

World News

Chefs' camaraderie lifts Basque cuisine

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eration of Basque chefs, credited Mr. Subijana with helping to create "a unique ecosystem of solidarity" in the Basque region, one that has distinguished the area worldwide.

Mr. Aduriz, 44, knows from experience. He set up his own restaurant, Mugaritz, ranked No. 6 in the world, in the hills surrounding San Sebastián after working for another leading local chef, Martín Berasategui.

"Martín could have booted me out, but instead he offered to become a shareholder in Mugaritz and share his experience to help a 25-year-old prosper," Mr. Aduriz said.

In 2010, Mr. Aduriz said, he again benefited from Basque solidarity after being forced to close Mugaritz for several months after a fire.

"I was facing ruin, and others could have applauded the disappearance of a rival, but I can't think of a single chef who didn't offer to help me reopen as soon as possible," he said.

For all their solidarity, however, Basque chefs thrive on a healthy competition, particularly in playful presentation and breaking frontiers.

At Arzak, a seafood dish might be served on a video screen playing ocean waves, or chocolate sweets presented in the shape of nuts and bolts.

There is a hint of molecular gastronomy, as when the chef Eneko Atxa of Azurmendi, his three-star restaurant near Bilbao, cooks an egg "inside out," by delicately using syringes to remove some yolk and replace it with a warm truffle consommé.

But almost always, it seems, traditions are maintained, even as they are subverted. Victor Arguinzoniz, the chef at his restaurant, Asador Etxebarri, excels at grilling over flame — and has designed his own equipment to do so. He may use a dusting of ash to enhance even the butter on the table.

"The Basque language changes every 10 kilometers, and I think the same happens with our food," Mr. Atxa said. "What we probably all have in common,

"Grilling a fish well is like being able to make a painting with just one perfect brush stroke."

however, is growing up in Basque homes in which life has revolved around the kitchen rather than the living room."

Certainly, the area offers enough to choose from. Elena Arzak, Mr. Arzak's daughter and partner, has been visiting San Sebastián's main food market since her early childhood. But however often she goes, Ms. Arzak explained, there is always something to be recalled or learned anew.

Depending on the season, she may find all kinds of regional specialties, like hake kokotxa, the fleshy underpart of the fish's jaw, or live baby eels — not for the squeamish.

"So much is available here that I often forget exactly what is best during what season," she said as she checked the ripeness of a green Errezil apple, a local variety.

In fact, every aspect of life in San Sebastián seems to revolve around food, from the gastronomic societies that are a less formal equivalent to British gentlemen's clubs — and where members often do their own cooking — to the small bars that serve pintxos, the Basque version of tapas, in the city's historic center. "It's extremely rare to have a place



Students at the Basque Culinary Center in San Sebastián, Spain, the first faculty in Europe to teach avant-garde techniques. The school will soon offer a doctoral course in gastronomic sciences.



The chef Elena Arzak, flanked by the creative directors of the restaurant Arzak, in its laboratory. At the restaurant, a seafood dish might be served on a video screen playing ocean waves.



Cooks at the restaurant Mugaritz working on a new dish. The chef, Andoni Luis Aduriz, closes the restaurant for four months in winter, three of which are spent elaborating new dishes.

where the top of the range is of such high quality, but also everyday food, down to what you find in the local supermarkets," said José Avillez, a Portuguese chef whose restaurants include the two-star Belcanto in Lisbon.

Indeed, by now, Basque gastronomy has reached such a level of recognition that it has become "our best international brand," said Joxe Mari Aizega, the director general of the Basque Culinary Center, which was inaugurated in 2011.

Its school, with the first European university faculty teaching avant-garde techniques, will even offer a doctoral course in gastronomic sciences next

year.

"We've been able to attract students from all over the world because we're promoting modern and contemporary gastronomy," Mr. Aizega said. "But also the balance that you find in Basque cuisine between tradition and innovation."

That devotion to experimentation comes at a cost. Mr. Aduriz, the chef at Mugaritz, closes his restaurant for four months during the winter, three of which are spent elaborating new dishes with his staff.

Still, however complex the dishes get, he emphasized, they draw on "a level of

simplicity that is essential at every level of Basque cuisine but can't be found everywhere else."

"Grilling a fish well is like being able to make a painting with just one perfect brush stroke," he said.

Mr. Aduriz has helped raise the international profile of Basque gastronomy in his own right. Some 95 percent of his clients come from outside the Basque region, mirroring the diversity in his kitchen, which has a staff of 40 from 19 countries. This year, he is set to open a new restaurant in San Sebastián that will offer a fusion of Basque and Latin American cuisine. He is also starting his first

overseas establishment, in Abu Dhabi.

The attachment of Basque chefs to their own society has inspired others, including Joan Roca, the chef of El Celler de Can Roca, a Catalan family establishment ranked as the world's best.

From Basque chefs, Mr. Roca said, he learned "the idea that a chef welcomes and takes leave from you as if you had gone to his home rather than his restaurant."

"I think Catalan cuisine is more complex and has more recipes," he added, "but we don't quite have this Basque idea that gastronomy should be at the heart of all social relationships."

be slowing flow of migrants in early days

Belgian may have helped

Greek state already battered by years of ... ers saw the rush to start sending people ... lish, and having already picked up some

Paris terror attack suspect