



HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Having forged their friendship and careers at the world-famous elBulli restaurant, *Mateu Casañas*, *Oriol Castro* and *Eduard Xatruch* are the trio of multi-talented chefs that form the culinary force behind 2 Michelin-starred Disfrutar in Barcelona and Compartir in Cadaqués.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOAN VALERA, ADRIÀ GOULA & FRANCESC GUILLAMET

DISFRUTAR

Nearly two decades on, it was during 1996-1999 that Oriol Castro, Mateu Casañas and Eduard Xatruch met in the kitchens of the infamous restaurant elBulli, under the tutelage of Ferran Adrià. Having all been inspired by their families to cook from an early age, elBulli was the perfect opportunity for these Spanish/Catalan chefs to forge their early careers on their native soil and with the guidance of a world-famous chef of Molecular Gastronomy.

“We all loved cooking since we were children and chose to be cooks when we’re teenagers. Oriol and Eduard studied in a culinary schools and Mateu learned the profession at his parents business. However, it was during our time at elBulli that we really started to develop both our individual and joint cooking styles.

“We are all uniquely inspired by the same two things: first of all, for the years we spent at elBulli. At elBulli, we grew as cooks and we understood and developed our culinary philosophies. The other thing that inspires us is the Mediterranean Sea; the influence of the Mediterranean is very powerful in our way of cooking.”

Before the restaurant’s closure in 2011, all three chefs had risen in the ranks to hold top positions within elBulli’s creative team, alongside Albert and Ferran Adrià. It therefore seemed only natural to the trio that they would continue this tight unit and become business partners with their own venture. They had all shared a long-standing idea to open their own restaurant along Spain’s Costa Brava, so in 2012 they took the plunge and Compartir was born.

Translated as “share” in English, Compartir based its gastronomic creations on dishes intended for sharing, whilst also showcasing contemporary Mediterranean cuisine blended with traditional cooking methods and recipes. With the restaurant located in the idyllic setting of Cadaqués - a small village filled with art, nature and the wild charm of the Mediterranean - the three chefs were able to put all their energy into cooking how they knew best.

“In Compartir we wanted to make modern, gourmet cuisine, but in a more casual way so that it feels like a shared experience. We also wanted to keep in line with our culinary background and create not only great tasting and attractive dishes, but also food that offers something a little bit new or



LEFT The lively interiors pay homage to Catalonia and the local artisan traditions.





PREVIOUS PAGE Macaroni Carbonara.

LEFT Panchino filled with Beluga caviar.

different to what people are used to. We use recognisable flavours with contemporary techniques to produce something unique to us and the region.”

With Compartir becoming a quick success, the trio decided to open their second establishment, Disfrutar, just a couple of years later. Disfrutar, which means, “enjoy”, made its home in Barcelona and aimed to provide guests with the ultimate level of enjoyment through their creative cuisine. The larger Barcelona venue also offered a kitchen space that could handle more experimental cuisine, allowing the three chefs to create an innovative and avant-garde tasting menu.

“Initially we didn’t want to do ‘creative cuisine’, but we did want to do something more modern and with a tasting menu concept. Our cooking style for both Compartir and Disfrutar essentially share the same touches, but they are different in creative complexity.”

“In Barcelona, the gastronomy we offer revolves around the tasting menu, with clear avant-garde cuisine and where the dishes stand out for their great, markedly Mediterranean identity. In short, a restaurant with daring, fun and modern cuisine searching for taste as the main proposition.”

Currently, the restaurant offers four different tasting menus: Gran Classic, Gran Festival, Disfrutar Classic and Disfrutar Festival. The more “gastronomic” tasting menus are Disfrutar Classic and Disfrutar Festival, with the former including the restaurant’s signature dishes such as the multi-spherical tatin of corn, macaroni carbonara, “panchino”, “tarta al whisky” and chocolate peppers with oil and salt, and the latter offering new, seasonal or experimental creations.

“We always try to create new techniques or invent new concepts. For example; the multi-spherical pesto with smoked eel made with the multi-spherical technique, a technique that we created at Disfrutar; the “panchino” filled with caviar, a dish made with the fried dough that we invented here; the macaroni carbonara with pasta made with gelatin of ham stock; or the gazpacho sandwich, a dish where we incorporate the sense of the smell. All of these examples are dishes that represent the experimental and creative essence of Disfrutar.”

Now in its 5th year, Disfrutar has continuously garnered many international awards for its cuisine, the success of which the trio believes comes from using select

DISFRUTAR

Mediterranean produce, a thorough investigation and trial process for the dishes, and excitement for constant change and innovation.

“When we started, we had 70 clients for service and now we accept a maximum of 45. However, we have upped our staff numbers so that our clients, the restaurant and the food get the care and attention they deserve. Equally, we try to have the best products and in Barcelona we have excellent vegetables, fish and shellfish, for example. Nowadays, with transport, we also get a daily delivery of shellfish or seaweed from Galicia or meat from the center of the Peninsula. The kitchen has also evolved in complexity and in creativity quality and, likewise, the restaurant maintains the same essence, but it changes a lot.”

Equally worth a mention are the stunning premises of Disfrutar, which are as surprising as the cuisine. Located in the Eixample, just in front of the Ninot Market, Disfrutar’s contemporary interior reflects the chef’s respect for the Mediterranean’s history and legacy, with ceramic being the common theme marking the interior. Decorated in an array of different formats of ceramic, guests are invited to

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LEFT Inside the award-winning Barcelona restaurant, Disfrutar.

RIGHT Multi-spherical tatin of foie gras and corn.





LEFT Chocolate pepper
with oil and salt.

explore the various spaces that have been impregnated with the essence of the region: the bar, the kitchen and the patio.

“The ceramic material is present throughout the different areas, thereby bringing us closer to the values that our clients wish to transmit: naturalness, humility and respect for the history and heritage of the Mediterranean. But, in each space it is transformed into a new material, which helps us to make each area unique.

“The entrance area contains more urban references, like the metallic structures of the antique Ninot food market across the street. In this area we use ceramics in a colorful, artistic way, with panels of monochromatic tiles, which surround us as if they were part of a deconstructed mural by Miró, the artist.

“The kitchen is the oven of the restaurant, both real and metaphorical, as it is from there that all activity emanates. Here we use ceramics in their most humble and rugged format: pieces of, baked bricks in their natural color, form a permeable limit through which the guests can see the interior of this oven, golden and warm.

“Passing through the heart of the kitchen we arrive at the main dining room, a wide luminous space which visually mimics the terrace and which invites us to open our gaze and our spirit, transporting us away from the city to a more natural environment. We are embraced by white walls, ceilings and floors, surfaces with openings in a chaotic order, reminiscent of Mediterranean towns.

“The limits of the space are drawn by these openings and windows, which allow color to enter the space, always Mediterranean, like the green of the bushes, the yellow of the genista or the blue of the sky. This is what we explain to all the customers when they arrive to Disfrutar.”

With a genuine desire to share their passion for food and their engrained enjoyment of the Mediterranean, Mateu Casañas, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch show no signs of stopping. With constant new ideas and a willingness to change and adapt to their environment, the only thing they are fixed upon is improving their cuisine to be the best that it can be.

“If it’s possible, we want to be better tomorrow than we are today, but beyond that we just hope that we and our guests keep enjoying the work we do.” ■