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Disfrutar Restaurant, elBulli's legacy freshly carried on

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Although Catalunya, the Northeast region of Spain I come from, has several Michelin starred restaurants, including the 10 time winner of the Best Restaurant in the world, elBulli, which closed in 2011, and the current winner, El Celler de Can Roca, most of these award winning restaurants were located in the farther northern tip of the Autonomy, and none of them in the capital, modernist Barcelona. This may change with the recent opening of Disfrutar, the sister property of Compartir, the brain child of three of elBulli's Head Chefs, which has taken the city and the food critics by the storm. In just over a year, Disfrutar has already garnered one Michelin star and it is on its way for the second one, on the second year since opening. And this comes as no surprise after a visit. Disfrutar is refreshing and strongly rooted in Catalan tradition, with several details that refer to the childhood of those born in the 80s and which may escape foreigners. It also continues elBulli's innovative, creative and out of the box molecular cuisine thinking with dishes that are a show of skill and invention.

Disfrutar restaurant review: the story



Disfrutar restaurant

When elBulli closed its doors as a restaurant in 2011 the world of molecular cuisine lost one of its forefathers. The restaurant had 3 Michelin stars since 1997, at a time when only two other restaurants in Spain had them: Arzak and El Raco de Can Fabes, and had been chosen as the Best Restaurant in the world by Restaurant Magazine since 2002.

But after the closing, several of its chefs and kitchen staff opened up other restaurants. Three of elBulli's Head Chefs, Mateu Casañas, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch, opened Compartir, a restaurant in Cadaques, near the original Roses where elBulli was located, a markedly romantic tiny fishermen village in the northern coast of Costa Brava, very near France, a town graced with white washed houses and narrow steep streets facing the Mediterranean.

After Compartir, came Disfrutar. Located in front of one of Barcelona's oldest and most traditional markets, El Ninot, Disfrutar is a great tribute to Catalan and Mediterranean food with the same innovative and avant garde spirit of elBulli.

The degustation menu at Disfrutar

Disfrutar offers a choice of two degustation menus, one with 18 and one with 25 morsels of goodness. Each of the dishes are made as small tapas, served in plates to share with a piece of each person at the table. All guests must choose the same menu.

We went for the 18 plates menu and it was a delight.



Disfrutar menu

Frozen passion fruit glass with coffee rum was an incredible way to start the meal. It was extremely flavourful, intensely delicious and a mixture between air and ice. A fabulous palate cleanser to kick it off.



Disfrutar beetroot

Beetroot that comes out of the soil. This was a real cute gimmick. The beetroot did indeed come out of the soil when the waitress sifted the tray in which the cute beetroot balls of air were hidden and they magically appeared from underneath. We had to eat this with our fingers straight from the sugary soil.



Disfrutar mango and walnut

Savoury candy with walnuts and mango, tonka beans and whisky. The edible plastic candy was an incredible concentrated yet tiny explosion of walnut flavour with tonka beans and whisky which complemented well the small slice of mango. We also ate that one with our fingers right from the cute wooden boxes in which they were hidden. It was slightly reminiscent of the Thai mango sticky rice.



Disfrutar menu

Mini fried fish with trout eggs and algae. A prawn cracker looking chip covered with mini fried fish, resembling the bait used in fishing, algae chips and accompanied by a serving of trout eggs. It was an Far East dish that contrasted with the rest of the menu and which was a welcoming addition. We also ate that one with our bare hands, breaking pieces of the large prawn cracker.



Disfrutar olive

Enjoy the olive. One of the most famous dishes at elBulli and one which I have seen in many other its “offsprings”, was the spherical olive. This one looked exactly like one of those large olives you can buy at any of the traditional markets in Spain only that, when we bit on it, it quickly exploded into a liquid. A wonderful, if expected, flavour.



Disfrutar menu

Smoked Idiazabal cheese biscuit with apple. One of the chef’s allusions to my and their childhood memories were the Artiach cream filled waffle biscuits that we ate as kids only, this time, it was made of smoked Idiazabal cheese and frozen into an ice cream texture delight. It was clever, and cutely positioned on a ceramic tile that made me think of the Middle Eastern pattern on a Moroccan mosque in Marrakesh and which also decorated the walls of the restaurant. It had to be eaten quickly, like a cookie, before it could melt.



Disfrutar egg and mushroom

Crunchy egg yellow with mushroom jelly. This one was very good. A deep fried crispy egg shell filled with egg yellow and mushroom jelly which we could scoop out with a tiny spoon. It was as intense in flavour as the rest of the meal and a tiny morsel of comfort food. It also came in a cute bird nest plate with hay and all.



Disfrutar langoustine sandwich

Airy langoustine cocktail sandwich. An ingenious baguette looking prawn cocktail that was instead filled into two airy pieces of bread looking genius. As soon as we bit into the sandwich the crumbly melt-in-your-mouth airiness made it disappear.



Disfrutar salmon

Salmon and marinated mackerel with cauliflower in vinegar. A simple sushi looking set of marinated salmon strips where the rice had been replaced by crumbled cauliflower. it was hard to eat with our hands, as the cauliflower was not tight enough to be picked up but it was a lovely composition and mix of flavours.



Disfrutar dumplings

Boletus dumpling, a real interpretation of a mushroom dim sum served in the original bamboo bowls. There was smoke coming out from the bottom of the bamboo tray to give it an added mysterious flair.



Disfrutar macaroni carbonara

Macaroni carbonara, one of the most inventive and delicious of the dishes was this jelly made macaroni carbonara. There was no pasta in this dish and the carbonara sauce came out of a pump, was mixed right on our table and sprinkled with ham and cheese cubes. It was one of the most creative and new dishes I experienced during the meal.



Disfrutar liquid salad

Liquid salad. As the name indicates, this was truly a liquid salad served in a tall dessert wine glass and tasting just like that. perhaps the weakest of the lot, unless we missed some genius. After all the previous dishes, I felt like I had perhaps missed the point and there was something magical in the vegetable juice.

Tomato and Arbequina olive Caviaroli “polvorone”. One of the most typical Christmas sweets we eat in Spain are polvorones. Usually made of a thick almond paste that stick to your palate and teeth like dry flour, they are sweet and give you a sure sugar rush but they are oh-so good. Here Disfrutar’s interpretation included a tomato and olive version that was equally sticky, offering the exact texture and tasted only a little bit sweet. Delightfully annoying.



Disfrutar red mullet and aubergine gnocchi

Red mullet with pork and aubergine gnocchi. Perhaps one of only two normal-looking dishes was the red mullet with pork, although the gnocchi looked nothing like a regular one. The fish was hyper tasty and the serving size slightly more filling than the previous mouthful-sized portions. When we got to the gnocchi we were told to handle with care as they were very delicate, and not to bite but put it all in our mouths. Inside, there was another great aubergine explosion.



Disfrutar Moroccan lamb

Moroccan lamb. The second main dish of the meal was a deliciously spiced Moroccan lamb that took me right back to my trip to the North of Africa. It had a touch of tagine, some broken grain salad and a fruity orange/citrusy and yogurt sauce that placed it right on the Moroccan Mediterranean spice trail.



Disfrutar mango and coconut

Mango sorbet with coconut. Another tribute to childhood memories, this one came in the frozen lemon peel that can so commonly be found in many restaurants and bars and which would make any kid happy. Inside, the tropical mango and coconut flavours were subtle but clear.



Disfrutar chocolate peppers

Chocolate, olive oil and salt peppers. One of the strangest of the dishes were the red and green pepper looking chocolate concoctions. Made to look like shiny glazed peppers, these were olive oil covered intense chocolates and accompanied by a thin slice of toasted bread. As we had to eat them all at once, the another explosion, this time of chocolate, filled my mouth. Even for a chocolate lover, it was maybe too much but this was a tribute to the “berenar” or tea snack that kids my parent’s age used to eat, bread with chocolate and olive oil.



Disfrutar profiteroles

Coffee profiterole. The last dish was a pretty profiterole filled with a coffee foam an made of the same airy texture of the prawn cocktail. It was a refined happy ending to the meal.

On top of a fantastic and incredibly unique dining experience, Disfrutar also had a reasonable wine list with affordable local and international wines without the hefty mark-ups of fine dining restaurants. We enjoyed a refreshing bottle of rose recommended by the Sommelier which was great.

A promotional banner for Endesa One. On the left is the Endesa One logo. The main text reads "12% Dto. Para siempre*" with a plus sign and "Descuentos adicionales según cuando consumas". Below this is a small clock icon and the text "Ver condiciones en www.endesaone.com". To the right is an image of an Apple Watch. Further right, text says "Contrátala hasta el 15 de septiembre y gana una de las 10 Apple Watch que quedamos". At the bottom right is a red "Contratar" button.

The ambience at Disfrutar Restaurant Barcelona

The restaurant is bright, refreshing and large, especially given its premium location. I had never been given a tour of a restaurant, until I arrived at Disfrutar. As we walked past the bar, the casual dining area and the kitchen, we were greeted by the various staff members, even the Head Chef. The various elements of the decoration and the design were also pointed at us, so that we knew that the colours in the first room alluded at the El Ninot Market across the street, and that the ceramic tiles were a tribute to Miro. At the farther extreme of the restaurant there is an indoor patio, open air, covered with some fine canvas to protect from the direct sun, in which guests get to enjoy dessert. As it started to rain during our visit, we could not move outside but, having a table by the floor to ceiling windows, we had plenty of natural light to brighten our meal.

The very high ceilings of the restaurant also gave the room a sense of space, although the use of metal and glass only did nothing to offset or cushion the loud Catalan dining tradition.

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