

Pride of Place

In Zagreb, the hottest tables are the ones that put Croatian cooking front and center.

By Kristin Vuković



◀ A dish of carrot carpaccio with sour cream, cumin, and young lettuce sprouts at Noel.

▶ Strolling Tkalčićeva Street in central Zagreb.



THE CROATIAN CAPITAL'S food scene reflects the diversity of the country's historic and cultural influences, which range from Austrian and Hungarian to Italian and Turkish. But in the past few years, a handful of Zagreb-based chefs have placed greater emphasis on their national cuisine, designing innovative tasting menus around a common philosophy: looking back at one's roots is sometimes the best way forward.

At **Nav** (tasting menu \$126), chef Tvrtko Šakota researches forgotten Croatian dishes and re-creates them using modern techniques and organic or biodynamic ingredients. The restaurant opened in 2019 in a former stable in the city center.

Growing up, Šakota's parents made their own miso and inspired his love of fermenting. "We are using a lot of techniques that came from Japan," Šakota told me before I sat down for dinner. Over the course of 14 artfully plated

FROM LEFT: MARINA RENDULIĆ/COURTESY OF NOEL; J. DUVAL/COURTESY OF ZAGREB TOURIST BOARD



dishes, his showmanship included a tableside demonstration of smoking young carrots over coals, *robata*-style, and a trompe l'oeil of specialties from different parts of Croatia. One standout dish was presented as a *nigiri*, featuring an amaranth-and-buckwheat base topped with young spring asparagus, olive oil from Dubrovnik, lemon from Vis, and shavings of cheese from the island of Pag. The experience felt highly personal—not least because Šakota serves only 10 to 12 guests each night.

At **Theatrium by Filho** (*entrées* \$14–\$54), a lunch spot that also debuted in the city center in 2019, chef-owner Filip Horvat changes his menu daily, personally sourcing produce at the city's Dolac Market each morning. My meal began with a riff on *čevapčići* (grilled finger-size rolls of seasoned ground meat, a Croatian staple) that was made with wild Adriatic bluefin tuna and served in a *bao* bun with *kaymak*, a condiment of horseradish cream, spring onion, and chili. Horvat's savory "ice cream" sandwich is built from cheese crackers and a filling made of Drniš prosciutto and Pag cheese.

Zagreb's reinterpretation of traditional cuisine is also reflected in the city's only Michelin-starred restaurant, **Noel** (*tasting menu* \$192), which has been led by executive chef Bruno Vokal since 2020. His approach is exemplified in his signature *štrukli*, tender ravioli filled with cottage cheese and sandwiched between baked and dehydrated milk chips.

For the finale of my tasting menu, he condensed two classic Croatian desserts into bite-size servings: *Međimurska gibanica*, a layer cake from the north of the country, became a ball of phyllo pastry with walnuts, fresh cheese, apples, and poppy seeds, covered with dehydrated sour cream chips. And *Korčula klašun*, a type of cookie from the island of Korčula, was presented as a shortcrust pastry ball filled with almonds and rose water. "For me this food has a huge sentimental value because these dishes are often made in my home," Vokal told me. "They always remind me of my origins and of kindness."

COURTESY OF MO'S CRIB



◀ Michelle (left) and Mo Mokone at their warehouse in Pretoria, South Africa.

A Tisket, a Tasket

The homewares brand Mo's Crib is well known in South Africa. Now available from U.S. retailers, it's finding a whole new audience. **By Jalyn Robinson**

IF YOU'VE STAYED at the Silo Hotel in Cape Town or a Singita Lodge elsewhere in South Africa, you may have seen elegant woven baskets tucked discreetly under a sink or by a bedside. These are the work of Mo and Michelle Mokone, the sisters behind the Pretoria-based décor company **Mo's Crib**.

Their story began in 2015, when Michelle, an agricultural economist, asked Mo, an origami artist, to go with her to **Kamers Makers**, Africa's largest pop-up art market, in Pretoria. "I saw someone making roses from newspaper," Mo recalls, "and thought, *I should come exhibit my origami swans*." The sisters returned the next year with something different: storage baskets made from recycled PVC. To make them, they gathered discarded plastic water pipes from construction sites, landfills, and manufacturers, then heated them, cut them into thin strips, and wove them into baskets.

This innovation paid off: the sisters won the market's best

new product award, which led to the launch of Mo's Crib in 2016. Today, their laundry and storage baskets, place mats, trays, plant pots, and wall art—some of which are made from natural fibers like the sisal plant—are found in major retail stores around South Africa and online. In 2021, they began distributing in the United States through Crate & Barrel and, this past January, at Target.

Some designs, like the "spark orange" baskets, are a celebration of South Africa's vibrant visual culture, Mo says. In contrast, the sisters' signature black-and-white line—which they say represents different races coming together—is inspired by Ubuntu, a humanist concept that translates to "I am because you are."

In September, the sisters will debut a new basket made from banana-tree bark at Crate & Barrel. But their ambitions don't stop there. "We would really like to have our own retail stores," Michelle says. "I want to one day look back and say, 'This was a dream, and now it's here.'"