

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

LIFT THE
FALL/WINTER LID
(WATCH OUT, IT'S HOT!)

Techniques

APPLE STRUDEL DEMO BY WOLFGANG BAN. GARY
TUCKER REPORTS. PHOTOS BY LIZ STEGER.

What apple pie is to America, apple strudel is to Austria. Taking its name from the German word for whirlwind, the classic pastry, conjured from many layers of paper-thin dough wrapped around a sweet or savory filling, is considered synonymous with the capital, Vienna.

Tremendous cross-cultural influences on Eastern European cuisines have led to a great rivalry between the Hungarians and the Austrians as to strudel's origin. *Larousse Gastronomique* credits Hungary for its creation, but according to **George Lang** in *The Cuisine of Hungary*, it was conceived in the Ottoman Empire, where flaky stuffed pastries were a hallmark of the cuisine (think Turkish *börek* and Greek *baklava*), and brought into Hungary in the 16th century. In either case, the Austrians, particularly the Viennese, enthusiastically embraced the pastry and have elevated strudel making to a high art.

The classic filling is made with apples and raisins, though orange and lemon zests and chopped almonds are often added. Other versions, such as cherry, plum, poppyseed (often mixed with apricot jam or grated apple), and sweetened curd cheese, are also popular. *Türkenstrudel* (Turkish strudel) is filled with a mixture of butter, superfine sugar, egg yolks, fresh lemon zest, finely chopped candied lemon peel, ginger, raisins, figs, dates, and walnuts, then lightened with stiffly beaten egg whites. Savory strudels, eaten as first courses or entrées, are made with stuffings of beef or cabbage enhanced with onions and spices, cheese, and vegetables.

American chefs have taken the idea and run with it. **Joseph Gabriel**, pastry chef at **Pluckemin Inn Restaurant** in Bedminster, New Jersey, layers in *panko* (Japanese bread crumbs) for textural contrast. At **The Biltmore Room** in New York City, executive chef **Gary Robbins** and pastry chef **Philippe Leyris** play crisp Riesling-poached Asian pears off soft and chewy coconut milk-flavored glutinous rice, roasted chestnuts, and candied ginger. And at **Danube** in New York City, **Alex Grumert** fashions a towering improvisation on the dish by layering baked squares of laminated strudel dough with frozen caramel custard and poached Bartlett pears, drizzling them with balsamic vinegar, and serving Riesling sorbet alongside.

Meanwhile, back in Vienna, its popularity has not diminished. **Hotel Sacher** executive chef **Hans Peter Fink** and his team produce 110 pounds of strudel dough daily for the hotel's selection, which includes apple, cream, cherry, pear, rhubarb, and grape.

Austrian native **Wolfgang Ban**, who attended the Worlds of Flavor Baking and Pastry Arts Invitational Retreat at The Culinary Institute of America's Greystone campus in St. Helena, California

(see "Sweet Retreat," page 78), at the invitation of *Food Arts*, usually cooks for parties of 12 to 20 guests two or three times a week. He prepares both savory (mushroom, potato, spinach, ham and cheese, cabbage) and sweet (apricots, cherries, seasonal berries) renditions, the latter as sampler plates alongside other Austrian desserts such as *Kaiserschmarren* and fruit dumplings. As co-executive chef (with **Edward Frauneder**) of the German Mission to the United Nations, he is often asked to prepare a strudel buffet, a sort of power lunch for the embassy crowd. Here he demos the apple strudel he makes as chef to the Austrian ambassador to the United Nations. ▶

