

ROSSANA ORLANDI

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THE TASTE ISSUE



Barcelona



After decades of opening up to the world, the Catalan capital is reconnecting to its Spanish roots.

BY ANDREW FERREN

I moved to Spain in 2002 for what was meant to be a one-year sabbatical from my life in New York, and although I ultimately settled in Madrid, for personal reasons, Barcelona is a huge part of why I'm still here 15 years on. Back then, as a travel writer, there seemed to be endless demand for stories about the city. Whether it was architecture, boutique hotels, local food markets, or early-morning foam parties, if it was happening in Barcelona, it just seemed so much fresher, more modern

and creative, and maybe even a little more fun than virtually any other place.

Eventually tourism skyrocketed, with not always the happiest of results. When Barcelona became a popular port for cruise ships, the tiny streets of the Gothic Quarter started having to absorb thousands of day-trippers racing from site to site. And with the success of Airbnb, both local and foreign speculators started buying up apartments to rent out to tourists, and it seemed some neighborhoods like La Barceloneta were being hollowed out, with few locals left. People spoke of the "next Venice," referring to a city with far more visitors than residents. Finally the ongoing political maneuvering over Catalan independence tempered things, putting a level of tension in the air that was palpable, even to tourists.

Of course no one is ready to give up on Barcelona yet. And why would they? This is a city where you truly can have it all: cultural

riches (ancient and contemporary), a highly refined gastronomy scene, a thriving design community, tasty wines, and Mediterranean weather that awakens the beach in summer. For visitors and locals alike, an upside to the recent existential crisis has been a subtle relaxing of some of the old-time formality and social mores that once separated visitors from residents. Lunch in a fashionable restaurant can now be had at 11 a.m., or 2 p.m., or 4 p.m. Many restaurants have well-edited boutiques and some of the best shops serve pitch-perfect G&Ts. In cafés, late-afternoon caipirinhas get sipped along with *café cortado* without anyone raising an eyebrow. Even the hotel invasion looks to be headed for a slowdown. Barcelona's left-leaning mayor, Ada Colau, put a freeze on new hotel licenses "until further notice." Nonetheless, a new crop of independent properties have appeared recently, instilling the landscape with some much-needed creativity.



RESTAURANTS & BARS

A chef recently joked that just by trying to sample all the restaurants in Barcelona run by El Bulli alums, one could dine out in the city for a couple of weeks. Indeed, many who came out of Ferran Adrià's kitchen have stuck around, including his brother Albert, who is responsible for more than a half a dozen openings. His latest is **Enigma**, whose unconventional style is making headlines and drawing comparisons to El Bulli. The interiors by surprise 2017 Pritzker Prize laureates RCR Arquitectes, also known for their work on the award-winning Les Cols, in Olot, conjure a silvery dreamscape with swirling clouds made of metal mesh on the ceiling and opaque resin walls molded to appear like rushing water. The 40-course tasting menu can take up to four hours and the wine list has been pared back to subtle, low-alcohol vintages, in deference to the food. While the fare evokes some of the theatrics of El Bulli at **Disfrutar**—run by three of its former head chefs—the informal interiors provide a fresh new backdrop. Clay, the most Spanish of materials, acts as a unifying element to the lattice-like terracotta

screens that surround the open kitchen. Another former member of the club, Rafa Peña, is celebrating the 10-year anniversary of his first solo restaurant, **Gresca**, by opening a more casual wine bar called **Gresca Bar** next door. Expect small tapas like eel toast with sour cream and onion, and anchovy marinated with lemon.

But Barcelona is about more than the ultimate gastronomic experience at 300 euros per person. Inspired by the well-known New York art dealer, **Mary Boone Bar** offers a fun dose of uptown attitude along with cocktails named for modern artists in an art-filled environment meant to evoke Boone's imagined Barcelona apartment. At photographer Nacho Alegre's **Servicio Continuo**, interior designers Cristina Carulla and Cristina Mas conjured a British member's club that jibes with the Prohibition-era drinks and abbreviated menu of global classics: fish and chips, dim sum, and scallop ceviche.

Located on the edge of the Barceloneta neighborhood near the harbor and beaches, the **Green Spot** has made eating vegetarian cool with an airy room lined

in textured timber and lush atrium by São Paulo-based Isay Weinfeld, and a seductive menu that includes sweet potato tagliatelle with macadamia nuts and black truffles. Its counterpoint, **Solomillo**, a *charcuteria* in the Hotel Alexandra, is an ode to beef: Diners choose the breed, weight, and cooking point of their carefully aged sirloin, which has been heralded as some of the best in the city. The space is studio Borell Jover's tribute to Spanish design, where Marset Funiculí lamps by Lluís Porqueras are complemented by Basque brand Ondarreta's graceful chocolate-hued stools.

Enigma. (OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) The Green Spot. Outside Servicio Continuo. Patio seating at Solomillo.



SHOPPING

Like many European cities where all the booksellers were historically on one street and the silversmiths on another, much of Barcelona's varied retail scene can still often be categorized by address or neighborhood. The most well-known and grandest boulevard is Passeig de Gràcia, but the recent expiration of decades-old rent control has seen global brands like Armani and Prada pushing out local businesses that have been there for generations. Two hold-outs worth seeking out are **Santa Eulària**, a compact department store with a fantastic edit of coveted niche brands, and **Bel**, an old-school haberdashery famed among the Catalan gentry for their bespoke shirts, pajamas, and boxer shorts, all made on-site. A few blocks away, on Carrer de Pau Claris, is the sprawling concept shop of Chilean interior designer **Jaime Beriestain**, who over the years has left his mark on dozens of hotels and restaurants. Visitors will find Spanish furniture brands and curios, a *floristería*, and his grandma's onion soup recipe at the café.

At the top of Passeig de Gràcia sits Carrer de Seneca, a narrow lane just a couple of blocks long that has somehow become a bellwether of trends in the city. A decade ago it was lined with fashion boutiques;

now it's all about vintage décor pieces. One of the most interesting stores is **Antique Boutique**, offering both Midcentury pieces and custom designs in gleaming brass. (It also houses the photography collective Anonymus.) Even if it weren't filled with cutting-edge contemporary art and displays of standout 20th-century furniture, **Galeria Miquel Alzueta** would be worth a visit for the architecture alone. Visitors arrive through an arched, steel-clad tunnel into an expansive vaulted space where Alzueta champions younger artists and unsung design pioneers, often sparking a critical reevaluation of their work and animating the market.

Closer to the port in the old El Borne neighborhood, Carrer de Rec continues its reign as a can't-miss fashion-and-design destination. Get your bearings at any of the five **La Commercial** boutiques, which carry a tautly selected array of housewares. On buzzing Avinguda Diagonal, David Vivirido and Francesco, founders of the cult men's lifestyle magazine *Hercules Universal*, have applied their sharp editing to **Issue Ten's** eclectic inventory of edgy art, underground fashion pubs, and special-edition tees from local label Shon Mott.



ALBERT ADRIÀ
CHEF AND RESTAURATEUR

"Even though Barcelona now has such a wide range of innovative and international restaurants, traditional Catalan fare is far from endangered, thanks to the extraordinary quality of local ingredients and diversity of the region's culinary tradition. Visit neighborhood markets like **La Boqueria** or **Santa Caterina**, where you can see the astounding variety of available ingredients and check out some of the premier specialist gourmet shops like **Sans & Sans** and **Casa Gisbert** for the very best coffees and teas, wines, olive oil, sweets, cured meats, and artisanal cheeses."

(FROM LEFT) Antique Boutique. Candy for sale at La Boqueria market.