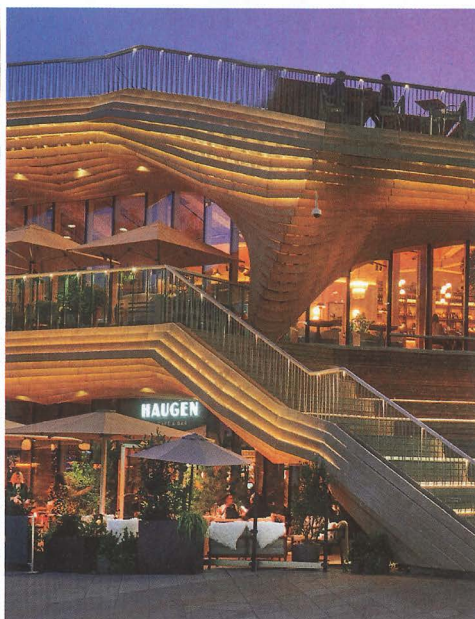


Restaurants

Tim Hayward



ALPINE DINING AT HAUGEN. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEAN CAZALS

Haugen, Stratford, London

I don't really trust skiing. It goes against my belief in Darwinism. It seems that the very cream of our species, the wealthy, successful, the beautiful and the slim, go up mountains, throw themselves down them, hit trees and rocks and crash their helicopters. Meanwhile, those without the funds or physical talents to ski survive to reproduce. This is why my family ski and I stay at the bottom, where they keep the cheese.

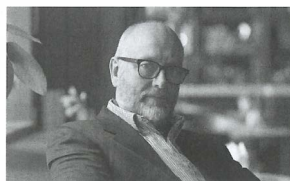
The nations that host Europe's annual frenzy of snow sports have uniformly cracked it when it comes to food. Plenty of dairy, fat, meat, salt and potatoes, held down by unlimited wine and novelty spirits, is a fine way to spend the winter. Yet I've decided I shall never "ski" again because now I can go to the Westfield shopping centre in east London instead.

Haugen is an astonishing piece of architecture. It quotes freely and wittily from the conventions of vernacular chalet construction

in a series of intersecting slopes. Its balconies and terraces reference overhangs and ledges. Interior walls are stores of cut winter logs, and there's Tyrolean accordion music playing in the lavatory. They're doing all the Austrian clichés before I get the chance to, in a sort of cultural pre-emptive strike.

The ground-level terrace is inviting, with umbrellas, heaters and a view over the soaring North Face of West Ham's stadium. It would be perfectly placed to ski into directly off the piste if a) there was any snow and b) it wasn't occupied by a troupe of frantic street dancers, practising to the accompaniment of a massively amplified human beatbox. Few words can express my feelings about public beatboxing... but there are just enough to call in an airstrike.

Did I fail to jump on an important Zoom about charcuterie in salads? Was there a memo? Because Tiroler Wurstsalat was emphatically not in my regular consideration set and, frankly, blew my buffers. Start with an extraordinarily good-quality, smoked, emulsified pork sausage.



Start with smoked pork sausage. Cut it into chunks with Emmental, pickles and an astringent dressing and call it a salad. It's fiendish genius

Haugen
9 Endeavour Square
London E20 1JN
haugen-restaurant.com
Starters £8.50-£12.50
Mains £12.50-£24.50
Fondue £22.50-£26.50 per person

Cut it into small chunks with Emmental, finely julienned pickles, chives and an astringent dressing and call it a salad. It's fiendish genius. It's not green, it's not crisp, it's got meat and cheese in it and if that's what they want to call a salad in the Tyrol, I am there for it.

I had, of course, to have fondue. Did you know that fondue is not an ancient Alpine tradition, but was a rather neglected regional treat of the Jura until it was seized on after the first world war by the Schweizer Käseunion AG, a cartel of Swiss cheese producers? They promoted fondue assiduously, inventing recipes that varied by canton "traditions" and making a tenuous though seductive subconscious link with young blond people and sexual permissiveness. The Käseunion was disbanded in the 1990s amid accusations of corruption, but I still felt pretty damn sexy, dunking my cubes among the high peaks and passes of Westfield.

The fondue was surpassingly spectacular. When you're used to something with all the charm of dairy napalm, it's a pleasant shock to realise that it should always have been more akin to a velouté. Less viscous, more silky, less agricultural, more caressing.

The menu is broad, encompassing some Viennese café classics alongside surprisingly jokey comfort foods. I'm happy to dive into authentic Schweinshaxe, but delighted to see a giant chilli-cheese hot dog lurking there just in case. I felt I should take one for the team - let nobody say I shirk - so I rounded off with a Black Forest gâteau that was entirely surplus to requirements. Pleasant but perhaps a little too echt.

Haugen could quite easily be a cynical theme restaurant but, weirdly, it's charming. The food is extremely good and the cod-Tyrolean stylings are executed with total commitment, a straight face and a good heart. Their Black Forest gâteau might not be quite ironic enough for my barbarous English taste, but for introducing me to my first leafless salad I shall remember them for ever. And for the fondue, I'd stand on the pitch at half-time and yodel. **FT**

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