

EPICUREAN-TRAVELER.com
A WORLD OF GOOD TASTE

[Home](#)

[Epicurean Tasting Room](#)

[Epicurean Traveler](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Bay Area Wine Writers](#)

[Links](#)

Ads by Google

[Mobile & Custom Bottling](#)

Northern California's
Leading Wine Bottling
Solution
www.halseybottling.com

[San Francisco Coupons](#)

1 ridiculously huge
coupon a day. It's like
doing The Bay at 90%
off!

www.Groupon.com/San-Franc

[Reserve Wine Experience](#)

A unique behind-
the-scenes tasting
with an award-winning
winemaker.
crushpadwine.com

[Wine cellars](#)

Custom wine cellars
Wine cellar designs
www.tixawinecellars.com

[California Wine Tours](#)

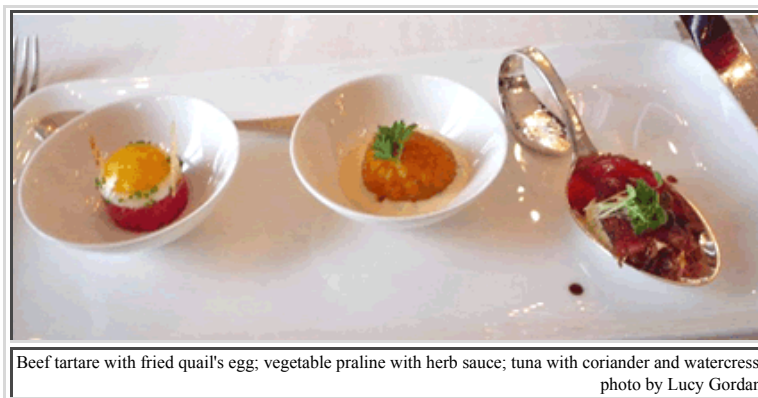
Visit nearly 200
Wineries in SLO
County. Win a
Vacation Here!
WineCoastCountry.com

PETER KNOGL: SWISS CHEF OF THE YEAR 2011



Interview ©2011 by Lucy Gordan

Born on September 14, 1968 in southeast Bavaria, Peter Knogl has worked his way up the career ladder almost always at Michelin-starred restaurants in Germany, Spain, London, and Switzerland. Since 2007 he has been the Chef de Cuisine at the gourmet restaurant Le Cheval Blanc in the Grand Hotel Les Trois Rois, the top hotel in Basel. Here, thanks to the generosity of the Basel Tourist Board, he discussed his love of cooking with Lucy Gordan, Epicurean-Traveler.com's Rome Bureau Chief after she had enjoyed his "amuse bouches" and three-course business luncheon tasting menu: beef tartare with fried quail's egg; vegetable praline with herb sauce; tuna with coriander and watercress; glazed monkfish with pommery mustard, thyme sauce and pureed fennel; roast saddle of venison with juniper gravy, and duo of celeriac with pumpkin; and praline noisette parfait with lemon aspic, accompanied by an aperitif of champagne and a 2004 Brunello di Montalcino from Andrea Constanti.



Beef tartare with fried quail's egg; vegetable praline with herb sauce; tuna with coriander and watercress
photo by Lucy Gordan

Our tastes in food are closely connected to our childhood; what are your first memories of food?

PK: My mother's cheesecake. She still is an excellent cook. Instead, the first dish I remember cooking in our kitchen at home were French fries.



The terrace at Les Trois Rois

Why did you decide to become a chef?

PK: It was a logical consequence. My grandfather, my mother's father, had a small restaurant in Bavaria. He cooked sometimes, but he was the owner. His wife, my grandmother, was the chef. I've always liked kitchens and from a young age always thought being a cook would be a good life for me.

Why?

PK: I feel comfortable, at ease, and always have in kitchens.

Who were your mentors and what did you learn from them?

PK: After a three-year apprenticeship in Bavaria, I met Heinz Winkler. He was my mentor. From him I learned not to make compromises, to use only the best products available. He was very self-disciplined, powerful, straight-on, a very clear chef. He let the ingredients speak for themselves.

As you know, Heinz Winkler was also the mentor of the best chef in Rome, Heinz Beck.

PK: Yes, I know. I know Heinz Beck very well. We worked together under Heinz Winkler at "*Tantris*" in Munich. He was *chef-de-partie* and made cold starters. I was *commis* and made sauces and fish dishes. I'm five or six years younger.

What are the essential qualities for becoming a top chef?

PK: You have to be very ambitious and self-disciplined, work very hard, have a talent to mix ingredients in your own style, and never make compromises, but always use the best available products.

What do you like best about your job?

PK: To create new dishes.

What do you like the least?

PK: The lack of free time and that I have to work on Christmas and all the other special days in the year.

What's your culinary philosophy?

PK: Never give up, persevere, use the best products and don't change their taste. Let the ingredients be themselves.

In a nutshell how would you define your cuisine?

PK: French/Mediterranean style.

What are your signature dishes and other specialties?

PK: Crabmeat chili with vichyssoise and caviar; and sweetbreads with artichoke and parmesan foam, and peanuts; and turbot with lobster and bergamot.



Glazed monkfish with pommery mustard, thyme sauce and puréed fennel

photo by Lucy Gordan

If you could cook the meal of your dreams only once, who would be your guest?

PK: Pope Benedict XVI.

Switzerland has long been famous for its hotel management schools and its hoteliers.

You were voted Swiss Chef of the Year 2011; what are the reasons for your success?

PK: I think because I work very hard all day every day, maintain my self-set very high standards, use exclusively seasonal and high-quality products, and produce excellent light dishes. Even if you order my six-course tasting dinner menu, you will find it flavorful and not too heavy.

Your favorite restaurant outside Switzerland?

PK: Dieter Koschina's Vila Joya in Albufeira, Portugal. It's the only restaurant in Portugal with two Michelin stars.

Swiss chefs that you admire?

PK: Andreas Caminada.

Non-Swiss chefs that you admire?

PK: Paul Bocuse, Heinz Beck, Heinz Winkler, Don Alfonso Iaccarino (who besides Sant'Agata sui due Golfi, has businesses in Macao and Morocco), and Marc Menau.

Your feelings about food critics and restaurant guides: have they been helpful to you or do they only add stress?

PK: They are helpful, but as far as I'm concerned all my guests are my food critics. Certainly the competition to get good ratings in the important gastronomic guides brings up the gastronomic quality of a restaurant.

You have won many awards over the past fifteen years, which are you proudest of?

PK: My second Michelin Star for *Le Cheval Blanc* only a year after my first one which I received after only seven months here, and being chosen by Gault Millau "Swiss Chef of the Year for 2011," not to mention the Five Star Diamond last week in Beijing from The American Academy of Hospitality Sciences. There I cooked *Bresse* pigeon with artichoke cream and *jus* of Tasmanian pepper.



Roast saddle of venison with juniper gravy, and duo of celeriac with pumpkin
photo by Lucy Gordan

You were born in Deggendorf in Bavaria, have worked in Germany, France, Spain and Portugal and are now Swiss Chef of the Year 2011. You specialize in Mediterranean cuisine, but have never worked in Italy. This seems to be true not only of you, but of most of the German and Luxemburgish chefs I've interviewed. Why?

PK: You're right; no, I've never worked in Italy. I think it's because for northern Europeans France is still "THE" place for chef apprenticeships. Then Spain has a nice climate. Perhaps Italy is more famous for its fashion than for its top cuisine. I really don't know, but I think perhaps more northern Europeans go to Spain for vacation than to Italy.

Do you have dual German and Swiss citizenship now?

PK: No, I'm only German.



Praline noisette with lemon aspic

photo by Lucy Gordan

Where would you live if not in Basel?

PK: That's a difficult one, but probably in Spain, southern Spain.

Where do you like to go on vacation?

PK: Southern Spain. I worked seven years in Andalucía. The people are very friendly there. They have a different mentality from northern Europe.



Les Trois Rois's terrace as seen from across the river

Your restaurant is in a hotel like Heinz Beck's *La Pergola* in Rome's Hilton. Have you ever thought of opening your own independent restaurant? If yes, why haven't you?

PK: I agree with Heinz Beck. The hotel here, *Les Trois Rois*, takes care of all the practical matters: finances, paychecks, advertizing, PR for *Le Cheval Blanc*. I can concentrate on my cooking. If I were still 25 or 30 years old, I would still have the energy to run my own restaurant, but now I'm too old. I'm 42 now. To open my own restaurant and make it successful would take at least ten years. Besides a top restaurant in a hotel is the future. To run your own restaurant is too expensive and too difficult to manage, the finances and everything else it involves. Fifteen or twenty years ago no restaurants in hotels had Michelin stars. Now many restaurants with 2 or 3 Michelin stars are in hotels.

Why is the restaurant called Le Cheval Blanc?

PK: After the winery near Bordeaux of the same name.

Up to now we have talked about Peter Knogl the professional chef; I'd like to know more about Peter Knogl himself. For example, your favorite food?

PK: Chocolate is my secret passion. Then come sausages and *Würstsalat* or hotdog and cheese salad. At home my girlfriend usually cooks.

Your favorite wines?

PK: Bordeaux and Spanish wines, especially *Hacienda Monasterio Reserva 1996*. I prefer reds.

A dish you don't like?

PK: Brains, liver. Tripe is OK but it's not my favorite dish. However, I was brought up to eat everything.

Chefs are known for having collections, in particular fast cars, motorcycles, and watches? What do you collect?

PK: Watches, art, especially lithographs by Dalí.

If you hadn't become a chef, what other profession would you have chosen?

PK: A singer and guitar player in a group like The Beatles because music brings happiness into everyone's life.



The dining room at Les Trois Rois

& & &

Lucy Gordan is an award-winning travel writer and cultural journalist living in Rome, where she is Epicurean-Traveler.com's Bureau Chief. She can be reached at gordan@attglobal.net. Her website is www.lucygordan.com.

Links to other recent articles by Lucy Gordan:

[Nick Anderer of Maialino](#)

[Sal de Riso: Italy's Most Famous Pastry Chef](#)

[Alfons Shubeck](#)

[Tantris](#)