

“The Best Food Experience in Sweden”

There's a strong wind and the snow quickly forms drifts in the Skåne landscape. The March evening is unusually cold, but we're comfortable in a four-wheel driven SUV driven by Executive chef Daniel himself. We're on our way to our overnight stay at Gamlegård after finishing a near four-hour dinner with a full 19 servings. Daniel Berlin provides, at present, the largest dining experience in Sweden.

Daniel Berlin

Friday, June 8, 2012 is the date that changed the life of Daniel Berlin. The newspaper DI Weekend gave the restaurant 25 out of 25 possible points and put it at the top of their list ranking of Swedish restaurants. It was followed up by the White Guide, which rated Daniel Berlin as “this year's food experience.” Now, all of the gastronomically interested have vied to get a table at Daniel's restaurant. So, it is with much excitement that we go through a windswept landscape, towards the small village Skåne-Tranå, just north of Ystad.

The farmhouse is welcoming and warm; we are greeted by Daniel, who along with his parents always personally receives the guests of the evening. The dining area in the house seats four tables and can accommodate 16 guests, and in addition to this there is a room for smaller parties.

Daniel is a big supporter of the Nordic cuisine and all the raw material he uses is from the Skåne region. “We are inspired by our surroundings here at Österlen and it is our observation of it that shapes our way of expressing ourselves. Our philosophy is based on an awareness of origin and respect for the raw material. We want to convey a sense of where we are right now,” Daniel Berlin explains. He shoots some game himself, and his vision is that the restaurant also should be self-sufficient in vegetables. With this in mind, they decided to build a greenhouse in the garden, which his mother Helene manages. She also helps with serving, while Daniel's father Per-Anders presents and serves the delicious wines. Pontus Elofsson, a good friend of Daniel and sommelier at award-winning restaurant Norma, helps with the wine purchases.

The Dinner

The dining room is Spartan decorated with white walls and black furniture. This evening, we are 13 guests. We are immediately handed a glass of champagne (Brut Nature from Christoph Mignom) and are generously invited to as many as seven appetizers. Chips of dried onion, smoked cod on crisp, crunchy turnip with burnt honey, scraped beef with pickled gooseberries, a donut filled with pork – cooked in apple sauce, a quail egg with self-dried ham of wild boar and ox. We were spoiled for choice. What a start!

Before we begin the first dishes, we are given delicious sourdough bread with churned goat and cow butter – baked in the village. Then come on rye bread with cold horseradish which is very tasty. This is followed by cod from Ålabodarna in Landskrona, served with beetroot. The wine we're served with this dish is the Portugese white ALR. The next wine to be served is the white and sparkling “Phil a Bun” from Loire, which is very suitable for the next two dishes – baked eggs with browned butter and then the highlight of the evening - grilled celeriac in aged cheese and broth. The whole celeriac has been roasted for five hours, which gives a lovely juicy flavour. Absolutely sensational.

Fresh, dried and roasted mushrooms in roe from turbot and artichoke in rooster skin with sea buckthorn are two light dishes that follow. It is accompanied by the gentle white Trauben, Liebe und Zeit from Austria. Then, a creamy potato with onion and an innovative dish with quail, where the quail legs are doused with ground elderberries and mushrooms – a whole new dining experience. A white Spanish “Nas del Gegant” was served with that, which really enhanced the flavours.

After an hour of sitting we're heading for the snow-filled garden, where broth of carrot and dill seed is served in the evening chill. Then it's time for the next seating, and back at the table we're served sweetbreads with cardamom, apple and dumpling, and also cow tail with onions. Daniel claims that he has served us everything on the animal, from nose to tail – and he certainly lives up to his declaration. The cow tail's meat has a good flavour and a somewhat stringy texture. Along with this dish we're served the delicious, red French wine “Pur Breton” in a magnum bottle with a beautiful and artistic label.

Before the dessert, there are three good cheeses from Vilhelmdals dairy. They are nicely served free of accompaniments other than bread and a perfect Zellenberg Gewürtztraminer Zellenberg from Alsace. It's just right. Two fresh desserts are then served – dew-berry with goat cream and colostrums with cucumber and apples. Paired with these is a glass of fruity Moscato d'Asti. It is a masterful ending by a masterful chef.

This dinner shows the rising star that Daniel is within Swedish cuisine and there is absolutely no doubt that it earns the epithet “the best dining experience.”

Words by Paul Dahlgren