

Cold War Commodities: Everyday Life, Work and Play behind the Iron Curtain

Learning Resource

***'It is not bad if in improving the theory of Marxism one throws in also a piece of bacon and a piece of butter'* – Nikita Khrushchev**

The idea of a consumer culture existing in the USSR seems directly opposed to the aims of the state, yet commerce and consumption (albeit state sanctioned) was a major part of life behind the Iron Curtain. Consumer culture looms large in the history of the socialist state: from Lenin's support of free trade during the New Economic Policy, to the opening of GUM in the 1950s – then one of the largest department stores in the world –, to the challenges of privatisation in a post-Soviet economy.

Work and Play explores the history of the production and distribution of goods behind the Iron Curtain and the place they had in the lives of the Soviet people.



'Everyday life is not a private matter!'

After Stalin's death in 1953 Nikita Khrushchev made a shocking speech denouncing the brutality of his predecessor's regime. This content sent shockwaves through the Soviet Union and marked the beginning of a period of 'de-Stalinisation'. A more clean and functional aesthetic was adopted, in stark contrast to the excesses of Stalinist design. An intensive mass housing drive was launched by Khrushchev in 1957. New pre-fabricated apartments intended for occupancy by a single family were built across the USSR; 52,000,000 square meters of housing were built in 1960 alone. Whilst the new apartments offered the Soviet citizen an unprecedented level of privacy in comparison to communal housing, they still operated as an instrument for regimenting daily life. Khrushchev himself stated that 'It is necessary not only to provide people with good homes but also to teach them...to live correctly, and to observe the rules of socialist communality.'

An ideologically controlled consumer culture was needed for a number of reasons; to boost the USSR's international image; support internal trade and production; reinforce Soviet values and limit dissent. The new, utilitarian functional housing spaces provided the perfect setting for a new generation of Soviet consumer objects and the subsequent opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959 sparked a drastic overhaul in the production and sale of consumer items in the USSR.

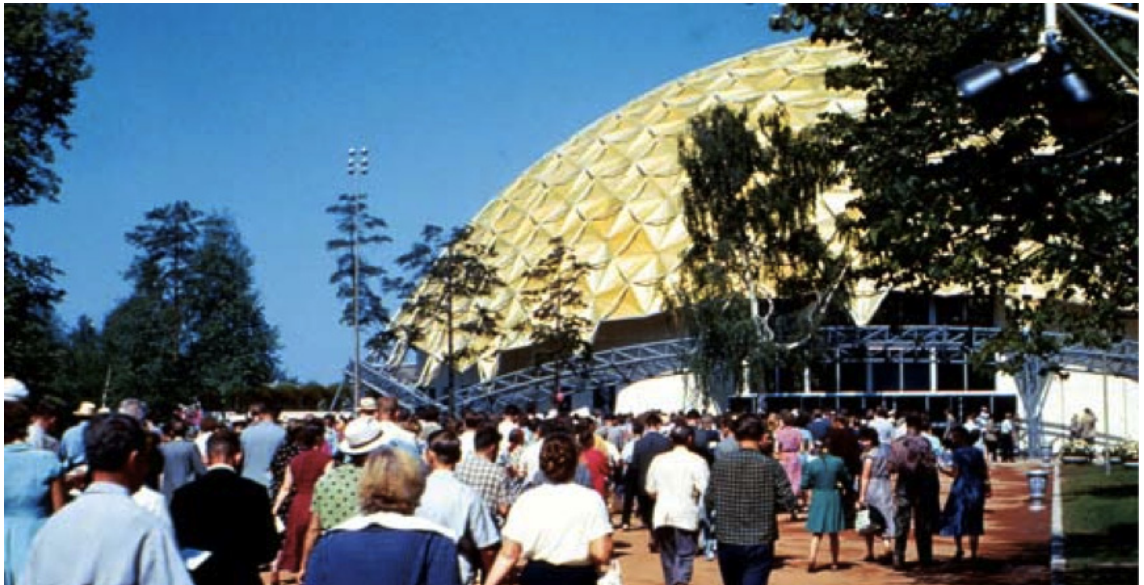
The resulting boom in Soviet design had an effervescence not seen since the earlier Constructivist period, despite inauspicious circumstances. There was not even a Russian term for 'design', so the emerging discipline was called 'technical aesthetics' and institutionalised in 1962 in the form of the All-Union Institute of Technical Aesthetics (VNIITE). As Technical Aesthetics – the VNIITE journal – shows, its members were highly aware of international design trends. In fact, all the USSR's budding design professionals had to be in order to 'catch up with capitalism' and overcome the gaping creative hole left by Stalin's regime. Many products bore striking similarities to Western items: the Star-54 radio was reputedly based on the French Excelsior-52 brought back by a Soviet diplomat; the Vyatka scooter and the Italian Vespa seemed to have been separated at birth; while the Saturnas vacuum cleaner was not dissimilar in shape or name to Hoover's Constellation model.

Cold War, Soft Power

During the Cold War the USSR and US competed fiercely to diminish the appeal of each other's political, social and economic systems. Whilst the Space and Arms races saw the waging of a high profile, public propaganda war, officials recognised the need for 'soft power' too. This meant that film, art exhibitions, consumer goods, architecture and other forms of culture became subtle yet effective weapons in the struggle to assert the superiority of one system over the other.

The 'soft power' approach of propaganda through culture and consumerism particularly suited the US whose production of goods, food and fashion far outstripped the austerity of the USSR.

In 1959 the American's made a decisive move in the battle for soft power dominance with the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. This extravaganza of the American way of life was to spark a more competitive phase in Soviet production and design and become the unlikely setting for a remarkable public political showdown between the two superpowers.



When the gates of the exhibition complex opened in 1959 Soviet citizens arrived in their thousands, eager to catch a glimpse of American culture, fashion and music. Free samples of Pepsi were distributed to enthralled visitors as they were funnelled through into a vast domed entrance hall screening multiple images of 'everyday life' in the USA. From here visitors could pass through two full scale 'average' American apartments, each fitted out with the latest goods from Macey's New York department store and inhabited by a model housewife, demonstrating the use of microwaves and washing machines to the gathering crowds.

The experience continued with fashion shows, rock and roll dancing and a vast bazaar-style display of US goods, including cosmetics, clothing, televisions, sewing machines, kitchen appliances, packaged convenience foods, soft drinks, sporting goods, mail order catalogues, fiberglass sailboats and automobiles.

Through displaying desirable consumer goods the Americans hoped the exhibition would put pressure on the Soviets to divert resources from industry and the military. It was crucial that the objects were positioned as far removed from the present Soviet existence but easy to obtain under a Capitalist system. The ambition of the exhibition was clearly summed up by US Ambassador to the USSR Llewellyn Thompson:

'[The exhibition should] ...endeavour to make the Soviet people dissatisfied with the share of the Russian pie which they now receive, and make them realise that the slight improvements projected in their standard of living are only a drop in the bucket compared to what they could and should have.'

Soviet authorities and publications worked hard to counter the popularity of the exhibition. The authenticity of the model apartments came under particular scrutiny from official newspaper Pravda:

'There is no more truth in showing this as the typical home of the American worker than, say, the Taj Mahal as the typical house of a Bombay textile worker, of Buckingham Palace as the typical home of an English miner.'



Pravda was justified in its criticism; it was highly unlikely that any 'average working American family' would have enough disposable income to shop exclusively at Macey's, let alone the knowledge of contemporary design to pick out such highbrow items.

For the Soviet authorities the implication was clear: although the USSR had launched the Sputnik two years earlier, more down-to-earth matters such as poor living conditions and a lack of consumer goods were hindering progress. Determined not to be outdone, Khrushchev focused his emerging economic plan on 'catching up and overtaking' capitalism, offering every family a modern flat of its own, fitted with every convenience.

The Kitchen Debate

The American National Exhibition became notorious thanks to the so-called 'Kitchen Debate', an impromptu war of words between Richard Nixon, then the US Vice President, and Khrushchev. The majority of the exchange took place in the kitchen of the model apartment before spilling into a nearby television studio, where the two men faced international broadcasters. Both men argued for the superiority of their respective countries' industrial accomplishments, with Khrushchev stressing in particular the Soviets' focus on practical rather than luxury advancements. Despite the intense rivalry both agreed that the United States and the Soviet Union should seek areas of agreement. As the discussion came to a close Nixon and Khrushchev both approved the translation and broadcast of the debate in their respective countries.



Transcript Extract

Nixon: I want to show you this kitchen. It is like those of our houses in California.

Khrushchev: We have such things.

Nixon: This is our newest model. This is the kind which is built in thousands of units for direct installations in the houses. In America, we like to make life easier for women...

Khrushchev: Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism.

Nixon: I think that this attitude towards women is universal. What we want to do, is make life more easy for our housewives.....

Nixon: This house can be bought for \$14,000, and most American [veterans from World War II] can buy a home in the bracket of \$10,000 to \$15,000. Let me give you an example that you can appreciate. Our steel workers as you know are now on strike. But any steel worker could buy this house. They earn \$3 an hour. This house costs about \$100 a month to buy on a contract running 25 to 30 years.

Khrushchev: We have steel workers and peasants who can afford to spend \$14,000 for a house. Your American houses are built to last only 20 years so builders could sell new houses at the end. We build firmly. We build for our children and grandchildren.

Nixon: American houses last for more than 20 years, but, even so, after twenty years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen. Their kitchen is obsolete by that time....The American system is designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques.

Khrushchev: This theory does not hold water. Some things never get out of date-houses, for instance, and furniture, furnishings-perhaps-but not houses. I have read much about America and American houses, and I do not think that this exhibit and what you say is strictly accurate.

Nixon: Well, um...

Khrushchev: I hope I have not insulted you.

Nixon: I have been insulted by experts. Everything we say [on the other hand] is in good humor. Always speak frankly.

Khrushchev: The Americans have created their own image of the Soviet man. But he is not as you think. You think the Russian people will be dumbfounded to see these things, but the fact is that newly built Russian houses have all this equipment right now.

Nixon: Yes, but...

Khrushchev: In Russia, all you have to do to get a house is to be born in the Soviet Union. You are entitled to housing...In America, if you don't have a dollar you have a right to choose between sleeping in a house or on the pavement. Yet you say we are the slave to Communism.

Nixon: I appreciate that you are very articulate and energetic...

Khrushchev: Energetic is not the same thing as wise.

Nixon: If you were in the Senate, we would call you a filibusterer! You-[Khrushchev interrupts]-do all the talking and don't let anyone else talk. This exhibit was not designed to astound but to interest. Diversity, the right to choose, the fact that we have 1,000 builders building 1,000 different houses is the most important thing. We don't have one decision made at the top by one government official. This is the difference.

Khrushchev: On politics, we will never agree with you. For instance, Mikoyan likes very peppery soup. I do not. But this does not mean that we do not get along.

Nixon: You can learn from us, and we can learn from you. There must be a free exchange. Let the people choose the kind of house, the kind of soup, the kind of ideas that they want.

Fashion

'The factory girl in Moscow is just as eager to adorn herself and to enhance her attractiveness as the lady of Park Avenue' – Photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White

Most women in the Soviet Union did not have access to a wide variety of fashions and had to make do with home-made outfits. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, fashion was constantly on the mind of Soviet women and girls. By the late 1950s an increasing number of beauty products became available to the Soviet woman and in 1953 the grand GUM department store reopened. However, shortages still remained the norm. Shoes, or the lack of, occupied the Soviet consciousness in particular. So much so that in 1958 American journalist John Gunther observed that Russians were *'acutely conscious of the clothes that foreigners wear, particularly their shoes...The whole country has a fixation on shoes. Moscow is the city where, if Anita Ekberg should walk down the street with nothing on but shoes, people would stare at her feet first.'*



'Kamennii Tsvetok' (Stone Flower) Perfume Box and Bottle. Produced 1950s

A bourgeois luxury once upon a time, perfume was rehabilitated with the rise of synthetic ingredients thanks to the development of the Soviet chemical industry during Khrushchev's Seven-Year Plan. No longer an extravagance, it was now available to everyone, from factory girls to husbands looking for a handy gift on International Women's Day. The New Dawn factory produced a wide range of goods, some of which you can see here: the 'Stone Flower' fragrance, with a decadent Faberge inspired box; 'The Tale of Tsar Sultan' perfume, with a satin-lined box and a kokoshnik-shaped bottle stopper; as well as the popular 'Red Moscow' range which included face powder and soap. The latter was touted as being superior to capitalist products and highly-sought after by Western tourists. Ironically it had been created in the 1920s by the factory's French perfumer Auguste Michel, who adapted it from a pre-Revolutionary fragrance entitled 'The Empress's Favourite Bouquet'. The New Dawn factory and its 'Red Moscow' range are still going strong today.



Dior in Moscow

Those who could not afford a whole bottle of perfume, could use the slot machine which would squirt you with fragrance for 10 kopeks. It could be found in GUM, Moscow's grand department store that re-opened in 1953, having been closed by Stalin 25 years earlier. Located in the Red Square and facing Lenin's mausoleum, GUM was better supplied than other shops, functioning as a showcase for Western visitors and party officials. Ordinary citizens were more likely to gaze in its glamorous windows, as a 1961 Sunday Times feature on Russia showed. They had already been treated to a display of alluring fashions in 1959, when Christian Dior presented its latest collections in Moscow, at the invitation of the Soviet government. Twelve fashion models stayed in the Soviet capital for a week, posing for pictures with bewildered babushkas and presenting two or three catwalk shows every day.

The Kitchen

'The communal kitchen was a war zone. During the Stalin era the kitchen was the most dangerous place to be' – Alexander Genis, Russian writer and journalist

In the aftermath of Khrushchev and Nixon's 1959 debate the kitchen became a troublesome symbol of the USSR's backwardness in comparison to the West. The Americans positioned their fully mechanised kitchen as a revolutionary development for the Housewife who was no longer chained to the drudgery of daily chores. For Soviet housewives still living in communal apartments with shared kitchens the reality was very different. Even those occupying more comfortable houses often had only one cold tap and a very limited set of appliances. Fridges and washing machines were even rarer. In response to the American challenge the Khrushchev regime promised a new period of abundance, albeit in a strictly Soviet manner. New goods for the home and kitchen were introduced with the purpose of making the housewife's life easier. This was achieved through simple and modest design; marketed as much easier to dust than the elaborate goods of bourgeois culture. Reduced complexity in design had the additional advantage of allowing for cheaper and quicker production.



ZIS DH-2 Refrigerator. 1956
(100,000th of its kind produced)

This gleaming curvaceous beauty is the 100,000th refrigerator produced by the ZIL factory. Having started out as a truck and car manufacturer, ZIL joined the consumer goods drive of the 1950s by adding a domestic appliance to its product portfolio. The result soon gained mythical status and was dubbed 'the Rolls Royce' of refrigerators, not least thanks to its car door chrome handle. It attracted the greatest number of visitors at exhibitions of domestic appliances and even featured in satirical cartoons, having become a recognisable social marker. The ZIL refrigerator was most likely to be found in the homes of high-ranking party members. Ordinary citizens made do with less prestigious brands, or even without. Even in 1960, only about 4% of the population owned a refrigerator or a washing machine. The climate helped, and perishables would often be stored on balconies, or hanging out of kitchen windows in string bags.

Avoska String Bag. Produced 1980s

These ubiquitous items, called avoskas, became emblematic of the Soviet consumer experience. Derived from the Russian word 'avos', which translates roughly as 'perhaps', the avoska was literally a 'just in case' bag. As desirable goods were only sporadically available and plastic bags even rarer, the savvy shopper had to be prepared for any opportunity. Designed to be carried in handbags or pockets, the avoska became an essential item for the Soviet housewife, who could thus join any queue she encountered. As one historian has observed, 'thoughts of shopping intruded into every corner of a Soviet woman's existence, so all-consuming was the planning, ingenuity, and scheming involved in procuring basic goods and services'.



Cosmic Dreams

'The cold war would become the great engine, the supreme catalyst, that sent rockets and their cargoes far above Earth and worlds away. If Tsiolkovsky, Oberth, Goddard, and others were the fathers of rocketry, the competition between capitalism and communism was its midwife' – William E. Burrows, This New Ocean

The Space Race dominated the early period of the Cold War, with the Soviets launching the Sputnik in 1957, the first satellite to orbit the earth. Just a month later the Soviets achieved another coup by launching Sputnik 2 carrying 'space dog' Laika, the first living being to successfully make a return trip into space. These national achievements sparked a space race frenzy among the Soviet public with books, films and even objects as banal as a hair dryers given a cosmic twist. However, as Nixon pointed out to Khrushchev in 1959, such lofty advances in the world of space technology did not help the ordinary citizens of the USSR.



'Saturnas' (Saturn) Vacuum Cleaner

Designs in the home soon reflected this new age of cosmic exploration. One vacuum cleaner was called 'The Seagull' and resembled a speeding rocket. Another model was shaped like the planet Saturn, even down to the ring surrounding it. Hardwearing and hardworking, these vacuums didn't just suck air in; they could also expel it, which made them popular tools for whitewashing ceilings and walls. Despite all these qualities, they were viewed with suspicion in some quarters. Mothers in law did not take kindly to these new-fangled machines, viewing them as a helping hand for work-shy housewives. Rival designers criticised the arrow-shaped decorations on the Seagull's body, claiming that eight tonnes of metal a year were wasted on a superfluous element. Despite the naysayers the vacuum cleaners soon became objects of desire, which often had to be procured during a special trip to the capital and would then remain in the family for years.



'Vostok' Tin. 1961

Other space inspired items also flourished, especially in the realm of packaging design. This blue and red tin box produced to commemorate Yuri Gagarin's first flight into space on the Vostok shuttle became the perfect space race keepsake. The Sputnik also appeared on the box of a desktop pencil organiser incongruously entitled 'Orbit' and coupled with the hammer and sickle emblem. Even a traditional object like a samovar could undergo a space age makeover, with a subtle nod to the Sputnik's globular shape and electric power.

Child's Play

Children's toys became an issue of national importance in Soviet Russia. A scientific research institute focusing solely on toys was established as early as 1946 in Sergiev-Posad, striving to standardise country-wide production, create functional educational items and utilise cutting-edge technologies. State rhetoric filtered down to the young generation through play, so an interest in technological advances was nurtured from a young age. Girls received miniature domestic appliances, such as fridges, stoves and washing machines, biding their time until they could become good Soviet wives and furnish their own modern apartments. Boys were treated to intricate electronics kits, teaching them to design and construct circuits.



Nevalyashka Roly-Poly Doll. Produced from 1950s – 1970s

Generations of Soviet toddlers were entertained by some version of the Nevalyashka roly-poly doll, the Matrioshka's less glamorous cousin. Wooden versions were popular in the nineteenth century, representing ruddy cheeked merchants and clowns. The first Nevalyashkas were probably inspired by Japanese Daruma dolls which function as good luck charms and represent Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism. The principle is always the same: a weight placed low inside the hollow body of the toy ensures it always bounces back to a vertical position. Coupled with a colourful appearance and a tinkling sound, the Nevalyashka is a fun and engaging toy, still popular to this day. It assumed its shiny new plastic incarnation in the late 1950s at the Sergiev-Posad toy institute and was rolled out to factories across the Soviet Union. The mass drive for consumer goods led to strange synergies, with one gun-powder plant adding the new toys to its production line in 1959. It still manufactures them today and the range extends to 35 different models.



'Alenka' Chocolate Wrapper. Produced 1966

The Alenka chocolate wrapper is one of the most iconic Soviet packaging designs, remaining a popular brand after more than 50 years. Urban legends circulated about the way the chocolate got its name, some claiming it was inspired by the offspring of cosmonauts Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova, both of whom had daughters called Lena. In reality, photographer Alexander Gerinas took a striking image of his eight month old daughter Lena in 1960. The portrait of the little girl, with her cherubic face framed by a colourful headscarf was widely circulated in Soviet magazines. Four years later, in 1964, a painted version of the photo was adopted for the Alenka chocolate wrapper by Moscow's Red October factory. The image proved to be incredibly popular amongst the Soviet public, even inspiring short poems which began to be included on the back of the wrappers. Although images of other children have featured on Alenka bars over the years, the original painting of Lena remains the most popular design and continues to be produced today.

Music

Bones Records. C.1957-1965

These unusual records produced on recycled X-ray scans were part of an illegal practice by Soviet dissidents, began in the late 1940s. It was often the only opportunity to enjoy Western music such as jazz and foxtrot, and hits by the Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley or The Beatles. If you look closer you will notice the barely visible grooves on the surface. These were made by pressing an original master recording against a heated and exposed X-ray film. 'Music on bones' as it was known was literally made on recycled X-rays of spinal cords, chest cavities and limbs taken from hospital bins and archives. As the grooves produced by this process were quite shallow, the records could only be played a small number of times, which enhanced their illicit quality.



The first laboratory to produce the homemade X-ray vinyls launched in St. Petersburg in 1946, calling itself 'Zolotaya Sobaka', the Golden Dog. It was not so much the sound quality of the X-ray records, but the zest and drama of producing and distributing underground records that was so appealing to those involved. The popularity of the records amongst progressive intellectuals had put the contraband production under the scrupulous attention of the pro-KGB 'Music Patrol', which came to view the X-ray record production as an anti-Soviet activity punishable by 3-7 years of prison. The transition from the authoritarian Stalin period to the thaw with its appearance of the tape recorder saw a decline in underground records production after 1961.



'Zvezda-54' (Star-54) radio. Produced 1950s

This radio was produced from mid-1954 in factories in Kharkov and Moscow with a total of 674,000 of these sleek, shiny objects sold across the USSR. The deep red colour and streamlined design made an instant impact on the Russian public and its relatively affordable price ensured it found its way into many a Khrushchev apartment. The origins of the design can be traced back to a model of the 1952 French Elcelsior-52 which a Soviet diplomat brought back to the USSR. Soviet engineers promptly analysed the design and produced their own, slightly modified version.

ZIL Factory

Founded a year before the Revolution in 1916 as the Automobile Society of Moscow (AMO), the factory answered Russia's desperate need for motor-vehicles during World War I. By 1918 the factory was nationalised and struggled to survive due to a lack of funding, proper technical supplies, competent workers and effective management and was soon functioning as a vast repairs workshop for foreign tractors and motorcycles. By 1930 the factory had picked up production, helped by new technologies learned from US and European car brands and by 1934 was producing its first passenger cars. Delighted by the achievements of ZIL, Stalin sent his son Vasilli to work at the factory as an assistant engineer. Over the course of its history the factory turned its hand to the production of fridges, bicycles and scooters, achieving national and international acclaim. However, with the fall of communism the popularity of ZIL rapidly declined. The upper echelons of Russian society preferred luxury international car makes and the average homeowner looked to brands such as Bosch and Electrolux to furnish their new contemporary kitchens. Like many other industrial giants of the Soviet age, the company could not survive without state support in the absence of public demand.

ZIS-110 Limousine. Produced from 1945-1958



Work at the factory did not stop during the Second World War, despite a period of evacuation. The war effort was supported by the production of military vehicles and machines, while designers were hard at work on the new ZIS-110 limousine model. When the luxury car made its debut during victory parades in 1945, it was billed as a sign of Stalin's confidence that the Soviet Union would prevail against Germany and life would return to normal. All the models on display in the exhibition were in fact made in China, as a thank you gift to ZIL after Soviet engineers helped develop the first Chinese car factory in the 1960s.



Banners for Outstanding achievements awarded to ZIL. 1950s - 1960s

These striking banners bear witness to ZIL's status as a model Soviet factory. Honours were granted by the state to the factory and its workers for fulfilling ambitious quotas, developing new products and fostering technological advances. The banners would be toted out on festive days or government visits and used to brighten up workers' parades. Other awards included certificates and medals, many of which were handmade with the graphic style changing in accordance with the approved state rhetoric of the time. Some of the factory's star workers were even invited to the festive parades held in 1945, marking the Soviet victory in the Second World War with one lucky recipient allocated seat in the centre of the action, in the stands situated by the GUM building in the Red Square.

Timeline

- 1910** 1914-18: World War I
1917: The Russian Revolution overthrows Tsar Nicholas II and civil war ensues.
- 1920** 1922: The Soviet Union is established.
1920s: The Constructivist movement flourishes, setting a new precedent for Russian design. Key proponents Vladimir Tatlin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, El Lissitzky, Gustavs Klucis and Liubov Popova attempt to put art to the service of the people, applying avant-garde aesthetics to everyday objects from porcelain to clothing.
Lenin institutes the New Economic Policy, encouraging a degree of free trade.
1924: Lenin dies and Stalin begins his rise to power.
1928-32: Stalin implements the First Five-Year Plan.
- 1930** 1930s: Socialist Realism is adopted as the official style of the Soviet Union. Constructivism and other avant-garde art forms come under suspicion from the authorities.
1936-38: Stalin purges thousands of alleged dissidents.
- 1940** 1939-45: World War II
1945: Yalta and Potsdam conferences
1946: Winston Churchill warns of an Iron Curtain descending across Europe.
1948: The Marshall Plan provides millions of dollars in financial aid to Europe.
1949: The Red Scare reaches its peak in the United States.
The Soviet Union tests its first atomic bomb.
- 1950** 1953: Stalin dies and Nikita Khrushchev becomes leader of the Soviet Communist party.
Having been closed by Stalin in 1928, GUM re-opens as a department store.
1954: At the National Conference of Builders, Khrushchev demands the introduction of prefabricated housing throughout the Soviet Union, in order to speed up construction and reduce costs.
1956: Khrushchev denounces Stalin's dictatorial rule, marking the beginning of the Thaw period.
1957: Sputnik 1 becomes the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth. . One month later Sputnik 2 is launched, carrying 'space dog' Laika, the first living being to successfully make a return trip into space.
A party decree is passed stating that every soviet family would receive its own apartment within a decade.
1959: The American National Exhibition opens in Moscow. Nixon and Khrushchev spar during the 'Kitchen Debate'.
Christian Dior holds a fashion show in Moscow.
Khrushchev visits the United States and is refused entry to Disneyland.
- 1960** 1961: Gagarin becomes the first man in space.
Construction starts on the Berlin Wall, dividing Eastern and Western Europe.
1962: Cuban Missile Crisis.
America sends its first man into outer space.
VNIITE (The All-Union Institute of Technical Aesthetics) is founded in Moscow.
1963: Valentina Tereshkova becomes the first woman in space.
1964: Khrushchev is ousted from his position as First Secretary and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev.

- 1967: The GOST Mark of Quality is introduced, encompassing a set of technical standards that Soviet goods are expected to achieve.
1969: Neil Armstrong becomes the first person to set foot on the moon.

- 1970** 1970: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.
1973: Brezhnev visits the United States and meets with Nixon, signalling a détente in the relationship between the two countries.
1979: In the Soviet Union, Brezhnev is awarded the Lenin Prize for Literature.

- 1980** 1980: The USSR hosts the Summer Olympic Games.
1984: Tetris, the tile-matching puzzle video game, is designed by a Moscow programmer and becomes the first entertainment software to be exported from the USSR to the US.
1985: Gorbachev becomes general secretary of the Communist Party and instigates the policies of openness (glasnost) and restructuring (perestroika).
1989: Mass 'revolutions' see the toppling of Soviet-imposed communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. The Berlin Wall falls on 9 November.

- 1990** 1991: The Congress of People's Deputies votes for the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
Leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus sign the agreement setting up the Commonwealth of Independent States.

- 2000s** 2013: After 54 years, the second ever Christian Dior fashion show takes place in Moscow.