

## DREAM CATCHER

# Pritzker Prize–winning RCR Arquitectes design “mysterious” Barcelona restaurant

By OLIVIA MARTIN • September 26, 2017



Enigma might not be the most appealing adjective for food *or* architecture, but the new, inscrutable restaurant concept by Chef Albert Adrià (of El Bulli fame) has received rave reviews for both. Adrià spent three years planning Enigma, which opened earlier this year in [Barcelona’s Paralel neighborhood](#), taking just 24 guests a night (reservations only) and requiring a password for entry. During their meals, diners move throughout seven separate spaces that coordinate with the menu’s forty courses. Meals can last three to six hours, meaning that diners interact with the space intimately. To render this surreal culinary experience in architecture, [RCR Arquitectes](#) and Pau Llimona crafted an ethereal, monochromatic atmosphere.

The 7,500-square-foot semi-industrial interior (“basically a car garage,” the architects quipped) is located in a nondescript office building. To transform it into an otherworldly gastronomic experience, RCR began painting an abstract cloudscape in watercolor. The painting was so striking that the architects decided

to completely cover the space in it, printing the design on [Neolith Sintered Stone](#). Neolith’s team resized the image to scale, and then painstakingly mapped out the pattern using cartography technology. The entire floor was installed off-site, and Neolith used a drone to take images of it, ensuring perfect placement. Then the watercolor-printed slabs were cut to fit the floors, ceiling, and walls, sometimes cut to just 3 centimeters wide to fit the layout. The finished slabs were assembled on-site like a puzzle and applied on other surfaces: kitchen worktops, kitchen hoods, and even in the bathrooms. “Engima’s aesthetic is best described as a giant futuristic igloo,” explained RCR. “The space is meant to transport the diner to a world disconnected from reality.”

Crumpled metal netting hangs from the ceilings, resembling stratus clouds, while textured glass walls, columns, and partitions evoke glass sheets, and custom fiberglass furnishings rise from the ground like lunar stalagmites. Elements are hidden and revealed as patrons move throughout their meals. The effect is equal parts Kubrick and arctic. “It is a world of textured tones and different colors,” said RCR. “The materials are naturally opaque yet magically offer warmth and transparency to the whole.”

As diners settle into their dreamlike cloud-cocoon, the architecture and food are meant to meld into one complete experience. While Engima is Adrià’s dream restaurant, RCR hopes that “[patrons] will perceive a world that’s quite far from their daily lives; a place with sensory pleasures where time stops. In other words, each person will live out their own dream.”

