

Hi-Tech Movie Screen Explosion Coming Soon

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Kronverk Cinema plans to open 26 modern screens in new movie theaters in St. Petersburg in the next few months, Edward Pichugin, director of Kronverk Cinema, said Friday.

The company's plans are part of an explosion in cinema development that will sweep the city's number of high-tech screens in the city may go from 28 to 90 by the end of the year.

This will transform the city's cinema market from being an underdeveloped one to nearly complete saturation in one year, analysts say.

To crown the change, St. Petersburg will get Russia's first IMAX 3D film in the summer of 2005. Running at the theaters will be mainly Hollywood blockbusters.

Kronverk Cinema, which operates two cinemas — NEO and Zanevsky Kaskad — will open three more in spring — a five-screen multiplex NORD on Thursday, a six-screen one on Friday and an eight-screen one on May 15. A seven-screen Balkansky multiplex will open June 15 near metro Kupchino.

In summer, two more multiplexes will open, a four-screen Nevsky and a six-screen Yugo-Zapadny, in the corresponding city districts.

HOME DELIVERY

Kronverk Cinema's managing company is Epos, a fully-owned subsidiary of Bankirsky Dom.

The Kronverk project is aimed at delivering films to the city's 'burbs, "directly to the homes of those people who did not use to spend their weekend nights in film theaters on Nevsky," Pichugin said.

Polls at NEO and Zanevsky Kaskad have shown that 80 percent of the audience is "new," meaning that it had not been attending cinemas over the past several years. As for the film freaks who have been traveling all the way to Nevsky Prospekt to see alternative



Kronverk's new eight-screen movie theater giant, Mercury, set to open soon as part of the project's plan to bring films closer to home

movie releases and festival projects — they will have to continue going to Dom Kino and Aurora.

"The city's 37 state-run theaters can hardly be called businesses, as they are surviving thanks to subsidies," Pichugin said.

Kronverk Cinema and other similar projects are counting mainly on Hollywood blockbusters to bring revenue for potential success. Russian and European alternative films will be provided with screen time occasionally, Pichugin said.

None of Kronverk Cinema's multiple theaters are specifically designed to form the city's new film festival location, he said.

"DomKino fully supports itself from ticket revenue and uses no subsidies. At present, 90 percent of film festivals are held at DomKino," DomKino's direc-

tor Viktor Agranatov said Monday in a telephone interview.

"DomKino is equipped with modern technology, and I don't think the city needs special festival theaters to attract more serious films. Simply keep on coming to DomKino," Agranatov said.

That said, Agranatov believes that commercial cinemas might well include European films in their programs once they see that those films can also bring profit.

MARKET TO SHAPE UP SOON

Expert magazine said Monday the boom in cinema openings is due to many projects having started a couple of years ago. They are nearing completion simultaneously, its report said.

This is very favorable for investments — they peaked in 2003, present-

ing several new players in the market, Expert wrote.

Kronverk Cinema is already the local leader, and aims to occupy up to 60 percent of the market once its new screens are launched later this year.

"Kronverk Cinema is investing from \$350,000 to \$500,000 per screen," Pichugin said.

Other players include Cinema Park, owned by oligarch Vladimir Potanin's ProfMedia and Nikita Mikhalkov's ThreeT, and Roskinoprokat, a state project launched by an order from President Vladimir Putin in 2001.

"St. Petersburg is just one of our regional projects, even though a very important one," Expert quoted Cinema Park's director Kirill Ivanov as saying. The company is planning to open a nine-screen Grand Canyon cinema on Prospekt Prosvyasheniya in 2005, Expert wrote.

Roskinoprokat's new multiplex will also have nine screens. It is set to open at the Peak center on Sennaya Ploshchad at the end of 2004.

Construction of shopping centers has been a key to the explosive expansion of cinemas in the city.

In the light of the high demand for quality screens, shopping center owners have started to include multiplexes in their construction projects at engineering stages.

About ten shopping centers that will have cinemas as anchor tenants are due to open in St. Petersburg soon, Expert said.

Putting cinemas inside shopping centers is cheaper than building stand-alone theaters, its report said.

NEW GENERATION FORMAT

Kronverk Cinema is conducting a tender among eight engineering firms to construct its most attractive project — the Kronverk Cinema multiplex theater in Alexandrovsky Park that is due to open in June 2005 for 2,000 viewers.

One of its halls will be equipped with an IMAX 3D system. The theater will hold national premieres in which Hollywood stars will take part, Pichugin said. The theater will cost about \$20 million.

The new standard in film presentation, IMAX uses 15-perforation, 70mm film to shoot and project images of incredible sharpness. The 15/70 frame is 10 times larger than the 35mm used in regular theatres and three times larger than standard 70mm film used in classic Hollywood epics. This makes it the largest commercial film screen ever invented.

The screen is half the size of a football field, enough to show a whale in life size.

There are 220 IMAX theaters all over the world, one of them in Moscow the Nescafe IMAX Theater at Palace Flora. However, Kronverk Cinema will have Russia's first IMAX 3D screen.