



Switzerland

WHERE ON EARTH

Haus Hiltl

The World's Oldest Vegetarian Restaurant

The roots of the world's oldest continuously operating vegetarian restaurant run a century deep but it's already setting plant-based trends for its next century.»

by ELYSE GLICKMAN

THE WORLD'S OLDEST VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT

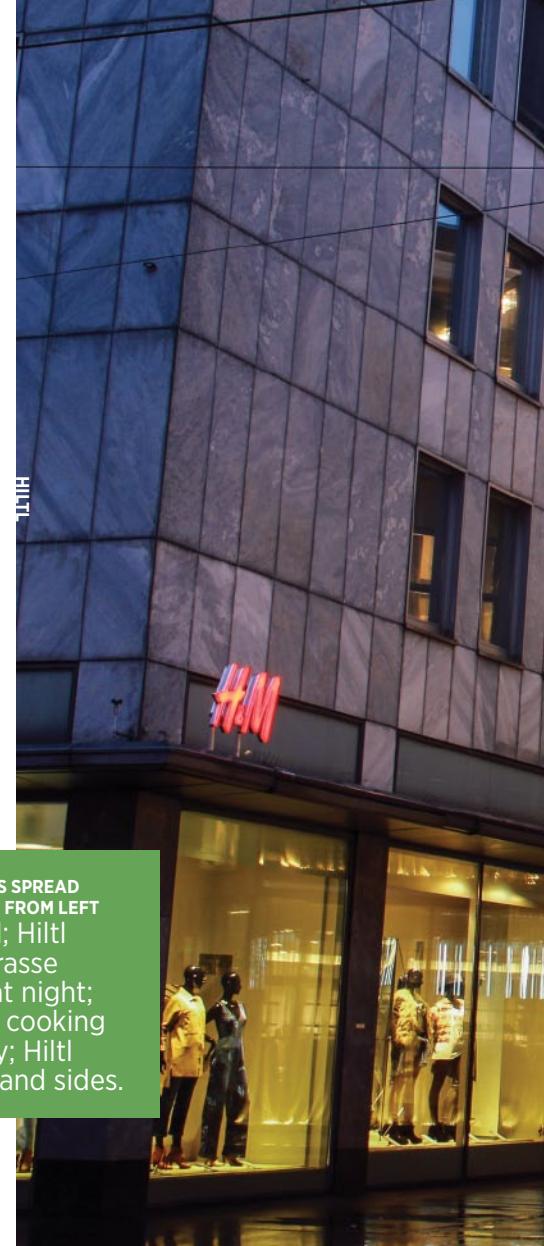
DINING

SWITZERLAND

PHOTO THIS PAGE
Haus Hiltl's
library.



BRUNO AUGSBURGER



HILTL

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Rolf Hiltl; Hiltl
Dachterrasse
branch at night;
The Hiltl cooking
academy; Hiltl
burgers and sides.

«There will always be cynics who view vegan and vegetarian restaurants as a product of the 1960s and 70s, and others who consider them niche or overly trendy. Imagine what happened when tailor Ambrosius Hiltl decided to open a vegetarian restaurant in Zurich in 1898.

Even with lots of trial and error in making the concept a viable business, Ambrosius charged on, partially for personal and practical reasons: His doctor urged him to give up meat completely after a bout of rheumatism in 1901 that almost took his life.

By 1907, Ambrosius Hiltl and wife Martha Gneupel (who poured her strict vegetarian upbringing into her role as the cook) laid down permanent roots by buying the building at 28 Sihlstrasse. Some wrote off the restaurant as a fad, even calling it a “root bunker.” However, it ultimately became one of the most enduring multi-generational family-owned restaurant enterprises in Europe. It’s even documented as such by Guinness World Records.

One strategy that has enabled Hiltl to thrive is taking an inclusive approach. According to Rolf Hiltl, it has never been part of his plan to cater exclusively to the needs of vegans and vegetarians. Instead, he prefers to educate the public at large about the benefits of adding more plant-based foods to any diet. From the buffet to the menu, all restaurants in the Hiltl family successfully present the case that plant-based food does not have to be bland, boring or intimidating.

“I don’t use ‘-isms’ because they are difficult,” says Hiltl. “I talk about a plant-based nutrition. We don’t communicate this out loud, but make this simple to understand: The goal is to want to make good gastronomy for all the senses. Visitors from outside of Switzerland who come and dine with us realize afterwards that they actually ate and loved vegetarian or even vegan foods like our Vegan Egg Salad or Hiltl Tartare. Healthy indulgence without being moralizers, that is our claim.”»



...Plant-based food does not have to be bland...



DAVID BIEDERT





M. STEGMANN

SERVES 4

Lemongrass & Coconut Soup

A RECIPE from Hiltl's cookbook *Vegan Love Story*.

Oyster Mushrooms

200 g

Neutral Flavoured Vegetable Oil

2 Tbs

Cherry Tomatoes

6

Fresh Galangal

3 Tbs

Shallots

3

Small Green Chillies

3

Lemongrass

3 stalks

Kaffir Lime Leaves

8

Coconut Milk

4 cups

Vegetable Stock

3 1/3 cups

Limes

juice of 2

Soy Sauce

4 Tbs

Raw Cane Sugar

1-2 Tbs

Salt

to taste

Cilantro

1 bunch

- 1 **CLEAN** the oyster mushrooms and pull apart into fine strips.
- 2 **HEAT** oil in a pan and fry the mushrooms until golden brown. Put to one side.
- 3 **WASH** and prepare the tomatoes and cut in half.
- 4 **PEEL** the galangal and cut into thin strips.
- 5 **PEEL** the shallots and cut into fine strips.
- 6 **CLEAN** the chillies and chop finely, and if you don't want it to be too spicy, remove the seeds.
- 7 **BASH** the lemongrass stalks flat on the lower end and cut into 4-cm pieces.
- 8 **CUT** the kaffir lime leaves in half.
- 9 **BRING** the coconut milk and vegetable stock to the boil in a pan.
- 10 **ADD** the galangal, shallots, chillies, lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves and cook everything for 10 minutes.
- 11 **SEASON** the soup with lime juice, soy sauce, raw cane sugar and salt and cook for a further 10 minutes.
- 12 **REMOVE** the lemongrass shortly before serving.
- 13 **ADD** the oyster mushrooms and the tomatoes to the soup and heat up again.
- 14 **FINELY** chop the fresh cilantro, sprinkle it on the soup and serve.

«Although the flagship Haus Hiltl restaurant still occupies 28 Sihlstrasse, one would never guess it has existed for more than a century, and in different iterations as subsequent generations of Hiltls made their mark. Everything from the vast global menu to its international army of cooks, impressive semi-open concept kitchen, cooking classes and decor would make a vegan wish for a US branch attracting lines around the block. The same is true for its Hiltl Vegimetzg (vegan butcher shop), opened in 2013 around the corner. Here, conscientious eaters can purchase gourmet plant-based Hiltl Tartare, traditional Züri Geschnetzeltes (made with plant-based chicken), burgers, meatballs, Cordon Bleu and other restaurant best sellers as well as condiments, baked goods and sustainable wines from nearby Zurich wineries.

At some points before the pandemic, 4th-generation owner/CEO Rolf Hiltl had mulled over some “US concepts.” However, Patrick Becker, head of marketing and long-time member of the Hiltl Executive Board, says Hiltl will make a bigger impact by setting an example for the rest of the plant-based restaurant world at large to follow. Recent changes at Haus Hiltl that have travelled to other Swiss locales include converting several recipes from vegetarian to vegan by swapping out some ingredients as well as keeping a finger on the pulse of international food trends. As a result, several Korean items have been added to its offerings. Among chefs and management, the goal is to make newer vegan versions of the recipes taste at least as good if not better than the vegetarian originals.

“The Hiltl Buffet is now 72% vegan, and many of our regular customers don’t even know it,” says Becker with a wry smile. “It’s



PHOTOS
THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM
BOTTOM LEFT
Hiltl Tartare;
Buffet at Hiltl
Langstrasse;
Masala Chai.



important to note that as 80% of our customers are flexitarian and focused on eating healthier, we are not so much focused on the moral aspects of veganism. We are focused on introducing everybody to delicious, plant-based foods that are so good — like our egg salad — that omnivores would never guess is plant based. Vegan customers, meanwhile, will appreciate being able to eat an old favourite they had to give up."

A lot of the magic one sees inside the first floor restaurant takes root inside the Hiltl Academy, on the fifth floor of the Haus Hiltl building. Becker points out that virtual Hiltl classes filmed inside the "Martha" kitchen during the pandemic became so popular that they will be offered after things go back to normal. And while both modular kitchens serve as classrooms for the general public, professional chefs, corporate team building events and niche classes for groups like middle school home economics teachers, the academy operates as test kitchen for the restaurants and shop.

"Our chefs and cooks develop new recipes as well as improving existing ones," Becker says. "As there's a big push in Switzerland on reducing sugar in one's diet, we've pursued reducing sugar content in many Hiltl recipes and seeing if we can reduce gluten and other allergens. Since 2014, we've had between 20 and 30 new dishes introduced that have stayed in regular rotation."

"We always try to do something new like our online cooking classes or our planted.bistro by Hiltl, our first purely plant-based»



SERVES 4 Stroganoff

A RECIPE from Hiltl's cookbook Meat the Green.

Seitan 250 g

**Brown Button
Mushrooms**

100 g

Shiitake Mushrooms
100 g

Oyster Mushrooms
100 g

Red Bell Peppers
2 small

Gherkins 2

Onion 1 small

Olive Oil 2 Tbs

Cognac 2 Tbs

Sweet Paprika 4 tsp

Chilli Powder
2 pinches

Red Wine 200 ml

Vegetable Stock
200 ml

Vegan Cream 200 ml

**Salt and Freshly
Ground Pepper**
to taste

Chives ½ bunch

**Vegan Whipping
Cream or Vegan
Cream Cheese**
4 Tbs

1 USE a knife or a mandolin to slice the seitan into very thin strips.

2 CLEAN the mushrooms and cut into quarters.

3 CHOP off and discard the shiitake mushrooms' tough stalks.

4 SLICE the peppers and gherkins into strips, and finely chop the onions.

5 HEAT the oil, and over a high heat fry the seitan and mushrooms in batches.

6 ONCE everything is fried, put all the seitan and mushrooms back into the pan, pour in the cognac and simmer until the cognac has boiled down.

7 ADD the pepper, gherkin and onion and continue to fry. Then season with the paprika and chilli powder and add the red wine.

8 REDUCE the liquid for 5 minutes.

9 ADD the vegetable stock and vegan cream and reduce the sauce until you have the desired consistency, then season with salt and pepper.

10 FINELY chop the chives and then add a dollop of vegan whipped cream or vegan cream cheese.

CHEF TIP: Goes well with rösti, brown rice or thin pasta.



SERVES 4

Züri Geschnetzeltes

ACCORDING TO chef Rolf Hiltl, this *tofu geschnetzeltes*, served with *rösti* or *pasta*, is as good as the meat version of this classic Zurich dish.

Button Mushrooms
400 g

Sunflower Oil 2 Tbs

Firm Tofu 500 g, sliced

Butter 25 g

Onion 1 medium, finely chopped

Tomato Purée 1 Tbs

White Wine 200 ml

Cognac a dash

Double Cream 400 ml

Vegetable Stock 150 ml

Fresh Lemon Juice
1 Tbs

Sea Salt and **Freshly Ground Black Pepper**
to taste

- 1 **CLEAN** the mushrooms and slice thinly.
- 2 **HEAT** the oil, gently fry the tofu over low heat and set aside.
- 3 **IN** the same pan, heat the butter and gently fry the onion until golden brown, taking care not to burn it.
- 4 **ADD** the mushrooms and tomato purée and continue to fry. Add the white wine and cognac, stirring while the liquid reduces.
- 5 **ADD** the cream and vegetable stock, and continue to cook until the sauce has the required consistency.
- 6 **LASTLY**, add the tofu and season with lemon juice, sea salt and pepper.

«restaurant, which we planned together with Planted, a start-up with many young people from the ETH, a public science and engineering-focused research university in Zürich, which exudes a lot of Swissness and innovation,» affirms Hiltl. «That's why we got involved and supported them with our gastronomy experience, and became the first member of the board. It is exciting that the planted.bistro by Hiltl is located at the production site of Planted in 'The Valley,' our own food version of Silicon Valley, which is small in size but huge in potential.»

While Planted and its meat alternatives have branched out to sell in other countries, another Hiltl innovation worth noting is taking the "locally sourced" concept as far as it can go to further reduce carbon

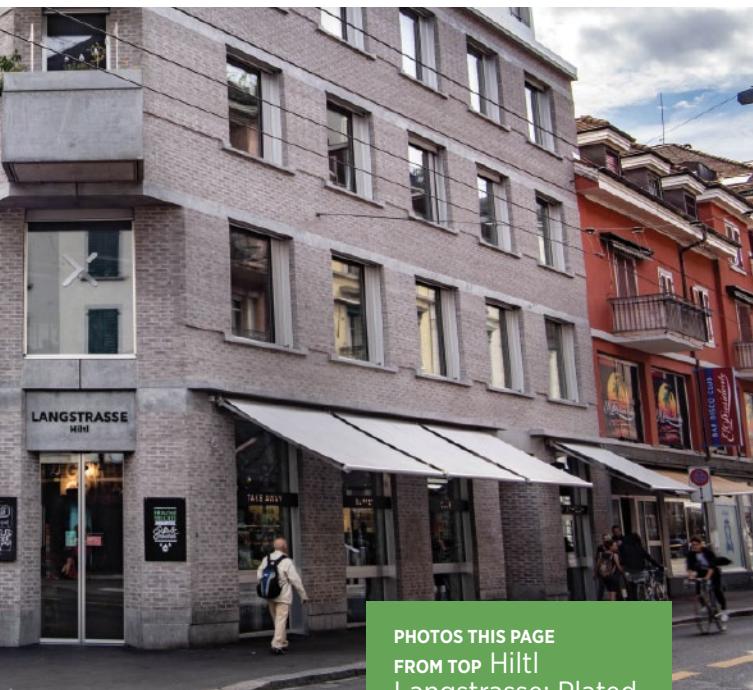


footprint. Becker, Rolf Hiltl and their colleagues decided guacamole had to go as importing avocados was at odds with the company objective to obtain greater sustainability. The perfected "Pea-mole," in turn, has been so well received that Becker insists guests don't miss the guacamole. Other recipes involving imported produce are being adjusted accordingly.

"We get cooks, chefs and restaurateurs from all over the world enrolling for our specialized cooking classes for professionals, as they appreciate how we have approached plant-based cooking," Becker affirms. "In Switzerland, and other countries, if you want to be a professional cook, one would have to know how to cook with meat. However, things are changing, and the professionals are finding that our 100-plus years of wisdom in cooking vegan and vegetarian dishes with the highest standards will serve them in their own establishments as their customers' tastes and health goals change."

In the meantime, if Switzerland is not in your travel plans, Rolf Hiltl encourages anybody interested a plant-based lifestyle or adding more plant-based home menu options to drop by the "Haus" virtually. To get started, he offers some samplings of what one will find in the restaurant's internationally popular cookbooks, including the just-released *Meat the Green*, inspired by its innovative and cruelty-free "butcher" shop. Social media also offers not only a taste of Haus Hiltl but a sampling of things to come around the world in plant-based eating.

"We share our know-how on Instagram or Twitter in English, showing that we welcome followers from all over the world," he says. "You can also book our online cooking classes for individuals, groups and even company retreats. In addition to our website, you can find our books available for sale on Amazon. We are happy to inspire people all over the world with our healthy indulgence... and maybe, with the fifth Hiltl generation, there will be a Hiltl restaurant in Los Angeles or Toronto after all!" 



PHOTOS THIS PAGE
FROM TOP Hiltl
Langstrasse; Plated
dishes at Hiltl
cooking academy.



SWITZERLAND

MAKES 25 BROWNIES

The Best Brownies in Zurich

A RECIPE from Hiltl's cookbook *Virtual Vegetarian*.

Butter 360 g

Dark Couverture with Vanilla¹
500 g, grated

Large Eggs 500 g

Salt a pinch

Brown Sugar 540 g

Vanilla Sugar
½ tsp

Shelled Walnuts
300 g

Wholewheat Flour
360 g

Butter for the tin

¹ Such as Callebaut.

1 **MELT** the butter and vanilla couverture in a small pan on the lowest heat.

2 **BEAT** the eggs, salt, brown sugar and vanilla sugar till they are light and fluffy.

3 **CAREFULLY** fold the egg mixture into the butter and chocolate mixture.

4 **FOLD** in the flour and the walnuts.

5 **PREHEAT** the oven to 180°C.

6 **GENEROUSLY** butter the baking tin.

7 **SPOON** the brownie mixture into the tin and spread smoothly.

8 **BAKE** for about 35 minutes in the lower third of the oven (about 5 minutes less in a convection oven).

9 **LEAVE** to cool, and then cut into 4 cm square pieces.

There are several Hiltl restaurants and partner restaurants in Switzerland. For details on classes and happenings, visit www.hiltl.ch/en



ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.