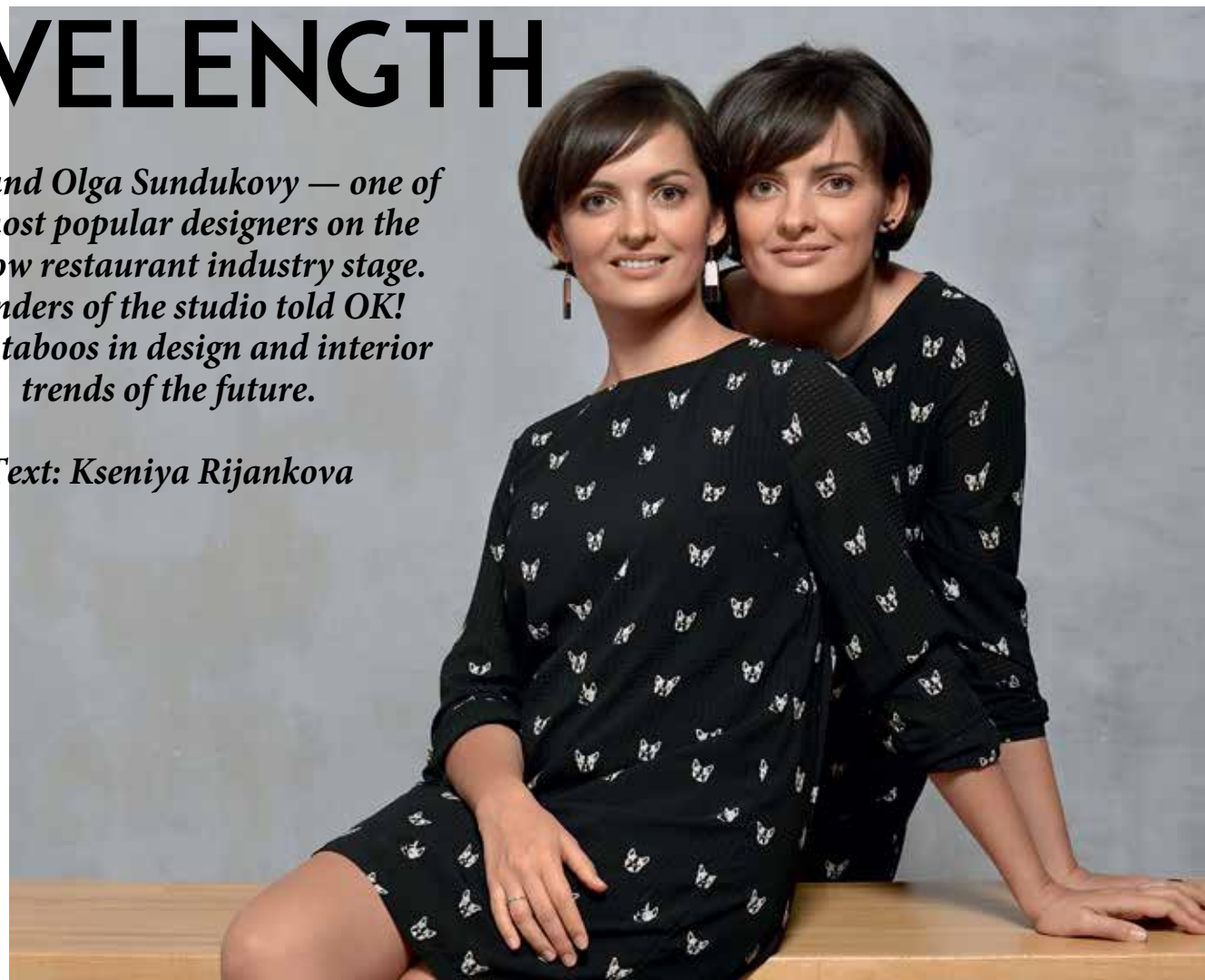


ON THE SAME

WAVELENGTH

Irina and Olga Sundukovy — one of the most popular designers on the Moscow restaurant industry stage. Founders of the studio told OK! about taboos in design and interior trends of the future.

Text: Kseniya Rijankova



A project for Russian cuisine restaurant in Dubai



Moroccan arch in "Tagine" restaurant

«CONTEMPORARY ART HAS BECOME MORE INTERACTIVE, TREND WILL BE REFLECTED IN INTERIOR DESIGN FOR RESTAURANTS»

DESIGN STUDIO
SUNDUKOVY SISTERS
Opening in 2004, Sundukovy Sisters has grown to be one of the leading hospitality design practices in Russia with projects for the most famous restaurateurs in Moscow - Arkadiy Novikov, Alexander Rappaport, Uilliam Lamberti, Alexander Oganezov. Since 2013, the sisters have started to work on the international stage with projects in Europe, USA, Asia and Australia.



The space with shared table in "Syrovarnya" restaurant

Interior design project for "Salumeria" restaurant

Nothing fashion steps off the catwalks of Paris, London and Rome. But who's setting the pace in restaurant interior design? Which cities are the trend-setters?

Olga: Wow, that's a good question! New York.. London... Paris... they're all at the frontiers of design.. so far so, that it would be poor taste for them to follow trends themselves. They've moved on from the mere pursuit of fashion – these are metropolises which put the premium on original design interior solutions which retain their relevance for at least five to ten years. Cities which still haven't hit the mature design development stage depend more on trends to set the scene.

Cities, you mean... like Moscow?

Irina: It's true – Moscow still hasn't found its own style. Fortunately we've managed to kiss the overblown, grotesque and pointless 2000s goodbye! Even so, 'photo-copying' successful restaurant concepts is, regrettably, still a popular approach. My sister and I are quite often approached by would-be clients, who simply want us to clone one of our own restaurant interiors which is doing well. Our reply is always that we don't copy other projects – not even our own ones. Of course, we'd love to design something new which is just as great – but not a straight copy. It's great when people recognise

our work – but our personal style comes over different in each separate new project we do.

What's the profile of your dream clients?

Olga: They come to us with a superb gastronomic concept, but without any pre-conceived ideas of what the final restaurant is going to look like. If you really mean a dream client, then they'd arrive with the words "I have no clue what kind of interior the restaurant needs – but what I most want, is that it's designed by you!" (*laughs*) Our best work of all comes from situations when the client gives us carte-blanche on the entire project.

Would you yourselves leave a restaurant - simply because you disliked the interiors?

Olga: Definitely! We can't tolerate time spent in appallingly bad-taste places. Although my sister and I are usually impressed and appalled by exactly the same things in a design. Probably that's a business's prerogative? (*laughs*) As visitors to restaurants ourselves - of course, the most important thing is way the food is served. So if an eatery's interiors aren't 100% to our taste, but are still what one could call 'acceptable', we'll stick it out... in order to enjoy the food.

Do you remember the first restaurant which you were asked to design?

Irina: Of course we remember! It was the first café in the Khachapuri chain – the one on Ukrainsky Boulevard – and a big thank-you to

Tatiana Melnikova, who gave us the chance. It was Tatiana who suggested that a café serving ethnic Georgian food didn't have to be decked-out ethnic-style – but like an urban café instead. We went on to work on the idea that it had somehow evolved naturally, without any designers at all – yet without the slightest excess detail. It was a tough assignment, but great fun to do – and the whole thing worked out beautifully.

From that time on you've established a great track record. What are the factors you're looking for in a project, that tempt you to take it on?

Irina: When it comes to restaurants, the cuisine's the deciding factor. The more exciting and exotic the cuisine is, the more inspiration it gives us for the design concept. The location and the clientele are important, too. After all, it's the guests who are going to their seal of approval on our work, in the final analysis.

Olga: There have also been a few cases where we were doubtful about the location, but still took the assignment on. One example is Brisket BBQ – a joint project between Arkady Novikov and Ferma-Burger founders Fyodor Tardatyan and Maxim Livsi. The guys went all the way to a kitchen in Texas themselves – to soak-up all the secrets and insider info that's made Brisket into a top-end, delicious project. The concept was actually so alluring that we wanted in on it, no matter what!

These days we're seeing lots of restaurants serving different international cuisines, decked-out with ethnic interiors. Has this transformed style ideas?

Irina: Ethnic style is usually deployed to reflect the ethos of a country or region. It's getting so that things are not so clear-cut as before. People are travelling more than they used to – so what's the point of offering them a copy, when they can have the real thing? For one of our latest ethnic projects – Tagine, a contemporary Moroccan restaurant – we immediately decided that it wasn't going to be a collection of tourist tat. The result is Morocco as seen through European eyes. Sure, we've used carved items and brass elements, actual tagines, and arches in our design – but they express a contemporary interpretation of Morocco, and aren't at crossed purposes with each other.

I loved the kind of 'orphan chic' that you achieved in your designs for Salumeria – one of your latest new restaurant projects.

Irina: For us it's really important that there's a stripped-down concept that be jotted down in just two or three words. Salumeria is an Italian deli and restaurant, at Patriarch's Ponds. We worked out to do something away from the

trends, without citing anything, and without new-fangled whim-of-the-moment ideas. Our brief was to create the atmosphere of a place which seemed as though it had always been there. That led on to the idea of premises which had been renovated with new ideas over time. The result is an airy venue with some outrageous elements – a golden oven, and painted Sicilian urinals – but our pride and joy has been Moscow's first restaurant drinking-fountain. On the lower floor we placed one of the contact tables right in the middle of the kitchen – putting the guests there right at the epicentre of the culinary process.

'Contact table' – that's a design idea brought in from Europe...

Olga: Yes – it's a response against the barriers which exist in modern society. The popularity of online social media has made real-life contact rarer and rarer – people really suffer from the lack of it. It used to be that the bar was the main communication location in restaurants, but now it's only relevant to bar stories. In culinary restaurants this function is fulfilled by the common table, where you can exchange a few words with fellow guests. Even if you arrive entirely on your own, you can take a seat at the common table, and feel completely at ease.

The geographic coverage of your projects is pretty broad – Russia, Europe, the USA...

Irina: Sure, and while we're doing restaurants and hotels in Europe right now, we're also looking eastwards. We've taken two projects in Dubai – an interesting and fast-developing market. Of course, there's a lot there that's over the top. Not even mentioning the cliches, Dubai is costly and expensive. Just like here, we go for a restrained yet creative style. Our first restaurant there is a beach outlet, serving Russian cuisine. The interior is laid-out entirely in white, and we've completely avoided any low-end tripe like balalaikas or matrioshkas. Instead we've gone for decorating the palm-trunks in birch-bark. Our second Dubai project is a seafood restaurant. If we could sum up the design in a nutshell, it would be 'hipster Oriental'. Like opening a contemporary art museum in an ethnic oriental interior.

A restaurant as an art space – is that really possible?

Irina: For sure. Art objects are going to be occupying ever-greater numbers of public spaces in future. The integration of modern art in designs indicates the arrival of the millennial era. Modern art is becoming more and more interactive, and that's soon going to be reflected in the design of restaurant interiors. We're already putting our money on light installations and 3D technology.