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## In Spain, a Restaurant Reimagines the Famed El Bulli

By BRADEN PHILLIPS ---- FEB. 17, 2017



The first of six spaces diners at Enigma pass through during a dining experience of some 40 dishes lasting three hours. Myriam Meloni for The New York Times

Having opened seven restaurants in eight years, [Albert Adrià](#) did not need to open another.

Mr. Adrià, 47, has explored the intersection of modern Spanish cuisine and other traditions more than perhaps any other chef. Five of his restaurants are in the same neighborhood here, creating a kind of culinary theme park that lures some 100,000 diners — half of them foreigners — in a year.

Albert Adrià was the pastry chef at El Bulli for 23 years. He says Enigma is its spiritual successor. Credit Myriam Meloni for The New York Times



But the spirit of El Bulli demanded to be heard. That trailblazing modernist outpost on the Costa Brava of Catalonia closed in 2011, leaving behind a legacy as one of the world’s most influential restaurants. Mr. Adrià was El Bulli’s pastry chef, and he worked there for 23 years alongside his brother, [Ferran Adrià](#), its creative force.

So Albert Adrià had everything he needed — the experience, the will and the audacity — to revisit El Bulli. The result is [Enigma](#), which opened in January not as a re-creation of El Bulli, but as an attempt to reimagine it.



The open kitchen of Enigma. The restaurant serves 24 people at a time for \$235 each, excluding drinks. Myriam Meloni for The New York Times

“This is not the El Bulli of 2011,” Mr. Adrià said. “Enigma is what El Bulli would be in 2017.”

Like its predecessor, Enigma offers cuisine that is wide-ranging and complex. But it focuses instead on the ingredients and their intrinsic tastes rather than revolutionary techniques, like the foams and spheres that distinguished El Bulli. Unlike that restaurant, Enigma serves cocktails and elaborate snacks. And where El Bulli’s décor was rustic, Enigma’s ambience is futuristic and cool — indeed, the tables and chairs look as though they were carved from blocks of ice.

Located as it is on the main floor of a bland office building, Enigma has an anonymous-looking entrance that requires a code number for admission, provided when the guest pays an advance deposit online. Inside, diners begin a journey through six separate spaces, sprawling over 7,500 square feet, where they are served a tasting menu of more than 40 small dishes. The meal costs about \$235, excluding drinks.

The first space features waist-high tables where guests stand and receive a hot hand towel and hibiscus tea accompanied by two bite-size tastes that will vary: one night they were a freeze-

dried strawberry with fresh wasabi and pomegranate vinegar, and ice crystals of yuzu saki with fresh wasabi and yuzu shavings.

Diners glimpse what is to come through hanging opaque panels that look like corrugated ice. If the planet Krypton had an elegant restaurant, this would be it. The tufted aluminum netting on the ceiling, shot through here and there with purple and blue lighting, is matched by the gray crepe outfits of the servers



**Seaweed with caviar, one of the snacks at Enigma.**

Myriam Meloni for *The New York Times*

Open five nights a week, Enigma serves only 24 people at a time (it plans to increase that to 30) in a choreography flowing from one space to the next, including a cocktail bar and a flattop grill where diners can watch the preparation. When served at a table, dishes are often set down in front of diners without comment; the server waits to see if the guest wants to know the ingredients before tasting. Most like to try to decipher what they are eating and hear about it afterward, Mr. Adrià said.

Some dishes send taste receptors into overdrive, like the squid tartar brushed with a thin layer of coconut oil and a drop of slightly spicy squid ink. Others are gorgeously simple: a Raf tomato cut in half, with one cream made of the red part and another of the green, poured into the same bowl.

At the end of evening, about three hours later, guests are suddenly led into a back-room storage area and through a door into a traditional bar for drinks and further tastes. The spell fades slowly.

“I don’t want to bore people or be too pompous,” Mr. Adrià said. “But the worst would be indifference.”

*Enigma, Sepúlveda Street, 38-40, [Barcelona](#), Spain; reservations: [enigmaconcept.es](#).*



The small bar where diners end their meal. Myriam Meloni for *The New York Times*

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