

# VIENNESE *twirl*



Wake up and smell the coffee in the Austrian capital, where Michael Raffael takes his with a side-serving of Michelin stars as he meets the chefs who are moving the city forward

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM SHAW



This page, clockwise from top left: old and new sit side by side; vivid mural at 25hours hotel; a building is adorned with a floral pattern. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: jars of pickles; sausages sizzle at Naschmarkt; trams are the most common mode of public transport; Tian head chef Paul Ivic and patissier Thomas Scheibelhofer; knives prepped at one of the city's cookery schools; enjoying coffee at Vollpension; the famous Ferris wheel; 25hours' industrial bar; champagne at Naschmarkt; Alt Wien owner Oliver Goetz; bikes in the window at Radlager café; Sunny Side Up from Tian

## Where to stay

**25hours** It falls under the loose umbrella of 'design hotel'. The outpost of a Berlin chain, rooms have vivid dream-provoking interiors themed around a cabaret-style circus. The bar is adorned with drums and the music is anything but the usual hotel pap. Doubles from £95.

*Lerchenfelder Strasse 1-3, 00 43 1 521 510, 25hours-hotels.com*

**Grand Ferdinand** A new, quirky four-star hotel with a stuffed black horse in reception. The classic ground-floor brasserie and rooftop café serves up typically generous Viennese fare. You can hire one of a dozen Orient Express-style couchettes with a shared shower for £23 a night. Doubles from £157. *Schubertring 10-12, 00 43 1 91 880 400, grandferdinand.com*

**Hotel Imperial** The clue is in the name. It is a grand hotel. The reception is understated but everything else, from the architecture to the rooms (expect chandeliers in the bathrooms), is on a grand scale. Manfred, the sommelier in Michelin-starred Opus restaurant, knows all the secrets of Viennese wine. Doubles from £260.

*Kärntner Ring 16, 00 43 1 501 100, imperialvienna.com*

**Sofitel Vienna Stephansdom** A new high-rise in a low-slung cityscape, its location by the canal makes it a sensible stopover. Its USP is the panoramic rooftop bar and restaurant. The views alone are unique, the service very good and the prices affordable. Doubles from £173. *Praterstrasse 1, 00 43 1 906 160, sofitel.com*

**Wiener Essig** Vinegar guru Erwin Gegenbauer has a B&B above his artisan brewery in the 10th District. Rooms have an industrial chic design. The swimming pool and lounge ooze class and he shares breakfasts – arguably the best in Vienna – with guests at a communal table in what doubles as a showroom. Doubles from £110.

*Waldgasse 3, 00 43 1 60 410 880, rooms@gegenbauer.at*

space looks like an Armani-inspired classroom. At one end, part pass and part theatre, two chefs add the finishing touches to dishes emerging from a kitchen that can be glimpsed through a window. The cooking doesn't have to rely on the ambience for effect: a saffron-tinted brandade of char, asparagus and *zander* (pike perch) with consommé or quail breast stuffed with mushroom duxelles served with a confit of the leg speak for themselves.

At the Imperial's Opus restaurant, the sommelier refills my glass. There's no such thing as a typical *gemischter satz*, he explains. It's white. It's dry. It's on Michelin-starred wine lists and in family owned *heurigers*, the taverns that dot the suburbs of the city's greenbelt in Grinzing, Stammersdorf, Mauer, Nussdorf and Neustift am Wald. A bottle may cost about £5 at the winery or as much as £35. In less than two decades it's grown from a historical relic to preeminence.

Vienna is the only capital in the world that produces significant quantities of wine within its boundaries. Its vineyards act as buffers against urban sprawl. In Nussberg, winemaker Fritz Wieninger describes how *gemischter satz* changed from a mish-mash of grape varieties grown on single vineyards into a closely controlled quality wine. 'Each vineyard has to be planted with a minimum of three varieties and they are all harvested together,' he says.

It's trickier than other winemaking, he explains. 'The wine is a symbiosis of grapes at different stages of maturity because some varieties are a little under-ripe and some are a little over but they are all harvested at the same time,' he says.

Thinking back, he admits it took a lot of persuading for him to accept it. 'Gemischter satz was a dirty word and many of my older colleagues had to convince me about it,' he says. 'Today it's the number one wine in Vienna and everybody loves it.'

Since 1999, when he started experimenting with it, his estate has grown from 8ha to 45ha. Each of his four *gemischter satz* wines has its own terroir and specificity. 'A friend told me that a varietal wine is like an instrument but my blends are like an orchestra,' he says. If that's the case, his entry-level wine, which includes 11 grape varieties, really does fit the bill, whereas his top-of-the-range *rosengartl* is more of a string quartet.

Fritz has a *heuriger* in the middle of his vines. Here, with a view of the capital, a glass of wine produced from vines that grow all the way up to the tables costs £2.60. Washed down with a platter of cold cuts, sweet mustard, horseradish and rye bread, it's a delicious reminder that while a new age may be dawning for Vienna, the best of its traditions will always be around. □

*Michael Raffael and William Shaw travelled to Vienna courtesy of the Vienna Tourist Board. vienna.info*

