

# NoMad Chef Daniel Humm's Guide to Zurich

by [Howie Kahn](#)

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Nobody knows Zurich quite like the Swiss-born **Humm**. Here, he gives us an abridged guide to the city where he first started cooking.

Daniel Humm began cooking professionally as a teenager, building his résumé in the rigorously precise kitchens of his native Switzerland. At 25 he left for the United States, eventually landing in New York and becoming chef and co-owner of Eleven Madison Park and

The **NoMad**, where he's elevated jewel-like, butter-frosted radishes and Muscovy duck roasted with lavender honey to cult status. But lately, he'd been missing the more elemental flavors of his homeland: the **Berner Rosen apples**; the rich, local dairy; veal liver with **rösti**. He wondered what it would be like now to cook with the ingredients he grew up with. And so for five nights last fall, Humm took over the **Baur au Lac hotel's Pavillon, where, at 14, he had worked as a commis**. "The first time I made food there, I was just starting out," Humm says. "I didn't know any other way to be than to be motivated by fear. This time, I came back to do things my way." That meant preparing elaborate 12-course dinners for his mentors, Gérard Rabaey and Viktor Geiser, and any other diner lucky enough to score a reservation for the sold-out run. Between meals, Humm **hung out in Zurich** and returned to his parents' house in the village of **Schinznach-Dorf**. There, he spent some quality time cooking with his greatest influence: his **mother**. "When I was a child, she'd have me wash the lettuce ten times or open walnuts by hand to make a cake," he says. "I was like, 'Mom, this is ridiculous.' But now? I run my kitchen the same way."

## Swiss Tease: Humm's Guide to Zurich

*When Humm heads home, he eats, shops, and swims his way through Zurich. So should you.*

**Where to have bread for a meal:** "Jens Jung grew up in one of Zurich's important baking families. He worked in the family business for a while before opening his own bakery, **John Baker**, a few years ago. He makes these amazing **sourdough breads** and bakes throughout the day, so

things are always fresh. He does more traditional Swiss breads too, but my favorite is this kind of French-California style that he learned from Chad Robertson at Tartine Bakery & Cafe in San Francisco. I also love the almond croissant from **Sprüngli**, probably the most famous *confiserie* in Zurich."

**If you come when it's warm:** "The Limmat River is right in the center of the city. In summer, young and old swim in it, and the water's so clean that you can see the bottom."

**Exactly what you'll want for lunch:** "I grew up in Zurich until I was 12, and I've always come to **Vorderer Sternen** for a sausage, a hunk of bread, and some mustard. Now, I add a beer. It's in the heart of the city, and they have a veal sausage and a pork sausage. You can't go wrong. Great people-watching too, since every type comes here—from kids on skateboards to politicians in suits."

**The restaurant that doubles as an art gallery:** "**Kronenhalle** has been around since the 1920s, and it's a timeless place. The dining room has amazing service and super Swiss food, like sautéed veal liver with *rösti* and crêpe soup, or **flädlesuppe**. The bar area is more modern—there's an original Miró in there—but they have a standout collection in the restaurant too, with **Braque, Matisse, and Chagall**."

**Souvenir shop here...** "One of my favorite stores in the Old Town is **Buchbinderei**. It's this tiny stationery shop where the owner, Doris Feldman, makes these beautiful hand-bound notebooks I always buy for gifts. Her paper stock reminds me of the packaging for Mast Brothers chocolate bars."

**...and here:** "H. **Schwarzenbach** is a very traditional place. The store opened in the late 1800s, importing specialty items from all over the world. It was curated before we even used that word. There are teas, spices, coffees, vinegars, rices, olive oils, grains, flours, jams, mustards, nuts, beans. It's the ultimate pantry. Everything is presented precisely and perfectly. The dried fruit is the most incredible in the world. I especially love the apples because Swiss apples are so special."

**The side trip worth taking (trust him):** "**Stefan Wiesner** has a restaurant called Gasthof Rössli, kind of in the middle of nowhere between Lucerne and Bern. He makes really amazing sausages and the **best salami** I've ever had, but he's also one of the most interesting culinary thinkers I've come across. His techniques are beyond avant-garde: He cooks salmon in a tanning booth, and one of his courses is dirt mixed with berries. **It's better than it sounds!**"



Chef Stefan Wiesner, left, of Gasthof Rössli, walking with friends.