

Executive Pastry Chef Nick Malgieri Article



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Nick Malgieri is the national spokesperson for the Switzerland Tourism Gastronomy and Wine program. After culinary school in the United States, he apprenticed in Switzerland and has maintained close ties with the country ever since through frequent visits. A frequent traveler to other destinations, he collects recipes everywhere. Below is a sample of some of the recipes from his book, *A Baker's Tour: Nick Malgieri's Favorite Baking Recipes from Around the World* (HarperCollins, October 2005).

Additional information on Nick Malgieri: www.nickmalgieri.com 

Zermatt

In the shadow of the iconic Matterhorn, the village of Zermatt is one of Switzerland's most popular destinations. Its ideal situation in the Matter Valley provides excellent opportunities for mountaineering, skiing, and hiking; and its proximity to Italy (about 6 miles) as well as the bi-lingual French and German traditions of the surrounding Valais canton have created a food culture as diverse as the Matterhorn is tall.

With only about 6,000 permanent residents, Zermatt is home to many world-class hotels and restaurants providing lodging and meals for its thousands of yearly visitors. Two of Switzerland's most valuable commodities, cheese and wine, are in abundance. The Valais is not only the birthplace of fondue's first cousin raclette, a dish of melted mountain cheese served with potatoes and pickles, but also the home of the country's best quality wines.

Aside from all the spectacular mountain views, year-round sports, and dining experiences both elegant and casual, Zermatt also offers visitors a pollution-free stay. The only internal-combustion engines in the town are in police and emergency vehicles; small electric buses shuttle visitors from hotels to the village and cover several routes through the village itself. A visit to Zermatt is always memorable and always, unfortunately, too short.



Raclette

Any visit to Zermatt or any other place in the Valais must include a raclette meal. Best for lunch since it's on the rich side, raclette is made from melted alpine cheese served with steamed or boiled new potatoes and small pickled gherkins and onions. Sometimes the meal starts with a selection of traditional cured meats including the Valais versions of air-dried beef, prosciutto, and dried sausages. Afterwards you'll be served a basket or bowl of the cooked potatoes wrapped in a napkin to keep them warm and a bowl of the tangy pickles. A corner of the dining room is reserved for melting the cheese on special grills that hold a half-wheel so that the cut side is facing upward under a heated element. Then the cheese is tilted or lifted off and the melted portion is scraped onto a heated plate and quickly served. You help yourself to potatoes and pickles and make up your own combinations of the three as you're repeatedly served more portions of freshly-melted cheese. It's a great relaxing way to enjoy the Valais' most famous traditional food in a completely unhurried way.

In Zermatt, everyone flocks to the Restaurant Stadel, right in the center of the village, for raclette, fondue, and other great alpine specialties. They feature a 42 franc menu that includes air-dried meats to start, unlimited raclette and all the trimmings, and mercifully, a fruit salad or sherbet for dessert. Other cheese specialties and wild game in season make the Stadel a fine choice.

Restaurant Stadel
Bahnhofstrasse 45
Phone: 011 4127 967 3636

www.restaurant-stadel.ch 

The Singing Chef

Not many restaurant chef/owners anywhere else can boast about having recorded duets with a former member of the singing group ABBA as Zermatt-born Dan Daniell has. His restaurant, Chez Heini, also right in the village, is also the scene of a nightly show which is also broadcast via his website, below. And as if that weren't enough, the food is also superb. The area around Zermatt is sheep-grazing country as well as alpine cow pastures, and Chez Heini features some of the best lamb specialties in town. Burgundian vineyard snails (the Valais used to be part of Burgundy) and a salad of ewe's milk cheese, tomatoes, and olives are other menu items that shine. The nightly show begins around 10PM, so dine on the late side if you wish to stay for it.

Chez Heini

Phone: 011 4127 967 1630

www.dandaniell.ch 

Some of Zermatt's Top Tables

The elegant and newly-renovated Hotel Mirabeau is the home of Restaurant Le Corbeau d'Or, whose chef Alain Kuster has garnered more Gault Millau points than anyone else in Zermatt. Open only for dinner and closed Mondays, this is the perfect spot for a celebration meal while visiting

Hotel Mirabeau

Untere Mattenstrasse 12

Phone: 011 4127 966 2669

E-mail: info@hotel-mirabeau.ch

www.hotel-mirabeau.ch 

Silvio and Doris Perren-Zimmermann run the charming Hotel Excelsior and its equally cozy restaurant, La Ferme. Owner Doris excels in tableside cooking and she'll happily prepare filet of beef with a wild mushroom sauce or flaming lamb medallions before your eyes. The hotel also has several comfortable bar areas.

Hotel Excelsior/La Ferme

Hofmattstrasse 36

Phone: 011 4127 966 3500

E-mail: excelsior.zermatt@reconline.ch

www.excelsior-zermatt.ch 

For a great Italian dinner, both locals and visitors favor Viktoria Nuovo – after all, Italy is only a few miles away. The antipasti buffet is well-known and the pasta dishes, a selection of classic and contemporary choices, are the best around. Centrally located too, Viktoria Nuovo is a great place for a light meal if you haven't worked up a big appetite on the slopes.

Viktoria Nuovo

Bahnhofplatz 4

Phone: 011 4127 966 2866

E-mail: rest.viktoria@rhone.ch

www.rhone.ch/rest-viktoria 

A little outside the town, Chez Vrony is reachable via ski lift or road. A typical mountain chalet of the Valais, the restaurant features organically-raised beef and produce from the owners' own property. Well known for its buttery roesti and its raclette kicked up a notch with truffle oil, Chez Vrony scores high on the lists of repeat visitors to Zermatt. Plus you can ski right up to the door...

Chez Vrony

Findeln (in the Sunnegga Paradise ski area)

Phone: 0114127 967 2552

E-mail: info@chezvrony.ch

www.chezvrony.ch 

Zum See's (At the Lake) tiny kitchen produces some of the most carefully-prepared food in Zermatt. A look at the menu means you'll have difficult choices to make among the restaurant's home-grown salads, crisp roesti, and an abundance of pasta and meat dishes. Wild mushrooms adorn the menu selections in season.

Zum See

Weiler Zum See (outside Zermatt)

Phone: 011 4127 967 2045

E-mail: info@zumsee.ch

www.zumsee.ch 

For some real Swiss soulfood like a crisply-grilled bratwurst with roesti or a kaeseschnitte (like an open-face grilled cheese sandwich), ski no farther than Ritti. The owner, Max, is reputed to make the best apple strudel in Zermatt.

Restaurant Ritti, accessible only via hiking trail or on skis

On the Gornergrat descent (near Furi)

Phone: 011 4127 967 1482

Sweet Zermatt

No Swiss town is complete without a couple for great places for bread, pastry, and chocolate, and Zermatt is no exception. These are a couple of favorites.

Bacherie/Konditorei Fuchs

I can never make up my mind if it's the authentic Valais rye bread, great cakes and pastries, or the exquisite chocolates that make Fuchs (Fox) so wonderful. With 3 locations in Zermatt, you can try a little in each. The café features great coffee and light meals and don't leave without a box of Matterhoerli – little chocolate Matterhorns.

Fuchs

Getwingstrasse 24

Bahnhofstrasse 72

Kirchstrasse 46

www.fuchs-zermatt.ch 

Boite a Chocolat

“The Chocolate Box” is an appropriate name for this café and chocolate shop. Recently opened, it has already won the hearts of Zermatt residents. Owner Marie-Christine Taugwalder prepares tartlets, cookies, and chocolates that rival the best anywhere.

Boite a Chocolat

Bahnhofstrasse 7B

www.boiteachocolat.ch 

Visiting a Cheese-Making Dairy

During ski season you can see real alpine cheeses being made right in the village of Zermatt at the Horu-Kaeserei. Mirjam and Reto Gobba-Wyrsh make several varieties of raclette cheese as well as a selection of other local specialties including Zermatter Kraeuterkaese flavored with alpine herbs. Phone ahead for the best times to visit since the cheese is only actually made once a day.

Horu-Kaeserei

Oberhaeusern 6

Phone: 011 4127 967 3975

www.horu-kaeserei.ch 

The best Swiss Wines

The wines of the Valais have long been reputed to be the best in Switzerland and today they can stand shoulder to shoulder with the best of what Burgundy and Bordeaux have to offer. The valley's sheltered situation next to the Rhone River, its light limestone and slate soils, and its highest yearly hours of sunshine in Switzerland all conspire to create an ideal climate for vines. Even up at Visperterminen (over 3,600 feet) the vines thrive in the highest commercial vineyards in Europe. The Valais has over 12,000 acres in vineyards and produces the largest quantity of wine in any single Swiss canton.

Over 40 varieties of grapes are grown for wine making; Chasselas which is made into Switzerland's best-known white wine Fendant, is the predominant white grape. Pinot Noir is the most grown red grape and, with some Gamay added, enters into the making of Dole, Switzerland's best known red wine.

White Wines

Chasselas grapes produce the light and easy-drinking Fendant whose character varies slightly from one vineyard to another due to the vines' ability to adapt to slight differences in soil and micro-climate. In Switzerland, it's the wine of choice with raclette and fondue, light dishes of fresh-water fish and as an aperitif.

Petite Arvine whose parentage is linked to some older varieties of French and Italian grapes, has been grown in the Valais since the 1700s. Producing wines that range from dry to sweet, all Petite Arvine vintages bear the grape's signature hint of a slight saltiness.

Heida, the grape that grows in the heights of Visperterminen, produces a strong and complex white wine. Wine experts theorize that it has been grown in the Valais for over a thousand years. Perfect with stronger flavored fish dishes and cheeses, Valais wine lovers often pair it with wild mushrooms.

Red Wines

Pinot Noir thrives best in the chalky soil around Sierre, and produces wines that can bottle age successfully for up to 8 years. When mixed with Gamay, a mutation of Pinot Noir, it turns into Dole.

Cornalin is another native Valais grape first mentioned in writings from the 14th century. Fruity and brash when young, it acquires grace and smoothness as it ages. This is a wine that stands up to strong dishes of wild game both furred and feathered.

Humagne Rouge, though only introduced a little more than a hundred years ago, has a flavor profile that matches many wines made from Cornalin grapes.

Because of tightly controlled yields per acre, many of the Valais' best wines are never exported – Swiss restaurateurs and consumers in the know buy them up as they appear. Zermatt is a perfect place to enjoy them, adding an unforgettable note of further pleasure to your visit.



Recipe: Gommer Cholera (Cheese and Potato Pie from the Valais)

No one seems to really know how this delicious pie came to be named for a disease. One flimsy explanation states that people stayed indoors and cooked what they had, rather than venturing out to do food shopping during the 1830 cholera epidemic. The village of Goms in the Upper Valais is also well known for the quality of the cheese produced there, but any real Swiss raclette cheese will do nicely.

This makes an excellent brunch or lunch dish with a salad and then some sorbet and crisp cookies for dessert.

Makes one 10-inch pie, about 10 servings

Pastry Dough

2 cups all-purpose flour (spoon flour into dry-measure cup and level off)

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, cold, cut into 12 pieces

2 large eggs

Filling

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter

1 large white onion (about 8 ounces), peeled and finely chopped

2 large leeks (about 12 ounces) trimmed, washed, the white and light green thinly sliced

2 large tart apples (about 1 pound) such as Granny Smith, peeled, halved, cored, and thinly sliced

Salt, pepper, and nutmeg

2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, boiled until tender, cooled, peeled, and sliced

12 ounces Goms or other Swiss raclette cheese, rind removed and thinly sliced

Egg wash: 1 egg well whisked with a pinch of salt

One 2-inch deep 10-inch round cake pan or a 9 1/2-inch deep-dish Pyrex pie pan, buttered

1. For the dough, combine the flour, salt, and baking powder in a food processor and pulse to mix. Add the butter and pulse repeatedly until it is finely mixed in. Add the eggs and continue to pulse until the dough forms a ball. Invert to a floured work surface and carefully remove the blade. Squeeze the dough together and divide it into 2 pieces, one slightly larger than the other. Press each into a disk and refrigerate until you're ready to bake the pie.
2. For the dough, combine the flour, salt, and baking powder in a food processor and pulse to mix. Add the butter and pulse repeatedly until it is finely mixed in. Add the eggs and continue to pulse until the dough forms a ball. Invert to a floured work surface and carefully remove the blade. Squeeze the dough together and divide it into 2 pieces, one slightly larger than the other. Press each into a disk and refrigerate until you're ready to bake the pie.
3. For the filling, melt the butter on medium heat in a sauté pan or Dutch oven with a cover. Add the onion and leeks and cook until they start to sizzle. Lower the heat, cover the pan, and let the vegetables sweat until very soft, about 20 minutes. Add the sliced apples and continue to cook uncovered until the apples are tender and the water has evaporated. Cool slightly and season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg.
4. When you're ready to bake the pie, set a rack in the lowest level of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees.
5. Roll the larger piece of dough on a floured surface and fit it into the pan, letting any excess dough hang over the edge of the pan.
6. Place a layer of half the sliced potatoes into the pan and season sparingly with salt and pepper. Spread half the onion, leek, and apple mixture over them, then top with half the cheese slices. Repeat with the remaining potatoes, onion mixture, and cheese.
7. Trim the excess dough at the rim of the pan to 1/2-inch and fold it in over the filling.
8. Roll the remaining dough to a disk the size of the top of the pie and trim evenly. Arrange on the filling so that the top crust comes right to the edge of the pan. Brush with egg wash and trace a lattice pattern on the pie with the back of a fork.
9. Bake the pie until the crust is deep golden and the filling is well heated through, about 45 minutes.
10. Cool the pie briefly on a rack and serve warm or at room temperature.