

# Rails replace waiters as dining rolls into future

By Tony Paterson

in Berlin

Fed up with being sneered at by waiters for choosing the wrong wine? Sick and tired of having your expensive bistro supper served an hour late? Germany may have found the solution.

There is not a waiter or waitress to be seen at 's Bagger's bistro in the Bavarian city of Nurem-

berg. Instead – in what seems like a parody of the advertising slogan *Vor-sprung durch Technik* (Progress through Technology) – the brightly painted interior of the restaurant is dominated by a series of 15ft steel spirals that look like enormous bedsprings. Each one is connected to a dining table and is held in place by blue painted metal rods that reach up to the ceiling.

The diners, who are of-

fered delicacies such as organic beef in buttermilk and sausages en croute, throw the occasional glance in the direction of these unwieldy contraptions to see whether their orders are on the way. Their food is soon spotted gliding down the sets of parallel rails that make up the spirals in specially adapted metal hotpots.

An ingenious system, similar to railway points, ensures that each dish is de-

livered to the customer's table where the hotpots come to rest by being forced to slide upwards and to a standstill on upwardly curved rails that mark the end of the line.

Germany has become the home of quirky restaurants. Three years ago an entrepreneur with long experience of helping the blind opened a bistro in Cologne in which diners sit in complete darkness and

are attended to by blind or partially sighted waiters.

Michael Mack is no exception. A former iron foundry manager and inventor of the restaurant's gravity feed rail system, he opened 's Bagger's earlier this month and says that he has already saved hundreds of euros in staff costs by dispensing with waiters. "Billions could be saved if the concept were to be adopted by major restaurant chains," he insisted. "The table is a place where customers can dispense with waiter service," he added.

Diners place their orders on computerised touch screens above their tables. These are linked to the kitchen where the chefs put the orders on the rails straight from the oven. To make the gravity rail system work, the kitchen had to be specially installed under the bistro's roof.

Mr Mack, who is also an enthusiastic cook, said he hit upon the idea while rushing from kitchen to dining room as he prepared a dinner party for some friends. "I simply thought – this would all be easier if the food slipped along to them on its own," he said. Several visits to mechanical engineering companies followed before Mr Mack decided to develop the system himself. He established that it would all work by gravity. "The system is so delightful precisely because of its simplicity," he said.

He has recently patented the system and hopes to



An ingenious system of spiralling rails brings the food from the kitchen in the room above to the diners

interest the fast-food giants.

A few of his customers have taken exception to the system. "I would much prefer a nice waiter or waitress to all this cold stainless steel – you can't talk to it," complained one customer on

the website of a German restaurant forum. Another customer was even less enthusiastic: she said the rail system reminded her of automatic pellet feeding devices "used to feed pigs" on battery farms.

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