



A Royal Feast

Rediscovering Saxony's culinary tradition



The "Elector" Menu *from the Royal Saxon Court*

*Quail supreme with truffled goat's milk yoghurt
served with peach and vanilla jelly and mint
from a recipe for a banquet on 8 February 1896, named "Prince George"*

*Pot-au-feu with porcini,
served with grilled scallops and tête de veau in baguette
from a recipe for a banquet on 8 February 1902, named "Prince John George"*

*Filet of cod wrapped in ham
on wild garlic spaghettini with baked sardines
in a saffron and algae sauce
from a recipe for a banquet on 18 November 1869*

*Strudel of pheasant and goose liver
in honey and spice condiments on a bed of caramelised chestnuts
with champagne cabbage and essence of rosemary and almond
from a recipe for a banquet on 24 February 1869, named "Grand Hôtel de Saxe"*

*Trilogy of Saxon "Schampagne"
from a menu for the Chamber Dinner held by President von Zehmen
on 18 February 1886 in the Royal Belvedere*



Festive dinner at asisi Panometer in Dresden,
a breathtaking 360° panorama of the baroque royal seat





Stadtbibliothek
Dresden

M E N U

17 Septembre 1882.

Consommé à la jardinière

Madère

Petites bouchées

Turbot, sauce ravigote

Scharzhofberger

Filet de cerf à la Cumberland

Côtelettes de veau aux haricots

Chât. d'Issan

Mayonnaise de volaille

Faisan, salade, compote

Champ. Verzenay

Timbale à la florentine

Glaces

Muscat Frontignan.

Dessert



Saxony is a state with a unique cultural heritage. It has produced a wealth of music, architecture and art of outstanding quality. As seat of the Saxon royal court, Dresden has long played an important role, as has Leipzig as a centre of trade and trade fairs.

Only very recently has evidence come to light that Saxony can also pride itself on an exceptional culinary history and that Saxon chefs were among the very best in Europe. It has always been assumed that fine European cuisine originated only in France. But that is not the case, as a historian from Dresden has now discovered. Prof Dr Josef Matzerath has researched dining culture in Saxony around 1900 and found evidence that Saxony's cuisine was among the finest in Europe. In the archives of the Saxon State and University Library, he discovered a collection of old recipes compiled by Ernst Max Pötzsch, chef at the royal court in Dresden from 1898 to 1899, where he cooked for Prince and later King Frederick Augustus III of Saxony.

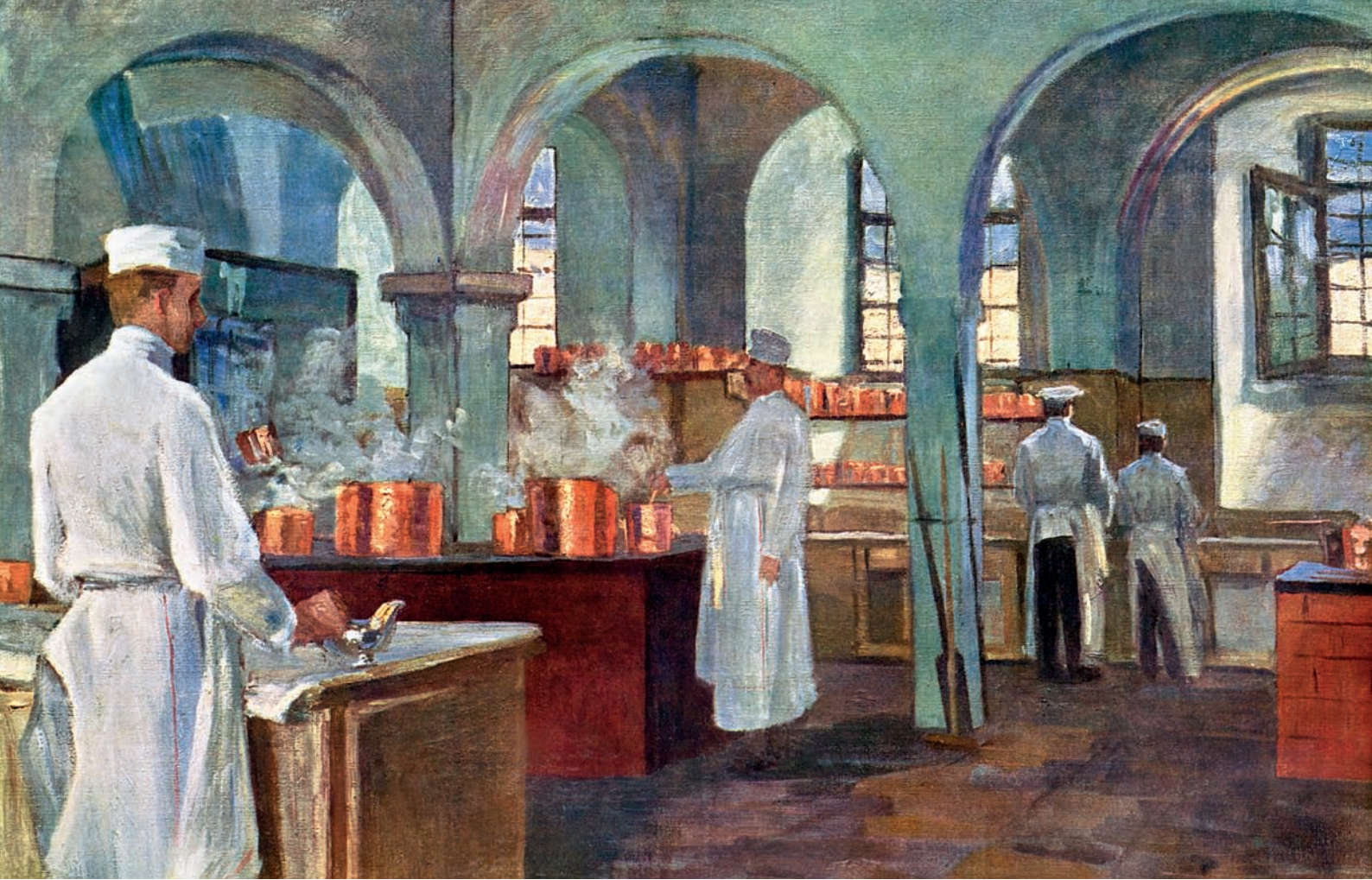
No court recipes are known to exist prior to that. Only old menu cards have been found in records from the Dresden court. Matzerath spent many years researching the history of Saxony's nobility and state parliament, including what people ate there, and discovered that before and after each session, the king's representatives were invited to a dinner. "If you could see what they ate; they were fantastic menus," says Professor Matzerath, who examined the menu cards. But nothing was known about how the meals were prepared. Matzerath was determined to discover how the chefs prepared these menus and what ingredients they used.

What he found in Pötzsch's collection amazed him: Of the 800 recipes that Pötzsch prepared at court, more than half were German dishes and just 200 were French. They also included Saxon pudding, Italian salad and Russian eggs. Matzerath's discovery was a special one, because it revealed for the first time just what a good but average chef was capable of. "One would assume that a budding chef at the time would have had to go to Paris to earn the corresponding qualifications. But Pötzsch proves that was unnecessary." He could learn his trade

in Dresden and move on later to other royal households. Another interesting fact gleaned from the collection is that not only extravagant ingredients like truffles or oysters were used at court, but above all regional and seasonal products, such as game, partridge, beef, cheese, fruit and vegetables – of course only of the very best quality. The characteristic flavours of the main ingredients were accentuated. Pötzsch shows that the food served at Saxony's court was exquisite and that European chefs met here and exchanged recipes during visits and festivities. Similar descriptions of ingredients and cooking methods from France exist, but they were written several years later. In Dresden, trade in exotic ingredients flourished after 1650: Italian traders settled here and even Swiss confectioners made the town their home in the 19th century. Regional producers supplied wine, poultry and fish with fine flavours. For instance, a poultry farm in Dresden even offered the royal court geese fattened with oats, or hens fed on milk.

By this time, exquisite cuisine and fine dining were no longer exclusively reserved for the royal court. Gourmet restaurants offered fine food for all those who could afford it. Leipzig's trade fairs attracted numerous visitors and merchants, as did Dresden's cultural life, as 19th century statistics on tourism show.

Saxony's culinary tradition came to an abrupt end when the First World War broke out in 1914. The king was forced to abdicate and the days of prestigious banquets were over. This period was followed by famine, the Great Depression, the Nazi era of brown bread and stew propaganda, and the Second World War. The East German regime had no use for fine cuisine either, being more concerned with feeding the masses. Food in many regions was scarce; only potatoes, pork, beef and factory-farmed poultry exclusively from East German producers were available for purchase; tropical fruit was rare, as were tomatoes and peppers.



The royal court kitchen in Pillnitz Castle, near Dresden, is on exhibit today as part of the museum inside. A picture painted by Princess Mathilde in the early 19th century shows how authentic the reproduction is.





View of the terrace at Hotel Bellevue in Dresden (photo from 1914)

If people wanted something more special, they had to pay in foreign currency or try their luck growing fruit and vegetables in their own garden.

Since German Unification in 1889, a culture of gourmet cuisine has gradually gained popularity in Saxony. A new generation of young chefs has taken an interest in the aesthetic aspects of food and is experimenting with new ideas. Mario Pattis from Dresden was the first to follow Saxony's culinary tradition. In 1994, he became the first chef in former East Germany to be awarded an internationally renowned and coveted Michelin star for his cooking – at the age of just 24! The award came as a tremendous surprise for Pattis, who at the time was working at the restaurant “Erholung”, run by his family in the Weisse Hirsch district of Dresden: “My life just took off. We hadn't a clue how our cuisine compared with others. I'd never even heard of a Michelin star,” Pattis says 20 years later. After training as a chef in the cafeteria of Dresden Technical University, he worked in his parents' restaurant. The guests, who were mainly from the West following German Unification, were extremely demanding. Suddenly Pattis was being com-

pared with the best chefs from the West, which put him under immense pressure. He would spend two to three weeks at other restaurants to learn new skills. At home, he would try new products, copy the dishes he had seen and experiment with his own ideas. “There was little time to look back. You had to keep up with the competition and find your own style.” He spent hours in the library, searching for his culinary roots in Saxony, and discovered collections of 19th century menu cards belonging to Baron Sahrer von Sahr. “I didn't copy those menus, but reinterpreted them in my own style.” If the menu said “Breast of Partridge à la Financière”, all that interested Pattis were the ingredients: truffles, chicken, mushrooms. Pattis used them to create his own dishes with a modern twist using lighter sauces. “I introduced new things every day. My guests were all in favour and even expected it. You could say that my guests were the secret ingredient.”

Today, Pattis advises companies and offers catering for exclusive events worldwide. For example, he travelled to New York with Saxony's Tourism Marketing Company and to the Expo in Japan, where he presented creative gourmet cuisine from Saxony.



Left: Benjamin Biedlingmaier and Mario Pattis collaborate to develop new recipes.

Right: Mario Pattis personally inspects the freshness and quality of the ingredients he uses.



In Dresden, Pattis works closely with Benjamin Biedlingmaier, head chef at the Caroussel restaurant in the Bülow Palais hotel. At just 28, Biedlingmaier was awarded a Michelin star in 2013, upholding the restaurant's gourmet tradition of star-rated cuisine. The critics were impressed with his light, playful style of cooking. Biedlingmaier is currently Saxony's youngest Michelin-starred chef. He, too, spent several years on the road, working at other restaurants in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Austria and on the island of Sylt on the North Sea coast to hone his skills and gain experience. What he most appreciates about Saxony is the excellent quality of the products from regional suppliers, because for him, the flavour of the individual ingredients is what counts most. When he prepares a dish, he emphasizes two or three components – like Pötzsch did with his royal cuisine in the 19th century!

But whatever the ingredients, whether fish, cheese or meat, chefs in Saxony value the close contact they enjoy with regional suppliers. Mario Pattis and Benjamin Biedlingmaier can fall back on sellers and producers from Saxony who offer the best foods and cater to special requests. Pattis buys his meat from a family-run butcher's in Dresden that makes its own sausage and meat from regionally bred animals. He accompanies them to visit producers in the Ore Mountains, for example. The two gourmet chefs buy their cheese from a seller who specialises in regional farms and niche products. The food and wine are seasonal and handcrafted. Pattis is a real trend scout, always on the lookout for new products. He also buys vegetables from a local fruit and vegetable wholesaler in Dresden. "My supplier delivers the vegetables just the way you want them. I like lambs lettuce to be large, for example." Pattis also regularly meets and visits gardeners in Saxony together with his supplier. Pattis und Biedlingmaier buy fish, such as char, trout or sturgeon, from a family-run business in Saxon Switzerland that sells fresh and smoked fish bred in its own ponds. Thanks to the spring water, the fish have an excellent flavour. Pattis buys them live and prepares them fresh in the kitchen.





When it comes to wine, Pattis and Biedlingmaier again rely on local producers. One key supplier is the Proschwitz Wine Estate, half an hour from Dresden, where Dr. Georg Prinz zur Lippe has followed an old tradition and now produces wines of the very best quality once more. The wines are given plenty of time to mature. The soil in the region gives the wine its mineral content and fresh taste.

Historian Professor Matzerath finds great pleasure in these developments. He has now managed to convince leading chefs from all over Saxony to reinterpret old recipes from the royal court. The result is a selection of superb menus that send critics into raptures and have been published in a book entitled “Court Menus for Today. Recipes from Dresden’s Court Reinterpreted by Saxon Chefs and Pâtissiers”.

Professor Matzerath and chef Volkhard Nebrich have also sampled, reinterpreted and compiled Ernst Max Pötzsch’s recipes to create a number of cookbooks for discerning professional and am-

ateur chefs. They have been published in German under the titles “Vollständige Herrschaftsküche des Kronprinzen von Sachsen” (2013), which includes a study on the characteristics of cuisine at Saxony’s court, and “Produktküche – Europäische Kochkunst aus der feinen Küche des Dresdner Hofes” (2013) with an exploration of the ingredients and methods used to prepare the dishes. The volume “Produktküche – Süßspeisen, Gebäck und Getränke” on desserts, pastries and beverages is due to be published in 2014. These are to be followed by additional publications with 16th century recipes for exquisite dishes.

Saxony’s cuisine has long enjoyed international standing. Five restaurants were awarded stars by “Guide Michelin” in 2013: Two stars went to Falco in Leipzig, while Bean & Beluga and Caroussel in Dresden, Sendig in Bad Schandau and Stadtpfeiffer in Leipzig were all awarded one star.

Visitors to Saxony can be assured of the high quality of its fine cuisine, which is deeply rooted in the region.

TRAVELINFO

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

Hotel Bülow Palais Dresden Caroussel Restaurant

This luxury 5-star hotel with a personal touch for connoisseurs and appreciators of an individual style is one of the most exclusive addresses in Dresden. In Caroussel gourmet restaurant, Benjamin Biedlingmaier prepares contemporary light and fresh cuisine using the finest ingredients. All dishes are served on real Meissen porcelain plates.

www.buelow-palais.de

The Westin Leipzig Restaurant Falco

The interiors of the Westin Leipzig blend local history with modern European design. The rooms offer fascinating views over Leipzig’s city centre. Designer ambience and gourmet cuisine on the 24th floor of the Westin Leipzig. Falco is the only restaurant in the new German federal states to be granted two stars in the Michelin Guide.

www.westin-leipzig.de,
www.falco-leipzig.de

Stadtpfeiffer Restaurant

Stadtpfeiffer is a restaurant in the Gewandhaus concert hall in Leipzig. Michelin-starred chef Detlef Schlegel pampers guests with exquisite dishes while his wife Petra manages the restaurant.

www.stadtpfeiffer.de (in German only)

Ratskeller in Dohna

Head chef André Mühlfriedel together with his team serves a varied choice of culinary delights and treats his guests with special menus. As chef at Maurice in Dresden, his exquisite cooking earned him a Michelin star in 2011. The Ratskeller, which has been renovated and reopened in autumn 2013, now welcomes guests in Dohna near Dresden.

www.ratskeller-dohna.de (in German only)

Elements in Dresden

Elements, a restaurant set in a former factory building, has an unusual ambience. In the old factory hall, historical architecture blends with clever, modern elements. The restaurant’s young chef Stephan Miessner and his team serve creative dishes perfectly aligned to the individual flair of Elements. He creates exceptional dishes using only first-rate products.

www.restaurant-elements.de
(in German only)