

THE CUISINE: BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN



IMPROVEMENTS IN COMMUNICATIONS HAVE ALLOWED THE NEW ANDORRAN CUISINE TO SPREAD ITS TENTACLES AS FAR AS THE MOST DISTANT REACHES OF THE PYRENEES IN SEARCH OF THE BOLDEST RECIPES, THE MOST EXOTIC PRODUCTS, AND TO USE ITS INNATE IMAGINATION IN COMPOSING A NEW RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES.

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Andorra affords her visitors a spectacular gastronomic offer. The time is over in which Andorra's traditional hospitality had to make up for her deficiencies in culinary matters. "The hospitality of the Valleys", wrote the French traveller L. Boucoirain in 1854, "is frank and cordial. The food is simple and frugal."

The country's sparse population had poor financial resources and the comfort of the traveller who ventured into the Valleys was the last thing they worried about.

For many years, the maxim of Antoni Fiter i Rosell, a doctor in law, that "the paths of the mountain passes need not be very good, but sooner difficult and bad, so that one can simply get by" (1748) was scrupulously observed.

Times have changed. After the end of World War II, the country realised that the future lay in tourism and its many facets. The historic decision to open the country to the outside, thanks to the roads from Soldeu to Pas de la Casa (1889) and from Andorra La Vella to La Seu d'Urgell (1913), were the starting

point for a radical change. Tourism and the tourist explosion gradually transformed the country to such an extent that all traditional values, whether in the economic, political or social fields, had to adapt or disappear.

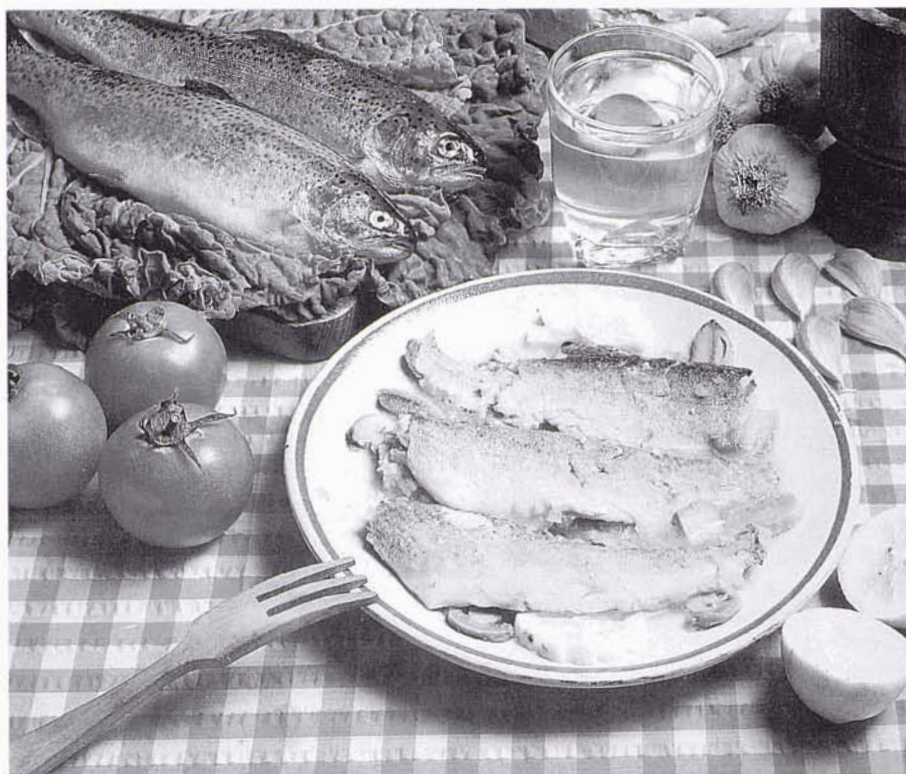
Today, this evolutionary process continues. It is not surprising, therefore, that Andorran cuisine has not escaped parallel transformations.

Andorra has had to adapt her gastronomy to the demands of her ever more numerous foreign clients and to the innovations that the Andorrans themselves have contributed from their numerous travels all over the world. The variety is immense. Every kind of cuisine can be found. To the traditional *tasques*, or taverns, where you can choose from a suggestive variety of tapas, have now been added all sorts of pizza parlours, Indian, Chinese or Vietnamese restaurants, and even the inevitable McDonald's, an unmistakable sign of the times.

And what has happened to the local cooking? Faced with this avalanche of contributions and innovations from

abroad, the Andorran cuisine was like a weak, defenceless pine that could have been swept away for ever. The avalanche has passed, the pine remains standing, stronger than ever. The Andorran cuisine is continually reaffirming itself and takes pride of place in the country's best restaurants.

Developments have been remarkable. The traditional recipes, all of them high in calories, based on raw materials in which pork predominated and a method of cooking in which sweet fat was the order of the day, have been considerably lightened. Mountain products are still used more than any other, but the portions have been reduced, the style of cooking has changed and the presentation now has a less austere air about it. Also, the obvious improvements in communications have allowed Andorra's new cuisine to spread its tentacles as far as the most distant reaches, on either side of the Pyrenees, in search of the boldest recipes, the most exotic products, and to use its innate imagination to compose a new range of possibilities.



These two sides of the cuisine, the classical –revised and corrected– and the modern –more daring–, live side by side in perfect harmony. Some restaurants even offer them on the menu together, without this causing the slightest surprise. Some of the new dishes are the result of a felicitous combination of local products such as potatoes, cabbages, edible toadstools or nuts, with distant products like sea-fish and shellfish.

In mountainous countries, and more specifically in our Pyrenees, a very interesting phenomenon has been observed as regards the transmission of customs and recipes. The exchange of messages from one valley to another was easier between people of the same condition who lived at more or less the same altitude than following the course of the river where, the lower one went, the richer the landowners became and the more insuperable the social gap. Communication, therefore, was transversal and very rarely longitudinal. The traditional recipes of Andorran cooking are the result of an age-old exchange between our valleys and the Catalan re-

gions of the Pallars Sobirà on the one hand, and the Alta Cerdanya on the other. Relations between the Pallars Jussà, the Alt Urgell and the Baixa Cerdanya came later. To put it another way, what we call traditional Andorran cuisine is no more than the result of a long dialogue between these Pyrenean regions.

Those who hanker after the familiar old dishes will find satisfaction in specific restaurants, dishes which are almost all included in the book *La cuina de casa meva*, by Andorra's great cook Maria Montanyà, and which have evocative names such as *palpis* (boned meat), *escudella i carn d'olla* (a kind of stew of which the liquid forms the first course and the meat the second), *trinxat de col amb rosta* (chopped cabbage with fried bacon), *freginat* (fried offal), *escudella de congre* (conger eel soup), *bacallà amb xamfaina* (salt cod with ratatouille), and so on. Similarly, the new gourmets, who show a concern both for their palate and for their appearance, can satisfy their needs at a wide range of restaurants, some of which occupy a priv-

ileged place in the most important guides to good eating.

However, Andorra's cuisine has had to pay its tribute to modernity: until a few years ago, the products from the traditional slaughter of the pig –a real feast– were to be found in all the homes. Today, transformations in society and the home have relegated these products to the background and the tradition is gradually being lost. Not all young Andorrans know the meaning of words like *donja*, *bringuera*, *bull* (various kinds of fat-meat stuffings in a pig's gut) or *biscor* (stuffed pig's heart) and they only just know what a *llangonissa* looks like. Andorra is evolving irresistibly towards the future. The economy is taking on new dimensions at the gates of the great Europe of 1993, in which our country has also placed its hopes. The necessary aperture of the Principality has taken its first steps with the application of the agreement with the EEC to open the doors of the European markets where, little by little, Andorra's products will have to find their niche. And why not start with the cuisine? ■