

FOOD AND WINE



The tortilla de patata was of generous size and delicious. PHOTO: ANDREW VALENTE

The magic that is a superb omelette

THE older I get, the more I enjoy simple foods such as underdone lamb chops with a few fried potatoes, or a thick slice of cod lightly grilled and nicely juicy.

Dishes like these test a cook's culinary techniques. Their sheer simplicity means the cook must get it right. If not, he has no where to hide his mistakes.

An omelette is also an ideal way of seeing if a cook learned the basics in his early days. Some of them didn't, and finding a light fluffy omelette that is also moist sometimes isn't all that easy.

At Tast they do individual freshly-made tortilla de patatas and that is always a temptation because at most restaurants they serve portions of big tortillas that may have been made a couple of hours previously. They are never as good as a freshly-made one.

When I ordered the tortilla I requested it slightly underdone and moist. The waiter said that was how the cook always did them. That was certainly how he did ours.

The tortilla was of a generous size, ideal for sharing between two and was lovely and moist.

The potatoes were cut up small, but not too small so the tortilla had plenty of texture, an essential touch that others often leave out.

This omelette was so delicious we immediately decided to order the salt cod tortilla, which is more difficult to get right than the potato one. Once again I requested it slightly undercooked, and once again the waiter said that was how the cook always did them. And once again he was right.

There was a good amount of salt cod in this omelette (that doesn't always happen because salt cod is dear) and it was moist, tender and with a nice soupçon of salt. It was one of the best salt cod omelettes I've had in recent times. It was sheer magic.

One of the best ways of eating salt cod is char-grilled. Our half portion was lovely and moist (we had asked for it that way) and it came with a colourful melange of char-grilled green asparagus, aubergines and red peppers.

The verdict

This was simple food at its best. The tortilla cooking times were spot on, so they were moist, tender and very tasty. The char-grilled salt cod was also beautifully done and the fish oozed juices that flooded the palate with scrummy tastes. The mix of char-grilled veggies added more moisture, textures and layers of flavour. It was all very satisfying. Portion control was nicely worked out: they serve generous amounts that are ideal for sharing between two or three, depending on how many other dishes are ordered. And prices were right, so this was a good-value-for-money meal that worked well from start to finish. Tast is famous for its pintxos and there is a big choice, but this time we gave them a miss and concentrated on the starters.

The place

Tast, Calle Unión 2, Palma. Tel: 971-729878. Closed on Sundays. There is plenty of space so it shouldn't be necessary to book mid-week, but do so at the weekend.

The bill

- Tortilla de patatas, €8.50
- Tortilla de bacalao, €9.90
- Half portion char-grilled bacalao, €8
- 4 cañas, €8

Total cost with VAT: 34.40 euros.

Superb oven-baked oxtail



Julio with the oxtail that was baked for five hours at 70C. PHOTO: ANDREW VALENTE

PALMA'S old wood-fired ovens, in bakeries as well as restaurants, are disappearing little by little. The latest whose flames have died out is the one in Tierra de Aranda in Calle Concepción.

Until just a few weeks ago, this place was a favourite with those who sought excellent roast baby lamb and suckling pig as done in the Castilian style. I had many a fine meal there.

However, there is also good news in the little world of wood-fired ovens: one of these old ovens has started a new phase that will see it being used for more than roasts.

The oven in Figón-Asador La Bigornia (Calle Bonaire 15. Tel: 971-720831) is now being used for several of Castilla's traditional specialities.

Julio Lázaro Carrascal has

had some really good service from the old oven since he took over these premises about nine years ago. But now he wants to give it more work and make more use of its residual heat.

This oven was the first one to be exported to Palma from Castilla. Its papers date from 1978 when there was a Castilian restaurant in these premises. But two years later it became La Bilbaina, which specialised in Basque cooking.

The oven was sealed until 2006 when Julio took over the premises to open a figón-asador specialising in dishes from Castilla y León. Since then the oven has been used mainly to roast baby lamb and suckling pig from the Valladolid area.

In La Bigornia's new phase, the roast meats in the old oven's capacious interior will be sharing space and heat with huge sauce-

pans of oxtail and shallow earthenware dishes containing authentic sopa de ajo castellana, a superb version of garlic soup with bread.

This convivial arrangement works beautifully, like the best marriages: there is complete harmony in the gentle residual heat of the oven, and the roasts, oxtail and garlic soup end up with a perfect finish.

Once the oven has lost its initial fierce temperature, the oxtail sits patiently in its gigantic saucepan while the gentle heat goes to work on the tough meat and slowly softens it.

The dish of oxtail I tried (€15) had been in the oven at about 70C for just over five hours and it was softly tender but with a consistency you could cut. Which means it wasn't overcooked. Next week I'll tell you about the incredible baked garlic soup.

The restaurant review

by Andrew Valente

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