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Who's for a Bulli burger?

Why would the chef of the world's best restaurant open a fast food chain? To show us how it should be done, says Kevin Gould

Kevin Gould

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Bulli for you ... Fast Good restaurant uses the same quality of ingredients used at El Bulli

Even at €165 a head (plus drinks and service), many people feel that El Bulli is a bargain. Each season, Ferran Adrià's restaurant, which overlooks the pretty, breezy bay at Cala Monjoi, north of Barcelona, has tables for only 8,000 diners. So far this year, 430,000 have attempted to book.

Adrià's reaction to his success is honest, and brilliantly subversive. Rather than following the well-trodden celeb-chef path of cloning El Bulli in Japan, New York or Dubai, his mission is instead to bring better burgers to the masses. His Fast Good concept already has two branches in Madrid, plus one in Santiago de Chile, and another four in Spain on the way.

"Why shouldn't you be able to eat decent food at a decent price?" Adrià demands, before adding: "What we need is to get young chefs to do more simple things." This from the chef whose reputation is predicated on serving such dishes as gnocchi of rose-scented air in tarragon soup, or pairs of thyme-poached rabbits' brains with deep-fried rabbits' ears. "I just want to make people happy through food," he says. Thus, Fast Good.

The outlets, all apple green and Warhol pink, have funky acrylic seats and lighting. Plasma screens flash TV news, and the staff are young and dressed-down. The soundtrack is Madonna. There are walls of fridges of fresh sandwiches, drinks and lunchboxes, and a counter where hot food is served. "The rule is that Fast Good uses the same quality of ingredients that we use at El Bulli," says Adrià. "That means pedigree DOC beef from named estates, baking our own buns on the premises every day and only Iberico ham for the sandwiches."

The execution is exemplary, too. Each burger is cooked to perfection and, rather than the sad, damp salad usually served up in burger joints, Fast Good offers mixtures of perky fresh leaves such as baby rocket and dandelion. Relishes are made from fresh chopped tomato, although there are bottles of ketchup and HP on the table. Chips are never frozen, but hand-cut from fresh potatoes and fried in first-press olive oil. Kids run about and there's no hushed, grand gourmand reverence, simply the buzz of people enjoying great, affordable food. Burgers cost around €5.50.

"You first have to learn how to do the simple things well," says Adrià. "If more young chefs would do this type of business, it would be amazing. No reservations needed, no Michelin stars wanted, no emperor's new clothes."

Over in Barcelona, Ferran's brother Albert (who runs the kitchen at El Bulli) has pulled another surprising rabbit out of the Adrià hat. In the Sant Antoni district, surrounded by fluorescent-lit old men's tapas bars, Albert has opened Inopia - a fluorescent-lit, old man's tapas bar. Granted, the crowd is hipper (Ferran himself eats there most Tuesday nights), the serving staff are dressed in Hugo Boss, and it is slightly pricier than some of its neighbours, but Inopia is as far from molecular gastronomy as El Bulli is from the Old Bull and Bush.

Wine is €1.75 a glass, and tapas are properly un-primped but, as at Fast Good, impeccably sourced. Tuna and tomato, for example, is a dish of plump, ripe Montserrat tomatoes with ventresca - fish from the best cut of the tuna's belly. Croquetas, which so often elsewhere approximate to deep-fried breadcrumb Polyfilla, here are light and studded with Iberico ham. Callos (tripe) is bought in from Juan's Bar in L'Hospitalet, the suburb where the brothers grew up.

This is not the only ready-made tapa on the menu. Albert, like his brother, can't resist a gentle joke, and Lay's "pollastre a l'ast" patates xips are a fast seller at €2 a go. Peek in the tiny kitchen, though, and you'll see them popping bags of roast chicken flavour crisps. "Great crisps!" exults Ferran. "This flavour's only available in Spain. That's what we all need: less restaurant blahblahblah. More naked food".

• Fast Good (fast-good.com) 23 Calle Padre Damián, Madrid; 3c Juan Bravo, Madrid; 2890 Av Isidora Goyenechea, Las Condes, Santiago de Chile. New branches opening soon in Barcelona (127 Balmes), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (5 Simón Bolívar), Madrid (11 Orense, Arroyo de la Vega) and Valencia (26 Gran Vía Marqués del Turia). Inopia, 104 Calle Tamarit Sant Antoni, Barcelona (+93 424 5231, barinopia.com).

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