

Alive Mind CINEMA

EL BULLI:

COOKING IN PROGRESS

A Documentary by Gereon Wetzel

2010, Germany, in Catalan with English subtitles,
108 min., 35mm/HD, 1.85:1, Dolby Digital

Press Contact:

Rodrigo Brandão
Director of Publicity

Email: Rodrigo@kinolorber.com

Phone: 212.629.6880 ext. 12

An Alive Mind Release from Kino Lorber, Inc.

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Long Synopsis

Pictures are taken down and cutlery wrapped up in cellophane foil, as a delivery van is loaded with machines and boxes. In the tiny cove of Montjoi below, waves pound the beach. We are at El Bulli, witnessing the closing of probably the most famous restaurant in the world. No, it's not forever, just until next season.

Each winter the restaurant closes, and Ferran Adrià, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch cloister themselves in their experimental kitchen in Barcelona for half a year, to create their new menu for the following season.

"Creativity means not copying." Ferran Adrià and his team have made Jacques Maximin's aphorism the motto of their everyday pursuits. The film *El Bulli – Cooking in Progress* is the close observation of that quest – from initial experimentation to the premiere of the finished dish. In the course of that process, however, many an ingredient is examined in a totally new way. What novel product can one derive from the sweet potato?

Taste and texture are systematically analyzed: by boiling, roasting, frying, steaming – vacuumizing, spherifying, freeze-drying – and then, tasting. Ideas emerge, are discussed and, finally, all the results, whether good or bad, are thoroughly documented – on a laptop beside the cooking spoon.

After all, research means to examine closely, with an understanding of fundamental principles. And research means work, sometimes until exhaustion. Ideas don't usually fall from the sky, they evolve in the diffuse realm between the intentional and the accidental, experience and the unfamiliar.

Then, come summer, everything changes. Within no time, a cold restaurant must be thrown into full gear – by a brigade of 35 new cooks from around the world, who here, on the Catalan Costa Brava, are entering uncharted culinary territory. Of course, not everyone is up to speed right out of the gate; and the previously so even-tempered Oriol is forced, now and then, to raise his voice to the group to drive home the strict and hierarchical structure.

Meanwhile, Ferran Adrià puts the finishing touches on the new dishes, which are already served on opening evening, in addition to the menu from the previous year. This is when the defining decisions are made: How will each dish look, how will it be served and, above all, in what order? Which filling goes inside the ravioli, whose pasta disintegrates as you dip it in water? And where do the small ice cubes go – with the tiny tangerines or the vacuumized champignon in hazelnut oil?

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Even on opening evening, there's a curious premiere – when a cocktail is served composed only of water, hazelnut oil and salt. In the experimental kitchen, it had already been tested by Eduard Xatruch, and the simple principle and silky sensation of oil in one's mouth were just what had convinced Ferran.

Yet later, during a course for the new cooks, he would ask himself in jest, "And what were they serving at El Bulli?" Only to instantly answer: "Water!" Great ideas are usually simple and autonomous, beyond what is known and familiar.

El Bulli is at once complex and simple, Ferran says. And perhaps there's only one fitting answer to the question, "So what is the film El Bulli – Cooking in Progress about?" - "Water, oil and salt!"

Short Synopsis

Three-star chef Ferran Adrià is widely considered the best, most innovative and craziest chef in the world. In his kitchen, that which was once familiar disintegrates. Each year his restaurant El Bulli closes for half a year – time for Adrià and his team to retire to his Barcelona cooking laboratory to create the new menu for the coming season. Anything goes – except copying oneself.

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Crew

Director — Gereon Wetzel
Concept — Anna Ginestí Rosell, Gereon Wetzel
Cinematography — Josef Mayerhofer
Editor — Anja Pohl
Sound — Daniel Samer, Gereon Wetzel
Composer — Stephan Diethelm
Colorist — Yvonne Tran
Food Photography — Francesc Guillaumet
Food Design — Marc Cuspinera
Consultant — Josep Maria Pinto
Translation English — Lonnie LeggSound
Postproduction Services — Pilotstudio, München
Dialogue Editor, Re-Recording Mixer — Michael Hinreiner
Sounddesigner — Jörg Elsner
Foley Artist — Joo Fürst
Foley Editor — Joao Pinto
Dolby-Consultant — Norbert Zich
Postproduction Coordinator — Fabian Spang
Commissioning editor (BR) — Petra Felber
Commissioning editor (WDR) — Jutta Krug
Produced by Ingo Fliess

Featuring:

Ferran Adrià
Oriol Castro
Eduard Xatruch
Eugeni de Diego
Aitor Lozano

2010, Germany, in Catalan with English subtitles,
108 min., 35mm/HD, 1.85:1, Dolby Digital

Alive Mind C I N E M A

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Gereon Wetzel

Born in Bonn on 30. September 1972. After his M.A. in Archeology from Heidelberg University, worked for a year, as a language teacher in Barcelona, then as an archeologist at the Institute for Marine Archeology in Girona, Spain. From 2000 to 2006, completed the documentary filmmaking program at the University for Film and Television (HFF München) in Munich, where he currently lives and works as a freelance author and filmmaker.

Filmography (excerpt)

- 2009/10 HOW TO MAKE A BOOK WITH STEIDL. Documentary, together with Jörg Adolph 88 min., HD, color. Produced by if... Productions, in coproduction with ZDF/3sat, with funding from FFF Bayern. Awarded "Best German Documentary" Dokfest Leipzig, "Award of the Goethe-Institute" Duisburg 2010.
- 2007 DIE REPRODUKTIONSKRISE (codirected with Jörg Adolph). Documentary, 84 min. Produced by if... Productions / BR / Goethe-Institut. Premiere: Filmfest München 2007. Distribution & DVD: DocCollection.
- 2006 CASTELLS. Documentary, 88 min., Super 16, color. Produced by SphinxMedia and HFF München. Broadcast rights: Bayerischer Rundfunk (Germany), Televisió de Catalunya (TV3/Spain). DVD: DocCollection. *Documentary Film Award of Bayerischer Rundfunk and Telepool (21st Dok.Fest Munich). Nominations: First Steps Award 2006, 11th Prix International du Documentaire et du Reportage Méditerranéen.*
- 2004 UNRECOGNIZED - BEDUINEN IN ISRAEL (contribution). Documentary short, 12 min., MiniDV.
- 2003 SPRECHPROBEN. Documentary, 44 min., DigiBeta, color. Premiere: 19th Dok.Fest Munich.
- 2003 DER GLAUBE. Short fiction film, 14 min, MiniDV. Based on a short story by Quim Monzó. Featuring Atef Vogel and Nanette Bauer.
- 2001 POLIS. Experimental film, 8 min, 16mm, b/w. Premiere: Filmfest München 2002 (experimental film program).

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Interview with Gereon Wetzel and Anna Ginesti Rosell

Question: What motivated you to make a film about El Bulli?

AG: To be honest, we had never been inside a star-rated restaurant, much less in one with three stars. What intrigued us was the fact that this chef would close his restaurant for six months to come up with new ideas. The cooks seclude themselves, like in a cloister, forfeiting half a year's business, to express their creativity. We found that odd and fascinating. From the very beginning, the film's focus clearly lay on their work in the Taller.

GW: Taller is a Catalan word for workshop, but it means studio too. Creative processes had already interested us in our previous films. Moreover, El Bulli is not just Ferran Adrià but an entire team. Ferran is the director, he holds the reins and attends to the big picture. In teams like this, the human and social processes are equally interesting, and films also turn people into intriguing movie characters.

Q: It must be difficult to arrange a film with a celebrity like Ferran Adrià. How did you go about it?

AG: It was astonishingly easy. We had several times discussed the possibility of making a film about him when we read in the newspaper that he had been invited to Documenta 12 in 2007. That was our signal. We got the e-mail address from the El Bulli Website and wrote him, describing our aim, that is, that we wanted to shoot for an entire year and mainly follow the creative process. Soon thereafter, we got a reply: Interesting, come by! And that's just what we did – we drove there, talked with him, with him directly, not with a press agent. He was convinced by our idea right away. And we had actually intended to start shooting in 2007, but there was some delay.

Q: What do you think convinced him? After all, EL BULLI – COOKING IN PROGRESS is hardly the first film about his work.

GW: There have indeed been numerous films about El Bulli, by television teams, but also in-house productions, from El Bulli circles. What convinced him, I think, was that someone would take the time to truly focus on the creative process, based on the obvious structure that makes El Bulli so special: a restaurant open for only half the year, because the rest of the year is spent in research.

Q: How did you prepare?

GW: Once we knew we were going to make the film, we finally did dine in a star-rated restaurant, one that we knew offered so-called molecular cuisine – a term Ferran Adrià isn't very fond of, by the way. Then Ferran highly recommended we meet one of El Bulli's important thinkers, Josep Maria Pinto. From him we got a crash course, which also helped us to better grasp the status quo of this cuisine.

Q: How did you go about recording the very nontransparent creative process in the Taller?

Alive Mind C I N E M A

AG: First we reviewed a lot of other material. The El Bulli team publishes quite a lot, each year they bring out a catalogue of all the dishes developed during that season. Earlier catalogues also describe various research approaches and creative methods. The television segments we screened gave us some brief insights. So we thought we had a certain grasp.

GW: The films and TV programs presenting the work in the Taller – so many were shot there – have always dealt with the basic principles of how the Taller functioned. Whereas our focus was on the concrete, yet unpredictable, process. Particular dishes started to interest us. So during the long shooting period – about once a month, for one week – we tried to track the progress of individual dishes. Ferran Adrià, Oriol Castro and Eduard Xatruch were very helpful, in that they adapted their research phases to coincide with our presence; even, for example, presenting a sort of summary of all the dishes that had already been prepared.

AG: Eduard Xatruch, especially, was our liaison during all those months. Moreover, we had access to all their material – in the film you can see how each experiment is carefully documented, with a report sheet for each dish. We were allowed to copy these reports and use them to prepare the next phase of shooting.

GW: This material also proved to be very useful during editing, as they helped to identify the dishes and identified which ingredients were used. During our first shoot in the Taller we were still quite bewildered, as we realized how complex the processes are, how quickly they were conceived and made, how quickly things developed and how difficult it is to follow. The film tries to track five, six dishes, using them as a thread; whereas their depiction, by necessity, remains fragmentary.

Q: How could you even shoot in those close quarters?

AG: Working in Taller there are five, in phases even six or seven people. And then there were initially four of us – us two, Josef Mayerhofer behind the camera, and Daniel Samer on sound – which was very cramped. Naturally we were often in the way... Later there were only three of us – with Gereon doing the sound, which made things a bit easier.

Q: So how many months did you shoot, in total, in the Taller and the restaurant?

AG: We always say a year, though actually, it was 15 months. In 2009, El Bulli changed its calendar. Normally the restaurant opens in March and closes in October, when the team moves to the Taller and works until March. But the year we were shooting, they wanted to work with different products. So they closed in October, but didn't reopen until June. In our case, the research phase lasted 9 months, and the restaurant didn't close until December 2009.

Q: How does one shoot a film in a three-star restaurant in full operation?

AG: At the El Bulli restaurant, we usually shot during the day. Since El Bulli serves diners only in the evening and not at noon, we were able to concentrate on the research and preparation work. Many dishes don't reach completion until they're prepared in the restaurant, that is where they acquire their final form – which, in the Taller, had often been only sketched. Of course we had to do a couple of shoots in the evening too, three

Alive Mind C I N E M A

or four times: on opening day, also the evening Ferran tested his menu. We always remained outside, opposite the pass counter. Opening evening was particularly difficult, because the numerous new waiters didn't yet have their movements down pat. We were often in the way! Later they moved like ballet dancers around us.

GW: The kitchen architecture is good for shooting, the area opposite the pass counter is spacious. In the restaurant, that is to say, in the dining area, we shot almost no footage. For one thing, we didn't want to bother anyone – after all, it's a big privilege to be permitted to eat at El Bulli. On the other hand, it was also a conceptual decision: Cinema can't really convey the sense of taste, through images; you can't really enjoy the things they have to eat there; you can't feel the genuinely different form of eating, so there's no reason to film that. Last, but not least, eating people don't look especially attractive either – at least I don't enjoy watching them. That's why we tried to depict the entire film from the perspective of the kitchen.

Q: Were you able to eat at El Bulli?

GW: Yes! At the very end of shooting, Ferran managed to wrangle us a free table. It was a grand experience, very relaxed, very funny. We were also relieved, though. After all, we13 had been dealing with the subject matter for three years without exactly knowing exactly what made this food magic. And that evening we fully realized perhaps for the first time how fabulous Ferran and his team's work is.

Q: How would you describe your collaboration with Ferran Adrià?

GW: Tremendously uncomplicated. The film project means a lot to Ferran. He gave us a lot of support, by synchronizing his calendar with ours, which enabled us to closely follow the development. Not once did we get the impression we weren't allowed to film something, we truly had every possible freedom, and he gave us his trust. Just think, we had access to all the documentation for the coming season, with all the information about the techniques and ingredients. We must also mention Oriol and Eduard, and the patience with which they tolerated us for weeks, without giving us the feeling we were disturbing them.

Alive Mind C I N E M A

Synthesis of El Bulli cuisine

1. Cooking is a language through which all the following properties may be expressed: harmony, creativity, happiness, beauty, poetry, complexity, magic, humor, provocation and culture.

2. The use of top quality products and technical knowledge to prepare them properly are taken for granted.

3. All products have the same gastronomic value, regardless of their price.

4. Preference is given to vegetables and seafood, with a key role also being played by dairy products, nuts and other products that make up a light form of cooking. In recent years red meat and large cuts of poultry have been very sparingly used.

5. Although the characteristics of the products may be modified (temperature, texture, shape, etc.), the aim is always to preserve the purity of their original flavor, except for processes that call for long cooking or seek the nuances of particular reactions such as the Maillard reaction.

6. Cooking techniques, both classic and modern, are a heritage that the cook has to know how to exploit to the maximum.

7. As has occurred in most fields of human evolution down the ages, new technologies are a resource for the progress of cooking.

8. The family of stocks is being extended. Together with the classic ones, lighter stocks performing an identical function are now being used (waters, broths, consommés, clarified vegetable *juses*, nut milk, etc.).

9. The information given off by a dish is enjoyed through the senses; it is also enjoyed by the mind, through rational reflection.

10. Taste is not the only sense that can be stimulated: Touch, too, can be played with (contrasts of temperatures and textures), as well as smell and sight (colors, shapes, *trompe l'oeil*, etc.) – making the five senses one of the main points of reference in the creative cooking process.

11. The technique-concept search is the apex of the creative pyramid.

12. Creation involves teamwork. In addition, research has become consolidated as a new feature of the culinary creative process.

13. The barriers between the sweet and savory world are being broken down. Importance is

being given to a new cold cuisine, particularly in the creation of the frozen savory world.

14. The classical structure of dishes is being broken down: A veritable revolution is underway in first courses and desserts, closely bound up with the concept of symbiosis between the sweet and savory world; in main dishes the "product garnish-sauce" hierarchy is being broken down.

15. A new way of serving food is being promoted. The dishes are finished in the dining room by the serving staff. In other cases, the diners themselves participate in this process.

16. Regional cuisine as a style is an expression of its own geographical and cultural context as well as its culinary traditions. Its bond with nature complements and enriches this relationship with its environment.

17. Products and preparations from other countries are subjected to one's particular style of cooking.

18. There are two main paths towards attaining harmony of products and flavours: through memory (deconstruction, connection with regional cooking traditions, adaptation, former modern recipes), or through new combinations.

19. A culinary language is being created that is becoming more and more ordered, and which on some occasions establishes a relationship with the world and language of art.

20. Recipes are designed to ensure that harmony is to be found in small servings.

21. Decontextualization, irony, spectacle, performance are completely legitimate, as long as they are not superficial, but stem from, or closely interact with, a process of gastronomic reflection.

22. The *menu de dégustation* is the finest expression of avantgarde cooking. The structure is alive and subject to changes. Concepts such as snacks, *tapas*, pre-desserts, morphs, etc., are coming into their own.

23. Knowledge and/or collaboration with experts from different fields (gastronomic culture, history, industrial design, etc.) is essential for progress in cooking. Collaboration with the food industry and the scientific world has particularly brought about fundamental advances. The sharing of this knowledge among cooking professionals has contributed to this evolution.

Alive Mind C I N E M A

What is El Bulli?

El Bulli is a restaurant owned by Ferran Adrià and Juli Soler. Ferran Adrià is considered the most creative chef of our time. El Bulli is famous around the world for its avant-garde cuisine, and the annual number of reservation requests is overwhelming. The renowned magazine *Restaurant's* annual international jury of chefs and restaurant critics has voted El Bulli the World's Best Restaurant five times.

Where is El Bulli located?

In Cala Monjoi, a cove near Roses, in the Catalan province of Girona, a few hours from Barcelona.

Why is El Bulli open only six months a year?

The only way they can prepare their creations is by keeping the restaurant open for six months, so the cooks can spend the remaining time developing new dishes in their cooking laboratory El Bulli Taller.

How many Michelin stars does El Bulli have?

Three.

How many people dine at El Bulli each year?

About 8,000 – fifty people per evening, 160 days per season.

How many reservation requests do they get each year?

About two million.

How many people work at El Bulli?

Depending on the season, between 60 and 70 – in other words, more staff than guests.

How is the personnel selected?

The restaurant posts vacancies on its website. The best candidates are selected from thousands of applications from all over the world.

What is on the menu?

Diners don't choose from a menu. Each guest is served between 28 and 35 small portions. These include cocktails, snacks, *tapas*, desserts and morphs.

What are snacks?

As an interesting alternative to bread and butter, they are little bites (for example, madeleines with black olives) served at the beginning of the meal, after the cocktail and before the *tapas*.

What are pre-desserts?

Small dishes served after the *tapas* and before the desserts, which mark the transition between the savory and the sweet world.

What are morphs?

An El Bulli invention. They replace petits fours as the conclusion of the menu.

What if a guest would like to try a dish from the previous year?

El Bulli completely changes its menu composition at the end of each season, so no guest is ever served a dish twice.

Taken from *A Day at El Bulli*, Ferran Adrià, Phaidon 2009.