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# Treasure Island

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Santi Taura is relocating his Michelin-starred **DINS** to Mallorca's old town neighborhood of La Calatrava. Why?

WORDS: CHRIS UJIMA

**G**eographically, the move is not as drastic as it first sounds. Mallorca's historic La Calatrava neighbourhood is not a million miles away from the original location of Santi Taura's **DINS** – a Michelin star gem which, before July, lay a half hour further north on the island.

In Lloseta – the former home of Taura's grandmother, where **DINS** resided since 2003 – he estimates having attracted an audience comprising “70 percent of local islanders visiting us there, with the other 30 percent being an international mix. Our waiting list to dine at the restaurant is one of the longest in Spain.”

Now in Palma, **DINS** is a jewel of the suave new El Llorenç Parc de la Mar hotel, and Taura is excited to attract a more diverse guest list. “We will have greater exposure to an international audience that will be staying at the hotel,” he admits. “Those guests may have never made their way to Lloseta, but naturally, because of the hotel aspect, we will be exposed to a much wider audience who might not have

otherwise found us. Plus of course we are still within reach for our loyal clientele. For us, that is very exciting.”

El Llorenç has been described as ‘a magical location facing the Mediterranean Sea’; Taura calls it a “special location.” He enthuses about how, from the hotel, one can overlook the old walls of the city and the bay, with a park that leads directly to the cathedral. The hotel, in a rather coveted quieter corner of the old town, allows guests to soak all of this in while seated on the stunning dining terrace.

“It seemed to make sense to partner with a new luxury hotel on the island, whose location and design were going to reflect historically what our food is also all about,” he explains. “La Calatrava is the oldest neighbourhood of Palma, and many of our recipes have ancient roots but are created in a modern way. It's all just seemed like a natural fit. The timing and opportunity were both right.”

When it comes to food matters, Mallorca is known for its rich culinary tapestry, with the many cultures that have landed on the island





each leaving an indelible gastronomic mark. Through various records and recipes, one can chart the preferences of island ancestors from the Roman Empire onwards, while Arab and Christian texts reveal their cooking methods and secrets.

The chef is famed for creating new interpretations of recipes that have been made for centuries across the island, and the relocation keeps Taura within touching distance of the precious produce that is required to shape his signature interpretations of these dishes.

"It's not that it is difficult to master," he downplays. "It's about how you turn the best products into the best possible cuisine – highlighting the best qualities of the product." It takes both respect and knowledge to manipulate the items, though: many of the island's products are found nowhere else in the world. "It's fascinating to look at how and why recipes developed over time – and to see how we can recreate them from today's products, and for a modern palate," he twinkles.

Among the menu showstoppers at DINS are Panada de moll (a red mullet pie), a unique sea and mountain recipe of Porcella amb anfós, and Espinagada (a traditional recipe made with eel and spinach).

Panada de Moll "is a typical recipe for centuries on the island and only two

restaurants in the world offer it", the chef annotates. "The difficulty is that the fish has many tiny bones so it is incredibly labour intensive, as one needs many fish in order to make enough for restaurant service." Taura says that "few people" know how to cook Porcella amb anfós – and few have tasted the fusion.

As for Espinagada, "The recipe really reaches back in history – back to 1400," he elaborates. "At that time, eel was an abundant catch for the island. It was a dish made before Easter, generally only made with spinach, from which its name comes, until someone thought of adding eel which didn't break the rules of Lent of not eating meat. We make it today with a particularly thin dough, which at the time only rich people could afford to do."

While Taura's mastery stands a level above (rubber stamped by his Michelin star recognition), he is not alone in the quest to spotlight local delights. In the last 15 years there has been a shift in Mallorca's dining scene, toward utilising the homegrown products, with a network of chefs following this concept – each with their own style of interpreting the dishes.

It's easy to see why; Taura explains. "We are really spoilt on Mallorca, in terms of products," he beams. "We have many artisans producing some really special items. We

always have the freshest fish, and the salt from the island is also quite unique. We forage for mushrooms in-season – the choices are vast. I could add that our wines and olive oil are special as well. Some Mallorcan wines have a small production so aren't exported, which means you are drinking them on the doorstep of where they are crafted – and that's special."

With regards to the new arena in which Taura's Mallorcan magic will transpire, "I don't think I am moving out of our comfort zone," he confesses. "The kitchen setup will be similar in that it remains interactive. I think this is one of the reasons guests enjoyed it so much. They get to see us cook, we explain some things about the dishes, and we hear directly if they enjoy it. That's very satisfying for me and the entire team. It will be similar here in the restaurant – equally interactive – and perhaps in closer proximity than before. There is a counter around the workspace for diners to see the preparation first-hand."

Taura and his team worked closely with the designer of the hotel, as the restaurant needed to be entirely integrated within the plans for the property. Yet while the aesthetics may be new, Taura is dedicated to delivering the high level of service and creative cuisine for which DINS is so highly regarded. "That is our heart and soul, and won't ever change," he promises.

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