



REASON

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DINE IN A SURREAL FANTASIA



PHOTOGRAPHY, SOREN GAMMELMARK (BUTTERFLY, PLANETARIUM DOME); JENS HONORÉ (CHEF)

IT'S ONE IN THE MORNING when I walk out of Alchemist in Refshaleøen, a former industrial area on the Copenhagen harbour. I'm buzzing from an epic, seven-hour culinary journey created by 33-year-old chef Rasmus Munk, designed to seduce the taste buds, arouse the senses and provoke debate.

"Gastronomy can have the same function as art in evoking emotions and raising awareness," says the self-described alchemist who wants to "change the world" through what he calls holistic cuisine. "There are a lot of similarities: The painter uses pigments; musicians use instruments. My medium as a chef is ingredients, flavours and presentations."

The city is already a gastro-tourism mecca, thanks to Noma – which will close its doors in 2024 and morph into a giant test kitchen creating new food

products – and Munk attracts similar adulation for his innovative 50-course dining experience, presented in five "acts." Munk, like Noma chef René Redzepi, has an R&D lab, and collaborates on projects like creating a bread recipe that can be baked on the International Space Station (with MIT) and using fermented fungi to make a delectable rice custard (with UC Berkeley).

Reservations at Alchemist start at 4,900 Danish kroner (almost \$1,000) per person, and sell out in minutes. It has two (of a possible three) Michelin stars, and sits at No. 5 on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list. "When you serve people something totally unexpected, it's like resetting all the senses," the chef says. "It grabs people's attention, and then they are open-minded and ready to discover new things."

In Act One, my first bite – a seaweed chip titled Square One – is served in a

dark room called Perspectives, where performance artist Lana Lind leads me around like the Pied Piper. For Act Two, I'm ushered into a luxurious lounge with a view of the kitchen-laboratory for whimsical snacks like

Guests watch a video projection of jellyfish floating through a sea of plastic bags as they eat; A freeze-dried tortoiseshell butterfly (above), served on a crispy "leaf" with nettle-flavoured cheese, is one of the thought-provoking bites offered at Alchemist restaurant; chef Rasmus Munk (inset)



freeze-dried butterfly, which is also a lesson on alternative food sources, since the farm-raised insects contain four to five times more protein than beef.

Acts Three and Four take place in the dining area, a planetarium-like arena where images of jellyfish, drifting amid plastic bags, are projected on the dome as I dine on a mini-tidal pool filled with raw moon jellyfish – an invasive species – while reflecting on marine pollution. I’m challenged to think about starvation in the developing world when I’m served Hunger, a small ribcage fashioned from silver, draped with a paper-thin filet of rabbit meat. The real awakening is Guilty Pleasure, a caramel-filled candy bar shaped like a coffin, which is a bitter-sweet reminder of exploitative child labour in the chocolate business.

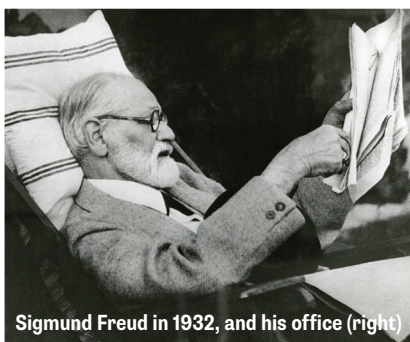
In Act Five, I’m coming down from the high of romping in a ball pit and, from the balcony overlooking the dining room, having petit fours with a splash of premium whiskey. Far beyond a meal, the privileged and transcendent dining experience at Alchemist is less preachy or pretentious than it is memorable. This is where difficult conversations are championed, and food nourishes the mind. –*Rénee Suen*



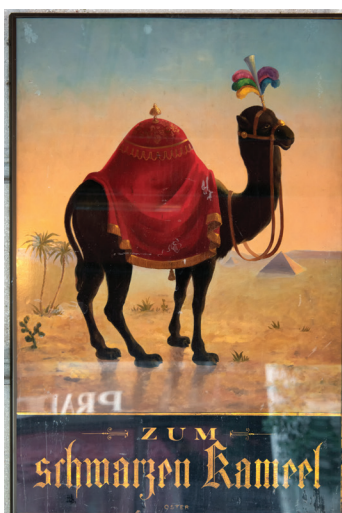
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PERFECT A FREUDIAN SLIP



Sigmund Freud in 1932, and his office (right)



TO TRULY GET INTO THE RIGHT HEADSPACE, you could do no better than a jaunt to Vienna. One of the most elegant of European cities, the Austrian capital is where you can find the Sigmund Freud Museum (freud-museum.at), possibly one of Europe’s most intriguing museums because it’s more about the mind – yours and his – than the matter, even though there is that too. Set in the flat in which Freud lived and raised his family and maintained his practice – Berggasse 19 – it is a bracing dip, or slip, into the birthplace of psychoanalysis itself (a foreshadowing of a time when people everywhere employ words like “trig-

Aerial view of Vienna, home of Mozart, Klimt and weiner schnitzel. Below: The Zum Schwarzen Kameel café, founded in 1618, remains a popular tourist stop today.

gered” and talk about their “trauma”).

The quarters, too, are where Freud wrote most of his books, and from which he and his family had to famously flee the Nazis in 1938. Where you can

even cast your eyes on the shrink’s actual doctor’s bag (with the initials S.F. marked on it, of course), and see the room where he had the world’s first psychoanalysis practice. The famous couch, however, is no longer here; it ended up in Freud’s house in Hampstead, London. However, in lieu of the actual piece of furniture, the Berggasse museum has collected famous artworks from Max Ernst to Man Ray, involving sofas, and every Sunday has a screening of Andy Warhol’s erotic film *Couch*.

That’s just one of the many charms in this, the city of Wes Andersonian panache and Habsburg bequests. Home of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert; of Klimt and weiner schnitzel. Where even its cafés come with the whirl of history – like when we stopped into 400-year-old Zum Schwarzen Kameel (it literally means to the black camel), a café visited by Napoleon himself and a hang-out of Beethoven’s too. Interestingly, it is so named because it was founded by Johann Baptist Cameel in 1618, as a market store selling spices from far-flung locales (Vienna once being an important trade route to the Ottoman Empire), and he played on his name. A shot of espresso, please, with a side of the unconscious. –*Shinan Govani*