

# TIAN

## RESTAURANT

### WIEN

#### **PAUL IVIĆ**

##### **... on his own diet.**

To most people it comes as a surprise, but I am not a vegetarian. I prefer a diet where I eat 80% vegetarian food and 20% meat and fish. At home I like to cook with fish and meat. And why wouldn't I? – If it's good quality and I know where it came from, there is nothing wrong about that. I think it is all about a well balanced diet.

##### **... on his culinary journey and his key moment.**

The journey began in my hometown Serfaus in the Austrian Alps when I was 14 and didn't want to continue with going to school. My sister told me to become a chef. She listed all positive aspects of the job: you can travel the world and be creative. What came to my mind were the buzzwords “free“ and “independent“. And I just thought: that's it!

##### **... on the decision to dedicate the restaurant to vegetarian haute cuisine.**

Several years ago I needed a new challenge in my life and by that time I heard of the Tian job offer. So two and two came together and I minimized the ingredients I work with to vegetarian ingredients. What I love about vegetarian cooking is working with natural products that feel alive and I appreciate the rhythm that nature gives us with vegetables that are specific for each season. What is most important for me, is the fact that I don't want to imitate the taste of meat, I want to bring forward the taste of nature.

Most vegetarian restaurants offer tofu or seitan as a replacement to meat. We don't do that. Furthermore, it was never part of our concept to do that. There are so many remarkable flavours that nature offers us, so why should we strive to find an imitation for something when we can work with the most original flavours there are?

##### **... on opening TIAN – a vegetarian restaurant.**

I was there from the start and we opened in December 2011. In the beginning, there was the idea of a vegetarian restaurant. The idea was already there when I joined as the head chef. But it was that limitation to vegetarian ingredients that caught my attention. We started out with a rather “normal“ menu and worked hard on ourselves to become the fine dining restaurant that we are now. This experience is what keeps my team together. We all know how far we've come.

##### **... on his philosophy and the choice to only use vegetarian ingredients.**

For me, what we do is way beyond just minimizing it to vegetarian cooking. Food is more than just sustenance. Food is about taking responsibility for all the resources and all the hard working people behind them. Food is about connecting people because it doesn't need a specific language – all it needs is a loving soul. What I mean is that behind every meal we eat, there are people who have been working hard on the ingredients we find on our plate. They have, for example, put a lot of thought in the right soil where they sow the seed. They have experimented with the right timing, when to harvest, they went over the top with bringing the products to the restaurant fresh from the farm. And my team honors their hard work by always trying to use the whole vegetable – from root to leaf – and not to throw anything away.

At TIAN we have great relationships with our suppliers. We know them, we know their goals, e.g. keeping alive old species that are almost extinct. Together, we try to keep the variety of nature alive.

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#### **... on vegetarian cooking as a trend and the future of food.**

I don't see what we do as a trend – I see it as a necessity.

In theory, there would be enough food for everybody on our planet but, most of the crops go into industrial farming.

Over the last years, the food industry has taken directions that are not necessarily good for us and our health. Just think about the drugs that are used in intensive mass animal farming. On the long run, this will destroy our planet. So on the long haul we will all have to think a little more about what we eat and what products we buy.

#### **... on his strive for uncompromising quality.**

First of all, I have to say that I work with the best team that I could have wished for. They all follow my lead by never compromising when it comes to the quality of food. And without their strength of purpose, the journey we made would not have been possible.

We work together with a lot of suppliers that share our philosophy – our unstoppable focus on quality. And without their phenomenal products, the TIAN menu would not be the same. When it comes to vegetables you have to work with the best products to get the best taste.

One of my suppliers is Robert Brodnjak from “Krautwerk”, a farm that is located near Vienna. He specializes in the rediscovery of old species. Not only do we use his products, but we also work together in finding the right timing when to harvest and how the taste of the crop changes within the seasons.

Another supplier of mine is Johannes Wiesmayer. He specializes in topinambur. He works meticulously with the various types and it is always great to see the smile on his face when he discovers something new. This is the kind of smile that truly is contagious.

#### **... on how his vision comes to life in his recipes.**

The dish “Chanterelle | Pea | Lemon”

I love the textures and the taste experience of this dish and it really reflects my philosophy. We use fantastic ingredients that have the best seasonal quality. For example, we take the peas that one of my friends grows in his fields. They taste exactly like peas from my grandmother's garden. Then you have this incredibly woody smell of wild mushrooms. The scent alone is fantastic. If we have time we hunt and pick them ourselves, otherwise one of our fantastic foragers will do this for us.

For this dish, every part of the ingredients is used. Meaning absolutely no waste, cooking from leaf to root. Other ingredients are pine nuts and almalfi lemons that my friend Luca gets us from special producers in Italy. This all perfectly fits my philosophy again.

The sphere on the plate is made from the juice of pea pods. We do not throw them into the garbage, we process them creatively. We also use the skin from the peas. These are dried for 24 hours. They are then processed into couscous and flour.

From the Almalfi Lemon, we use the zest for its fragrant aroma. The sweet acidic juice is used to give a balanced flavour. The pith from the lemon is made into a cream giving a velvety, bitter note to the dish. So again, we use the whole fruit.

The flavour of the sauce is extracted from the wild mushrooms but we also want to reproduce an additional earthy taste echoing the smell of the forest floor. This is achieved by the aroma of roasting these wonderful pine nuts rounding the dish off.

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I hope I could bring you a little closer to my way of thinking. For me, cooking is a passion and mission that we playfully and uncompromisingly meet with quality and endless energy.

#### **... on the creative process of creating a new dish.**

When we use everything from root to leaf we are obliged to experiment and find out how to make something tasteful that would normally be thrown away. We use old and new techniques and in doing so we discover new tastes and new ways of preparation. I am lucky that my team is still curious and so we try things out and we taste and we combine. And for a chef there is nothing better than the moment when you put that spoon in your mouth and suddenly you just know "This is it! We found the right combination!"

When it comes to inspiration we don't really follow any trends. We get inspired by the seasons. We work with what the seasons are offering us. So we work really close with nature even though we are located in the center of the city.

#### **... on pairing vegetarian dishes with the right wine.**

Usually, wines are paired with meat or fish. But we don't have either of those on our plates, so this doesn't make it easy for sommeliers to pick the right wines.

In the restaurant we put a lot of thought in the wine pairing, because we want our guests to have an incomparable experience. For the most part, we offer natural wines because their nuances complement our dishes very well.

#### **... on people's reactions not being served meat and fish.**

A lot of colleagues appreciate what we do and they congratulate us on our courage. Because, obviously, we could make our lives a little less difficult. But we took on the challenge and we fight for it every day.

Of course, sometimes people leave the restaurant as soon as they find out that there is no meat and fish on the menu. For us, this feels like a stab in the heart because we have worked so hard and now they don't even want to give it a try. But sometimes we can convince them to stay. And when they do – not once has anybody left the restaurant unhappy! Most of them apologize for their earlier behaviour and are just glad about the experience of taste they just had. And what more can we wish for?

#### **... on the most interesting comment coming from a guest.**

Some years ago, a girl came to my restaurant with her parents. That was actually her wish for her 10th birthday, because she had seen an article about me and the restaurant in a magazine. So at the end of the evening I went up to them and asked her if she liked it and she just glanced at me and said „No! I loved it.“

For me that was a very special moment because kids are the most honest people.

#### **... on being successful.**

Steve Jobs said: "Great things in business are never done by one person. They are done by a team of people."

I relate to this quote 100%. I consider myself very lucky to have a great team around me. They share my beliefs – my strive to use organic, regional products, my philosophy of uncompromising quality and my urge to use the whole product from root to leaf.

On top, over the past years we really became good friends and we sometimes even spend our days off together checking out new restaurants. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for them.

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#### **... on receiving a Michelin Star and on the hard work that led to this achievement.**

Of course, a Michelin star is something you aim for and work for very hard as a chef. You can never get there by yourself. It is always the work of the whole team and I could not have wished for a better team than my guys at Tian.

When we heard that we got the Michelin star, we could not believe that we had made it. A lot changed that day. Customers know that they can trust us. They can rely on the fact that they are going to be served a great menu. And of course, a lot of international guests were suddenly interested in us.

We are really proud that we got this recognition as a vegetarian restaurant, considering that there are only 4 vegetarian restaurants worldwide (including us) with a Michelin Star.

#### **... on people who inspired him.**

There are a lot of people that inspire me, but they don't specifically need to be chefs.

You can find inspiration in various people that achieved their goals, stood out of the crowd and fought for what they believed in.

One of my childhood heroes is Captain Kirk. He inspired me in forming a unique team that consists of various characters and cultures. He respected the origin and opinion of each and everyone of them and he always acted with great responsibility.

Somebody who also inspired me is Reinhold Messner, the mountaineer. It might be a little due to the fact that he is also from Tyrol just like I am, but aside from that, I appreciate that he never stopped believing in his dream. He was seeking tirelessly for ways to reach his goal, not listening to the people that told him to give up.

When I was young, I looked up to chefs like Eckhart Witzigmann, Alain Passard and Alain Ducasse.

Witzigmann was a pioneer in Austria and Germany. He was one of the first to fight for the best quality. He wanted to bring a variety to Austrian and German cuisine. So he encouraged and motivated the farmers to sow various seeds. His unstoppable enthusiasm for products is what made a huge impact on me. And the fact that he always acted out of conviction and not because of fame or glory.

#### **... on his inspiration for new dishes.**

I like to be inspired by situations, people and landscapes. A few years ago, I was staying at Vila Joya and was lucky to enjoy the beautiful sunset. It combined all kinds of colours like different shades of red, orange and a little yellow. This picture was stuck in my head and I got inspired to do a dish that reminds me of this sunset.

The dish "Fava Bean" is inspired by my childhood. My grandmother grew beans in her garden and I remember her picking them in summer. Every other weekend I went looking for mushrooms in the woods with my grandfather.

We wanted to create a dish with earthy flavours that meet the taste and smell of wood, that is not heavy but lighthearted, and the combination was just perfect.

#### **... on future projects.**

We will see what the future holds for us. Our number one goal is to clear away the old misconception that vegetarian food tastes boring. People are still a little bit afraid of an 8 or 10-course menu without fish and meat. So we are on a mission here and it is always a great pleasure when guests that were doubtful in the beginning have a big smile on their face by the end of the evening. That's when we know that we did a perfect job.

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Furthermore, in the restaurant we always strive forward and challenge ourselves with creating new flavours. We want to support our farmers in their vision of biodynamic agriculture and also set the tone in the no-waste movement.

### **... on his own breakfast.**

To be honest, breakfast is not my favourite meal of the day. I usually just have an espresso and that's it. But on Sundays, when there is a little more time, I like to make poached eggs.

### **Location & Info**

TIAN Restaurant Wien

Himmelfortgasse 23, 1010 Wien

TIAN Bistro am Spittelberg

Schrankgasse 4, 1070 Wien

TIAN Restaurant München

Frauenstraße 4, 80469 München

### **Contact**

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