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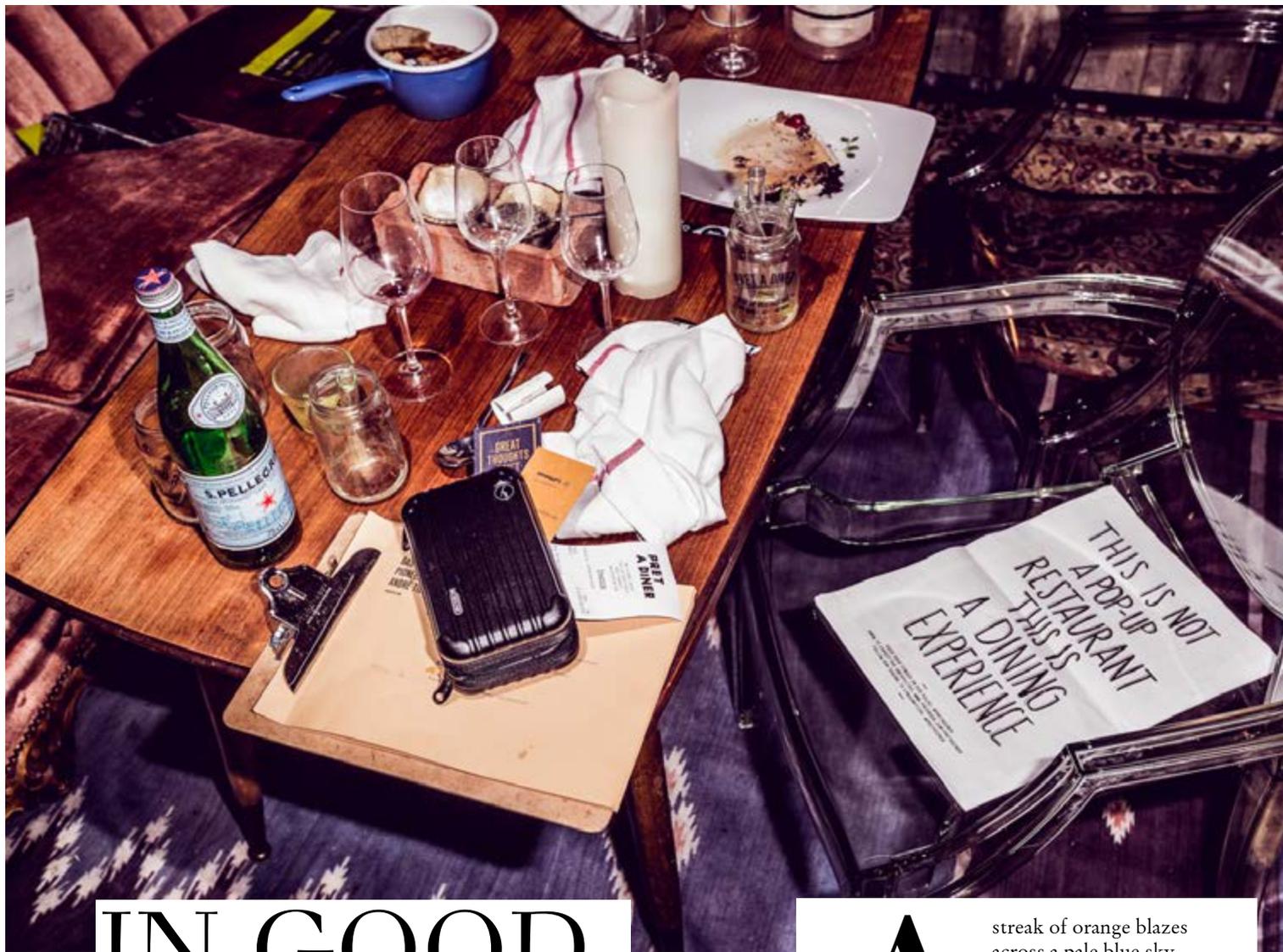
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IN GOOD KOMPANIE

FOR CULT CATERER *Kofler & Kompanie*, its successful venture in the GUERRILLA DINING SCENE came via a series of MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR pop-up restaurants that count *Madonna*, *Sean Penn* and *Bob Geldof* among their regulars.

WORDS: PETRA ZLATEVSKA

A streak of orange blazes across a pale blue sky, and a warm summer night beckons with the promise of a caipirinha or two. Home to the Christ the Redeemer statue, samba, poseurs, peddlers and the infamous Ipanema Beach, Rio de Janeiro is welcoming a new resident: Kofler & Kompanie – one of Germany's oldest catering businesses, once named one of the top three caterers in Europe and boasting a prestigious Michelin star awarded to a head chef.

A far cry from its humble beginnings as a bakery in the spa town of Bad Homburg on the outskirts of Frankfurt some 190 years ago, Brazil represents a historic transition from old-world Germany to a new world full of energy, colour and opportunity.

Come 2014 and Kofler & Kompanie will feed hundreds of thousands of hungry football fans during the FIFA World Cup, as one of the official hospitality partners of the meet.

It's also the location currently being touted as the first South American incarnation of Pret A Diner, the company's pop-up dining sensation that has sprung up in cities far and wide, from Munich to Monaco. >



in Berlin, to appease those who still wanted quality food but not at ridiculous prices. “It was important to do something in Germany, as our country of origin and Berlin seemed like the perfect place to launch Pret. It is a metropolis with an ‘X factor’,” KP says. “It was a core part of our plan to be open during key international and cultural events such as Fashion Week and the Berlinale.”

[I] FELT A DRIVE *to create something new where there was room for INNOVATION to focus on experiences, not just PRODUCTS.*

Both Pret A Diner and the World Cup are part of a string of new directions the company has taken under the leadership of Chairman Klaus Peter (known affectionately as KP) Kofler, who despite being a sixth generation in a long line of Koflers trained as konditors (bakers), was adamant the baker’s life was not for him.

“[I] felt a drive to create something new where there was room for innovation to focus on experiences, not just products,” he says.

KP’s attitude is not surprising: his family baked the feted baumkuchen, a chocolate-layer cake made especially for Kaiser Wilhelm II in the 19th century.

But while the baking industry captivated his attention and exotic new markets like Brazil called, KP says it was important to revitalise things in Berlin, a city acclaimed for its non-conformity in art, fashion, architecture, and now gastronomy.

In 2011, Kofler & Kompanie launched Pret A Diner in Berlin as the company’s love letter to a younger, more urbane crowd.

They had watched how the European economic crisis took many Michelin-starred restaurants victim (think El Bulli in Spain), with non-orthodox dining options sprouting up all over Europe in their place, particularly

As its name suggested, they would pop-up and pop down again within a week, sometimes less. With menus costing between €55 in Berlin and €85 in Frankfurt per head, some argued it was still a lot to pay

in times of economic austerity, and KP admits it was a challenge with the price structure.

It was crucial, however, to approach the right target group who was willing to be part of the one-off experience, he says.

Together with co-founder American visual artist Olivia Steele, they envisioned Pret A Diner as a fusion of modern, metropolitan lifestyle interests and unconventional gastronomy. The approach would vary from city to city and so would the experience: the carefully curated space could be an abandoned former mint in Berlin one month or the underground Old Vic Tunnels in London the next, they said.

▶ SET UP AT PRET A DINER IN FRANKFURT.



PHOTOGRAPHY: HANNES WINDRATH



Pret a Diner’s mantra, “This is not a pop-up restaurant. This is a dining experience”, is emblazoned across its website, menus and merchandise.

Everything is sourced from scratch, from the food to the neon art installations that hang from the walls. The space is meticulously decorated – grungy, elegant and quirky – but not overly so. Michelin-starred chefs such as Portuguese Nuno Mendes of Viajante, German Matthias Schmidt, and famed Spaniard Juan Amador take their positions behind the make-shift kitchens across Europe.

In this spirit of adventure, the chefs are also expected to create bespoke menus in each city, using only the best local produce and signature tastes of the resident culture. Once complete, everything is dismantled as if it never existed.

Emphasising the transient nature of the concept was essential to securing a loyal following, says KP. And he has succeeded in enticing celebrities including Madonna, Sean Penn, Salvatore Ferragamo, Bob Geldof and Bar Refaeli to become Pret regulars.

The restaurant’s fleeting opening times also managed to lure even the most habitualised diner and KP admits that time and the lack of it is a key factor in building an audience.



“People are attracted by limitation and scarcity,” he says.

Reinvention and innovation in the modern era are perennial boardroom discussion topics for established, centuries-old and family-run businesses like Kofler & Kompanie in Germany.

Testament to the German can-do entrepreneurial spirit, even in the automotive industry, BMW and Mercedes-Benz have launched more environmentally friendly, and smaller, more affordable cars to appeal to the next generation of buyers. Likewise engineering giant Siemens has embraced renewable energies.

In order to stay ahead of your competitors, KP says that there needs to be a “constant output of innovation and creation”, and the company’s move into premium gastronomy has been deliberate and well thought out.

Aside from the opening of The Magazine restaurant in London’s Serpentine Sackler Gallery (designed by Pritzker-prize winning architect Zaha Hadid), Kofler & Kompanie provide catering at several global airport lounges and launched into sports hospitality following the successful tender for the FIFA World Cups in Germany (2006) and South Africa (2010).

KP says this was a decisive step to stay relevant and build on the company’s gourmet roots. And seize the Zeitgeist along the way. ■

