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Review: *Constructing Albert*

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Chef Albert Adria opens several restaurants in *Constructing Albert*.

For more than a decade before it closed in 2011, elBulli was considered the most important haute cuisine restaurant, if not the best restaurant, in the world. On the Mediterranean coast of northern Spain, executive chef Ferran Adria and his team created a rarified dining experience, more theatrical culinary adventure in nuance and deconstruction than a meal. Guests paid up to \$325 each to eat as many as 40 bites or mini courses. Though Adria never embraced the term, many consider him a pioneer of molecular gastronomy for the techniques that yielded exotic textures, presentations and precise focus on flavors — in morels such as Parmesan marshmallows, cherries covered in powdered yogurt and flavors delivered in clouds, foams and freeze-dried crisps as delicate and colorful as butterfly wings.

While Adria has gone on to write encyclopedic volumes about food and drinks, his younger brother Albert Adria has labored to claim his own place at the top of the culinary world. Though he worked at elBulli for 25 years, his last name is almost always associated with Ferran. Directors Laura Collado and Jim Loomis' *Constructing Albert* is a beautifully filmed documentary about Albert's work and ambitions after the close of elBulli.

The film picks up Albert's story in 2013 as he is opening five restaurants in Barcelona. We watch as Albert converts raw spaces into Bodega 1900, a Catalonian "vermouth bar," Pakta, a Peruvian-Japanese concept, a contemporary Mexican restaurant and 41°, which like elBulli serves course after course of exquisite small bites, artfully presented in seashells, ringed by flower petals, wrapped in little sushilike rolls or encapsulated in soft egg yolklke spheres cradled by tiny spoons. The stream of creativity is mesmerizing, and Albert looks every bit a genius restaurateur as he synthesizes his culinary inspirations and techniques in stylish restaurants. But as soon as 41° earns a coveted Michelin star, Albert closes it to move on to his dream restaurant, Enigma.

His ambitions are unwieldy as he invests roughly \$3.5 million in a 7,000-square-foot space meant to serve series of artful and technically sophisticated bites to a small pool of diners each night. As the restaurant's name implies, the space is abstract, and viewers will have to judge for themselves whether the result is a futuristic marvel or a monstrosity (spoiler alert: reviews are available online and both Adrias have been busy, but watch the film first).

Viewers obviously can't taste the food at any of Albert's restaurants, so it's hard to know if the flavors matches the visual spectacle, but it's a compelling film, and not just for foodies. In an age of reality TV cooking competitions and restaurant overhauls, nothing about the high stakes — egos, reputations, investments, etc. — is contrived. The movie relies heavily on reverence for elBulli and Michelin stars, and it doesn't substantially delve into Albert's life outside the kitchen. Albert may never get enough credit for his work at elBulli, and it's a challenge for him to reap that reward while trying to reinvent himself and what a restaurant can be.

Constructing Albert. *At 9 p.m. through June 28. Zeitgeist Multi-Disciplinary Arts Center, 1618 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., (504) 352-1150.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v11rTrl0nxw>

<https://www.bestofneworleans.com/thelatest/archives/2018/06/21/review-constructing-albert>