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Barcelona's Spoonik: food as performance art

R. Daniel Foster · Wednesday, June 6th, 2018

Restaurant dining invariably involves a performance. Chefs Jon Giraldo and Jaimie Lieberman have taken that art and added a histrionic spin. Their Barcelona enterprise — because it truly is more destination than restaurant — combines a heady crossbreed of Latin and Mediterranean cuisines with staged performance that is sometimes artful, and often crafty.

Spoonik is located in Barcelona's Sant Gervasi-la Bonanova district, a ten-minute walk from the Metro's Line 3 Lesseps station, at Plaça de Lesseps. Look for the lit Spoonik sign and the marbled entrance at Carrer Bertran 28.

Inside, the scattershot decor (masks, and mismatched paintings) promised culinary curiosities — and yes, displayed on the bar, that truly was a statue of two naked men, one kneeling with his head up the other's ass. The man standing wore a donkey mask.

The name branding that backs "Spoonik" is considerable: start with the Russian satellite Sputnik (although the chefs are Columbian and Mexican); toss in "the relationship between stars and haute cuisine today"; stir that name combo with an utensil (presumably a spoon); and dash all of that with the word "unique." Voila — Spoonik.

Meal prices hover just north of \$100 per person but can top \$200 if choice wines are ordered.



Bearded waiters in jeans and vests studded with winsome jewelry were frisky

The establishment seats about 40, with both bar spots (an excellent view of the action-packed kitchen), and communal tables. Bearded waiters in jeans and vests studded with winsome jewelry were frisky. The fun at Spoonik can sometimes be forced, but with the right diner mix, I imagine the space grows lively, even raucous.

Guests were ushered into the kitchen for introductions to cooks and assistants — a collective affair. Here, we sampled what Lieberman termed "ephemeral pizza," which involved blossoms, along with a vegetarian ceviche: mango, green apple, and nopal (a cactus). The bites were flavor-infused, little bursts of surprises in the mouth. A great start.

Lieberman performed some call and answer with the kitchen crew who recited ingredients (we were all crammed in the space, about 18 people). The little assembly was meant to spark intimacy with the creators because traditionally, cooks and helpers are forever banished to the kitchen. It did

precisely that. I appreciated the approach.



At Spoonik, table tops double as video screens with animated images paired to dishes

Back in the main room, the music shifted, the room fell dark, and the tabletops lit up with screened entertainment. The surfaces double as video screens, with animated images paired to dishes — the first of which was a Mexican panucho with its roots in the Yucatan.

Panucho usually involves a refried tortilla and black beans, some cabbage and standard meat. The chefs' twist on the dish was duck confit, avocado, pickled purple onion, Stilton cheese, and honey. The offering was a sweet-sour riff on creamy deliciousness.

Popcorn dust was up next. splashed over a cold corn cream with lime foam. The hot-cold serving was inventive, and like nearly every nonconformist dish, was meant to be talked about, and to light up the mouth.



A warm lobster salad was closer to standard fare, nearly a relief in its sublime ordinariness. A couple next to me also named it their favorite, simply because it was a nice break from the continual shock of rebel cuisine.

The tabletops once again lit up with animations — it may have been fire or ice, or flowing water that danced as a new dish was served. The up-lit expressions of diners revealed a sort of fixation on the experience that seemed curated for Instagram.

As if on cue, a ceramic mold of chef Jaimie Lieberman's mouth — amply filled with sea urchin ceviche and aji cream — was served to each guest. I looked to the donkey statue with the naked man's head up the beast's ass — as if to find, I don't know, some clue as to the workings of this Twilight Zone dinner. Certainly, dissimilar idiosyncrasies can join, pointing one to greater meaning.

In any case, this is a restaurant that Salvador Dali would have loved.



A ceramic mold of chef Jaimie Lieberman's mouth — amply filled with sea urchin ceviche and aji cream

"Everything starts with the mouth ... so — " said Lieberman explaining why diners were lifting, with some trepidation, what resembled dentures to their own mouths. The mouth molds included a front gold tooth, which I assumed was a fanciful addition since I did not spot any bling in Lieberman's grin.

In any case, holding Lieberman's mouth to my own and then slurping down its filling was a memorable experience.

Back to the food, which is, after all, the point of a restaurant — and the food was good, with considerable thought and labor backing it, make no mistake. Another standout: the "titote bass" in a papillote of banana leaves with coconut milk, toffee rice, and pickled chayote. I welcomed its basic, grounded flavor, as again, did the couple seated next to me who said in unison (I swear they

did): “An optimal combination.” They were from San Francisco.



Seated at the bar, guests have views of the action-packed kitchen

The menu went on — I lost count after about a dozen dishes. There was dry ice, multicolored lasers, octopus, beef chuck with grated sweet plantains, and a Mediterranean dessert with “seven yogurt textures,” including caramelized, with a nice granularity. This was followed by a Caribbean-Colombian crossed dish: banana bread, yucca toffee, Costeno cheese, rice ice cream, banana custard, tapioca . . . the flavors marched on.

The menu was packed to an overwhelming degree, and in the end, Spoonik seemed determined to inundate. Mission accomplished.

A primer on the chefs: Giraldo, 37, hails from a renowned hospitably family in Western Columbia’s coffee-growing region. He has lived in Barcelona since age 19. He trained at the Hofmann and Bellart cookery schools, and at El Cellar de Can Roca. Lieberman, 36, grew up in Cancun where he trained as a photographer and artist (he provides much of the inventive panache Spoonik delivers). The chef moved to Barcelona at age 20 where he trained at the Bellart and Hoffmann schools.

[Spoonik](#), Carrer Bertran 28, Barcelona / Metro: Line 3 Lesseps station

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Photos: R. Daniel Foster

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