

# between *pots and pans*

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Chef Maximilian Müller loves horseradish and Japanese knives, dreams of owning a Porsche and admires Austrian chef Eckardt Witzigmann. At home, he often treats himself to a shot or two of Maggi seasoning sauce.

When asked about his childhood hero, Maximilian Müller barely hesitates: 'I've always admired Eckardt Witzigmann,' says the 30-year-old. 'For his ability to create as straightforward as multi-faceted dishes, and for the influence he has had on generations of chefs.' Besides Witzigmann, however, two other characters have influenced Müller. His father, whose cooking he meticulously observed as a young boy, and long-time Pavillon chef Laurent Eperon, who gave him the job of sous-chef seven years ago. 'I was just 23 at the time, and after an exceedingly stressful job on the island of Sylt, I had taken a break from the fine-dining circus not long before Laurent presented me with this great opportunity,' Müller recalls. 'He was a strict boss – but also one who always set a good example. Above all, he is a great person, smart, skilled and empathetic.'

And what will happen at Pavillon after Eperon's departure from the Baur au Lac in November after more than a quarter of a century? 'There will be no break. We have created the upcoming menu together,' says Müller, who steps up as head chef of the renowned restaurant lauded with two Michelin stars and 18 Gault Millau points. Furthermore, the long-time companions speak a clear and somewhat similar culinary language. 'Last but not least, Laurent and I share a soft spot for butter. So Beurre Blanc will remain one of the pillars of the kitchen at Pavillon,' Müller adds.





#### PIMENT D'ESPELETTE AGAIN AND AGAIN

The same goes for the use of spices. 'They are a culinary playground for me. I must have a few hundred of them at home. Piment d'Espelette, a fruity-sweet, slightly smoky and relatively mild chilli variety from the French Basque country, makes practically every dish a little better. I also experiment passionately with special curry mixtures. For example, Durban curry-based chilli, coriander, curry leaves, cumin, cardamom, Ceylon cinnamon, fenugreek, ginger and cloves. I don't mind a little flight of fancy when it comes to spices.' And then there's one flavour Müller can't resist. 'I have a bottle of Maggi seasoning sauce at home. Guilty pleasure or not, Maggi tastes good to me.'

## THE POWER OF BEING GROUNDED

When Müller won the renowned marmite youngster competition five years ago with his creation Arctic char – footed crayfish – greaves, he described his culinary philosophy as follows: 'Classic, peasant-like but refined, not overloaded, reduced and simple.' That has changed in the meantime, he says and laughs. 'In a restaurant like Pavillon, whose guests regularly savour the most exclusive dishes at the best addresses worldwide, you can hardly serve peasant-like cuisine.' However, Müller will undoubtedly incorporate some of the products that lend the more grounded dishes their magic into his menus as part of Pavillon's gentle reorientation. 'I love horseradish very much, for example. And I am convinced that an unexpected, down-to-earth element makes guests with an extensive international background particularly happy,' he says. 'A product can be a bit simpler as long as the implementation meets the demands of haute cuisine.'



Sounds a lot like Hans Haas, who was part of Eckardt Witzigmann's brigade at Munich's Tantris back in the 1970s, and later shaped the iconic restaurant's cuisine for almost three decades. 'I like this looseness and focus on taste that Haas has always stood for. My internship with him is one of the most impressive experiences I've had as a chef to date,' explains Müller, for whom Tantris was 'one of the best restaurants in the world' during Haas' time. 'When I arrived in Munich, apricots were in season – and the entire kitchen was covered with the sweet fruit. We were ordered to cover all surfaces with plastic foil before preparing the famous apricot jam Haas distributed to special guests.'

#### **HIS GREAT-GRANDMOTHER WAS FERDINAND PORSCHE'S SECRETARY**

The longer you talk to Maximilian Müller, the more you notice: the master chef prefers to talk about others rather than himself. He formulated his professional goal, three Michelin stars, years ago. So why make big speeches when you can let actions speak louder than words? At the keyword 'Porsche', however, Müller spontaneously rants and raves. 'My own 911, that's a big dream,' he says. 'I'm not only a Swabian but also the great-grandson of the personal secretary of the company's founder, Ferdinand Porsche.'

One could say that the love for fast cars from Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen runs through my veins.' Müller received a very special gift from former top chef Wolfgang Kuchler – he made the Taverne zum Schäfli in Wigoltingen a fixed star in Swiss gourmet heaven – for his 30th birthday: a Porsche trip to the Engadine, including an accompanying culinary programme. 'Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to redeem the gift yet, but I'm really looking forward to the trip with Wolfgang, who also comes from Swabia and is one of the chefs I've always looked up to,' explains the sixth-generation innkeeper's son. Until things work out with the Porsche ('My favourite would be a 911 GT3 RS'), Müller will continue to indulge in his third passion. 'I probably own over a hundred kitchen knives by now. Many more than can actually fit in the biggest drawer in my kitchen,' he says with a laugh. 'I'm particularly fond of the forging art of Japanese cuisine, which is craftsmanship at the very highest level, quite comparable to what ambitious chefs aspire to. I brought fifteen knives back from my trip to Tokyo, a veritable buying frenzy.' ♦