

Gourmet Ljubljana



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THE POWER OF PROTEIN

The Role of Game in
Ljubljana's Gastronomy

RICHNESS OF FLAVOURS

Our (Unusual) Daily Bread

FACES OF LJUBLJANA

Štefka from Striček

Gourmet Ljubljana is an informative publication of Tourism Ljubljana, which aims to raise awareness and provide information about the gastronomic offer of central Slovenia. It aims to present the pulse of the culinary scene and invite you to discover what is available. Published 1 time a year. The price per copy is EUR 6.90. The magazine also includes articles by external contributors, which do not necessarily reflect the views of Tourism Ljubljana.

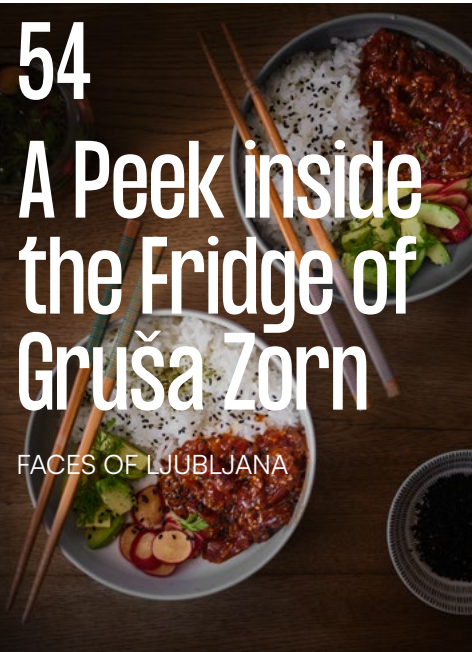
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INDEX



THE POWER OF PROTEIN	4
Ljubljana and its Proteins ⁴ From the Hunt to the Stove ¹⁰ The Role of Game in Ljubljana's Gastronomy ¹⁶	
RICHNESS OF FLAVOURS	18
Our (Unusual) Daily Bread ¹⁸ Umami ³⁶ Which Pizza is the Absolute Best? ⁵⁰ Does the Ljubljana Breakfast Make Us Happy? ⁷⁸	
FACES OF LJUBLJANA	22
Leonardo Fonseca Celis ²² A Peek inside the Fridge of Gruša Zorn ⁵⁴ Štefka from Striček ⁷⁰	
RECIPE	26
Culinary Calendar ²⁶ Ljubljana Cottage Cheese Pancakes with Tarragon ⁷²	
CHEERS	38
Mixologists in Action ³⁸ We're All for Zero Alcohol ⁸⁰	
GASTRO QUARTERS OF LJUBLJANA	44
The Charm of Poljanska Road ⁴⁴ The Northern End of the Number Six Line ⁴⁵	
LJUBLJANA IS FOOD	58
WORLD CUISINE	64
Ba(l)ccchanalia ⁶⁴	
ALONG LJUBLJANA'S STREETS	74
Green Heart of the City ⁷⁴ Perk Up Your Ears ⁸⁴ Where Everything is Served Except the Old-School Pony Bicycles ⁹² Mmm Stories ⁹⁶ Don't Miss Your "Insta" Moment ⁹⁸ Ljubljana on Four Paws ¹⁰²	
KulKul MOMENT	88
For Honeymoon Days and Nights ⁸⁹ Beer under a Straw Hat ⁹⁰	
FOOD BEAT	106
Cheers to the Flavours of Merry December ¹⁰⁶	
AWARD-WINNING CHEFS	108
Recipients of the Highest Michelin and Gault&Millau Awards ¹⁰⁸	

CHEFS — HUNTERS

From the Hunt to the Stove

TEXT: KAJA SAJOVIC
PHOTO: SUZAN GABRIJAN

At 5 am, we gather in the town of Železniki. It would have been pitch black if not for the full moon illuminating the landscape shrouded in early morning mist. We slowly make our way along the winding road towards Soriška planina and Ratitovec, with Jakob Pintar's trunk rattling with a mixture of tools, chef's utensils, and a baby carriage; everything that makes up the life of a chef/hunter.

"I shot my first roe deer here," Pintar proudly points to a dark ravine on the right side of the road. This first kill happened not long ago; a year or so back. The 35-year-old chef, who has been at the helm of TaBar for the past seven years, set about obtaining his hunting licence together with his colleague Timi Rožič, who himself had been the Chef de Cuisine at Zanoodle for several years.

"It's no joke; the course takes a year and a half, there are a lot of exams and practical tests," Pintar recounts while skilfully weaving through corners. As both of them are from the Gorenjska region - Jakob from Železniki and Timi from Bohinj - hunting is in their blood; Jakob getting the knack for it from his father who was a hunter and from whom he inherited an impressive collection of rifles, and Timi from his grandfather.

On this particular day, we are hunting under the auspices of the Lovska družina Železniki hunting club, in the central part of the 9159-hectare Selška dolina valley, 8965 hectares of which are hunting grounds, making it one of the largest hunting grounds in Slovenia. It is an extremely varied shooting ground with valleys, plains, and ravines ranging from 440 to 1678 metres above sea level, which is certainly attractive for hunters and also allows them to catch quite a variety of game - from roe deer to wild boar and chamois, and a bear or two may even wander in from time to time.

We arrive at the mountain as it is slowly getting lighter, but the ground is still covered in frost. Somewhere in the distance, we hear bark-like sounds - it's deer rutting time. We shuffle side to side from the cold and wrap ourselves tighter into the fleece. As it turns out, we are not alone, one of the mountain huts is occupied by a group of hunters from Kočevje. They slowly creep out, cups of coffee in hand and still a bit sleepy. For them, it's been a long evening after the hunt - and a short night. A rifle rests against the stone wall of the hut, and a hunter's hat is perched on the fence.

New and old hunters exchange a few words about the previous day's hunting luck and where the hunting might be good today, one of them offering us tea made from medicinal flowers and herbs picked and dried the previous season.

The landscape looks like an impressionist painting on this early, sleepy morning, all soft and pastel green with darker hillsides of spruce forest. In the distance, the sun illuminates Mount Triglav in pink hues. All is peacefully silent, except for the occasional sound of a deer's mating call. A blurred trail of blood from the previous day's catch.

In some parts of the grassland, bushes are already overgrowing due to the abandonment of high-altitude farms, which poses some problems for hunters. Hunting is only one aspect of the hunter's and hunting club's activities - much of the rest is mowing such areas, repairing damage caused by wild boar, maintaining paths and feeding stations, and so on.

Hunters being bloodthirsty barbarians of some kind is one of the prejudices that hunters often face in today's hypersensitive and hyper-quickly-offended society. But many chefs are convinced that if you serve meat, you must be prepared to kill the animal yourself - not because of some perverse urge to kill, but just so you get to know how that piece of meat actually gets to the table. In doing so, you also become more respectful and committed to the philosophy of using the whole animal, gut and all.

Jakob has served a lot of game at TaBar over the years, whereby his main focus has been on the use of internal organs in educating people. Autumn being known as game season, the menu currently includes dishes such as fillet of venison, marinated venison tongues, wild boar brain, various venison tripe, and chamois shoulder.

On this day, we're hunting chamois, which roam the slightly higher, more exposed, rocky areas, so we walk briskly uphill until we came to an exposed area with a view of the top of Ratitovec.

The Železniki hunting club is also famous for hunting tourism, the main trophy being the chamois, which is also the reason for large numbers of hunters visiting from abroad. Using binoculars, it doesn't take long to spot a large herd of chamois on the slopes of Ratitovec. "I counted 21 of them," says Timi quickly and with the mathematics of an astute observer of his surroundings.

But they are too far away to take the shot. One has to be extremely precise because the penalties for any slip-up are severe and costly. "It's a structural hunt - if you shoot a deer one day, you have to shoot a doe the next, otherwise you're summoned to a disciplinary hearing. When hunting, you are constantly walking a fine edge - what you can shoot, when you can shoot, where you can shoot..." Jakob explains.

Each trophy shot is brought to the hunting association - the antlers for males, the jaw for females and cubs - and then the age of the animal shot and the points are assessed, which is then used in drawing up an annual plan and adopting a two- and a ten-year work plan depending on how much game there is in the hunting area.

"The two-year plan is about what is actually shot - by gender, age, etc., and the ten-year plan is about the area-wide bag limit. This then serves as a strategy of what we would like to have in the hunting ground and what the vision of the hunting club is. It's all statistics and nothing is left to the individual," Jakob explains.

CHEFS — HUNTERS

"When hunting, you're constantly walking on the edge — what can you shoot, when can you shoot, where can you shoot..."

Upon reaching the top of the hill, the sun is beating down, an unusually beautiful day for October, without a cloud in sight and no wind – ideal for hunting, indeed. Jakob and Timi lead the way and signal for silence. Two chamois are spotted below us in the ravine, but Jakob does not take the shot. He does not have a clear line of sight and chooses not to take the risk. "Never mind," he shrugs, and they collectively decide it is time for a hunting breakfast with a view.

Timi throws in some Bohinj mohant cheese, while Jakob contributes homemade cured meats, salami and rye bread. The air is fragrant with the last remnants of summer and thyme.



Second time's a charm. When Jakob finally has a chamois in his sights, he pulls the trigger and a single shot breaks the silence. A spruce twig in the mouth of the chamois serves as a symbol of its last bite and a hunter's homage to the animal before he disembowels it and removes its entrails.

"The goal of hunting is hunting, not shooting. Essentially, we all go hunting to get outside, into nature, to 'cleanse' ourselves after work and pressures in the kitchen — not merely for the act of shooting," explains Timi on their way back from the mountain. "You see, hunting is an experience; those bones on the wall hold little value."



The Role of Game in Ljubljana's Gastronomy

Luka Košir, Grič



Brioche with deer heart and Garum sauce and Goatsbeard

Game has traditionally played a significant role in Slovenian gastronomy, including that of Ljubljana. Slovenia is renowned as one of the countries rich in game, attracting foreign hunters while exporting most of its game meat, particularly to Switzerland. However, you will not find many old recipes featuring game because Slovenians have never been an aristocratic nation; thus, we didn't have our own hunting grounds and poaching was widespread, leading to few recipes being re-

corded. Recently, a significant contribution to popularising game has come from the book *Divjačina* (Game) by Matjaž Erzar from the Gostilna Matiček tavern in Kranj. It documents how monasteries used to serve beaver and otter during Lent, but in Ljubljana, everything from bear goulash to deer tripe and roe deer liver was eaten. Today, however, the menus of Ljubljana restaurants probably most often list venison goulash with bread dumplings or polenta.



Heart Tartare with trout roe mayonnaise, wild pear vinegar and larch oil

Smoked tongue with pumpkin seed oil

Open-fire roast kidney glazed with venison Garum and Monarda

Liver and spleen dumplings, bone broth with wild mushrooms, ornamental cabbage

Chamois tripe in sauce

Rye bread with chamois tallow

Uses of chamois offal

Our Daily Sourdough

Ljubljana boutique bakeries
... and other Ljubljana



TEXT: NEJA ŽITNIK
PHOTO: SUZAN GABRIJAN, JAKA BIRSA

During the time of day when it is hard to tell whether it's late night or early morning, when ordinary people are still sound asleep, magic happens in Ljubljana's bakeries. Master bakers with floury aprons and rolled-up sleeves use dough kneaded a day or two before to shape boules and loaves, croissants and bird nests, skilfully creating other magical doughy delights and getting them ready for baking. This is all done so that, in the morning, crispy bread and warm fluffy pastries await us on the shelves of their fragrant bakeries, warding off the morning blues.

Bread with sourdough starter — a rising star

We are very fortunate to be living in a time when bread is "in" again and the new way to bake it is, well, the old way. Sourdough starter, the living mixture of flour and water that is now increasingly replacing yeast in bread recipes, was of course known to our great-great-grandmothers (and the ancient Egyptians long before them), but it has recently made a comeback.

At one point, it may have seemed that bread with sourdough starter was just another culinary trend that anyone with five minutes to spare would take up, and that small bakeries in Ljubljana would spring up like mushrooms after the rain. But since 2013, when Andrej Gerželj from Postojna opened Slovenia's first sourdough bakery, new ones followed with slow, timid steps. And in the year when the Pekarna Osem bakery celebrated its 10th anniversary (and the sourdough starter still used at the bakery celebrated its 10th birthday), the number of sourdough bakeries in Ljubljana was still in single digits.

Behind the romantic, almost fairytale image of the baking profession – the fogged-up windows of the bakery, the oven-warmed air smelling of fresh pastry, the supple dough rising obediently and baking to a perfect golden brown – there are many hours of hard work (mainly during the night shift) and knowledge gained both from books and from one's own mistakes. That is why we appreciate those who have, through patience and diligence, turned their love of bread into a profession all the more.

It is thanks to them that for the past few years we have been able to choose from an incredible variety of different types of bread with crackly crispy crusts and fluffy, airy, soft and juicy crumb, mainly at small bakeries in Ljubljana, but also more and more often on the shelves of large retail chains.

Global trends, local ingredients ... and lots of butter

But classic sourdough boules and loaves are far from all that Ljubljana's boutique bakery scene has to offer! To make sure our breakfasts and snacks have never tasted so good, the capital's small bakeries offer a myriad of sweet and savoury pastries,

combining the influence of culinary traditions from all over the world and bringing smiles of satisfaction to our faces. And although the virtuoso-crafted, fragile, seductively buttery French croissants are bestsellers among the range of any micro bakery, they are just the beginning of a list of global bakery trends and local hits that have become a staple in Ljubljana.

With his Pekarna Art Bread bakery, Risto Pecev was the next to follow the career path of an artisan baker. In the eight years since it opened, its list of offerings has included not only bread, but many world-famous names such as panettone, babka, Danish pastries, and pain au chocolat, while its epi baguettes are a particular delight for those who like a crispy crust – having the shape of an ear of wheat, they have far more crusty ends than an ordinary baguette!

Ksenija and Matt run Pekarna Malo drugače (the Slightly Quirky Bakery) where she keeps a close eye on sourdough bread and he specialises in a fine range of confectionery. This sweet and sour duo pays homage to both Ksenja's Slovenian roots – for example, they bake traditional Slovenian fruit bread around Christmas – and the American heritage of Matt's ancestors. The latter, to the delight of many, was highlighted when they added bagels to the selection offered at their slightly quirky bakery.

A Slovenian-Russian couple was the next to gather the courage to take on a family-run "sourdough" project. Anže and Vita from the Pekarna Brot bakery are proud to present Ljubljana residents with a Russian bakery speciality – Borodinsky bread, made from rye and white flour, with rye malt and coriander seeds. They have pioneered another first on the streets of Ljubljana and on locals' IG accounts, the cruffin – a hybrid between a croissant and muffin that is both visually appealing and exciting to the taste buds.

Of course, when we look at those "made from real dough", we cannot go past the (currently temporarily closed) bakery of the most awarded Slovenian chef, Ana Roš. At times, the team from the Pekarna Ana bakery elevates world classics with unusual international combinations, but even more often they play with Slovenian seasonal ingredients. Whether it's a pain au sausage and kimchi, a buckwheat pyramid, or an apple strudel flavoured cruffin, every new product seems to turn into an instant hit!



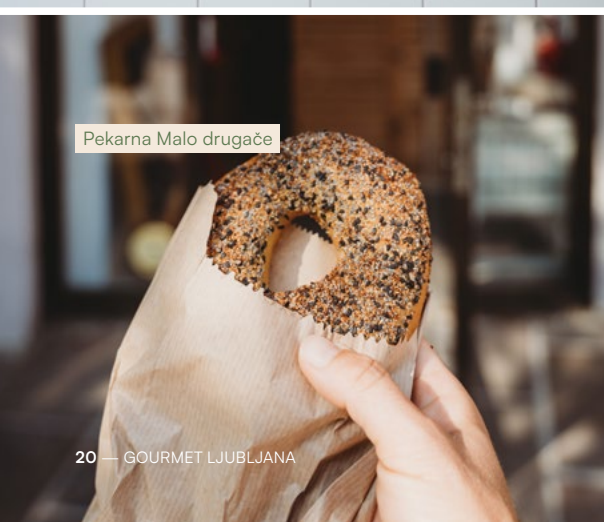
Pekarna Ana



Pekarna Art Bread



Pekarna Brot



Pekarna Malo drugače

Pekarna Ana

Slovenska cesta 30

@pekarnaana

Pekarna Art Bread

Rožna Dolina, cesta II 36

@artbreadbakery

Pekarna Brot

Poljanska cesta 11

@brot_pekarna

Pekarna Malo drugače

Poljanska cesta 17

@pekarna.malo.drugace

Mama peče

Šmartinska 24

@mama_pece_

Pekarna Osem

Stari trg 17

@pekarna_osem

For the best choice and the best experience, stop by the bakeries early in the morning — the shelves tend to empty before closing time.

A day at the Pekarna Osem bakery



4:00 am

Bakers start their workday by shaping boules and loaves from dough that has risen slowly overnight in the fridge, and by rolling out croissants.



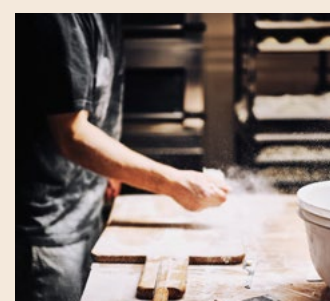
5:00 am

The bread to be sold today starts baking.



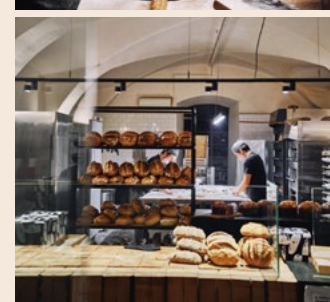
6:00 am

Bakers knead the dough for tomorrow's bread.



8:00 am

The bakery door opens.



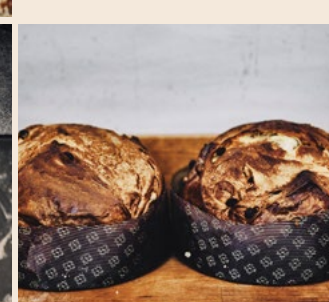
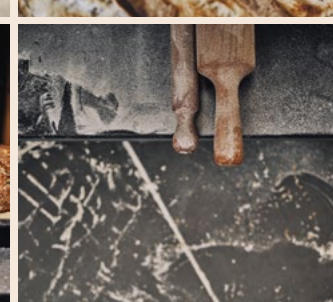
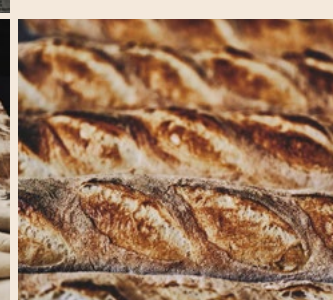
10:00 am

The dough for tomorrow's bread is sufficiently risen to be put in the fridge until the next day.



12:00 pm — 1:00 pm

Today's bread is ready.



6:00 pm

The bakery closes and the bakers go home to get some well-deserved rest. It can take up to 24 hours from kneading the dough to putting the fresh loaf on the shelf.

A peek inside

Gruša's motto is, "If there are no vegetables, the fridge is empty."



— the fridge



TEXT: KAJA SAJOVIC
PHOTO: MANCA JEVŠČEK

"Care for some gin?" Gruša asks as she hurries to chop herbs. "You must try this gin with curry plant and rock samphire. It's the best if you ask me." She tempts me with a neat bottle of Dubrovnik Republic gin in her hand.

She loves Dalmatia and she loves the sea, and it shows in her cooking.

She strokes the cat coiling around her feet, then steps out onto the balcony to pick some fresh thyme to add to the gin and tonic and to mix with her homemade fig leaf syrup. "I like to play with syrups. I picked the fig leaves for this syrup on the island of Mljet, where I've been vacationing since I was a little girl," she explains, throwing an ice cube into an aromatic drink which transports you from your Ljubljana apartment block to the coast.

Gruša Zorn is probably the best-known food stylist in the country today, but she got into the business a decade ago – partly by chance, partly out of necessity. Before that, she worked in tourism and lived in Paris for a year, then in catering and as a photo producer for a Slovenian company. "I told them I needed a food stylist and they said, well, you can do it yourself, can't you? And so I gradually got into food," explains Zorn, who went on to train for the business in New York.

But make no mistake – Gruša, who is also in great demand abroad, is not only a great food stylist, but an amazing cook as well. "I made this one on the spur of the moment because I had some peppers left over and I was a bit bored waiting for you," she explains, offering us a delicious spread. "I added some roasted hazelnuts and mint, just to taste." To accompany the spread, she serves homemade croutons made from leftover bread. "If there's one thing I hate, it's throwing food away, so I really try to use up all the leftovers." She spins on her heels, opens the fridge, and reaches for a bunch of parsley. "I always have fresh herbs on hand. And vegetables, lots of vegetables. My saying is, if there are no vegetables, the fridge is empty," she explains.

"There will always be a bottle of wine in there, of course," she smiles, pulling out a bottle of Križ from the Pelješac peninsula.

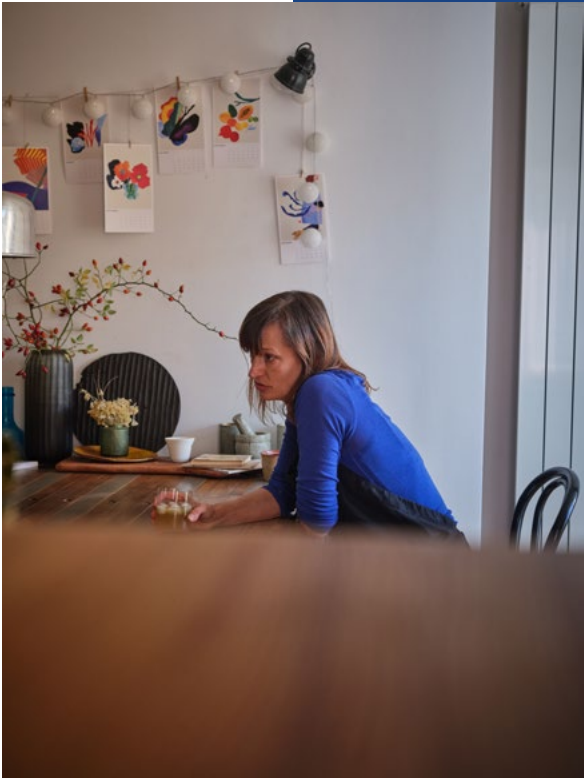
She pours the amber macerated wine into glasses and takes the clams out of the fridge. "I managed to get some wild ones at the market today!" she enthuses. In almost record time, she whips up the clams in a delicious broth made from olive oil, wine, ginger, coriander, garlic, and chillies, which hang in garlands on the kitchen wall. "I made it a bit spicier because that's how I like them, I hope it's okay," she says. It is more than okay.

The tuna with rice and avocado that she serves with it also has some heat. "I make spicy tuna a lot, so I've really perfected this recipe," she explains as she sets a bottle of soy sauce on the table. "I'm crazy about Asian food, so I always have a lot of this stuff in the fridge. And there are always fresh ferments. I have a lot of kimchi, which I usually make myself, and I also pickle capers in salt ..."

"I also love the Kis in kvas ferment shop, so I always have a whole bunch of their products on hand – their natto, their peanut miso, their fermented cucumbers... these don't look the prettiest, but they're great!" she declares, showing off her overflowing shelves.

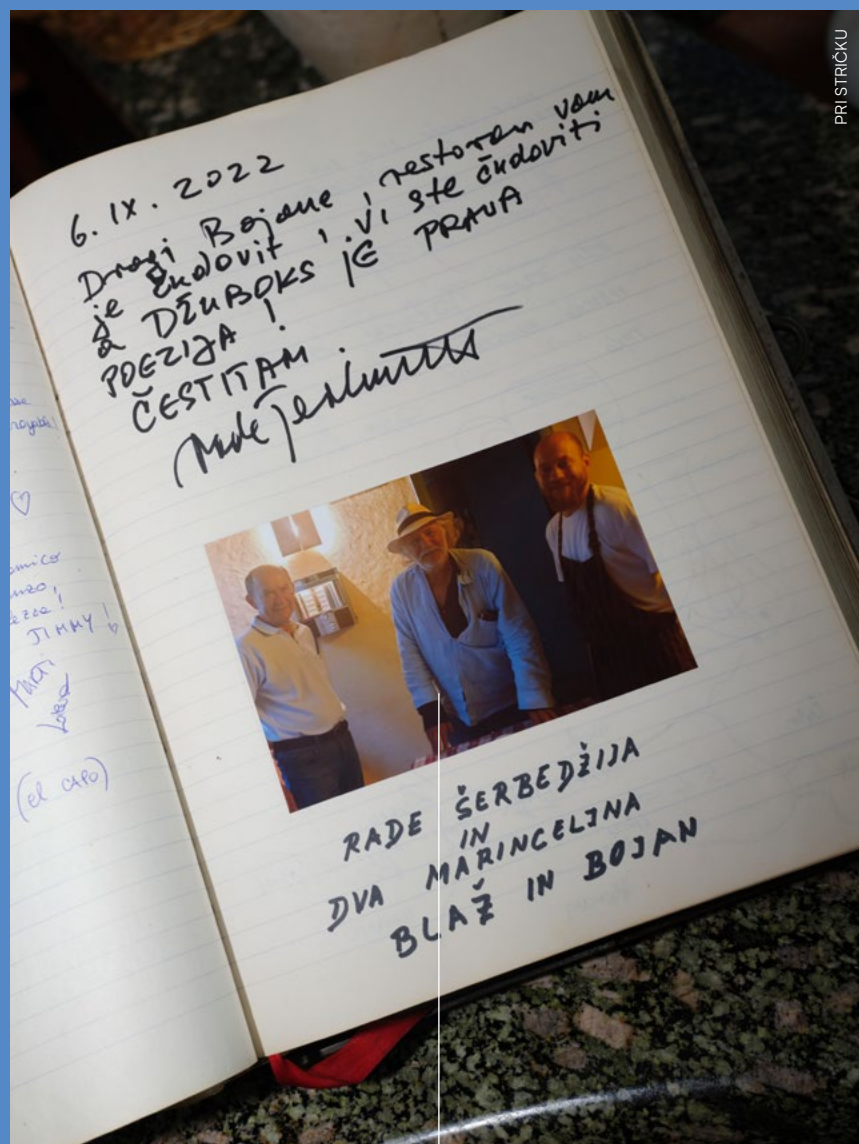
The ferments are accompanied by bottles of Isa's kombucha ("It's great in a gin and tonic!"), smoked mullet from the market, bottarga she brought from Italy, and a sourdough starter. "I always make my own bread now. I hardly ever buy it any more," she says.

Certainly not lacking in drive, Gruša is always adding new areas to her food styling repertoire. She also does catering and workshops with a nutrition therapist, and has recently turned her attention to her culinary studio, Rashushka, which is high-level enough to host the best Slovenian chefs.



I made it a bit spicier because that's how I like them, I hope it's okay,"

Prick Up Your Ears



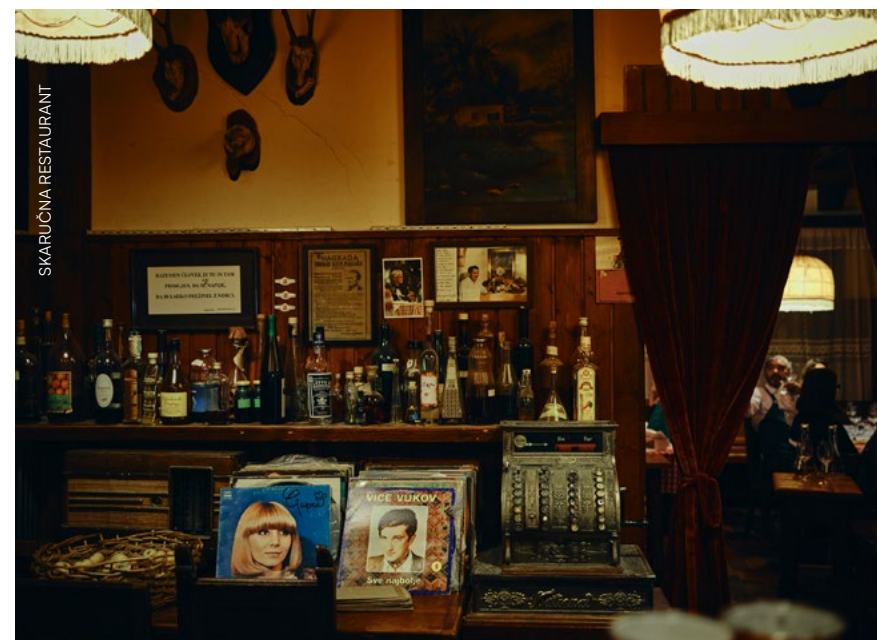
TEXT: BOŠTJAN NAPOTNIK
PHOTO: SUZAN GABRIJAN

Many people believe that we eat partly with our eyes. Furthermore, there are an increasing number of us who believe that we also eat with our ears; that the soundscape pubs, bistros and restaurants offer to their guests is a key part of the dining experience.

Heston Blumenthal called one of his iconic dishes The Sound of the Sea, and while guests nibbled on fresh seafood, they listened to the sound of the sea-shore through headphones – the sound of waves lapping, sand slipping, seagulls calling, people frolicking, and a ship's siren in the background... This sensory experience has been empirically proven to enhance the flavour of the food.

Many Slovenian restaurants are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of sound and few of them still just plug in a random radio station or CD of the head waiter's choice. In addition to the choice of music genre, the volume is important, not least how the chosen music functions in the space and how it will blend with the sounds produced by guests and staff – conversations, the use of cutlery, taking orders, explanation of dishes, toasting... So where should we go for good music?

The legendary Skaručna restaurant has secured a revered place in the hearts of diners from the environs of Ljubljana with its multi-hour bacchanalian sessions with Italian canzone music, opera arias, bouncy jazz, soft-voiced pop songs and rarities from the rich treasure trove of Yugoslavian vintage music. All of this is elevated with an analogue patina as the songs are exclusively played from a turntable behind the bar. You can also find out if there are any copies of the mixes prepared especially for Skaručna by the Tetkine radosti DJ collective.



Pri Strčku is a classic old-school tavern where the tradition of preparing authentic, homemade, freshly prepared seasonal dishes and practising the old rules of hospitality are firmly adhered to – waiting for an open table with a glass of spritzer at the bar is one thing, keeping an old-school juke box in full working order is another. Do not be embarrassed to ask where it is and how it is used, then browse the range of "singles" and choose the right one for the company and the occasion.



Chef Jorg Zupan has two outposts in Ljubljana, each of which, in addition to a creative and original approach to preparing dishes, is characterised by a serious approach to the sound design of the restaurant. The bar and bistro Aftr spins curated melodious funk and alternative pop, which become increasingly lively as the midnight hours approach, and it is especially worth turning up for Sunday lunch at Breg, which is served with a banging set of classic Slovenian songs. You might also be inclined to take to the dance floor at the relaxed fusion bistro Zanoode where the staff love to show off their DJ skills.

If you are a music and gastronomic aficionado, then we recommend a short trip outside Ljubljana. After less than an hour's drive, you will arrive in Cajnarje where you will be served interestingly modernised and up-graded dishes suitable for relaxed sharing and chatting around a common table, and the good mood will no doubt be enhanced by an eclectic playlist of not necessarily well-known but extremely interesting songs, without any genre, geographic or time limitations; the last time we had our first taste of the King of Khmer music, Sinn Sisamouth. Check it out!

The bar and bistro Aftr spins curated melodious funk and alternative pop, which become increasingly lively as the midnight hours approach.



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