.5 million rubles) **Alexander Ilichevsky, *The Persian*** An author returns to find a troubling picture in his native home by the Caspian Sea.

• Third Prize (1 million rubles) **Victor Pelevin, *T*** Historical and metaphysical action novel about a nobleman named Count T, who is in some aspects based on Tolstoy.

may be more accurate to say that the Devil found him. In 1919, the Futurist poet and exuberant revolutionary moved to a communal flat near Red Square and the Kremlin. He became Russia's most famous living poet. Yet, increasingly conflicted by political restrictions and personal troubles, the larger-than-life Mayakovsky shot himself in 1930.

The four-storey Mayakovsky Museum, which opened in 1989 in the original building that housed the flat, strikingly celebrates his iconoclastic life. Taking its lead from Constructivism and the poet's bold, anarchic impulses, the first three floors are jammed at odd angles with dramatic allusions to his life: agitprop posters and manuscripts, old boots and cracked mirrors, typewriters and cannonballs. The small room on the fourth floor, into which he first moved and where he met his ultimate fate, offers a more realistic depiction. (Visitors will notice that the building's neighbours at Lubyanka Square include the KGB headquarters and Detsky Mir, Russia's largest children's toy store.)

"Maybe I use a bit more complicated language than my reader would prefer," says novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya, "but I suppose I do it subconsciously, because my way of thinking is overfilled with linguistic and intellectual clichés created by the great Russian literature of the 19th century."

For a quieter portrayal of a beloved writer's life, Boris Pasternak's dacha in the Moscow countryside can be visited with a short trip by train or car. In an area known as Peredelkino, where many Soviet writers had dachas, you can see Pasternak's charming wood house, his austere study and the desks where he completed *Doctor Zhivago*. While Pasternak gained worldwide acclaim and a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958 after *Zhivago*'s publication abroad, the book was banned in the Soviet Union and he was barred from accepting his prize. Visitors will find a bittersweet photo of the author raising his glass to toast on the day he was meant to be in Oslo.

Half a century after his death in 1960—which was five years before the release of the film of his novel—this lifelong Muscovite's enduring reputation is secure. While his lyrical poetry may be less known outside Russia, his love for Moscow and his commitment to writing can be found in one stanza of his poem "Waves":

I will hear you, Moscow
crawling, smoking, growing, building,
will hear and put it into words 4S

Steven Beschloss *is a writer, filmmaker and former Moscow resident.*