

• FLUX

NAMED AFTER BARCELONA'S MOST ACCLAIMED FOOD MARKET, BOQUERIA IS A TAPAS RESTAURANT WITH SWAGGER. THERE'S A MENU WHICH GOES FROM COMRADE'S CANTEEN TO AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, A WINE LIST WITH ITS OWN CAVA AND SHERRY ANNEXE, AND A BATTALION OF KNOWLEDGEABLE WAITING STAFF, ALL OF WHICH MAKE FOR SOME BEATING.

THE DECOR, SO BREATHTAKINGLY NEUTRAL TO MAKE SWITZERLAND LOOK LIKE A SWASHBUCKLING ROGUE DICTATORSHIP, WON'T BE TO EVERYONE'S LIKING – ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO LIKE THEIR SPANISH RESTAURANTS TO LOOK LIKE THE COLOURFUL DRESSING ROOMS OF A PARTICULARLY FLAMBOYANT FLAMENCO DANCING TROUPE – BUT THERE IS AN UNDENIABLE BUZZ ABOUT THE PLACE. MAKE NO MISTAKE, BOQUERIA HAS ATMOSPHERE



The first thing you'll notice when you glance across the menu is its geographical stretch: a market in Barcelona may have served as the inspiration, but the food hails from across the Iberian peninsula. Aside from the Catalan specialties, such as the excellent monkfish, there are Galician salted peppers, chorizo from Mallorca and a whole range of Spanish specialties. All the marquee names you'd expect are here, from *patatas bravas* to *croquetas*, but there's more than enough interesting twists and turns to this selection.

Chorizo a la sidre (yep, you guessed it: that's cider) are sweeter and punchier than you might expect, and all the better for it. The cider gives the chorizo, which is sliced into thick meaty barrel-esque logs rather than the crispy discs I've seen elsewhere, a more complex flavour, and tellingly it's the first plate to be emptied. Not far behind are the *croquetas*, filled with Iberian ham and cheese, which are as thin and crispy as perfect French fries on the outside and richly satisfying within, with a thick creamy cheese interior. Calamari is one of those simple dishes which often go disastrously wrong, and it's satisfying to note that Boqueria has passed this test with nonchalant grace and a dollop of lemon mayonnaise, which accompanies the squid rings commendably. The aubergine cannelloni,



filled with goat's cheese and mushroom, were delightfully fluffy and soft, and an excellent example of how a few simple ingredients, when combined with creativity and imagination, can make something really special.

With a strong recommendation from our waiter, the suckling pig arrives with the fanfare you'd expect from a dish favoured by medieval monarchs; before me is a coffee-coloured slab of crispy pork lounging regally atop a bed of parsnip and vegetable crisps. Two accomplices flank the suckling pig – the

expected sweetness of apple sauce, and a dollop of lemon sorbet, which is a bit like bumping into Aristotle at Vodka Revs. Clever, but confusing. The wisdom behind its inclusion becomes evident after a few mouthfuls – not only does it cleanse your mouth of the saltiness of the pig, the hint of lemon enhances the sweetness of the dish and brings out the sunny side of the apple sauce. As for the suckling pig itself, the tile-shaped slab is cooked to perfection, with a savoury crackling exterior which cracks like glass and a smooth, potent filling. There isn't much of it, admittedly, but you'll smother every last inch in apple sauce and sorbet and bury it in all in parsnip and be glad you ordered it. A real triumph.



Less convincing but pleasant enough was the *rape a la Catalana con gambas* – or, monkfish 'Catalan' with prawns – which came in a rather anonymous tomato sauce. The monkfish itself was delicate and fleshy, practically falling apart into the sauce, and the prawns were crunchy and ample. There was very little at fault with this pairing, but I feel the monkfish has a lot more to offer than is present here. Perhaps it's just outshined by the outrageous suckling pig.

Dessert embodies all that Boqueria does well: an enticing selection which lives up to the hype. The *pan de calatrava*, a baton-shaped slice of grainy flan-like sweetness, emblazoned with the tell-tale criss-cross of honey, was the kind of joyful result you'd expect if Willy Wonka had tried his luck at making edible and delicious sand. Meanwhile, the ambitiously titled triple chocolate tart with its layering of dark, white and milk chocolate pole vaulted over 'decadence' and landed in 'inexcusable indulgence', and as such received a very high score indeed. Each chocolatey sediment tasted fresh and distinct, with none of that artificial plastic taste that comes with cheap white chocolate in particular. Growing in popularity, and justly included as one of *Time Out's* best cheap eats of 2012, Boqueria deserves your attention, and with a menu this engaging it might just save you a return flight to the Costa del Sol. Not to be missed.

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