

my experience in the Republic of cala Montjoi

by Christian Lutaud

Returning now, in 2004, to the El Bulli kitchen has been a trip back to the past, although the “Bulli World” today is from another galaxy, and is nothing like the one I knew. At the end of this visit, Albert, Juli and Ferran asked me to write a few lines on the years I spent in El Bulli.

Over twenty years have gone by since I, with my 2CV and my guitar, landed in cala Montjoi. Three months previously I had had a meeting with Jean-Paul Vinay and Annick Janin which led to me becoming assistant chef, and so swell the ranks of the “Gang des Lyonnais”. Also at El Bulli were Mme Marketta, Juli, Jose, Ali, Ángel, Artur, Jordi, Julio, Cándido and others, who were to be my new family, and this corner of the Mediterranean, my new country, which would mark my life for ever afterwards. All those years in El Bulli were special, and moulded me as a professional and as an individual. I have a great many memories, many of them good and just a few bad ones, and I have forgotten the latter. From Jean-Paul and Annick I learned the trade (techniques, taste, tidiness, hygiene, etc.) and I shared a friendship and good times with them; everything else I learned from Juli.

Then came Fermí (Mr Puig), and after him Luisito, Ramiro Buj Fuster (my friend from Gandía), and one day, Ferran arrived. We were gradually leaving the Spanish Navy without cooks. I used to look after the arrival of the new cooks, tell them about the work, accommodation and the life in our little commune, and also about the night life in Roses (*Chic, Si Us Plau, Rachdingue, Picasso*, etc.). When he finished his military service, Ferran stayed with us, the team concept became more important, and the level higher (in two years we obtained two Michelin stars). With Ferran and Toni Gerez (the gentleman from Llançà) we formed a “triumvirate” and began our trips to Setcases to venture forth and open our own establishment, something which never left the drawing board. In fact, there was one event that changed the destiny of El Bulli. Jean-Paul and Annick left to set up their

own restaurant, *La Ciboulette*, taking with them half the team (Fermín, Cándido, Tito and Ángel). So we put our project aside and went back to our home, to cala Montjoi, for a new undertaking, with Ferran and I as chefs de cuisine, assisted by Andy and Uwe. Later we were joined by Albert Adrià and Xavi Sagristà.

I well remember our first steps, the first menu, the nights spent studying in the caravan (the El Bulli “casino”). Ferran and I would go every Tuesday to the Boqueria and buy produce from Colomines and Petràs’ stalls. Later we would get in the car, together with Xavi and Albert, and go and have a meal in the restaurant in Gualba. We would also visit the truffle and mushroom market in Vic, and frequent the market in Figueres and the fish auctions in Roses. I still remember our visits to the *Mas Pla*, in Borrassà, the restaurant belonging to André Bonnaure, where we used to eat cassoulet, or *Le calamar en folie*, which belonged to our friend René Lopinet, a charming character who left us a few years ago; I can still remember his guinea fowl with spices and honey kebab, as well as his cheesecake.

Among many episodes, I remember the fire in cala Montjoi, with the subsequent power cut; fearing that all the tarts on the sweet trolley would be ruined, we gathered them all together and left them in the freezer belonging to Cal Julià, our fish

supplier. And then there were the football matches in the camping grounds, Judit’s beach bar, the night clubs, the flat in Roses, which became a boarding house in the summer months, and dinners at



friends’ homes. The trips to France, the visits to the “greats”, like the time Ferran, Juli, Toni and I went to Lyon and stayed the night at my cousin Serge’s house in Tarare. Another time, we went with Dr Schilling to

Troisgros, and then to Jacques Pic's restaurant, where we had a row with the sommelier. And meals in Roger Vergé's *Le moulin de Mougins*, Jacques Maximin's *Chantecler*, Louis Outhier's *La Napoule*... and in the casino in Cannes, which left us with our pockets considerably lighter. On our trips we also visited bookshops and bought recipe books, such as in Toulouse, where we had a meal in Lucien Vanel's restaurant. And later there were the *stages*, mine with Troisgros and Michel Chabran, and Ferran's with Pic and Georges Blanc. And then there was the mountain of day to day work. And not only in El Bulli. We were consultants for the *Si Us Plau* restaurant, as well as the *Passarella* restaurant in Roses; we also cooked for the Dalí seminar in Figueres, in the Corte Inglés in Madrid, the Nixe Palace in Mallorca, and the *Florian* in Barcelona.

Time went by (five years), and the yearning to try something else marked the moment for me to move on to new ventures and a change of scenery. Artur Sagués (my fellow-sufferer and a son of El Bulli) and I went to open our own establishment (*La Guardia*), followed later by the *Oligarum*. When this closed down, a new stage began for me, which might be described as my "doing my own thing" stage (courses, consultancy, etc.), together with my friend Paco Torreblanca.

After all this time, coming back to El Bulli, and seeing what it represents, what Albert, Juli and Ferran, their collaborators and everyone who has passed through it have made of it, and the work of one individual, Mme Marketta; seeing how a lad from Santa Eulàlia was over time to become the first chef superstar in history... All this fills me with great joy and immense pride at having been, and still being, part of this family.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ferran Adrià', written in a cursive, stylized script. The signature is positioned at the bottom right of the page.