

FOOD & DRINK RESTAURANT

RIDING SCHNITZEL
Saturdays, 14:00 • Meissl & Schadn • 1., Schuberttring 10-12 • (01) 902 12 • meisslundschnadn.at

PHOTOS FROM LEFT: LUIS SPINA, MEISSL & SCHADN, MICHAEL KOENIGSBERGER/POSTERZ HOTELS

restaurant

Let Them Eat Schnitzel

Channeling Imperial indulgence, Meissl & Schadn's riding dinners are all about good taste – in both senses

by Simon Ballam & Dardis McNamee

Close your eyes: Imagine, you're in a horse-drawn *Fiaker*, dressed to the nines, leaning back on the leather seats with a glass of bubbly in your hand, gazing into a pair of bright eyes as all Vienna lies at your feet... As you round a corner, the coachman pulls up as a liveried waiter approaches to lay your table...

Even in our troubled times, some fantasies can still become real: Just ask the people at Meissl & Schadn in the Grand Ferdinand Hotel, who are now offering just such a ride out of time, where you dine in style on *Sekt* and *Wiener Schnitzel* and become an honorary member of the carriage trade. Touristy perhaps, but it's actually a lot of fun. Royals in older and better days would receive

suplicants and dispense favors or justice while they dined. As bourgeois royalty, you reap the just-a-little envious stares from passers-by as you roll graciously past.

The ride begins at 14:00 every Saturday right outside the Grand Ferdinand on Schuberttring, just a hop from Schwarzenbergplatz. *Chefkoch* Jürgen Gschwendtner prepares the *Wiener Schnitzel* himself right behind the plate glass window as guests assemble. Placing a slab of lean, topside of veal on the cutting board, he butterflies it into thin halves, then flattens and pummels it vigorously for tenderness before rolling it in his own egg-and-bread-crumbs coating. A glass of *Sekt* (Austria's bubbly, in this case Hochriegel) takes the

edge off the wait until your *Fiaker* rolls up to the door. Once seated, a table is snapped into place, four holes grouped mysteriously round the center. Their purpose is soon made plain – your next glass of *Sekt* arrives in a tall glass with no base, but an elegant stem sheathed in chrome that slots in to prevent a spill. A wave from your waiter and a grunt from the *Kutscher* and you're off with a lurch and the leisurely clip-clop of horses' hooves.

A MOVABLE FEAST

For the next 10 minutes the *Fiaker* rolls gently round a small circuit, along the Ring to Hotel Sacher and the Staatsoper, snaking discreetly through the side streets and back to the



Ferdinand where the freshly cooked *Schnitzel* are waiting.

Fiaker carriage doors were designed for elegantly gloved hands but leave little room for elbows attempting to dissect an enormous *Schnitzel*. But by the time you are passing the Kunsthistorisches Museum, you'll have mastered the cool finesse of the

experienced *bon vivant* – think Crown Prince Rudolf, just collected from the Café Griensteidl by his faithful *Kutscher* Bratfisch, and on his way to an assignation up the back stairs of the Grand Hotel. The uninvited audience watching from the sidewalk helps focus the mind wonderfully, for a spill-free performance worthy of a prince.

As the carriage turns onto Herrengasse, the *Schnitzel* is gone – and it was delicious. The remaining meander back to the hotel is pure relaxation, savoring the last drops of *Sekt* and, by now, totally oblivious of the groundlings. At €145 a head it's not a modest meal, but altogether a thoroughly memorable Vienna experience. *Guten Appetit!* 