

Meeting with the Seas

Where the Ría de Arousa ventures into the vegetable garden

Javier Olleros

Restaurante Culler de Pau (O Grove) 1 Michelin star

Javier Olleros, from Culler de Pau Michelin star holding restaurant in O Grove, at the heart of the Ría de Arousa, was the last speaker of the morning before the round table of the congress.

Chef Javier Olleros supplies his kitchen with the produce of the Ría de Arousa, where his Michelin-starred restaurant Culler de Pau is located. For the chef, the rías (estuaries) are still the great unknown, and he particularly emphasized their biological diversity, their wealth and the culinary potential of their produce. “The ría de Arousa is just 200 metres from our restaurant and for us it’s a great larder,” Olleros declared.

The salty maritime and sweet river currents together with the small water streams that form estuaries and sandy areas create a perfect temperature for the existence of a unique green ecosystem. “The height is also important, they are usually no more than 60 metres deep and all these characteristics mean lots of food is created to enable any animal to live in a comfortable, healthy and sustainable way. It’s a very important natural resource factory,” Javier Olleros pointed out. To demonstrate this, he prepared two recipes before the audience: one of marine asparagus and another with shellfish, both from the rías.

As a curiosity, the chef pointed out that the marine asparagus dish was linked to Ángel León’s work with the sea and that they discovered in a natural manner. Their first investigations of this product led them to find that, although asparagus from the land are better known, they were actually born in the sea. Salicornia and purslane were two of the ingredients that were added to the first recipe “they’re harvested when the tide goes out because we’ve noticed that that’s when they contain more salty notes,” the chef reported.

During elaboration of the dishes, Javier Olleros took the opportunity to explain that his grandfather was a sailor and when he brought home a catch, he described not just the place it had been caught but also “the rock it came from.” This information, he explained, was generally passed around in the village and it was vital to know what the fish had fed on. All this knowledge is becoming lost to chefs and it’s a legacy that should be preserved. He also took the chance to speak up in favour of preservation of these very particular fishing grounds, as they are “like the terroir for wines.”

Finally, the chef spoke of his ten years of trajectory at the helm of the restaurant, a decade which has helped him to “gain perspective, file down insecurities” and during which he has maintained a “real commitment to the planet,” as 90% of his kitchen is supplied by “sustainable fishing, small producers and people who want to bring us the best.”

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