

Meeting with the Seas

Marine mycology: edible mushrooms underneath the sea

Ángel León

Restaurante Aponiente (Puerto de Santa María) 3 Michelin Stars

He did it again. Ángel León once again surprised us upon appearing on the stage. This time, that of the 1st Meeting with the Seas. He did so this Monday, giving a preview of some of what the tide is bringing to his three Michelin star-holding restaurant Aponiente: marine mycology, in other words, mushrooms and fungi that he himself and his team decided to search for, and managed to find, at sea.

He presented the idea at the congress along with his head of R&D, David Chamorro. “It all started with one of his crazy ideas, he said “there must be mushrooms down there,” recalls Chamorro, who joined up with the chef from Cádiz to launch this novel project which they’re now launching together with specialists from the University of Cádiz. They studied the process and carried it to their own territory. Here, in the form of algae, they are marine mushrooms. They gave the Acetabularia, which they already work with, as an example. As León explained, kept in fish tanks they have a great potential as, once cut, they grow in a sustainable way. They presented them together with an emulsion of plankton and truffle.

“We realised that the human being is wary of the unknown, and that’s a problem when it comes to accepting the sea. That’s why we resort to fantasy as a weapon to combat that fear,” Ángel León recalls, referring to a decade of commitment to the sea, repurposing the proteins that humans didn’t see as food.

Today, “the actual reality of the sea has surpassed that fantasy,” the chef pointed out, revealing another of his discoveries: the sea hare and its laying, “a skein” which is often found in the sea and that he started to ‘pull’ to incorporate it as an ingredient for the new season. But the story doesn’t end there. Ángel León made the most of his visit to this congress he once dreamed about to announce a project he admits he’s very excited about: La Dehesa del Mar, a line under which he will be selling his marine cold cuts starting in September.

“I’ve always been obsessed with bringing them to the general public, but it’s been a personal torture because, after meeting with four multinational companies, they only guaranteed a 25/30% fish content in the product. I ended up exhausted. But two months ago, I lost my mind completely and we’re going to face the challenge alone. If we can drive in a wedge that leads to a new industry to allow people to eat in a healthy way and brings our children to snack on omega 3 it would be fantastic,” León admitted, giving a live

demonstration of marine bacon which he cooked on the stage and which has arrived through a company that cleans fish and discards the stomach. That gave the Cádiz chef a lightbulb moment. He pressed the stomachs of those sea breams and basses to form a sort of mass that would turn into the bacon. “Don’t tell me you don’t fancy having some bacon and eggs with omega 3 without anyone telling you off,” he joked.

Juan Carlos Mackintosh
Owner of Atún Rojo del Estrecho

Juan Carlos Mackintosh, owner of Atún Rojo del Estrecho (Red Tuna of the Straits) spoke of red tuna at the 1st Meeting with the Seas. His experience within the sector told him that it would take patience. And also following the advice of chef Ángel León, he didn’t give up. He continued on his path in search of obtaining quality without affecting prices. He even visited Japan to discover their sustainable fishing techniques for himself. Now he has applied them at his company in Tarifa, which in two and a half years has trebled its workforce and turnover.

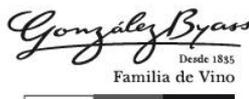
As Mackintosh pointed out, just 5% of his produce is sold at market, the rest goes to international distributors with Italy as his biggest client. “We only fish what we’re asked for,” Mackintosh said, “always committing to putting quality before quantity.” By doing so, they obtain a clean fish with immediate exsanguination, applying a technique that gives the tuna an electric shock to avoid it losing lactic acid. A process that ends by introducing the fish in ice to balance the temperature.

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