



# PRIORITIZING THE PRODUCT

Rooted in French haute cuisine and enriched with Mediterranean and Asian influences, *Peter Knogl's* culinary creations showcase a masterly symbiosis of nature's best products.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRAND HOTEL LES TROIS ROIS

## PETER KNOGL

**B**orn in Bavaria but now residing in Switzerland, Peter Knogl's culinary journey – like that of many other chefs – began in his childhood. Following in the footsteps of his grandmother, who owned a restaurant in Bavaria, Peter became aware of and familiar with gastronomy at a young age.

“It was clear early on that I wanted to be a chef and do it as my profession. Something else was out of the question. From an early age, my passion was preparing food as well as a responsible attitude in dealing with different ingredients.”

Peter's passion for the culinary arts led him to the kitchens of some very notable chefs. German master chef Heinz Winkler, whom Peter worked with both at Tantris in Munich and Residenz Heinz Winkler in Chiemgau, played a very important role in his professional career. Other formative experiences included time spent at famed restaurant Tristan in Mallorca, Le Chantecler in Nice and restaurant Le Saveur working under Joel Antunes in London.

Much like the restaurants he once trained at, Peter Knogl's restaurant Cheval Blanc in the Grand Hotel Les Trois

Rois in Basel has, too, become a culinary hotspot. No longer a stranger to the spotlight, the chef has garnered a host of awards over the years. Under his guidance, restaurant Cheval Blanc has taken its place among the 100 best restaurants in the world and has been lauded with 3 Michelin Stars; 19 GaultMillau points and the Best Hotel Restaurant in Europe 2015 award by Prix Villégiature. Knogl has also been named Chef of the Year by GaultMillau twice, in 2011 and 2015.

As for the recipe to his success, his philosophy is simple: use the finest ingredients and focus on the taste of the product itself. “My aim is to put the real, straightforward taste of the product in the center of my creations. This is how I enthruse my guests again and again. I always say the greatest art in cooking is to ideally combine the ingredients and aromas while preserving the taste of the central product. Moreover, the presentation and design of the dish is detailed, precise and reduced to the essentials. The dish has to delight me too. It must fit into my philosophy and should not be too complicated to understand.”

“The idea was always to cook in a classic way. Over the years I have been inspired and my style has changed a little



LEFT Restaurant Cheval Blanc's terrace overlooking the Rhine River.



## PETER KNOGL



### PREVIOUS SPREAD

Razor clams with white balsamic vinaigrette.

RIGHT Oyster, mandarin, yuzu and ponzu.

bit. The classical French haute cuisine style has remained the basis, and nowadays my creations are enriched with Mediterranean and Asian influences.”

Much like his cuisine, the restaurant itself is a timeless masterpiece. Glittering chandeliers hang from a tall ceiling, framed by arched windows and walls. In the dining room, wood coalesces with shades of ivory, and pops of deep purple velvet from the chairs bring an eternal elegance.

“We are privileged to work in one of the most beautiful, classic restaurants in Switzerland. It is the interior that reflects my philosophy of preparing dishes that inspire our guests. The interior transports you back to a bygone age. The massive table in the centre dates back to the 18th century and belonged to the Rothschild family. It is part of the impressive collection of historical furniture you will find placed all over Grand Hotel Les Trois Rois. The 18th-century murals in the arched alcoves were obtained from a château near Paris. And of course, the impressive flower creations come from our flower boutique Fleurs des Rois.

“The tableware also corresponds to the style of the classic interior. The crockery represents the dish and should not

be allowed to distract attention from it. On the table, you will find exclusive handcrafted porcelain from Coquet in Limoges and Saint-Louis Crystal for the glasses.

“My favourite item of cutlery is the spoon. I focus on the size of the portions so that every bite is an experience – even better if you can eat it with the spoon! Everything together – that’s the emotion I want you to have.

“Every dish must trigger an emotion in your mind because that is the way it remains in memory. I always say if you remember a dish six months after eating it, it was a great dish. Therefore, guests should leave with a perfect taste experience as well as a great overall impression, which includes our service and the atmosphere.”

The basis of each of Peter’s dishes stems from tradition. This is the key to creating a successful end product, along with using only the best quality ingredients. “I use only the finest ingredients and focus on the taste of the product itself – by adding the technique we enhance the product to its maximum. I also use products that I enjoy myself. I highly value delicacies from the sea, and delicacies from classic French cuisine are also served.”

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This philosophy of using top quality products paired with simplicity is in part inspired by an impactful trip Peter took to Tokyo in 2010. Here, he learned about how stimulating the culture and quality of products can be – which was particularly evident during a visit to a local Japanese fish market – and he channels these principles in his cooking every day.

Of course, ingredients are always best when in season, and this is why Peter adapts his menu throughout the year. The latest spring menu celebrates the best of the fresh bounty in the form of myriad seafood dishes, such as the new amuse-bouche that combines sardines with cumin and melon. Mussels from Mont Saint Michel served with a citron-vert sauce; beetroot tapioca with crispy char caviar and wasabi as well as a carabinero served with a green jalapeño espuma also feature as part of the special spring offerings.

“Fish and crabs are the stars of the menu. There is a dish of kingfish with avocado, ponzu gel, miso and radish, which is very refreshing, soft and crunchy at the same time. There is also a dish of langoustines with asparagus

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LEFT Cheval Blanc dining room.

RIGHT Bresse pigeon with Tasmanian pepper.



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RIGHT Green apple, tangy yogurt and verbena.

and morels. Moreover, we serve a Breton turbot with bergamot sauce.

“For the main course, we serve Wagyu beef from Kagoshima. It comes with okra, mini peppers and aubergines. I developed this dish during lockdown, and I use the Green Egg to enhance the roasted flavours.

“You will also always find some of my favourite signature dishes on the menu, such as fillet of red mullet with crispy scales, black garlic and a tomato vinaigrette. Sweetbreads with a yuzu, pepper and mushroom cream as well as a dish with artichoke, roasted duck liver and Périgord truffle jus are also my signatures. Moreover, sauces are a defining, fundamental ingredient in my dishes.”

Although Peter’s culinary prowess – which includes his penchant for perfect sauces – has been an integral factor in the restaurant’s acclaim, the overall triumph of Cheval Blanc continues to be a group effort. The chef’s dedication to being the best paired with a good team and supportive, trusting owner, are the keys to the restaurant’s success. And after facing various lockdowns over the last 12 months, the team is grateful to be back in the kitchen

cooking, especially Knogl, who continued to hone his craft during the restaurant’s closure.

“During the second shutdown last winter and spring, I read a lot and of course thought about what we need to change and improve. Twice a week I went to the kitchen of my restaurant at Grand Hotel Les Trois Rois, otherwise, I got bored. I checked the fridges and sometimes I also prepared a dish.”

Looking to the future, Peter believes that there will always be a place for classic cuisine. “I am sure the cuisine with classic products will always survive, where on the other hand latest kitchen trends will always change. It is similar in music as well; classic music will always be important and will remain.

“As in many other sectors, planning for the future is very difficult. At the moment no special collaborations are lined up, but I would like to develop my cuisine and of course make our guests happy. We are constantly reflecting on our work to identify where we can improve. My goal is to create more variety and integrate a few new dishes. Since we are successful with what we do, we do not want to reinvent ourselves or change too much.” ■