Two Young Women, One Restaurant, and a Food Philosophy Europe Needs



The summer of 2021 was supposed to be temporary. Ida, from Copenhagen. Camilla, from Norway. Both arriving on Ærø for a single season, for different reasons, with no particular plan to stay. But the island had other ideas.

'We both just fell in love with it,' Camilla says. 'The pace. The sea. The way people here relate to food and to each other. It didn't feel like somewhere you left at the end of summer.'

They didn't leave. Instead, they opened Marstang Café — a daytime spot designed to bring life to Marstal's streets year-round, built around soups served in organic sourdough bowls, locally baked bread, and coffee from suppliers they believed in. The philosophy was clear from the start: everything homemade, everything local, everything honest. Within a year, the café was full, and Marstang Mad & Vin — the evening restaurant — followed.

Mad & Vin is where the philosophy becomes most vivid. The menu changes every week. There are no concessions to what sells reliably or photographs well on a tourist's social media. There is only the question of what is available from the island's farmers and fishermen, and what can be done with it that is genuinely beautiful. Dinner is three courses, the wine list is serious and thoughtfully curated, and the atmosphere is the particular warmth that comes when a small team cooks food they genuinely care about.

The fish, in this context, has always been something of an adventure. Marstang buys from local artisanal fishermen who work the waters of the South Funen Archipelago, and those waters yield species that most mainland Danish restaurants would not recognise. Small, silver, unfamiliar — the kind of fish that gets weighed, passed over by the wholesale buyers, and sent back. At Marstang, it gets a recipe.

'We never thought of it as a sustainability project,' Ida explains. 'It was just common sense. You're on an island. The fish are here. The fishermen know what they've caught. If you're serious about cooking locally, you cook what's local — and that means sometimes you cook fish that nobody's heard of. And they're usually delicious.'

This instinct — so practical, so unideological, and so clearly right — is exactly what the Forgotten Fish project is trying to disseminate across European catering education. Not a manifesto, but a method. Not a grand gesture, but a weekly habit of attention and adaptation that turns the overlooked into the exceptional.

Ida and Camilla didn't set out to build a model. They set out to build a restaurant. That the two things turned out to be the same is, perhaps, the best argument of all for what Marstang represents.

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