



AMUSE BOUCHE

Culinary Ascent

THE NORTHERNMOST ITALIAN PROVINCE OF South Tyrol has always been a *fêted* playground among Europe's clued-up and well-off outdoorsy set. Endowed with rugged peaks and lush, vineyard-covered valleys, this outdoor Xanadu sees Moncler-clad visitors raising *après-ski* flutes in the winter and hikers peregrinating uphill and down dale in the summer.

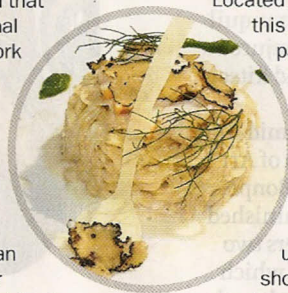
But this uniquely bilingual region of the Dolomites, bordered by Austria to the north and Switzerland to the west, is now adding first-rate haute cuisine to its lofty natural draws. Eleven of South Tyrol's restaurants boast Michelin stars—and the five that follow here are newbies that received their prestigious first accolades in 2007 (retaining them for 2008). While that honor usually equates to an abrupt hike in prices and attitudes, at these countrified eateries you can still expect to encounter friendly polyglot service and inventive, locally sourced fare.

■ **Anna Stuben**, www.annastuben.com. This traditional Tyrolean eatery has just four tables at which guests indulge in the Mediterranean-inspired creations of noted local chef Armin Mairhofer. His fuss-free specialties include starters like homemade *pici* noodles served with summer truffle and *fossa* cheese and main

courses such as lamb with coffee-encrusted tuna. For dessert, the creole tonka chocolate roll with chilled cream of cedar wood, tobacco and rum is an original take on decadence.

■ **Tilia**, www.tilia.bz. Housed in an 800-year-old farmhouse with space for just eight, Tilia's unadorned dining room is the setting for an ever-changing *à la carte* menu that trades heavily in fresh seasonal fare. The menu is the handiwork of 35-year-old chef Chris Oberhammer, whose previous stints include two years at Alain Ducasse's lauded Louis XV restaurant in Monaco. Dishes like Oberhammer's green-asparagus soup with Parmesan panna cotta and white pepper benefit from ingredients picked fresh from the herb garden out back.

■ **Zum Löwen**, www.italien.com/zumloewen. Chef Anna Matscher's candlelit eatery is fresh from a much needed renovation and welcomes returning habitués with local fare, including the famous *schlutzkrapfen*—a spinach-filled ravioli that's served with melted butter and topped with Parmesan cheese—and native baked calf's sweetbread on a bed of potato salad. Unlike most chefs in the area, who use local wines exclusively, Matscher (the only woman with a Michelin star and a self-taught chef at



Homely comfort The intimate dining room at *Anna Stuben*, above; a dish from *Jasmin*, below

that) pairs her complex dishes with those from afar afield, including vintages produced in the U.S., Chile, Australia and South Africa.

■ **Jasmin**, www.bischofhof.it/de/jasmin.php. Located in the tiny hamlet of Klausen, this establishment features floral-patterned banquettes separated by wrought-iron partitions, ensuring a sense of privacy (not that there's much chance of feeling intruded upon—even when full Jasmin sits only 20). The cuisine is the daring but delicious work of chef Martin Obermarzoner, whose dishes marry unlikely ingredients (think oyster shooters with white-chocolate shavings and a passion-fruit purée) and are served in a sprawling, nine-course degustation menu.

■ **Die Trenkerstube**, www.hotel-castel.com. Amid an inviting *mélange* of pale wood carvings and chintz curtains, chef Gerhard Wieser offers a rousing and substantial menu that includes such mouthwatering dishes as saddle of venison poached in a hay of mountain blossoms and served alongside stewed medlar shrub, herb dumplings and leek. Or try the rib-sticking veal fillet and sweetbread roasted in sage with smoked mashed potatoes and chanterelles. —BY FARHAD HEYDARI