

20 Years of Making Cooking History

20 years ago a revolution began to emerge in my Munich restaurant, *the Aubergine*. Back in 1971 I had imported the modern, health-conscious *nouvelle cuisine* from my French masters (above all Paul Haeberlin and Paul Bocuse), into Germany, that is, into the Tantris restaurant, Munich; this was rewarded eight later years by being the first German-speaking chef to receive three Michelin stars. 20 years ago the *nouvelle cuisine* was still world class, but the guests began to long for something new. They wanted something different from the filets and medallions. Why not something hearty such as a crispy roast duck or a tasty calf shin? The guests wished for more transparency. Thus, I began to prepare the entire produce and to serve it at the table. At the same time I experimented with fresh herbs, began to look out for seasonal and regional produce and began to go back to my Austrian roots. These were courageous steps, for which I had to take some side swipes. Danube salmon (Hucho hucho) instead of wild rockfish – how could that be? Introducing such changes meant walking a tightrope, constantly trying to successfully bridge the gap between tradition and the zeitgeist while allowing for contemporary production techniques

Towards the end of the Eighties two movements were forming, which played to my intentions: there was the Eurotoques initiative, founded in 1986 by the Belgian master chef Pierre Rohmeyer and the then EU-president Jacques Delors with the aim of disseminating, furthering and safeguarding European cultural themes, such as cooking, eating, enjoyment, awareness of quality and nutrition, and a healthy and natural lifestyle. The second important movement in this context is the Slow Food movement (motto: ‘good, clean and fair’), which was founded in 1989 in Italy by Carlo Petrini and which is present today in more than 132 countries. I am loyal to both organisations as a founding member.

In the middle of the 90s, similar to the regional kitchen the so called Cross Over Cuisine started to become popular in restaurants worldwide. It blurs the boundaries between country or region-specific cooking styles from all over the world. It is a sort of culinary freestyle that will be increasingly influenced by Asian food culture in the coming years.

During the last fifteen years, the international cooking scene has been mostly influenced – for better or worse – by Ferran Adrià’s molecular cooking. In his restaurant El Bulli, north of Barcelona, he provides one culinary highlight after another. In 2005 I awarded the International Eckart Witzigmann Prize of the German Academy for Culinary Studies in Stuttgart to him for his original, way out culinary mind. However, I believe that in amateur cooking this style will only be taken up in very small numbers.

The topic of eating was never as present in the media as in the last couple of years. Unfortunately this does not prevent us being overrun by the fast food convenience avalanche. This is the reason why I have become strongly involved recently with the rediscovery of the healthy and pleasurable cooking and eating as a central part of family life (see Eckart Witzigmann’s Family Cookery Book). Apart from this I am calling for sensory and taste education for children and affordable good quality school meals. This is a political topic!

If I interpret the culinary signs of the present time correctly, then we will see a significant change in top end gastronomy. The best restaurants will still serve three star menus, but prepared with fewer staff. Simultaneously the new nutrition and health consciousness of the young will produce a new type of restaurant: so called fun places, which emphasise strongly on merchandising as an additional source of income. An example is the business of the Austrian Wolfgang Puck in the United States. No matter what happens, one thing is for sure: good food is not a luxury one can do without. Good food is and will always be the basis of a healthy life.