

Michelin's Starry Above Night Croatia

Award-winning restaurants Monte, Pelegrini, Draga di Lovrana, Noel and 360 are shrines of Croatian gastronomic tradition, interpreting local ingredients in innovative ways



Danijel and Tjitske Đekić, restaurant Monte

Text Hrvoje Petrić Photos D. Duboković, V. Arevalo & Archives JRE Hrvatska

When in 2017, at the beginning of February, on its Twitter profile, Michelin announced the first star in Croatia, I received a call from the Croatian and Slovenian media on the same day to comment on such a significant event for the Croatian gastronomy. Back then, and today, I find Michelin's arrival of great significance for the promotion and development of our restaurant scene. The truth is Michelin entered the Cro-gastro-arena with the first guide edition a bit awkwardly and not sufficiently prepared. The sceptics doubted its reputation, but regardless, I believe it belongs to the most significant moment for the development of the Croatian restaurant scene. In that Twitter post, they congratulated the Rovinj Monte Restaurant on their first star with Dubrovnik photo in the background. The guide contained restaurants already closed, and they missed out some important and already proved high-quality ones, so we expected if not a star, at least a recommendation. It was obvious the Michelin inspectors toured only Istria, Zagreb and Dubrovnik, not entire Croatia. Along with the first Michelin star, there were recommendations for 34 more restaurants. Back in those days, we were proud of Tjitske and Danijel Đekić, owners of the Monte Restaurant. They were showered with compliments, even though

only a few knew of their way to success. Namely, Danijel left civil engineering studies in 1985 and started working as a waiter in Monte. A few years later he started cooking and met the Dutch lady, Tjitske. They moved to Utrecht where they opened a restaurant. In 2001, they returned to Rovinj and took over Monte. Since Monte is closed in the wintertime, Danijel was collecting invaluable experience from chef Gaëla Orioux, a chef that has learned his trade from Bocuse, Senderens, Carton, Allénoa, and also worked for the legendary chef Alain Passard in his L'Arpège Restaurant. Tjitske was in charge of all restaurant departments except the kitchen, and even took over the role of a sommelier. A year later, Dubrovnik restaurant 360 and Šibenik tavern Pelegrini were awarded the M-stars. Along with the stars, there were four Bib Gourmand recommendations plus 24 new recommendations. All those who have visited the Dubrovnik 360 Restaurant are well aware of how highly demanding and challenging it is to set the system on a grand level under such ambience. The credit for the restaurant's grandiose success goes to the host Rudolf Papac and chef Marijo Curić. Mario has been a chef since 2015 and has been working in the 360's cuisine since 2007. Mario has been constantly professionally developing in



Marijo Curić and Rudolf Papac, restaurant 360



the kitchens of the best world chefs and restaurateurs, always bringing the fresh experience and spirit into the 360's kitchen. Restaurants like Elystan Street, The Square, Marcus, Bibendum and Ledbury in London, Devero in Milan, represent just a few on the long list. Running a restaurant and tenting the wine list are jobs for a man of remarkable energy and knowledge, Rudi Papac. The restaurant staff consisting of more than 50 people demands an immaculate management

strategy capable to deliver sophisticated meals, even under pressure, to the magnificent terrace enchanting the guests of high expectations. 360, Monte, Pelegrini, Draga di Lovrana, and Noel tend to present local foods under the innovative light at the same time respecting the Croatian gastro tradition. Also, apart from Noel, these restaurants have been members of the Jeunes Restaurateurs Association featuring, through a whole range of activities, promotion of Croatian

gastronomy and encouraging young chefs at distance to pursue professional development. In a 700 years old Pelegrini-Tambača Palace towering above the St. Jacob's cathedral the Pelegrini Tavern is nested, and Rudolf Štefan, the chef, with his young and perspective team, launches contemporary Croatian cuisine in a unique way. Relying on tradition and local ingredients Pelegrini stands out as the most meritorious for the progressive evolution of our gastro-scene. Furthermore, chef Deni Srdoč, at only 24 took over Draga di Lovrana's kitchen. Three years later he became the first chef from Kvarner wearing a Michelin star. The family hotel and restaurant were open in 2006. The owners, couple Suzana and Christian Nikolac, count as great gastro enthusiasts and restaurant gained a remarkable reputation on behalf of Zdravko Tomašić, who Deni inherited. This young guy from Krk belongs to unquestionable talents with the best cooking years yet to come and definitely interesting to follow. Somewhere in the second half of 2016, chef Goran Kočiš together with sommelier Ivan Jug decided to leave Bistro Apetit and pursue a quest of opening up an ambitious restaurant based on top cuisine embracing the usually 'rejected' local seasonal foods. The restaurant experienced a high-speed headway reaching its first Michelin star. A luxurious wine list, supreme service level, the most remarkable cocktails in town thanks to the barman Karlo Ferenčak, a recent reinforcement Gorana Kočiš (Goran's sister), the master pâtissier, all speak of Noel's improved superb offer. Until the next



Rudolf Štefan, Pelegrini

Croatia develops as a gastronomic destination and attracts the attention of international guides

Michelin's guide, we will have to wait for another eight months. The R'N'B Weekend Festival in Zagreb hosted this year for the first time a gala Michelin awards event. It is expected to see Boškinac star on the Michelin starry night. Young Matija Bregeš attracts attention with his creative and autochthonous island cuisine. The Zagreb gastro scene is buzzing with news of the chef Hrvoje Kroflin and ManO2 Restaurant enforced through excellent chefs and sommeliers currently preparing exciting and complex contemporary Croatian cuisine. Tvrtko Šakota with his NAV Restaurant receives compliments for his exquisite dishes and concept. But let's leave this part to the Michelin inspectors and their assessment rules. Croatia develops, in baby steps, as a gastronomic destination and attracts the attention of international guides, media, the audience – a significant contribution to its tourism promotion with so much to be proud of in terms of the fabulous gastro-scene.



Deni Srdoč, Draga di Lovrana



Goran Kočiš, Noel