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BARCELONA BE PART OF IT



TWO IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

Give your tastebuds a stretch at this 'Japanese tapas' restaurant.

By Tara Stevens.

Photos by Richard Owens.



◉ - NOT WORTH THE TRIP, ◉◉ - COULD IMPROVE, ◉◉◉ - GOOD, ◉◉◉◉ - VERY GOOD, ◉◉◉◉◉ - NOT TO BE MISSED

The Raval, let's face it, is not best known for its fine dining restaurants. And yet, despite the odds, Dos Palillos endures. I went a few weeks ago for the first time since it opened—mainly because my prevailing memory of it was being charged €78 for a couple of tapas and a couple of glasses of wine—and was intrigued to find it full on a blustery, Tuesday night of no import with a 70/30 mix of Catalans versus food tourists.

In fact, this time around it didn't seem quite so eye-wateringly expensive. €55 for the shorter tasting menu not including wine, is not exactly cheap, granted, but it is accessible enough for a treat. Last time I sat at the bar, decorated with old beer crates stacked up in the corners and funky labels plastered onto the walls, and I suspect you can rack up a terrifying bill if you allow yourself to go mad. This time, however, we headed through the chainmail curtains into the womb-like dining room, where a square bar arranged around an open kitchen is home to chefs quietly creating masterpieces.

What I liked most about it was that the food was challenging enough to give you a proper experience, but not so weird as to leave you scratching your head and thinking, "what the hell was that?" The pace was careful and service from the several different chefs who will host you through the evening, each with their own speciality, was bang on.

Head chef and owner Albert Raurich was Ferran Adrià's right-hand man at El Bulli for 11 years and it shows in much of the meticulous presentation. The Japanese angle comes from

his Japanese wife, who personally guided him into the country's regional cooking and encouraged him to fuse it with the heritage of his own. The result: Japanese tapas, I guess. We begin with four barely-cooked Palamós prawns arranged on a slab of black slate and scattered with just a few grains of sea salt. "Snap off the head, suck the brains, then eat the body," says the chef who serves us.

My companion had an oyster that had been gently poached in sake. He said it was interesting, but would have preferred it raw. I had three baby octopus that had been cooked *shabu-shabu* style, ie. barely, in a vat of water delicately flavoured with a single bay leaf and a couple of peppercorns, surrounded by a dribble of intensely flavoured mustard sauce. We agreed it was bloody good—tender as butter and punchy as hell—and pretended not to notice they were little babies that we were eating. Little dishes of *chawanmushi* (steamed custard) topped with the innards of sea urchin—raw, naturally—were smooth and subtle save for the salty tang of the urchin and contrasted nicely with a cluster of tempura-clad whitebait *buñuelos* topped with a dollop of wasabi. It was all cream and crunch and recalled an interview I did recently with the chef Andoni Aduritz (of the two-starred Mugaritz restaurant in San Sebastian) who assured me the future of food was all in the texture. I believe Andoni on most things, but this seemed to confirm it.

A small bamboo steamer contained little *gyoza* (Japanese dumplings) stuffed with shitake and scallions and topped with black sesame that we dipped in soy. The flavours were big and

earthy, almost meaty, and moved us neatly into the DIY sushi course. Large lozenges of belly tuna (I didn't check the provenance), a square stack of *nori* seaweed, sushi rice, soy and wasabi were a smart, interactive touch and so we competed for who could make the best one. Not me, alas!

And then came a large platter of simply sautéed vegetables: baby carrots and asparagus, spring peas, mustard sprouts, straw mushrooms and jasmine flowers in a light, brothy dressing. Funnily enough it was almost the star of the show—not least for the novelty of being served a simple dish of vegetables in a place like this—but also because it put an emphasis on the luxury of pristine freshness.

The final course was a skewer of chicken in a honey glaze speckled with Szechuan pepper, cooked just enough to be silky and evidently enough to sate me. I'm afraid I can't remember what we had for dessert but I'm willing to bet if the rest of the night is anything to go by, it was fairly close to perfect. 🍴

Follow Tara's gourmet musings on Twitter: @taralstevens



Dos Palillos, Carrer d'Elisabets 9 (Raval). Tel. 93 304 0513, www.dospalillos.com. Open Tue-Wed 7.30-11.30pm; Thu-Sat 1.30-3.30pm, 7.30-11.30pm. Closed Sun & Mon. Tasting menus €55 (short), €70 (long). Wine not included.

Tara's rating: ★★★★★