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Inside Disfrutar: An interview with chefs Eduard Xatruch and Oriol Castro

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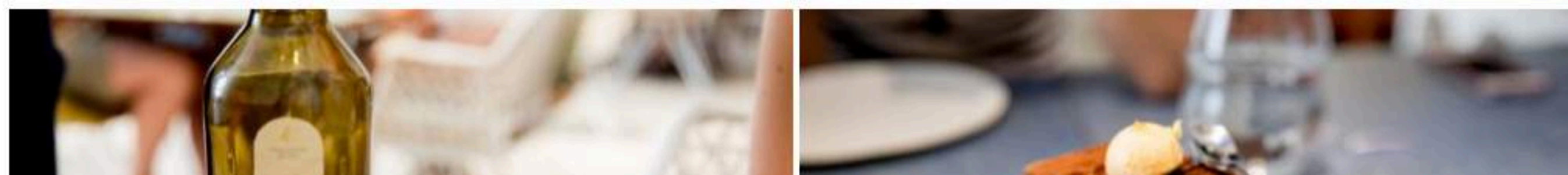
FILIPPO L'ASTORINA

26TH JUNE 2017

Eduard Xatruch, Oriol Castro and Mateu Casañas were some of the most senior chefs at the celebrated ElBulli. After joining forces, they first opened Compartir, on the coast, not far from Roses, then in December 2014 they launched Disfrutar in Barcelona, a very ambitious yet relaxed creative restaurant. We went down to try their cutting-edge food first-hand – a spectacular 33-course menu.

"We are a 'live' restaurant and we make personal menus. In two and a half years we came up with two thousand and sixty recipes," Xatruch tells us in Disfrutar's basement workshop. Walls of pictures of dishes surround us. This is clearly one of the most active and organised kitchens in the world.

"For instance, we took the whisky tart, which has been very popular here for the past 30 years, even though it's not a traditional recipe, and we deconstructed it. We wanted to make a tribute so we used liquid caramel hazelnut, creamy egg yolks with yuzu and just vanilla chantilly. You eat all these elements with your fingers but first we put in your hands a bit of 'perfume' [they pour actual liquor] of whisky and you smell it and eat the elements with flavours of a tartar whisky. You smell it, you have the taste, but you aren't eating whisky."



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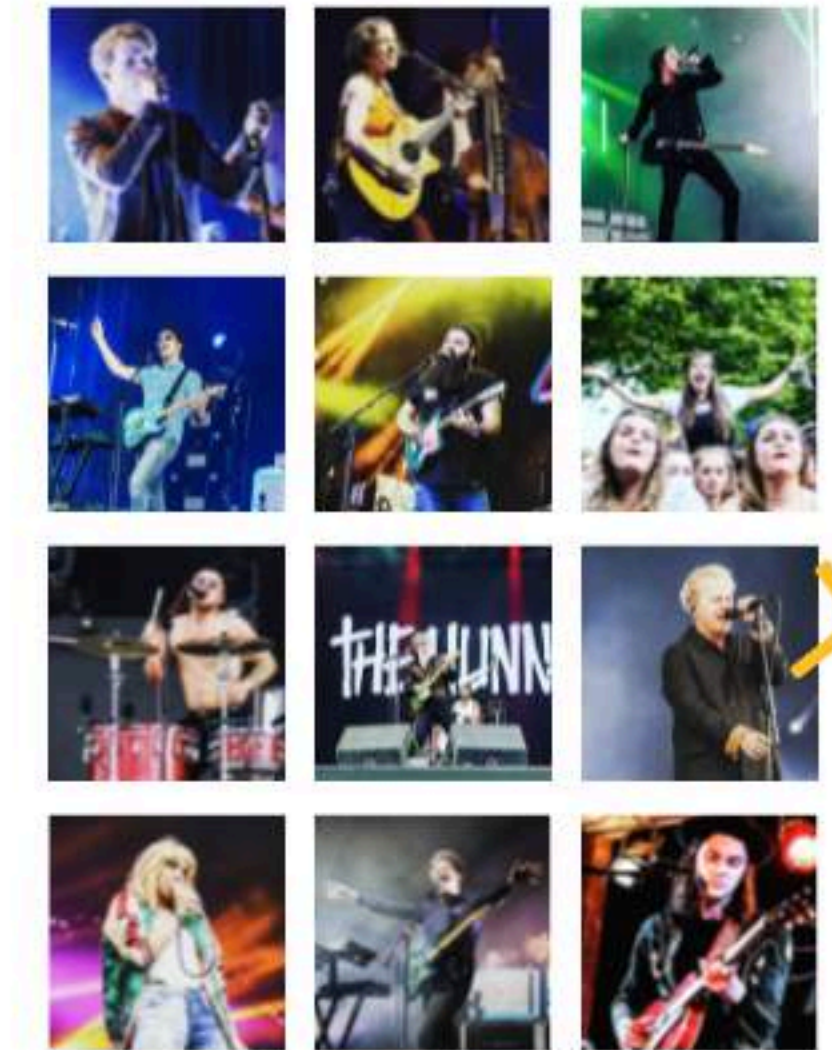


"We did the same with the gazpacho. It's the most popular cold soup in Spain, we made it in a sandwich form, crunchy, creamy and fresh. We put vinegar in a glass and you smell it like a wine. A 30-year-old cherry vinegar. When you normally cook gazpacho you'd miss that smell. You had it all your life and never smelled it!"



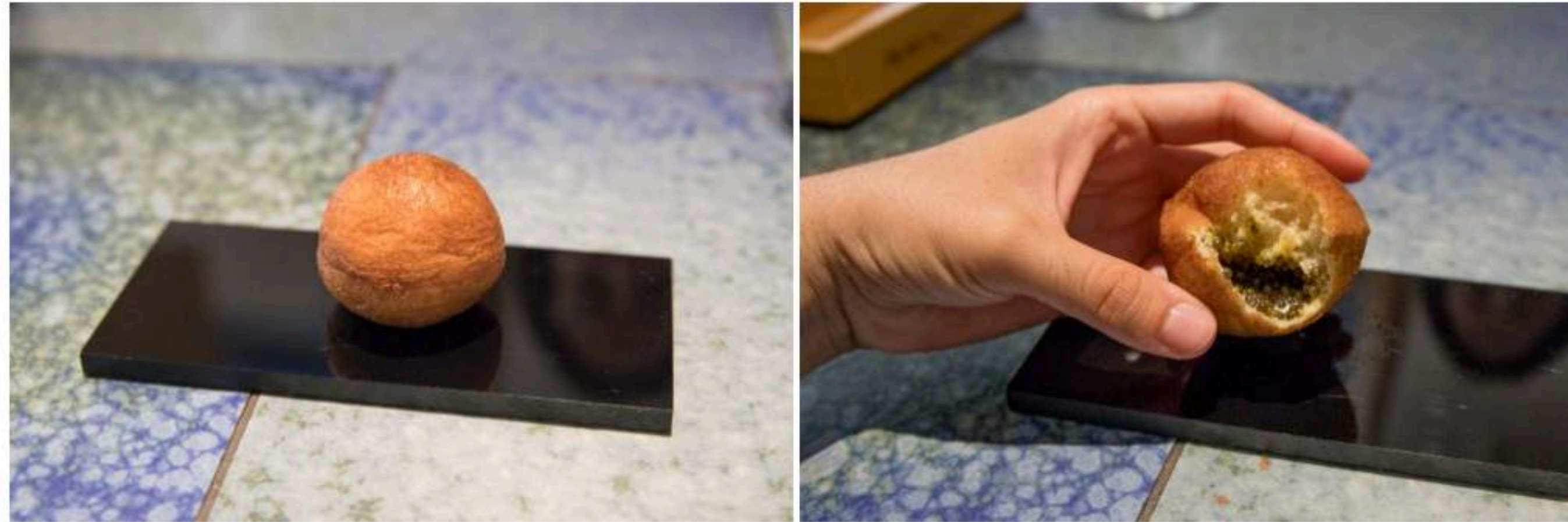
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Xatruch is very focused and sure of himself. "We look at the product from all the points of view. You don't [always] need a very complicated technique, some dishes here are very complex yes, but the main thing is the sensibility. If you look at it in the right way it can be magic."

The Catalan chef is very proud of all the new techniques they developed, one in particular. "Eight months ago we created this 'panchino', a tribute to the Chinese bun. It's not a panchino though, it's like a liquid brioche we put in a siphon, then we fry it at the moment. 20 seconds and it's done. We fill it with what we want, in this case caviar and crème fraîche. So you eat an areated brioche with fresh filling. You can put inside ice cream, sea urchin, tuna...and it's magic. Normally to have a dough so airated you have to ferment it first, and you can put inside [dry things], nuts for example, but not a fresh product, because it wouldn't turn out well. With this technique we can make a lot of dishes."



We move around the studio space and he points at three huge folders, with a year dated on each of them. "2015, 2016 and 2017. It's very important for us to put our work in order, because we produce many recipes. So unless you are very organised in six months you won't remember what you made – or how you made it. So we catalogised all our dishes, per year."

"What is important for us is not to make shows. We think in a very serious way, it's not about making fun things but if you have a good time and smile it's better. All dishes have to be very tasty and bear a meaning. We don't have favourite dishes because if there's something we aren't sure about we don't put it in the menu. We also work with a design school to improve the presentation."



Teamwork is everything at Disfrutar and halfway through our interview Xatruch passes the ball to Oriol Castro. "We believe union is strength. We are three, with different personalities, but we complement each other." Castro has a calmer approach, testament of his longer experience in the field. "I've been doing this job for 25 years, without emotions and passion it wouldn't be possible."

We move back to the walls of dishes. "Take a look at this one, flowers in a glass. It's so simple, some people were shocked when we told they just had to smell the flowers. But it's magical because it has coherence in a longer menu." Recently they've been named One to Watch by the World's 50 Best Restaurants list, where they rank at 55. It still makes Castro proud, but he sees achievements just as motivation. "We didn't expect that actually, but we were thrilled after we heard of it. And with we, I don't mean only the chefs but the whole team, because we never think Eduard is better, Mateu is better or I'm better, we are a bunch of people who work on a project which is Compartir and Disfrutar, and we believe we have to bring happiness to the people who come to the restaurant."



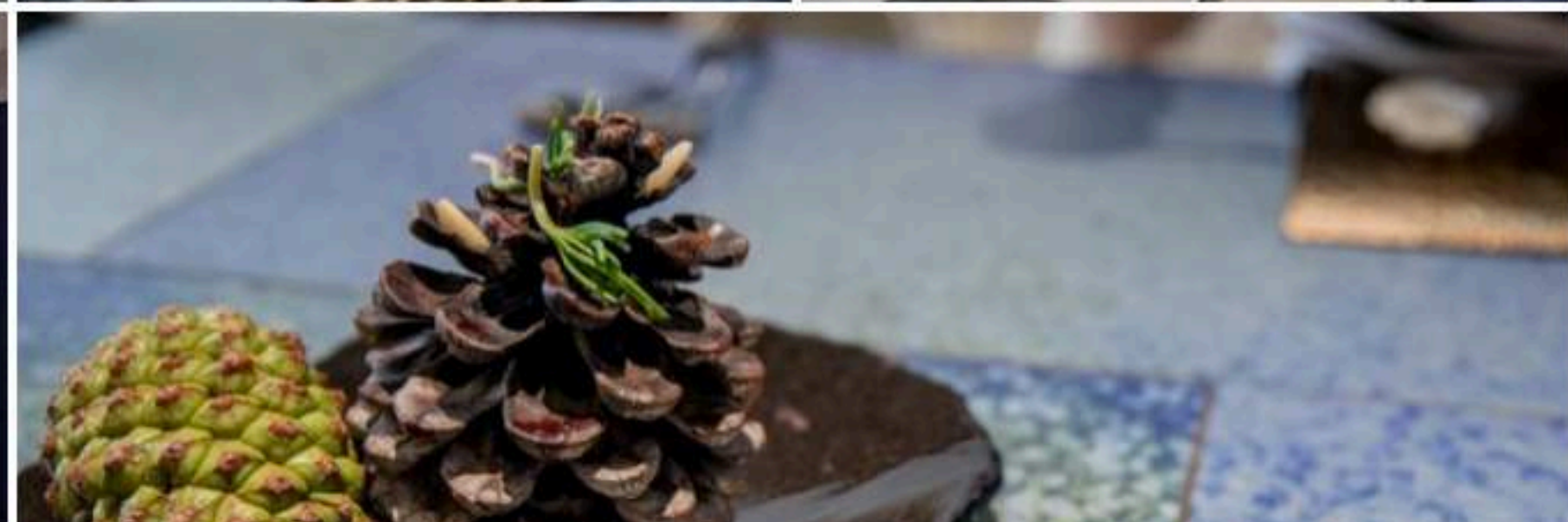
"Getting into the 50 Best is a dream and an honour for us, we couldn't have imagined this two and a half years ago, and it's very important for us to receive this recognition. At the end of the day you are what other people say you are. For the team this news is very important and we are excited about taking part on this list, it's a dream. And I know we were first at ElBulli for five years, but also know you can't live of your successes, you need to keep working every day and that's what we do here in Disfrutar, keep working to keep improving and do our best so the people who visit us are surprised and happy with what they experience, and then they leave thinking that something happens here."

Filippo L'Astorina, the Editor

Photos and video: Filippo L'Astorina/Laura Denti

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