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Into the Woods

Germany's storied Black Forest is finally updating its tourist offerings, but the old traditions and offbeat charms remain rooted in place

By **MATTHEW KRONBERG**

THE FAIRY tale version of Germany still exists, more than anywhere else, in the Black Forest. Villages of half-timbered houses dot deep valleys in the shadow of mountainsides thick with spruce and fir trees. Hilltop castles loom above sprawling vineyards and orchards. The traditional finery is ornate and the souvenir cuckoo clocks even more so. Then there's the namesake cake, tempting enough to lure even the most resolute weight-watcher into a witch's cottage. That's the Black Forest most visitors come for. It's the one I expected to indulge in when I tagged along with my wife, who was attending a springtime seminar in the region, at the Schwarzwälder Pilzlehrschau, Germany's oldest mushroom school. Over the course of a week—a mix of day trips and overnights—we found great hikes, plenty of cake and unexpectedly, a clutch of local, young chefs, hoteliers and artists who are finding compelling new ways to build on old traditions.

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The region covers the far southwest corner of Germany, spanning, in its most expansive interpretation, from the cities of Karlsruhe and Pforzheim, down about 100 miles to the Swiss border, and west from the A81 Autobahn to the Rhine river. While the heart of the region is marked by dense, dark forests, the Upper Rhine Plain in the west is wine and agriculture country, with a climate to match. The city of Freiburg im Breisgau is considered the sunniest in the country.

In the southern Black Forest, at the Mühle Schluchsee, a 10-room inn with a Michelin-starred restaurant, owner Marius Tröndle and his partner Anika Cabraja view hospitality in the Schwarzwald through a fairy tale lens. But not the one I was expecting. "It's like Dornroschen—Sleeping Beauty—the story where the whole village falls asleep," said Ms. Cabraja. Hoteliers, she added, didn't generally feel the need to invest or innovate, because they "know that the guests are coming anyway, because of the nature."

They hope that the Mühle Schluchsee, which opened just before the pandemic, will serve as a beacon for what's possible. Occupying a hipped-roof, Black Forest-style farmhouse built in 1603 (it was a flour mill for the St. Blasien monastery), it strikes a balance between the traditional and contemporary now. The cozy lounge, where guests laze on plush powder-blue sofas for welcome drinks and afternoon coffee and cake, still features the low-timbered ceilings from when the ground floor housed livestock. The



20-seat restaurant, meanwhile, feels utterly modern, with pale, minimalist woodwork and dishes like a tartare of local beef wrapped in crisp nori and topped with a dab of Marsala cream. Mr. Tröndle, who was born nearby, aims to turn the area around the Schluchsee into a southern Black Forest counterweight to the Michelin-star-studded town of

Baiersbronn, near the Schwarzwald National Park in the northern part of the region. This winter, he plans to reopen the Auerhahn, a 64-room lakeside hotel, which his grandparents founded in 1990. There he aims to have a restaurant which will largely limit itself to ingredients sourced from within about 30 miles, and an aesthetic that eschews

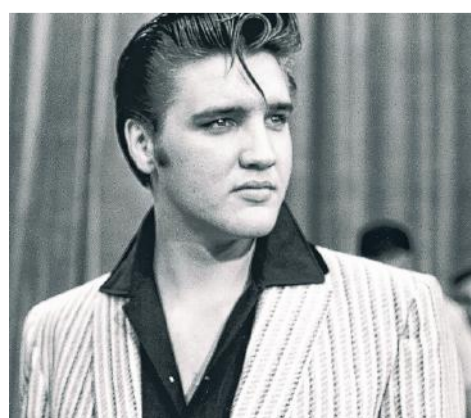
cuckoo clocks, Black Forest cakes and red pom-pommed bollenhut hats. "You can still show what the Black Forest is without just using these three things to promote it everywhere," he said. Others, though, employ those symbols in updated or subverted form. Even at bastions of traditional culture like Gutach's Black

Forest Open Air Museum Vogtsbauernhof, a sprawling collection of centuries-old buildings, you'll see examples. The railway underpass between the parking lot and the museum entrance, for instance, features artist Stefan Strumbel's pop-art takes on local symbols, like a slice of Black Forest cake. *Please turn to page D4*

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JAMES GULLIVER HANCOCK

DESIGN & DECORATING



ROPE THAT'S DOPE Designers are loving the lightness and brightness of cord upholstery, like that seen in Paola Lenti's new Jardin line.

What's Hot, What's Not, This Summer

We asked hundreds of design pros for the latest trends in al fresco living. Their forecast? Say hello to playful umbrellas and luxe upholstery—and wave farewell to uninspired planters and bulky plastic-weave furniture.

OUT



Staid Stools

If you can get something next-day delivery from Amazon, it's probably not au courant. "While there will always be a place for the iconic garden stool, that classic, cookie-cutter aesthetic"—most commonly drum-shaped and rendered in preppy blue-and-white chinoiserie—"has definitely become seen as a 'one trick pony,'" said Manhattan interior designer Daun Curry. Added designer Kristen Rivoli, of Boston, "People are tired of the 'everyman' look...that you can get at any big box store, and they want more unique, artistic pieces."

IN



Spirited Ceramics

As more people approach outdoor spaces as personally curated sculpture gardens, one-of-a-kind glazed ceramic furnishings in offbeat silhouettes is adding a welcome artsy flourish. "[They] are durable and weather well...while still creating a look that has soul," said Ms. Rivoli. Favorites among pros we polled include the earthy pressed pieces from Dutch designer Floris Wubben and the trippy Cloud side tables (pictured) from Sun Valley, Calif., artist Bari Zipperstein's BZippy & Co. Said Ms. Curry, "They're a great modern [take] on a traditional shape."



Blah Upholstery

According to our experts, conservative colors like white, tan and navy are on the way out. "Last year's spaces had a lot of neutrals, but homeowners are ready to break free and are increasingly asking for a more distinctive ambience," said designer Michael Tavano of New York City. Also losing their luster: matchy-matchy cushions, said Manhattan designer Brendan Kwinter-Schwartz. How to pull off this layered look? "Use colors that reflect nature's hues—like sky, sun, water tones," said Mr. Tavano, "and you can still go for a very bold pattern or delicious texture."

Next-Gen Performance Fabrics

Gone are the days when "indoor-outdoor" meant canvas duck, period. Thanks to strides in fiber technology, nearly every high-end fabric house—from Pierre Frey to Liberty (pictured)—now carries luxe outdoor offerings. "It's a full palette, from fabulous woven options to towel-soft fabrics that feel like a beach blanket," explained San Francisco designer Noz Nozawa. Even in small doses, they have an impact, said Mr. Tavano, who recently brought in an "outrageous" velvet from Mokum to refresh a client's outdoor seating area.



All-Angles Shades

As interest in hard-edge design has begun to wane, minimalist linear umbrellas, which offer little in the form of congeniality, are losing their allure. "We've been leaning toward more of an intimate indoor feeling for outdoor spaces," said Baltimore-based designer Laura Hodges, and that includes decorating overhead. "Designers often [talk about] the fifth wall—referring to ceilings," explained Melinda James of the Beaumont, Texas, firm M. James Design Group. "Awnings, arbors and umbrellas are just as effective, adding comfort, drama and coziness."

Resort-Style Umbrellas

Scalloped, fringed and layered umbrellas in playful stripes and sherbet colors—the pros say today they're all fair game. "I'm seeing a lot of requests for fun shapes and vibrant colors that feel like you're at the beach," said New York City-based designer Elisa Baran. When Houston designer Mary Patton needs to create shade for clients, which she acknowledges is crucial, she turns to Santa Barbara Designs' iconic and super-customizable umbrellas (pictured), available in dozens of colors and trims and bench-made on the California coast.



Plain-Jane Planters

Unless you want your space to look like a soulless condo vestibule, just say no to the sort of "modern" monolithic planters that seem to be de rigueur in office lobbies and other institutional locales. Los Angeles designer Rydhima Brar is eschewing boring gray floor planters for sculptural varieties "that instantly uplift an entire patio," she said. Ms. Nozawa agrees that outdoor planters have been homogeneous for too long and she is seeing "more silhouettes and surfaces that come from nature."

Containers With Patina

Designers are noticing a surge of interest in planters and containers made of "live" metals and other surfaces that patina over time—a materials trend that has also been thriving in interiors. For his projects, Marblehead, Mass., landscape designer Adam Woodruff routinely installs artisan-made zinc and natural Italian terra cotta planters. Ms. Collarte called out the Corten-steel planters from Domani, shown here—a great option if you want to nod to nature while keeping an industrial edge. "I'm a big fan of materials that react with the elements," she said.



Bulky All-Weather Weaves

Bid goodbye to blocky chairs and sectional sofas the size of sedans. "We are definitely moving away from dark, heavy pieces," said Shaolin Low of the Honolulu-based firm Studio Shaolin. That goes double for those pieces made of the ubiquitous tightly woven synthetic wicker. The all-weather weave is conspicuously faux, doesn't lend itself to delicate design and will soon be in a landfill. "[Plastic furniture is] typically mass-produced, which encourages a wasteful 'throw away' attitude," said Toronto designer Jaclyn Genovesi.

Striking Cord

From polyester marine rope to cotton-fiber, "the cord has been rediscovered," said Los Angeles-based designer Darrin Varden. Janelle Burns, interior designer at Maestri Studio, in Dallas, noted that rope furniture "is soft without being a fully upholstered, high-maintenance outdoor piece." Constanza Collarte lauds their lightness, "always a plus during hurricane season!" The Miami designer has lately been mixing into her projects the easily-stowed pieces, like those from the Harp collection from Roda, shown at right.



—Sarah Karnasiewicz