



with Lou Perri from the Stunned Mullet.

palate *pleasures*

is food that simple?

Food today is increasingly influenced by our lifestyles. We are more health-conscious than ever before, we are far more concerned about the impact of agriculture on our fragile ecosystems, not to mention global warming. We demand to know how large the carbon footprint is for the sirloin steak sitting on our plate. Are our eggs free-range, bio-dynamic, or cage? Was our chicken corn-fed? Should we box a young cow or should we fatten our geese for a mere pâté? It's no longer just about wanting to eat locally grown stuff; it's about wanting to know exactly where the cow has lived, what it ate, how it was slaughtered, how long it took to get to you, how long it was aged ... Not to mention what it was marinated with, seasoned with, whether it was grilled, pan-fried or oven-roasted.

There's a lot to consider here. Firstly, it is a wonderful thing that the consumer has become empowered and knowledgeable enough to be able to elicit information concerning origins, as well as a choice of products from manufacturers. We are no longer content with just blindly purchasing those little plastic meat trays from the supermarket – mysteriously arriving on the shelves, neatly stacked and portioned.

Instead, we fearlessly head to the butcher and ask the questions about where things come from, asking for different cuts – inspired by those fabulous recipe books we own. And we get what we want, too. Suppliers have had to step up their game to the beat of public demand – quality produce, credible origins and sustainable agriculture.

Essentially, the focus is on minimising processing. Too much human intervention in a natural product is regarded as a negative thing in today's world of food. And yes, we know which aisles to avoid in the supermarket – a whole lot of canned and pre-packaged stuff is terrible for you and should indeed be avoided at all costs.

But let's not forget that truly divine food also comes from manipulation of food's natural state. Where would the world be without wine, for example – a food vastly modified by human intervention. Cultures throughout the world would be devoid of their national cuisines if it weren't for processing – imagine Japanese food without soy products, Italian without oils and vinegars, or prosciutto for that

matter, Mexican without corn tortillas ... the list is endless.

Last week I was fortunate enough to see Ferran Adria speak – widely regarded as the world's most talented chef in the world's best restaurant El Bulli, located just outside Barcelona. This is a man who is famous for deconstructing ingredients and then reconstructing them in a different form. Just for example – he makes a jelly and a sorbet out of strawberries, then places the mixture in a mould shaped like a strawberry, uses little dots of black pepper to create the little seeds and then freezes the mould, only to have a perfect strawberry emerge. Except it is not a strawberry as we know it, but perhaps an even more perfect, more intense version of what nature provides ...

One main criticism people seem to have regarding Adria's food, is that it is too complicated – too scientific. A common perception is that he solely embodies principles of molecular gastronomy, bringing up the

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question whether cooking is really just about chemistry. In fact, Adria's food is in many ways much more simple than much other restaurant food. It focuses primarily on the purity of the ingredients at hand, just inventing new preparation methods designed to intensify characteristics already present

Adria does not like to discuss individual dishes with customers, but would rather they just simply and wholly experience what they are eating, without analysing or intellectualising.

As A.A Gill maintains, after interviewing Adria – “Food is dinner”.

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Although there is no mistaking that there have been amazing developments in the culinary world in the last few years, both in sourcing and availability of diverse produce, as well as innovations in cooking methods and techniques by pioneers such as Adria – we need to remember just to eat for the sheer need of it and the simple pleasure.

We need to avoid getting caught up in the 'how', 'where' and 'why' of it and just relish whatever is in front of us on our plate – bearing in mind that the only thing wrong with food today is quite simple ... we eat too much of it!