



APPETITE

My City on a Plate | Albert Adrià's Barcelona, the City he Transformed

The legendary Catalan chef lets you into the city where he built his "gastronomic theme park"

As told to KIERAN MORRIS ----- NOVEMBER 6, 2018

In this series, we speak to some of the most talented, bold, and creative chefs on the planet about the cities they hold closest, and the sounds, smells, and flavours that characterise them.

If you were to describe Albert Adrià as the most talented individual gracing a kitchen right now, nobody would correct you. His family name – shot into the stratosphere by El Bulli and his brother Ferran, who scarcely needs introduction – still maintains its place at the bleeding edge of cuisine, with Albert pursuing his own path with characteristic Adrià ambition.

He is the 'culinary conductor' of six restaurants in the same neighbourhood of **Barcelona**, Paral·lel, which Albert has single-handedly turned into perhaps the most exciting food district in Europe. Moving away from pastry, which was his dominion in the all-conquering El Bulli, Albert now oversees a diverse portfolio of eating establishments, ranging from a classic **Catalan vermuteria**, to **Japanese-Peruvian** fusion, to Enigma – Albert's ever-changing, 40-course expression of pure gastronomic theatre.

"Barcelona life is all about sitting on a terrace, with a cold beer, champagne, or vermouth, and some good tapas"

He is about to open his first establishment outside of Paral·lel, Cakes & Bubbles, inside the Hotel Café Royal in **London**. There, Albert will return to focus on pastry, presenting some of the delicate, sublime creations that

have graced his menus in Barcelona, paired with lots of champagne & cava. Ahead of the launch of Cakes & Bubbles, Albert spoke to us about his beloved Barcelona, showing us his perspective on the city to which his cuisine is so intertwined.

I am as I cook, and I cook as I am. I use this phrase because my style in the kitchen has evolved as I have. I am a chef, but also a pastry chef, and also a chef with many different cooking styles. More than merely food, I was transformed as a child by the smell of a restaurant as you enter it. I am one of those who believes that the first taste is not with the mouth, but the nose – I am sensory in my approach, and I have carried this forward since childhood.



Artichokes with pistachio, from Hoja Santa – Adrià's pre-Hispanic Mexican restaurant. Photo: Moises Torne Blayna

The Barcelona life is very Mediterranean. It's all about sitting on a terrace, with a cold beer, champagne, or vermouth, and some good tapas. We also love foreigners – I love seeing how much Barcelona is truly loved by those that visit and those who come to live here; that never stops making me smile.

The flavour of Barcelona is *Pa amb tomàquet* (bread rubbed with tomato). It is our specialty, and is part of our culture. I love working with our tomatoes, and our vegetables in general. There are many countries that are not lucky enough to have as much sun as we do. I miss their quality most when I'm away from the city.

My favourite *calle* in Barcelona is Parlament: I love it. It has a very Barcelona aesthetic, and is teeming with amazing bars and restaurants; you will never be too far from a good meal or a nice glass of wine on Parlament. Every chance I get, I stroll down the street on my way home from an evening's service – it never fails to spark my imagination.



The pristine kitchen of Enigma, Adrià's most high-concept restaurant. Photo: Pepo Segura

Like everywhere else – I hope, at least – Catalans are angered by inequality and intolerance in our society. I also feel like we are losing the opportunity to be a reference point across the world as a cosmopolitan and global city; people on the ground are starting to believe that, having previously done things well in Barcelona, things are now in decline. I hope they are not correct

Of all of my dishes, I think my spherified olives best characterise the city of Barcelona. Explosive, surprising, memorable – it is the dish that is most associated with my style, and the one that has been tried the most by those who have visited my restaurants. If I was to put my city on a plate, that plate would be a spoon, with a spherified olive sat atop it.

Albert Adrià's latest establishment, [Cakes & Bubbles](#), opens on the 8th November inside the Hotel Café Royal. For any latest news on Adrià's restaurants, or to make reservations, go to his restaurant group [elBarri's](#) website.

For more chef's perspectives on the cities that inspire them, check out the rest of our [My City on a Plate](#) series.

If you want to find better [things to do in Barcelona](#), check out our Departures guide, which has the best [bars](#), [restaurants](#), [hotels](#), and [buildings](#) in the Catalan capital.

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