

# Balearic bites

Spain | A new generation of chefs is rediscovering Mallorca's gastronomic heritage. By Paul Richardson

Seasoned eaters agree that Mallorca is shaping up as a gastronomic hub to rival the best in Spain, but it wasn't always so. Before mass tourism arrived in the late 1950s, islanders stuck to a limited repertoire of traditional dishes from *sopes mallorquines* (vegetable and bread soup) to *llom amb col* (pork wrapped in cabbage leaves). Then came the first tourist dining rooms, serving the standardised Spanish fare — gazpacho and paella — that the foreigners wanted; and a little later the first fancy restaurants, with chefs from the mainland or Germany dishing up French-style haute cuisine. In those days, island-grown produce was under-used and undervalued. Josef Sauer-schell, the chef at Es Racó des Teix, a long-standing culinary fixture in the town of Deià, tells me even the fish came in frozen from the mainland.

It's a measure (but not the only one) of just how far Mallorca has come that the island now has seven Michelin stars, of which three are for born-and-bred Mallorquin chefs. (The others belong to a German, two mainland Spaniards, and a Brit, Kent-born Marc Fosh, whose Simply Fosh in Palma brings London-style eclecticism to the former refectory of a 17th-century convent.) The idea of visiting Mallorca for its food is now entirely feasible — and you couldn't have said that 10 years ago.

A four-day stay last month — a gastronomic safari among wineries and olive mills, fruit and vegetable growers, restaurants and producers of such celebrated local foods as the pimentón-spiced sausage *sobrasada* — left me in no doubt that the island has embarked on a process of culinary self-discovery. Among the stone corridors of old-town Palma I stumbled on a small bakery, Es Fornet de la Soca, where owner Tomeu Arbona is bringing back to life forgotten pastry items such as *coixins*, *jubenets* and *rodonets*, and superb bread made from *blat de xeixa*, a variety of island wheat recently rescued from near-extinction. On a drive around the unspoiled flatlands of the southeast I was surprised to see snowy hills looming up on the horizon — in reality, giant heaps of salt. It's here that Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc, artisan maker of sea salt, is adding value and visibility to a product that the island had always taken for granted, and winning numerous awards in the process.

On restaurant menus wherever I went, traditional ingredients such as potatoes from Sa Pobla, apricots from Porreres, and meat from the *porc negre* breed, were being given top billing. In another development, country house hotels such as La Residencia and Son Brull were once more making their own olive oil and wine, in a return to the agricultural origins of the island's great *possessions* (Mallorquin for "rural estates"). Over lunch at Son Net, a hotel housed in an impressive mansion dating from the 17th century, sommelier Xavier Ramos offered me a sneak preview of the property's first wine, a crisp and aromatic white from the island's Malvasía grape.

There's a new pride in local produce, local practice. Sisters Maria and Teresa Solivellas have long preached the gospel of "km 0" (what English-speakers would call "zero food miles") at their restaurant Ca Na Toneta in Caimari. Now more than ever convinced of the excellence of Mallorquin raw materials, Maria admits little in her kitchen that doesn't proceed either from the Solivellas family's own orchards and olive groves or a neighbour's farm (even the



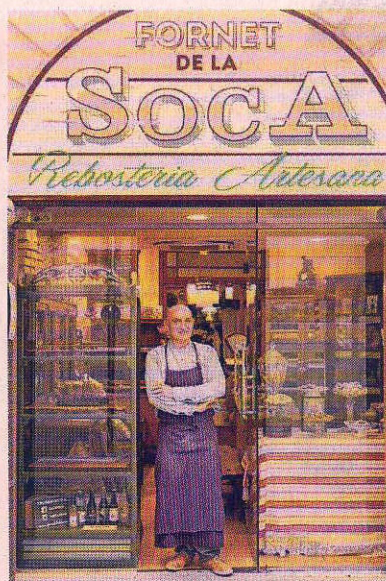
Clockwise from main: Restaurante Andreu Genestra; Restaurant Ca Na Toneta; its owners, sisters Maria and Teresa Solivellas; Tomeu Arbona of Es Fornet de la Soca; the team at Andreu Genestra (with Genestra second from right)

All photographs by Anna Huix

For a slideshow, visit [www.ft.com/mallorca-cuisine](http://www.ft.com/mallorca-cuisine)

## i / ADDRESS BOOK

**Es Racó des Teix;** C/ Sa Vinya Vieja 6, Deià; [esracodesteix.es](http://esracodesteix.es)  
**Simply Fosh;** c/de la Missió, 7A, Palma de Mallorca; [simplyfosh.com](http://simplyfosh.com)  
**Es Fornet de la Soca;** c/Sant Jaume 23, Palma de Mallorca; [fornetdelasoca.com](http://fornetdelasoca.com)  
**Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc;** Carretera de Campos, Colonia Sant Jordi, km 10; [flordesaldestrenc.com](http://flordesaldestrenc.com)  
**Gran Hotel Son Net;** c/Castillo de Sonnet, Puigpunyent; [sonnet.es](http://sonnet.es)  
**Restaurante Ca Na Toneta;** c/Horitzó 21, Caimari; [canatoneta.com](http://canatoneta.com)  
**Restaurante Andreu Genestra;** Ctra Cala Mesquida/desvío Camino Son Moltó, Capdepera; [andregenestra.com](http://andregenestra.com)  
**Restaurante El Jardín;** c/Tritones, Port d'Alcúdia; [restaurantejardin.com](http://restaurantejardin.com)



fish comes from a friend's fishing boat in the port of Alcúdia). On the day I visited the sisters' rustic-chic restaurant the daily menu featured a sensational *coca*, its crisp pastry base made with "xeixa" flour topped with fresh goats' cheese and translucent slices of courgette picked that very morning.

But now even the most sophisticated kitchens on the island are following their example. Andreu Genestra holds a Michelin star at his eponymous restaurant in a rural hotel outside Capdepera, part of a large *posseïció* from which he



derives ingredients from olive oil and fruit to chicken, pork, and the produce of a 6,000 sq metre vegetable garden. My table for dinner stood in the estate's former store-room; iron hooks set in the barrel-vaulted roof above my head were once used to hang *sobrasadas*. To an islander of Genestra's generation (he is 32) the idea of local supply is natural, though on the evidence of his seven-course *menu degustación*, what he does with island products — combining "crispy rabbit" with sea cucumbers and Sa Pobla peanuts, or weever fish with pickled cherries and raw almonds — seems more urbane than rustic.

But diversity is a mark of maturity, and the new Mallorquin food covers a variety of approaches. The cuisine of Macarena de Castro, one of the most talented of the younger chefs (and the owner of a Michelin star at El Jardín, in Port d'Alcúdia) has a stripped-back simplicity light years from Genestra's more

highly-worked style. Though de Castro travels widely in Asia and now has an offshoot of her restaurant in Punta del Este, Uruguay, she has no time for "fusion food". "I'm fascinated by the product, always, and what I'm really most interested in are the traditional flavours of the island," she told me.

At lunch on the last day of my tour, among the plainly and simply delicious things she served me was a dish of cuttlefish strips briefly cooked in an intense stock of the same fish and flavoured with seaweed gathered by de Castro herself on a nearby beach. After that came a bite-sized serving of diced pork loin with dried cabbage leaf and a sauce made with *sobrasada* — nothing more, or less, than a deconstructed version of the traditional *llom amb col*. So the wheel has come full circle.

