



WIEN • SEIT 1876

PRESS RELEASE

Café Central: today as then, a treasured Viennese institution

Since 1876 Café Central (Strauchgasse 4, first district) has been a centre and cradle of Austrian culinary tradition, literature, philosophy and culture. The recipe for success is always modern, as befits its long-standing traditions. Here is a brief taster of the historic milestones and culinary highlights, studded with bon mots from the pioneering intellectuals and literary figures who once ranked among its regulars, topped off with a smattering of facts and figures.

Best of bon mots: fitting tributes to Café Central...



- **Stefan Zweig** (1881 – 1942): “It is actually a kind of democratic club that is open to anyone who is able to afford a cheap cup of coffee, where in return for this nominal contribution every patron can sit for hours, talk, write, play cards, collect their post and, above all, read an unlimited number of newspapers and magazines.”
- **Alfred Polgar** (1873 – 1955): “Central is not a coffeehouse like any other – it’s a philosophy. Its inhabitants are mainly people whose misanthropy is as strong as the craving for people who want to be alone, but also want company as they do so.”
- **Egon Erwin Kisch** (1885 – 1948): “The coffeehouse is the apartment that is no longer needed if you have a coffeehouse.”

Café Central: a home-from-home for some of history’s greatest thinkers

The stuff of legend, Café Central opened in Palais Ferstel 140 years ago, which at the time was feted as the most modern building in Vienna. Since then Vienna has been through two world wars, five new currencies and eleven presidents – and for the majority of this time Café Central has provided a constant expression of the Austrian attitude to life as well as a central meeting point for the capital’s intellectuals. Virtually every literary figure and scholar worth their salt could be found among the ranks of the ‘Centralists’ – as the café’s regulars referred to themselves. From 1900, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler, Alfred Polgar, Leon Trotsky, Robert Musil, Stefan Zweig, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and many other famous faces met to exchange ideas while enjoying the coffeehouse specialities.

For many years Café Central was known as ‘the university of chess’. The café was one of the most important meeting hubs for intellectual life in the city right the way through until 1938, and also welcomed numerous chess masters during this time.



Café Central: home-from-home and an attitude to life

The nation's – and age's – greatest thinkers left an indelible mark on the coffeehouse. To this day the Austrian writer Peter Altenberg can be found passing the time at his table in the form of a life-sized effigy – after all, Café Central was not just his living room and study, it doubled up as his laundry service and secretary's office.

He gave the literary café as his home address, had his post sent there along with his laundry. He was, however, unable to sleep there – much to his chagrin. The only other people to sit at his table did so at his personal invitation. Things ran in a similar vein at Karl Kraus' regular table. Anyone lucky enough to have this honour bestowed on them would be rewarded with good coffee and an intellectual high.

Women's rights and cashless payment – Café Central inventions?

Café Central has played host to multiple generations, yet has always kept up with the times: while the topic of equal rights is more relevant now than ever, Café Central was already quietly laying the groundwork a hundred years ago. It was the first café to permit women patrons to visit without a man at their side. In every other coffeehouse in the city, female patrons were only admitted if they were in the company of a gentleman. Outdoor seating areas were the only exception, where ladies could come and go as they pleased with a female chaperone. But not at Café Central! The unique glass-roofed courtyard allowed lone women to meet for coffee – provided they wore suitable headwear – and move freely inside the building without male company while still being somehow outdoors.

Cashless payment is also believed to have its origins at Café Central, due to Peter Altenberg. While he did not always have cash on him, he was inventive enough to ensure he always had some way to cover his bill. A select few can proudly claim to have an Altenberg original on a serviette. He would simply barter away the ad hoc literary gems he immortalised on the table napkins to clear his tab at Café Central.

Café Central: history and...

Palais Ferstel was instantly celebrated as Vienna's most modern building when it opened in 1860. Finished in stone in the Venetian-Florentine Trecento style, the building was one of the most spectacular – and most expensive – projects completed during the Ringstrasse era. Under a commission from the imperially-warranted National Bank, the 27-year-old architect Heinrich von Ferstel created a bank and stock exchange building complete with glass-covered shopping arcade and a colonnaded hall which was designed from the outset as an inspirational setting for a coffeehouse. However, to begin with the spaces were part of the stock exchange and the National Bank. In 1876 the Pach brothers opened Café Central, which remained one of the city's pre-eminent literary cafés until 1918. In 1925 Café Central was completely renovated ahead of its 50th anniversary, and reopened a year later as a café and restaurant. Today the world-famous Viennese coffeehouse is as popular among locals coming to enjoy its national and international newspapers as it is among culture loving visitors to the city who stop by looking to soak up its authentic coffeehouse charm.



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... success story

“Café Central is an important constant – not just historically, but also in a commercial context. Visitor numbers and revenue are consistently at a high level,” explains **Kay Fröhlich, Managing Director of Palais Events Veranstaltungen GmbH**. Each year the traditional coffeehouse on Herrengasse attracts around half a million visitors. A 100-strong team look after the guests at all four Palais Events venues. “We are very pleased that we are not only a must-see for fans of Vienna, but also a popular choice for today’s ‘Centralists’,” **Fröhlich** confirms.

Café Central culinary facts and figures

Each year an incredible 300,000 pastries and slices of cake are served at Café Central, in addition to 140,000 hot and cold dishes and 320,000 cups of coffee. The legendary apple strudel leads the bestseller list with 55,000 portions, closely followed by the Sachertorte with 25,000 slices. 15,000 Wiener Schnitzels and 16,500 portions of Kaiserschmarrn also leave the Café Central kitchens each year. Whether it is breakfast, classic Viennese cuisine or a quick snack, the menu is all about quality, tradition and creativity. The aim is always to exceed our international guests’ high expectations and offer local coffeehouse aficionados contemporary and modern interpretations of time-honoured recipes.

Did you know...?

... that it is down to Napoleon that guests can sit down to proper meals in Café Central? With his forces laying siege to Vienna and access to imports cut off, the city’s coffeehouse owners were forced to get creative. Eager to provide succour to guests during these difficult times, the capital’s coffeehouse kitchens suddenly became places to get a good meal. This period saw a number of coffeehouse classics see the light of day for the first time, including a pair of sausages with a Semmel bread roll and mustard, tangy goulash and legendary local soup speciality Wiener Suppentopf.

... that the first few episodes of the Café Central discussion programme were actually filmed at Café Central in the heart of Vienna’s old town? Eventually the interior was recreated at the ORF studios, where the show continued to be produced until 1991.

... that a glass of water has been part and parcel of the Café Central coffee drinking experience since the 19th century? A spoon placed faced down on top of the glass indicates to the guest that the water has been freshly poured for them. Upheld at Café Central to this day, this ritual actually has its roots in Spanish court ceremonial and Habsburg court etiquette.

For historical background information visit www.cafecentral.wien. Follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/CafeCentral.Wien) and Instagram (www.instagram.com/cafecentralwien)



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About Palais Events Veranstaltungen GmbH

Palais Events – part of VERKEHRBUERO since 2011 – has around 2,500m² of prime historic event space in its portfolio, the second largest of its kind in Vienna. Each year our 100-strong team plays host to around half a million guests at around 300 events at Palais Ferstel, Café Central Wien, Palais Daun-Kinsky and the Wiener Börsensäle. The 180-seat historic Café Central, one of the best-known Viennese coffee houses, was added to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011. Its in-house patisserie is among the best in the city.

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