

SPACES



## FOR THE GODS

Entertaining editor **Kate Anzani** uses her recent trip to Spain to visit the three Michelin-starred restaurant Arzak, where history and heritage come together for an amazing meal.

**A**RZAK SITS ON TOP OF A hill in Spain, about 17 minutes away from the center of San Sebastian in the Basque region. The restaurant is a three-storey building, its façade unassuming considering it has been in operations since 1897. The history that comes with its dining area, and the dishes served there, makes it one of the best gustatory stops in the area.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that the restaurant has been awarded three Michelin stars—something that we're often told is reserved for the gods. These days, father-and-daughter tandem Juan Mari and Elena Arzak are at the kitchen, the standing pillars of this culinary legacy.

There's a true sense of arrival upon entering the doors. White dominates the halls and

tables, in defiance of any strong composite color. There are personal touches that grab your eye. There's a quiet busyness that engulfs you, representative of the refined service sequence that begins the moment you step foot in the restaurant.

As someone in the food business myself, there were some details that truly defined Arzak that I feel are worth acknowledging.

### SPACE AND SIMPLICITY

"Simplicity is the highest form of complexity," or so we're told. There are 30 seats in the Arzak main dining room, and reservations go through a 48-hour confirmation period.

Menus are divided into tasting menus, and a simplified ala carte list. Items like the Monkfish Cleopatra are headers for a course. There's no fuss and no complications, but everything



is most certainly bespoke.

There is a second floor private dining room for those in the know, and most likely a little VVIP. Small hallways lead to the more spacious areas—it feels a little bit like a maze.

### THE WINE MENU

The second floor boasts of a museum of 100,000 bottles of wine in the wine cave, sourced from all over the world. There is also a design statement in this room—they highlight the tree trunk standing in the middle of the floor, something that has been in the family house for generations.

This is the kind of atmosphere Arzak has. They cultivate heritage and stories, and let the past seep into the present.

### THE ARZAK LAB

The Arzak Lab really impresses. Unlike any other thinking box, it gives you a deep look-in, feel-into the chefs' character, creativity and uniqueness. There is a strong realization of the 'incubation period' a dish goes through before it makes it onto the menu—here, it usually takes about six to eight months before the course is born. The research and development, the number of hours that goes into

one dish is dumbfounding.

It almost feels like you've stepped into such a raw state, and you're standing in the middle of their brain. This state of exposure, available to some individuals, helps you realize why the Michelin guide found this food good enough for the gods—the lab is proof that there is love and passion in this lab.

The Arzak Lab also highlights a four or five-meter wall-to-ceiling spice rack. Over 3,000-something spices are all kept in containers, stacked and labeled per continent and country.

Islands of gadgets—a dehydrating machine, a food vacuum, smoking machine, an alcohol-like diffusor, plate samples, double-edged glass mirrors—sit on one table. There are others, some I don't even recognize. It seems here, cooking is not just an art—it's also a carefully thought-out science.

### THE MENU

The tasting menu is composed of seven to eight courses, starting with a food collection of first impressions. All of them, of course, is executed to perfection and with an artful display. ▣

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** The Arzak Lab's organized and catalogued spice rack is extensive, a good indication of the flavor profiles their team can explore; the Square Moon is a lunar chocolate cube with a fluid core of mint, neroli and kiwi; Plating is an art at Arzak, as seen on these Eel Rods served on trays poking out from a slab of wood; the Red Space Egg is cooked at 65°C and garnished with red peppers, cereal ferments and crispy pig's trotters; the Big Truffle is a large cocoa and sugar truffle with creamy chocolate carob; with highly trained sommeliers, it's easy to find the perfect wine to pair with your meal; the Fish of the Day with Patxaran, a Basque liqueur made from blackthorn berries, and purple corn; from the amuse bouche selection are the razor clams; a charming brick façade welcomes diners to the restaurant; the interiors are simple but tastefully done, while the large red A is a stylish take on signage.