



The Chinese Palace at Oranienbaum: Catherine the Great's Private Passion (Great Palaces)

Will Black

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The Chinese Palace at Oranienbaum: Catherine the Great's Private Passion (Great Palaces) Will Black Catherine the Great's seizure of power remains one of the most dramatic and ironic episodes in Russian history. The little-known and rarely visited complex of Oranienbaum, a closed area until recently, was the setting for her coup d'etat as well as where she commissioned her first palace as tsarina. Here, she would relax in private with her accomplice and lover Grigory Orlov, with whom she had a secret child. Her creation, the rococo Chinese Palace, her personal dacha, exudes her personality and youthful tastes to this day. Uniquely untouched during the Revolution and two world wars, its dazzling interiors survive intact from 1762. The palace was designed and built by Antonio Rinaldi, with the help of the great artists and craftsmen of the day - Giovanni Tiepolo, Giuseppe and Serfano Barozzi, and Stefano Torelli, to name but a few. Their work survives in this idyllic rococo retreat, redolent with power and mystery just a few miles down the coast from Vladimir Putin's new maritime residence at Strelna. The World Monuments Fund is actively restoring the fragile Chinese Palace as part of a program of restoration, coinciding with the 300th anniversary of the founding of St Petersburg by Catherine's predecessor, Peter the Great. Will Black is Russian Projects Director and Press Office at the World Monuments Fund's UK office, and is co-ordinating the restoration of the Chinese Palace at Oranienbaum. He graduated in Russian at Edinburgh University and has worked as a journalist and political researcher. Simon Sebag Montefiore is an historian and author of the acclaimed *Prince of Princes, the Life of Potemkin*. After graduating in History from Cambridge University he traveled extensively throughout the former Soviet empire whilst writing two novels and many newspaper articles. His new book *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* will be published in 2003.

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