



Genuinely German

For a city that boasts not only a Germantown, but also a Schnitzelburg, Louisville is surprisingly barren of authentic German cuisine.

Many of us been forced to define local German food by what's available at Oktoberfests or the Derby Festival Chow Wagons, and the experience makes you wonder if there's any more to the fare than beer and bratwurst. Germany is, in fact, a diverse country with many regional specialties, from Thuringian blood sausage to Frisian creamed herring to Westphalian ham.

Only at the Gasthaus in Brownsboro Center will you find the better qualities of this hearty Northern European cuisine. Co-owner Annetarie Griepel, a native Westphalian, describes the offerings as "good cooking you would find in any typical German home." And the home theme gets even more play in the Griepel family's re-creation of Germany, set, improbably, in a shopping center off State Route 42.

Frankenheimer beer is just one of many authentic touches on tap at the kitsch-filled Gasthaus on Brownsboro Road. **By Stephen Hacker**

collection of riotously diverse German-themed knickknacks: clocks, a stuffed pheasant, German and American flags, an array of stuffed teddy bears, family photos and boxes of artificial flowers — all competing for wall space with paintings and a wall mural of (presumably) Bavarian scenes. In addition, the dining area has been separated into faux chalets, seating some diners in more intimate, but not exclusive, spaces. Lively canned German music and a sign announcing that "Unattended children will be sold" make for snap-to mood setters.

The waitresses add to the atmosphere, dressed as they are in a version of traditional Bavarian dirndls (although I doubt that running shoes are a part of the traditional garb). You may be served by one of Griepel's daughters, by a young woman from Hamburg or by one

The restaurant's decor reminds visitors that "kitsch" is a German word. The dining area isn't exactly small, but it can seem cramped by the vast

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from Bosnia who came to America by way of Germany. In any event, the accents and costumes will help set a Teutonic mood to your meal.

The menu at the Gasthaus has several interesting features aside from the food. It begins with a photocopied article about how to teach children to behave while dining out. (Hint: don't leave them unattended.) This unsolicited advice proves worth the taking once the bill of fare steers in the direction of salads, soups, various beef, pork, chicken and vegetarian entrées, and a selection of Bavarian side dishes. Do yourself a favor and quickly pass by the vegetarian selections. If you're going to eat German food, eat it the German way — with plenty of meat.

The Gasthaus serves both German beer and German wine. Personally, I believe beer is the best accompaniment to the region's food, although I did sample a Rhineland dry Reisling that was quite nice, if a bit sweet. Your choice of beer arrives in a tall glass featuring the brand you've selected. The restaurant has a good variety, from the featured Frankenheimer to a clear, tasty Tuborg wheat.

Crosses are served with an eye-appealing cross-hatching of sour cream. Cream of potato soup (\$3.25), a regular feature, was a pleasantly mild spud-lovers' delight, served with a large helping of frankfurter sausage, which (not too surprisingly) looks and tastes much like a gourmet hot dog. Tomato and basil soup (\$3.50), a soup-of-the-day selection on our recent visit, hit the tongue with a vinegary, spicy and tart appeal, but didn't shortchange the two main ingredients.

A house spread brought by our friendly waitress — there are no waiters at the Gasthaus — was made of cream cheese, butter, onions, paprika, caraway and a "secret ingredient" that our server wouldn't divulge (Annemarie Griepel told me later it was finely chopped pickles). It definitely livened up the warm but somewhat bland brown bread served with every Gasthaus meal.

Dinners are prepared by her husband Michael Griepel and a chef from Strasbourg, which was once part of Germany and is now part of France. (Don't ask — it's kind of a sore spot with Germans.) Beef dishes include both sauerbraten and Rouladen. Sauerbraten's (\$15) main attraction is its marination for over 24 hours in a mixture of wine and vinegar. The sauerbraten I sampled was a tender piece of beef roast, served with its distinctive sour-sweet sauce, but it could have been a bit more vinegary. Rouladen (\$16) featured beef rolled around and cooked with herbs, onion, bacon and a dill pickle — the beefy taste of the meat

complemented by a brown sauce accented the melange of flavors inside the roll.

Where the Gasthaus really shone, however, was with its schnitzels. "Schnitzel" describes any cutlet dipped in egg, breaded and fried. Jaegerschnitzel (\$16), a breaded and sautéed pork cutlet with brown sauce and mushrooms, made my fork stand up and say "Achtung!" The meat was tender and tasty, with plenty of button mushrooms swimming in the rich sauce. For an even more delicious (and adventurous) selection, try Schnitzel à la Holstein (\$18). This tender breaded veal cutlet came to our table topped with eggs, anchovies and capers. I recommend using the salty anchovies sparingly as a condiment with the dish; they may overpower the other flavors in too large a dose.

Each entrée at Gasthaus came with one side. Additional sides were extra (\$3.50), but it was worth a few additional deutsche marks just to get the restaurant's fine red cabbage, prepared with vinegar, juniper berries and the surprising and silky taste of brown sugar and applesauce. The portion was big enough for two. Some Gasthaus entrées were paired with a pre-selected side dish. Schnitzel à la Holstein, for example, arrived with *bratkartoffeln* — German home fries. These excellent potatoes were browned with onions and bacon and glistened with a cholesterol-be-damned appeal. Other side dishes included a warm German potato salad with bits of bacon and a delightful spaetzle, tiny tender noodles made with flour and eggs.

"Dessert" in German evidently translates as "sweet and creamy." Whipped cream played a large role at the Gasthaus, where six or seven choices (\$6.50 each) are available every night from a rotating cast of about two dozen selections. One reason for the rotation is that all desserts are made in-house daily by Annemarie Griepel. The very sweet walnut chocolate torte we sampled dripped with flavor and dollops of whipped cream. The apple strudel was a very sugary, very soft roll containing hot, mildly spiced apples, served with both vanilla ice cream and whipped cream, with a sweet strawberry/raspberry sauce. Frankly, I found the soft and creamy concoctions a bit too much on the sweet side, but sugar junkies can definitely find their fix here.

If You Go

GASTHAUS, 4812 Brownsboro Road, 899-7177. Dinner hours: Tues.-Sat., 6-9:30 p.m.

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