



IN THE KITCHEN WITH CHEF **MANUEL SCHMUCK**

| BY HELÈNE RAMACKERS

The nomadic private chef tells us what he can't live without in the kitchen, and how incredible it was to cook at Purple Ski's Chalet Harmony in Méribel, France.

Manuel, tell us about yourself.

Hi, I'm Manuel Schmuck – a nomadic private chef and recently also a network marketer. I've been traveling the world full-time for the past two years, cooking for ultra-high-net-worth individuals in villas, chalets, and even the occasional presidential suite.

I'm originally from Bavaria, Germany, and have over twenty years of professional kitchen experience – from Michelin-starred fine dining to cutting-edge casual dining concepts. My culinary journey started in Austria, Vienna, then took me to Toronto, followed by Berlin and later Munich. Each of these cities shaped my approach to food in unique ways, helping me develop both technical skill and creative depth.

About four years ago, I took the leap into self-employment as a private chef. Since then, I've brought my knives and curiosity to incredible destinations like Bali, Mexico, Colombia, the U.S., and Georgia – always seeking new flavors, cultures, and experiences to bring back to the plate. I still occasionally work short stints in Michelin-starred restaurants to refine my

skills and stay creatively sharp.

What I love most is making people happy through food. I thrive on the buzz of the kitchen – the clatter, the aromas, the rhythm of cooking. My style is seasonal, rooted in product quality, and infused with global influences. My dishes are known for bold, layered flavors where the essence of each ingredient still shines through. I love surprising guests with something they've never tried before – something they'll remember.

Lately, I've also stepped into network marketing as a way to expand my business and connect with people beyond the kitchen. It's all part of the same mission: growth, creativity, and connection.

Did you have an influence in your youth that shaped your career path?

Absolutely – and it all started with a slice of salami and a campfire in the mountains. I must've been around six years old, and I was with my family at a hut in the Alps.

We had a fire going, and I noticed a large stone that had been heated by the flames. I happened to have a slice of salami with me and, without thinking too much, I placed

it on the hot stone. Suddenly it started to sizzle and release the most incredible aroma. I let it cool for a moment and then tasted it – and just like that, something clicked. I had cooked for the very first time, and even as a kid, I somehow knew that it was special.

That moment stuck with me on a deeper level. Later, when we had to choose internships at school, I was the first to raise my hand and say, "I want to be a chef." My first kitchen experience came when I was 13, during a school internship in Bavaria – and I didn't want to leave. I was instantly hooked by the pace, the pressure, the sounds, the smells... and especially by the chefs themselves. The way they moved, the way they handled the heat – they were rockstars to me. From that point on, I knew: this is what I want to do, no matter the long hours or tough conditions.

I later started my formal culinary training at the iconic Biohotel Stanglwirt in Tirol, and from there, the journey really began.

You work in an incredible environment – at the stunning Purple Ski Chalet





Harmony in Méribel. What is that experience like for you?

What made my time at Chalet Harmony this past ski season truly special was, without a doubt, the team I worked with. While not everyone came from a traditional hospitality background, they were all incredibly committed, kind, and always ready to help. There was a great sense of unity and support – and that made all the difference.

The chalet itself is also a dream workplace for any chef. The kitchen is beautifully open, which allowed me to connect with the guests and be part of their experience. Even after years of working in chalets, I was impressed by the layout, the equipment, and the generous storage space – everything was thoughtfully designed and made my daily work smooth and enjoyable.

And then there's the view. Every day, stepping out onto the terrace and looking down on the snow-covered valley was just magical. It brought such a sense of calm and gratitude before the busy service kicked in.

The guests at Chalet Harmony are wonderful – warm, open-minded, and genuinely appreciative of what we created for them. Many were excited to try new flavors and dishes they hadn't experienced before, which

made the cooking even more fun and inspiring.

One of my favorite moments each day was right before service – when everything was prepped, the plates were heating, every little herb leaf had been picked, and we were fully ready. That quiet, focused energy before we started plating – especially with my team jumping in to help with the final touches – that was pure joy.

Which essential tools are you lost without when it comes to cooking?

There are a few tools I absolutely can't live without in the kitchen. First and foremost: my Zwilling chef's knife – it's like an extension of my hand. Along with that, a good honing steel is essential to keep the blade sharp and service-ready at all times.

Another must-have is my Micro-plane. It's such a simple tool, but incredibly versatile – from zesting citrus to finely grating cheese or spices, it adds those finishing touches that elevate a dish.

And finally, the Thermomix. It's a powerhouse in the kitchen – perfect for precision tasks like emulsifying sauces, making smooth purées, or controlling temperatures for more technical elements. It saves time, ensures consistency, and opens up creative possibilities.

How do you stay calm in the kitchen while managing your team?

For me, the key to staying calm in the kitchen is preparation. Before every service, we go over everything in detail – dietary requirements, allergies, plating styles, cutlery, timing preferences. Once everything is clear, there's very little room for surprises. And when surprises don't happen, stress doesn't either.

But of course, things can still go sideways from time to time – and when that happens, I rely on breathing techniques to stay centered. Over the years, I've learned that raising your voice or getting aggressive in the kitchen isn't a sign of strength – it's the opposite. It creates tension and disrupts the flow, both for the team and the guests. Staying respectful and composed under pressure is what really makes the difference.

Do you have a favorite dish to prepare?

One of my absolute favorite dishes to make is braised beef cheek, slow-cooked for hours in Châteauneuf-du-Pape wine. There's something deeply satisfying about transforming such a humble cut into something so rich, tender, and full of depth. The sauce becomes intensely reduced and glossy, and the meat just melts apart.

What I love even more is balancing that richness with a bold gremolata-style salsa – packed with fresh parsley, lemon zest, olive oil, and lots of garlic. That hit of freshness and acidity on top really lifts the dish.

The sides I serve with it vary depending on the season and the setting, but that base combination – slow braise and zesty salsa – is something I never get tired of. It's comforting, full of contrast, and always a guest favorite.

What is the biggest challenge for you creating outstanding cuisine in a chalet in the mountains?

One of the biggest challenges is definitely the planning phase – especially at the beginning of the season when the chalet is still empty and you're preparing everything weeks or even months in advance. You build your menus with a certain vision in mind, only to realize later that some ingredients might not be available, or not in the quality you had hoped for. It can be frustrating, but over time I've learned to see it as a creative opportunity. Limitations often push you to think differently – to adapt, to substitute, and sometimes even discover new ideas that turn out even better than the original plan. So yes, sourcing in the mountains can be tricky, but it also keeps you sharp and inspired.

Any signature dishes on the menu that have become a staple?

Yes – one dish that's really stood out for guests at Chalet Harmony is my take on Chakapuli, a traditional Georgian lamb shank stew I discovered in a small, cozy restaurant in Tbilisi. It completely blew my mind – the depth of flavor, the warmth, the freshness from the herbs – I knew I had to create my own version.

In my interpretation, the lamb is slowly braised until it's fall-off-the-bone tender, and I serve it as a main course on the tasting menu. It's accompanied by a smooth potato and feta espuma, lots of fresh tarragon, and a sprinkle of sumac for brightness and contrast. It's bold, comforting, and full of character – and it's been a real guest favorite.

Lastly, do you have a favorite recipe you would like to share with us?

Yes – I'd love to share a refreshing pre-dessert that has become a real favorite among my guests. It's light, playful, and full of contrast: a passion fruit sorbet served on cucumber salsa with a sweet yogurt espuma, finished with nasturtium leaves for an extra kick of flavor and color.



Passion Fruit Sorbet with Cucumber Salsa and Yogurt Espuma

Serves: 8

Ingredients

Cucumber salsa – 1/2 cucumber – 200 ml passion fruit purée – 3 tbsp maple syrup

Method

- Peel the Cucumber, finely dice the cucumber and mix with the passion fruit purée and maple syrup. Let it sit for 10–15 minutes before plating.
- Passion fruit sorbet (for Pacojet): – 330 g passion fruit purée – 200 g orange juice – 100 g water – 100 g sugar
- Dissolve the sugar in the water, mix with the juices, and pour into a Pacojet beaker. Freeze for 24 hours at –20°C.
- Pacotize twice before serving. (Note: a good quality store-bought passion fruit sorbet works too.)
- Sweet yogurt espuma – 325 g Greek yogurt (10%) – 75 ml whole milk – 40 g sugar (adjust to taste) – 150 ml heavy cream – 1.5 tsp vanilla extract – A few drops of lemon juice
- Mix all ingredients, strain through a fine sieve, fill into a 1L siphon and charge with two N₂O cartridge. Chill for 2 hours before use.
- Spoon the cucumber salsa into martini glasses, add a scoop of sorbet, top with the yogurt espuma and finish with nasturtium leaves.

About Chalet Harmony, Méribel *Sleeps up to 15:

Chalet Harmony in Méribel is part of the Purple Ski portfolio and sleeps up to 15 guests in seven bedrooms. Enjoying a privileged position in Méribel's central Duo du Pont area, the opulent new four-story property presents a rare opportunity to combine luxury and complete privacy with proximity to the Alpine resort's charming center, with its bustling shops, bars and restaurants as well as the main ski lift area. Chalet Harmony's French owner fell in love with Méribel's authentic village with its excellent skiing and wanted to create a chalet that was respectful of the traditional Alpine chalet style, whilst offering all the modern comforts and features one might need – from state-of-the-art technology to the impressive wine cellar.

For more information or to book, visit <https://www.purpleski.com/chalets/harmony/>