



CINCO
BY PACO PÉREZ

Das Stue



A Top Chef Introduces Berlin To Modern Spanish Cuisine

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5-Cinco

Growing up in a tiny village in Catalonia, Spain, Paco Pérez lived in a modest family home that didn't even have an oven. The chef rose from these humble beginnings to become well



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known in his home country for his modern interpretations of Spanish cuisine, earning accolades for his restaurants, Llança's [Miramar](#) and [Barcelona](#)'s [Enoteca](#), along the way.

With his latest establishment, [5-Cinco](#), Pérez not only adds another feather to his culinary cap, but he shares his style of cooking outside of Spain for the first time, too. Inside [Berlin](#)'s newly opened [Das Stue](#) hotel, the former elBulli chef draws on his background in molecular gastronomy and avant-garde cuisine to create a 24-course tasting menu, which diners enjoy in the restaurant's breathtaking dining room, marked by copper accents and eclectic décor from the mind of Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola. We caught up with Pérez during one of his recent stops at Cinco to talk about his inspirations, impressive menu and initial thoughts on Berlin.

Why did you become a chef?

It's one of those things that happens without you even realizing it. Why does one become a painter? It's a little about where life takes you and about your sensibilities. You become a cook without knowing it, and then you realize that one of the few things you can do that makes people happy is to cook.

Did you grow up cooking?

My first memory of myself cooking, I was very young, about 11 years old, and I set out to make a pizza. Where I lived — a town of 1,500 inhabitants — pizzas did not exist. And where I lived was very poor and my house didn't have an oven, so I cooked it in the sun, and it was a disaster. But I became a cook because of the smells at home. My family had a tapas bar, and the aromas and flavors drew me in without me realizing it.

You spent time working at elBulli. Can you tell me about the experience and how it shaped you?

My first time at elBulli, after dinner, I didn't sleep. When a person — because of an effect, let's say a visual one — transforms and they can't sleep, it's because something happens. And my time at elBulli made me realize that cooking is not just eating, not just dining companions, not just about cooking points, but also transformations. Not everybody will have this reaction because we're all marked by our own sensibilities. I'm not trying to say that there are people who have no sensibilities. But it's not the same to eat a nigiri [as it is to eat] a steak. The steak is delicious, really good. I love it. They both transmit different sensibilities. You can dislike my food, but it doesn't mean you don't have sensibilities. What elBulli taught me was to try to bring happiness to the people who visit our restaurant. On top of this, elBulli teaches



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discipline, labor, consistence and organization. It's not only about food; it's also these philosophies.

Tell me about Cinco. How did the concept come about?

The main cause was Daniel Aristot, who's the owner of the hotel. I want it to be stated that I'm here because of him. The story is quite simple: Aristot tells me he wants to open a hotel in Berlin and I say, "Berlin is far. I'm from the Mediterranean, and it's a different climate." But I come to see the space, and when I get to the door, the [construction] date on the entrance is 1939. It's the same date as in [Miramar](#), and I thought, "What does this mean? There's something here." So, we opened the restaurant.

What is the concept for Cinco's menu?

It's mostly based on our restaurant, Miramar. There is one menu that's more traditional with some creative and modern touches. And then we have the experience menu, where we try to cross the lines, make you smile and have a good time. The flavors are more present, with smaller portions, and it is more experiential.

And there are 30 courses on the menu, right?

There are 24. In Miramar, it is 35.

That's a lot!

No, it's not much. I'd like to be *more* generous. When you come to our house, I don't want you to just come for one or two hours and have only a plate of sole or cod. We want you to be at the table and say, "Oh, what is this?" and want more and more and more, and have the experience leave you very happy. At the end of the day, seeking happiness in all senses of life is very complex and very hard. If we have the opportunity of doing this, we're doing this as long as we're allowed. So, if you come and I can give you 40 things and you're glad, then that's amazing. Generosity today is one of the biggest problems; people are not generous, and everything is in dollars.

Can you tell me about one of your favorite dishes on the menu and how you developed it?



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No, we don't have a favorite dish. It's a complete menu, a trajectory, and every dish tells you a story and gives you, more or less, emotions. For example, we have the scrambled eggs dish. It is an interpretation in the end. So, it's scrambled eggs that everyone has for breakfast, but instead of eggs, we have a soup made of mushrooms and herbs. And then we have eggs yolks, but instead of egg yolks, we have spheres. Then, we have a bit of cream, a bit of parsley. So, it's an interpretation and a deconstruction of scrambled eggs. It's about the surprise. It's a dish that's very simple, but you get a lot out of it. But it's not my favorite; it's just one of the dishes along the way of the experience menu.

How often does the menu change?

Every season. At the moment, we are introducing the new spring menu.

The restaurant itself is quite beautiful. Did you work with designer Patricia Urquiola on the interior design of the space?

A little bit. I explained our way of understanding gastronomy and they interpreted it a bit, but the design is Patricia Urquiola.

I was also impressed by the beautiful, and rather large, open kitchen.

That we fought for, because it was one of the things the interior designers didn't want. They didn't want the kitchen to show. But it's important. It's the theater. It's where the cooking happens, and we wanted it to be visible, to show how we work.

Were you excited to come to Berlin?

Regarding food, no. It was interesting as a city. It's a young city, with a lot of strength, with different ways of understanding life, with multicultural spaces, with places that create decadence but are not decadent themselves. I think Berlin is a city to discover, particularly in spring and summer; it's a time to grab the bike and go around Berlin, because it's really pretty. And maybe Berlin has this strength of history, with the Second World War, and all these things that are very present in recent memory. It's a city more to give your part and we want to give to the city what we do.

How often are you here?

I come two days, every 25 days.

Do you have time to eat out? Are there any restaurants in Berlin that you like?



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Das Stue

Not really. I generally don't get a chance to leave the hotel. Just last night I went out with the staff because Cinco was closed, but generally I stay here. Before opening, though, I ate in every restaurant in Berlin. One of the places I liked the best is Facil. I've always liked it. But I also like all these very simple places. Last night we went to have ramen at Cocoro. I like Einstein for a coffee and afternoon cake. Grill Royal for meats. Fischers Fritz for more French cuisine that's interesting.

What's next for you?

Well, we're alive, and as long as we are, we have to make it known. What we like to do is to cook, and some projects can come through and some can fail. Projects come our way and sometimes we say yes and sometimes no. What's important is that in all of the places we've opened, there's always a person behind it who we have empathy with. In every place we are, there's a friend.

Spanish interview translation by [César Augusto Cotta](#)