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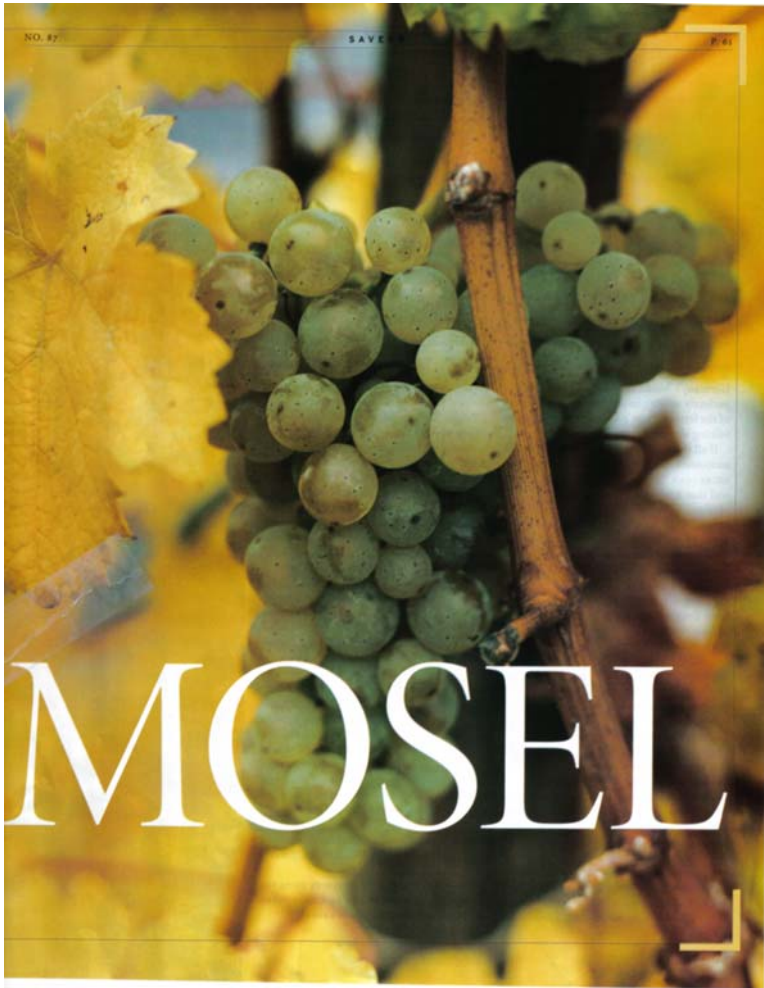
NO. 17

MANFRED PRÜM
CRAFTS WHAT MAY
BE GERMANY'S
FINEST RIESLINGS

MASTER OF THE

BY MICHAEL STEINBERGER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BROOKE SLEZAK

Above, from left, Amel, Manfred, and Katharina Prüm outside their winery home. Right, riesling grapes ready for harvest in a Prüm vineyard.



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MOSEL

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anfred Prüm is no ordinary winemaker. In some respects, he's actually rather peculiar. For one thing, he almost never shows guests his cellar. "It's not interesting," he says. He almost never takes guests to see his vines, either; indeed, he seldom ventures into the vineyards himself. A tasting room? He doesn't have one; instead, he usually conducts tastings in the salon of his baronial mansion on the banks of

Germany's Mosel River. And while Prüm is perfectly willing to discuss the finer points of the fermentation process, he much prefers talking about history, politics, and art.

If all this suggests a certain lack of focus or seriousness, it only goes to show that appear-

ances can deceive and that a winemaker should really be judged only by the fruits of his labor—which, in Prüm's case, happen to be sublime. In fact, he is arguably Germany's most consistently excellent winemaker, with an unrivaled knack for producing rieslings of surreal purity and complexity year in and year out. There are no bad Prüm wines: there are only good ones, great ones, and otherworldly ones.

Prüm's kabinetts, spätleses, and ausleses are benchmarks in their respective categories, while his beerenausleses and trockenbeerenausleses—or BAs and TBAs, as they are

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commonly known—are among the most coveted sweet wines on the market.

Prüm, 70, lives with his wife, Amei, in the village of Wehlen, which has been home to members of the Prüm family since the 17th century. Weingut Johann Josef Prüm (not

to be confused with several other Mosel estates that bear the Prüm name) was founded by Manfred's grandfather Johann Josef in 1911. It was under Manfred's father, Sebastian, that the winery first won international acclaim, and its reputation has soared in the 36 years that Manfred, aided by his shy younger brother Wolfgang, has been at the helm. Manfred and Amei have three daughters, and the oldest, 26-year-old Katharina, is now being groomed to succeed her father.

THE VINEYARD called Wehlener Sonnenuhr sits in the middle of the Mosel Valley, directly

A picker in one of Prüm's vineyards along the Mosel, right. Above, herring tartare, smoked salmon, and shrimp on potato pancakes.





RECIPE

Matjestartar, Geräucherter Lachs, und Shrimps auf Reibekuchen

(Herring Tartare, Smoked Salmon, and Shrimp on Potato Pancakes)

SERVES 4

Matjes herring, popular in Germany, are skinless, boneless fish cured with vinegar and sugar.

- 2 matjes herring filets (see page 114)
- 5 tbsp. heavy cream
- 1 small shallot, peeled and minced
- 1/4 lb. small cold, peeled, boiled shrimp
- Salt
- 2 medium russet potatoes, peeled
- 1 leek, white part only, trimmed, thinly sliced crosswise, and washed
- 1 small onion, peeled and thinly sliced
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/4 tsp. grated nutmeg
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups canola oil
- 1 1/2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. white balsamic or wine vinegar
- Pinch sugar
- 2 cups mesclun greens
- 8 slices smoked salmon
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh dill
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley leaves

1. Soak herring in 4 tbsp. of the cream for 1 hour. Drain and dice. Mix herring, shallots, and remaining cream in a small bowl, cover, and refrigerate. Season shrimp with salt to taste, cover, and refrigerate.

2. Using a mandoline, slice potatoes into long, very thin matchsticks and put into a large bowl. Add leeks and onions and mix well. Transfer potato mixture to a clean dish towel, gather corners together, then squeeze out moisture with your hands. Return potato mixture to bowl. Mix in eggs, nutmeg, and salt and pepper to taste, shape into twelve 3"-wide pancakes, and set aside. Heat half the canola oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Fry pancakes in batches, adding more oil to skillet between batches, until golden, 2-2 1/2 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels.

3. Mix olive oil, vinegar, sugar, and salt and pepper to taste in a medium bowl. Add salad and toss.

4. To serve, arrange 3 pancakes on each of 4 plates. Top 1 pancake on each plate with one-quarter of the herring salad, another with one-quarter of the shrimp, and another with one-quarter of the salmon, then garnish each plate with some of the salad and sprinkle pancakes with some of the dill and parsley.

across the river from the Prüm house and roughly halfway between Trier and Koblenz, the cities that bookend the valley. If there is a more spectacular wine region than this narrow, twisting corridor of western Germany, I am not aware of it. Quaint Tudor-style villages dot both sides of the river, which is enclosed by some of the steepest vineyards in Europe. One of these is Wehlener Sonnenuhr (a *Sonnenuhr* is a sundial; Prüm's great-great-uncle Jodocus Prüm built one amid the vineyards here in 1842). Among the most fabled sites (and almost certainly the most dramatically beautiful) in all of German winemaking—rising from the banks of the Mosel at a 70-degree angle to a height of over 1,000 feet—Wehlener Sonnenuhr occupies about 140 acres in all, with portions belonging to roughly a hundred different proprietors. With 17 acres, the Prüms are the vineyard's largest landowner.

The top of the hill is dusted with snow on this icy, overcast mid-November morning. What makes the white stuff a particularly arresting sight is the fact that there are about 30 people harvesting grapes just below the point where the last flakes have accumulated. These are Prüm's pickers, and they are the only ones on the hill; he is almost always one of the last producers in the Mosel to harvest. Waiting entails risk, Katharina will later tell me, but, she says, it gives the wines much more flavor: "It brings out the floral, fruity, and herbal aromas that we want."

Despite the frigid temperatures, the pickers seem in a good mood, their spirits no doubt buoyed by the ten bottles of glüh-



MAP BY JACQUES WILLIAMS

wine—heated, spiced wine—that have been sent up from the house. But the work is back-breaking; the vines are trained six feet high, and on a slope this steep, it is an achievement just to keep from tumbling down the hill. Getting the grapes out of the vineyard is not unlike getting coal out of a mine shaft: the



Braised wild boar prepared by Amel Prüm, above. Facing page, left, at table with the Prüms (from left), Amel, Manfred, and Katharina; right, Prüm's Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese.

harvested clusters are put into large green bins that are lifted by motorized pulley to a truck waiting on the road above. So that the buckets don't tip over while on their way uphill, pickers ride atop them like Roman warriors on chariots.

Even on a day this cold and dark, it is easy to see why Wehlener Sonnenuhr is capable of yielding such ethereal wines. In addition

to its southwestern exposure, the vineyard has the Mosel lapping at its feet and reflecting sunlight back onto the vines. Then there are the huge slabs of Devonian blue-gray slate strewn across the vineyard floor; the rocks absorb the sun's heat and help keep the vines warm through the night. Apart from the advantages conferred by the hill, the Prüms are further blessed by having very

RECIPE

Wildschweinkeule

(Braised Wild Boar)
SERVES 6-8

Amei Prüm, whose recipe this is, serves the dish with sautéed cabbage (see recipe, page 67).

4 tbsp. olive oil
1 4-lb. leg of wild boar (see page 114), boned, trimmed, and tied up into a roast
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 medium yellow onions, peeled and sliced
3 carrots, peeled, trimmed, and grated on the large holes of a box grater
4 ribs celery, sliced crosswise into 1/2" pieces
6 cloves
4 bay leaves
1 bottle Johann Josef Prüm Wehlener Kabinett (see page 114) or other Mosel riesling
1/2 cup heavy cream

1. Heat oil in a medium enameled cast-iron pot or other wide heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. Add boar and brown well all over, 10-12 minutes. Transfer boar to a dish, season to taste with salt and pepper, and set aside. Add onions to pot and cook over medium-high heat, scraping browned bits stuck to bottom of pot, until they are lightly browned, 6-8 minutes. Stir in carrots and celery and cook until lightly browned, 4-6 minutes. Return boar and any accumulated juices to pot, then add cloves, bay leaves, and wine.

2. Cover pot, reduce heat to medium-low, and braise meat, turning it in pot every half hour, until tender, 2-2 1/2 hours. Transfer boar to a large sheet of aluminum foil and wrap completely, then wrap foil pack in a clean dish towel and set it aside to let meat rest for 20-30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, strain broth from pot through a sieve set over a medium saucepan, firmly pressing on solids with the back of a wooden spoon to extract as much flavor as possible, then discard solids. Skim off and discard fat. Boil broth over medium-high heat until reduced to 1 cup, 20-30 minutes. Whisk in cream, season sauce to taste with salt and pepper, and turn off heat.

4. Unwrap boar and transfer to a cutting board. Discard twine and thinly slice meat. Arrange meat on a warm platter and garnish with a sprig of parsley, if you like. Pour sauce into a gravy boat and serve with the boar.

old vines; 50 years is the average age, but some of the plants have given as much as a century of service.

I HAD BEEN told that Amei was an excellent cook and that the Prüms entertain guests with something approaching Homeric hospitality, so it is with some enthusiasm that I take a seat at the dining-room table for lunch with Manfred, Amei, and Katharina. As Amei, a charming woman with a deep, infectious laugh, hurries back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room, I feel a twinge of guilt for having caused her so much work; only later do I realize

that scurrying is her normal speed. The first course is nearly a meal unto itself; it consists of three plump, deliciously moist potato pancakes, one topped with white herring, another with smoked salmon, and the third with shrimp, with a few leaves of salad on the side. The dish is accompanied by a wine from another Prüm vineyard, the 1999 Zeltinger Sonnenuhr Spätlese. Mosel rieslings tend to be pale in color, refreshingly acidic, and very low in alcohol—well under 10 percent—and the Zeltinger spätlese is true to type. It is a mellow wine, with ripe pear and peach flavors and a strong sulfur note, which is typical of young



GERMAN WINE TERMS: THE BASICS

TAFELWEIN: table wine (i.e., wine of basic quality)

QUALITÄTSWEIN: literally, "quality wine"; in general, any wine made from late-harvest grapes (though sugar may be added at fermentation)

QUALITÄTSWEIN BESTIMMTER ANBAUGEBIETE (QbA): quality wine from one of 13 specific wine-growing regions; the functional equivalent of a village wine from Burgundy

QUALITÄTSWEIN MIT PRÄDIKAT (QmP): quality wine with special attributes; there are six such wine designations:

Kabinett: the first level of QmP wines; light-bodied and usually the driest of the QmPs, though they can sometimes be slightly sweet

Spätlese: slightly riper and slightly richer than

kabinett, usually with a touch of sweetness, but can be made in a dry (Trocken) style as well

Auslese: literally, "selection"; late-harvest wine, substantially richer and sweeter than spätlese

Beerenauslese (BA): "berry selection"; wine produced from individually selected overripe, shriveled berries usually infected with *Botrytis cinerea* (noble rot); sweet and ultra-concentrated

Eiswein: "ice wine"; made from grapes that have actually frozen on the vine; phenomenally sweet and dense, like the BAs and TBAs; a dessert unto itself

Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA): "dried berry selection"; decadently rich, almost syrupy wine—the sweetest of all—made from individually selected extremely shriveled berries that have usually been infected with *Botrytis cinerea*—M.S.

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Above, clockwise from top left: a cup of glühwein; the Prüm house; a basket of ripe riesling grapes; Prüm and daughter Katharina tasting wines at home. Facing page, sautéed savoy cabbage.

Prüm wines. (Prüm believes that long aging brings out the best in Mosel rieslings, and he tends to use a heavy hand with the SO₂ in order to assure his wines an extended life.)

The main course is classic German fare: braised leg of wild boar with a potato gratin and sautéed cabbage. The boar, served in a riesling sauce, is predictably rich but surprisingly subtle in flavor. In keeping with the porcine theme, the gratin and the cabbage contain shards of bacon, giving both

dishes a terrific smokiness. With the boar, we drink a 1995 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese. The wine has a seductive nose of spiced apples and peaches, along with a strong note of petrol (the less pretentious might call it "gasoline", but petrol is the preferred wine term), one of the telltale signs of a mature riesling. The wine is every bit as impressive in the mouth, leaving Prüm quite pleased. "I keep smiling," he says. "It's good."

Over lunch, we talk about the winery, its history, and the impending succession.

Prüm says he has pretty much kept things as they were in his father's day; the large oak barrels that once filled the cellar have given way to stainless-steel tanks, and he puts less emphasis on the BAs and TBAs than his father did, but otherwise little has changed. "Nothing revolutionary," he says. Looking across the table at Katharina, I point out that a revolutionary change is in the offing. Prüm admits that he detected some pity among his neighbors when Amel bore him only girls—the Mosel Valley is a fairly conservative region, and there are as yet few women winemakers—but that he couldn't be more excited at the prospect of his daughter's taking over.

Like her father, Katharina studied law at university and has no formal training as a winemaker. Her legal background is evident in her brisk, precise manner of speech, and as we talk, she makes clear she has no intention of hewing to tradition simply for tradition's sake. She says, for instance, that

Tasting Notes

The wines of Johann Josef Prüm have such a high reputation that they tend to disappear quickly from retail shelves. These are a few Prüm rieslings that were recently available. See THE PANTRY, page 114, for sources.)

GRAACHER HIMMELREICH AUSLESE 2003 (\$47). Big, rich, and mouth-filling—almost unctuous—but with remarkable finesse nonetheless, framed with notes of citrus and vanilla; faintly perfumey at the end.

WEHLENER KABINETT 2003 (\$31). Wonderfully rich, almost honeyed, with a classic petrol nose, some spritz, and loads of luscious fruit, but sharp and a little flinty around the edges.

WEHLENER SONNENUHR AUSLESE 2001 (\$24/375 ml). Very stylish wine, with an abundance of almost tropical fruit and a somewhat elusive sweetness, counterbalanced perfectly by bright acidity. Long, rich finish.

WEHLENER SONNENUHR AUSLESE 2003 (\$52). Honeysuckle and petrol in the nose, then lively and citric and very ripe and concentrated, with some spritz and an opulent sweetness offset by good acidity.

WEHLENER SONNENUHR SPÄTLESE 2003 (\$47). Immense floral bouquet with only a whiff of petrol coming through; ripe and floral and a bit oily but not overly dense on the palate, with ample honeyed fruit. —THE EDITORS

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while her father thinks biodynamic farming is New Age boooey—"He just hears the word and says, 'No, that's completely silly'"—she finds the concept intriguing and may wish to give it a try. But Katharina is also well aware that her first obligation is to do no harm: "We have a long history here, and I need to keep us on top."

AFTER LUNCH, we head out to the winery, which is located in a Victorian-style house

attached to the Prüm residence. The moment we step into the fresh air, our noses are assaulted with the pungent smell of green grape stems. Inside the pressing room, a large bucket of freshly harvested green grapes is waiting to be crushed; there is a smaller bucket of grapes that have shriveled and turned purple from the effects of the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, which concentrates sugar levels in grapes and is essential to the production of BAs and TBAs (as well



RECIPE

Wirsing

(Sautéed Savoy Cabbage)

SERVES 4

Cabbage, both fresh and preserved, is a favorite vegetable in Germany. The recipe for this simple dish comes from Amel Prüm.

Salt

1 small head savoy cabbage, leaves separated
2 tbsp. butter
2 shallots, peeled and finely diced
2 slices thick-cut bacon, finely diced
Freshly ground black pepper

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Working in batches, blanch cabbage leaves, stirring occasionally with a slotted spoon, until they are slightly wilted yet remain bright green, about 30 seconds. Transfer leaves as done with the slotted spoon to a large bowl of ice water and let them soak until cool. Drain leaves and pat dry with paper towels.

2. Using a kitchen knife, cut out and discard rib from each cabbage leaf. Cut leaves crosswise into wide strips and set aside.

3. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add shallots and bacon and cook, stirring often with the slotted spoon, until shallots are soft and golden and bacon has rendered its fat but is still soft, 6-8 minutes. Transfer shallots and bacon to a small bowl and return skillet with rendered fat to medium heat.

4. Add cabbage to skillet and cook, stirring and tossing frequently, until heated through, about 5 minutes. Add shallots and bacon and toss well. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer to a warm serving dish.

as that of sauternes and barsac, the great sweet wines of Bordeaux). At some point during each harvest, Prüm and his vineyard manager decide whether there are enough high-quality botrytized grapes to produce either BAs or TBAs (whether a wine is classified as BA or TBA is a function of must weight; see box, page 65). If there are, five or six workers will be assigned the task of selecting individual grapes for the BAs and TBAs. Needless to say, these wines take considerable man-hours to produce, are made in minuscule quantities, and fetch

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astronomical prices at the harvest auction held each September in Trier. In 2003, 36 bottles of Prüm's 2000 TBA were auctioned off at a price of \$3,400 per bottle.

As we stand by the winepress, Prüm tells me a story about the vintage of 2003. Because of the record heat wave that summer, the grapes were overripe by the time of the harvest. As a result, growers were given permission to acidify their wines, which many promptly did. Prüm chose not to—because of something he had learned while standing in this same spot 45 years earlier. The now legendary 1959 vintage was also the product of a scorching summer, and when those grapes were harvested, many local winemakers bemoaned their lack of acidity and worried that they would never develop properly. Prüm's cellar master, who had worked for the family for almost 50 years, erupted in anger at their complaints. "I hate so much fool-

ishness," he barked. "Mosel rieslings can have too much acidity," said the cellar master, "but never too little."

WITH THE LIGHT beginning to fade, Prüm suggests we head inside to the salon. Once there, he uncorks a 1982 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett, which is drinking beautifully. The room, decorated with portraits of Prüm's past, looks out on the Mosel, whose languid pace is interrupted only by the occasional barge hauling coal upriver. As we slowly drain our glasses, Prüm holds forth on the history of Trier and the Mosel Valley. As he talks, I think I finally understand why Prüm doesn't play host the way other winemakers do. I think he's trying to make a point: that wine's primary purpose is to stimulate good conversation and that for good conversation to occur, you need not only a good bottle of wine but also a decent place to sit. Seated here on this raw afternoon, soaking up the warmth of the house and the family that owns it, I'm not inclined to disagree. 🍷

THE PANTRY, page 114: Sources for matjes herring, wild boar, venison, and a spätzle press and for Manfred Prüm's wines.



Below, a view of Wehlen. Above, venison stew. Facing page, center, chef Hubert Scheid of Schloss Monaise. Top right, "little sparrow" noodles.



RECIPE

Ragout vom Hirschkalb

(Venison Stew)
SERVES 4

This dish is served at one of the Prüm family's favorite traditional-style restaurants, the Blauer Salon at Ringhotel Weinhaus Moselschild in Urzig, near Wehlen (see box, right).

3 tbsp. olive oil
2 lbs. boneless venison shoulder or leg (see page 114), cut into 1 1/2" pieces and patted dry
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 medium yellow onions, peeled and sliced
1 bouquet garni consisting of 6 sprigs fresh thyme, 2-3 bay leaves, 1 branch fresh rosemary, and 1 tbsp. crushed juniper berries tied together in cheesecloth
2 cups burgundy or other red wine
1/4-1/2 cup black currant preserves
1/2 cup fresh cranberries
3 tbsp. butter
6 oz. chanterelles, cleaned and trimmed, larger ones halved
1 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley leaves

1. Heat oil in a heavy medium pot over medium-high heat. Season meat with salt and pepper. Working in batches, add meat to pot and brown all over, 5-7 minutes per batch. Transfer meat to a bowl as done.

2. Reduce heat to medium. Add onions to pot and cook, scraping browned bits stuck to bottom of pot, until browned, 10-15 minutes. Return meat and any accumulated juices to pot. Add bouquet garni and wine, bring stew to a simmer, cover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until meat is tender, 2-3 hours.

3. Strain stew into a colander set over a large bowl and discard bouquet garni and onions. Return broth to pot and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Whisk in preserves, then add cranberries and simmer until berries pop, 10-12 minutes. Return meat to pot and adjust seasonings. Keep warm over lowest heat.

4. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add chanterelles and sauté until tender, 4-5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve stew garnished with mushrooms and chopped parsley and accompanied by spätzle (see recipe, right).

DINING AROUND
THE MOSEL

The Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region does not enjoy the reputation for food that it does for wine. In and around Wehlen, the choices are generally limited to low-key restaurants offering home-style German fare. One such place recommended to me by the Prüms was the Ringhotel Weinhaus Moselschild, a hotel in Urzig with a warm, inviting dining room overlooking the Mosel (Moselufer 12-14; 49/6532/93 93 0; www.ringhotels.de). A rich venison stew served with spätzle was the highlight of the meal. The restaurant's wine list is impressive and features fairly priced bottles from some of the best addresses in the Middle Mosel.

There are more upscale choices available to visitors willing to spend a little time in the car. The village of Drain, about ten miles from Wehlen, is home to Waldhotel Sonnora (Aul' im Eichefeld 1; 49/6578/98 22 0; e-mail info@hotel-sonnora.de; www.hotel-sonnora.de), one of Germany's six Michelin three-star restaurants. Another restaurant worth a detour is Schloss Monaise, located in the city of Trier, near the French border (Schloss Monaise 7; 49/6518/28 67 0). Owned by the brother-and-sister team of Hubert and Birgit Scheid, Schloss Monaise is set in a majestic wedding cake mansion in an



otherwise forlorn part of the city. Hubert (left) spent part of his career in France and Belgium (including stints at La Bonne Auberge in Antibes and La Cravache d'Or in Brussels, both three-star restaurants at the time) and returned to Germany in 1979 with a real flair for light, modern French cooking. Everything late, from simple coquilles st-jacques to roast duck breast with a potato-celery purée to a chocolate-chestnut torte with marzipan icing, was excellent. The restaurant's wine list is equally superb, offering multiple bottlings and vintages from top German estates like Prüm, Christoffel, and Haag, as well as a good selection of wines from Burgundy and Bordeaux. Hubert is as passionate and knowledgeable about wine as he is about food; he is also a terrific raconteur, who kept me listening, and laughing, late into the night. —M.S.



RECIPE

Spätzle

("Little Sparrow" Noodles)
SERVES 4

At the Blauer Salon, these noodles are served with venison stew (see recipe, left).

Salt
1 1/4 cups flour
2 pinches freshly grated nutmeg
4 eggs
3 tbsp. sparkling mineral water
2-3 tbsp. butter, softened
1 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley leaves

1. Bring a large deep pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Meanwhile, combine flour, 1/2 tsp. salt, and nutmeg in a medium mixing bowl. Beat eggs and water together in another bowl, add to flour mixture, and beat with a wooden spoon until batter is elastic and small bubbles form, about 5 minutes. Batter should fall from spoon in long strands; if it doesn't, beat in 1 tbsp. of water at a time until consistency is correct.

2. Rinse a spätzle maker (see page 114) or a potato ricer with cold water and hold about 3" above boiling water in pot. Put half the batter into the spätzle maker or ricer. Slowly press batter through holes so that it falls into the boiling water in long strands. Cook spätzle, stirring often, for 2 minutes. Transfer spätzle with a large sieve to another colander to let drain, then transfer to a bowl. Cover to keep warm. Rinse spätzle maker or ricer and repeat process.

3. Toss warm spätzle with butter, season with salt, and serve garnished with parsley.