

Big Eaters Only

There's a place in Madrid that will thrill extraterritorial Germans to bits. And anybody who's ever been to Germany and loved it. It's Fass Food Center, Rodríguez Marín, 84, Madrid. (Between General Mola and Calle Serrano, corner Concha Espina.)

Go through that front door, and that's the end of anything Spanish except for all the Madrileños who've been grabbed by it all. And addicted. I daresay. The decor is bright, cheery, sort of Alpine and traditional, all broken up into several different rooms and alcoves. All very unpredictable and very cozy.

The Fass is now only a bit more than 2 months old, but already the place is jammed, regularly. Word gets around.

Herr Jens Witthaus, the brain and dynamo behind the Fass who looks more like a bouncy young student than an entrepreneur, made us instantly happy with a crackling cold bottle of Liebfraumilch that sported a "Beigeschmack" of the gentlest "moscato" suggestion. The mood was set, the hum of happy voices was building, and now the gourmet madness would begin to emerge from the kitchen.

But what gigantic portions! Shades of

Louis XIV, shades of Mad Ludwig, shades of Henri VIII! I now issue a warning to ladies with wasp waists. Abandon ye all hope for any future with the Weight Watchers. The Fass restaurant is dedicated to hearty, healthy appetites and the good life. If you eat every night as we did last week at the Fass, you'll end up looking like a Wagnerian soprano!

First course: the most glorious Smoked Trout I've had in long decades, with a little swirl of whipped cream on a fresh orange slice. This is a nice thoughtful accent. In Paris, they add fresh horseradish to the cream, but I find it detracts from the trout flavour.

Then came my undoing: the *Eisbein*, a huge ultratender, flavour full ham hock. The whole thing, wall-to-wall, endless, superb, with sauerkraut and a purée of potato with an elusive seasoning in it. I've had this in Germany many times but never ever managed to learn what the seasoning is.

Along about now that wonderful sense of well-being began to tide through me.

People around us were obviously experiencing the same thing. The wine flowed, the beer went glug-glug-glug, and the hap-

py laughter everywhere began to build decibels. The bar was now beginning to sound a teeny bit rowdy in a genteel way, such as you find in a snowy little Bavarian ski lodge.

My friend had the *Entrecôte*, what seemed acres of it, precisely what's needed to still the beef hunger North Americans get over here. Throughout, there were the genuine German breads one remembers so fondly from the "Heimat", all baked right on the premises by German bakers.

I normally have the appetite of a foot soldier, and I thought I was doing justice to the *Eisbein*; but I couldn't polish it all off. I've simply never encountered such mammoth portions anywhere in Germany or even in the more generous *Weinstuben* of Strasbourg. Herr Witthaus is too generous.

Still, when a seductive wedge of the house's own *Schwarzwälderkirchtorte* went waltzing by, I knew I was going to get clear but of line and order it, too.

It was a triumph! And sinfully rich. (The Weight Watchers may have to disband altogether). The Fass baker has accomplished something all his own in blending the cherry, chocolate, and whipped cream into the actual fluffy cake entity. Again, in accordance with Herr Witthaus's disproportionate generosity, a customer gets a wedge of this cake that by all German standards should serve 3 people.

The boss recommended a *Himbeerschnaps* (raspberry, but not so syrupy as French liqueurs) which was a great topper.

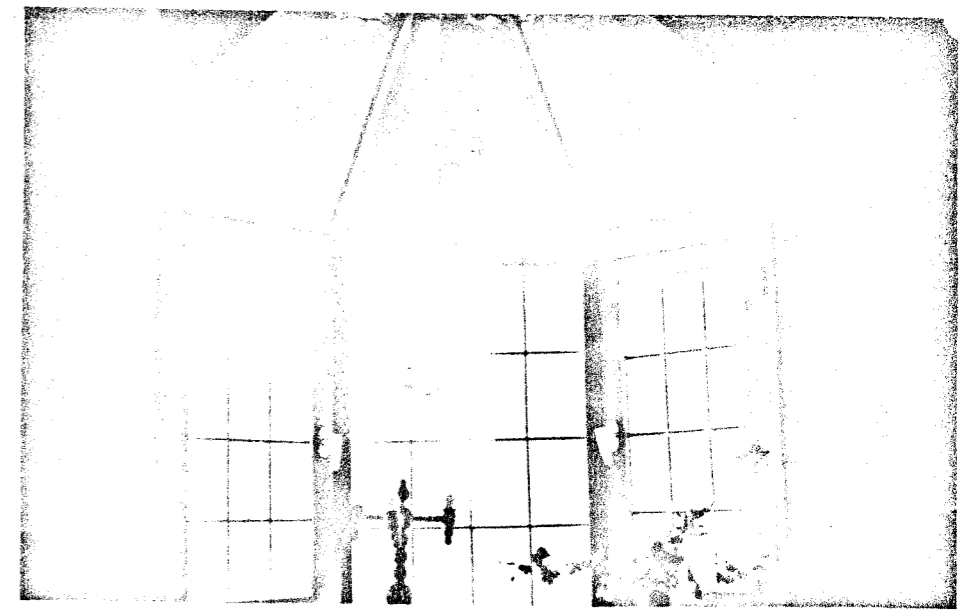
After dinner, we got a tour of the Fass complex: bar, restaurant, coffee-drinking area with a lot of Fass-baked *Torten* (cakes) and pastries in a big glass case that will look just like Germany to the practiced eye. Beyond the cafe is the Fass super market, resplendent with imports from Germany and elsewhere, actually a gourmet's paradise, with a special meat department where you can find imported wurst, hams, salami, cold cuts. Again wholly German and immaculately cared for.

The bakery department will, incidentally, be selling its own Christmas Specialties such as *Christstollen* and *Lebkuchen*.

Needless to say, the Fass attracts a lot of celebrities, Spanish and international. I can well imagine that very soon it will be one of the "in" places to be seen in, and you'll have to book a table days in advance.

Prices are not steep considering the atmosphere, fine service, and stupendous servings. The trout, for instance, was 180 pesetas. The *Eisbein* and the *Entrecôte* are priced at 350. But I have to reiterate:

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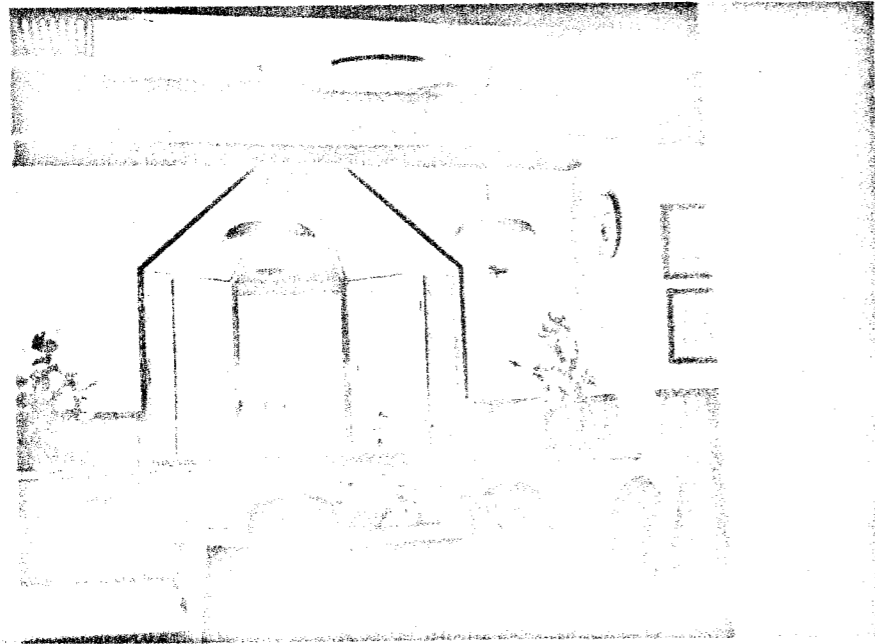
Window in *Stammtisch* alcove.

either of these is more than a meal in itself. There is also, each day, a big, generous set dinner for 300 pesetas, in addition to the large, highly varied à la carte menu, enough to keep you for long months of fascinated visits.

The Fass is open all day, around the clock, so you can have lunch, or afternoon coffee with "Kuchen", or a prolonged dinner.

Guidepost heisst das Fass willkommen in Madrid!

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"*Stammtisch*" alcove in the Fass restaurant. Where 'regulars' and friends of the management congregate.

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