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Barcelona restaurant creates perfect spot to wine and dine

The Boston Globe



The Monvinic restaurant in Barcelona has a sleek design and a wine list of 3,500 bottles. (Photo by Ann Trieger Kurland for The Boston Globe)

By Ann Trieger Kurland
Globe Correspondent / May 20, 2009

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BARCELONA - If Bacchus were around today, he would most certainly invite Ceres to dine with him at Monvinic, a restaurant, wine bar, and wine library that opened last summer here. The Roman god of wine would dazzle the goddess of the harvest with his 3,500-bottle list.

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Glass doors open automatically when you enter the restaurant, and the sleek concrete and stainless steel design is a surprise, a stunning contrast to the Gothic architecture and nearby Gaudi buildings that make Barcelona so charming.

Diners sit at communal tables and an adventure in technology begins when each guest is handed a digitized wine list. They're PC tablets, which allow you to search wines from every corner of the world, by price, style, region, or grape variety. With the touch of the screen, you can also find a picture of the bottle, the vintner, and a map of the region where the grapes are grown. Bottles range from 10 euros (about \$13.50) to more than 500 (the oldest is a 1795 Spanish Madeira, around \$2,500).

The restaurant's short bilingual menu, with several warm and cold starters and eight meat and fish entrees, is also digitized, but you don't get another PC tablet. Instead, the menu is projected on the wall of the "culinary space," as the staff calls the room. Because of Monvinic's ultra-modern design, you might expect the dishes to be prepared by a molecular gastronomy chef trained in the celebrated El Bulli kitchens. However, the menu is traditional but creative Catalan, using organic ingredients, with items ranging from 18 to 33 euros (about \$24.50 to \$45), reasonable for a fine Barcelona restaurant.

Chef Sergi de Meia, formerly at a two-star Michelin restaurant, changes the menu almost daily. He buys meats, poultry, and vegetables from local family farms and seafood from a single fisherman who regularly delivers his catch of prawns, sea bass, octopus, or squid. De Meia works with the sommeliers to make his dishes wine friendly. "The chef is a very crazy man about ingredients," says restaurant spokesman Montse Alonso. "When he finds something special at the market, that's what he's going to cook with that day."

A salad of tomatoes with prawns and shaved Parmesan tastes of true vine-ripened fruits. Duck foie gras is wonderfully offset by a glass of grenache. Plates of roast chicken and veal, both perfectly juicy, are garnished with potatoes and porcini. Peach tart with sheep's milk ice cream is divine. A glass of Moscato from Molino Real in Malaga is an exceptional finish.

The daunting wine selection makes it nearly impossible to choose, but the restaurant's sommeliers are gracious with suggestions. One is Isabelle Brunet, a French sommelier who worked for six years at El Bulli. Another is Cesar Canovas, recognized three times as Spain's best sommelier. Eating at the wine bar is one way to dine less expensively here. Sip a glass (some cost as little as \$2) from one of the 30 selections, and order tapas (\$7 to \$11 each), such as octopus with onions; egg with truffles and fries; and pork tripe with chick peas.

Monvinic means world of wine in Catalan. Sergi Ferrer-Salat, head of a major pharmaceutical company, opened the place to share his passion and establish a first-of-a-kind wine center. The restaurant houses a wine library with computers and hundreds of books and magazines, as well as a room for tastings and seminars.

Ferrer-Salat planned Monvinic for six years, no doubt with Bacchus whispering in his ear every step of the way.

Monvinic, Diputacio 249, Barcelona, 011-34-932-726-187, www.monvinic.com.

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