

## LAST NIGHT, THE WORLD'S BEST RESTAURANT SET SAIL ON BISCAYNE BAY

BY PATRICK HIEGER | PHOTOS BY PATRICK HIEGER | THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 2015

Last night, 100 lucky diners were invited aboard the **SeaFair** yacht for a once-in-a-lifetime dining experience. The dinner was part of the Cooking Tour Experience 2015, hosted by more than 40 members of the team from El Celler de Can Roca, the Spanish restaurant that sits atop the list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants. Featuring dishes and a masterful wine pairing from the hands of the Roca brothers — Jordi, Josep, and Joan — the evening offered a dining opportunity unlike any other and a chance to experience Miami like never before. The evening on Biscayne Bay kicked off the U.S. leg of the five-week tour, which began last week in Buenos Aires and will finish next month in Istanbul.

The Cooking Tour Experience 2015 is sponsored by BBVA Compass, the Spanish banking giant that made its first footprint in Miami in 2012. If you weren't invited, don't be disappointed.

The guest list included local members and high-ranking employees of the bank, which services more than 50 million clients worldwide. Although extremely exclusive, the tour is a chance for the Roca brothers to deliver their culinary expertise to the rest of the world, even if a small sliver of it.



*A table set for a 12-course meal*



*The brothers with the SeaFair's executive chef*



*A ham-cutting sermon set to the sea*



*Fatty jamon iberico cut with sharp sherry wine*



*Anchovies escalivada*

Beginning on the SeaFair’s open-air top deck and ending in the window-lined dining room that offered exclusive views of Biscayne Bay, the evening consisted of 12 courses, inspired by the brothers’ travels throughout the Americas, as well as a bevy of local ingredients they’re using in each of the countries visited. The meal began with paper-thin slivers of earthy jamón ibérico and ended with an unexpected taste of Cuba, showing off the three brothers’ talents that have garnered them world renown.

Below, a taste of the unforgettable menu and perhaps a reason to consider the coast of Spain for your next vacation.

The evening began on the ship’s top deck, with smells wafting from the first dish and its pairing. The scent of jamón iberico — culled from the fabled pata negra hogs that are fed a strict diet of acorns — drifted through the crowd, cut only by the pungent aroma of the accompanying wine, made from sherry grapes, a sharp contrast to the ham’s intense fattiness. It was one of the evening’s many contrasts and surprises.

Ham was juxtaposed with the intense flavors of the sea. Anchovies were rested atop a bed of escalivada — a mix of roasted squash, eggplant, and onions — soaking into a baguette, which absorbed the flavors perfectly.

High cuisine has become much more than small dishes with intense flavors. Theatrics play a key role in the success of El Celler de Can Roca, and even on a boat, they were not to be missed. A paper lantern disguised the first round of bites before being removed to showcase a unique plating device.

Five small bites told the stories of each city the brothers will visit. A small asado taco spoke of Argentina. A coconut basket with citrus screamed Miami. The grape leaf with lentil, eggplant, and goat cheese will finish the tour in Turkey. Shrimp croquettes tell tales of fishing in Alabama. A barbecue fritter speaks to the smoke and thyme of great barbecue in Houston.

For “Memories of a Neighborhood Bar,” the second round of appetizing bites, a pop-up display told the tale of the time each of the three Roca brothers spent in their parents’ restaurant, where El Celler de Can Roca is still situated today. Anchovy bones were placed atop crisp Pals rice for a taste of the sea. A potato- and-onion omelet atop a small crisp screamed of traditional Spanish cooking. The calamari ring represented the tapas for which Spain is so well known. An image of young Josep overlooked the pop-up bar.



*The meal began with a balloon full of surprises.*



*Five internationally inspired bites set the scene for the meal.*



*The pop-up bar, which featured photos of the boys as children outside their parents’ restaurant.*



*Fried green tomatoes, an homage to the South.*

The mains began with an homage to Alabama. Though many Southern natives may refrain from calling this a true salad of fried green tomatoes, the crisp fried nightshades paired well with ham and a candy made of mescal.

Easily one of the stars of the evening was green coconut soup served in its own shell, whose aroma made the dish's presence known before arriving at the table. Succulent prawns bathed joyfully in the subtle broth, featuring the tart pop of pink peppercorns and a sweet sofrito.



Lobster Parmentier is something that should be served more often, everywhere, all the time. Although dubbed a "mole," reminiscent of the Rocas' time in Mexico, the sauce surrounding the soft potatoes and gently poached crustacean was more of a chupe made from the heads of the same shellfish. Best eaten in as few bites as possible, the umami-laden dish left layer upon layer of complexity lingering on the palate.

*ABOVE Fried green tomatoes, an homage to the South. BELOW Lobster Parmentier, a dish worth having every day.*



Great Britain is known for hearty bread sauces, but a Mexican sauce of charred tortillas has yet to become world-famous. However, when this sauce is layered over delicate, flaky corvina and paired with a restrained jalapeño-and-pecan jam, the resulting dish could give any of the best seafood plates in Miami a run for their money.

If you head down Calle Ocho, it won't be long before you find a dish involving plenty of pork and a dash of lime, though none will match the complexity of this duo of suckling pig. Roasted belly was paired with minced, mojo-style pork and accompanied by sauces of chipotle, lime, and citrus. A balsamic barbecue sauce added a balance of acidity and sweetness, making this the pinnacle of the evening's meal.

A "braised beef taco" clearly showed the Rocas fell hard for Mexico. However, this couldn't have been further from Mexican cooking. Incredibly tender brisket was paired with grilled watermelon and a sweet, herbal plantain purée. The brothers are known for their work with sauces, and this dish combining a banana leaf salsa with roasted pepper sofrito didn't disappoint.



*Roasted corvina in an unexpected tortilla sauce.*



*ABOVE Roasted suckling pig, two ways.*

*BELOW Seventy-two-hour beef*





FROM TOP

*Sponge ice cream cupcake.*

*Chocolate anarchy, one of two desserts.*

*A chocolate cigar inspired by Cuba tasted surprisingly of smoke.*

*A mojito made of fluid gel, cookies, and ice.*

Dessert began with a Sponge Cake Ice Cream Cupcake, layers of cream and ice cream with hints of lemon. Not overly sweet, the German Riesling pairing showed Josep's deft palate, and ability to make the flavors dance out of their subtle textures.

Perhaps a bit machista or maybe honoring local traditions and customs, the meal presented men and women with different desserts. The ladies received "Chocolate Anarchy." Layers upon textures of chocolate — ice cream, sauces, cookies, brownies, and more — gave fermented beans a stage to showcase their true flavors.

Gentlemen were treated to a "Trip to Havana," in the form of a chocolate cigar. Cigars have been done before, but with an overwhelming taste of real smoke, the dish was an interesting play on the senses.

Finally, a mock mojito finished off the evening. Comprising rum crumbles, sugar ice, and lime fluid gel, the tart "beverage" provided a needed balance to the intriguing flavors of the cigar. Texturally, it was one of the evening's most interesting dishes.

Though the two-night-only dinners are nearly impossible to attend, they do offer at least a few diners a chance to see why the Roca brothers have once again achieved first place in a world ranking of restaurants. Whether the tour will return to Miami next year remains to be seen, but a trip to Girona, Spain — if you can snag reservations for a year from now — is definitely worth the wait.

