

# Getting stung

An ex-El Bulli chef offers exciting and intriguing tapas like jellyfish salad. Don't worry—only the prices carry a sting.

By Kirsten Foster. Photos by Patricia Esteve.



Until now, Barcelona residents have had to go down to the beach and peel a *medusa* off a screaming child if they wanted to satisfy their jellyfish cravings. But no longer! Help is at hand from ex-El Bulli chef Albert Raurich. His Dos Palillos bar-restaurant offers a piquant *kimchi de verduras con medusa* (Korean fermented vegetable salad with jellyfish), along with an array of authentic pan-Asian *platillos*, from *dim sum* to stir fries to *tempura*.

As if eating jellyfish weren't weird enough, the whole concept of Dos Palillos is a bit freaky. Pre-opening press suggested the idea was to create an homage to old-school Barcelona bars with their "terrazzo floors, glasses of brandy and toothpicks". The floor is indeed 'terrazzo', that social-climbing floorcovering that tries to look like marble and falls miserably. There are brandy bottles and toothpicks, plus kitsch knick-knacks. There are even plastic crates to sit on, which is going a bit far—surely even the humblest bar had at least a couple of proper stools?

But there the similarity with the humble *barrio* bar ends—do you really expect a chef to go from a three-Michelin-star establishment to churning out deep-fried squid rings and chips? The kitsch knick-knacks are, in fact, rather cool and artfully arranged. There are bottles of *saké* next to the brandy. The staff are young, pretty and designer-clad. There's a much more chicly decorated dining room in the back. And the *tapas* are about as far removed from *croquetas* and *bravas* as you can get.

The menu features detailed explanations for those who, for instance, don't know that *ankimo* is "monkfish liver in a Japanese style, marinated in *saké*, steamed and served with a ponzu sauce" (€9.50). As on a first date, perhaps a little more mystery would have been a good thing. One of the girls on our girls'-night-out was put off by the thought of fish liver. But one taste of these lightly marbled pink discs and she was sold. It was a beautifully balanced dish. The creaminess of the liver—the *foie gras* of the sea—contrasted well with softly crunchy seaweed, the citrus buzz of the jellied *ponzu* sauce and a nubbin of pepper-grated *daikon*.


The aforementioned *kimchi* (€4.70) is a summer version of the emblematic Korean dish, made with cabbage, cucumber, hot radishes and

tiny pepper flowers. The fan-shaped pieces of jellyfish flesh had a texture and flavour similar to seaweed. *Kimchi* has been called one of the world's healthiest dishes, and this peppery, zingy, crisp version certainly had a refreshing effect that felt like it was doing good.

Our seafood journey then turned to more familiar waters: a couple of oysters (€3.20) that had been splashed with *saké* and put under the grill. They were beautiful oysters, but that just made me think I would rather have had them raw.

Much of Dos Palillos's *carta* is taken up by dumplings. Five steamed potato flour parcels stuffed with spinach, *pak choi* and *shitake* mushrooms (€5.50) were a bit bland. A single large *char siew bao* (barbecue-pork-filled steamed bun, €3.20) was more substantial, with well-seasoned and juicy pork. Fried meat and vegetable *gyoza* dumplings (€5.80) were our favourites, with crispy brown bottoms.

Initial rumours suggested Dos Palillos's food would be Spanish-Asian fusion, but there hadn't been much evidence of that so far. It might just be possible to argue that the use of Iberian pig in the *costilla de cerdo ibérico a la cantonesa adobado con jengibre, soja, miel y hoisin* was fusion, but whatever you call it, it was rich, sticky and tender. It was also €7. For one rib.

The majority opinion in our group was that with the prices Dos Palillos charges you should at least get a stool. But, I say, tired legs and the cost of a *menú del día* are a small price to pay for your monkfish liver and jellyfish fix. 

Dos Palillos, Elisabets 9; 93 304 0513. [www.dospalillos.com](http://www.dospalillos.com)  
Open Tues-Weds 7.30-11.30pm. Thurs-Sat 1-3.30pm, 7.30-11.30pm  
Tapas a la carta from €3.20, glass of wine from €3, beer from €3. Menú degustaciones €45/€60. Only menú degustación available in the rear dining room in the evenings.



## What's for lunch

Au Port de la Lune, Plaza Sant Galdric, 93 270 3819  
Menú del día (not inc drink) €12 (Mon-Fri), €15 (Sat).

On Wednesday evenings there is a set dinner menú for €35, inc. wine. Booking essential.

The French bistro seems such a simple, successful formula, yet many attempts at reproducing it fail miserably. Perhaps it relies on something in the French genes to pull it off. Guy Monrepos from Bordeaux is so 'bistro' it's almost a caricature. With a face that seems born to float above a shrug, and a pair of hands that only seem at home shucking oysters, he trained as a dentist, but always preferred using his own teeth to fixing other peoples'. Four years ago, he opened La Caixa del Gourmet on the Plaça de Sant Galdric next to the Boqueria market. Here, he sold French delicacies and had a few stools for in-house sampling. Two years ago he realised he was more of a host than a grocer, moved the premises across the square and turned it into a bistro.

The day-time *prix fixe* *menú* starters are heavy on the veg: grated carrot or boiled baby leeks in vinaigrette, crisp endive with roquefort cheese, various salads. These are made up of flavourful lettuces underneath generous portions of rustic livery *paté*, slices of duck ham or pungent French goat's cheese. Monrepos's main course specialities are *bavette à l'échalotte* (skirt steak with shallots) and lean, home-made hamburgers. Both are made of *buoy* or *toro de lidia* (fighting bull), depending on the season. He sears the aged meat very lightly so it's 'saignant'. The bloody juices mix with a deglazed caramelised shallot sauce. A velvety *purée de patatas* accompanies the meat. Other classics that often roll up on the menu are duck *confit* and *cassoulet*. Sugar-dusted fruit tarts and cheeses with forceful personalities make up the regular pudding offerings.

If all this sounds a little heavy for hot days, there's a perfect alternative light lunch: half a dozen Marennes-Oleron oysters and a glass of chilled Muscadet de Sevre et Mains Sur Lie.

-- Kirsten Foster