



DYNAMIC KIEV

After a century out in the cold, Kiev is making friends fast and re-establishing its place as the innovation hub of Eurasia. *Onelife* goes in search of the new leaders driving the city forward

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EARLY MORNING. A sunburst breaks from behind the gaze of the Motherland monument. Driving across the Patona Bridge, into the heart of modern Kiev, Ukraine's capital, there is a sense of traversing the crossroads of the entire Eurasian landmass. On the hills overlooking the Dnieper River, dynamic new hubs of business, arts, technology and fashion are bringing a new energy to the golden domes of ancient monasteries and cathedrals.

A casual glance at a map of Europe and Asia reveals the potential of Kiev's position. It has been a centre for the exchange of cultures, goods and ideas for centuries. For centuries, that was, until a Cold War frontier fell on these borderlands between East and West. Today, a new urgency has gripped this capital. In the place where once the adventurous minds of Asia, Europe and the Middle East mingled, they are connecting once again. This is the story of Kiev – a city that came in from the cold, rediscovered itself, and is now opening up to the new global village.

Build it and they will come

"We have very talented people who in some sense are more free here than elsewhere." So says Sergey Makhno. He is one of a new generation of Ukrainian architects and designers who want to open the eyes of Kievans to the possibilities of the spaces that they inhabit, and how the built environment can enhance our experience of life more broadly. They are a generation who are finding the freedom, drive and versatility to realise their vision.

Makhno, alongside his contemporaries such as Slava Balbek and Vladimir Nepiyvoda, is taking the old ways and reinventing them. "We respect the older generation but, you know, theirs was a different time ►



with different values and a different mission,” he says. “It is important for us to reach for our own goal. And we do it not simply for big money, but for a something permanent. For something great, something to impress, something to stay after us.”

This sense of the new as holding integrity is central to Makhno’s vision. Truly authentic innovation is always acknowledging the best achievements of the past. It is a sentiment reflected in Makhno’s dream project, to create the biggest ceramics museum in Europe as a dynamic affirmation of Ukraine’s rich legacy. “Our ancient Trypillya culture is probably the most important in Europe,” he explains. “According to much scientific study, this is the place where horses were domesticated for the first time, and where people first started to use ceramics.”

Not everything in Kiev impresses Sergey Makhno – from “trashy and corny new buildings” to the bureaucrats who approve them – but that doesn’t stop him getting excited about his home city. “There are splashes of immense talent,” he says. “These people are developing important projects – new restaurants, new buildings, some great pieces of design.” One of the latest additions is the new INK restaurant that he conceived, not merely as an interior, but as a whole experience. Taking inspiration from as far afield as Japan and the UK, he created the name, the logo, the furniture, the lighting – even the cutlery. “It is all there, and it works,” he says. “I love to travel. But I always come back. It’s more challenging, but more exciting to work here.”

A new sense of style

The excitement that Sergey Makhno feels is in the air these days. 2012 saw Kiev’s Olympic Stadium hosting the final of the European football championships and the launch of the Kiev Biennale of Contemporary Art at the Mystetskyi Arsenal, set to become the largest art museum in Europe by 2014. It is also reflected in the rise

of Ukrainian Fashion Week – the platform from which young designers such as Svetlana Bevza are propelling Ukrainian fashion onto the global stage.

Bevza has been exhibiting at Ukrainian Fashion Week for seven years and she is a key player in driving its success. “It’s just the beginning for the Ukrainian industry, but it’s got real potential. Ukrainian Fashion Week has developed very quickly because it brings foreign fashion editors, bloggers and line researchers to Ukraine.”

She is proof that with the creativity that has blossomed in the newfound cultural space since independence, so too has an appetite for entrepreneurial success. “The popularity of the fashion business in Ukraine is growing. A few years ago, the fashion industry in Ukraine was something like a theatre – it was not a serious business,” she explains. “I’m a designer and I like to create clothes, but I consider my creativity as a business.”

It’s a business with a future, as Ukraine starts to attract ever more interest from around the world. In 2013, Bevza was selected by Sara Maino, fashion editor of *Vogue* Italy, as one of 200 emerging global talents and she also picked up the award for Best Womenswear Designer at Ukrainian Fashion Week. A regular at fashion weeks from Moscow to London, Bevza was one of the first Ukrainian designers to be taken up by buyers in New York, Paris and Milan. It is a position that allows her to bring exposure to emerging talent – like Marsha Reva, who Bevza describes as “a real talent” who is able to think about fashion as a business.

It is the younger generation that Bevza sees as the key to unlocking Ukraine’s potential, a vanguard in which she sees herself. “Young people in Kiev are totally different from the previous generations. Education has changed and the global network has helped us to see things differently. It is very important for me to say that I am from Ukraine, I’m from Kiev, but we are shaping the city in our own image.” ►

Previous page:
Sergey Makhno
in the INK restaurant.
Makhno designed
every element from
walls and lighting right
down to the cutlery.
Below: leading fashion
designer Svetlana
Bevza. Right: Kiev
as viewed from the
Botanical Gardens



“It is very important for me to say that I am from Ukraine, I’m from Kiev, but we are shaping the city in our own image”





Left: the Range Rover Sport and the 1982 “Friendship Arch” that symbolises the friendship between Russia and Ukraine. Right: IT specialist Victor Valeyev in the corridors of the Kiev Polytechnic Institute in which he studied

“We can be not just a logistical hub, but a hub for ideas from Asia, Europe and the Middle East”



The global connector

Hooking up to the global network has become all-important to the innovators of Ukraine. If the world’s continents were a series of devices – laptop, desktop, tablet and smartphone – then Kiev would be its USB hub. It is the intermediary force that brings everything, from the latest start-up tech to the brightest new cultural ideas, together.

In Europe and Asia, the continents it straddles, Ukraine has been a sleeping giant for too long. It ranks as the second largest country in Europe by area, and if it entered the European Union – and aspirations for integration are huge – then it would be the sixth largest member by population. For a modern state only 22 years since independence, it has huge potential.

Ukrainians are justly proud of the fact that the first computer ever assembled on continental Europe was built in Kiev. The city was a key player in the Soviet defence and technology industries, and Kievans are keen to make the most of their historic opportunity to act as mediator.

“Ukraine is a hub of cultures,” says Victor Valeyev, Executive Director of IT Ukraine Association and a key player in generating links between tech companies in Ukraine and the rest of the world. “We can be not just a logistical hub, but a hub for ideas from Asia, Europe and the Middle East.”

It is perhaps unsurprising that an IT specialist should be inclined towards interaction rather than isolation – computers and the internet have had perhaps more impact than any other inventions in terms of encouraging interaction and undermining isolationism. What is perhaps more surprising for an IT man is a preoccupation with the value of the past.

“I studied here at the Kiev Polytechnic Institute. I am

inspired by the place and its sense of the generations of history, the history of ideas,” says Valeyev. “I am particularly inspired by Carl Jung’s idea that we learn from our grandfathers and fathers things that help us innovate for the future. Their ideas can reveal possibilities they never imagined. The past is important as a creative space that leads to innovation.”

Born in Kiev, Valeyev has witnessed his city grow from a Soviet satellite town through two revolutions to the emerging hub he now sits in, looking out over a new business district from his office window. He believes the key to Kiev’s success is threefold. “Firstly, Kiev has a very long history as a technological centre, part of the Byzantine legacy. It has always been a centre of education and thinking,” he explains. “Secondly, Ukraine is a country which is between two worlds – a more conservative and wealthy world of Europe and the more energetic and wild world of Asia. The third factor is mindset. To gain technological advantage in one of the most advanced industries in the world you have to be a very open-minded person. You have to be both a good analytical and creative person. Both are important. In the new IT industry, you have to be an engineer and a poet.”

Valeyev’s work is focused on bringing Ukrainian innovations into world markets, merging scientific and industrial potential, and creating conditions for greater regional development. “Our main task is to combine the research potential of Ukrainian academic institutions located in Kiev with venture businesses with money to develop, and young, practical people with brilliant ideas and energy,” he explains.

“We have set up a correspondence pavilion in Silicon Valley to facilitate interchange of experience, and we are also organising a large IT forum in Kiev,” says Valeyev. “As an association, our main task is to ►





create the environment to help people make the right contacts – to find each other.”

Though the software revolution in Ukraine may have begun with outsourcing and start-up ideas that quickly moved abroad, as the reputation of Kiev develops, so the reasons for building on home turf do, too. “In each area of Kiev, especially in the central districts, you will find at least one IT company,” Valeyev says with assurance. “Everything points to Ukraine’s historic chance to be a bridge between worlds – technologically and in every sense.”

Leading from the front

Victor Pinchuk is reputedly Ukraine’s second richest man, having made a fortune in the steel industry and he is a leading philanthropic force in the arts, education and diplomacy. In 2006, he set up the Pinchuk Foundation and opened the PinchukArtCentre in central Kiev to expose young Ukrainians to the best in contemporary global arts, and to provide a platform for emerging local talent. And young Ukrainians are responding.

“We receive around 1,400 visitors per day, which is pretty much the capacity of the PinchukArtCentre, and the major part of our visitors are young people. Since opening in September 2006, more than two

million people have visited our exhibitions,” says Dennis Kazvan, head of communications for the Victor Pinchuk Foundation.

“While most global art centres find that the major part of their clientele are 60-plus, here in Ukraine it’s young people who are filling the queues. Our core audience is between 16 and 35. They start young, admission is free, and they are getting to see

the works of top artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Damien Hirst and Anish Kapoor alongside Ukrainian artists.

“Access, integration and education are our main principles,” Kazvan explains. “We work with children – from the age of four – in our education programme to help develop their creative skills. Victor Pinchuk likes to say that ‘contemporary art is one of the most revolutionary forces in the world’. And we can really see it in this country. Just 25 years ago, contemporary art as well as rock music and underground literature were forbidden and prosecuted by Soviet authorities. Contemporary art now is a very universal language connecting people and expanding their creativity. And with national and international art prizes launched by us in 2009, we are creating a future generation of artists.”

While Dennis and his team are plotting the takeover of Kiev by a modern generation of artists from the bird’s-eye view of the uber-chic SkyArtCafe atop the art centre, the Foundation is also implementing big ideas for Ukraine across a far wider range of sectors. It provides hospitals across Ukraine with state-of-the-art medical equipment that is vital in reversing child mortality rates. More than 20,000 babies have been saved due to unique equipment since the launch of the project. “Another main focus of our work is education,”



Left: The Art Nouveau House of Chimeras is used for official ceremonies. Bevza cites this as one of her most inspiring Kiev buildings. Above: Dennis Kazvan, head of communications for the Victor Pinchuk Foundation

says Dennis. “The Foundation helped to establish the Kiev School of Economics in 2006, has translated the most popular Coursera courses into Ukrainian, and offers scholarships to young Ukrainians to study at the top Ukrainian and global universities. There are more than 2,500 alumnus of our scholarships programmes – young Ukrainians who will be the future leaders and changemakers of tomorrow’s Ukraine.”

But it is the Yalta Annual Meetings organised by the Foundation and YES (Yalta European Strategy – another network founded by Victor Pinchuk) that are making the biggest impact in integrating Ukraine into a global community and looking for solutions to global challenges. YES is held annually in Yalta, at the historic Livadia Palace where Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin divided Europe in 1945. Kazvan explains: “The YES Forum, attended by leading world politicians, visionaries and businessmen, is often called the ‘boutique-Davos of Eastern Europe’.”

Cruising Kiev’s iconic Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti), negotiating the cobbled streets of the old quarter, heading out across the bridges onto the eastern flats, the pulse of the modern city is unmistakable. It is one that runs through all the innovators and pioneers we have met on our journey, and it is a thread that seems to weave throughout Kiev and its long history.

It is a pulse of connectivity. Just as the bridges of the wide Dnieper River connect east and west Kiev, so the legacy of wisdom, architectural beauty and the tenacious Kievan spirit connect the city’s past with its future. The innovations marking the city out as a pacesetter in the new Europe are all about the desire to connect, influence, inform and transform. ■