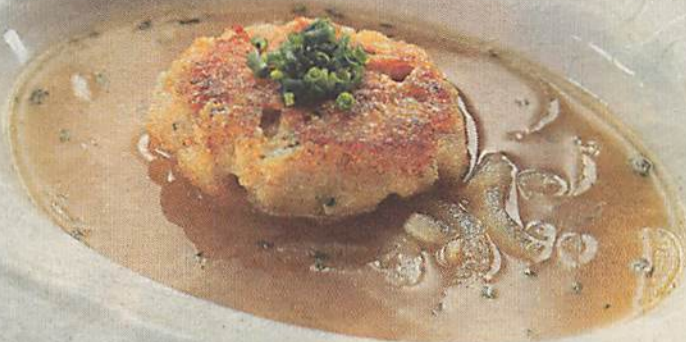


Kaspressknödel in onion soup from Ingrid Pernkopf's cookbook.



One Dumpling to Rule Them All Austria's Favorite Knödel is the Cheesy Kaspressknödel

By J.S. MARCUS

Austrian cooks are nothing if not resourceful. In a country where the signature dish is the irresistible knödel—a dumpling usually fashioned out of old bread—they have found a way to harness the innate properties of Sauermilchkäse, a type of low-fat, pungent cheese from the country's Alpine regions that is very much an acquired taste. By spiking dried-out bread with a binding dose of Sauermilchkäse, and then mixing and frying the results, Austrians bring alchemical forces to bear and create one of the greatest dumplings of them all: Kaspressknödel.

In the center and west of the country, you may find Kaspressknödel medallions floating in your bowl of beef broth, or perched on a dinner plate next to sauerkraut. At its best,

it manages to be both light and luscious, a sort of rustic soufflé. And, as another ski season gets under way this month, it is now making its annual reappearance as the ideal antidote to a day on the slopes.

Kaspressknödel is making its annual reappearance as the ideal antidote to a day on the slopes.

"Kaspressknödel in hot soup is a much-loved dish after going skiing," says Ingrid Pernkopf, a cookbook author and expert on Austrian regional cooking, based in the Salzkammergut region just east of Salzburg.

The low fat content of the cheese—a reminder of farmers pre-

serving leftovers of the butter-making process—is a key to the dish's success, she says, preventing the crucial step of frying from making the dumplings too greasy.

Everyone approaches the dish a little differently, she says, but her recipe calls for the bread and cheese to be combined with milk, parsley, raw eggs, sautéed onions, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Variations include the addition of thyme or marjoram, but "parsley is classic." Her secret ingredient, she says, is "a lot of chives," which she heaps on just before serving the dumplings in their broth.

A good Kaspressknödel "depends on the skill of the cook," says Vienna's Frank Pammer, who works at Käseland, a cheese-monger in the city's outdoor Naschmarkt, which specializes in Austrian regional cheeses. Here you can find Austria's feisty low-fat cheeses in many variations, from Salzburg's richer Pinzgauer Bierkäse to the somewhat milder Tyrolean Graukäse. (Sura Kees, from the far-west region of Vorarlberg, warns Mr. Pammer, is the most pungent, aged to a jellylike heap.)

On occasion, he admits, the Kaspressknödel can taste too salty, or there isn't enough cheese, "but sometimes it's really like heaven."

The border between Tyrol and Vorarlberg is home to some of the country's best-known ski resorts, like Lech and St. Anton am Arlberg, and it also a culinary divide. One of Austria's most prestigious types of Sauermilchkäse—the Sura Kees produced in another ski area, the Montafon valley—comes from Vorarlberg, and Kaspressknödel often shows up on menus.

But "Kaspressknödel is definitely no traditional dish" of the region, insists Andrea Masal, a tourism official in Dornbirn, near the Swiss border. Instead, she says, locals prefer to use their Sura Kees in Käsknöpfle, the local version of melted cheese and spätzle, which uses a thick dough rather than a batter to achieve a sturdier, pasta-like consistency. Cooks often combine the low-fat Sura Kees with a nutty Bergkäse, Austria's answer to Gruyère, along with an intense jolt of Rässkäse, similar to Appenzeller.

In Vorarlberg's Bregenzerwald, a snowy valley above the regional capital of Bregenz, local food authority and cooking teacher Karin Kaufmann has found a middle way. A Tyrolean grandparent instilled a love of Käskpressknödel but she uses a single ripened Bergkäse in her preparation. "I don't like to combine different



A-Rosa Resorts; top, Ingrid Pernkopf

Après-Ski Gastronomy

From December to April, European ski lovers head to Austria's premier ski resorts, where, until recently, a long day on the slopes ended with a hearty meal of local specialties like roast pork and dumplings, or in glitzy places like Kitzbühel, with a dollop of caviar. Now, thanks to a new wave of young chefs—who are mindful of locavore trends and international techniques—après-ski is a time for world-class dining.

At the Restaurant Alexander in the Hotel Lamark (www.lamark.at), in the Tyrolean village of Fügenberg, 1,500 meters above sea level, expect to find local venison filet cooked en croute in a version of Christmas stollen—a creation of a 38-year-old native son, chef **Alexander Fankhauser**.

In Kitzbühel's Heimatliebe restaurant (resort.a-rosa.de), chef **Andreas Senn**, another Tyrol native in his 30s, has created a dessert out of local parsnips, turned into

dark chocolate.

In Kirchberg, outside Kitzbühel, Michelin-starred chef **Simon Taxacher** has built a mecca for foodies from around Central Europe. Austria's Alpine regions are starting to see "gourmet tourism," says the 36-year-old chef, whose hotel and restaurant Rosengarten is part of the Relais & Châteaux collection of premium hostels and eateries (www.rosengarten-taxacher.com).

Traditional dishes like Kaspressknödel still have their place, but often with a twist. In Lech, **Thorsten Probst**, chef at the Griggeler Stuba at the Burg Vital Resort (www.burgvitalhotel.com), uses four different cheeses, including a local, Munster-like washed-rind cheese, in his version—but only at lunchtime. At night, the dumplings come off the menu, replaced by dishes such as local crawfish and kohlrabi, served with oyster leaves, an oyster-flavored