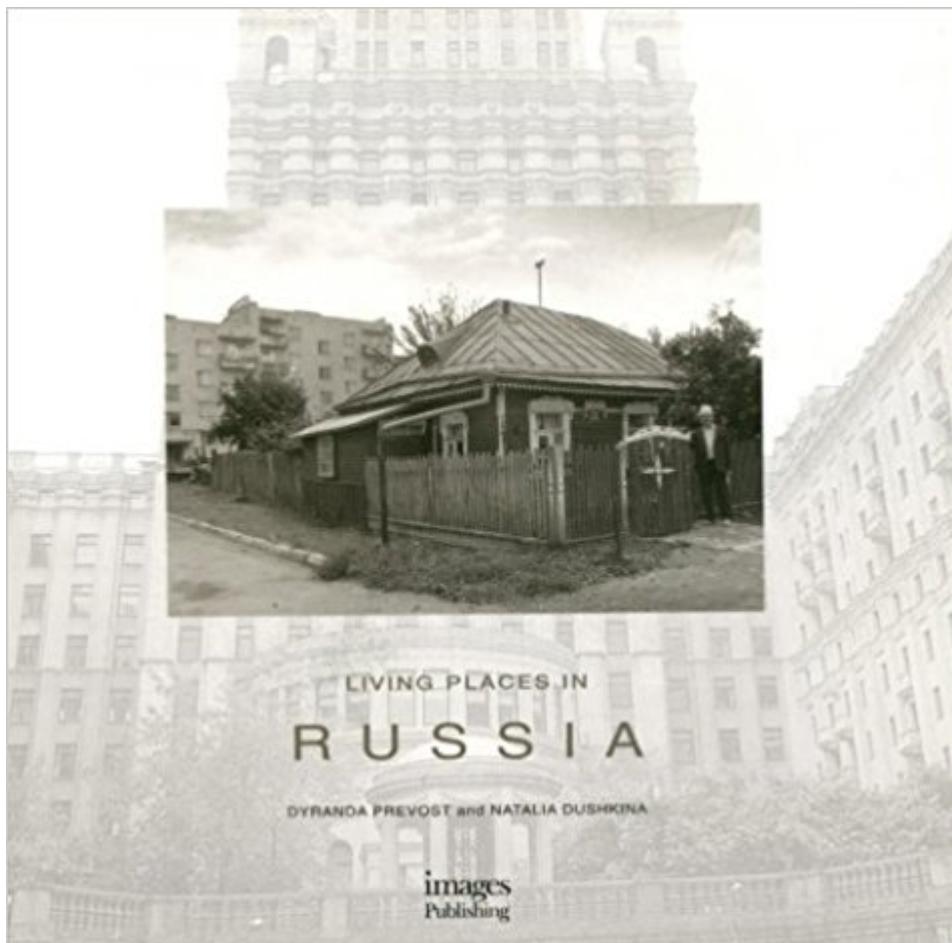


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Living Places In Russia



Synopsis

In Living Places in Russia, photographer Dyranda Prevost and architect Natalia Dushkina have conveyed life in Russia at a critical moment in history, recording 22 homes in both city and country. Westerners remember the Berlin Wall, and its momentous fall that followed glasnost and perestroika; this book reveals the concealed, historic changes to the walls containing ordinary Russian people since the 1917 Revolution. Documented in 1990-1991, and completed in 1999, the images and voices in this book are a revelation; a "collective image" of various professions and strata living in a variety of buildings built in different periods. These photographs capture the ambience of a lived-in 'place' and the messages conveyed by its objects. The interviews allow the inhabitants to tell their own stories and express their constant longing for freedom and tranquility, epitomized by life in the countryside - in however humble a place that may be.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From traditional wooden houses on collective farms and communal apartments in urban tenements to former mansions on St Petersburg's Fontanka and prefabricated apartment blocks from the Khrushchev era, this book reveals how people lived just as the Soviet Union was collapsing. The interior photos show the intimate details of life in narrow quarters--pails and pots, samovars, clothing, personal decorations, a bathtub in a kitchen and beds everywhere. Brief interviews with each pictured inhabitant provide insights into a radical social organization that has disappeared. This book contributes to the valuable writing on Eastern Europe's late 20th century transition. On

collective farms life was constricted. Water was carried from a well to the wooden dwellings. A simple bathhouse served men and women on alternate days. The residents raised potatoes, eggs and root vegetables as mainstays of their diet with sugar, butter, tea, sausage and wine narrowly rationed. In urban communal flats multi-generational families lived and slept for decades in one room of 17 square meters or less. A single toilet served as many as 10 families. In the shared kitchen each family had a table and a primus (gas) cooker. Elegant 18th and 19th century buildings were reorganized to accommodate a massive influx of people by the simple addition of partitions to subdivide grand rooms. Often the front entrance was boarded up and a humble back door became the only access. Bathing facilities were not usually added in the transformation so public baths such as the Sandunovsky Baths were used by the many Moscow residents who had no bathing facilities at home. If the prerevolutionary owners remained, they were assigned the smallest, least desirable room in their subdivided former residence or another communal flat. Their adjustment makes compelling reading. Russian architects in the 1920's and 30's explored Constructivist forms for the new society, designing buildings with canteens, kindergartens, libraries and meeting rooms for the government's communal living theory. Narcomfin and other architectural icons of this era were largely abandoned and seriously deteriorated by 1990, but when I photographed them in Moscow in November 2009 they were in better shape, thanks to recent restoration or stabilization. In the 1950's Khrushchev, reacting against Stalinism, began a massive program of prefabricated housing construction. The vast blocks contain meager apartments but they were not communal. Each with its own kitchen and WC was occupied by only one multi-generational family. Though cheaply built and on the fringes of most cities without cultural or other amenities, the units offered greater personal privacy. Unpredictably, in St. Petersburg people often refused the new flat. Reluctant to leave the beautiful historic city center, they stayed in tight communal quarters. Russia's transition in the 1990's was precipitated by the collapse of its government, not by violence as in Yugoslavia and Rumania. Seeing Soviet living arrangements at the end of perestroika provides perspective on the dramatic transition.

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