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## O.K., Russia, Time to Work It



James Hill

**NOW THIS WAY** Alex Reznik, right, runs the new Western-style gym in the Moscow Ritz-Carlton.

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ  
Published: February 5, 2010

### MOSCOW

IT is easy to mistake Alex Reznik for one of the thick-necked barrel-chested bodyguards who stalk the corridors of the [Ritz-Carlton in Moscow](#), Russia's most glamorous hotel.

Only his track pants give him away. He is a personal trainer, a profession relatively new to a city better known for hedonism than health.

Mr. Reznik, 41, was born in the Soviet Union, where he served in the military. After leaving Russia and finding success in Manhattan with his own gym, Complete Body, he has returned home to manage the Ritz gym. He hopes to cash in on the wealthy Russians' newfound love of, as they say here, "feetnis." For the elite, a gym membership and a personal trainer seem to be as necessary these days as an Armani suit or a Vuitton purse.

"In the last three to five years, you see Russian businessmen who are in shape, who are drinking water," Mr. Reznik said. "People have decided that they want to live longer."

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On a recent day, Andrei Malakhov, a popular television host, was tossing a medicine ball with Mr. Reznik, as Ksenia Sokolova, the deputy editor of the Russian edition of [GQ magazine](#), powered through some crunches. “If you look good, you will never be without work,” said Mr. Malakhov, 37, adding with a chuckle, “If my career on television doesn’t work out, I can at least find work in some strip bar in Florida.”

Mr. Reznik’s services don’t come cheaply. Gym membership fees are as high as \$23,000 a year; a one-hour private session at home costs \$200 to \$300.

But even with the global economic downturn, the Ritz gym, which has been open for 16 months, has done well. Clients are on a steady uptick; there are two to three new members on average a week. Mr. Reznik and his trainers serve more than 200 people.

Ms. Sokolova, of GQ, who is also 37, said she started seriously working out only three years ago, more out of necessity than desire.

“For people living in my circles, this way of life is a must,” she said after a workout with one of Mr. Reznik’s assistants. “I am terribly lazy, for instance, and have to drag myself to the gym, but I go.”

During the Soviet era, physical fitness was trumpeted with totalitarian zeal, but much of the athletic infrastructure benefited only a handful of top Olympic-caliber athletes. Today, gyms and fitness centers can be found across the country. Two of the largest Russian fitness chains, World Class and Planet Fitness, have more than 30 locations between them in Moscow. Fresh fruits and vegetables are in most cities year-round (as are McDonald’s and other fast-food chains). Even an occasional jogger can be seen braving Moscow’s inclement weather and maniacal drivers.

The country’s leaders have also promoted exercise. [Vladimir V. Putin](#), the former president and now the prime minister, has been the country’s biggest fitness cheerleader. He has a black belt in judo and a fondness for swimming and skiing. More than once, he has exposed his barrel chest for the cameras. [Dmitri A. Medvedev](#), the current president, continues the drill; he skis and practices [yoga](#).

Their examples notwithstanding, gym culture is elite culture. Heavy smoking and drinking remains in place, and men continue to have a life expectancy of about 60 years. And in spite of the growing number of gyms, most Russians do not have the money for, or access to, a gym — nor the interest. “There is mass interest in beer,” said Kirill Vishnepolsky, the editor in chief of the Russian edition of [Men’s Health Magazine](#). He said that while a few watch their health, “their numbers are not nearly as high as in Europe, and their numbers are not growing.”

Whatever the obstacles, Mr. Reznik has big hopes for his fitness regimen. He said he plans to open his own gym in Moscow soon. And he wants to reintroduce some fitness strategies that he learned when training soldiers in the Soviet Army. His workouts — variations of push-ups, sit-ups and balancing exercises — often require little more than bodyweight. He blends the military toughness with martial arts, yoga, Pilates and meditation, as well as dietary and medical coaching. [Deepak Chopra](#), the guru of [alternative medicine](#) and wellness, has been a mentor and a client since 2002.

“He is a hard trainer, but he also understands everything about diet and the rules of proportionality and mental well-being,” Mr. Chopra said in a telephone interview from New York. “Most trainers are just into, you know, cardiovascular conditioning and weight training and don’t go beyond that.”



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Mr. Reznik said he is not allowed to name many of his 200 or so Moscow clients. Some top the Forbes Russian billionaires list, he said, and some are members of Parliament.

But as powerful as his clients may be, Mr. Reznik has limits. "Lots of clients request extra substances of which I don't approve," he said. "I'm talking about testosterone shots and chemicals, which you can still get in Russia."

And a few clients, he said, still come to workouts with alcohol on their breath.

A version of this article appeared in print on February 7, 2010, on page ST10 of the New York edition.

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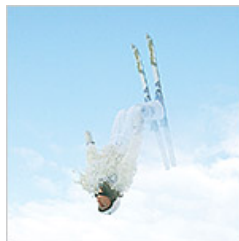
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