



MADE TO REIMAGINE

This is a story of three Chefs who apart from the origins and mutual passion didn't have much more in common. Not until the day they met in the '90 at the famous El Bulli restaurant in Catalonia, a place where an entire new culinary era has begun. Starting as apprentices, the three managed to climb all the way to become head chefs at El Bulli and work closely with its founder Ferran Adria on the creative development for the following 18 years

By **Zoja Stojanovic**

After El Bulli closed for the public, this was not the end for Mateu Casañas, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch. More than that what followed was a fruitful new chapter. For the next couple of years the three Chefs continued working with Ferran at El Bulli Foundation and at their very own restaurant Compartir, opened in 2012. Two years later they opened another restaurant located in the heart of Barcelona named Disfrutar, meaning Enjoy.

Everything about Disfrutar blends in a joyful symbiosis of Mediterranean

influences and rich cultural legacy this region is known for. The iron decor is an homage to Ninot food market located in front of the restaurant. Colorful ceramics honor the famous Spanish artist Joan Miró, while the terrace situated in the back leads to a true micro oasis.

In the epicenter of the room is the open kitchen decorated with clay tiles, typical for the small fishing villages. Within this lab-looking space is where skills, passions, but also past, presence and future knit so well together to create a true sensation for all senses.

Everything begins and ends with very complex yet very delicate savory and

sweet tastings that come in different shapes, textures, colors and flavors. Whether it is the rose petals with reconstituted lychee and gelatin liquor drops, beetroot merengue balls that appear after shaking the bowl, dehydrated gazpacho sandwich, olive spheres encrusted with cocoa butter, fried beignet with cold caviar filling, transparent carbonara, rabbit consommé served in a cognac glass... No matter on the technique, each of those bites is exploding in the mouth to unleash a bath of perfectly balanced and unexpected flavors. Some 30 different tastings later, it was the time to meet three brilliant minds who stand behind this enchanting place called Disfrutar.

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? From all the people that gone through El Bulli, how did you three manage to recognize each other and team up?

Eduard: Working for so almost two decades in a restaurant where a lot of pressure and dynamics was happening on hourly bases, once you encounter someone you can fully trust and collaborate with in a very productive and pleasant way it becomes a keeper and may lead to stories like ours. Being involved in a creative cuisine requires not only a lot of hours spent in the kitchen, but also a lot of hours spent discussing and brainstorming. This is when you realise who you can click with. The more you think about the people you want to work with and the more you start developing the idea, the more you begin realizing you need each other. To run a creative-contemporary restaurant requires space, equipment and a big team. Personally, I don't believe in one-hero stories, this is why I have had so much faith in ours.

? Starting your career at the restaurant that has been 5 times named world's best and has changed the dining experience forever, how much courage did it take to open something on your own?

Eduard: The thought of opening a restaurant was brought up a month before El Bulli was about to close. For sure being the three gave us additional wind in the back and encouragement to do such a venture but it was not easy. We gave all what we had. We believed it was the right moment and we took it step by step. In the beginning we opened Compartir, a restaurant located north from Barcelona, in Costa Brava, where we transform traditional dishes into modern suggestions. Two years later followed Disfrutar that gave us a wide space to create, explore and experiment. We joined our learnings, our passions and our visions all aimed at offering the essence of what we believe is a pure enjoyment. Looking back we feel proud to see the direction Disfrutar is heading. Being able to develop and combine new techniques and offer ingenious concepts has been a dream come true.



? Being on a constant quest to create and recreate, how would you define your cuisine?

Eduard: Having Mediterranean blood running through our veins, it is normal that our cuisine will be infused by our backgrounds. But also, being very experimental by nature we don't hesitate combining other flavours and influences. In its very essence our cuisine is playful, it is meant to produce enjoyment. Sometimes it is meant to tease, to be ironic, to make you smile or feel surprised. Our cuisine is purely creative, very skillful but imaginative, with a unique goal to please the palates, excite the senses and ultimately offer a unique and very personal experience.

? All the three being chefs, how do you collaborate while creating a menu?

Eduard: Each of us would have an idea, we would then talk about it and give it a try. Afterwards, we would taste it, discuss it and take it from there. For us this is a winning combination. Nevertheless, our skills are also complementary – I feel spicy stronger than Oriol, while Oriol tastes bitter more than me. The way of work we have established at El Bulli has remained till this day. We complement each other and at the same time we are very critical and questionable among each other, which creates an unbiased atmosphere and fantastic team work.

? Where do you take the inspiration from?

Eduard: The creative process is so beautiful because it is so vast. You simply collect the inspiration on the way. From nature, memories, books, markets, other restaurants, travels, random discussions... Once you are very much into something, your mind is open. It is like a sponge that is always ready to soak in ideas. More challenging is to recreate inspiration, but this kind of a challenge is a great incentive to try everything possible and if the idea is worth it to make it a reality. Also, when we are brainstorming over a new dish, we never focus on a single ingredient. It is always about creating a new concept. Once you have a new concept it will give you endless possibilities to exchange ingredients and continue creating.

? As a one Michelin star restaurant, listed among 50 best in the world

and recognized by Miele "One to watch" award in 2017, what are the next goals for Disfrutar?

Eduard: The menu is always evolving, as well as our ideas. We don't see end of innovation. There will be always something new to try out – a new piece of equipment, a very exotic ingredient or a new concept. In that sense the goal is only to improve, to maintain our passion and our curiosity. When we receive an award we can only feel proud and think – yes, we are on the right track. It generates satisfaction but never causes pressure. The pressure of constantly improving comes from us. We are those who create tensions, but only in the positive sense. To enjoy our work and life is our philosophy. We have been enjoying it every single second, and we do it for the sake of giving pleasure to whoever comes to Disfrutar.

