

Russian spoken here

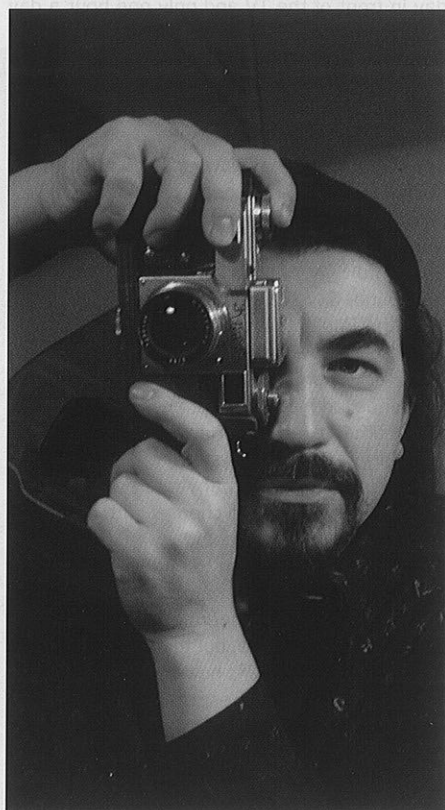
An increasing number of immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union are settling in the city.
By Stephanie Sears. **Photos by** Patricia Esteve

Victoria Pchennikova, is a Russian from Vladivostok who has been in Barcelona for eight years. She is opening her second bookstore in the city, a bigger enterprise than the last. With her whole family, including her Russian husband who is preparing, in Catalan, his degree in physics, Victoria feels at home. She is by no means a unique case in Barcelona, whose broad cosmopolitan base is broadening further to include a growing Russian-speaking community.

They come from various ex-Soviet countries such as Belorussia, Azerbaidjan, Georgia, Russia, Ouzbekistan, Moldavia, Ukraine and Tadjikistan. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, replaced by the CIS or Commonwealth of Independent States, which fragmented in 1992. On March 31st, 1992 the Federation of Russia was formed, where today's real Russians live. Around that time, ex-Soviets began to emigrate and establish themselves in the Catalan capital, so that the mellifluous tones of the Russian language are frequently overheard in the city's daily bustle, and signs of their enterprise have sprouted here and there.

They are some 10,000 declared residents and, unofficially, some 100,000, according to the Russian Church in Barcelona. The only figures offered by the Russian government's Pushkin Institute are that 300 Russian families came to Barcelona 10 years ago, and that about 100,000 Russians live in Spain. Owing to feeble economies, southern parts of the old USSR, like Ukraine (500,000 Ukrainians in Spain) and Georgia, are also well represented.

Meanwhile, things are improving so much in parts of the Federation of Russia that some of Barcelona's Russians are thinking of moving back, mostly those from the western cities of



▲ Yuri Mykhaylychenko is a musician and actor married to a Catalan who wants to make his creative mark here.

St. Petersburg and Moscow. Ilya, from St. Petersburg is married to a Spaniard, and has a small store in the Raval crammed with books, films and Russian souvenirs. Though at around 6pm people troop in, evidently attracted to the store's 'underground' charm, Ilya suggests that business would be better in Russia, because most ex-Soviets in Barcelona are too unsettled to buy books.

Other Russians view a return to their homeland less favourably. Oxana Khimitcheva transferred her St. Petersburg flower business to Barcelona with the intention of staying. One of the more conspicuous Russian stores in Barcelona is Troika, just off the Ramblas; it does a brisk business, offering Russian delicacies and hand-painted souvenirs.

Why Barcelona? The city's good weather and its immediate access to both sea and mountains are the overwhelming draws. Spain is also considered easier to enter than other countries. Regardless of individual priorities, a feeling of empathy towards Spain and Catalunya is frequently expressed (pioneered perhaps by Salvador's Dalí's wife, Gala, from Kazan), through a common experience of dictatorship and war. At the same time, differences are pointed out between the Russian and Catalan way of life in favor of the latter: Catalans enjoy life more than the ex-Soviets' compatriots back home, often described as relentless strivers. Some nostalgia for the country left behind is inevitable. Many already return to their native country at least once a year but hope for cheaper, direct flights between Barcelona and Moscow or St. Petersburg.

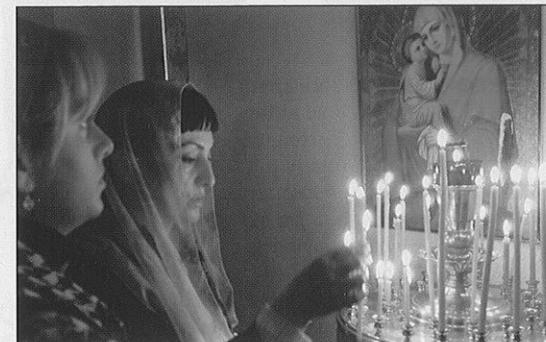
Mostly in their twenties and thirties, some of these ex-Soviets are understandably uncertain as to whether they will remain in

Barcelona. Through the sharing of a common language and immigrant status, ex-Soviets enjoy perhaps better relations than do their respective countries. The most informal of a variety of meeting points is Plaça Catalunya on Saturday mornings. But, the Russian Orthodox church where some 300 people congregate every Sunday is perhaps the most striking example of a Slavic presence in Barcelona. Many members are Ukrainian and Georgian. The church was built three years ago, from a ruin and with no money to speak of, through the energetic efforts of Ukrainian Padre Feodor. With myriad candles, beautiful icons on the walls (many painted by the Catalan artist, María Roig), and beautiful liturgical singing, Sunday mass transports one to the heart of Russia. The visit of the head of the Russian Church in Paris on the December 19th, Saint Nicholas Day, was an important consecration for Barcelona's young Orthodox church.

Other ex-Soviets meet through associations such as Manos Rusas which promotes both Russian culture and workmanship; weekly meetings allow for a combination of socialising and networking. The Foutoka Association is more specifically cultural in intent and favours the reunion of Russian-speaking artists. There are no 'Russian' restaurants in the city apart from a Karaoke bar called 'Svetlana la Ratrac' in Sarría. Lloret de Mar, however, has two restaurants catering to a concentration of ex-Soviets living in the area.

The Pushkin Institute offers Russian language courses and conveniently shares its space with the agency IberRusia, thus encouraging its students to discover Russia. Daniel Diaz Strukov, half Russian half Peruvian, and a Muscovite friend are starting their own Russian travel agency in the Barri Gòtic.

The community also comprises scholars, scientists, and artists whose subsistence sometimes entails working at jobs unrelated to their qualifications. Such is Elena's case, a physicist from the Ourals, specialising in fundamental research on polymers. After working as a scientist in Russia and in Stuttgart, she moved to Barcelona five years ago and is now employed as a cleaning woman.



▲ Saint Nicholas day celebrated in Barcelona's Russian church.

Yuri Mykhaylychenko, 37, Ukrainian musician and actor, first came to Spain in 1991 and married a Catalan woman. While awaiting the success of his musical project, called *Yuri y los Cosmonautas*, which features what Yuri calls 'folk, space, cabaret' music, he supports himself by working at several jobs.

Marina, a Russian musicologist, was not forced by economic reasons to leave Russia. But, it was an opportunity for her son to study piano with a well-known Russian pianist in Barcelona that brought her here a year ago. Through an exchange programme between Tomsk university and the University of Barcelona she now teaches Russian musicology here while her husband, a successful producer, continues to live in Russia. Frequent visits back and forth keep the family connected. Marina and her family plan to divide their time equally between the two countries.

Based on mutual respect, relations between Catalans and ex-Soviets seem to be evolving harmoniously. And, why not? It's a win-win immigration. Catalans would be unreasonable to dislike this young, smart influx of ex-Soviets, quick to learn both Castilian and Catalan, while ex-Soviets appreciate the sun and the more relaxed pace of life. ■

FYI >

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 www.centroruso.com

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 cpena@iberrusia.com

'Knijnaya lavka' bookstore
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 Tel. 93 270 10 49

Libreria Rusa
 Joquin Costa 2
 barkoffbook@mail.ru

Russian Church
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 (Sants station)
 Tel. 636 888 638

Floristeria Mamia
 Av. Republica Argentina
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 Centro Cial. Argentina,
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Troika delicatessen
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Mask magic

Putting on a mask can still turn people into someone else. By **Stephanie Sears**



There is a peculiar fascination about masks and the advantages of dissimulation and metamorphosis which they permit, and it has not disappeared over the centuries. Catalunya shows an uncommon relish for Carnival celebrations and masquerading. In 2003, there were 87 to choose from in the province, of which the most renowned were Sitges, Barcelona, Vilanova i la Geltrú, Solsona and Reus.

Throughout Europe, masks are rarely used with solemnity anymore as they were in ancient times, in funerary rites and other rituals involving contact with ancestral and divine spirits. But they remain a main accessory of carnivals. As such, one principal asset of the mask hasn't changed, which is that while hiding one's identity it continues paradoxically to help communicate with others and by liberating inhibitions becomes an instrument of freedom.

Man's first attempts at disguise occurred in the Paleolithic, probably wearing the head and fur of an

animal whose powers he wished to acquire or dominate. Through pre-Christian times, masks were worn in propitiation rituals. Roman celebrations such as the *Lupercalia* on February 15th, honouring the wolf deity *Faunus Lupercus* to ensure women's fecundity, were later replaced by Christian festivities honouring saints such as Saint Tryphon, patron of vineyards, in place of Pan. Similarly, the mask's ceremonial setting evolved from being rural to the formalised representations of ancient Greek theatre, later transformed through the influence of the *commedia dell'arte* into the Renaissance's urban farcical processions.

February remained, through most of this evolution, the month of chaos, reversals and purification, as the Latin, *Februus* indicates, and therefore of renewal. Each year, for three to four intense days of colourful revelry preceding Christian Lent this spirit is celebrated in Catalunya by *Carnestoltes*, the Catalan word for

Carnival. It means, "to take away the meat", and Catalans celebrate this time of profound change with parades, balls and mock battles of tomatoes, caramels, flour, water, etc.

During the Carnival's golden age of the 17th and 18th centuries, the mask was worn in a decidedly playful way, which in Europe's hierarchical societies led to reversing social roles for the duration of the revelry. Various marginalised characters such as the lunatic, the deformed, the pauper, the blasphemer, were represented and honoured, as they still are today. Masks also allowed the upper classes to mingle, unrecognised, with the lower classes, and even to carry on illicit love affairs.

Carnival celebrations were banned during the Franco years—a tribute to the daring proclivity of this celebration—but have seen a revival since the Nineties, during which the construction of floats, and designing of costumes and masks, has become increasingly elaborate, an art in its own right, if an ephemeral one.

In Barcelona, the two stores called *Arlequi Mascarees* cater to this taste for masquerades with a stupendous array of masks. One of them is located in the Ribera on Princesa. The other larger store in Poble Espanyol includes the workshop where the owners, Jaime Serra and Shamira, or their team, can be found in action, making the masks. Observing them as they progress precisely and carefully through the different steps required gives a thrilling sense of good craftsmanship. It starts as a drawing, from which is made a clay model, then a plaster mould, finally a *papier-mâché* (or leather) version, in which the eyes and mouth are cut. The surface is then covered with two successive layers of a glue, and a plastic to give consistency and suppleness. Painting the mask includes a technique that confers a cracked, aged finish and/or collages and in some cases extra drawing, and can take up to six hours to do. Gold and silver leaf are used here instead of a cheaper chemical substance called *purpurina*, which oxidises in time, and again, for aesthetic reasons, ribbons are used

for straps rather than elastic bands.

Regional styles such as the egg-head *al dentat*, or the fat face *al galdas*, appear side by side with international types including the French Pierrot, the medieval juggler, the Greek theatre mask. But, Venetian masks are clearly favoured; one of the more villainous-looking is a long beak which used to protect Venetian doctors against the plague when visiting their patients, while one of the more flattering and elegant is the *Civetta* with a crown of feathers. This prevalence stems from a friendship formed with a Venetian during Jaime and Shamira's art student years in Florence. In time, the Venetian acquired his own mask-making business in Venice, and since 1982 a regular exchange of styles and techniques has been going on between them.

While traditional forms are made with a keen

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knowledge of their historical and ethnological backgrounds, innovations are by no means lacking as illustrated by the Gaudi-inspired mosaic and draped leather masks. The masks are so beautiful and so well made that many clients buy them as works of art to place on a table or a wall.

As *Carnestoltes* approaches, one can only wonder why there is such excitement and promise at putting on a mask? After all, today it is a simple secular object, and we no longer live in such constricting forms of society as in bygone centuries. Is it simply fun? It is, but there may be more to the exhilaration: we can forget about the psychological guise we put on every day and adopt in its place the mask's more audacious identity. Beyond this advantage, there may be the esoteric hope that by transforming our faces for a few hours, we may participate in some very real seasonal changes and bring about deeper renewal in our own lives. ■



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Stephanie Sears

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Equestrian Barcelona

Whether it is riding lessons you want, or stable space for your horse, various alternatives are on offer.
By Stephanie Sears



Stephanie Sears

City dwellers may adapt to, and even revel in, the urban density surrounding them, but a non-urban activity such as horseback riding can still be a welcome change of pace. The *Federació Catalana Hipica* lists 46 clubs in the province of Barcelona, four of these near enough to the city centre to be reached by foot, bus, metro, *ferrocarril*, and never more than 20 minutes away by car. They are open membership clubs that teach jumping and/or dressage in English or French style. They offer the choice of riding school horses or boarding one's own horse. Stall rental includes daily cleaning, forage, exercise and veterinary services, usually available at extra cost. Each rider's level is evaluated in a preliminary test entailing basic movements around the ring, putting the horse into a trot and a canter.

No club offers regular riding beyond the precincts of the ring, though in the case of higher level students, some propose occasional outings. An owner can obviously do as he likes, but bridle paths aren't always available. Outside the *Escola Municipal d'Hipica La Foixarda*, in Barcelona, amidst traffic and the din of construction work, a man was seen riding his Spanish gray on the street looping around the back of the *Palacio Nacional*. To do so, he admitted, a rider should be confident in his horse.

The 12-year-old school, *La Foixarda*, is situated at the top of Montjuïc, to the right of the *Palau Nacional*. Lesser equestrians and those without their own horses ride in three rings within two hectares of land; one, 45 metres by 54 metres, for higher level students; another, 40 by 20, for intermediates; and a smaller, for beginners, is 20 by 20. Twenty-six school horses (five are ponies) are mostly saddle bred, interspersed with the occasional Anglo-Arab and Arabian. The 20 privately owned horses are being relocated to new stalls, more spacious than the old ones, but which are full for the time being. Four instructors teach basic riding and dressage up to medium level, along with equine anatomy, theory and horse care.

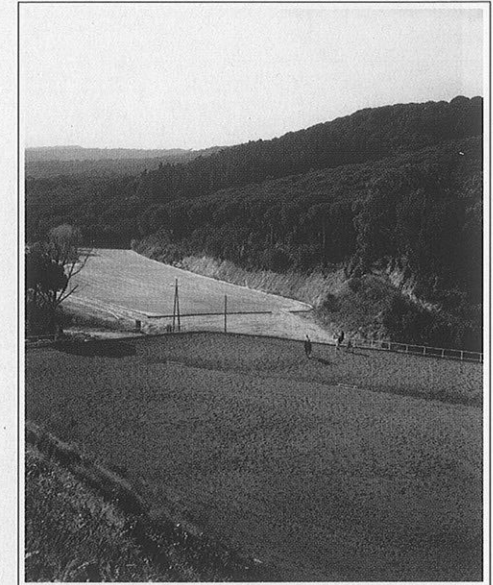
minute walk from the Sant Cugat station through a chic suburb nestled against the *Collserola*. Built on less than one hectare of land, the school has two 30 by 30 rings with *gamma*, a ground rubber surface that fights the humidity of the neighbouring forest. Twenty-nine horses and ponies, mostly Hispano-Arabs and saddle-breds, have moderately spacious stalls. Spared the yearly membership fee of €100, owners pay €240 a month for their horse's board including the usual amenities. Small classes of six riders are taught by four instructors from Tuesday to Sunday, all day. Instructors teach dressage at all levels and jumping no further than initiation. Testing follows federation standards and competitions are organised between regional clubs. Owners can ride in the adjoining *Collserola*. Others go with an instructor, but infrequently.

strenuous walk—or, like this writer, catch a chance ride with the local police. The 12-hectare *Centro*, born 24 years ago, and privately owned for the last nine, is amidst pine forest, near the mountain top. It includes a small hotel, pool, restaurant and tennis court. It is quiet, but for bird twitter and the snorts of horses being ridden around one of the seven rings terraced one above the other with wide vistas of the valley below. Two are big, used for competitions, one 40 by 20, is covered, and others are used for training. The total ring surface of sand and 'gamma' is 20,000 square metres. The stables are cheerful, stalls spacious, perfectly maintained and arranged in 'streets' allowing the horses to face each other.

Beyond differences of cost, each [facility] has its particular appeal and advantages.

The owner, Enric Piguillem, is improving his small club by leaps and bounds, having already added to the old lot by two and a half hectares, on the hill above. Four more rings have been made, the biggest of which is 120 by 40. Forty more stalls will be finished in less than a year as well as a restaurant to supplement the present sparsely furnished lounge. Unfortunately, beginners trying to enter the club now will be put on a waiting list; more seasoned riders will find room. The furthest club, the *Centro Ecuestre de Llanereres* is also the largest and the best, overall, except in accessibility. After a train ride to Sant Andreu de Llanereres, and the town minibus to the village centre, one must either walk the *Cami Can Cabot* up the mountain for about 30 minutes—an attractive but

One hundred and thirty-two members share 120 Spanish, thoroughbred, Anglo-Arab and saddle-bred horses. Eighty are privately owned, and their superior quality testifies to the excellence of the care given to horses and the confidence owners have in the centre's management. Monthly rates for a horse's board were not available, although estimates put the cost considerably higher than other stables. Five instructors, including Luis Lucio of the national Olympic team, teach all levels of dressage and jumping every day, except Mondays. Testing of theoretical and practical knowledge occurs three times a year through the official channel of the Association of British Riding Schools. Every Sunday, two or three hour rides in the mountains are organised for about 40 riders, owners only. The centre also has special programmes such as 'hypotherapy' for people who are physically or mentally challenged and the hotel is available to school groups during vacations. Although Llanereres is without doubt the most beautifully appointed of these clubs, all of the facilities seem fine. Beyond differences of cost, each has its particular appeal and advantages. ■



Escola Municipal d'Hipica La Foixarda
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Contact: Jordi Alonso 93 426 1066

Open Sports Club
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El Prat de Llobregat_Bus: L-95
Contact: Roma Galimany 93 370 4051

Escola Hipica Collserola
Calle San Cugat, 15, Zona can Trallal
Sant Cugat del Valles_Ferrocarril: Sant Cugat
Contact: Enric Piguillem 93 589 8989

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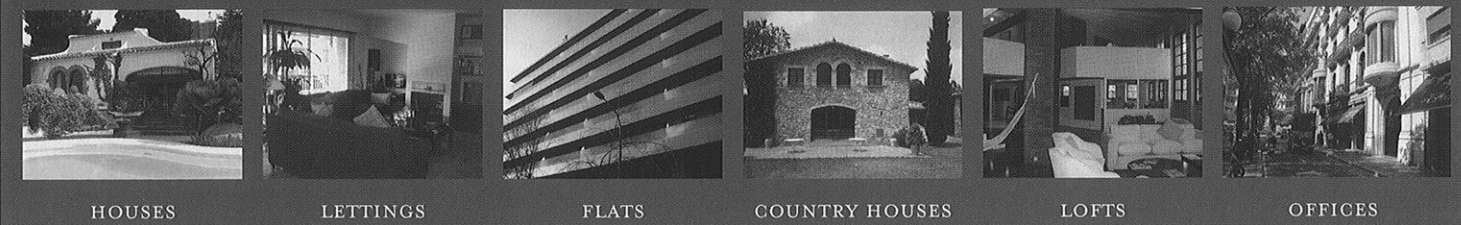
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ARTISTS AT WORK

A LONG TRADITION OF ARTISTIC ENDEAVOUR CONTINUES AT THIS VENERABLE LOCATION. BY STEPHANIE SEARS. PHOTO BY ARCHIE MACIAS



▲ In addition to artists' workspaces, the Cercle also offers weekly tertulias.

The Reial Cercle Artistic near Barcelona's cathedral offers more than just the possibility to draw, paint, sculpt or engrave. It is also a resource for getting better acquainted with the work of some of the best Catalan artists, past and present, and an unusual example of authentic Catalan culture.

The Cercle Artistic has occupied the 16th-century Pignatelli Palace, and the connecting Casa Bassols since 1959. But, it has been at the centre of Catalunya's artistic life since 1881 when it was formed from two previous artistic associations and named El Circulo de Acuarelistas. It was located near the Cathedral back then, in an annexe of the building known as La Canonja, before moving several times and finally returning to the same quarter, at Carrer Arcs 5.

Inside, the first impression is of entering someone's private and rather grand house, or an exclusive club. The art hanging on every wall reveals the special features of its history and connections even to the eyes of first-time visitors. The Cercle's membership has included such major Catalan artists as Joaquim Mir, Santiago Rusiñol, Lluís Graner and Joan Abello, the Cercle's current president.

Through the patronage and work of members, and its regular tertulias during which art and lots else has always been freely discussed, the Cercle Artistic has long had a strong influence on Barcelona's social and cultural life.

Inside, the first impression is of entering someone's private and rather grand house...

It would seem today that much of the spontaneity of those artistic-intellectual assemblies and the immediacy and closeness of the relationship between art and society has been lost to increasing specialisation, commercialisation in the art world and bureaucracy. But the Cercle Artistic, while providing a tangible setting to improve one's own talent, also continues to offer a direct route to the heart of Catalunya's society of artists in the most uncontrived and pleasant atmosphere. Joan Abello, president of the Cercle, has his own museum in the town of Mollet del

Vallès, some 20 minutes away from Barcelona. His works are characterised by thickly applied, brilliant colours in the 'explosivismo' style that he created. He also shows the work of friends like Salvador Dalí, Antoni Tàpies, Jean Cocteau, Manolo Hugue and that of his masters Joaquim Mir, Pere Pruna and Carles Pellicer. Suddenly, just by going to draw at the Cercle, one feels a stimulating proximity to these great artists.

Though no teaching, *per se*, is offered at the Cercle, it is not rare that skilled members will offer their advice to novices, and artists—some of considerable distinction—will casually drop by and participate in impromptu discussions on art during break periods. On Thursday evenings in the Sala de Actos, which is the Cercle's periodicals' reading-room, the traditional weekly tertulia takes place; during these meetings a variety of subjects are broached, gracefully presided over by paintings and sculptures by the likes of Enric Galweiy, Josep Clara and Enric Casanova.

The Cercle provides five studios, each one devoted to still life, nude model drawing or painting, sculpture or engraving. For €30 a month, a non-member can have the use of all of these. For €36 (three months payable in advance), one becomes a member and may use the periodicals room and the library devoted to 19th- and 20th-century art history—specifically to *Noucentisme*, a branch of *Modernisme*. Various conferences and exhibitions take place in the Cercle's main event hall, including an annual show that helps artists financially through the support of the Foundation Güell. Fee reductions benefit fine arts students (€13), young people between the ages of 16-18 (€12) and 18-25 (€27).

The appeal of the Reial Cercle Artistic comes in part from its limited self-promotion, but it should not be missed by an artist looking for advice, preparation and good company. ■

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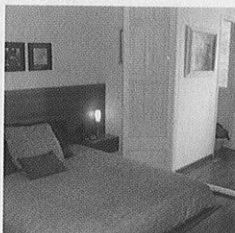
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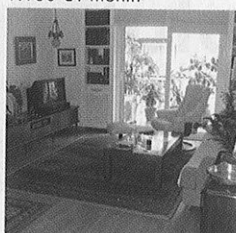
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The other ball game

You don't have to be super rich to learn how to play polo—it's playing seriously that costs a bundle. **By** Stephanie Sears



Photos courtesy Real Club de Polo de Barcelona

▲ Good polo requires extraordinary communication between horse and rider.

There is such a thing as growing weary of the ubiquitous football, and its pampered star players. A worthy alternative is the oldest ball game in history: polo, also the sport of the 29-hectare Real Club de Barcelona founded in 1897, which is easily reached by getting off the green line at Zona Universitaria, then walking three minutes to the gate.

Horse polo (for there is also elephant polo in India) has long suffered from a reputation of social elitism. Labelled 'the game of kings', it was, indeed, played by men and women of the nobility in the past. It originated in Central Asia some 3,000 years ago as both a diversion and training for nomadic cavalry between periods of actual warfare. Over the centuries, the game spread to Near and Far East, and was rediscovered in the 1800s by Englishmen living in India. Today it is becoming more widely popular and Argentina, England and the States are the leading playing countries.

Frederico Lucas Español, the young and gregarious Argentinean polo teacher at Barcelona's Real Polo Club compares the game to Formula One driving for excitement, and for the rigorous teamwork binding horse, rider and groom. In fact, polo does contain similar ingredients of speed and risk which partly

explains why it is not widespread; but while the game may have been a free-for-all in Tamerlane's days, it is played today with a helmet and knee guards, and follows strict rules, which help to make the sport less dangerous.

Two teams of four riders, arbitered by two 'in field' referees and one 'off', confront each other on a grass rectangle of 135-165 metres wide, 235-285 metres long, with two goals at each end. The match is divided into seven-minute-20-second periods called Chukkers or Chukkas. The trick is to hit a 3.25-inch plastic ball, which may go over 100 miles per hour, with a mallet's striking head, while galloping down the field at 35 miles per hour. Well played, the game melds rider and pony into a centaur, combining a keen sense of team strategy with passionate physical commitment and fearlessness.

The so-called pony is, in fact, nowadays, a horse of about 15 hands. The best come from Argentina. A well-trained polo pony knows the game so well that he will sometimes, when the rider and his mallet have failed, mark a goal with his hooves, which is counted.

Previous riding skills are not absolutely necessary to begin polo. Español can, in such cases, teach riding fundamentals along with

game technique. To become proficient in polo, however, takes two to three years, with three to four lessons a week the first year, he said. One other impediment to popular participation: to participate in tournaments a polo player must have a minimum of three, preferably four ponies. The good news is that to learn the game, one need only join the Real Club and own a pair of riding breeches, boots and a helmet.

Membership dues are paid over a period of five years, and two established members must serve as patrons (the polo instructor may help in obtaining patrons if the aspiring member has no personal contacts in the club). During this time, by paying a monthly fee of €88, one may use the club, a large, attractive, well-equipped facility also featuring swimming, tennis, paddle, squash, hockey and a variety of other fitness services, and restaurants. Polo lessons cost an additional €135 for four lessons a month. Class periods are from the 15th of September to the 15th of December and from the 15th of March to the 15th of July. ■

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