



Beyond rösti

Fresh, seasonal produce has long been a staple of traditional Swiss cuisine

Cheese fondue, raclette and buttery cakes of golden-brown potato rösti are iconic Swiss foods, familiar and savoured around the globe. But there's a lot more to sample from traditional Swiss cuisine. *Swiss News* steps inside the kitchen to find out more.



By Gail Mangold-Vine | There are two main characteristics of Swiss cuisine. One is that the cooking of the German, French, Italian and Romansch-speaking regions shares similarities with the regional cooking of the countries they border.

The second is that there's rural versus metro fare – the difference between the poor mountain farmer of yore dipping stale bread into melted cheese compared with wealthy Zurich town councillors who feasted on *Zouftschriibertopf* (platters heaped with beef and veal fillets, kidneys, liver and sweetbreads).

However, whether the food is gentrified or rustic, and regardless of lifestyle and means, availability of ingredients, and culinary skill, the common denominator is that Swiss cuisine is unpretentious 'comfort' food.

It "gets under your skin"

Its simplicity and "*Gemütlichkeit*" (cosiness) is precisely what Ed McGaugh, the Zug-based entrepreneur who created the Expat-Expo, treasures about Swiss food. The dishes he sampled as a child when visiting his Swiss mother's family during summer holidays are still among his favourites to eat and cook today.

McGaugh calls himself a "self-taught cooking fanatic", and has worked as a professional chef in two prestigious U.S. restaurants: The Venue in Kansas City and The Marsh Tavern in Manchester, Vermont.

One of his favourite dishes is *Aelplermagronen* (an Unterwalden speciality, it consists of potatoes and noodles with cream, cheese and sautéed onions, although it's made without the potatoes in Uri), which he prefers to serve with wedges of caramelised apple rather than the usual applesauce.

Another is the all-things-boiled *Berner Platte*, which includes various meats like ham and sausage, green beans and sauerkraut. It's "a humble dish, but it just gets under your skin," he says.

'Tis the season

Enter UK-born Sue Style who writes for the *Financial Times* and who used to live in Switzerland. Her book *A Taste of Switzerland* – which she describes as a "study of good things to eat and drink" but which also contains recipes – was first published in 1992 and has been reprinted since by Bergli Books.

"Switzerland as a country where you eat exceptionally well doesn't necessarily spring to mind; people tend to be unaware

Swiss food in a nutshell

Air-dried beef sliced sliver-thin is known as *Bündnerfleisch/viande des Grisons*, although Graubünden and Valais both produce similar products. Unlike these meats, *Appenzeller Mostbröckli* is first smoked then air-dried. The 'most' in its name refers to the cider it was traditionally served with.

Soups include barley, flour, cheese and even cherry.

Savoury pies include spinach, onion and meat, as well as interesting combinations like zucchini and mint, a Vaud speciality. *Chäs-Chüechli* are cheese ramekins served as hot snacks and starters.

Fish. Try Rhine salmon, Basel style (fried in batter), or lake fish. The typical varieties include perch, trout, dace, pike, whitefish and char. *Filets de perches meunière* is a signature dish on both sides of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva). The fish are dredged in flour, pan fried and served with browned butter, chopped parsley, lemon and potatoes with local white wine to wash it down.

Meat. While pigs' trotters and tripe with vinegar, not to mention horse, may be acquired tastes, most meat-eaters rejoice at *Aemmtaler Schöfigs* (a fine saffron-spiced lamb stew), *Mistkratzerli* (stuffed chicken), *Zürigschätzlets* (veal strips in cream sauce) and *Leberli* (calf's liver redolent with the aroma of the herbs it is sautéed in).

In all four regions, **game** (*Wild, chasse, caccia*) is an autumnal favourite. In the French and German parts it is often served with Brussels sprouts, red cabbage and stewed pears with cranberries (*Preiselbeeren/airelles*).

Wild mushroom ragouts are another delight of this season.

Meat dishes are often served **with traditional accompaniments**, like Valais roast veal with *Crève-à-Fous* (turnips and potatoes *au gratin*). Geneva too has a favoured combo, turkey with cardoons *au gratin*, popular at Christmas.

Regional specialities. Some of the more unusual regional specialities can be found in Vaud: *papet vaudois* (leek and potato stew served with pork, liver or cabbage sausage); *malakoffs* (cheese fritters); and *tarte au vin* (wine tart).

Even **more exotic** are Graubünden recipes for potato dishes like *pizokel* and *maluns*, and stuffed chard leaves known as *capuns*, although the fame of their walnut tart (*tuorta da nus ch engiadinaisa/Engadiner Nusstorte*) extends well beyond cantonal borders.



Bündnerfleisch



Chäs-Chüechli



Capuns



Röstli

© John Miller, A Taste of Switzerland

Altes Klösterli

ZOOH RESTAURANT

With a wonderful view over the Zurich lowlands we serve you traditional Swiss Specialities.



OUTPOST

ZOOH RESTAURANT

Fish and grill specialities from the West and around the world.



YOU SAW THIS AD

And so do more than 35,000 other English-speaking expats. Most of them in well-paid positions in international companies, organisations or Embassies and Consulates. If you would like to advertise your services or products in Swiss News, contact me now at Swiss News:

Nadine Papakosta, telephone 044 306 47 17

Probably the BEST Indian Food in Town



We serve North and South Indian vegetarian and nonvegetarian food.

- * Business Lunch from Sfr. 16.- onwards
- * Every Sunday buffet à discrétion Sfr. 37.-
- * Tandoori * Korma * Kebab
- * Curry * Vindaloo * Jalfrezi
- * Catering, Party Service and Banquets

Limmattalstr. 252 / Wartauweg 18 | 8049 Zürich
 Tel. 043 300 45 55 | Fax 043 300 45 56
 www.maharani.ch | info@maharani.ch
 With Tram No. 13 or Bus No. 80 up to «Wartau» Stop
 We also have own parking facility



The English Show

94.5 Radio X
 Basel



News
 Interviews
 What's on
 Where to Go in Basel

Live Tuesdays 6:30-8pm
 webstream anytime.....

www.TheEnglishShow.com

Indian Restaurant Vulkan

Good quality, friendly service
 There are a lot of Indian Restaurants, but only one Vulkan.
 (with original Indian tandoor!)
 Our aim is to be the best also in 2004!
 Klingenstrasse 33, 8005 Zurich (corner Konradstrasse)
 Phone 01 273 76 67, www.restaurant-vulkan.ch
 Monday to Friday: 11.00-14.30 18.00-24.00
 Saturday and Sunday 18.00-24.00



www.tasteofamerica.ch

043 495 6185 Your favorite American food products, delivered right to your door! Anywhere in Switzerland! Thanksgiving Dinner Ingredients!



of the enormous variety,” says Style, who also updated the chapter on Swiss wines for *Hugh Johnson’s Pocket Wine Book*.

Did she encounter any surprises as she researched her book? Definitely.

“There really is a difference between back-valley rustic and what you see in the cities; it’s not just a tourism construct,” says Style. She recalls being in Graubünden, looking down at the Valbella ski resort, and thinking how the sophistication of the resort below was physically so near – but yet so far removed from the lifestyle of the farmers who spend the summer months in the mountains tending their cows and making cheese. “It was a whole other world,” she remarks.

Style says she was also struck by “how close the Swiss still are to seasons in their eating. You see this or that season – asparagus, strawberry, game – advertised on signs in shops and restaurants.” She also mentions the autumnal Swiss habit of gathering chestnuts and walnuts that have fallen on public ground.

Canvassing the forests and collecting edible mushrooms is also something of a national pastime, Style notes. Discovering the whole “mushroom network”, which includes official experts to whom collectors can bring their finds for free identification, was another revelation as she travelled the country, she says.

Swiss revival

Still, Style says, in Swiss cities it has now become difficult to find restaurants that serve traditional Swiss food exclusively, or even at all.

The ones that haven’t re-scripted their menus entirely may, like Restaurant Kirchenfeld in Bern or the Oepfelchammer in Zurich, still list some Swiss dishes in the “classics” section of the menu. By contrast, some like the Restaurant de l’Hôtel de Ville in Geneva, which serves brasserie-style fare, may highlight it as an unusual selling point, as they do with their copious, set-price menu of Geneva specialities like *longeole* sausage and pork fricassee.

The move towards serving international (and not necessarily seasonal) food in what may formerly have been traditional Swiss restaurants is also bemoaned by Boris Markov, an IT specialist who lives in Erlenbach (ZH).

Son of a Bulgarian and a Ticinese, he’s been a passionate amateur cook for 35 years: “I started to cook with my mother and never stopped.” Markov be-

Swiss food in a nutshell

Desserts may feature cakes and chocolate, meringues and thick cream. They can also include vegetables, like *Rüebli-Torte* (carrot cake), or chestnuts (as in *vermicelli*). But it’s mainly about fruit – as fritters, in pies, stewed in wine or preserved in alcohol.

Another Swiss tradition is serving a single, **sweet dish for supper**, like apple or plum rösti (a great way to use up day-old bread) sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon. Such recipes can be found in Marianne Kaltenbach’s book.

For recipes in English try:

- *A Taste of Switzerland* by Sue Style
- *Cooking in Switzerland* by Marianne Kaltenbach
- *Culinary Art and Traditions of Switzerland* by Fondation Nestlé Pro Gastronomie, Vevey
Order at www.slbvideo.ch/en/products/books/default.asp

Just out at Bergli Books:
Swiss Cookies by K. Fekete and A. Rushton,
more at www.bergli.ch



Rüebli-Torte



Or these websites:

www.about.ch
www.suissegourmande.ch
www.swissroots.org

© John Miller, A Taste of Switzerland

lieves that dining on seasonal food is part of authentic eating, and regrets today’s “no waiting” ethos.

“Ticino has been perhaps least affected by the move away from traditional recipes,” he says. Alongside such Ticinese staples as pasta, risotto and polenta is Markov’s own favourite: *capretto* (young goat), a traditional Easter dish. Called *Gitzi* in Swiss-German, it’s also popular in that part of the country during the Easter season.

“Some places have retained a stronger sense of food identity than others,” Style agrees, naming the Emmental and Graubünden as other cases in point.

There are signs, however, of a return to traditional dining habits. The growing trend toward eating ‘fresh and local (*terroir*)’ – and thus seasonal by definition – and ‘slow food’, stimulates consumers and producers alike, and has hooked many urban restaurants and their patrons.

Best places to go

Sue Style recommends seeking out the rural spots. “Ask. People are proud of their specialities, and want to point you

in the right direction.” Just as dog walkers establish instant rapport with pet-owning locals, she says, “even with limited language skills, asking about food is a great way to break down barriers.”

“Seek out regional dishes – it’s not for nothing they’ve stood the test of time; it’s because they’re so good!” suggests Ed McGaugh.

“And go to local events, like a *Käseteilet*,” he adds, referring to the cheese-sharing events that take place in late summer throughout early fall. “I think the best one is in the Justistal in the Berner Oberland. You can experience how different a cheese tastes based on where the cow was grazing, if it was eating clover, moss or wild flowers.”

Markov and McGaugh share the view that going to a *Besenbeiz* is one of the best ways to learn “about how people in this country really eat”. These are farms in the Swiss-German part of the country that serve food, albeit not on a regular basis.

“When they were open, they’d prop a broom (*Besen*) up outside,” says Markov, adding that nowadays you’re more likely to see a sign.

A Sue Style selection from *A Taste of Switzerland*

Ziibelewaije (Onion Tart)

This dish is great for winter, and typical at the Bern Onion Market (the fourth Monday in November) and Fasnacht in Basel. Plus, it's a wonderful supper dish.

Serves 6

1 kg (2¼ lb) onions
25 g (1 oz or 2 tbsp) butter
Salt and pepper
300 g (10 oz) short crust (basic pie) pastry
3 eggs
200 ml (7 fl oz) cream
200 ml (7 fl oz) milk

Optional: 50 g (2 oz) fat-streaked bacon cubes

Slice the onions finely. Stew them gently in a covered pan with the butter, salt and plenty of black pepper for about 30 minutes, until golden and tender. Heat the oven to 200°C (400°F or Gas Mark 6).

Roll out the pastry to fit a 30 cm (12 in) quiche pan. Whisk together the eggs, cream, milk, and salt and pepper to taste. Spread the cooked, cooled onions in the pastry case, pour the egg mixture on top and scatter the bacon over it (if using).

Bake the tart for about 35 minutes or until set and golden brown.

Used with permission of the author

Typical *Besenbeiz* fare includes a *Z'Vieri-Plättli* (including cold meats, cheese and bread). The one run by the Bauer family in Gächlingen (see 'Eating out' sidebar) offers seasonal specialities along with bread baked in a wood-stove, home-smoked ham and bacon, fried eggs with *Rösti* and homemade *Spätzli* (tiny, rough-shaped dumplings made from egg, flour and cream), cakes, pies and ice cream.

Another way of discovering Swiss food, Markov suggests, is heading for places that still feature a *Metzgete/cochonaille*. A *Metzgete* is the winter tradition of slaughtering a pig and then using every possible bit as a cut of meat, and the rest to make charcuterie and sausages of different kinds.

Black pudding (blood sausage) is part of the *Metzgete* tradition, although it is generally a winter favourite on its own. Called *Blutwurst/boudin*, it's served with fried onions and applesauce.

Research can be yummy

In addition to experimenting with Swiss specialities at home, a great way to learn about the food, says Ed McGaugh, is through systematic research.

"Take one thing, like sausage – and really get out there and try them. Swiss sausages are incredibly refined," he says.

The sausage fan – specifically of *Cervelas* (made of beef, bacon and pork rind) and *Landjäger/gendarme* (a dry salami sausage) – says his all-time favourite tuck-in consists of thick slabs of veal *Lyoner* or *saucisse de Lyon* on slices of the braided bread called *Züpfle/tresse*. "Bell makes a decent *Lyoner*, but otherwise buy at a

quality butcher shop – not the supermarket," suggests McGaugh.

"Washed down with some local beer – heaven," he says.

This writer's personal favourite is a good *OLMA*, aka *St. Galler Bratwurst*, served with onion sauce and *rösti*.

"Cheese is another thing," McGaugh adds. "Get into the culture of cheese they have here. A good, aged Alp cheese is so good it's beyond description."

He recommends other full-immersion experiences like going to the Swiss Open-air Museum Ballenberg, which has some 100 century-old reassembled buildings from all over Switzerland, to watch sausage, bread and *Mutschli* cheese being made.

Yes, it *is* fattening

McGaugh agrees – if you're hauling stuff around on a mountain farm all day, a diet strong on *Magronen* (cheese noodles) et al makes sense. Whereas, for someone living a sedentary city life – unless they've been pounding the ski slopes all day – it doesn't.

For the less active among us, McGaugh suggests limiting some of the heavier dishes in "the way you have special stuff at Thanksgiving that you don't eat all the time".

But when you do indulge, really get into the experience. With your meal, drink the wine the locals recommend, and perhaps sample a postprandial herbal digestive or a fiery *Schnapps/eau de vie*.

"Find out how Swiss people do things. Give things a try. That's what is most interesting and rewarding," says Style.

Eating out

Here is a regional selection of favourite restaurants from Sue Style, Boris Markov, Gail Mangold-Vine and Ed McGaugh.

Basel

Brasserie Löwenzorn,
www.loewenzorn-basel.ch
Restaurant Schnabel,
www.restaurant-schnabel.ch
Safran Zunft, www.safran-zunft.ch

Bern

Brasserie Bärensgraben,
www.brasseriebaerengraben.ch
Gasthof Hirschen, Matten-Interlaken,
www.hirschen-interlaken.ch
Restaurant Bären, Unterseen,
www.baeren-unterseen.ch

Graubünden

Bündner Stuben, Romantik Hotel Stern,
www.stern-chur.ch

Lucerne

Wirtshaus Galliker, Schützenstrasse 1,
041 240 10 02
Gasthof Rössli, Adligenswil,
www.roessli-adligenswil.ch

Ticino

In the countryside, look for the word *Grotto*; the more remote, the better.

Valais

Chalet Binii, Savièse, 027 395 12 17

Vaud

Au Bon Vin, Chardonne, 021 921 27 04
Auberge Communale, Luins,
www.aubergedeluins.ch

Zurich

Alpenrose,
www.restaurant-alpenrose.ch
Restaurant und Bierhalle Kropf,
In Gassen 16, 044 221 18 05
Zeughauskeller, www.zeughauskeller.ch
(features the 'Wurst of the Month')

Metzgete / Cochonaille

(Look in late fall, early winter – call ahead)
Alpenblick, Toggwil (Meilen), Zurich,
044 923 04 02
Auberge des Vieux-Chênes, Presinge,
Geneva, 022 759 12 07

More addresses can be found at

www.myswitzerland.com (under Food and Wine, 'typical' restaurants), and in Karen Brown's *Switzerland: Charming Inns & Itineraries*; her recommendations often include wonderful eateries that serve authentic food.

Some Besenbeiz suggestions and addresses

Lugmer, Gächlingen (SH),
http://web.coolportal.ch/1pager_1
Hirschi, Weiningen (TG),
www.hirschi-weiningen.ch
Knobel, Hütten (ZH),
www.besenbeiz-knobel.ch

For Käseteilet dates

www.schweizeralpkäese.ch