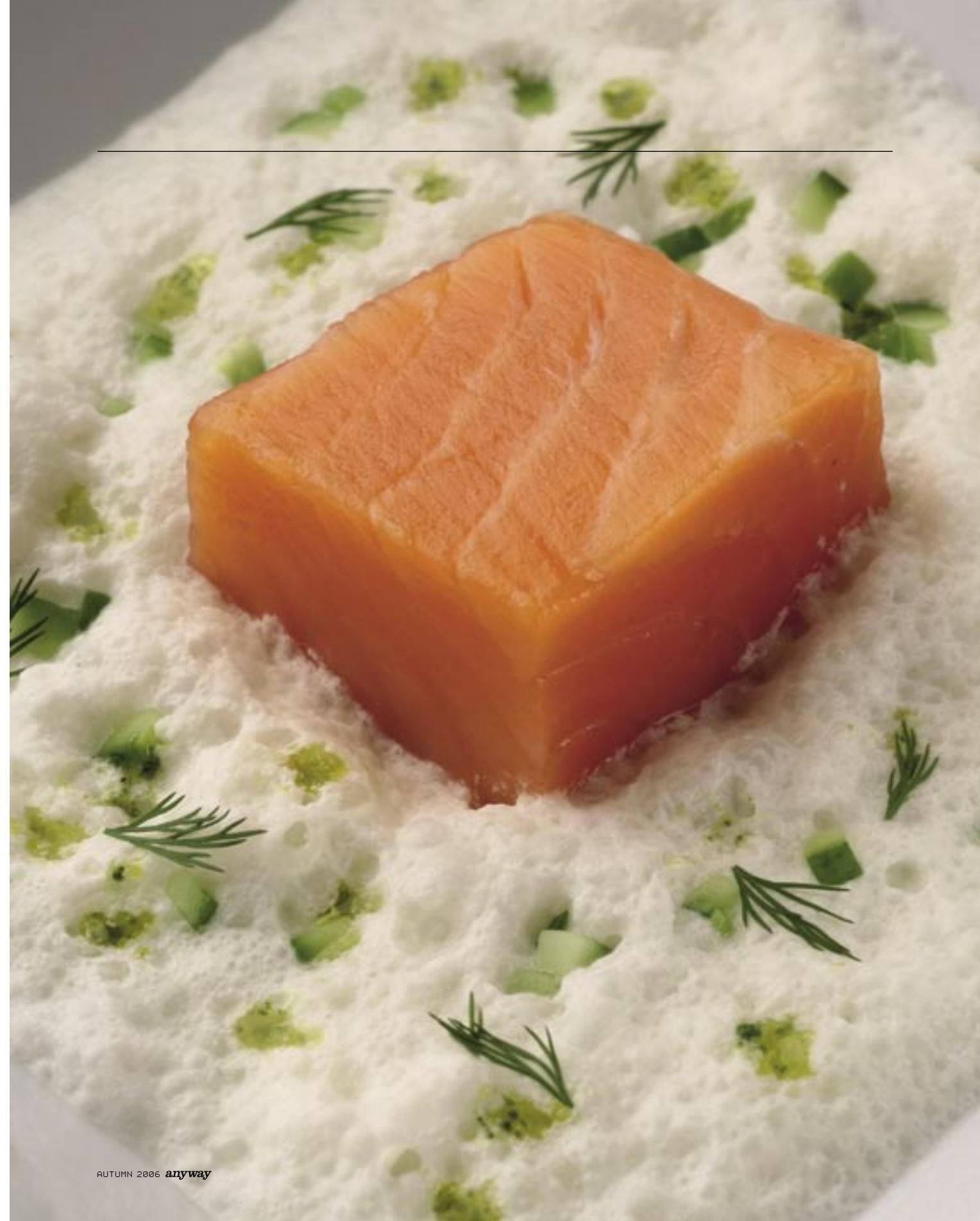




MEHMET GÜRS IS TURKEY'S ANSWER TO JAMIE OLIVER. THE YOUNG CHEF USES BOTH FRESH INGREDIENTS AND FRESH IDEAS.



98 99

A Finnish Turk

In just a decade, Mehmet Gürs, the 37-year-old chef has opened several highly successful restaurants including Downtown, Lokanta, Nu Teras and most recently Mikla, the city's hip new rooftop restaurant and bar.

Istanbul is full of surprises, and the city's hottest young chef, Mehmet Gürs is one of them. Raised in Finland, of Turkish and Finnish origins, his name doesn't betray his blonde, blue eyed features. Described as Istanbul's cooking 'wunderkind', Gürs is relaxed and rather charming. But behind the twinkling eyes and lazy smile, there lies an astute business man with a plan. The original plan was to study medicine, but instead, his summer jobs in his father's friends restaurants motivated him. "I was supposed to be a doctor, but last minute change of plan! I didn't want to study for that long. I wanted to start working earlier." A French education was followed by a degree in the US, and by 1996 he returned to Istanbul ready to open his first restaurant: Downtown. "We were very lucky, the timing was very good. The stock market was booming, advertising agencies had opened branches in

Istanbul. People started travelling for business and pleasure. There was a real need for good restaurants in Istanbul." Knowing he'd expand "from the very first day" he had the foresight to open a central kitchen which now serves his four current ventures: Nu Teras, Lokanta, Mikla and Erguvan. "It was expensive in the beginning, but now we've got a central purchasing and prepping unit. One guy buys the tenderloin, makes the portions, marinates them etc. Whenever Mikla needs something, they plug it into the computer and it gets delivered." Their efficiency also comes from his hand picked team. He raves: "all the people I work with are great. I'm proud of saying we have a very, very good team, by far the best in Istanbul, in Turkey!" After the formal atmosphere at Downtown, Mehmet fancied a change of direction. He remembers: "there everything was so proper. We even measured the table settings with a ruler. >

SALMON TARTARE

INGREDIENTS:

- > TARTARE: FRESH SALMON (0.5 CM CUBES) GRAVLAX (0.5 CM CUBES), LEMON JUICE, EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL, SEA SALT
- > CROUTONS: DAY OLD FOCACCIA
- > SALAD: CHIVES (FINELY CHOPPED), RED ONION (FINE BRUNOISE), DILL (CHOPPED), EGGWHITE (FINE BRUNOISE), LEMON ZEST, EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
- > OSCIETRA OR OTHER CAVIAR

PREPARATION:

- > CROUTONS: SLICE THE CROUTON PAPER THIN AND PLACE IT BETWEEN TWO SHEETPANS AND BAKE FOR 20 MINUTES IN A 175°C OVEN. ALLOW TO COOL ON A RACK.
- > SALAD: MIX ALL INGREDIENTS JUST BEFORE SERVING.
- > TARTARE: CAREFULLY MIX THE RAW SALMON AND THE GRAVLAX. ADD LEMON, XVO AND SALT TO TASTE. SERVE WITH CROUTON, SALAD AND A SPOON OF THE CAVIAR.



“Too much is made of celebrity chefs. A chef that’s good on TV is not necessarily good in the kitchen.”



PANORAMA FOR DESSERT:
THE ROOF BAR IS NOT ONLY OF SURREAL BEAUTY - THE VIEW IS AWESOME.

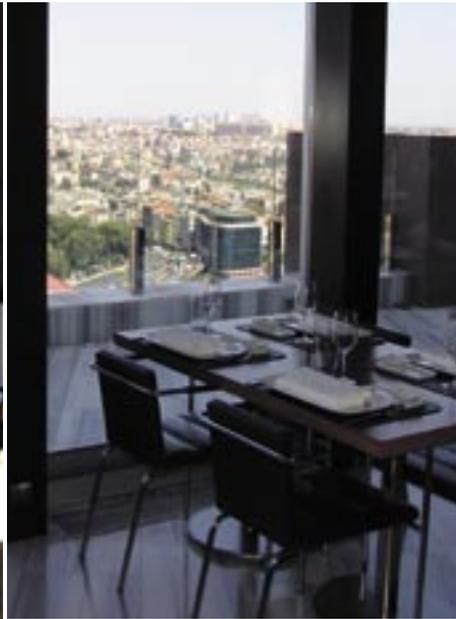


When you play at a certain level for a certain time you kind of get tired of it, you want to reach a somewhat broader clientele and that’s what we did.” In 2000, the swanky rooftop restaurant ‘Nu Teras’ was born and became an instant must famous for its spectacular views overlooking the Golden Horn, international DJs and an innovative ‘Small Foods’ menu with a contemporary take on Imam Bayildi, Circassian chicken and Börek. Nu Teras oozes a casual chic vibe. It also had another asset: barman Tayfun Bozkurt who single-handedly launched Istanbul’s craze for Hazelnut vodkas. Way below Nu Teras, Lokanta was opened on the ground floor for the winter season. Down to earth, with leg of lamb, pizza and pasta dishes on the menu, Lokanta is another trendy yet social place to party. Gürs reminisces: “The bar caved in once, although it was a thick steel construction! We had 40 people on it. We have a lot of fun there!” Last year, the entrepreneurial chef “got itchy again” and launched Mikla. “I wanted to do something more fun: a bit edgier.” Mikla, on the top floor of the Marmara Pera hotel,

is urban, sleek and stylish. The restaurant is funky retro with chrome 70’s and 50’s style furniture and a stunning wooden rail-sleepers bar. Friendly but discreet staff hover, and the views over the city stretch to the Agha Sofia and the Topkapi palace. But the real gem is the rooftop bar: slightly surreal, it would put any Manhattan bar to shame. With white soft furnishings, manicured greenery, a sleek female DJ spinning mellow tunes accompanied by awesome views shimmering in the setting sun the bar makes every new arrival’s face break into a smile.

Mikla is a showcase for Mehmet’s signature cooking: a sophisticated blend of Mediterranean and Scandinavian, directly due to his childhood. Using 99% local ingredients, he applies both French and Scandinavian techniques: “marinated seafood, smoked food... or I take local fish and make a mousse out of it. We do that a lot here.” He denies that the fusion of a dual heritage makes his cooking adventurous. In fact, he looks puzzled: “I’m very conservative with





RETRO-CHIC:
THE INTERIOR SPEAKS OF THE 50'S AND 70'S,
AND THE CUISINE REFLECTS MEHMET'S
SCANDANAVIAN BOYHOOD.

my food. I'm not very adventurous." He is passionate about the quality of his ingredients and their source, including the legendary spice market. "I find a lot of stuff there. It's an amazing place. Unfortunately very touristy! It takes a bit of the magic away, but if you dig you definitely find some really good ingredients'. He has a soft spot for lamb: "there is one specific breed that comes from the western side of the Bosphorus towards the Dardanelles. It's just amazing. The flavour is outstanding."

This year, the 37-year-old will celebrate a decade in the business, with several highly successful restaurants to his name including his latest endeavour Erguvan, he has also launched Num Num, a chain of healthy "fast food" outlets tagged "good food fast". Like his British colleague, Jamie Oliver, Mehmet wants to reach out to the younger genera-

tions and that's what Num Num is about: good, healthy food on a budget. Unlike Mr. Oliver, he doesn't court media attention, although he did a TV series and a book. "Turkey isn't that way yet. I don't know if I agree with the whole concept of celebrity chefs. Often it becomes that unfortunately. A chef that's good on TV is not necessarily good in the kitchen... Fame is something that's very relative. If you are respected by family and friends then what else do you need?" With a finger in so many pies, does he ever get away? "We try to spoil ourselves. We do a lot of travelling, if there is a good concert at La Scala we go". But Istanbul also has its perks, and he makes the most of it with his wife and 8-year old son, sailing, kite-surfing or "just lying on the beach, a little wine..." This is one chef who is brimming with energy and although he says he has no plans to expand abroad yet, it's unlikely Turkey will keep him contained for long ...

ERGUVAN
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NU TERAS
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LOKANTA
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"40 people danced on the bar and it caved in – but it was fun."

ALMOND PASTE SOUFFLÉ

INGREDIENTS:

200 GR DOUBLE CREAM
150 GR ALMOND PASTE (MINIMUM 70 ALMONDS)
100 GR EGG YOLKS
150 GR EGG WHITES
75 GR CASTER SUGAR
FOR RAMEKIN: BUTTER, CASTER SUGAR

PREPARATION:

MIX CREAM, EGG YOLKS AND ALMOND PASTE WITH PADDLE ATTACHMENT OF YOUR MIXER UNTIL CREAMY. WHIP EGG WHITES AND SUGAR UNTIL STIFF. FOLD EGG WHITES INTO THE ALMOND CREAM. COAT THE INSIDES OF RAMEKIN MOLDS WITH BUTTER AND SUGAR. FILL WITH MIXTURE. BAKE IN A PREHEATED OVEN (180°C) 8-10 MINUTES. SERVE WITH PUREED FRESH RASPBERRIES.

