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*Bienvenidos a*  
**BARCELONA**



Barcelona's Gaudí Museum, and the city beyond. Right: Fidel Puig, Santi Rebés, and Cristina Torras, the trio behind Restaurant Embat, a bistro in Barcelona's L'Eixample. Opposite, from left: Potato velouté with squid "spaghetti" and quinoa, at Restaurant Embat; behind the counter at Dos Palillos, where a former chef de cuisine from El Bulli brings together Catalan and Asian cooking.



## ~ BARCELONA ~

EVERYONE IN BARCELONA THESE DAYS COMPLAINS ABOUT the credit crunch and the construction-boom crash—but mostly in between swooning at all the amazing lunch deals in town. Eating well: that's the Catalans' recession revenge. For our first meal we join Pau Arenós, *El Periódico de Catalunya's* food guru, for lunch at **Restaurant Embat**. "Young Barcelona chefs are returning to grandmother's cuisine!" Pau declares over fat truffled chicken ravioli with artichokes. Then, eyeing my squid "spaghetti" atop a chilled potato velouté, he adds: "That is, if *la abuela* worked at NASA." Any space-age granny would be proud of the classic lunchtime *arroz* (rice) pushed into the stratosphere by a discreet touch of foie gras and near-invisible tears of green grape gelée. And she could certainly live with the prices—about \$50 a head including wine by the glass. The trio of thirtysomethings behind the cutting-edge dessert atelier *Espai Sucre* designed this narrow tiled space in L'Eixample on a shoestring. "Notice the gold trim we painted over the tiles?" one of them asks as he sets down a bowl of crunchy-soft-salty-sweet chocolate "sand" under a cloud of vanilla foam.

For dinner, the star power of El Bulli's former chef de cuisine Albert Raurich draws us to his just-opened **Dos Palillos**. The setup is half the fun: you enter a traditional tapas bar (it's actually new) in the Raval quarter. Continue through beaded curtains at the back and you emerge into

a designed-to-death red-and-black Asian cubbyhole, where Catalan and Japanese chefs steam dumplings behind a deep, angled counter. *Dos Palillos* (two chopsticks) is Raurich's tribute to Asian snacks. Good as they are, I don't recommend wasting precious euros on familiar wontons and Vietnamese spring rolls. Instead, cut straight to the wondrous *onsen*-poached egg in a cold *dashi* broth highlighted with crystals of freeze-dried soy sauce (an El Bulli trick). Ponder the salty, tangy complexity of monkfish liver with *yuzu* gelée, steamed after a long soak in sake and ginger. Quaff some *Inedit*, a suave ale bottled especially for Ferran Adrià and his cohorts. While the back room serves multicourse degustation menus, the no-reservations "Spanish" front space offers the same small plates à la carte. Eating razor clams perfumed with Kaffir lime and curry at a tapas bar whose floor is strewn with napkins and toothpicks... "*muy surrealista*," Raurich admits.

There's nothing surreal about the \$26 lunch deal at **Gresca**. This meringue-white L'Eixample storefront belongs to Rafa Peña, the 32-year-old current leader of Spain's bistronomic movement. "I set my lunch menu only after placing morning calls to suppliers to see what's on sale," Peña explains. Yes, he enjoys haggling with fishmongers over the day's bargain catch—such as a pearl-pink chunk of *merluza* (hake) with an earthy garnish of seared scallions and red chard. The slow-cooked, richly glazed pork ribs here are from pigs reared by a friend. After his wife brings back three kinds of tomatoes from the cheapo neighborhood market (not





the posh Boqueria), Peña sets them atop tomato jam on a dazzling *coca* (a type of Catalan tart). Gresca, of course, is much more than a simple bistro. Dish for dish, Peña's \$63 regular menu matches anything you'd pay five times as much for at the Parisian three-starred L'Astrance.

Ah, Barcelona—so much great food, so little time. There's the terrific \$17 lunch (a glass of vino included) at **Els Fogons**, where the velvety melon gazpacho followed by *arroz negro* studded with cuttlefish or a perfect seared tuna are served at an industrial-chic space inside the renovated Barceloneta market. Then there's **Patxoca**, a boho café near El Born that's so green that even the beer is organic. The earthy spelt bread dunks superbly into the saucy meatballs enriched with a hand-pounded almond sauce, and the fluffy *brandada de bacalao* is painstakingly beaten with olive oil. Also not to be missed is **Bohèmic**, a snug new-wave *taperia* only insiders know about. Chef Francesc Gimeno Manduley's low-cost, high-concept miniatures are a marvel of ingenuity. Imagine, for instance, a composition of pink slices of beef served alongside a mini grill, a baby skillet of wheat-and-pistachio risotto, a bowl of shallot emulsion for dipping, and a wooden box holding various salts. Bohèmic's classic tapas—try the *patatas bravas* served with *alioli* and chili jam—give Albert Adrià's (Ferran's younger brother) thronged **Inopia Classic Bar** nearby a run for its anchovies.

On our last night in town, I nervously count my shekels. Phew...enough for our Big Splurge dinner at **Fonda Gaig**.

## Barcelona at Your Fingertips

When ordering at sit-down restaurants, it's perfectly fine to ask for a *media ración* (half-portion). Also, locals don't usually tip more than a couple of euros at tapas bars.

### BOHÈMIC

40 Calle Manso;  
34/93-424-0628;  
tapas for two \$57.

### DOS PALILLOS

9 Calle Elisabets;  
34/93-304-0513;  
tapas for two in the front  
room \$57.

### ELS FOGONS

Plaça de la Font,  
Mercat de la Barceloneta;  
34/93-224-2626;  
lunch for  
two \$36, including  
one drink.

### FONDA GAIG

200 Calle Corsega;  
34/93-453-2020;  
dinner for two \$108.

### GRESCA

230 Calle Provença;  
34/93-451-6193;  
lunch for two \$54.

### INOPIA CLASSIC BAR

104 Calle Tamarit;  
34/93-424-5231;  
tapas for two \$32.

### PATXOCA

28 Calle Mercaders;  
34/93-319-2029;  
lunch for two \$51.

### RESTAURANT EMBAT

304 Calle Mallorca;  
34/93-458-0855;  
lunch for two \$71.

### TAVERNA CAN MARGARIT

21 Calle Concordia;  
34/93-441-6723;  
dinner for two \$44.





This new brasserie from Barcelona's *haute* chef, Carles Gaig, is my idea of perfection, from the sprawling room that's both cozy and cool to the *nuevo catalán* menu, where every dish commands, Order me now. Open just under a year, Fonda has already achieved a cult status, Barcelona's answer to San Francisco's Zuni Café. Even at lunch on a Monday everyone's here: patrician businessmen in beige blazers, svelte Marni wearers—all talking recession blues over crisp golden bacalao fritters. Gaig's traditional pastas are legendary: slender cannelloni with a decadent multimeat filling, and *macarones del cardenal*, silky pasta tubes cloaked in a divine sauce of cream and onion *sofrito* under gratinéed Parmesan. "Really, you want more?" asks Gaig's wife, Fina, flashing a Hollywood smile. Out comes the beef-cheek terrine in a deep glossy sauce with an anisey hint of Ratafia herbal liqueur. With our bill clocking in at less than \$200 with service and wine, I'd eat here every night. Apparently, many do. Can't get a table? Don't despair. There's always the stupendous mound of fried rabbit and caramelized garlic at the rustic gem called **Taverna Can Margarit**, in the folksy Poble Sec neighborhood.

## ~ TURIN ~

**F**AMISHED AS SOON AS WE ARRIVE, WE INSTANTLY CLAIM an outdoor table at **Mood Libri & Caffè**, a design-minded café with a bookstore. In the shadow of a monumental palazzo, we taste tiny roasted potatoes, focaccia with artichokes, prosciutto, mortadella, mozzarella, and a farfalle salad tangy with capers. The bill? *Niente*. That's right: zip, zero, zilch—provided you order a drink. Welcome to the *aperitivo* hour: a cherished tradition in the food-obsessed Piedmontese capital, home of vermouth, *grissini* breadsticks, and gratis hors d'oeuvres. Why go home after work? locals seem to say. Why not linger at an ornate bar or café over a Punt e Mes or Negroni and some free *stuzzichini*? Why not, indeed! *Tramezzine*, mini-*pizzate*, baby panini—the parade of dainty edibles has our heads spinning at the burnished cafés on baroque Piazza San Carlo. Laid out under a vast chandelier, the spread at **Caffè San Carlo** is as rococo as the florid 1822 interior. So civilized is the mood, we don't dare refill our plates yet again with the lush half-moons of eggplant parmigiana or the canapés dressed with cream-cheese curlicues and folds of *bresaola*.

Though at times Turin can feel like a private club frozen in time, its *aperitivo* ritual keeps evolving. "With our terrible economy, *aperitivo* is suddenly *aperi-dinner*," quips my pal Bob Noto, a local food photographer and gourmand. Such is the feeding frenzy the next night in the cafés on the Piazza Vittorio Veneto—grazing central for Turinese youth—that by 8 p.m. every last tuna-stuffed cherry tomato has been devoured from the copious hot-and-cold smorgasbords. We jump in a cab and console ourselves with the blistery (Continued on page 182)

### Turin at Your Fingertips

At most Turinese bars and cafés, food is free when you order a drink between 6 and 8 p.m., with a more limited selection also available with prelunch drinks. Drinks usually run between \$8 and \$13.

#### CAFFÈ SAN CARLO

156 Piazza San Carlo;  
39-011/532-586;  
drinks for two \$19.

#### CANTINA

1 Via Po; 39-011/817-4321;  
drinks for two \$14.

#### EATALY

Recommended stalls:  
La Carne (meat), Il Pesce (fish),  
La Pizza e La Focaccia; and  
Agrigelateria San Pé.  
230 Via Nizza, Lingotto;  
39-011/1950-6801;  
lunch for two \$25.

#### LE VITEL ÉTONNÉ

4 Via Francesco da Paola;  
39-011/812-4621;  
drinks for two \$14.

#### MOOD

#### LIBRI & CAFFÈ

3/e Via Cesare Battisti;  
39-011/518-8657;  
drinks for two \$19.

#### PIZZERIA

#### DA CRISTINA

10 Corso Palermo;  
39-011/248-1706;  
pizza for two \$21.

#### RISTORANTE

#### SOTTO LA MOLE

9 Via Montebello;  
39-011/817-9398;  
lunch for two \$94.

#### VINICOLA AL SORIJ

10C Via Matteo Pescatore;  
39-011/835-667;  
drinks for two \$19.