

# When nature complicates life...

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**NORBERT NIEDERKOFER, HAVING TRAVELLED AROUND THE WORLD BEFORE RETURNING TO THE DOLOMITES, STRIVES TO BRING SIMPLICITY BACK ONTO THE PLATE, BALANCING WHAT NATURE HAS TO OFFER WITH METICULOUS TECHNIQUE AT RESTAURANT ST. HUBERTUS IN ALTA BADIA.**

It is not unusual to find thirty pizzas sitting on the counter in the kitchen of Norbert Niederkofler's St. Hubertus. This is the staff lunch, and the menu changes daily. What does not change however is the way they eat. Norbert has always stressed the power of a meal in bringing people together. He first became aware of it as a boy around the family table (his parents managed a boarding house and he had four sisters), and he confirms it now as the head of the numerous, young, multi-ethnic family working at St. Hubertus. "We eat together at the same table. It's a good chance for chatting," he says. It's also good for the mood at work. The kitchen can be very busy and the hours are long, so "you need good times outside of the restaurant to handle it when you're inside".

You can see from his face that Norbert is a man who cares about balance. This is a man who has travelled, sought out, questioned; one who has struggled, and learned and finally found equilibrium. His philosophy comes down to one word: respect. Respect for others and their opinions, for clients, for produce, and respect above all, for Nature. It shows in his sporting activities - cycling in the summer and skiing in the winter - and even more so when he cooks.

But that was not part of the plan at the beginning. When he had just turned 18 he left the Dolomites to travel the world, working for six months in various kitchens in the United States to

pay for his travels for the following six months. His great adventure with the American Indians, from Mexico to Guatemala and the Honduras was still in the future, an adventure that would lead him in the end to find himself. His relationship with Nature developed on the road: travelling, learning, meeting and cooking.

Through his cooking Norbert explains what he means by showing respect for Nature. "In the last fifteen years all of us cooks have gone well beyond the limit of the simple need to eat. In the

past you had to be creative to transform the little that was available into something tasty. We wanted, rightly so, to experiment, to invent something new in order to tempt guests. But at times this ended up as pure exaggeration, and we exhausted the desire for research".

Norbert refutes this exaggeration over food, especially when speaking of the younger generation of chefs who are coming up the ranks: "If the pace is so frenetic and everyone is constantly looking to be amazed at restaurants,

what can the younger generations invent? Wouldn't it be better to slow down? After all, the most tantalising and delicious things are also the most simple." This is the illuminating thought that guides him as he concentrates his energy on food from the mountains. He was born in Lutago in the Aurina Valley of the Dolomites, a place of magisterial peaks and impervious valleys. This is the place he left at 18 and the place he returned to, perhaps even more in love with it than before.





And yet the food that seems so close to his personal experience is not as simple as it looks and it certainly is not a short cut. If anything it's the contrary. "Being faithful to the place you live in, paradoxically, is more difficult". Difficult because the cook must force himself to make something out of what is available, going back in a certain sense in time (even if it is with greater scientific and technical knowledge). "When I chose to simplify and go back to Nature, I complicated my life," says Norbert with a smile. His basic idea is to take away, to deduct from Nature, and with this purpose he studies constantly, travelling, reading, trying to discover what he does and does not need anymore.

It's a way of expressing Respect - learned from Shaman friends with whom he lived for a long time - that

often comes up when you talk to him, and the same goes for Balance. The two concepts find expression in Niederkofler's persona and in his cuisine. "When you have this clear in your mind, and even if you have an extremely high level of technique and technology, you know that the ingredient is at the centre of everything," he confirms.

St. Hubertus, the restaurant in Hotel Rosa Alpina, is where Norbert has embedded his culinary mark over the last 17 years, his contribution recognised in the most respected guidebooks. The "Cook the Mountains" menu, a 'revolutionary' gastronomy project designed by Norbert and Hugo Pizzinini (the soul of the Rosa Alpina) in collaboration with the Bolzano provincial administration, is where Norbert's ingredients take centre-stage.





It's an illustration of the workings of an innovative food network between the chefs, the farmers and the wine-makers of the Alto-Adige region, extending beyond the boundaries of the restaurant.

Norbert's philosophy has simplification on one side and appreciation of the regional traditions on the other, which has slowly led him to discard the more showy ingredients of the larder, filling it instead with local produce that until just a few years ago had been ignored or dismissed. It was not an easy choice, as some seafood and ingredients like foie gras that went into some of the restaurant's staple dishes - Tagliolini risottati with shellfish or the classic composition of goose foie gras to name just two - have disappeared from the menu.

Niederkofler's courage has in the end paid off, as his food is now frank, clear, and at the same time persuasive, seductive and voluptuous. He cooks with what his suppliers and neighbours bring, with exquisite results that can bring the diner to tears. The trout tartar with lemon purè and larch wood smoke is a stunning illustration of his kitchen philosophy. Ravioli with nettles, snails and buttermilk (made with a churn directly at St. Hubertus using cream that arrives every morning from Vipiteno) is a small masterpiece that evokes a double pleasure for both the

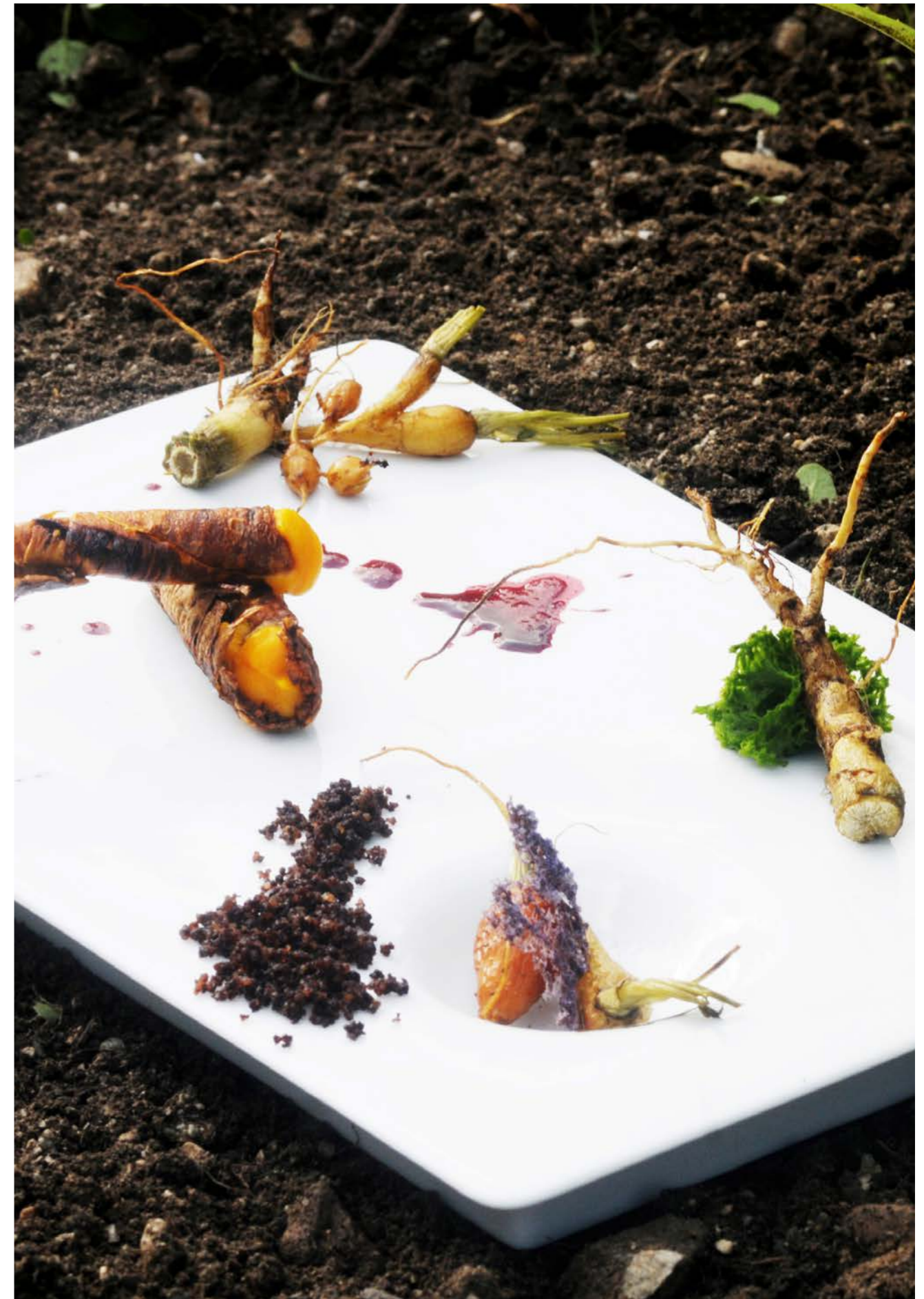
palate and the brain, combining the snails and the grass that feeds them on the one and same plate.

The hay tempura with Graukäse ice-cream is an ethereal evolution of a dumpling, served as tradition dictates with the typical 'grey' cheese. Nothing could be more local than the Alpine Trout with its own caviar, horseradish, wild mint and peas, a recipe of absolute elegance and intelligence that marries the extremely delicate flesh of the trout with the horseradish and mint that is gathered from the banks of the river where the fish is caught. Foie gras fanatics will not be disappointed with a genial composition of apricots and duck liver (not fatty), Venetian-style liver and a creme brûlée of chicken liver. Even the desserts follow Norbert's motto of "new techniques, ageless ingredients". The dessert menu includes tiramisù, Black Forest cake and apple strudel. "It's fascinating to think about who has created and codified these desserts in time. They are pieces of our gastronomic heritage, and I don't want to snob them or fail to show respect for them," he reiterates. He prepares them however according to his own rules, true to the flavours but using avant-garde techniques.

At the end of the meal you realise that you have eaten dishes spoken in dialect, but which you can definitely interpret and universally appreciate.

## **Restaurant St. Hubertus**

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*Home made butter at St. Hubertus*





## Caramelised eel, with veal heart sweetbreads, leek sponge and chanterelle mushrooms

Serves 4

### For the veal sweetbreads

500 g veal heart sweetbreads  
2 l milk  
1 clove garlic  
1 sprig thyme  
1 bay leaf  
salt and pepper  
butter, thyme and garlic for brown-  
ing  
Maldon salt

Leave the sweetbreads in running water for about 3 hours so they are thoroughly cleansed. Put them in a covered pot with the milk and add garlic, thyme, the bay leaf, salt and pepper. Bring to boil, take off the heat and leave to cool in the milk, then drain and remove the thin film that covers them, leaving them whole.

Brown the whole sweetbreads in a pan with butter, thyme and rosemary. Lightly salt and pepper. Cut the sweetbreads into rounds and garnish with Maldon salt.

### For the caramelised eel

a small eel fillet,  
cleaned and dried  
40 g cane sugar

Cut the eel fillet into 12 even slices, 3 per person. Just before serving, dust the eel with cane sugar and caramelize with the help of a small burner.

### For the sauce

40 g beef sauce with red wine  
5 g soy sauce  
10 g extra virgin olive oil  
salt and pepper

Mix all the ingredients, taking care to add each one according to the intensity of the red wine sauce.

### For the leek sponge

250 ml milk  
60 g corn starch  
50 g flour  
5 g sugar  
10 g albumin  
2 whole eggs  
3 egg yolks  
220 g leeks (green part)  
olive oil  
salt and pepper

Cut the green part of the leeks into thin julienne strips and brown them with a little oil in a hot pan and a pinch of salt for one minute. Cool immediately in a blast chiller. Put the rest of the ingredients into a mixer and blend on high for 1 minute, then filter and adjust to taste with salt and pepper. Put the mixture into a syphon and load with three capsules of gas. Take a heat-resistant, transparent plastic glass and make three holes in the bottom. Fill 3/4 of the glass with the leek foam, put into the oven or microwave on high for 30 seconds. Leave to cool head down, then break the sponge into pieces by hand.

### To serve

120 g clean chanterelle mushrooms  
extra virgin olive oil  
salt and pepper

Briefly brown the chanterelle mushrooms with a little oil, salt and pepper to taste.

For the arrangement of the dish, place the sweetbread slices alternating with the caramelised eels in the middle, surround with the leek sponges and the mushrooms and top off with a few drops of the sauce.

### Wines

2009 Pinot Nero Riserva Bot de  
chi Dui - Tenuta Hofstätter  
Pinot Nero Reserve Selection  
from Martin Foradori and Hugo  
Pizzinini. An elegant wine with  
great structure, Pinot Nero is a  
passion.



## Ravioli with liquid nettles crispy snails and our own buttermilk

Serves 4

### For the nettle filling

300 g of fresh nettle leaves  
1 l water  
salt  
12 sheets of gelatine

Wash the nettle leaves well and choose the best 12. Bring the water to the boil, emerging the rest of the leaves briefly and placing them onto a dish before cooling in the blast chiller. Blend for 1 minute and filter with a gauze. Warm a small part of the liquid and add the gelatine that has been soaked in cold water. Mix well and pour in the rest of the liquid, stirring continually. Leave to rest in the refrigerator for a few hours.

### For the ravioli dough

200 g 'O' type flour  
70 g durum flour  
120 g egg yolks  
40 g whole eggs  
4 g salt  
2 spoons of olive oil

Mix ingredients into a dough for pasta. Leave to rest in the refrigerator, then roll into thin sheets, cut into circles and fill with a small spoonful of nettle gelatine, closing into the classic ravioli shape.

### For the buttermilk foam

1/2 l buttermilk  
grated rind of 1/2 lemon  
salt and pepper  
2 g soya lecithin

Mix the buttermilk with the lemon rind, adjust to taste with salt and pepper and add the soya lecithin. Warm and foam with immersion mixer.

### For the ricotta cream

100 g cow's milk ricotta  
30 g fresh cream  
salt and pepper  
extra virgin olive oil

Blend all ingredients together until you have a smooth but thick cream. Leave to rest in a pastry bag in the refrigerator.

### For the snails and the nettle leaves

12 perfect nettle leaves  
12 snails, cleaned and cooked  
flour for tempura  
sparkling water  
peanut oil for frying  
salt  
a knob of butter  
to sauté the ravioli

Mix the tempura flour with sparkling water. Coat the snails, shake and fry them, then salt. Fry the 12 nettle leaves without tempura and salt.

### To serve

Place the ravioli in salted boiling water for about 3 minutes, drain and sauté for a few moments with a knob of butter. Place five dots of ricotta cream on the plate and arrange the ravioli. Place the snails, leaves of fried nettle and buttermilk cream in an orderly pattern.

### Wines

2011 Dedit - Baron Nicola del Monte Solaris, from un-treated vines. A natural wine from the mountains with a great, fruity palate typical of high altitude wines.

# Veal fillet with tripe, Gewürztraminer raisins and Mugo pine needles

Serves 4

## For the tripe

### First cooking

1 carrot, 1 onion  
2 celery stalks  
1 bouquet garni  
1 tomato  
400 g raw, clean veal tripe  
20 ml white wine vinegar  
20 g rock salt  
3 l cold water

Mix all ingredients in a large pot, bring to boil and leave to simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from heat and leave the veal to cool in the cooking liquid. When it is cold, drain and cut into small strips of about 1-2 cm x 3 cm.

### Second cooking

1 carrot, 1 onion  
2 celery stalks  
1 bouquet garni  
1 tomato  
extra virgin olive oil  
3 l unsalted veal consommé  
100g veal sauce  
a few grams of xanthan gum, salt and pepper

Clean and cut the carrots, onions, celery and tomatoes into large pieces. Brown with oil, add the tripe and leave to simmer for a few minutes. Add the consommé, sauce and bouquet garni. Leave on very low heat for about 3 hours. Remove the tripe, set aside and reduce the sauce, strain and adjust to taste,

## For the Gewürztraminer raisins

600 g crushed Gewürztraminer  
grape skins  
2.5 g agar  
2.5 g gelatine sheets  
1 pinch of ascorbic acid

Put the grape skins in a bowl and cover with water. Leave to soak for 24 hours. Place in a centrifuge, extracting the juice. Weigh 300 g of juice, bring to boil, add the agar and mix well. Remove from heat and dissolve gelatine sheets that were previously soaked in cold water. Leave to rest in the refrigerator. When solid, emulsify with a mixer to obtain a thick sauce.

using a small amount of xanthan gum to bind but only if necessary. The sauce should be quite thick. Heat the tripe in its own sauce before serving.

## For the veal fillet

500 g trimmed veal fillet  
olive oil and butter for browning  
1 sprig thyme  
1 sprig rosemary  
1 clove garlic  
salt and pepper  
Maldon salt  
100 g Mugo pine needles  
100 g Panko bread

Dry the pine needles and blend with the Panko bread to obtain a powder. Wrap the fillet in cling film and then in aluminium foil so that it maintains a solid cylindrical shape. Cook in the Roner oven at 65°C for 20 minutes, depending on the size of the fillet. The temperature in the middle should be 51°C. Remove the cling film and leave to rest in a warm place for about ten minutes. Before serving, salt and pepper the fillet, brown in a pan with oil, butter, thyme and garlic. Take out of the pan and pass through the Mugo pine needle powder. Cut the fillet into 4 rounds and garnish with Maldon salt.

## Wines

2009 Istante - Franz Haas Istante Vigneti Dolomiti is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and a small percentage of Petit Verdot.

An elegant wine with a smoothness that makes it a great accompaniment to a wide variety of dishes.

## To serve

Spread the Gewürztraminer sauce on the plate, place the tripe at the centre and finish with the fillet.

# Alpine Trout with its own caviar, horseradish, wild mint and pea broth

Serves 4

## For the trout

1 clean Alpine Trout (approx. 600 g), with the bones  
fine salt for marinade  
(3% of the weight of the trout)  
extra virgin olive oil  
4 pea shoots  
40 g alpine trout eggs

Sprinkle the trout fillet with salt on both sides and leave to marinate for about 3 hours. Wash, dry and de-bone. Cut the fillet into 4 portions of about 120 g each, place on a tray with a little oil, cover well with cling film and cook for about 10-15 minutes at 60°C depending on the height of the fillet.

## For the horseradish mousse

250 g cream  
1 spoon horseradish cream  
2 g agar  
2.5 g isinglass (fish gelatine)  
50 g whipped cream

Bring the liquid cream to boil, add the horseradish, remove from heat, cover and leave to infuse for 10 minutes.

Filter and re-boil, adding the agar while stirring for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add the isinglass that was previously soaked in cold water.

Leave to cool, and when the mixture begins to thicken thanks to the gelatine, add the whipped cream. Salt to taste, spread 1 cm thick in a dish and leave to solidify in the refrigerator for a few hours.

With the help of a pasta form, cut 4 circles with a diameter of about 5 cm.

## For the mint gelatine

1 bunch of mint  
200 ml water  
1 g agar  
1.5 sheets of fish collagen  
sugar syrup (1 to 1)

De-leaf the mint, blanch in the water and put the whole mix into the blast chiller. When cold, blend for a minute, filter, lightly salt and add to the syrup, in proportion according to taste. Bring a small part of the liquid to boil and dissolve the agar, boil for a few minutes, remove from heat and add the isinglass that had been previously soaked in water. Combine with the rest of the liquid. Spread 5 mm thick in a tray that has been lined with cling film and leave to rest in the refrigerator. When the gelatine has solidified, cut it into even cubes.

## For the pea broth

1 kg peas  
1 pinch of ascorbic acid  
Salt, pepper, sugar  
extra virgin olive oil

Shell the peas, setting aside the pods. First blanch the peas and then the pods in abundant salted boiling water, cooling them immediately in iced water. Delicately peel the peas and gently warm just before serving with salt and extra virgin olive oil. Centrifuge the pods

and extract the juice, adding a dash of ascorbic acid to preserve the colour. Gently warm the juice and adjust to taste with salt, pepper and sugar before serving.

## To serve

Place the horseradish mousse at the centre of the plate, place the peas and mint gelatine around it and pour the pea juice over it, taking care to not go over the edge of the horseradish mousse. Place the trout fillet on top and garnish with its eggs and pea shoots.

## Wines

Riesling Windbichel - Castel Juval  
The Riesling of Val Venosta  
It's only been in the last 15 years that Val Venosta has been discovered as a place particularly suitable for the cultivation of this grape. A fresh wine with a complex and very mineral palate.



Apple Strudel

DART ASSOCIATI



Bontà  
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