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STORY



PH FRANCESC GUILLAMET

## DISFRUTAR: FAMILIAR FLAVOURS, NEW TECHNIQUES

Eduard Xatruch at Barcelona's Disfrutar restaurant, winner of The World's 50 Best Restaurants 2017 One to Watch award, on balancing innovation and taste.

BY TOM JENKINS (/PEOPLE/5DDF1342-582B-4085-B660-972538702BE4/TOM-JENKINS/) ON APRIL 03, 2017

In just over two years, **Eduard Xatruch**, **Mateu Casañas** and **Oriol Castro** (left to right above), the three culinary brains behind *Disfrutar* (<http://en.disfrutarbarcelona.com/>) in Barcelona, perhaps Spain's most creative restaurant, have achieved an enormous amount. There's the Michelin star in successive guides, assorted gastronomic awards in Spain, and now, 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/>) – which they'll receive at the ceremony in Melbourne on 5 April, **live streamed on Fine Dining Lovers** (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/tag/50-best-restaurants>). “This [One to Watch] award is very important for our present and our future,” says Xatruch when we speak on the phone. “It's great to have an international award in the gastronomy world.”



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The Disfrutar story starts around 130km north along the Costa Brava, near Roses, in the kitchens of the legendary *elBulli*. (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/search-box/?ElBulli>) where the trio of Catalan chefs met in the late 1990s. They went on to become part of the core creative team alongside Ferran (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/search/?Ferran+Adria>) and Albert Adrià (<https://www.finedininglovers.com/search-box/?Albert%20Adria>) and when El Bulli closed in 2011, helped establish the *elBulli Foundation*. With its support they opened their first restaurant, *Compartir* (<http://en.compartircadaques.com/>) (which means “to share”) a little further up the coast in the small town of Cadaqués, in the 18th century house of a loyal customer. It gave them a chance to cut their teeth.

“We knew nothing about running a restaurant, we only cooked,” says Xatruc. “We needed to go step by step, open in a quiet place, where we could think. Compartir – it’s not a creative restaurant, but there’s a modern kitchen and we play with modernity and tradition. We had to start with a project that wasn’t very ambitious.”

Compartir’s casual sharing plates and team of 19 though are a world away from the fiercely innovative modern Mediterranean cuisine at Disfrutar (“to enjoy”), which opened in December 2014 in Barcelona’s Eixample district. There, a crew of 50 prepare **three tasting menus of between 20 and 30 courses**, from an open kitchen in a light and airy, ceramic adorned space. Dishes include a **clear gelatine macaroni, tossed in truffle foam and dressed with a Parmesan cream** at the table and a **deconstructed whisky tart** for which you’re encouraged to rinse your hands in whisky beforehand, so as to inhale the aromas whilst eating. There’s a **multi-spherical tart of foie gras and corn**, and a neat little **gazpacho sandwich with a vinegar garnish**. The list goes on – well, after 16 years in the kitchens of elBulli, you’re bound to have a few tips and tricks up your sleeve, aren’t you?



“We don’t serve anything that we served at elBulli,” says Xatruc, in the interests of clarification. “People say it’s Bulli-style, but it’s our way to cook. We can’t cook in a different way.” Technique does not supersede all else, however: “The kitchen is very sensual and fragile. You don’t need to use a strange machine and create a strange dish. Sometimes in the little things, you feel the magic,” he says. “We use new techniques, but we try to present in a familiar way in terms of flavour. We play a lot with memory. The emotion of the customer is very important.”

The three are no longer involved with the elBulli Foundation, they’re simply too busy, but remain close with Ferran Adrià. “We talk with Ferran, we go to visit him, or he comes here, and we know how the elBulli Foundation is going,” says Xatruc. “We have a very, very close relationship, but now we need to be in our restaurants and working on our projects.”



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Those projects include a Compartir book and whittling down the 300 or so dishes they create each year at Disfrutar to the 90 to 100 that actually reach the diner. “We want to be better every day. Our plan is be happy cooking. We’re not chefs that are planning to open 10 restaurants in our lives,” he says. “If we have two restaurants we’re happy. It’s important that people see that we put our hearts into the kitchen and the restaurant, because it’s our life. Maybe we’ll open another restaurant, but Disfrutar is very young. Our restaurants have a long life and we have lots of things to do.”

They do indeed, starting with a trip to Melbourne. Disfrutar is one to watch alright, one to watch intently.



The World's Best Female Chef reflects on her journey to the top during her acceptance speech at the World's 50 Best.

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