

René Frank **CODA** DESSERT BAR

When Oliver Bischoff and René Frank opened CODA Dessert Bar in Berlin in the middle of last year, they were taking a step into the unknown. CODA is not a restaurant – it's a dessert bar. Their signature style is a paired menu of desserts and matching drinks. It's a completely new idea for Germany, and shortly after they opened they were awarded the Rolling Pin Award for gastronomy concept of the year 2016. But winning awards is one thing – a business like this needs to bring in enough guests in order to be successful. Was the German public ready for a new kind of dining experience?

photo credit: white kitchen berlin



CODA's goal is to make food into an experience for all the senses. It's a concept that runs through their breathtaking dessert creations and carefully selected drinks, as well as the design of the bar and the relaxing atmosphere of the dining area. The bar is the result of a collaboration between restaurant designer Oliver Bischoff and famous pâtissier René Frank. Their menu follows the concept of food pairing: for every dessert, a carefully selected drink offers the ideal accompaniment. Diners can order from the à la Carte selection or go for a 6-course tasting extravaganza, and a full range of experimental drinks rounds off the experience perfectly.

World famous pâtissier René Frank previously worked at the 3-Michelin-Star La Vie in Osnabrück, as well as the Zirbelstube in Stuttgart, Akelarre in San Sebastián, Lampart's in Switzerland and Georges Blanc in France, all of them Michelin Star restaurants. He refined his sense of taste by training in Alain Ducasse's school and the Culinary Institute of America in New York and Napa Valley. He has been named Pâtissier of the Year multiple times (including Gault Millau 2013 and Busche 2016) and has worked in some of the world's finest kitchens from Barcelona to Tokyo, and last year he took the next logical step and collaborated with Oliver Bischoff and a top team to bring his new culinary concept to life. And with word of mouth spreading fast, and reservations made weeks and months in advance, it's safe to say that Berlin has found its sweet tooth at CODA.

— INTERVIEW —

How would you describe your style of dessert? What makes your creations so special, beyond their creativity – is it the flavors or the ingredients you use?

The most important aspect for me, in combination with the experience of eating the dessert, is that everything is light and feels effortless.

Do you have to have a sweet tooth to book a table in CODA?

Well you have to like dessert, certainly, but dessert doesn't have to always be sweet. We work a lot with vegetables and cheese. The drinks are also very important for us.

You trained as a chef. What was it that made you decide to specialize in desserts?

It's always been a passion for me – desserts, chocolate and pâtisserie in general. In the past, the pâtissier was not as well regarded in the industry as he is now.

You've cooked all over the globe, in some of the best Michelin-Star kitchens in the world, but where did you find the courage to open a dessert bar? Were you always confident your concept would do well?

I really just wanted to do something different, and be ready to break a few taboos. Honestly, I really didn't worry about it too much. When I met Oliver, there were two of us that believed in the project. That was enough. We really just went for it with CODA, we bet everything and rolled the dice.

Tell me about the name CODA. What does it mean for you and why did you choose it?

We're focused here on re-interpreting the classical concept of a dessert. In classical music, the CODA of a piece is the end, the

finale, just as a dessert is the grand finale of a meal. CODA is the perfect place to end a perfect evening.

Do you have a lot of guests from the creative industry and media?

Yes, actually we do. CODA is a fearless place, a place driven by inspiration. It's about the experience, more than just eating because you're hungry. A full meal made up of only modern dessert courses is a new way to eat.

How would you describe your ideal guest?

We're actually very lucky – we have a lot of ideal guests every day. You need to be open to trying new things, to the unknown. Ideally, don't think about it too much – just sit back and let us do our thing. That's the best way to make your visit to CODA unforgettable.

How often do you change the menu at CODA?

Every month, we change one or two items on the menu.

Do you have any favorite ingredients that you use again and again?

There are a few basic ingredients. Classical pâtisserie uses a lot of sugar, milk, cream, eggs and butter. We're a little different. For sure, sometimes we use an egg or some cream, we have nothing against that. But basically we build our dishes on unconventional ingredients, for example we make our own tofu out of soy milk; we use nut milks and root vegetables that have their own sweetness.

What role do the drinks play in your concept? Is it just about alcohol?

We work a lot with alcoholic drinks, sure. We see ourselves as a bar, not a restaurant, and it's always more fun to end the evening with a drink that without one. We do have alcohol-free drinks on

the menu. The most important thing is the ingredients – all our juices and other ingredients are fresh, whenever possible.

When you develop a new dessert, what comes first? The flavor experience or the visual composition?

The most important thing is always the natural flavor of the dish – if you use great ingredients, that's usually enough. The visual presentation is also very important for us, too. At the end of the day, we never do anything just because it looks good.

How did you approach the design of your ESCADA dessert?

What was your idea and what were you inspired by? What does this special creation say? My first inspiration was the season – so, what's available in Fall/Winter? What's fresh and in season? That's what brought us to beetroot and cranberries. It had to be light and elegant, so we decided to eliminate dairy products and use soymilk and tofu. Incidentally, this dessert is lactose and gluten free, and actually vegan. That wasn't part of the plan; it just happens that way when you work with different ingredients.

What are your unbreakable rules of cooking?

It has to be effortless. Always use the best, the most natural and highest-quality ingredients. And never ignore your own sense of taste.

Do you have more goals in life that you haven't yet achieved?

I want to inspire others with CODA, particularly when it comes to how we consume sweet food. I would be really happy if classic dessert and pastry cooking sometime took the next step forwards.

You know the restaurant scene all around the world. Do you have any top tips for the best restaurants that our readers should visit?

Oh, there are so many. Too many to list them on a page of your magazine! What I would say is that a food tour through Japan and its restaurants is an incredible experience. Anyone who's passionate about food has to go there.

Before you came to Berlin, you lived all over the world. What are your favorite places and cities?

Definitely Japan and more specifically, Kyoto.

Working in gastronomy is known to be a very stressful life. How do you relax after a long day at work?

I find sport and good food are a good way to unwind. But it's not easy to get the balance right!

ESCADA DESSERT "FALL / WINTER 2017"

Beetroot • Cranberry • Soymilk • Lime

Serves: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

BEEFROOT SORBET

150g fresh beetroot juice
50g dextrose
1/2g locust bean gum*
100g cooked beetroot
(boil the beetroot bulbs in water until soft, then measure 100g of cooked beetroot)
75g reduced beetroot juice
(reduced from 750g fresh beetroot juice)
100g marinated cranberries (see recipe right)
200g raspberries (fresh or frozen)
50g golden syrup or light treacle
70g lime juice
Grated zest of an unwaxed lime
10g raspberry brandy

MARINATED CRANBERRIES

500g fresh cranberries
200g raw cane sugar
375g water
6g salt
1/4 vanilla pod
Peeled zest of 3 unwaxed oranges, removed with a speed peeler
Peeled zest of 3 unwaxed lemons, removed with a speed peeler

BEEFROOT GLOBES

3 large organic beetroots
1g salt

SOYMILK FOAM

325g coconut milk (21% fat)
470g unsweetened soymilk (see recipe right)
100g agave syrup
10g agar gum*
2g salt
60g lime juice
Grated zest of an unwaxed lime

UNSWEETENED SOYMILK

100g organic soybeans, softened overnight in water
900g water

PREPARATION

1 To make the beetroot sorbet, mix together the dextrose and gum and add to the beetroot juice. Add this juice and all remaining ingredients to a food processor and blend until smooth. Pass the mix through a sieve and put the sieved juice into an ice-cream machine. Freeze when finished.

2 To make the marinated cranberries, prick the cranberries with a skewer and set aside in a large bowl. Mix together the sugar, water, salt, vanilla and citrus peel and bring to the boil. Pour boiling mixture over the cranberries. Allow to sit for 5 minutes, then cool down. Cover and marinate in the fridge for at least 12 hours.

3 To make the beetroot globes, wash and peel the beetroots. Use an 18mm Parisienne scoop (melon baller) to remove globes of beetroot. Keep 200g of perfect globes. Use the remaining beetroot to make juice. Put the beetroot globes, 150g of beetroot juice and salt in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 5-10 minutes until the beetroot is soft. Drain the beetroot and place in a container with 300ml of leftover cranberry marinade (see recipe above) for 24 hours.

4 To make the soymilk foam, mix together coconut milk, soymilk, syrup, agar and salt in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 1 minute. Allow to cool and blend until smooth. Add lime juice and zest and blend until very smooth. Pass through a sieve and pour into a whipped cream dispenser. Store in the fridge for at least 6 hours before using.

5 To make the unsweetened soymilk, drain and rinse the soybeans. Put the soybeans in a food processor with the fresh water and blend until smooth. Strain through a muslin cloth, reserving the liquid that comes through. You should now have a milky liquid. Bring this to the boil and simmer gently for 7 minutes. Use a spoon to remove any foam that forms on the surface. Now your soymilk is ready to use.

6 To serve: Add soymilk foam to the plate, then one spoon each of marinated beetroot globes and marinated cranberries. Garnish with a pinch of crushed hazelnuts and top with a scoop of beetroot sorbet.

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*(a thickening agent – available in specialist food stores)

www.coda-berlin.com