



in the ring

By Pandora Peñamil Peñafiel

Four Chefs against the ropes

We have confined four of our most celebrated chefs in a metaphorical ring set up by Olivatessen by Mercacei, as though it were a boxing match, to mercilessly fire a whole battery of questions at them about extra virgin olive oil, in an attempt to find out what their opinions, sensations and emotional responses are regarding this magical elixir of olives. We also want to test their knowledge (and reflexes). Here is the result. Four chefs against the ropes.

we asked them...

1. If we are going to talk about EVOO, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?
2. And your first experience of it?
3. Complete the sentence: EVOO inspires...
4. What use do you make of Extra Virgin Olive Oil? How important is it to you in your cuisine?
5. The best EVOO for salads (raw)?
6. The best oil to use for frying?
7. Your latest discovery related to Extra Virgin Olive Oil in your cuisine?
8. What EVOO can we find in your restaurants?
9. Your favorite food cooked with Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
10. Your first creation with EVOO was...?
11. If you had to choose one of the varieties (arbequina, picual, hojiblanca...) which one would you choose? And why?
12. Take the plunge: which is your favorite Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
13. Where do you usually buy your Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
14. In a disposable bottle or a traditional oil cruet?
15. Is there anything more Spanish than Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
16. In your opinion, what is the secret the success of Spanish Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
17. What would you say was the reason for the consumer's lack of culture in Extra Virgin Olive Oil?
18. Lastly, you have one minute to sell us EVOO. Why should we consume it?



Martín Berasategui

*Martín Berasategui, Guipuzkoa (Spain)
Three Michelin Stars*

1. The kind that my mother and aunt used in the Bodegón Alejandro, the home-cooking restaurant that my family ran in the old quarter of San Sebastian. They always used exceptional quality oil.
2. Ever since my earliest childhood, it's a part of my life and my cuisine.
3. EVOO inspires... extreme quality.
4. It's fundamental, I cannot conceive the idea of cooking without extra virgin olive oil, it's the pillar that sustains it all.
5. I like using an hojiblanca monovarietal, for its aroma of fresh mint, its almond notes and that gentle degree of spiciness that goes well with salads.
6. Any EVOO is ideal for frying foods, it's the most noble kind of fat that we have available for this, and, without a doubt, the kind that best adapts to high temperatures. The picual monovarietals are fantastic for frying with.
7. A creation that we made years ago, but it still fascinates me: Extra Virgin Olive Oil Ice Cream. It's marvelous!
8. An infinite number of them, at the moment we are using Spanish Vega Carabaña, Alma de Jerez and Venta del Barón.
9. Any dish, but marinating fish and meat in a good extra virgin olive oil fascinates me.
10. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was probably a fish stew that my mother and aunt taught me to make. They



always finished off their stews with a generous dash of raw EVOO, and I have always done likewise.

11. I like all of them, without exception. There's always a variety that's the best for certain dishes and not for others, and also there are coupages, some of which are very interesting.

12. I cannot commit myself. To limit my choice to only one variety would be like choosing only one wine in the world: impossible.

13. I have various suppliers, who supply my restaurant.

14. The traditional oil cruet has its charm but one must admit that, in the restaurant business, it's much more practical and hygienic to use disposable bottles.

15. Well, I think that its only competitor would be the Iberian Ham.

16. The secret is their astonishing quality, it's unbeatable, it would be strange if they weren't successful. This is a first class product.

17. The lack of information. We haven't known how to communicate its richness and possibilities well enough. There should be more campaigns to inform the consumer about the rich and fascinating world that's behind extra virgin olive oil.

18. Because, without a doubt, it is one of the best Spanish products. Because it's delicious as well as healthy. Can one ask for more?

Dani García

*Dani García, Puente Romano
Beach Resort Marbella (Spain)
Two Michelin Stars*

1. French fries.
2. It reminds me of my father, of windmills, of harvests...
3. EVOO inspires Andalusia in me.
4. It's the thread that sews together everything we do in the restaurant.
5. Arbequina, a monovarietal.
6. I like a mixture of hojiblanca and picual.
7. Everything we have been doing with liquid nitrogen and Extra Virgin Olive Oil, such as, for example, nitro popcorn.
8. *Castiño de Canena* and *Basilipho*.
9. A slice of toast with olive oil.
10. The semolina of oil that we create with nitrogen.
11. Arbequina, for its subtlety, elegance and fruitiness.
12. Any *Castiño de Canena*.
13. We buy directly from the producers.
14. As is logical, in disposable bottles.
15. Bellota Iberian Ham is at the same level.
16. Because of tradition and climatology. These are the reasons why it has no competition.
17. Much has been achieved in this respect. Now people are beginning to recognize what is Extra Virgin Olive Oil, and what is not.
18. It's ingrained in us from birth, it forms a part of our everyday life and, it's healthy.





Paco Roncero

La Terraza del Casino, Madrid (Spain)
Two Michelin Stars

1. More than a memory of EVOO, I remember the olive trees.
2. I remember when I used to pick asparagus in the fields near my home. I lived amongst olive trees for most of my childhood.
3. EVOO inspires passion, emotions.
4. Extra Virgin Olive Oil is the only ingredient that I would never be without in my kitchen.
5. It's a matter of taste. The type of olive is fundamental. Normally, guests like arbequina very much, because of its fruitiness, but I prefer hojiblanca. It also depends on the salad, but for a neutral salad, hojiblanca is the best, without a doubt.
6. I usually make a mix of comicabra with picudo or sometimes with hojiblanca, to reduce the strength of the comicabra.
7. Discovering the differences in the same oil, depending on whether the olives were harvested in November, December or January, as each one differs in an infinite variety of aromas and taste.
8. We have 216 different brands of EVOO in the restaurant, so I always try to learn about and get to know any brand, and try to keep an open mind towards them and the world of possibilities that each one contributes to my cuisine.
9. The Extra Virgin Olive Oil Paella that we cook at the restaurant.
10. A candy made of EVOO.
11. It is impossible for me to choose only one kind, it depends a lot on the dish. I use picual for making potato puree with

truffles and caviar; hojiblanca for shellfish; picudo for aromatic sauces... I try to create with each one of them dishes that are more in line with their organoleptic qualities.

12. I am in love with Castillo de Canena's EVOOs, I must admit.
13. I am fortunate in that the producers send me samples. Otherwise, I order a brand directly from the distributor.
14. Disposable. One should never refill a bottle of EVOO.
15. Extra Virgin Olive Oil is the flagship of the brand Spain. The only other product that can compare to it is Iberian Ham.
16. During the last few years an impressive effort has been made by Spanish producers to improve the quality of the product and the design of the bottles. This, alongside the recommendations made by chefs, has been fundamental for the consumer becoming more informed, to be able to choose Spanish Extra Virgin Olive Oil when shopping around.
17. It is incomprehensible. We are the largest world producers of olive oil. However, the consumer did have a negative concept of EVOO, such as that it is too strong, or not too good, for frying. Fortunately, these concepts are vanishing.
18. First of all because it is synonymous to health, and secondly, because it's the magical ingredient that contributes to a degree that no other sauce does to your food.



María José San Román

El Monastrell, Alicante (Spain)

One Michelin Star

1. 'Churros' (deep fried breakfast pastries or batter sticks).
2. Of my childhood, in my mother's kitchen, making 'torrijas' (Spanish equivalent of French toast).
3. EVOO inspires taste, health and tradition.
4. For me, EVOO is the most important ingredient in my kitchen. I begin each and every one of my recipes submerging the recipe's main product in all the extra virgin oils that I have, and I then decide which one I like most, and go on to look for the other ingredients.
5. It depends on the salad. With sweet tomatoes I love picual, as the sugar minimizes the spiciness and brings out the other aromas.
6. Always Extra Virgin. I use a mixture of picual, hojiblanca and picudo, and the result is spectacular.
7. I make my Bearnaise sauce with arbequina EVOO, instead of the butter that's in the original recipe. It is much lighter, I feel.
8. The OliveToLive oils, a project that I am enthusiastic about and whose objective is to spread the culture of EVOO and assure its quality. The oils that are offered by OliveToLive cover the different producing regions in Spain, giving the consumer the chance to try a great variety of aromas and tastes that will suit different dishes.
9. Eggs fried in picual olive oil.
10. Guacamole made from peas.
11. Cornicabra, that always surprises me when I am inventing dishes. But if it's to be consumed raw, and for taste, perhaps it would be a royal.
12. A good coupage always comes out on top.
13. From OliveToLive.
14. To taste EVOOs, it should be in glass dishes and using pipettes. This is how to best perceive the aroma and obtain the correct dosage with precision (one should think of our diets!).
15. Alongside of Iberian Smoked Ham and rice dishes, it is definitely the Spanish ingredient par excellence.
16. The impressive degree of quality in Spanish oils, which is being attained by more and more producers, as they can see there is a strong chance here of doing good business.



17. The lack of diffusion right from school age. Nutrition is the big link missing in children's education. I trust that the same way that information about wine became commonplace, the same thing will happen with olive oil, and that people will become more and more demanding with such an extraordinary product. My guests, who enjoy the best EVOOs, become quite intransigent when they are served a lower quality olive oil, and this is yet another reason for me to go home happy.
18. Because it improves the quality of the food cooked using it, it is healthier than other types of vegetable oils and helps to preserve Spanish culture and economy. In restaurants, without a doubt, it is a great added value and an interesting and coherent discourse.