

The proof is in the Strudel

Helga Mussner is the chef of the Chalet Gerard before the Passo Gardena. Over the course of the decades, together with her family, she's transformed the humble mountain hut into an exclusive, small mountain hotel with a restaurant. She was practically brought up in a Val Gardena bakery and patisserie, where she learnt the most important and sweetest arts of temptation.

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'Learn how to cook: then we'll talk marriage!' instructed Helga Mussner's parents to their daughters. The host and chef of the Chalet Gerard learnt how to bake perfect, delectable cakes and strudel in the home bakery and patisserie, to the point that today she still bakes the legendary apple strudel herself. Starters, main dishes, and all other delicacies you find on the menu have been developed over the course of her adult-

hood, always experimenting with new recipes and preparations. Nut spatzle, Arctic char from Passiria with mashed potato, porcini and parsley pesto. Golden delicious apple cream with baked potato straw. These are the creative and refined dishes whipped up by Helga Mussner. 'I cook Tyrolean food with a Mediterranean twist', is how she succinctly describes her unmistakable style.

"Cooking is a passion"

Her signature dishes and style were only developed after her wedding and over the course of decades. 'I simply went to the stove in the small mountain hut of my husband and started with a few traditional dishes. Soon enough, I simply couldn't continue doing Knödel, the demands in the kitchen grew, and even the old tradition of using a lot of butter and cream was replaced by a new lightness. I actually went to a lot of courses, and experimented a lot, too,' she recalls.

She remained in her domain, the kitchen, even after the conversion from hut to a modern hotel-cum-chalet. 'Cooking is a passion. You either have it, or you don't. If you do, you want to express it!', she tells us, her eyes twinkling with delight. The second secret to her success is typical of Val Gardena, 'It's very important to stick to what your guests want.'

And that's why the experimental chef does contain herself. 'I can't simply change the menu every time it takes my whim. Our restaurant guests would be disappointed. Most of them come here for our classics such as our barley risotto, polenta dumplings or venison stew.'

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