

One of the World's Best Pastry Chefs Opens a Cake Shop in London

El Bulli's Albert Adrià's Cakes and Bubbles opens today

by [George Reynolds](#) Updated Nov 10, 2018, 10:28am GMT



One of Spain's most celebrated chefs, **Albert Adrià**, today [opens his first permanent site outside of his home nation](#): **Cakes and Bubbles** — a cake shop and sparkling wine bar — inside the Hotel Café Royal, on Regent Street, in central London.

Adrià — who is perhaps best known for his eternally hot Barcelona restaurant, Tickets — is the brother and business partner of Ferran Adrià, creator of the now-closed, seminal, three-Michelin-starred Catalan restaurant El Bulli. Albert, a pastry chef by qualification and one-time “best pastry chef in the world,” is the [restaurateur and empire builder behind the El Barri group](#), founder of 41°, Bodega 1900, Pakta, the 2016-starred Mexican “table” Hoja Santa, and most recently, [Enigma](#).

The Catalan, who follows the [internationally acclaimed French chef Laurent Tourondel](#) into the storied central London hotel, talked to Eater about pastry in 2018, Instagram, ‘wow’ moments, and the (non-)separation of sweet and savoury.



Albert Adrià and his famous cheesecake | Jade Nina Sarkhel

How has the attitude towards desserts changed since you started working in the industry?

There was an evolution and then an ‘involution’, or contraction — when I started pastry chefs were actually not that respected, and there wasn’t a dedicated pastry station: the pastry station and cold station were one and the same. Even in the fine dining restaurants of the time, you had a trolley of pastries that had been bought in from outside. Then when the dominant mode of eating in those places shifted from à la carte to the tasting menu, where everything was very precisely portioned out, a trolley no longer made much sense. And that’s when the pastry chef came into being: someone who had trained as a chef but was now working on pastry, as opposed to someone hired from a pastry shop. And that’s how I approach desserts now: for me, the sweet and the savoury are one and

the same.

Desserts seem to have been going out of fashion recently, with some restaurants cutting their offering entirely, or reducing it to relatively simple dishes like ice cream. Why do you think this is?

There has definitely been a contraction: at the end of the day, it’s the customers who define how important desserts are. You get some customers who are interested in them, who need them, and some people who don’t care about them at all. And — clearly — pastry chefs and pastry sections come with costs. And then of course you have chefs who don’t bother completing their training — who aren’t interested in learning how to make desserts. And so it’s a combination of those factors that explains

why you get chefs now changing their dessert offering, or eliminating it entirely. But, to be fair, I'd rather have a good bowl of ice cream than a bad pudding.

Something I always found interesting about the old El Bulli menus is that you could never tell at precisely what point it transitioned from savoury into sweet — how important is that sense of progression in a tasting menu, which is in itself an evolution (from light to heavy, for example)?

Well, part of the problem at El Bulli was that Ferran never left me any space in the customers' stomachs! But after a while I figured out that fewer sweet things were probably better, and that's how we came up with the prepostre ('pre-dessert') — desserts that were made without the addition of any sugar. And then we came to the petits fours, and came up with the idea of 'morphings' — little bites you could have as easily at the beginning of the meal as at the end.

“To be fair, I'd rather have a good bowl of ice cream than a bad pudding.”

Does a similar philosophy inform what you're doing at Cakes and Bubbles?

One thing I've noticed about contemporary pastrywork is that it's actually returned to something quite classical — very fat-heavy, very sweet, lots of artificial colouring. The aesthetic appearance is suddenly very important (Instagram definitely plays a part, too). And part of the problem with pastry in general is that the processes are very technical, and the rules are quite rigid. So one of the things we're doing at Cakes and Bubbles — like at El Bulli — is questioning everything. Questioning the role of desserts in the first place, for example — this idea that they're a special treat. You don't *need* to eat sweet things, just like you don't need to have an aperitif before eating. But there are things you can do — without adding fat, or sugar, or colouring; by playing with temperatures and textures — that create special kind of emotion in people. And that's what I'm searching for at Cakes and Bubbles.

You trained as a pastry chef, but you also trained as a conventional chef too. It's interesting that, for London specifically, you've chosen to open somewhere focused on the sweet side of things. What is the thinking behind that?

Well, we're not just talking about desserts. The other 50 percent is crucial too — the bubbles. Champagne is a sensation, a treat (clearly, it pairs very well with desserts, too). But in Barcelona, Cakes and Bubbles couldn't work because for it to work I need location, location, location, plus there isn't a culture of eating desserts during the week in Spain — it's a special treat, only for the weekends. London is the capital of the world, and the street we're sitting on is the main street in the capital of the world, and this hotel is so impressive in terms of its location and its history, its mix of classicism and modernity. And that's a bit like my work: it moves between classicism and modernity: it's very traditional, in terms of its focus on dessert, but equally it's more modern in its focus on things like temperature and texture. And the challenge has been adapting it to its new setting: it's the middle of London, a super-luxe hotel — we've got to make sure our proposition is adapted to suit it.

“For me, the sweet and the savoury are one and the same.”

What will be on the menu?

Well, I know what I don't want. I don't want fondants, I don't want unnecessary fat, I don't want things that look trendy but are basically just sugar. But I have this Groucho Marx quote that I use a lot: "This is my philosophy — if you don't like it, I have others." My cooking now is totally different from how it was 10 years ago, which is hard to do with pastry. You look at Pierre Hermé with macarons, or Marcolini with éclairs, or Alain Ducasse with chocolate — classical, traditional, impeccable — the issue they face is the rigidity of the medium they're working in. What I'm interested in is moving towards a more seasonal mode of pastry, like they have in Japan. So we'll have various things that change with the seasons, though there will also be a focus on one specific dish: a cheesecake. But the idea isn't that you'll come along and have just one thing — it's that if there are four or five of you, you'll come and share four or five different dishes. The cakes will be light — Tickets-style meringues or air waffles — and they won't be too big, because then you lose the sense of play that the best pastry gives you, the sense that it's something special. I want people to come here to treat themselves.



"Air pancake" | Cakes and Bubbles [Official Photo]

I like that — the idea of a small luxury

When people ask me about the future of gastronomy, one of the keys is the idea of specialisation — the idea of doing one thing, and doing it really well. Some people do chuletas, some do nigiri, some do ice cream, some do [Cronuts](#)...

...It's interesting that you mention Cronuts, since I think Instagram increasingly seems to be playing a huge role in food, and in pastry in particular — because it's pretty, because it's cute, because it's almost designed to be photographed. How has Instagram changed your perception of pastry?

It's changed the perception of everything. In the past, you used to have to wait until a big food congress to show your latest creations. Now, you can share them instantly. Information has lost its value, in a sense — there's so much of it now, whether true or false or whatever. And I worry what impact it's having — you have young people spending all day just looking at what other people are doing. What is that doing to their imagination? You even see it in pastry: the current revolution is really just looking at other people, or back in time, to the 1980s.



"Robuchon cake" — named after the late Joël Robuchon | Cakes and Bubbles [Official Photo]

Do you think it's harder to create a genuine 'wow' moment now?

All I want is that when people leave here, they want to come back. And you don't get that unless you're giving people something physical, and powerful. And on Instagram you get dishes that... I don't even need to eat them to know they'll taste bad. I want to give you things you couldn't possibly taste in any other place. And that's why the champagne is important, too: it's not about quantity, it's about pleasure. Opening a bottle of champagne is about happiness, always: it's the closest thing to being happy. When you arrive at a hotel, and they want to make you happy: bottle of champagne. If you want to make your family happy: bottle of champagne. If you go to a wedding: bottle of champagne. And when you come to eat a dessert made by Albert Adrià: bottle of champagne [Laughs].

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