

LA TERRAZA DEL CASINO, MADRID



How best to describe double Michelin award-winning restaurant, [La Terraza del Casino in Madrid](#)? 'Marvelous' might be one. 'Elaborate' might be another. But my personal favourite would have to be 'theatrical'. It's impossible not to visit this stunning establishment and not be drawn to the pure spectacle of the place. A visit here is a feast – for both eyes and appetites – on a remarkable show of epic culinary proportions. One becomes at once the spectator and a key role in the carefully choreographed performance of gastronomy, and this is what so delights us from beginning to end.



And what of these beginnings and ends? The beginning is a Pisco Sour cocktail – made using liquid nitrogen, it is a magic show; it is Houdini in a dish, it is smoke and mirrors and pure entertainment. Lime juice and pisco are poured into a shining metal bowl, liquid nitrogen is added, there is the undulating roll of steam over the lip and then two portions of amuse bouche citrus ice are delivered in lemon skins. This is an appetite-whetting combo of lip-puckering sharpness and alcohol booziness. And the end of the meal? What could book-end such a show? Well, expect a cart of sweets, wheeled around as one might see a Punch and Judy show transported on a

boardwalk, laden with all kinds of sugary nibble, chocolate indulgence, vibrant macaron and retro candy. The perfect way to finish such a sophisticated and innovative meal – with an experience that wonderfully evokes childhood.

So what kind of stage must be set for this show of culinary excellence? My excited dining friend and I are both excited audience members and also the willing actors – we have read about the black tie dress-code and come clad in appropriate costumes. There aren't enough places that require 'posh' attire and it's great fun to make an effort. Then there's the building itself – the lavish Casino de Madrid, a Grand 19th-century building resplendent with gilding, period artwork and plenty of gold-leaf. After all this shimmering opulence it's somewhat surprising to head to the top floor and find yourself in La Terraza restaurant, where the overarching colour is a cool, non committal white. The floor is black and white checked, like a chess-board, and there are pillars and curves, swoops and recesses, mirrors that reflect other diners back to you. The whole thing makes me think of Alice in Wonderland, or a doll's house.

The tables are great circular islands floating on this board, huge and round, and positioned so there is a gangway in the middle down which waiting staff can wheel their trolleys of delights. It also means you can face your other diners, inviting everyone to participate in the fabulous set menu. The most famous menu consists of 22-courses and takes place over three hours. We have a paired down version, and yet still manage to spend a considerable portion of the evening in this beautiful room. From the beginning we're delighted and intrigued. A blob of green gel pops in our mouth to give the taste of olive. A sachet of golden olive oil can be eaten whole and layers the tongue with a wonderful film of silky flavour. The fish is delicious, a mackerel so pink as to be nearly flapping in the plate (freshness is unarguable) and my favourite course is a bowl of risotto, crunchy to the bite, with a crisp of rich Parmesan and sliced of the most perfectly pink pigeon I have even eaten. The gaminess and the rustic rice marry perfectly. Every dish is completely different to the last, igniting a different set of emotions and appreciation of the taste-buds. To finish we have an art-work of citrus blobs, then that fabulous sugar-laden cart where we are allowed to pick ourselves and are as happy as – well, the 'kid in a sweet shop' analogy writes itself.

Don't be surprised if you finish dining at La Terraza del Casino feeling slightly dazed – full of food, marveling at the innovation of it all, and with a sensation that you've just experienced something wonderful. It's telling that, en route to visit the restaurant, we met up with famous Brit chef Jason Atherton, owner of the City Social restaurants in London and, upon hearing we were dining at La Terraza, he was impressed and slightly envious. Praise from other chefs, I have learnt, is high praise indeed, and now I can add my humble stamp of appreciation. It's not often a meal transcends into an actual spectacle – an interactive event – but in this case it made the evening all the more enjoyable and memorable. If you are in Madrid and get the chance to secure a reservation, I urge you to make this a priority – you'll remember it forever.



To learn more, visit the [La Terraza del Casino, Madrid website](#), and email terrazza.casino@nh-hotels.com