



FINAL PHASE 2018

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(/SPECIAL/SANPELLEGRINOYOUNGCHEF2018/)



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ORIOL CASTRO: 'COOKING IS MY THRILL'

As a young pastry chef, **Oriol Castro** couldn't have wished for a better mentor. He joined **Ferran Adria** (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/stories/ferran-adria-interview/>)'s *elBulli* in 1990. By the time of its closure, he had worked in all areas of the ground-breaking restaurant, from leading its creative team, to shaping its research and development programmes.

Alongside fellow *elBulli* alumni **Mateu Casañas** and **Eduard Xatruch** (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/stories/disfrutar-restaurant-barcelona/>), he is breaking new ground with two restaurants of his own. **Compartir** (<http://en.compartircadaques.com/>) (Cadaques) and **Disfrutar** (<http://en.disfrutarbarcelona.com/>) (Barcelona, the *One to Watch award 2017* from *The World's 50 Best Restaurants* (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/blog/news-trends/worlds-50-best-one-to-watch-2017/>)– as well as the number 55 position on said list (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/blog/news-trends/worlds-50-best-restaurants-2017-51-100/>)) are both renowned for their welcoming **atmosphere** and **avant-garde food**.

Now Castro will be a mentor to **David Andrés**, the lucky finalist of the Spain and Portugal region at **S.Pellegrino Young Chef 2018** (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/tag/san-pellegrino-young-chef/>). He spoke to *Fine Dining Lovers* about the importance of creativity and teamwork.



Can you remember the moment you decided to become a chef – what inspired you and what obstacles did you overcome to achieve your dream?

At high school one of my teachers asked me about my future plans. I thought studying ‘marine cultivation’ or cooking. Finally I chose cooking because I had always seen my mother and grandmother in the kitchen, cooking traditional dishes, and it inspired me a lot. Cooking is my passion, my thrill. The only obstacle was and is being far from my family.

What was your biggest triumph as a young chef?

As a young chef, the opportunity to work at *elBulli* (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/search-box/?elBulli>) was a dream come true. Being part of the creative team at *elBulli*, and doing what I felt, was the biggest triumph without a doubt.

As a mentor, what do you expect from your young chef, and what do you think you can offer him / her?

I've worked in a kitchen for 25 years and I hope to offer my knowledge about gastronomy, as well as my personal experience. I expect that all these young chefs become the future. Nowadays they have a lot of information, great education, and they are very well prepared. They are getting better and stronger, day-by-day.

What would victory in the *S.Pellegrino Young Chef* competition mean for a young chef?

S.Pellegrino Young Chef competition is one of the most important awards in the world and a victory would change a chef's life in a professional way. He or she will win visibility and recognition. And it would be very important for their country and its local cuisine.

What was it like to have Ferran Adria as a mentor, and what has it taught you about mentoring young chefs?

Mateu Casañas, Eduard Xatruch and I regard both **Juli Soler** (Ferran Adria's partner at *elBulli*) and him in equal esteem. They are without doubt our most important mentors. *elBulli* was a huge turning point for us. It was where we first met 19 years ago, and grew up together both personally and professionally.

We learned Ferran's way of thinking and his approach to ingredients. And from Juli, we learned the art of hospitality and looking after our customers. Effort, persistence, dedication, passion for cooking, never thinking that we are the best, and freedom of thought are what we learnt from Ferran and Juli, and this is what I can offer to my young chef.



How has your early training as a pastry chef helped your career?

It was very important. The patisserie and kitchen have a great symbiosis. I worked with **Paco Torreblanca**, who showed me to be very methodical,

which is also important in the kitchen. This knowledge helps me to introduce techniques from the patisserie to the kitchen and we have done very interesting things.

How important is creativity in the development of a young chef?

Creativity is important, of course. But as important as creativity is traditional cuisine. Young chefs have to have a very good basis of traditional cuisine to be able to do creative and avant-garde cuisine. They need this knowledge to develop and adapt their own style and to be different.

At *Disfrutar* and *Compartir* you work as part of a three-man collective. How important is collaboration and teamwork in a successful restaurant?

We always say that we are one person, but with six eyes, six hands and three brains. Our culinary philosophy is a result of many years spent working together. We have a lot of discussions about how to move forward, what works and what doesn't. Sincerity is vital.

We each have different strengths: Mateu is extremely organised, I have the gift of the gab, whilst Eduard excels at execution. But the most important thing is that we are a team. United we stand. It's like a football team. A single player needs the whole team. And in a kitchen it is more or less the same.

Is it important to take risks in cooking?

Yes, in creative cuisine you need to take risks. If you take risks and test different things you get new things. Without risks, these new things do not arrive.

What are you working on now, and what are your plans for the future?

We work step by step. When we start a new project, we are quite prudent and there is often a lot of reflection as to how we move forward. Right now, we are working hard every day to evolve and improve. We are focused in *Compartir* and *Disfrutar*.



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