

A Day in the Life Of a Russian Homeowner?

Editor's note — Someone once said that anyone who owns his own house deserves it. It seems that's true for Russians as well as those owning a summer cottage in Malibu or Long Island. One of the somewhat sorry Soviets is "Boris Ivanovich," owner of a recently acquired country dacha. Since Soviet authorities frown on such capitalistic tendencies, the name and personal details have been camouflaged.

By Holger Jensen
Associated Press Writer

MOSCOW — (AP) — Boris Ivanovich Ptushko bought a country dacha to get away from it all.

"Instead I got into it all — up to my neck." He spits to show Russian disgust.

Like many American property owners, Ptushko has discovered that his summer retreat from big city life is not without its headaches.

These are aggravated by a system directly opposed to the life-style of a "dachanik."

But Comrade Ptushko is pretty good at beating the Communist system. A man of many professions, none of which he cares to discuss too openly, Ptushko knows his way around the black market.

"In the Soviet Union there are many shortages," he shrugs.

"In a city of seven million there is always someone who needs something."

Ptushko and his wife share a nine-room Moscow apartment with seven other families. They have to take turns in the bathroom, the toilet and the kitchen.

The Ptushkos can afford better, but the waiting list for new housing is two years long.

They would like to own a car, but that waiting list is so long new applications are not being accepted.

"Look at this," Ptushko says, picking up a transistor radio and shaking it. It stops playing. "That's how they make their cars. We have all these rubles but there is nothing to buy. The stores are either empty or filled with rubbish."

So the Ptushkos decided to invest in a dacha, an escape from their cramped Moscow apartment room and "those seven women always fighting in the kitchen."

With certain limitations, one is permitted to own private property in the Soviet Union. In rural areas, everything does not belong to the state.

Many Muscovites, tired of collective living, quietly become country squires when they reach the upper middle-income bracket — a steady 250 to 300 rubles a month. The ruble is worth \$1.11.

These dachaniks are, in effect, a new class of petit bourgeoisie, unrecognized but tacitly tolerated by Communist officials.

Of course, you don't find a dacha looking in the real estate section of Sunday's Pravda. There are no house-for-sale ads. The would-be dachanik has to scour surrounding collective farms until he hears of a good deal.

Ptushko heard about his dacha through a friend who had heard of the death of an old man in his native village. The widow has received permission from the collective farm council to sell her house and move in with her daughter and son-in-law.

For 1000 rubles, Ptushko acquired a small brick house and a half-acre apple orchard and vegetable garden in the village of Akulovo, 105 miles south of Moscow.

That is, he acquired the house and all the plants and trees growing on the land — but not the lot itself.

"The land belongs to the state," he explains. "What I grow is mine."

The house has one large "winter room" with a radiator, an unheated "summer room," a porch, a kitchen and a bathroom. It is located on the bank of a small stream, where one can catch four-pound pike for a summer's fish fry.

Akulovo roughly translates as Sharksville. "And believe me, it didn't take long for the sharks to move in," Ptushko ruefully shakes his head.

"Last summer, I wanted to relax, to get away from the city. But the house needed many repairs. It cost me three months of rest, 600 rubles and a hell of a lot of vodka."

As nearly all Soviet building supplies are channeled into state projects, it is virtually impossible for private property owners like Ptushko to legally purchase some lumber or a bag of cement. Dachaniks are forced to pay high prices for stolen materials.

"I went to a school construction project, gave a worker a bottle of vodka and he stole me some lumber," recalls Ptushko.

"Of course I had to pay extra for the lumber — five rubles for one lousy plank and more vodka."

"Rubles are not enough. In the countryside there is nothing to buy, so everyone has rubles. With the Kremlin campaign against drinking, vodka is becoming scarce. Many rural stores don't stock it for weeks at a time. If you have vodka, you get the goods."

Thus Ptushko, seeking to retire from Moscow's black market, found himself embroiled in the rural variety. He caught on quickly and capped the lumber deal by obtaining four bags of cement from the construction boss of a nearby country jail.

"He steals cement all the time and substitutes sand," Ptushko explains. "It will not be a strong jail."

Unaccustomed to working with his hands, the new dachanik had to enlist local talent to help with his renovations.

"That's when they really skin you naked. Those peasants know you can't do it yourself so the prices go up. And you have to take what you can get, in the country."

"I had two workers at my place. They each demanded 20 rubles a day, half of it in vodka. They were drunk every second day."

For Ptushko and his wife, getting away from it all is not easy. Akulovo is reached by a four-hour train ride, a five-mile bus ride and a five-mile walk. They must endure the journey laden with groceries and food.

"The dacha is right next to a collective farm but we cannot buy any meat or produce there," he explains. "All their food is sent to the city to be sold in state markets. So we buy it in the city and bring it back to the country."

The Ptushkos now grow most of their own vegetables, and they eat fish from the stream. As there is no refrigerator to store fresh meat in the sweltering summer, they eat salted meat.

Is dacha ownership worth the hardships?

"Yes," says Ptushko. "The country air is clean. There are no crowds. There is only one woman in my kitchen. The house is the only thing I own that I do not have to share."

Building Versus A City

Just one industrial building will yield more in enterprise taxes than the entire 220 acres which formerly comprised Russell City.

This was the claim made last week during dedication ceremonies at the Cabot, Cabot & Forbes Hayward Industrial Center by Paul P. Shepherd, vice president for the company.

The Russell City area was yielding less than \$20,000 a year in revenue in 1960-61, when it was taken over by the agency, Shepherd cited. Since CC&F acquired it, following the agency's relocation of the families and clearing of the ground, four companies have announced that they were moving in — Alcoa, Climate Manufacturing, Charles W. King & Associates, and Air Reduction Co. — for a total of nearly a half-million square feet of new building space, on approximately 31 acres. The first three buildings are already under construction.

The Alcoa building by itself, Shepherd said, when completed and occupied, would contribute approximately \$50,000 a year of revenue to the city and the county.

The potential future tax yield of the entire CC&F Center, when fully developed, will dwarf these figures, Shepherd said, and "yield enormous benefits to Alameda County and the City of Hayward, by providing a pleasant place to work for several thousand people, with the resulting payrolls, as well as the flow of revenues to county and city."

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Aetna Building All Filled Up

The 38-story Aetna Building is completely leased, according to Coldwell, Banker, the agents for the building.

The building at the corner of Market, Post and Montgomery Streets went on the market in 1969.

Bigger Housing Crisis Seen If Capitol Hill Doesn't Act

If Congress and the Administration doesn't start funding housing programs now on the books the nation will fall further and further behind in a "catastrophic downward spiral."

This is part of the testimony given by the American Institute of Architects before the House Appropriations Committee.

The architects cited these reasons for their alarm:

- "There is virtually no new housing for rent being created that meets the needs of working families of average income."

- Inadequate funding and high interest rates have sharply cut new housing starts, making it impossible to form a mass market that would lure industrialized building and new workers into construction.

- "It is a myth" that "an honest, hard-working man can, by sheer will and determination, provide a good house for his family without outside help," and this fact is dividing the nation.

- Local zoning codes are being used to exclude multi-family housing and mobile homes in many cities and are widening the gap between the housing haves and have-nots.

- HUD must be given a adequate funds for research into building materials, formation of new towns, and ways to increase the housing supply.

- HUD should not be allowed to end two of its successful programs — the so-called 202 subsidized housing for the elderly and 221-D-3 below-market interest rate (BMIR) financing help for rental and cooperative-owned housing.

Even though the elderly housing and BMIR financing programs do not attack the housing shortage on a mass scale, they do bring some relief to city housing vacancy rates, stimulate construction employment,

and ease social problems, the AIA noted.

Jeh V. Johnson, AIA, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., a member of the President's Committee on Urban Housing (the Kaiser Committee), Thomas Wright of Washington, D.C., past president of the Washington Metropolitan Chapter of AIA, and Jackson T. Wright, Sr., director of AIA's Housing Programs, presented the testimony on behalf of 24,200 registered architects who comprise the AIA membership.

"Every architect I know who is involved in housing has in his office several hundred, and in some cases, several thousand units of housing ready and waiting" for Federal funds, said Johnson. The units have won all local approvals and are stalled because Congress and the Administration have not appropriated full funding for past housing acts, he added.

The AIA has urged Congress and the President to re-allocate national funding and priorities to concentrate on timely help for the cities and adequate money to help housing.

Johnson said a survey of his home area indicates single family homes are now beyond the purchase reach of 81 percent of the families, rental units are increasing in cost 15 percent a year, and it takes an annual income of \$13,000 for a family of four "at the average rent now being charged." He added: "This is in an area of relatively moderate land and construction costs."

The AIA also urged Congress to appropriate \$30 million for improved tenant services. Jackson Wright, a onetime public housing manager in Pittsburgh, said the funds would help educate tenants to care for units, reduce vandalism, and promote citizenship.



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The Building Scene

Meridian Corners Opens in San Jose

Meridian Corners will open 162 new one and two-bedroom apartments for rental this week, starting at \$160.

The development is at 355 Kieley boulevard in San Jose and when completed the complex will contain 266 units.

On the 34-acre site is a two story clubhouse, a swimming pool, outdoor barbecue area, a volleyball court and three tennis courts.

Arcata

Construction will start in May on Unlontown Square, a 75,000 square foot shopping center at 7th and F streets across from city hall.

The building design will have heavy timber with natural stone and a covered mall area.

The two major tenants for the center are Safeway

Stores and a Value-Giant Department Store.

Connolly Development, Inc., Oakland is the developer.

The center will open for business in October.

Salinas

The first townhouse community in Salinas is now open.

Park Place, a development of 36 acres with 178 townhouses, has 2-3-4 bedroom models with one and one and a half baths.

Prices start at \$15,400 and four plans are available.

The development will have its own homeowner's association.

Money collected from dues will be used for landscaping, grounds keeper, common area, insurance, taxes, water bills, exterior maintenance, re-proofing repairs and repainting.

The development is located at the corner of East Laurel Drive and Sanborn Road.

Colma

The first building in the new Cabot, Cabot & Forbes Serra Center in Colma will be a 100,000 square foot Gemco Membership Department Store.

Construction will start immediately on the 9.18 acre site at the intersection of Serramonte and Junipero Serra Boulevards.

Parking will be provided for about a thousand cars.

It will be the 23rd Gemco store in California. Gemco is a subsidiary of Lucky Stores, Inc.

San Francisco

The site of the original U.S. Branch Mint at 610 Commercial street in San Francisco has been purchased by the Bank of Canton.

The bank plans expansion of its headquarters facility located adjacent to the property at 555 Montgomery street.

Seller was Determined Productions, Inc., which has moved to new quarters at 300 Broadway.

Berkeley

Berkeley's Sather-Gate Mall, a retail-commercial development in the block between Durant avenue and Channing way will be finished late this year, according to Coldwell, Banker & Company, the leasing agent.

The center will have a covered mall accented with colorful lighting and small, quaint shops.

Parking for 400 cars is being built in a five-story garage over the mall.

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The San Francisco Housing Authority is now entertaining inquiries and proposals for the construction of quality housing to be built under the "Turnkey" procedure.

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