



Editor's update

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GRIEPENTROG

"From Russia with love!" Whoever coined that phrase must have met some of the same wonderful people I met on my recent two-week adventure.

As a participant in a People-to-People Exchange Program, I was joined by 15 other Home Economists in Business to visit four Soviet cities: Moscow, Leningrad, Tbilisi and Baku. We met with professional counterparts in each city, with a goal of bridging the gap between the cultures, and I must say we were successful on an individual basis in achieving that end.

I can't condense my exciting two weeks of experiences into this small amount of space, so I'll share my sewing-related adventures in two segments: this month, a visit to a woman's magazine; next month, fabric shopping in the Soviet Union.

A visit to Rabotneetsa

Our group had the privilege of spending an entire morning with the editorial staff of the Soviet publication, РАБОТНИЦА, translated to "Rabotneetsa." Equivalent to our Family Circle magazine, Rabotneetsa touts itself as the 75-year-old "magazine for the working woman," though it bares no resemblance to the American publication entitled Working Woman; others I spoke with said the primary readers are homemakers.

Selling for only 25 kopecks (25 cents), the Moscow-based newsprint publication reaches nearly 21 million readers each month, offering 48 pages of information for solving problems of the home. And since Rabotneetsa is a state-owned publication, typical of all Soviet magazines and newspapers, it includes no advertising.

Popular editorial topics include sewing, cooking, interior design, family relationships and questions

and answers to the more than 170,000 reader letters the publication receives each year. My special interest was sewing and fashion coverage, and we were able to meet with the needlework editor, the interior design editor and one freelance designer (Lubov Axionova), who develops most of the sewing projects featured in the magazine. The highlight of my entire visit was a fashion show by Axionova and students of a dressmaking class she teaches, showing garments they had created and sewn.

Most Russian women indulge in the hobbies of sewing and needlework out of necessity, since durable consumer goods are scarce. And because fabrics are also somewhat scarce, they depend on recycling to make the most of their creative efforts. Rabotneetsa encourages this, offering an array of articles focused on fabric recycling. And Axionova made the results of recycling efforts creatively clear in her fashion show, with a beautiful pleated black leather jacket made from a discarded sofa! Another of her dresses began life as a few shawls, and yet another as a winter blanket.

Necessity: The mother of invention

The Soviet sewing philosophy: "Do with what you have, but do it creatively." This was apparent throughout my trip. For example, I saw decorative garments made by piecing together leftover fabrics—not in the American sense of patchworking, but with carefully thought out seaming, appliques and color blocking techniques; garment designs dictat-

ed by the quantity of fabric available; the necessary use of multiple fabrics in single garments as a rule rather than an exception; and embellishment often achieved with handwork to tie diverse fabrics together for a unified look.

Most sewing is done without benefit of commercial patterns, and our morning with Axionova certainly proved it: To illustrate her methods of designing and sewing, she sought out a volunteer from our group (I was voted unanimously due to my sewing-related career), offered me a choice of fabric (I selected a pink floral Pakistani design), measured me

using only a torn piece of eyelet trim, then questioned me (through our interpreter) about styling preferences. Within an hour, she returned with a dress that fit me perfectly—complete with finished seams and a chiffon roll-hemmed scarf to accent the waistline.

While checking the dress for fit, Axionova noticed a bit of extra room in the shoulders and promptly removed 1"-thick Velcro®-attached shoulder pads from her sweater to trade for my thinner ones—true evidence that fashion crosses many cultures!

My dress was sewn on a 25-year-old German-made sewing machine and an old industrial-looking serger, using an assortment of thread colors—probably whatever was available. The whole experience—from fabric to sewing to finished design—was fascinating, and I'm thrilled with my prized souvenir.

Axionova's techniques are admired and sought-after in the Soviet Union, prompting her to write one of the few Soviet sewing books. She also offers mail-order designs, a godsend to Russian women so hungry for sewing information, and Rabotneetsa prides itself on being the first journal to teach her unique dressmaking methods.

Of a different yarn

Many of the knitting projects I saw combined several yarn types into a

single garment, giving the look of a well-planned artistic design, rather than one born of shortages.

The use-what-you-have philosophy permeates the home-dec department as well. For example, Rabotneetsa offers readers advice on how to make a bedroom comfortable for children who must share a room, how to change bedroom decor as the child grows up and ways to use living space creatively since it's such a premium in Russia. One issue featured an article on how to decorate a kitchen using colorful ashtrays; another gave instructions for making simple furniture.

Definitely not a "fantasy" or dream publication, Rabotneetsa seems to cut to the heart of the real needs of Soviet homemakers, whether in meal planning or sewn fashions.

Thinking positive

We saw little waste of anything in the Soviet Union—from food to fabric. The scarcity of goods makes everything precious, and using what you have is inbred in Soviet homemakers, a theory to which Americans should perhaps take note.

The people I met at Rabotneetsa were warm and friendly, and like most Soviets with whom I interacted, more than eager to learn about the American ways. I can't say who was more curious about whom! We spoke of so many more things than I can mention here, and though we didn't speak each other's language, it didn't seem to matter. We communicated well—people everywhere share common concerns. □

CREDIT CHECK

For credit information about fabrics and accessories featured in the magazine, refer to our new "Credits" section. Look for a reference of this new section in each issue's Table of Contents.

THE finished product fits like a dream, and Lubov Axionova anxiously awaits perusing her copies of SEW NEWS.



MEASURING me with the actual fabric assured a perfect fit.

LUBOV Axionova works against time to make my dress.



Rabotneetsa Magazine