



STARCHIEFS

Tanja & Mariya: 2 chefs, 2 styles

The 'Smiling Gecko' four-handed dish by Tanja Grandits & Mariya Un Noun was a hit – despite their different cooking styles.

By Daniel Böniger

AN AMAZING PAIRING. The perfect four-handed dish? Ideally, the four hands of the star chefs involved work together so that one plus one can sometimes be more than two. The 19-point chef Tanja Grandits and the amazing Mariya Un Noun from Cambodia recently showed how this works. The cheerful woman, who is only 1.50 metres tall, came to Basel's Stucki restaurant to raise money for Smiling Gecko at a charity dinner. The organisation was founded in 2014 by photo artist Hannes Schmid, who encountered so much misery on one of his trips to Cambodia that he decided to do something about it.

FARMHOUSE: SCHOOL, JOBS, RESTAURANT. What began as a proverbial battle against windmills has now become, among other things, a small village with countless school and workplaces. Some of the money comes from foundations, while some is generated locally with the integrated 'Farmhouse', one of the most beautiful spa and holiday resorts in the country. And with Mariya Un Noun's gourmet restaurant. And, of course, not least with events such as this dinner on the Bruderholz. What was served up by the two chefs with such different styles?



Light and airy: scallops, almonds, cauliflower by Tanja Grandits.



Tanja and Mariya's teams worked hand in hand for the 'Smiling Gecko' event.



Amazing: sea bass, mulberries, lime by Mariya.

250 KILOGRAMS OF INGREDIENTS IN THEIR LUGGAGE. After Schmid had presented his project and Tanja and Mariya had shaken hands with almost all of the guests present, it was time to sit down at the table. A few snacks set the mood for Mariya's world of flavours and cooking style – aromatic, reminiscent of Asian street food, served like Western fine dining: spring rolls with chicken filling seasoned with Kampot pepper, for example. Or fish tartare with pumpkin essence, containing ginger and lemongrass. Mariya's team had brought 250 kilograms of ingredients from the farmhouse resort for the Swiss tour.



They were both hosts, so to speak: 'Smiling Gecko' founder Hannes Schmid and hostess Tanja Grandits.



Committed and focused, down to the last detail: Mariya Un Noun in the kitchen of the 'Stucki'.

SCALLOPS, LIGHT-FOOTED BUT INTENSE. Then it was hostess Tanja's turn. She presented her scallop ceviche with almond espuma and cauliflower in various textures (cream, couscous, shaved, marinated). This remarkably light and colourfully restrained dish featured subtle notes of yuzu and a slight hint of iodine. It should be noted that the dish is nevertheless an intense experience!

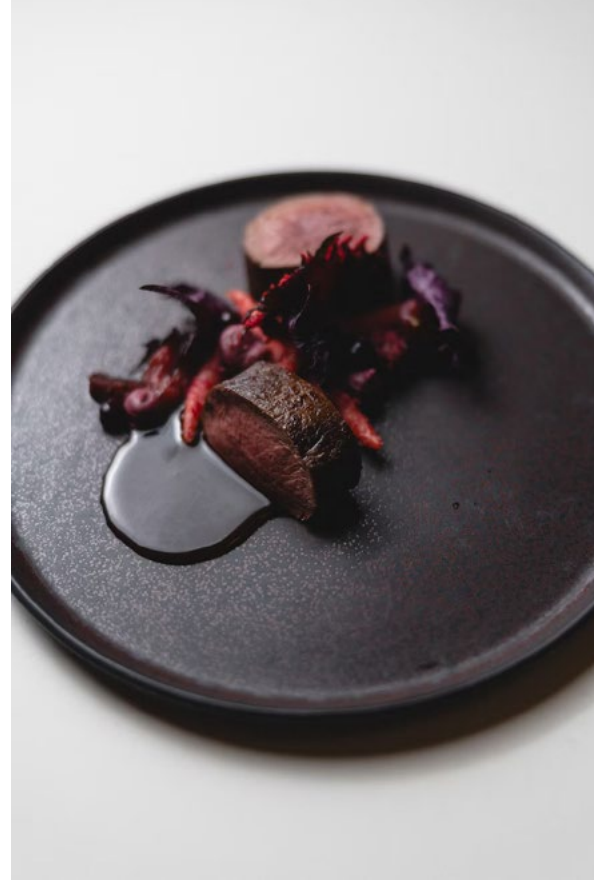
FLOWER SHOPPING AT 4 A.M. Mariya's sea bass tartare was astonishing. Not least because the pink yoghurt sauce that accompanied it had a surprising taste of lime and sesame. Mulberries, also brought back from Cambodia, provided the colour. It was drizzled with a bright green oil with herbs and decorated with white flowers that Hannes Schmid had bought at the wholesale market at 4 a.m. the day before. It's clear to see: Mariya (and the Farmhouse) means everything to the homesick Toggenburg native!



Highlight 1: Khmer-style chicken curry on homemade noodles by Mariya.



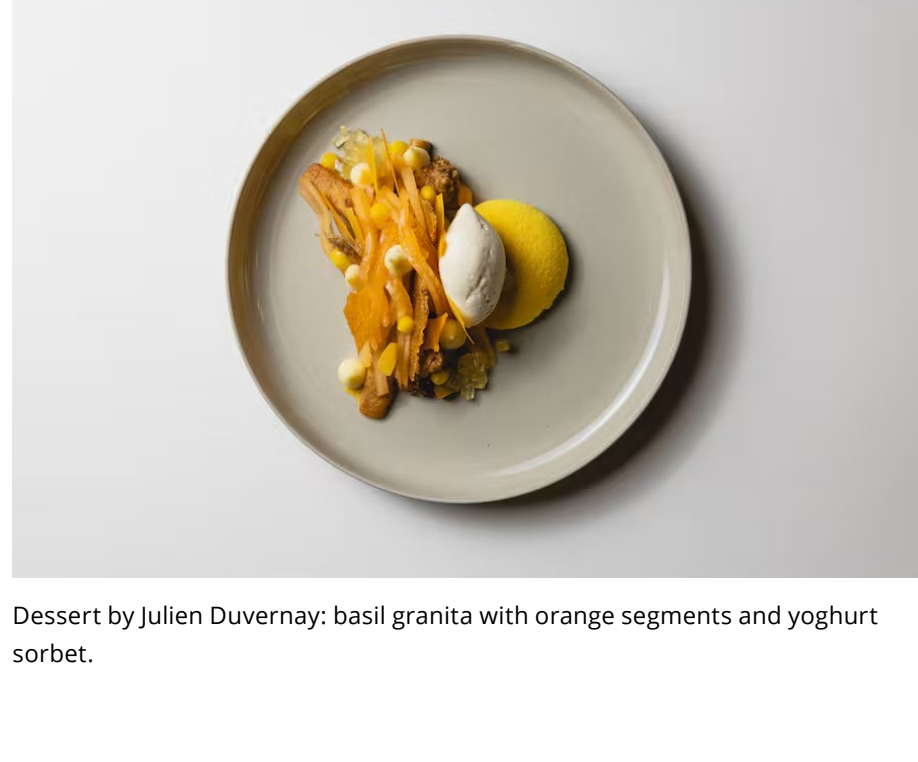
Highlight 2: Grégory Rohmer with his 12-litre Balthazar Péby Faugères.



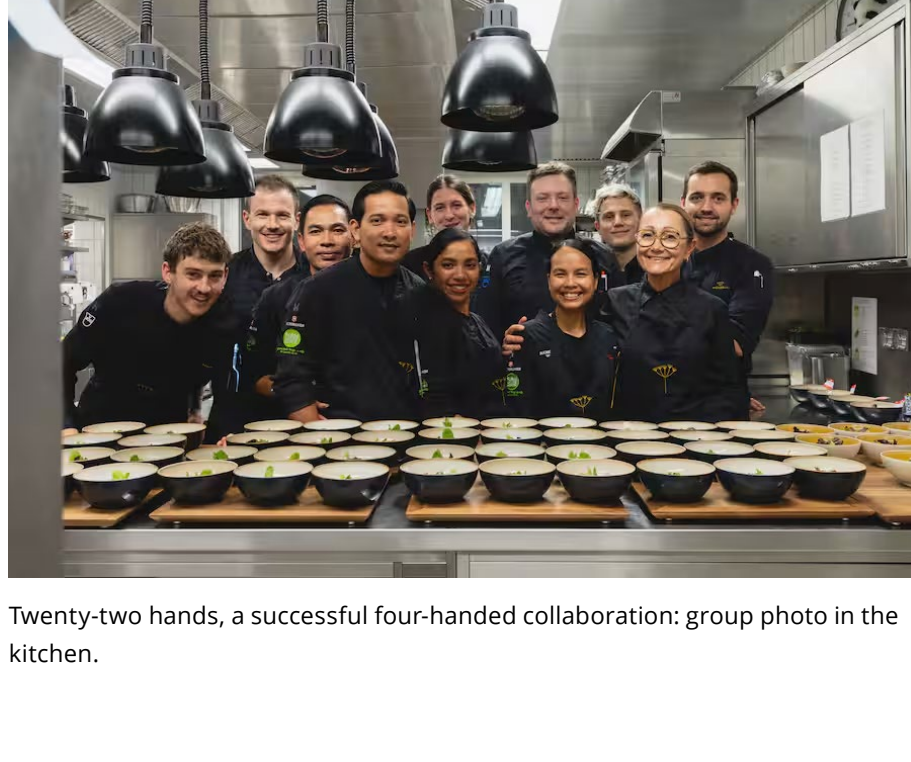
Highlight 3: Summer venison with shiso potato noodles by Tanja & Marco.

PORCINI MUSHROOMS MEET CURRY. While the slightly spicy fish dish had brought beads of sweat to the foreheads of most guests, it was followed by a 'grounded' composition from Tanja's team: Porcini mushrooms were draped over a rich miso pretzel dumpling. A dollop of coffee yoghurt foam and crunchy buckwheat provided a surprising twist. And as always at the Stucki, sommelier Grégory Rohmer contributed to the guests' enjoyment with Completer Malanserrebe 2023 from Donatsch. The wine remained on the table for Mariya's next course: a spicy and piquant Khmer-style chicken curry with peanuts, served with handmade fine noodles and generously refined with herbs. Intense and, for many guests, the highlight of the evening.

WITH THE VENISON: 12-LITRE BOTTLE OF PÉBY FAUGÈRES. Marco Böhler, Tanja's man for meat, then made his grand entrance: perfectly cooked, super-tender summer venison with long pepper glaze was accompanied by shiso potato noodles and marinated radishes. Everything was deep red and deeply aromatic. The wine to accompany it? A 2008 Péby Faugères St. Emilion from a 12-litre Balthazar bottle, opened and decanted several hours earlier! It's worth mentioning that at the end of the evening, there was still a good half bottle left – which must have delighted the guests the following day.



Dessert by Julien Duvernay: basil granita with orange segments and yoghurt sorbet.



Twenty-two hands, a successful four-handed collaboration: group photo in the kitchen.

MEMORABLE PHOTOS IN THE KITCHEN. We could have polished off more courses, whether from Mariya, Tanja or Marco – but Julien Duvernay provided the final flourish. As usual, during dessert service, the previously quiet and concentrated mood in the kitchen gave way to a pleasant cheerfulness. Team Tanja and Team Mariya, who had spent almost four days preparing for the event, chatted, took souvenir photos and even enjoyed a glass of wine. Julien's desserts? A refreshing basil granita with orange fillets and yoghurt sorbet. Followed by melon with walnut brittle and verbena pepper mousse – a lively and fruity dessert. But this was a 'four-handed' affair, with all hands involved working in harmony. Not just the four from Tanja and Mariya, but over twenty from the two teams.

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Daniel Böniger likes gourmet restaurants and hearty pubs, organic producers and star winemakers. The best cuts? They end up at 'Böniger tranchiert'.