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elBulli: The Taste of Innovation

"Creativity comes first; then comes the customer."

—Ferran Adrià

"The only thing customers know to expect is the unexpected."

—S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants

In spring 2008, Chef Ferran Adrià reflected on his much-publicized accomplishments. Over the past two decades, his creative work had revolutionized *haute cuisine* and elevated the experience of eating to a new level, culminating in the selection of his restaurant—elBulli—as the top restaurant in the world in 2002, 2006, and 2007, the only one ever to win three times. Juan Mari Arzak, a three-star chef considered a father of new Spanish cuisine, believed that "Ferran is the most imaginative cook in all history." The famous French chef Joël Robuchon called Adrià "the best cook on the planet,"¹ while New York City chef and author Anthony Bourdain described his trip to elBulli as "the childhood I never had."² Because elBulli was open for just six months each year and served only 50 customers per evening, a reservation at elBulli had become among the most sought-after in the world.

As he was closing his restaurant for the season, Adrià wondered what was next for him and for elBulli. He and the team had moved from running one restaurant to several different initiatives. They had entered the book publishing business (elBulli sold an illustrated General Catalog of all its recipes, which contained an evolutionary analysis, techniques, products, and materials used). They had also been involved in opening a hotel and a chain of fast-food restaurants. In addition, Adrià had entered the consulting business, though he chose to work only with a limited number of companies. Looking ahead (he was just 46 years old), Adrià envisioned that innovators from all over the world, across all disciplines and industries (home design, education, even automobile manufacturers), could draw lessons from his unique approach to creativity, taking the principles of "Molecular Gastronomy" and applying them to their own products and services. Was this a realistic vision, or merely the foolish dream of the man once called "the Salvador Dalí of the kitchen"? How would elBulli—and Adrià himself—grow and change in the coming years?

¹ Arthur Lubow, "A Laboratory of Taste," *New York Times Magazine*, August 10, 2003.

² Anthony Bourdain, as quoted in *Decoding Ferran Adrià: Hosted by Anthony Bourdain*, Ecco DVD Edition, 2006.

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Dining at elBulli

So unique was the elBulli experience that many people who visited elBulli were sure to take pictures of each dish they were served. Any Internet search for elBulli revealed countless images of Adrià's creations, and diners had written volumes about their experiences, evidenced by the excerpts below, taken from several bloggers' accounts.

Getting a reservation The first hurdle to clear in order to dine at elBulli was getting a reservation. Estimates varied, but it was believed that elBulli processed one to two million reservation requests per year, yet served just 8,000 customers; some diners had tried for years to get a spot before achieving their goal. One diner commented, "I remember reading about elBulli four or five years ago in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. I remember the yearning, and I remember the pang that followed. Considering the small number of guests that the restaurant could accommodate each season, the dream seemed out of reach." Internet message boards were filled with rumors and advice about how best to navigate the mysterious elBulli reservation process.

Getting to elBulli Guests who did manage to obtain a reservation most often arrived at elBulli after a two-hour car ride from Barcelona, via a curvy mountain road that led to Roses. The restaurant—a handsome tile-roofed building—offered striking views out to the sea (see [Exhibit 1](#) for views of the restaurant). Reflecting the origin of the restaurant's name, paintings of bulldogs lined the walls of a place one diner described as "an eclectic space that feels like an artist's home." One guest commented:

After a few wrong turns, we finally found one sign for the restaurant and continued on a long, winding road. But after driving for a while without another sign in sight, it felt like we were in the middle of nowhere. Everyone started to worry that we'd gone the wrong way. We flashed our lights at the first car we saw and pulled up alongside a group of tan teenagers, fresh from the beach. They confirmed that elBulli was back the way we came. We did yet another frightening three-point turn on a steep mountain road and quickly sped away.

The tour All patrons of elBulli were carefully guided through their experience with a series of stops before getting to the main dining room (see [Exhibit 2](#) for the sequence of the elBulli experience). Adrià himself was a powerful presence at elBulli, meeting and greeting each customer. *S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants* noted that Adrià "paces the sections . . . and is always tasting, tasting, tasting."

Upon arriving, patrons were greeted by the staff and taken on a tour of the kitchen in order to showcase the unusual equipment and innovative techniques used at elBulli. One patron—who described Adrià as "Willy Wonka"—wrote, "Lab-like and full of stainless steel; it was immaculate," and went on to say that he "watched in awe as gourmet oompa loompas diligently prepared a dizzying array of dishes." In his 2003 review of elBulli in the *New York Times*, Arthur Lubow wrote that "standing in Ferran Adrià's kitchen at elBulli, it is easy to believe that you have slipped down the rabbit hole. Adrià, who would have been the caterer of choice for the Mad Hatter, invents food that provokes all the senses, including the sense of disbelief. His success is almost as amazing as his food."

After viewing the kitchen, guests were next taken to the terrace, which overlooked the beach, a highlight of one guest's experience:

A swarm of servers surrounded us; some mixed welcome cocktails, while others set out a selection of snacks. This was, without a doubt, my favorite part of the entire evening. The sun was setting, I could hear the ocean in the distance, I had just wrapped my arm around Ferran

Adrià's back, and it was still the beginning, the very first few moments of a night I never wanted to end. Our cocktails—cold blackberry cosmos poured on top of tangy, lime-flavored foam—were served in silver bowls, and we each got a big spoon for easier sipping.

The meal Guests were next guided into the main dining room, where they were presented a dizzying array of dishes from the tasting menu, served in a fixed sequence on any given evening (see **Exhibit 3** for the 2008 menu). Adrià commented, "We conceive of the sequence of dishes to be like a movie. Montage is sometimes hard to explain. The rules are all relative, and I focus on breaking them." One patron noted:

The tasting menu, which changes slightly every day, unfolds in three acts and 35 dishes: small snacks that you eat with your fingers, larger-sized tapas to be eaten with a fork and spoon (no knife, ever), and desserts. It is a fast-paced, dining roller coaster, with explosive flavors and textural surprises that await you at every turn. It is thus a good idea to take a break on the terrace every now and then. Each dish, or group of dishes, is brought to the table by a small squadron of waiters dressed in black, and while you are busy taking pictures of the new UFO that has just landed, the head waiter explains what it is and how to eat it: start with this end or that, gobble it up in just one bite, or hurry before it melts.

Even one of the "simplest" dishes from the 2008 menu—spherical olives—elicited many testimonials from patrons. One wrote that "it looks like a kalamata olive, but put it in your mouth and as soon as you press it, it explodes with an intensity of flavor that's 10 times that of a regular kalamata. Baby, you don't have to chew anything, it hits you like a ton of bricks." Another described it as "an emulsion of perfect olive purée, encapsulated with the sodium alginate process, and then brined. When you bite into it, there is a little snap through the skin, and then your mouth floods with intense olive. This is what you hope that an olive could be."

An interactive experience between the staff and patrons was integral to the elBulli experience; another diner wrote that "the unbelievably attentive staff made us feel like we were the only people in the place. Many of the dishes came with eating instructions—'Have one bite of this, a sip of this, eat the whole thing at once! Immediately! It will melt!' You really feel like you're on a roller-coaster ride of textures and flavors from the very beginning." One diner's summary of the experience was typical:

It took us six hours to go through the entire meal—from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.—but we were in such a state of elation that it was hard to tell if it had been two minutes or two days since we had first sat down. Dining at elBulli is certainly a one-of-a-kind experience, and I wish it upon anyone who's passionate about food, who has broad tastes, who is tickled by the discovery of new flavors, and who is happy to be whisked away on a flying carpet driven by a mad scientist, even if the ride leaves him a bit dizzy.

As Adrià told CNN, "If you know nothing about what to expect, it's like magic."³

Behind the scenes The work required to create each day's meals was a remarkably elaborate process. Each day, a 60-person team (including some 30 to 40 cooks) created the total elBulli experience for the 50 customers (at 15 tables) served each evening. The day started with the purchase of the necessary produce—an average of 7,000 grams of food per customer to deliver just 700 grams of final product, and nearly 200 ingredients for each menu, resulting in some 1,500 different cocktails, tapas, dishes, and desserts. From 7 a.m. to noon, the team purchased from the best local suppliers to ensure the highest quality of meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, herbs, and so on. Some produce was

³ "Science Creates Gastronomic Storm," CNN.com, June 27, 2005.

delivered each day from suppliers in Barcelona (a two-hour ride from Roses). Adrià himself arrived at the restaurant at 10 a.m. after eight hours sleep and spent an hour organizing his day. Cooking started at 3 p.m. Starting at 4 p.m., the hall team would clean and prepare the dining hall, getting everything ready by 5:30 p.m., two hours before customers arrived. The 60-person team recreated this process every day that elBulli was open for business (see **Exhibit 4** for a schematic of the restaurant operation).

The Origin of elBulli

The restaurant elBulli opened in June 1961, when German physician Dr. Hans Schilling and his wife Marketta obtained a license to open a mini-golf course in a remote cove called Cala Montjoi, near the beautiful town of Roses on Spain's Costa Brava. The Schillings loved French bulldogs, colloquially known as "bulli," and adopted this name for their new venture. Within a year, the mini-golf course became a beach bar, primarily serving outdoor barbecue to tourists, and then a restaurant (see **Exhibit 5** for an early menu). Dr. Schilling often traveled through Europe to visit the finest restaurants, and his ambition was to incorporate increasingly sophisticated recipes and ideas. By 1975, elBulli's menu had moved from golf club fare to flambéed sea bass with fennel, prawns in Pernod, and double entrecôte with béarnaise sauce.

Soon, a promising chef named Jean-Louis Neichel joined elBulli, and the restaurant earned one Michelin star—a prominent mark of excellence in the restaurant industry—with a menu blending French inspiration and Mediterranean flavors, aligned with the *nouvelle cuisine* movement. Seasonal drops in tourism in fall and winter every year forced elBulli to close until spring, and Dr. Schilling encouraged his new chef to use this time to work with and learn from people such as famed French chef Alain Chapel. In 1981, Neichel left to open his own restaurant in Barcelona, and manager Juli Soler was hired as *maître d'hôtel*. Dr. Schilling asked Soler to travel across Europe for two months to visit the finest restaurants. Upon his return, Soler first appointed Yves Kramer and then Jean-Paul Vinay as head chefs. These transitions caused elBulli to briefly lose its Michelin star, however, it would soon be recovered after Marketta Schilling, Juli Soler, and Yves Kramer made an unusual personal visit to the Michelin offices in Paris, which prompted a new inspection. Soon thereafter, elBulli earned its second star under Chef Vinay.

In August 1983, Ferran Adrià joined elBulli as an intern during a short leave from his military service, where he had worked as a cook. On his very first day at elBulli, Adrià was asked to pluck 70 blue ducks; he worked through the night, finishing at 4 a.m. Influenced by his friend Fermí Puig, who later became a renowned chef himself, Adrià read many cuisine books by prominent chefs, including Alain Chapel's *La cuisine c'est plus que des recettes* (*Cuisine Is More than Recipes*), Paul Bocuse's *La cuisine du marché* (*Fresh Market Cuisine*), and Michel Guérard's *La grande cuisine minceur* (*The Great Light Cuisine*). In 1984, Vinay left elBulli, and Adrià teamed up with Christian Lataud to head the restaurant's kitchen. In late 1984, elBulli was again downgraded to one star.

The Development of Adrià's Style

By 1987, Adrià had become the only chef at elBulli. He realized that in order to break the cycle of gaining and losing stars, and truly make elBulli a sensation, a new cuisine and new style of cooking were necessary. In the past, Adrià had worked as hard as he could to learn from famous chefs and imitate the best *nouvelle cuisine* recipes. In 1987, however, he attended a lecture by acclaimed chef Jacques Maximin. When someone in the audience asked, "What is creativity?" Maximin replied, "To create is not to copy." This simple phrase had a profound impact on Ferran Adrià. He realized that

copying had been the guiding principle for his entire career. In 1988, he was ready to introduce a new creative cuisine style at elBulli, and by 1990, the restaurant had recaptured its second Michelin star. Marketta Schilling retired, and Adrià and Soler took over the ownership. In 1992, profiting from the Olympic games in nearby Barcelona, elBulli increased its international reputation. Chef Joël Robuchon, then one of the most prestigious chefs in the world, ate at elBulli and became a passionate champion of Adrià's work.

Adrià constantly refined his philosophy, always trying to move further and further from his earlier desire "to copy." He wanted his dishes to provoke, to make people think and feel when eating. Aiming for a holistic experience, he focused on the five senses and created new food textures such as savory ice creams, foams, and gelatins. Raviolis, for example, were filled with liquid instead of the traditional solid core. Adrià's seemingly innocuous pea soup—one of his first "classic" dishes—offers a glimpse into the process of innovating with a traditional, boring dish. In this dish, half of the soup was hot and the other half cold. Through a tool called a "cocktail master," the two liquids were put in the same glass without mixing the temperatures. The dish looked like regular pea soup, surprising diners when they discovered the extreme variation in temperature when tasting their first spoonful. In another dish, guests received a small round dish of white caviar, but realized upon tasting that the content was pure melon, processed into caviar-like pearls (see Exhibit 6 for pictures of some of his dishes).

In addition to new recipes, Adrià and his team constantly sought new techniques and new equipment with which to experiment, which they often incorporated into the presentation of recipes. "If you want new emotions, big emotions," said Adrià, "you need new techniques." For the *nitro caipirinha* cocktail, for example, the waiter would bring a trolley carrying a large receptacle to the table. He would pour liquid nitrogen—a colorless, odorless substance at a temperature of -196 degrees Celsius—into the receptacle, followed by the cocktail in liquid form. In a few seconds, the cocktail would freeze into a sorbet. The guest then "ate" his cocktail, and quickly, since the sorbet would melt at room temperature. In another example, because traditional gelatin was highly unstable when heated, Adrià decided to develop a hot gelatin by incorporating an Asian ingredient called agar-agar, derived from red seaweed. Such near-scientific approaches to the transformation of food gained popularity as an international movement labeled "Molecular Gastronomy." Other world-famous restaurants joined this movement, such as Heston Blumenthal's "The Fat Duck" in England and Thomas Keller's "The French Laundry" in California, together with many restaurants opened by followers and former students of Adrià.

By 1994, elBulli had begun the process of formalizing the recipe-creation process, with ideas originating from a development team responsible for the creation of new dishes. Andoni Luis Aduriz, a chef who belonged to the development team during those years, commented, "The biggest revolution that Adrià brought was not the techniques he used, but the philosophy. He has ignored the barriers that impeded us to innovate, and he has moved forward without any fear."

By 1995, the method of "deconstruction" was the norm at elBulli, that is, reducing dishes to their constituent components, then recombining and altering them in often delightful ways. Perhaps the most emblematic result of this method was elBulli's Spanish omelet. It consisted of a glass filled with three visible layers. The bottom layer was made of stewed onion, the second was warm egg yolk, and the top was "potato foam." Guests were instructed to submerge a spoon to the bottom of the cup and then to slowly move it up so that it would retain a bit of each layer. As with the surprising pea soup recipe, the result was a clearly identifiable taste—the classic Spanish omelet—but one that surprised and delighted guests. Adrià explained:

I am rethinking traditional dishes. If you change the aspect or the texture, you get a surprise factor, and this is always of interest to me. The guest sees a dish and doesn't know what it is,

but when he tries it, he recognizes it, as long as the dish is from his culture. For a Chinese guest, the deconstructed Spanish omelet is as exotic as the traditional one.

Adrià's creativity encompassed more than deconstruction. Other common methods included creating unusual combinations of the savory and the sweet, or re-appropriating items inspired by mass-market consumption (such as marshmallows and lollipops) as fine cuisine ingredients. One particularly evocative goal was to engage patrons' "sixth sense"—causing them to experience irony, humor, and even recall childhood memories—moving the experience beyond sensorial to a fully emotional one. As Adrià claimed, "We have turned eating into an experience that supersedes eating."

In 1997, the restaurant earned its third Michelin star, a supreme distinction shared by only two other restaurants in Spain.

In 2003, Adrià appeared in the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*; until then, the only Spaniard to have appeared on that cover was Salvador Dalí. A few months later, *Le Monde* put Adrià on its cover, and *BusinessWeek* chose him as one of the 100 innovators of the year. In 2006, elBulli participated in Germany's Documenta fair, perhaps the world's most prestigious event for contemporary art. In 2007, Ferran lent his voice to a minor character in the Walt Disney film *Ratatouille*, in which a small rat becomes one of the best chefs in Paris.

In 2002, and then again in 2006 and 2007, elBulli ranked first in *Restaurant Magazine's* "Top 50," the world's reference ranking in its field.

Innovation in the elBulli "Laboratory"

Worried that success would keep them too busy to continue creating, Adrià decided to open an "R&D laboratory," called El Taller ("the workshop") in the center of Barcelona, near the prestigious farmer's market "La Boqueria."

From early October to late March, elBulli was closed. In Adrià's words, business success had allowed him "to buy freedom for creativity." September was the only month in which Adrià did not devote time to creating new recipes. At El Taller, he teamed up with his brother Albert, as well as Chef Oriol Castro, to develop a full set of completely new recipes each year. The notion that recipes were to be developed, used for one season, and then discarded and never used again was crucial to the creative process at elBulli. In Adrià's view:

Everything at elBulli needs to be renewed for the next year. Imagine Pepsico having to renew its entire product line for next year. . . More techniques and concepts have been developed at elBulli over the past 15 years than in the world over the past century.

Adrià created systematically, relying on a catalog of thought-generating techniques developed over the years and respecting the doctrines he and his colleagues had created and embraced (Exhibit 7). The creative process at El Taller was ultimately imitated by many restaurants, though many recipes required expensive machinery (such as industrial tools for freeze drying that were simply not available to most restaurants, and certainly not to most amateur chefs who tried to recreate elBulli recipes at home) or "ingredients," such as liquid nitrogen, that were difficult to obtain and use. Adrià commented:

First of all, creativity requires pragmatism. Creativity is mean and has no pity on you. Words are not creativity. Philosophical people are not creative. When the flame burns out, you start talking nonsense. In the end, they are tangible things. The creative pyramid is very

important: philosophical lines, concepts, and techniques. Few people in the world do this, in any activity.

The process of generating an initial concept could take a few hours or several months. Intuitions were developed methodically, until samples could be prepared for analysis and reflection. Some recipes went through literally hundreds of iterations, with Adrià systematically varying ingredients and techniques. Adrià felt that “ideas are the only thing that cannot be explained, but you can create methods to make them flow.” Adrià had formed a creative team consisting of eight to nine people reporting to him, as well as Chefs Albert Adrià, Oriol Castro, and Marc Cuspinera. The team was divided into three research groups, each separately searching for new lines of creativity by attending courses, traveling abroad, and always seeking new foods and techniques. The three groups then came together, explained the lines they had been researching, and then decided which should be given priority. Most of the recipes, however, were finalized in the restaurant over the course of the season. In order to decide which recipes to include in the menu, the team considered whether it was feasible to prepare them for 40 to 50 customers every day. But the final decision to include a recipe was always culinary, based on how the recipe awakened the senses and whether it was true to the gastronomic tradition they had developed at elBulli over the years. Table 1 shows the timeline of creativity, which was repeated each year at elBulli.

Table 1 Timeline of Creativity for the 2008 Recipes

<i>October 2007</i>
• Day 2: elBulli is closed
• Day 10: The creative team commences work
<i>November 2007-February 2008</i>
• Attending specialized courses
• Searching for new foods and new equipment
• Visits to USA, Japan, other countries
• Visits to designers in other industries
<i>March 2008</i>
• Day 26: elBulli is open
<i>April 2008</i>
• First week: Start with the 2007 menu and scattered new recipes
• Gradual incorporation of new recipes to the menu
<i>May 2008-August 2008</i>
• 2008 menu is finalized

Source: “Un día en elBulli,” elBullibooks.

In developing one new recipe, the team generated the basic germ of an idea, in this example, to combine caviar and marrow, two foods not usually integrated into one dish. The idea met the goal of deconstructing the familiar and reinventing it. If others on the team thought the idea was interesting, the next step was research to see if anyone had made something similar. If the answer was yes, the team would think about what it could learn from previous approaches to the idea, and whether the new concept was sufficiently novel. Then the team members would decide whether to continue with the idea. If they did continue, they then began the all-important step of inserting creativity into the concept—what would be the most surprising and satisfying ways of combining caviar and marrow for the “mental palate”? The team then searched for the right raw materials, techniques, and equipment (what kind of caviar should be used? what techniques could be used to cook the marrow? what new equipment can be utilized?). The next step was to take the first recipe and begin to experiment, using different techniques, different sauces, and so on, to play with the physical palate. Each dish was perfected through much iteration, ultimately leading to a final recipe. In this case, the recipe was named “sea and mountain,” the name of a traditional Catalan recipe combining meat and fish. As with many recipes at elBulli, the final experience of the dish was both reminiscent of the traditional dish but also quite novel (see **Exhibit 8** for two elBulli recipes).

The evolution of recipes did not necessarily end there. At the restaurant, the team continued to elaborate on each dish, sometimes making small, daily changes. Recipes were occasionally redesigned based on feedback waiters received from customers; in general, however, listening to customer feedback was not one of Adrià's favorite activities:

We have the best team in the world and that should be enough to determine what makes sense. I don't give a damn whether people like what we do or not. I am pleased if they like it, but elBulli is not a service operation. It is a venue to explore the boundaries of cuisine, and it would be boring not to share our findings with guests. I don't rule out the possibility of this place being devoted solely to research, where every so often a group of friends sits at the table in the kitchen to share.

“Creativity comes first,” concluded Adrià, “then comes the customer.”

Epilogue: Business or Not?

As the 2007–2008 season came to a close, Adrià was committed to continuing with the restaurant business for at least five more years, but over time he had developed a number of other “side projects.”

Book publishing Adrià felt that it was critical to catalogue all recipes developed during the previous year, a yearly “internal audit” of the creative process. Started in 2000, the General Catalog gave a date and number for each recipe, a process familiar to artists but unknown in gastronomy. It served three distinct purposes. First, in the absence of cuisine patents, it was a means to receive proper credit for new creations. Second, the catalogue allowed the team to draw an “evolutionary map” to track trends in innovation. Finally, the catalog was a source of revenue and publicity in its own right; it sold in the €100–€150 price range. Catalog sales varied from 10,000 to 25,000 units, depending on the year. One amateur chef who purchased the 2003–2004 catalog on Amazon.com wrote that buyers should expect to be able to prepare “5% to 10% (or less) of the recipes in this book” and that “most of the time you'll end up with a *really* unappetizing mess rather than a meal,” yet went on to give the book the highest five-star rating. Since 1997, elBulli had published five books and five catalogs.

Hotels and fast food In 1998, the elBulli team decided to transfer its philosophy to a hotel near Seville, called elBullihotel Hacienda Benazuza, which soon received two Michelin stars. Rates were as high as €1,440 per night. "elBullihotel is a wish, a different way to understand a hotel. It's hard to explain it with words," said Adrià, who commented that the hotel was an effort to replicate "the atmosphere, sensations, and feelings that people who have visited the elBulli restaurant have felt." With NH Hotels, Adrià also developed the concept of a restaurant chain called Fast Good, where customers could eat good fast food at a reasonable price. This venture was not a partnership between NH Hotels and elBulli, but elBulli advised on the development of the concept: "To offer a quality fast-food service in order to satisfy the demands of the modern client who has little time to eat but who isn't willing to compromise his or her health or the quality of the food" by "adding gourmet ingredients to traditional fast-food menu items." The chain—limited to a few locations in Spain—offered typical fast-food items, but with a twist, such as hamburgers made entirely from veal, or French fries served with olive oil. The average price of a meal was €9 to €18.

Consulting In 1999, Adrià, took on his first consulting project for Borges—a leading manufacturer of food products and renowned worldwide for its olive oil and vinegar—helping the company create a new line of olive oils, including a new chili and cardamom-flavored version. The consulting business expanded to new clients such as Lavazza, Kaiku, Armand Bassi, and Diageo. In one project with Frito-Lay in 2005, Adrià attempted to invigorate the potato chip category by bringing the elBulli philosophy to bear, creating rosemary and garlic varieties, as well as roasted-chicken flavored chips. Adrià's photograph appeared on the back of each four-ounce bag, which retailed for €1.15.

Adrià declined to work with many companies and imposed two rules for accepting a consulting project: he wanted to work directly with the president or CEO, and he also wanted to work from day one with an innovation team of people from all departments in the company. Adrià spoke about his attitude toward business:

Until 1998, we were not really making any money. As success increased, in 2001, Soler and I sat down to plan activities that we would develop just enough to reach the target of leading and sustaining a normal life after 2008. elBulli itself cannot be a business. What interests me above all is creative cuisine. I am not a business creature.

The restaurant Top-rated restaurants were businesses in which it was difficult—if not impossible—to become very wealthy. The typical top-rated restaurant in Spain had around 30 employees, revenue of €3 million, and a net profit of around 10%. Earning Michelin stars was not a guarantee of profitability; there were restaurants that had gone bankrupt even after receiving a third Michelin star. Starting these restaurants was expensive, and an owner assumed an enormous amount of debt. The restaurant business was also highly cyclical, as an economic downturn could drastically reduce customer flow.

The elBulli business was no exception. Though approximately half of the 60 employees were trainees who earned no salary (Adrià did provide them with housing, food, medical insurance, and a degree title from the University of Barcelona), the 60-person staff for just 50 guests per evening was typical of the grand scale of the elBulli operation. At 350 square meters, the elBulli kitchen was larger than the total dining space, which consisted of a dining hall (250 square meters) and outdoor terrace (80 square meters), a ratio of kitchen to dining area that far surpassed that of other restaurants. The wine menu offered some 1,616 different wines—325 origins, 40 different growing years, 216 wine varieties—and even 55 styles of glassware. With the help of casaDelfin, Adrià often designed entirely new plates and flatware for use with just one specific recipe. The scope of the elBulli experience, from the number of staff to the number of dishes to the quality of the cuisine, meant that, at an average

final meal price of €230 per person (depending on the wine and beverages chosen) and just 8,000 customers per year, elBulli usually fell short of breakeven.

Adrià concluded:

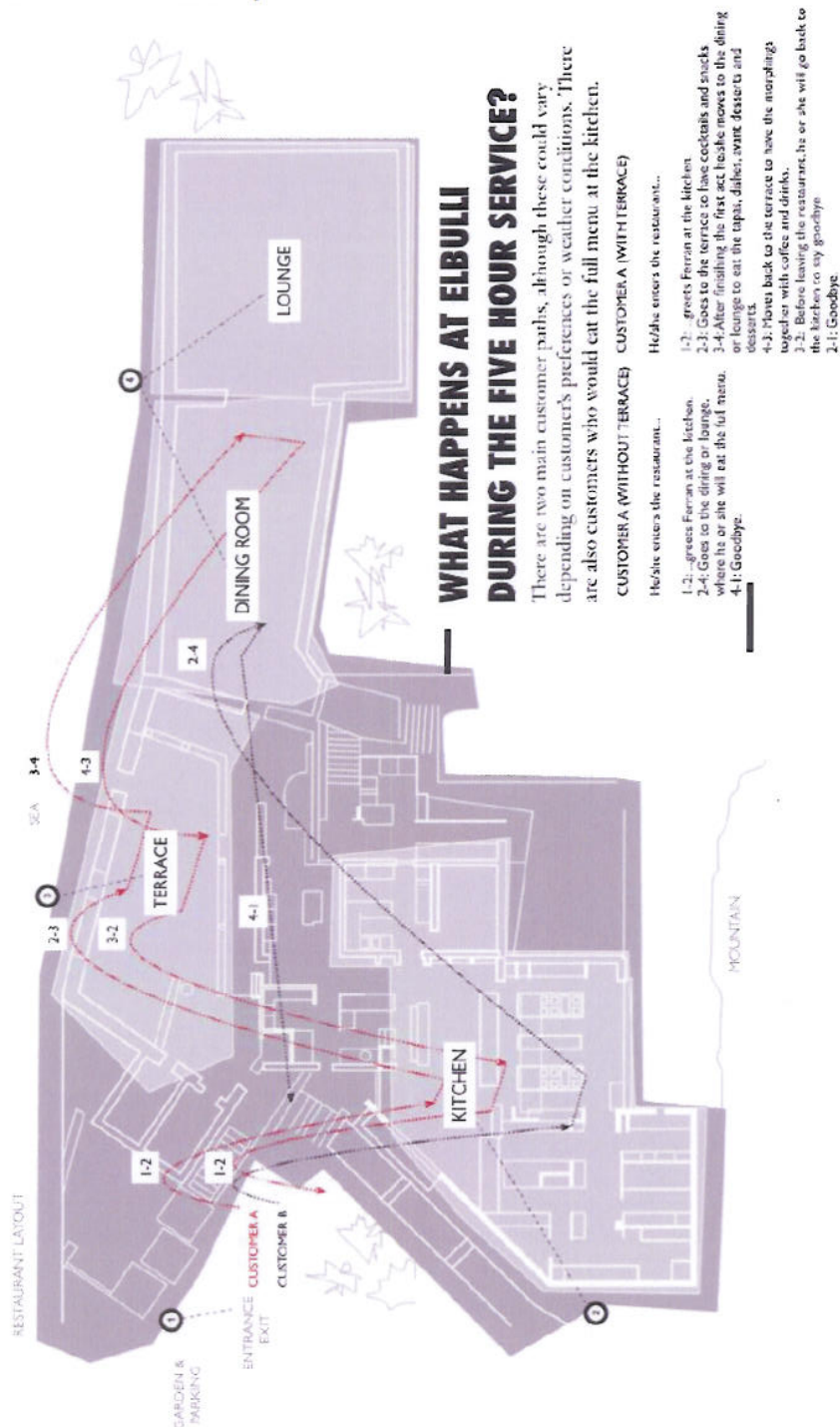
I recently saw a TV interview about the American Express Centurion Card. It said that you can have access to anything that can be purchased in this world. But it made me laugh. There is one thing that you cannot purchase: a reservation at elBulli. What would be the normal thing to do? Raise prices. It should be €600. But I do not cook for millionaires. I cook for sensitive people.

Exhibit 1 elBulli from the Sea; the elBulli Dining Room



Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 2 The elBulli Experience



Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 3 The 2008 elBulli Menu

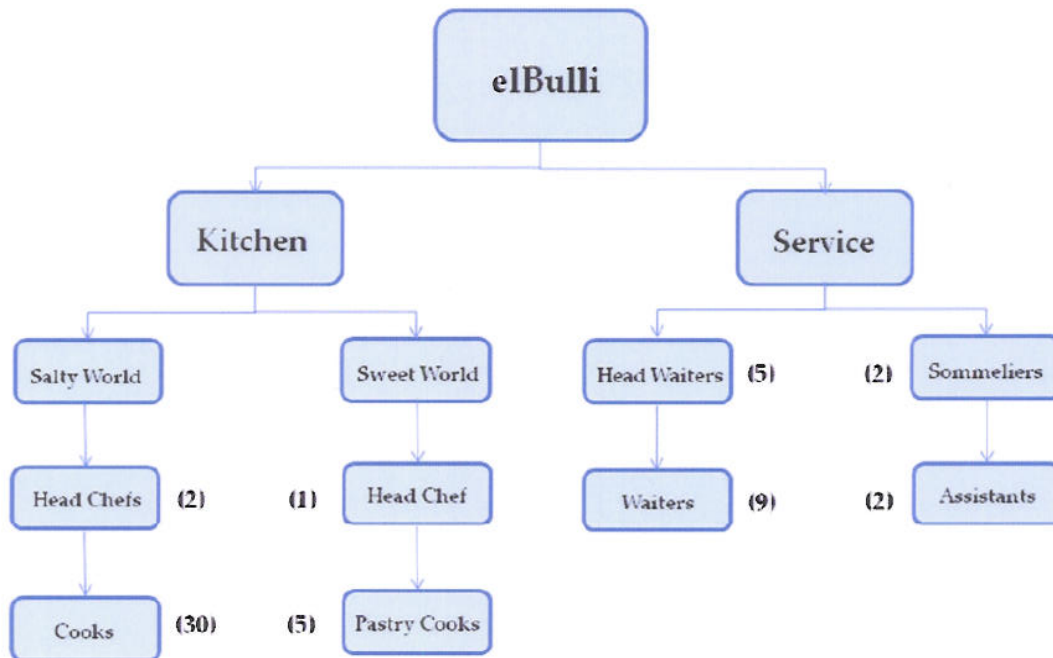
02/04/2008

elBulli^{roses}

cosmopolitan-mallow
spherical olives
LYO fruits
salty "catanias"
beetroot and yoghurt meringue
mango leaf with tagete flower
rabbit ear crunchy
peanut and curry bombons
pistachios sponge cake with acid milk mousse
black sesame sponge cake with miso
flowers paper
pine tree dacquoise
"horchata" - truffle
steamed brioche with mozzarella and roses perfume
haricot bean with Joselito's iberian pork fat
caju of polenta with fermented yoghurt
thai pink grapefruit risotto with coconut and white sesame
oysters yoghurt with px in tempura
tomate soupe with virtual iberian ham
asparagus in different cooking times
begonia leaf with peas and almonds oil
gnocchi of polenta with coffee and safran yuba
tomato cous-cous with oil-olives, basil and pamesan cheese
sea cucumber with mentaiko and rhubarb
capuchina leaf with eel and veal marrow
hare juise with apple jelly-cru with black currant marinated
hot Cañarejal with raspberry and kirsh
gorgonzola shell
strawberry
Morphings....

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 4 The Restaurant Operation (with total staff in parentheses)



Source: Casewriters.

Exhibit 5 An Early elBulli Menu






HAZIENDA

"El Bulli"



GRILL-ROOM - BAR - APARTAMENTOS

ROSAS - COSTA BRAVA - ESPANA
CALA MONTJOY

MEI: MENU DEL DIA Pesetas 125.--

SOPA DEL DIA
Tagesuppe

FILETE DE PESCADO EMPANADA
Panierte Fischfilet

HELADO
Eiscreme

Inkl. Pan y 1/4 de Vino





Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 6 Sample Dishes at elBulli



1353 | flower's paper



1343 | gold nugget



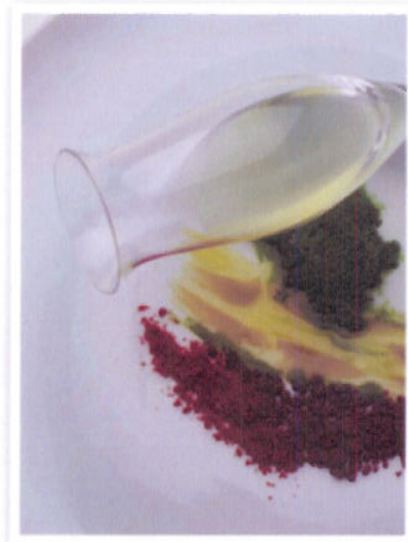
1386 | snails roasted in the pan



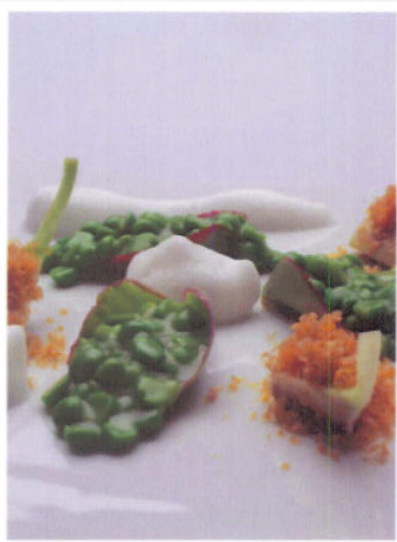
1360 | icy truffle of carrot and passion fruit



1361 | sponge cake of
black sesame with miso



1376 | tomato - basil -
parmesan



1380 | peas and
artichokes with
begonia's leaves, elder
and grey mullet's roes



1372 | small pies of
crystal almonds with
cherries

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 7 Creativity Concepts in Use at elBulli

The sixth sense: Introducing emotions in cooking, such as irony, humor, provocation, and childhood memories. The objective is to introduce in cooking other elements of judgment apart from the sensorial.

Deconstruction: Taking apart each element of a dish and putting it back in a way that modifies textures and temperatures. The result is very different from the original, but keeps the “genome” from the original dish.

Adaptation: Revising recipes from the classic or traditional cuisine, adapting them to a new philosophy. The result is a dish recognized in comparison to the original.

Minimalism: Building recipes built with a minimum of elements, trying to offer the maximum of magic.

Haute cuisine versions of mass-market products: Using commercial products that are usually not used in professional cooking (marshmallows, popcorn, etc.) or even crafting them in the kitchen (e.g., lollipops).

Influence from other cuisines: Getting inspiration from the traditional characteristics of cuisines from other places.

Senses as the starting point to create: Using perceptions from our senses to begin to create.

Symbiosis of sweet and salted worlds: Interchanging elements, ingredients, preparations, and even vocabulary among both worlds.

A new way of serving food: Innovating with respect to the utensils or recipients in which food is presented (e.g., cups, straws, different types of glasses, specially created flatware). It is possible to modify the way of serving food and, in consequence, the way of consuming that food. Often this requires the active participation of the guest.

Searching for new products: Discovering new products (either exotic or from the near environment).

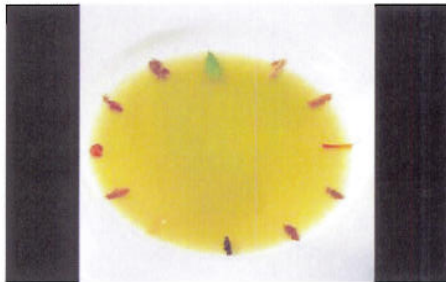
Techniques and concepts applied to new products: Applying techniques and concepts, new or old, to products and elaborations that have not been subject to them.

Synergy: All of these concepts interact in our cooking.

Source: Adapted from “Un día en elBulli,” elBullibooks.

Exhibit 8 Two Recipes from elBulli

THE SPICE DISH (Recipe 367)



Year: 1996
 Family: Desserts
 Temperature: Cold
 Serves: Four

For the apple juice

500g of Granny Smith apples

1. Core the apples and cut them into eighths.
2. Place the apples in boiling water for 5 seconds, remove and chill in water and ice.
3. Liquidize the apples and pour juice into tall, thin container.
4. Leave it to rest in the freezer, so that the impurities on the top solidify and are easier to remove.
5. Remove the impurities with a skimmer.
6. Pass the juice through a piece of chef's muslin.

For the base syrup

50g of sugar

50g of water

1. Mix both ingredients and bring to the boil.
2. Remove from the heat, put to one side and allow to cool.

For the apple jelly

450g of apple juice (prepared earlier)

50g of base syrup (prepared earlier)

2 sheets of gelatin of 2g each (hydrated in cold water)

1. Dissolve the gelatin sheets by heating in microwave.
2. Mix the apple juice with the syrup and keep in the fridge, monitor its level of oxidization and if necessary rectify it with a little green food coloring.
3. Divide the apple jelly among soup bowls.
4. Place it in the fridge, ensuring that the bowls stay totally horizontal. Leave it to set for a minimum of 3 hours.

THE SPICE DISH (CONT.)

FINISHING TOUCHES AND PRESENTATION

1. Take the bowls out of the fridge and place the 12 spices around the bowl like a clock face. Start with the quarters, 12, 3, 6, and 9 to make the margins and then continue with the rest. This dish is accompanied by a small book which explains the twelve spices, although not in order.

12 o'clock	mint leaves
1 o'clock	grated nutmeg
2 o'clock	curry powder
3 o'clock	saffron threads
4 o'clock	chopped cardamom
5 o'clock	Szechwan pepper
6 o'clock	vanilla seeds
7 o'clock	julienne of crystallized ginger
8 o'clock	cinnamon powder
9 o'clock	crushed red pepper
10 o'clock	ground star anise
11 o'clock	crushed juniper

2. The waiter advises the order in which the spices should be eaten, with the aim of helping the client discover them.

BEETROOT AND YOGURT ICE CREAM LOLLIPOP (Recipe 469)



Year: 1998
 Family: Snacks
 Temperature: Frozen
 Serves: Ten

For the yogurt mousse

50g of Greek yogurt
 50g of liquid cream (35% m.g.)

1. Whip the cream and mix it with the yogurt using smooth top to bottom movements.
2. Place it in a waxed paper cornet.
3. Keep in the fridge.

For the beetroot jelly

250g of raw liquidized beetroot juice
 1¼ gelatin sheets of 2g each (hydrated in cold water)
 Salt

1. Warm ¼ of the juice and dissolve the gelatin in it.
2. Take off the heat and mix in the rest of the juice. Add salt to taste.
3. Leave to cool in a container in the fridge.
4. Place in a wax paper cornet.

For the raspberry coulis

50g of raspberries

1. Crush the raspberries and pass them through a strainer to remove the seeds.

Other ingredients

Freshly ground black pepper
 10 skewer sticks of 10cm

FINISHING TOUCHES AND PRESENTATION

1. On a baking sheet covered with Silpat, trace a fine circle of 4cm diameter, with the yogurt mousse and draw randomly across the circle to give it a stained glass effect. Insert the sticks in one side of the circle, forming a lollipop and freeze it.
2. Take it out of the freezer and fill the spaces in the middle of the yogurt mousse with beetroot jelly. Freeze it again. The step is easier done quickly.
3. Put the raspberry coulis in a paper cornet and dispense three drops on top of the frozen beetroot jelly. Freeze it once more at -10°C.
4. Carefully take the lollipops out of their molds and pepper them; when serving, place them vertically, standing up in a glass.

Source: Company documents.