Disfrutar

THE EL BULLI ALUMNI STRIKE AGAIN WITH A TASTING MENU TO REMEMBER. BY TARA STEVENS.
PHOTOS BY YAN PEKAR

Strolling up Villarreal, you could be forgiven for missing Disfrutar. It’s a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it kind of place, but keep your eyes peeled because this is likely to be the most exciting meal you’ll eat this year.

The interior, by the brilliant Equipo Creativo, at first made me think of a modern-day Western saloon with a long, sage green bar at the entry and tiled stalls enclosing a small dining area. Keep going though, and you come to a large open-plan kitchen, effervescent with brilliant chefs doing their thing. Eventually you’ll reach a cavernous, glazed dining room, with two-storey high ceilings, an elaborate feature wall and curiously comfortable cut-out dining chairs in subtle shades of chalk, mustard and olive. And beyond that again, there’s a decked terrace with retractable shades and vertical gardens creeping their way towards the sun. It’s quite the tardis, but it was here as a fan of the chefs—Mateu Casasas, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch—who opened the much-lauded Compartir in Cadaqués in April 2012. Alumni of El Bulli with a sterling reputation to boot, the boys are now shuttling between the two ventures, ensuring that there’s always at least one of them present. And frankly, wow, what a show.

We began with a cheek puckering passion fruit granita, spiked with rum and topped with coffee beans, freshly ground from a pepper mill, that sent streaks of acidity scuttling wildly across the tastebuds. Then, a light-as-air beetroot puff, as delicate as the finest crystal, served sunken in an elegant glass bowl of black sesame seeds. You swirl the seeds and the puffskinny mayonnaise and crammed into an apple-flavoured meringue—is dreamy.

By now, my pal and I were starting goggle-eyed at each other proclaiming it a marvel. Had it stopped there, it still would have felt like a bargain, but we were only half way through. The rice taco with tomato, Parmesan and basil, was deceptive in its simplicity, punchy and refreshing, it primed us for more. Turns out that mackerel with porcini and cauliflower couscous is a match made in heaven. Who knew? And Disfrutar’s version of macaroni a la carbonara—translucent tubes turned opaque in a foam of eggs and bacon, literally ‘cooked’ at the table—becomes an extraordinarily soothing, yet light, comfort food. Mussels and peas were a plump and yielding amalgamation of sea and garden, whilst the narguis blanketed in a smooth truffle and foie cream, served with a salad of crunchy oyster leaves and topped with a lemony foam, was the best use of foié I’ve ever seen.

A ‘mandarin’ stuffed into a mandarin with rose-infused jelly at the bottom, and a thimble-sized cheesecake topped with cherry ice-cream and served in a raspberry cone, made a refreshing finish, but the best was yet to come. Two perfect chocolate chilies—one green (with mint), one red (with chili)—garnished with olive oil and sea salt, as all good meriendas should be. By now it was nearly 5pm. We’d been there for four hours, and as I said my thank yous and goodbyes, I admit, I shed a tear or two. If the art of seduction could be boiled down to a tasting menu, this would surely be it.

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