



14 NOVEMBER 2016

ERFURT GERMANY



Erfurt. This student city of 200,000 people is a little more than two hours by ICE train direct from Frankfurt airport, and attracts more than 3 million visitors each year. Right now it will be heating up as it holds one of Germany's most famous Christmas Markets, in a vast plaza in front of the city's magnificent cathedral. In the summer months an outdoor opera is staged on the same precinct, so it is these two events that most of the visitors head for.

I was there to cover the IKA, the Culinary Olympics, as the city also boasts the Messe, a vast modern exhibition hall where that extraordinary event was held. Because Erfurt is strategically placed in the centre of Germany and almost equidistant from Frankfurt, Berlin and Munich the conference centre is busy year round.

But what about the rest of the city? There are many lovely old buildings and churches in the centre, an excellent bus and tram network to get visitors and locals everywhere for less than two euros and some excellent shopping including a modern mall that is cleverly disguised behind a quaint old façade. My favourite place was the Kramer Brucke, a 1000 year old bridge that has houses built above classy little handcraft and specialist shops. Pic above.

As for food destinations, Goldhelm Chocolates is the not to be missed place – a little shop on the bridge alongside their own ice cream store, but also a superb store and chocolate cooking school in the square behind the bridge where the philosophy is bean-to-bar. Near there is a hand craft baker, Backstube where the owner allows visitors to bring their own condiments to go on his amazing bread. And in another nearby square look for mustard maker Born which has been in operation since 1820.

Everywhere in almost every restaurant the regional specialty Thuringer dumplings and bratwurst are served. You won't get away without eating this

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I would easily classify Lauraine Jacobs as the high priestess of the international food and wine scene.
— Charlie Trotter of Charlie Trotters Restaurant in Chicago

hearty meal, but luckily the city is also known for broad beans and watercress. I visited Ralf and Karolyna Frisch who cultivate watercress on a family site that dates back to 1630. Impressive and vital as it is an antidote to the rich fare served in the city.

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27 OCTOBER 2016

AND SILVER!



The logistics are almost overwhelming and certainly our New Zealand Anchor Food Professionals Culinary Olympic team probably had not only come the furthest to Erfurt, Germany, but had to cope with all sorts of hurdles like transport from their base 70 minutes away, access to kitchens and an absolutely bare bones number of helpers. Some countries had brought a veritable army of support.

But the Kiwis put their heads down, cooked their hearts out and proved their worth. The dinner that came from the hot kitchen was delicious. Salmon starter, lamb main and a dessert that was inspired by Pacific flavours. The judges and lucky diners obviously were very impressed. The team won Silver.

They also won the hearts of many, and attracted television crews and much other media attention. And they're bringing home two bronze medals and a very worthy and admired silver.

Congratulations to each and every member of the tiny team, and also to the sponsors whose faith has been rewarded.

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24 OCTOBER 2016

OLYMPIC MEDALS FOR NEW ZEALAND CULINARY TEAM



The joy of winning Bronze at the Culinary Olympics clearly shows as our team of Steve Le Corre, Mark Sycamore, John Kelleher, Darren Wright, Richard Hingston and Corey Hume celebrate in Erfurt.

Their exhibition Cold Table was a thing of wonder. An array of New Zealand fine food from canapes to festive three course dinner menus were intricately created and presented with a clean and clear theme that truly captured the spirit of our beautiful country.

The team had hardly slept for four nights as they prepared their entry during the night in a tiny hotel kitchen more than an hour's drive from Erfurt. They were up against other national teams who are paid professionals, who had armies of assistants and many of whom came from countries that were a matter of a few hours away by van.

The last time NZ competed was 1988 and they did the major sponsor Anchor Food Professionals and the many other generous suppliers and sponsors proud as newbies to the competition. I am not sure the jury truly grasped the subtleties and brilliance of a uniquely representative NEW ZEALAND display that showcased our food with classy, stylish stories. But the buzz created around the table and the positivity of the crowd won us many new fans.

Go New Zealand! Bringing home Bronze.

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22 OCTOBER 2016

NEW ZEALAND CULINARY PRIDE



The New Zealand Anchor Food Professionals Culinary Olympics Team marched into the Messe Stadium in Erfurt Germany to the boom of Davanius' magnificent Poi E song, under a waving NZ flag and brandishing their Kiwi mascot. Clad in smart chef jackets edged with a Maori pattern and wearing pounamu pendants proudly they made my heart swell with pride.

I have never seen so many chefs in my life. 59 countries represented and tomorrow they will commence the battle of the stoves. But tonight it was all about celebration.

Austria marched to We Will Rock You. Denmark and Poland brought so many chefs I imagine most restaurants back home will be closed. Italy marched in to Andreas Bocelli's Time to Say Goodbye (hope that's an anthem not an omen.) The Mexicans added sombreros, hairy false moustaches and played La Bamba.

South Korea danced in Gangnam Style as you might expect. The Scottish had a bagpipe recording of course and the sustainably minded Swedish Team want tp literally wanted "To Save The World Tonight" - their chosen theme song.

Such fun and now let the Culinary Olympics commence.

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19 OCTOBER 2016

SOPHISTICATION IN THE SUBURBS



So you think and truly believe you have to go to Ponsonby or at least west of Mt Eden Rd to find great food and wine? You must be a Metro reader! Hey! Exciting new finds in the Eastern suburbs have the locals all excited and hungry.

- PASTURE, 235 Parnell Rd, Parnell, ph 09 300 5077

Ed and Laura Verner's restaurant screams simplicity and sophistication. From Wed to Sun they offer a six course set menu for \$130 that challenges, delights and satisfies. They cook over fire, they are seriously into fermentation, their drinks are hip, and their bread is a thing of wonder. And like the deceptively simple yet sophisticated food, the dining room is modern with an almost Nordic influence. Tip: just go with one other and sit at the bar. Bookings essential.

- TRUE BISTRO at TRUE FOOD & YOGA, 19 Tamaki Drive, Okahu Bay, ph 09 528 8781

Nic Watt of Masu fame and his wife Kelli have opened the most remarkable destination the Eastern Bays has seen for years. On the former site of Hammerheads, the spacious yoga studio takes up most of the building, but the entrance and stunning outdoor deck is given over to a lovely bistro that produces food that ticks every box the healthy and hungry could wish for. Watt's menu is light and delicious, served from Breakfast through to dinner and is a far cry from the bird seedy food that dominate other health-oriented eateries. Fresh smoked fish, lovely vegetables, tasty combinations of meat and more. And yes, vegans, gluten free diets and more are catered for but you'd be surprised how interesting all this food is. Tip: Book a table on the deck and watch the sun set over the westerly harbour

- PINEAPPLE, 207 Parnell Rd

From the owners of Meadow in Meadowbank and 46 & York, this new bar in Parnell brings unprecedented sophistication to the Auckland bar scene. Luxuriously furnished with leather and dark timber, and featuring the sort of bar that's reminiscent of posh New York, it's the new place to relax over a late night drink or a bottle of wine. You may have to wait in line but it's worth it. Tip: don't even bother showing up without a collar on your shirt. Dress code keeps it smart.

- CLOUDY BAY COME SAIL AWAY, PARNELL POP UP, 46 Parnell Rd, 09 377 9675

Cloudy Bay wines have taken over 46 & York until mid November with a stunning pop-up restaurant. The place has been specially redecorated, a

timber deck installed, copious greenery everywhere and those gorgeous Cloudy Bay wines featuring on the list. Better still, the fashionable chef Sam Mannering has designed a tasting menu to match the wines. Crayfish, Mahurangi oysters, pork belly and the very first of the season's Coastal Spring Lamb tiny cutlets. All deliciously moreish. Tip: Go for dinner and order the tasting menu with matched wines. Bookings essential.

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19 OCTOBER 2016

ART DEGO 2016



Every year this event gets better. The concept: collaboration between chef and artist, produces clever food, thought provoking art over a five course meal, with cocktails and canapes. Held in the Auckland Art Gallery this has to be the primo event on Auckland's culinary calendar.

This year, ably organised by Gather & Hunt's Courtney Peters and Rebecca Smidt of Cazador fame, the food was delicious, the accompanying wines well matched and the art, performance and static very interesting. Art curated by Pippa Milne.

To begin, Ainsley Rose Thompson came from Queenstown's Sherwood to work with a jellyologist to create a veritable forest floor of treats, all representing the goodness that grows in the earth matched to a creative cocktail by Laura Lopez. (see pic above)

The dinner set in the airy space above the gallery entrance was spectacular. First, the arrival welcome with Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's quartz singing bowls to create the right karma, matched to Kyle Street's salt, burrata and honey with sunbathed water(!) Then a short film show by Ngahuia Harrison with waves gently washing over rocks in homage to Hayden McMillan's Kono mussels, kingfish and compressed watermelon. The watermelon looked like tuna sashimi, but of course who would dream of serving or eating Bluefin tuna these days?

The connection between Steve Carr's playful watermelon production and João Martin's watermelon course was obvious. A thin round watermelon coloured wafer was lifted to reveal the vivid colour of that fruit's interior – with a difference. Lamb, beets and peas. The lamb heart was raw, the beets cut into tiny dice and the peas in a puree. Everyone ate it all! And the Brick Bay pinot gris was my wine of the night.

Then a fabulous performance. Dancers from Red Leap Theatre leapt about

with symbolic birds held high above the crowd, accompanied by playful guitar and song. And Dariush Lolaiy's main course covered the table with platters of venison skewers, flatbreads, hummus, greens, radish, barberries and spices. Too bad I splashed my lovely Seresin Pinot across everything.

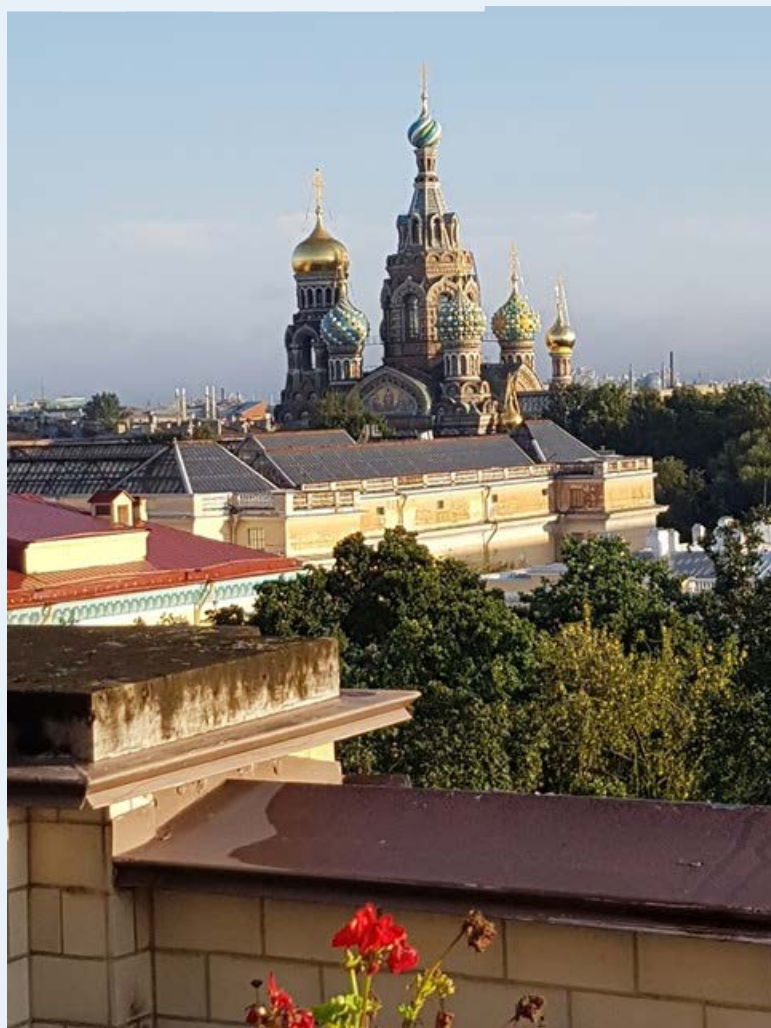
And to finish the gorgeous Sonia Haumonte of Vaniye in Parnell give us two lovely sweets – a citrus bergamot lollipop on licorice root and a rich caramel and chocolate cake.

50 volunteers, 6 top chefs, 120 diners and three clever women. Do not miss the 2017 event.

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27 SEPTEMBER 2016

TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE



It's a long way to St Petersburg, but as we were in Stockholm, we would probably never be closer again. So we flew in and were immediately daunted by the heavy rain, the grim attitude of everybody (no smiles) and the endless traffic jams. This is a city to visit if you love Russian history and museums.

Personally I am the sort who travels to sit in sidewalk cafes, eating and drinking something delicious and observing the culture of the place as evidenced by passers-by and fellow café dwellers. There's not much of that.

There were some bright spots. Our hotel was fantastic. The Belmond Grand Europe had smiling helpful staff, and our luxurious room with a balcony gave us a breath taking view over the city that included the spires of the Church on the Spilled Blood. The heavy bodyguards sitting in the corridor outside the next door room were a little disconcerting however. We ate well at dinner and

the hotel breakfasts were the best ever, complete with a pianist tinkling away on the proverbial ivories. We also indulged in a dinner in the caviar bar that started with three sorts of caviar on blinis with matching vodkas and continued in that vein. Yesss.

The Fabergé Museum is new and exclusive. Only fifteen people are let in each hour and the displays are unbelievably beautifully presented and lit. Taking a guided tour is important as everything needs so much explanation. The Hermitage defies description. Suffice to say if you spent about six months in that huge building you still could not do all the treasures within justice. But it's a bit dingey and dark. The churches are more interesting, especially if there's a service in progress. Several were mind-bogglingly complex.

We also ate the bargain of 2016. Stunning pies (meat, rabbit, fruit and everything else) plus tea for less than \$4 at Stolle on Nevsky Prospekt. The sidewalk of this famous street was jammed with grim people, dodging the puddles with about half of them actively smoking as they walked. And we loved a meal in a Georgian restaurant, rather like a pub where puffy Khachapuri bread, dripping with cheese was pulled from the woodfired oven. That recipe will be in next week's Listener and eventually on this website.

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8 SEPTEMBER 2016

FAVIKEN



We went to a wedding in Stockholm, Sweden. (That is another great story.) You cannot get that close to one of the world's most talked about restaurants without going there.

So having flown for about 30 hours to reach Stockholm it was off early the next morning on the train for the 750 km journey to the far north where Faviken, the restaurant of Magnus Nilsson. Now that is a pilgrimage.

We had reservations for dinner, booked months in advance, and had also secured one of the five guest rooms so we could stay the night. We caught a taxi from Are station to the middle of nowhere, and settled into our room with a welcoming tea, and curiously, some air-dried sausage.

Dinner at Faviken is very special. Guests assemble in the ground floor of a very ancient barn and are plied with Champagne and a stunning parade of beautifully crafted hor d'oeuvres. Such unusual treats as pig's head dipped in sourdough and deep fried with gooseberry and tarragon salt. Or broth of smoked and dried reindeer, decomposing leaves, very fresh curds and crowberries. And flowers served in a crust of dried pig blood. And more...

It's then on to the allotted table for dinner and the parade of courses begins. The scallop to begin was perfect. Cooked in its own juices over burning juniper branches, and served in the shell. The king crab that followed could not have been more perfect either – a juicy stick of fleshy crab leg with almost burnt cream. Then, for me, the highlight of the night. A lamb tongue with a delicate array of brined vegetables, rhubarb and seasonal plants. So good.

After that there were many more courses – mackerel with spruce needles, a sourdough pancake with seaweed and beef butter, lupin curd gratin (lupins are the new thing), a small egg in ash, steamed leeks with marvellous Finnish caviar, roasted veal with fermented, roasted and ground lupin, a tasty broth with leaves and oats and then colostrum with meadowsweet, silage ice cream (!), and potato dream. It was a dream.

Three desserts served at the table – raspberry ice, bone marrow pudding with frozen milk, and a rich brown cheese pie which was a play on an ancient dish. Much of Magnus Nilsson's food is inspired by traditional Nordic food, although never ever did any of those ancestral cooks pay so much attention to detail in quest of perfection like this.

It was then downstairs to even more amazing sweets and tastes, including the most textbook platter of wild seasonal berries, and astonishingly, some dried reindeer pies. Tea with this, made with wild herbs and flowers gathered from the adjacent meadows.

Perhaps the best bit was next morning breakfast before we left. Far more conventional and served at the very same table we had sat at for dinner. Lovely cheese, dried ham and meat, Faviken's knockout bread, and the best porridge ever.

Perfect food. But in the quest for perfection, somehow the true meaning of hospitality was missing. The courses were served at an alarming pace and the American sommelier maitre d' constantly clapped his hands for attention to describe each and every course. It was almost intrusive and there was no room for relaxation, conversation and no chance of sitting back and savouring the moment.

But I'd go back if I could get another reservation. In winter, when there will only be about one hour of daylight. That would be really special.

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2 AUGUST 2016

FOOD DESIGN 2016



This had to be one of the most stimulating and challenging three days of ideas ever held in the food world. Students and teachers involved in Otago Polytechnic's 2016 International Food Design Conference set out to create a unique conference filled with new directions, innovative concepts and cutting edge presentations.

Certainly the 150 participants left with a whole new take on the importance of seeing food as far more than mere fuel for the body. Food was presented as the platform for business, art, new design and many of us had our thinking challenged by a raft of exciting perceptions and views.

The keynote speakers led the way each day: Marije Vozelgang of the Netherlands runs a food design studio in Amsterdam and set the scene with a dazzling visual video display of edgy and provocative installations and feasts she'd created. Her words of wisdom: "If you break bread with each other, you can't break each other's necks." (Emmanuel Khan) Direct from Nigeria, although raised and educated in the USA, Chef Michael Elégèbedé shared his vision for the new project he is creating in his return to his birth country. He is planning a modern restaurant where traditional Nigerian foods and ingredients, sourced from small farmers will be shaped into a new form of high-end cuisine. His words of wisdom; "In Nigeria they cook stew just to eat. It should mean more than that." On the third day, one of celebrating New Zealand food culture, the affable Al Brown discussed our cuisine and what it actually is. He reacquainted us with the joy of baking and preserving that is the backbone of cooking in home kitchens and reminded all to embrace the imperfections of food, to understand flavour and texture, and to enjoy the casual carefree environment that is New Zealand. His words of wisdom we should all take pride in: "The flavour of our food in New Zealand has the volume turned up."

Along the way the presentations, workshops, shared meals and pop up dinners around the city were inspiring and breathtakingly delicious. Food waste and repurposing food was high on the agenda. Many of the presentations were held at Manaaki, the lecture theatre and cookery skills building. Truffles, ice cream, modern Māori food, southern seafood, coffee, raw food design, cocktails, bitter foods and even eccentric subjects such as matchstick design were discussed and debated. Some extraordinary pop-up dinners gave attendees the chance to relax and share food ideas.

The conference food was mind-blowingly great. Students had worked hard on concepts and the delivery of morning teas, lunches, afternoon teas and a spectacular Gala Dinner. The first day was all about repurposing food waste and some very real innovative recipes were delivered in the meals. The best: a fantastic spicy vegetable tajine. The second day had been themed and

prepared by the Asian students, and morning tea's delicate pastries and flavours were followed by delicious stuffed pork buns and exquisite fresh spring rolls for lunch.

But it was on the third day that I realised just how much of the real New Zealand food scene I had missed in my thirty years of a food writing career. Manaaki is at the heart of our unique way of eating and entertaining. I had never heard this term before, or if I had, no-one had explained it. Simply Manaaki means to show respect for, and this is inherently part of all Māori feasting. I was entranced by the Hangi workshop where we discussed Manaaki and then pulled wonderful titi (muttonbird) wrapped in thick fresh sea kelp from the steaming pit. And by the workshop presented by Hiakai, a modern Māori food project, and the final day's brown bag lunch of pork and kumara sandwiches and little sweet doughnuts, inspired by a student's memories of his marae lunches. A little card in the bag told the story, "As I play with my cousins I can hear my aunties laughing in the Wharekai as the smell of boil up fills the air. Taea Kai – Let's Eat." As I winged my way home north I felt determined about embracing the Manaaki in my life and spreading and sharing all those delicious words I had heard and learned.

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2 AUGUST 2016

EXCEPTIONAL DINING



From time to time I go to extraordinary efforts to get to special dinners. And they never disappoint.

Back in May, when Giulio Sturla of Roots Restaurant in Lyttleton announced he was doing a collaboration with an ex-Noma Chef Jacobs Kear, I jumped at that. That involved flying to Christchurch, checking in to the gorgeous Heritage Hotel opposite the crumbled Cathedral (just restore it, quickly!) and then taking the bus from the city's fantastic Bus Exchange. The dinner was extraordinary – a progression of carefully crafted dishes made lovingly from New Zealand's finest fare, and matched to some extraordinary wines. Highlights (the courses were all highlights in their own way) were the kingfish cured in kelp, tiny fermented duck tacos, some ethereal blackfoot paua and egg tofu (pic above) and some extraordinary koji ice cream made

with rice. There was a lovely synergy between Giulio's affinity with foraged, native fare and Jacob's superb Japanese inspiration. Dinners like this come by only occasionally and this was a You Had To Be There occasion.

The other standout dinners have both been prepared and executed by Hiakai (Māori word for hungry). Hiakai is the brainchild of Monique Fiso, a young woman who, having worked with Martin Bosley, set out for New York where she worked alongside Michelin starred Matt Lambert at The Musket Room. Monique brings finesse, style and imagination to her interpretation of modern Māori cuisine.

Her first dinner, (both were cooked with Kane Bambery,) was held in Dunedin at Bracken, themed around Southern seafood. Every bite was delicious, and my favourite was a paua porridge with celery cream and puffed barley. The second, held at Merediths, was a celebration of winter gardens. Hiakai's menu included a superb modern Boil Up and a terrific play on Hangi food with chicken and cabbage. But the piece de resistance was native spinach fashioned into ice cream and served with poached rhubarb and rhubarb foam. I am sure they would be all terrified down on the marae, but it was an exceptional dinner orchestrated by an exceptional young chef. Even better it is great to see well established restaurants sharing their premises for occasions like these.

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