



## LADY MISS KIEV Meet Ukraine's harsh mistress of high fashion. *By Stephen Heyman*

In 1994, three years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was an unmitigated economic disaster. The inflation rate had reached nearly 100 percent per month. Fat-cat politicians feasted on assets that once belonged to the state, and more than half of all economic activity was estimated to be illegal. The national currency, known then as “coupons,” became so worthless that one Ukrainian factory used it to produce toilet paper.

It was at this moment of total insecurity that Oksana Sergeevna Moroz, a wealthy woman from Kiev, knocked on the showroom door of Azzedine Alaïa in Paris. She had come with a simple message: Let's do business. But before she could sell Alaïa at home, she had to sell herself to the West.

“I was dressed all in Chanel because I loved Chanel at that moment. In our country, maybe 10 people understood what it was,” said Moroz-Hunt. (She now goes by the name of her deceased ex-husband.) “And when I came to Alaïa, very elegant, wearing a gold Rolex watch, they started to touch me, and they looked at my watch and asked, ‘Is this a real Rolex?’”

Before long, clothes designed by Alaïa, Gianfranco Ferré and Thierry Mugler arrived at Moroz-Hunt's small store, called Vogue, in central Kiev. “I would hire a special security

company with guns and armor because at the moment everything would get stolen and broken on the roads.”

Moroz-Hunt decorated the shop herself and dressed all the mannequins. She served imported chocolates and Champagne. Astronomically expensive by local standards, the clothes she sold dressed the wives and girlfriends of the country's emerging elite. Before she entered politics, the famously braided former prime minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko (who is now in jail) also came there. Seventeen years later, Moroz-Hunt's boutique has become Sanahunt, a gleaming multilevel department store for New Ukrainians who crave everything from Céline bags to stuffed animals made of chinchilla.

In the passion play that is post-Soviet Ukraine, Moroz-Hunt sees herself as fashion messiah. “I understood that people were dressed awfully. They were very low-cultured. But they wanted to change,” she said. “I saw how they looked at me, how they tried to mirror me.” But as with any messianic figure, Moroz-Hunt's path to fashion salvation was beset by persecution, both real and imagined.

On a screaming hot day in Kiev, back in June, Philip Vlasov met me on the ground floor of Sanahunt, next to the Balenciaga boots and the Y.S.L. sling-backs. He had recently moved to Kiev from Moscow (where he worked for Russian Vogue) to become Sanahunt's marketing director. Vlasov is soft-spoken. He was wearing expensive sweatpants and had an unruly mop of hair dyed almost white. A few months after we met, he would quit, citing exhaustion and frustration with Moroz-Hunt; she said that she chose not to renew his contract.

At our first encounter he was still upbeat. “Kiev is like

**Cloakroom drama**  
Oksana Moroz-Hunt and her store, Sanahunt (above right), have brought the likes of Alaïa and Dior to Kiev.



Moscow in the '90s," Vlasov said. "Now, in Moscow, people spend less. Even rich people — they've started wearing High Street brands. But here it's still about showing off."

We were seated on the leafy fourth-floor terrace of the Sanahunt Lounge, eating that mayonnaised Soviet staple salat olivier (this one topped with black caviar). One block away is Budynok Uryadu, a massive Stalinist edifice where the prime minister and other officials have their offices. Politicians eat lunch at the Lounge all the time.

The wealthiest Ukrainians, Vlasov said, tend to buy brands that have been traditionally popular in Eastern Europe, like Dolce & Gabbana and Versace. But Sanahunt also stocks designers that don't translate as easily into the local market, like Joseph Altuzarra and Alexander Wang. They sell poorly and at the end of the season are sharply discounted.

"Sometimes I get clothes, knowing they might not sell," Moroz-Hunt said. "But I still buy them because my clients must see that they exist."

Cecilia Dean, the editor of Visionaire, met Moroz-Hunt this year when she was in Kiev for a Sanahunt event. "It's a really impressive store," Dean said. "It was curated very well." She can't recall what Moroz-Hunt was wearing "but I'm sure it was something with a lot of cleavage. She's got a body and she flaunts it. More power to her."

In August, Moroz-Hunt met me in the lobby lounge of the Mandarin Oriental hotel in New York, which, along with the George V in Paris, she thinks of as "like home." (Her actual homes are in Kiev and Cannes, France, where she owns a villa.) She was dressed in a black Alexander McQueen blazer, a white tuxedo shirt by Stella McCartney, black Balenciaga pants and dangerously sharp Jimmy Choo heels.

"Caviar?" she asked a waiter, not impolitely, in thickly accented

English. "American sturgeon — what is this? If you have something good, give us." Rosé Champagne arrived along with caviar-topped tuna tartare.

It is unclear how much money Moroz-Hunt has. NetJets features a customer profile of her on its Web site. In Kiev, where she has bodyguards, she drives around in a chauffeured Rolls-Royce Phantom. In Cannes, she has a Ferrari. She said that Sanahunt was built on an initial investment of \$340,000 and has grown purely through profits.

When Moroz-Hunt first began to make money, her landlord decided arbitrarily to raise her rent. This was her first brush with post-Soviet business ethics. "My personality is I hate when people blackmail me," she said. "I just don't let them mess with me."

Moroz-Hunt is trim, busty, thick-lipped and long-nailed. Christophe Robin, the celebrated Paris colorist, tends to her platinum hair. Her visage seems to morph from pallid to uncomfortably flushed, depending on the topic of conversation.

"I've had a few husbands," she said. "But I'm not married right now. Maybe, I don't know, maybe it wasn't the right people. Or maybe the business and husbands just don't work out."

Moroz-Hunt said she was born in Kiev in 1964, the child of scientist parents. Before the Wall came down, she lived in Moscow and, she told me, was married to a judo star whose status enabled her to travel widely and be exposed to fashion. She eventually divorced him and in the late 1990s, after she moved back to Kiev, met Alexander Hunt, a Russian who had at one time immigrated to the United States. They married ("Sanahunt" is a hybrid of their two names) and, in 2000, had a son, Nicholas, who attends a private school in the south of France.

At some point their relationship soured, dramatically. According



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to court papers, Hunt left Ukraine in January 2003, and the couple divorced, on April Fool's Day, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Then, in June, Moroz-Hunt sent a letter to the Interior Ministry, claiming that Hunt had a criminal history and that he came to Cannes and threatened to kidnap Nicholas while he was under the care of a nanny there.

Hunt was subsequently banned from the country and stripped of his parental rights by Ukrainian courts. In response, in 2004, he sued Ukraine in the European Court of Human Rights, arguing that the government took illegal steps at Moroz-Hunt's behest. In 2006, the court awarded Hunt about \$13,000 in damages.

"He wanted to take everything," Moroz-Hunt said. She said she became gravely ill during the custody battle and speaks of that period cryptically, as if she were the victim of an intricate plot at some imperial court. "My entourage was waiting for me to die," she said.

She became emotional when discussing her ex-husband. "He did many things. He sued me. He threatened me," she said. "A lot of story! And, end of story is, he is dead. I was very close to death, and unfortunately, I don't know how it's possible, he had a heart attack and he died. That was three years ago."

The Ukrainian press, not surprisingly, had a field day with the story, writing thinly sourced exposés filled with lurid details. And the Hunt affair is not the only incident that fuels Moroz-Hunt's murky mystique. She is connected to Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine's controversial former president, through his daughter, Elena Pinchuk, who is the godmother of Moroz-Hunt's son. In 2008, Moroz-Hunt and Viktor A. Yushchenko, the former president, became godparents of a mutual friend's daughter.

People in Kiev seem to know Moroz-Hunt's reputation better than

what clothes she puts in her store. Security at Sanahunt is tight. When I came in unannounced, a day before my meeting with Vlasov, a shopkeeper trailed me suspiciously from room to room. The store was mostly deserted, save for an Orthodox Jew and a stout businessman exchanging Russian anecdotes on the lounge terrace. This makes one wonder who exactly shops at Sanahunt.

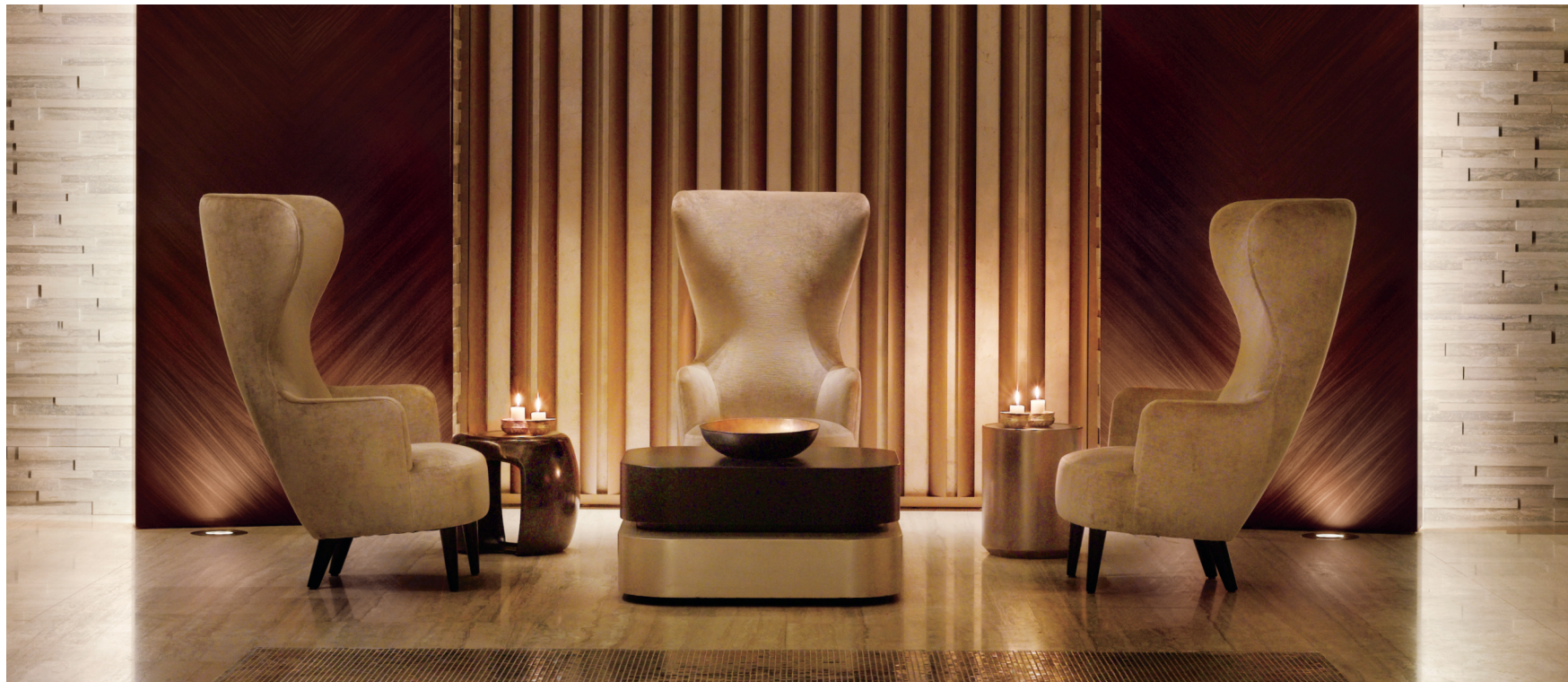
"My friends and I, we never go in there," said Natasha Lysova, a former journalist who is now Tymoshenko's spokeswoman. "We couldn't afford anything." The average gross monthly salary in Ukraine is about \$320, which buys a few orders of lobster pasta at the Sanahunt Lounge.

Still, Sanahunt is a symbol of what can now be achieved in Ukraine — through grit and vision, or shady dealings and high-placed connections, or all of the above. I asked Moroz-Hunt if many of her customers came from the oligarchy, which swelled during last decade's commodities boom. "Of course. They love beautiful things," she said. "We treat them like royalty."

Moroz-Hunt is at work on a second Sanahunt store, to open in 2013 in Odessa, on the Black Sea coast. She also plans to unveil a capsule collection, provided she can find an appropriate designer. During his time at the store, Vlasov had struggled with this task.

"Finally," he said, "I insisted on Miguel Adrover, whom she hadn't known but found interesting." Vlasov found Adrover in Majorca, Spain, and convinced him to come to Paris to negotiate terms, but then Moroz-Hunt canceled the meeting at the last minute.

"She called me and said, 'You know, I realized that I really like Adrover's styling, but I don't like the shoulder line on his garments. It's rounded. It's weak. I want the Chanel shoulder line: straight, or even pointing upwards.'" ■



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