

# my arrival at El Bulli: necessity or vocation?

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by Albert Adrià

This book has required me to dig deep into my memory, not always an easy task, in an effort to recall as accurately as possible the years gone by, my arrival, the feelings I would have had back then when, as a lad of just 15, I ended up in El Bulli. It has been nearly two decades of work, sometimes hard, almost always gratifying, that began on 28th March 1985. That grey, unsettled day I arrived at cala Montjoi, and the spot seemed enchanting yet bleak. And I began to harbour doubts, wondering whether I had made the right choice in coming so far from home. The situation got worse when Ferran introduced me to the manager, a lanky, restless fellow called Juli, who immediately peppered me with questions which, to tell the truth, I did not begin to understand. I thought then that such a reception was necessary, as if he somehow wanted me to understand that I would not be the boss' kid brother there.

After a while, they got me to choose what was to be my new home, although I can no longer remember whether I stayed in a room first, or whether I went straight to the ramshackle caravan that would later house me, situated halfway up the track that went from the bend in the road to the restaurant. Despite the obvious inconveniences, and once I had got over the initial misgivings, it seemed a paradise: suddenly I was living on my own, without the support of my parents, and although the first two weeks it took me some time to adapt, having left school, my friends and my environment behind, the predominant feeling was one of interest to see what the future held for me. And as always, first things first: very soon discotheques, parties and girls became my main concern.

And what about work? One of the first questions I am always asked in interviews is: "How did you come to El Bulli?", followed by "Was it a vocation for you?" The answer is as simple as it is unoriginal. I had never liked school,

but all the time I was passing my exams, there was no problem; however, when I got to secondary school and did not even pass P.E., I decided that there was no point in even finishing the first year. At that point, perhaps the most logical thing to do was to go to El Bulli, at a time when my brother Ferran was chef de cuisine and needed staff. And so I joined El Bulli, and I am still here, nearly twenty years later. Funnily enough, people tend to think that I arrived in the restaurant long after Ferran did, perhaps because there is seven years' difference in our ages, although the truth is I arrived just one year after him.

Another frequent question in interviews is “Why did you specialise in patisserie?” There are various reasons. Firstly the person in charge of patisserie left around 1987, and I, having worked in all the departments of the kitchen, found myself in patisserie at that time. In addition, I knew that I had a hereditary allergy to shellfish, which was a nuisance as I could not work properly with it. Finally, the fact that my “teacher”



was Christian Lutaud, who had an exquisite grounding in the Lyonnais school, helped me to discover all the techniques and secrets of the sweet world. From then on (interrupted only by my military service in 1988) I quickly absorbed everything there was to know about this aspect of cooking. However, since 1997 I have not been devoting myself exclusively to desserts, as I am in charge of the Workshop in Barcelona, and together with Ferran and Oriol look after everything, both sweet and savoury.

There is a saying (not mine of course) that I often repeat: “You are what you cook, and you cook what you are”. In the light of this, I owe not only my way of cooking, but also the way I am, to all those who one way or another have

crossed my path over these two decades. They helped me to mould my way of living and enjoying life which I would certainly not have learned had it not been for El Bulli.

