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From left to right: M Oriol Castro, Eduard Xatruch and Mateu Casañas.

ORIOLE CASTRO
Disfrutar

Poc a poc

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.duke.lu/disfrutar2024

ALL THREE OF US ARRIVED AT EL BULLI BETWEEN 1996 AND 1998. IN 2010, FERRAN ADRIÀ TOLD US THAT THEIR KITCHEN, SELECTED AS THE “BEST RESTAURANT IN THE WORLD” MULTIPLE TIMES, WOULD CLOSE A YEAR LATER. WHAT SEEMED TO BE A CATASTROPHE PROVED TO BE A BENECTION. INTERVIEW.

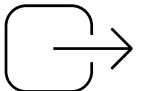
Your mission statement starts with “We believe in who we are.” Who are you?

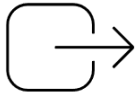
We are three chefs, with values, as people, capable of great effort and sacrifice. We truly love our work. We work for creativity and for the kitchen. We are disciplined. Non-conformists.

How do you approach cooking?

I consider myself a chef. We always feel that we need to keep our feet on the ground. We know things but we don't know everything. We work with clear protocols: Look at this book (He opens a thick file full of notes, lists, and photos). The team working here in the R&D kitchen documents everything they do. Every combination they

Disfrutar's mission statement: “We believe in who we are and we cook as we know how, without giving up anything that has been built so far, and with the search for excellence and customer service as the backbone of our project.”





Poc a poc



Calçotada 2023 - freeze-dried calçot, its consomme and romesco miso.



“By keeping a record of everything we do, we create a healthy pressure to get better every day.”



Panchino filled with caviar.

try. Every object we invent to enhance the menu is kept here on these shelves. Every year, we aim to invent 60 new dishes and publish our work. Whatever we did that was unfinished, we continued the next year. We never stop. We never give up anything. During the year, certain months are harder for creativity, but the team works relentlessly from January to December and we travel a lot. We always try to improve, little by little. As we say here: “Poc a poc.”

It is all about emotions?

The most difficult part is looking for new techniques and concepts. When you have that, you can start looking for emotions, like in music. Each new technique opens up new opportunities: New combinations, new colors, and new plates. Techniques and concepts are not limited to the dish. Sometimes we also start from the emotion. Our dish “Fear” for example was inspired by Covid and we invited guests to put a hand in a box full of smoke to grab



Pearl necklace with lychee.

whatever was inside it. You can apply our method to many disciplines. It involves a lot of trial and error.

What about the team? How do you attract, motivate, and retain your staff?

First of all: We have to be here. We show by example. It is the most important thing. Then we need to have faith in

what we do, so that we never lose sight of our goal, year after year. Ours is to innovate and to excel in every aspect related to servicing our visitors. By keeping a record of everything we do, we create a healthy pressure to get better every day. If you don't have this drive, you get bored. Our philosophy is, “We want for others what we want for us.” Everyone is welcome here, but we also run a business, so we need to pick the best people. Clearly, the four people who make up the R&D team are among the most important.

You are 100% independent. How important is it?

We created our first restaurant in 2012 in Cadaqués, called Compartir (To share). Disfrutar opened in 2014. Compartir Barcelona opened in 2022. We are very happy because we are completely free. We don't need to give explanations to anybody. We hire who we want. We had to learn everything from scratch in 2012 but being three chefs helps a lot. We manage everything directly and we make

sure we keep everything under control. Every month, for example, we close our financial books. As owners, we take full responsibility and we want to make sure that our business is sustainable, especially as it is growing steadily.

Is it getting harder to do business in your sector?

In a way, everything becomes more difficult with inflation, the rent, sourcing staff, and the best products, but at the same time, things become easier. When I learned my job, I wasn't paid. Today, you can learn while being paid and you can get additional training online, night and day. By the way, we work with the University of Barcelona. The main factor is that everything goes faster. That is making life harder for everyone in the world. But all in all, if you want something, you will get there.

How do you approach customer service?

It follows the same rules as creativity. It must be approached at 360 degrees. Service in the room is as





Poc a poc

important as cleaning a dish or attending to a client at the reception. Service needs to be a culture shared by all members of the team. But service needs to work with everyone: You need to know how to read the client. We follow industry rules, but at the same time, we made these rules ours by making a difference at a human level. By showing love to the client. Technique without emotion is like knowledge without passion. You need both to create an emulsion.

Disfrutar seems to incarnate the Catalan culture: Independence, identity, tradition, family, and excellence.

Exactly. We can be considered as an embassy for Catalan culture. We want to share our culture with our guests. In our region, many restaurants adopt the same approach, which is great! We spread this spirit, our values. How to grow as humans and professionals.

You worked at El Bulli from 1996 to 2011. How did you feel when it ended?

Ferran told us a year before that we would close. As any human, we felt bad. We lost everything. The three of us always had an idea to do something together. None of us would have started on his own. We collaborated with the Bulli Foundation until 2014, and that year, we went from the very top to being as low as can be. We rented a very old place that we had to renovate completely. We had no idea how to run a business. But we started. Poc a poc. And over the past 10 years, every step felt natural. Organic.



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“Disfrutar can be considered as an embassy for Catalan culture.”



©Ernest Abentin

Flavor concentration, sprouts



©Francisco Guillamet

Black apple with noisette butter ice cream and flourless puff.