

Destinations

EVENTS

Big screens and burlesque

APRIL 22-25
HOLLYWOOD, Calif.
TCM Classic Film Festival: If your remote control tends to bring you to the channel known as TCM (that's Turner Classic Movies), you'll find like-minded thinkers in Hollywood next month at this first-ever festival, which features a lineup of some of the most beloved movies in history. The films, which include "Casablanca" and "The Story of Temple Drake," are must-sees, but the big draw will be the personal appearances. Luise Rainer, who just turned 100, is scheduled to visit the festival to introduce her 1937 film "The Good Earth." Jerry Lewis will be on hand to screen "The King of Comedy." The theaters themselves should also appeal to movie buffs. Venues include Grauman's Chinese Theatre and the Egyptian Theatre. Packages vary. www.tcm.com/festival

APRIL 15-17
CHICAGO
Windy City Burlesque Festival: Burlesque has been making a comeback for years. Gyms offer burlesque exercise classes. Troupes like the Boston Babydolls spin tassels all over our Puritan City. For whatever reason, it's quite acceptable to shake in something shimmery. Next month in Chicago, you can see some of the best of the country's burlesque performers at this festival, which features headliners such as Foxy Tann, who has shared stages with comedian Margaret Cho, and Madame X, who has performed in a Chicago production of "Snow White and the Seven Drag Queens." There's also a lineup of comedians scheduled to perform in non-sparkly clothing. *Various locations.* www.windycityburlesquefest.com



"The King of Comedy" with Robert DeNiro will air at the inaugural TCM festival in Hollywood.

APRIL 17 and 18
PHILADELPHIA
Free Library Festival: The big name at this year's festival is Sapphire, the author who wrote "Push," on which tonight's Oscar favorite "Precious" is based. Other authors in the lineup include Jimmy Gownley, who wrote "Amelia Rules! The Tweenage Guide to Not Being Unpopular," and Jim Zervanos, who wrote the coming-of-age story

"Love Park." The best thing about this festival, as its name suggests, is that it's free. 215-567-4341. www.freeibrary.org

APRIL 17-MAY 8
KALAMAZOO, Mich.
Gilmore Keyboard Festival: The early part of this celebration of music is good for families, thanks to artists such as Peter Miyamoto, who makes piano sound fun to youngsters. The

middle part of the program should appeal to pop fans, thanks to former "American Idol" contestant Matt Giraud, who has signed on for a show on April 21. The end of the run should attract classical fans, who will enjoy performances by artists such as hot young concert pianist Jonathan Biss. Locations and ticket prices vary. www.gilmorekeyboarfestival.org

PLAN AHEAD

JUNE 11-13
LEICESTERSHIRE, England
Download Festival: Aerosmith has been somewhat unpredictable lately. Lead singer Steven Tyler fell off the stage during a show last year and then found himself in rehab. Months later, he showed up at a Home Depot and began singing into a loud-speaker. Not long after that, his bandmates were rumored to be replacing him with a new lead singer. Then last month, those same bandmates surprised fans by announcing tour dates with Tyler at the helm. One of those dates is the Download Festival at Donington Park, where Aerosmith will share a lineup with Them Crooked Vultures, Wolfmother, Rage Against the Machine, and Billy Idol. Ticket packages vary. www.downloadfestival.co.uk

MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; call or check online. Meredith Goldstein can be reached at mgoldstein@globe.com.

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Supper for the senses, no forks required

► **EL BULLI**
Continued from Page M1
El Bulli (which is colloquial Catalan for a bulldog breed). "I know it's a good restaurant," he says. "Do you know it's been called the best in the world?" Edu grins an uncharacteristically large grin and stares at the road ahead.

From Barcelona, it's a two-hour slog north to Roses, then several beautiful windswept miles through the Cap de Creus nature preserve. Once at the restaurant our table is set slightly apart from the main dining room, giving us the sense that we are both looking in on a play and taking part in it.

The menu immediately sets an informal tone. Apéro "mojitos" and "caprihinas" are rectangles of sugar cane set in ice and soaked in white rum and cachaca, a sugarcane liquor. These are followed by a black currant and eucalyptus "tea," presented like part of a Japanese tea ceremony, where a single green drop of concentrated eucalyptus floats atop molten red liquid in a tiny silver bowl. We cradle it in our hands, liquid bits of heaven and hell in one sip.

One of the first dishes to arrive is a Gorgonzola globe with fresh-grated nutmeg, presented in the center of the table like an ostrich egg we break into and share. We're several courses in before someone realizes we've yet to see a fork. By meal's end, we've



PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Cooks work with blunt-ended syringes in El Bulli's kitchen, where chef Ferran Adrià (below) oversees each station.



used mostly our hands, lifting bites to our mouths and dabbing up sauce with our fingers.

For some courses, the tableware is as artistic as the food, for others, the receptacles are living things; pinch the end off a hummingbird-friendly flower and suck out the "nectar" inside in one dish or lap drops of honey from pine needles in another. In both cases, the vessel's flavor is transferred to what we eat.

The meal creates personality shifts at our table of four. We talk and touch more than normal, as if the route to our emotions has been shortened.

There are themes that run through the meal: "Tender pistachios" are a meditation on about 10 ways to prepare them. Later, soybeans are presented at least 15 ways in one dish — every conceivable form presented like an abstract abacus. Other moments push a diner's limits, like rabbit brains in consommé and a chicken cartilage canapé. Some tease perceptions with trompe l'oeils like "artichoke" leaves that turn out to be white rose petals or a "shark fin" made of clear, spaghetti-like pumpkin strands.

We share the food as a group or as couples; we guard it like cavemen and savor it like it's the last thing we'll ever eat. Edu breaks out of his shell. The man I've never associated with the word "goofy" is posing for pictures, making funny faces, clenching the rose between his teeth, and hanging a spoon from his nose. Out of the blue, while eating tiny sea anemones, he growls, "Mar!" ("Sea!")

We're served a whole grilled passion fruit and once the top's cut off, we find it's been filled with chicken broth. The dish mixes sweet and savory and makes us pucker and giggle. Later, tiny cubes of marrow lie atop an oyster in its shell, which we spoon onto an oyster leaf and

pop into our mouths. Along with moments when we say, "Is that food? Should it be?" it seems Adrià is also showing us how we should treat food daily. There is a world of technology and science in his work that has fascinated me for years, yet seated at our table, it all falls away and I'm interested only in the glow of its effects. This food is privilege and deep pleasure, appreciated as art, slurped with a drip running down the chin, served with a dose of surprise, considered delicate or devoured sensually.

Two weeks later I interview Adrià and spend the first hour shooting photos in the kitchen and watching him work. There are 45 cooks, each practically glued to the 2 square feet they're allotted, but Adrià never stands still. He is a conductor, constantly moving in and out of the frame. Before dinner, he checks kitchen stations, looks over product orders, and tastes everything he walks past, silently considering what he has in his mouth for several seconds before pronouncing a verdict.

Along with the customary things you see in a kitchen — bubbling pots, whisks and knives, the bent-head position of a cook at work — there are people walking around with blunt-ended syringes that they use to extract liquids from silver bowls. In a back alcove, there's a machine that looks like a miniature cement mixer with a copper bowl and behind it, a cook runs his fingers across the top of a silver balloon, spinning it atop a liquid nitrogen bath that spills fog onto the table and across the floor, making the Gorgonzola "egg."

This is Adrià's domain, the nexus of food, science, and art. He is known for foams, spherifications, and essences, reduced and reconstituted versions of products that are futuristic versions of a perfect past. Yet while other chefs struggle to understand his concepts, he simply uses them as a tool.

"It would take three days to explain spherification, but that's not important," Adrià says. "I'm after the emotions science brings out. We want happiness, not comprehension."

There is a world of culinary references and another of science and technique that would wreck the meal and its surprises — and leave you with lots of cold food — if someone took the time to explain it all.

If you go . . .

El Bulli
Cala Montjoi
Roses, Spain
011-34-972-150-457
www.elbulli.com
Dinner, with wine, runs more than \$400 a person.
Where to stay
Roses is a seaside eyesore, but is your best nearby option.
Vistabella
Av. Díaz Pacheco, 26-30
Playa de Canyelles Petites
011-34-972-256-200
www.vistabellahotel.com
A romantic and pricey option on the outskirts of Roses. Rooms for two start around \$400 a night.
Aparthotel Mar y Sol
Plaza de Cataluña, 20
011-34-972-252-111
www.prestigehotels.com
A good budget option with options starting around \$80.

I push Adrià a bit and his reply is enigmatic: "Bulli always talks about the past."
He's not after old techniques, but the nostalgia that new ones can create. If he can come up with something in a near-perfect state, Adrià bets it will knock something loose in the heart or the mind. It's an imperfect process.
"There's no direct line," he says. "If you make a salad with artichoke and lobster, that'll do one thing for one person and something else for someone else. A flower brings out emotions in some people and not in others."
So he conducts. He breaks perceptions that border on what he calls "kitschy" to put customers at ease. He makes you eat with your hands. He plays with themes and juggles with the spots where sweet and savory show up during the meal.
"It's complicated. It's like editing a film," he says. "If you don't have a good rhythm, you fall asleep."
Yet when he gets the elements to line up, he creates a direct connection between your food and your emotions.
I think back to our dinner, to a squab consommé so clear and pure that it's served in a wine glass and savored like a grand cru. There was also a perfect cockle floating on a gel seemingly made of a weekend by the sea and there you are, feet in the sand, face in the sun. Beaming.
"I want to do more than eat," he says. "There is emotion in food and I want to feed the soul."
A few days later, I receive an e-mail from Edu:
"I'm sending a leftover sensation from our night at Bulli. It was 6 hours and 44 dishes. It flew."
Is it food? Should it be? This is why we go. Now, after 20 years as a restaurant that turned food on its end, perhaps only two years remain. It flew.
Joe Ray can be reached at joe@joe-ray.com.

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