

THE FUSIÓN FACTOR

ONCE A YEAR, IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY, MADRID BECOMES THE CENTRE OF THE GASTRONOMIC WORLD. CHEFS FROM JAPAN AND CHINA, SOUTH AMERICA AND THE USA AND ALL OVER EUROPE CONVERGE OF THE CAMPO DE LOS NACIONES FOR A CELEBRATION OF NEW-WAVE, OFF-THE-WALL AND SOMETIMES JUST PLAIN WEIRD COOKERY, FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING LIGHTS. WAYNE EDWARDS OF THE FOOD PEOPLE WAS THERE.

The 2008 event featured a wide range of seminars and demonstrations, including Michel Troisgros (Maison Troisgros, Roanne, France) and Magnus Ek (Oaxen Skärgårdskrog, Sweden) on 'La Cocina Acidulada – the new frontier of taste'; Marcos Morán (Casa Gerardo, Asturias, Spain) on 'Trash-Cooking Seafood – Fish Leftovers'; and, inevitably Ferran Adrià (El Bulli, Roses, Spain) on 'Symbiosis of the Sweet and Salad Worlds'. All in all some four dozen chefs did presentations in the centre's magnificent theatre, including Juan-Mari Arzak, Vineet Bhatia, Heston Blumenthal, Joël Robuchon and David Muñoz, who is destined to be one of the greats of the next generation, if the money holds out (see DiverXo, elsewhere in this issue).

In addition to demonstrations there were stands promoting regional produce, wines, and specialities and an amazing buzz of electric and eclectic new ideas. This has to be one of the most innovative culinary events in Europe.



In the demonstration theatre the variety and breadth of cutting edge gastronomy opened with 'bistronomics', the emerging trend of low cost haute cuisine, represented by Iñaki Aizpitarte, a 35-year-old Basque chef whose Paris restaurant Le Châteaubriand serves a €14.00 lunch menu which might consist of oysters in a red cabbage and lime gazpacho followed by blood sausage with mash and a dessert of tangerine and olive oil sorbets.

A number of speakers presented their specialist research work: for example María-José San Román (Monastrell Restaurant, Alicante, Spain), working with the University of Castilla-La Mancha, has spent the last two years researching *Crocus sativus* (saffron). Different ingredients require different quantities to maximise the flavour and aroma, meat broths require more than fish ones; infuse threads in fats and the colour doesn't leach but the flavour will: a blast in the microwave to roast threads to 120°C will maximise delivery of this oldest of spices.



Carlos Cidón (Vivaldi Restaurant), with the University of León, has focused on the boletus mushroom; Sergio Azagra, a chef with no kitchen but a laboratory, had been researching truffles. His mission is to create a more professional trade in the black gold and he has identified that the aroma is most pronounced in the veins that run through the truffle.

Juan-Mari Arzak, like Ferran, has his own R&D laboratory to support and challenge our views on techniques and methods to create new concepts and dishes at his world famous restaurant Arzak in San Sebastian. He talked about the importance of earth and the influence of the landscape and soil in his cooking. "Nature starts with the soil..." So why not use it in cooking as demonstrated in his hake and white clay dish?

Juan is a passionate man and particularly about the importance of ingredients, his philosophy, and love for cooking. "Preserve the taste of ingredients, your produce will guide you as to what to cook, challenge yourself, don't compromise and remember the roots and knowledge of tradition; good chefs filter the contemporary and marry with the traditional, but most of all enjoy life."

Perhaps the last word should rest with Ferran who talked about his 2007 dishes and those that he and his team are working on for 2008. He asked that we all take time to think, and stressed how important it is that we don't cook all the time or we become stale: inevitable if you stand in the same place, see and do the same thing day in and day out. "Remember that all chefs create their own mark and that it is about ingredients and the dishes we create, not about technology and techniques. It is what you make that is important.

"Cuisine is everything, so be free to do what you want in your restaurant, listen to others, learn from them and share your knowledge and ideas then we all grow and cuisine will evolve. Remember, cooking is pleasure." ✨

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