

BERLIN

by Rich Rubin

If you haven't been to Berlin in a while, you might be surprised by its transformation into a foodie destination. With eleven Michelin-starred restaurants, and a host of spots offering cuisine from Japanese to Turkish to French (and everything in between), this city relishes its food. Cosmopolitan, international in scope, and constantly surprising, Berlin offers one of Europe's very best culinary scenes. If you're a bit daunted by the riches, sign up for a culinary tour offered by **Urban Insider** (www.berlinagenten.com), which gives you a "dine around" experience at some of the best spots. In the meantime, here are some of our favorite restaurants that you may want to visit during your next trip to Berlin. Guten Appetit!

WEINBAR RUTZ

At Berlin's latest entry into the starry Michelin firmament, you enter into a wine shop/bar with floor-to-ceiling glass shelves full of wine bottles, dark floors, and soaring ceiling. Enjoy a creative bar menu here, or head up the illuminated, translucent steps to the restaurant, which features pink marble and deep wood tables with white cloth runners. The food, served with amiable flair, is among Berlin's best, and includes such offerings as a silky, cold red pepper soup with two perfectly-grilled, chary scallops and a small dish of tandoori ice cream that tastes about like you'd expect tandoori ice cream to taste, but a million times better. Check out such menu-delights as pheasant with champagne and cabbage, or cod with prawns, fennel, and balsamic. Indulge in desserts whose creativity ranges from frozen plum soup topped with white wine ice cream resting on a cylinder of walnut crème caramel, to a half-liquid chocolate soufflé with banana, passionfruit, and guava ice cream. Can't face all these choices? Try the "surprise menu," where chef Marco Müller and his crew cook up four courses for you, so you can sit back and relax as the delights appear before your eyes. • *Chausseestrasse 8. Tel: 011-49-30-2462-8760. www.rutz-weinbar.de*

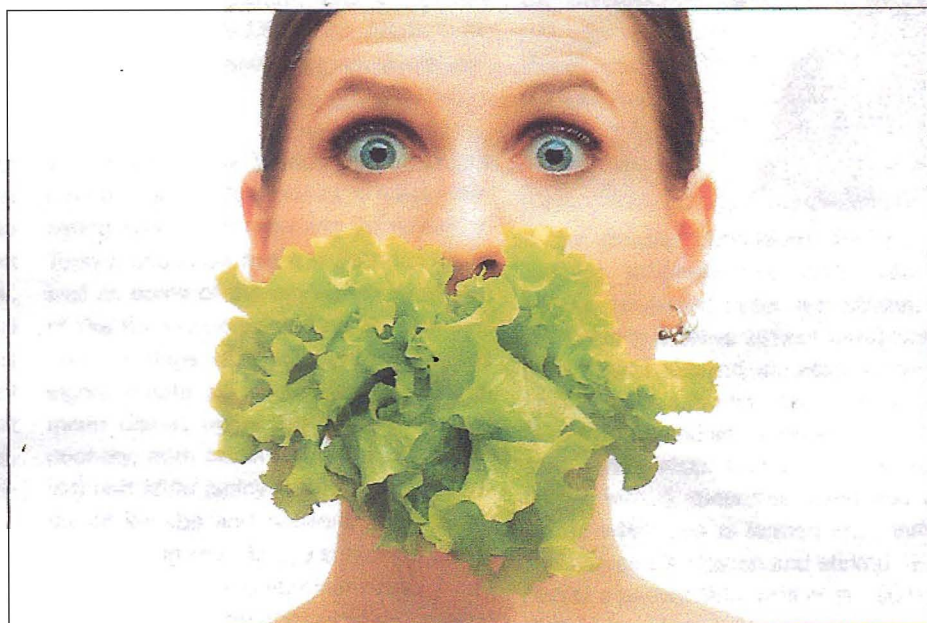


Photo: Victoria Alexandrova

SHIRO I SHIRO

The first thing you notice in Shiro I Shiro is white: the walls, the long table in the front room, colorless but for the glittery leaves and flowers embossed into it, and a hint of blue in the chair cushions. The back room has more traditional tables for two or four, with a series of booths where you can pull the white curtains and be alone with your partner and your amazing food—and amazing it is, from the relatively straightforward Japanese menu to the creatively European-with-a-hint-of-Asian selections. The Caprese, for instance, is deconstructed into a wonder of design and taste, the mozzarella alternating with lettuce leaves in a little tower topped by a scoop of basil ice cream, drizzled with balsamic reduction, and the plate dotted with red and green tomato "hearts," seaweed, and a round balsamic crisp encircling tomato marmalade. Lamb comes with pumpkin ravioli, a pumpkin-yuzu chutney, and a jaunty pumpkin flower finishing off the creation. Jellied quince soup boasts hazelnut/semolina balls and a rich hazelnut sherbet, while kumquats are served with gingerbread, a chocolate waffle, and hot chocolate espuma. You're unlikely to find

food like this anywhere else on earth. Best of all: contrary to what you might expect from the formal look, the service is the friendliest in town. *Rosa-Luxemburg-Strasse 11. Tel: 011-49-30-9700-4790. www.shiroishiro.com*

VAU

The cuisine at Michelin-starred Vau isn't wild or overly-designed, just perfectly-prepared and delicious, not a flavor or texture out of place. Choose smoked mackerel with pear purée, carrots, and bacon, or tagliatelle with lobster and basil, followed, perhaps, by braised shoulder of veal with broad beans and chanterelles. Desserts are the most adventurous, such as pineapple in sesame brittle with coconut mousse, macadamia crème brûlée, and lemongrass/chile ice cream, or pistachio mousse with hints of champagne and mint. The setting is lovely, with modern, deep blue oil paintings along the wall and a courtyard section for nice weather. Service here is a bit formal, and very attentive. As with most Berlin haute cuisine palaces, the menu items are limited to a dozen or so wonderful selections. *Jägerstrasse 54/55. Tel: 011-49-30-202-9730. www.vau-berlin.de*

MORE

Enter More, and you won't have much doubt this is a gay restaurant. The walls are bright scarlet, while illuminated columns of tiny white beads hang from ceiling to countertops and are reflected in the large wall mirrors. Cylindrical red lights hang from the ceiling and a video screen shows a tumbling waterfall. If this didn't clue you in, check out the crowd: two men in leather holding hands, two women leaning in over the table to engage in intimate dialogue. Food choices here range from an herbed crème soup with chorizo chips to lamb in honey-spice sauce, or rumpsteak with either Gorgonzola or pepper sauce. It's a perfect place to have a good meal before exploring the nightlife of Schöneberg, or to treat the after-effects of a night at the clubs with a hearty breakfast (served till 5 P.M. for overindulgers). *Motzstrasse 28, Schöneberg. Tel: 011-49-30-2363-5702. www.more-berlin.de*

MARGAUX

In Margaux, another of the city's Michelin-starred restaurants, there's a restrained and very modern elegance. Walls are marble-paneled, floors are marble, armchairs sit at round or square tables while large windows look onto a lovely courtyard. Choose a multi-course menu of three, five, or seven courses and you can see just how creative chef Michael Hoffmann is. Recommendations include the octopus with fennel and scampi to

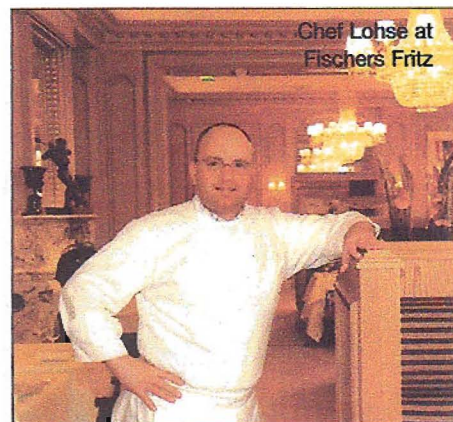
such mains as lobster glazed with melon vinegar and served with glazed Jerusalem artichokes, avocado, dried peperoncini, and a salad of cress and candied papaya. This is a splurge spot, with a romantic ambience as well as high-design food, the quintessential modern, urban, culinary palace. *Unter den Linden 78. Tel: 011-49-30-2265-2611. www.margaux-berlin.de*

HASIR

With Berlin's large Turkish population, it's not surprising to find one of its most interesting restaurants reflecting the cuisine of Turkey, and Hasir has a welcoming air as well as some of the city's best examples of this time-honored cuisine. Turkish tiles and paintings of that country's famous sights create an exotic ambience. The menu dishes up all the best of Turkish cookery, from *börek* (cheese-filled, rolled filo) and *köfte* (spicy meatballs) to a variety of kebabs and desserts like Turkish rice pudding or *künefe*, a shredded wheat concoction that's pretty incredible. There are now several branches of this beloved restaurant, but the Kreuzberg original is still tops for atmosphere and a warm welcome. *Adalbertstrasse 10. Tel: 011-49-30-614-2373. www.hasir.de*

FISCHERS FRITZ

Fischers Fritz wears its two Michelin stars gracefully (it's the only Berlin restaurant with two). The service is flawless and sweet, and the room soothing and graceful



under glowing chandeliers and curtains framing windows that look onto the famous boulevard Unter den Linden. The food here is creative without being pretentious. Cabbage salad, a traditional German favorite, gets a modern spin, with a heady ginger sauce and small pieces of pan-fried quail sitting atop. Carpaccio of sturgeon comes with a cucumber salad and char caviar, while cod is formed into "leaves" and served with bacon and shrimp. Every dish is a perfect little work of art, so beautifully presented that you have to take a deep breath before destroying the creation. When dessert arrives, it's like a Jackson Pollock painting, such as a chestnut ice with mandarin sour cream and Chai latte foam. You won't admire the visuals for too long, as the depth and variety of flavor is too tempting to sit there and look at. *Charlottenstrasse 49. Tel: 011-49-30-2033-6363. www.fischersfritzberlin.de*

HEAT

Not your typical hotel restaurant, this eatery in the Radisson SAS delivers its eponymously fiery quality in such dishes as Dal or South Indian curry. You can go more traditional with a Berlin-style calve's liver with onions, apples, and potatoes, or indulge in Tandoori lamb, chicken, or prawns (or a combination of all three), with house-baked Naan bread as accompaniment. In nice weather, take a seat in the lovely courtyard, where tables scatter across a shady patio. Versatility is key here, and you can enjoy the spicy wonders of Indian cuisine while your less-adventurous lover sticks with fried scallops or gratinated goat cheese. It's all about the choice, and Heat gives you that in spades. *Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse 3. Tel: 011-49-30-238-280. www.heat-berlin.de*

