

Thema: Prater Wien

Autor: k.A.



wurstelprater
**Carnival for
 All Seasons**

BY NEJRA RIZVANOVIĆ
 PHOTO CATHERINE MARGARET
 ILLUSTRATION KARIN DREHER

At the *Wurstelprater*, it's always show time. Through the quaint grandeur of the entrance arch, its Grand Square spreads out in a comic masterpiece of faux-baroque and terraced cafés, paint box theaters and a generous use of trompe l'œil. The atmosphere is almost dreamlike, preserving the quality of yesteryear in a stage set for diversion. It's all endearingly cheesy, a mélange of kitsch and nostalgia that is the true charm of this all-season fairground – a never-ending carnival like Blackpool or Coney Island, but with a Viennese flavor all its own.

Opened in 1766 when the imperial hunting grounds were gifted to the public by Emperor Joseph II, the *Wurstelprater* has long been a local favorite, offering a pleasing jumble of thrills and – to the Viennese, pleasure always has a lot to do with food – lots to eat and drink at leisurely cafés, rustic

restaurants and snack kiosks of every sort.

Named after *Hans Wurst*, the famous comic archetype of Viennese theater, the amusement park originally started as a group of refreshment stands for day-trippers. Things really took off during the 1873 World Fair, transforming the area into an elaborate world of exhibitions and performance spaces with a carnival atmosphere it has had ever since. In 1895, it became the site of (arguably) the world's first theme park, *Venedig in Wien* (Venice in Vienna), a small-scale reproduction of the great merchant city on the Adriatic, replete with canals and actual *gondolieri*.

BIG WHEELS AND STELZE

Towering over the *Wurstelprater* is the *Riesenrad*, Vienna's iconic Ferris wheel, immortalized in Carol Reed's 1949 noir thriller *The Third Man*. Built in 1897 for the Emperor

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9 HOTEL PSYCHO
2., Prater 50b
prater.at/
hotelpsycho

8 TORNADO SWING
2., Prater 4a
praterwien.com

1 EISVOGEL
2., Riesenradplatz 5
Mon-Sun 11:00-0:00
(01) 908 11 87
Stadtgasthaus-eisvogel.at

2 RIESENRAD
2., Riesenradplatz 1
seasonal; through Sep 4
9:00-23:45
(01) 729 54 30
wienerriesenrad.com

REACH FOR THE SKY
The Wurstelprater has many thrills, chills and (near) spills that will keep you on the edge of your seat. There is the infamous giant swing **Tornado**. 25 meters tall and equipped with heavy harnesses, it twists and twirls on long chains as it rockets to and fro, occasionally tipping you on your head. Then there's **Black Mamba**: A swing as well (in the broadest sense of the word), it operates at the shrieking speed of 80 km per hour, thrusting you into the sky while rotating all the while. What's more, you never know which way you'll go down.

Franz Josef's golden jubilee, it stands 65m tall, providing a jaw-dropping view of the city. It was among the first of the city's landmarks to be rebuilt after WWII – even before the Staatsoper – reopening for business in 1947 and becoming an important symbol of a return to post-war normality. Whether you're planning a romantic dinner or a shady parley, this is just the place. Nearby is a plaque honoring the beloved Austrian composer Robert Stolz, whose hit tune *Im Prater blüh'n wieder die Bäume* (The trees in the Prater are once again in bloom) celebrates the park and its beauty.

Another old and venerable institution is the **Schweizerhaus**: Opened in 1868 (and tracing its roots back to an old hunting lodge), its vast, rustic beer garden has become synonymous with the Prater itself, drawing diners from afar for a taste of their famous *Schaeinsstelze* (roast ham hock), traditionally washed down with a pint of *Budvar* – their house beer since 1926.

Slightly more upmarket is the eminent

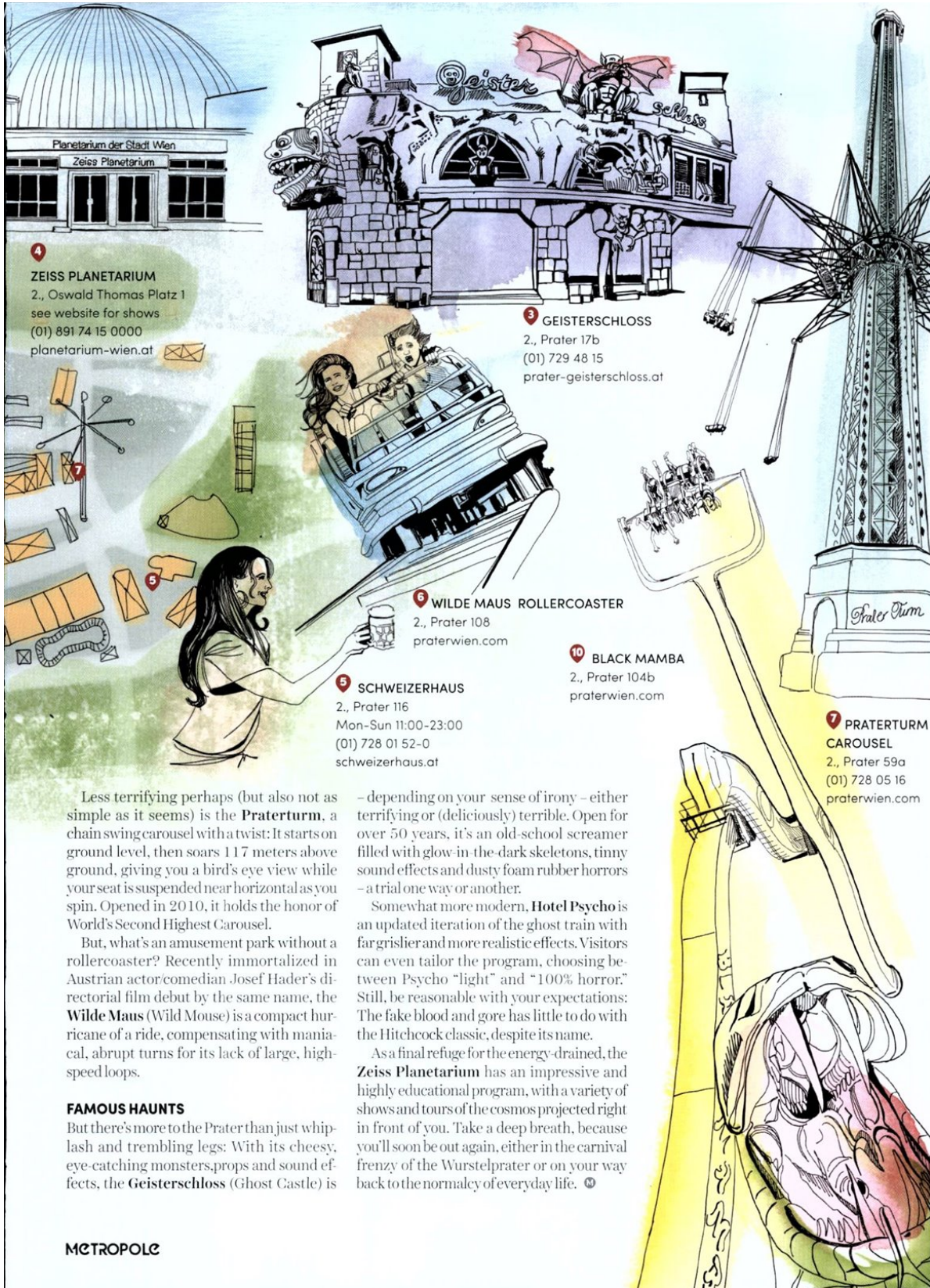
Eisvogel, open since 2008 but claiming heritage back to 1805. Specializing in traditionalist fare with a locally-sourced twist, you can dine under your own stars with their special "Zodiac Menu," defined by the moon's phases. It wouldn't be a Prater institution if it didn't have a gimmick.

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4 ZEISS PLANETARIUM
2., Oswald Thomas Platz 1
see website for shows
(01) 891 74 15 0000
planetarium-wien.at

3 GEISTERSCHLOSS
2., Prater 17b
(01) 729 48 15
prater-geisterschloss.at

6 WILDE MAUS ROLLERCOASTER
2., Prater 108
praterwien.com

5 SCHWEIZERHAUS
2., Prater 116
Mon-Sun 11:00-23:00
(01) 728 01 52-0
schweizerhaus.at

10 BLACK MAMBA
2., Prater 104b
praterwien.com

**7 PRATER TURM
CAROUSEL**
2., Prater 59a
(01) 728 05 16
praterwien.com

Less terrifying perhaps (but also not as simple as it seems) is the **Prater Turm**, a chain swing carousel with a twist: It starts on ground level, then soars 117 meters above ground, giving you a bird's eye view while your seat is suspended near horizontal as you spin. Opened in 2010, it holds the honor of World's Second Highest Carousel.

But, what's an amusement park without a roller coaster? Recently immortalized in Austrian actor/comedian Josef Hader's directorial film debut by the same name, the **Wilde Maus** (Wild Mouse) is a compact hurricane of a ride, compensating with manic, abrupt turns for its lack of large, high-speed loops.

FAMOUS HAUNTS

But there's more to the Prater than just whip-lash and trembling legs: With its cheesy, eye-catching monsters, props and sound effects, the **Geisterschloss** (Ghost Castle) is

– depending on your sense of irony – either terrifying or (deliciously) terrible. Open for over 50 years, it's an old-school screamer filled with glow-in-the-dark skeletons, tinny sound effects and dusty foam rubber horrors – a trial one way or another.

Somewhat more modern, **Hotel Psycho** is an updated iteration of the ghost train with far grislier and more realistic effects. Visitors can even tailor the program, choosing between Psycho "light" and "100% horror." Still, be reasonable with your expectations: The fake blood and gore has little to do with the Hitchcock classic, despite its name.

As a final refuge for the energy-drained, the **Zeiss Planetarium** has an impressive and highly educational program, with a variety of shows and tours of the cosmos projected right in front of you. Take a deep breath, because you'll soon be out again, either in the carnival frenzy of the Wurstelprater or on your way back to the normalcy of everyday life. ☺

METROPOLE