



**JORGE BERNÁRDEZ. General manager of the Poble Espanyol**

Jorge Bernárdez has been the general manager of the Poble Espanyol for three years. Satisfied with the current tourist numbers, which total more than one million people every year, he's now striving to attract the local community. Bernárdez is hoping to address this "unfinished business" with a new culinary offering that will complement the architectural tour of the different regions of Spain the Poble Espanyol currently offers.

**“The Poble Espanyol’s next major  
task is gastronomy”**

**XAVI CASINOS**

**How is the Poble Espanyol coping with the current crisis?**

Well, in 2009, we noticed a certain fall in tourist numbers but, in 2010 and 2011, we saw a major increase in visitors. For instance, more than 1.1 million people buy tickets every season, and if we include the people that work here or visitors who don't buy their tickets at our ticket office, we're talking about almost 1.4 million. As

a unique visitor attraction, the Poble Espanyol is becoming fully aware of the fact that Barcelona has become an international destination.

**And has this increase led to a recovery in the numbers of visitors you lost two years ago?**

Yes, if we compare them to 2007, the benchmark year in the tourism sector, which was the best year in Spain both in terms of visitor numbers and economically. At the time, the Poble Espanyol also registered visitor numbers of around 1.4 million.

**We sometimes hear objections voiced against Barcelona's vocation as a tourist destination...**

And what would Barcelona do without tourists at the present time? People need to change their mindset regarding tourism. We continue to see it as something invasive or a nuisance, when, in fact, it is helping establish our position worldwide as a major city and is a decisive factor in sustaining Barcelona's economy. Nevertheless, certain factors influence this mindset, including the fact that there are too many tourists in some parts of the city and premises such as Irish pubs and souvenir shops. The local authorities need to regulate this.

**What do we need to improve on as a tourist city?**

The service we provide to our customers – the tourists – and how we deal with them, particularly in the restaurant sector, and, in this way, offer added value. Gastronomy could provide an excellent opportunity for Barcelona by taking advantage of the fact that it is one of the key factors in raising Catalonia's profile worldwide. As far as other aspects are concerned, we're doing pretty well. Our hotels provide good

service and safety is also good. It could be improved, but it's good. And the city has stunning architecture.

**Do tourists understand the Poble Espanyol? Are they aware that it is a compendium of architecture from different parts of Spain that was built for the 1929 International Exhibition?**

Some are better informed than others. Some visitors find out about it from the information points around the village, and some have prior knowledge and bring their own guide books with them. But, I'd like to stress again that the challenge lies in telling the local community about the village.

**How do such diverse activities as craft workshops and a discotheque coexist and how do you manage the situation?**

It's much simpler than it appears. The Poble Espanyol is like a village with a life of its own, with its own economic activity, social interactions, people that get on and don't get on... And looking after it all is a company that manages its general interests. You can come here at 9 in the morning and leave at 4 or 5 in the morning. Artisans and discotheques live side by side without any problems for a very simple reason: because they have different opening times and a different clientele. Of course there are conflicts, but they are easy to sort out.

**Traditional crafts are one of the cornerstones of the offering of the Poble Espanyol, but we often get the impression that they play a secondary role...**

I don't know where you get that impression from, because, at the Poble Espanyol, we make every effort to ensure crafts play a central role. The offering is represented by workshops and studios offering quality products made at the Poble Espanyol that

have been inspected by a committee of experts. In our view, an artisan who buys products elsewhere and comes to sell them in the village isn't an artisan, he's a shop. We have about 60 outlets and more than 20 of them are craft workshops. This is a key factor in the way we are run and position ourselves, because it's what makes us different. It's a product "made in Barcelona".

**You mentioned earlier that visitors can spend a lot of time at the Poble Espanyol. How come it's never had a hotel?**

For a simple reason: we've never had a certificate of habitability, due to the peculiarities of the way it was built and designed in 1929 to be a temporary structure. It was due to be demolished after the International Exhibition.

**Is the Poble Espanyol expensive to run?**

Yes. It costs a great deal of money throughout the year and a lot of it goes towards cleaning and repairs. The building materials used 80 years ago were very different.

**In recent years, you've introduced an activity that we might say is more unusual. Weddings. Is there really a demand to get married at the Poble Espanyol?**

Yes, absolutely. We hold about 40 weddings a year and not just for locals but for people from abroad: Irish, English, Chinese, Japanese, Russians... Religious ceremonies are held at the monastery church and civil ceremonies too. Although small-scale it is, indeed, a new line of business.

**The Poble Espanyol runs joint offers with the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), but with no other cultural attraction on Montjuïc Hill.**

**Why is this?**

We'd love to. At the present time, only the MNAC has expressed its willingness, but it would be great to extend this collaboration to other attractions.

**How does the Poble Espanyol evaluate the work done by Turisme de Barcelona?**

Well, I would give it ten out of ten. It could even be an 11 (laughs). It plays a decisive role in raising the profile of Barcelona as a tourist destination and with initiatives like the Shopping Line and Convention Bureau. It also plays an important role in defining the tourist tax project.

**Are you in favour of establishing this tax?**

Yes, I am. And I'm also in favour of charging admission to places like Park Güell, just one or two euros. The money should be used to improve the quality of tourist services. It's good for people to value things. Freebie culture isn't a positive thing in the long run.

**During your three years at the helm of the Poble Espanyol, what have been the main plaudits and criticisms you've received?**

The main plaudit is when we ask visitors how they found out about the Poble Espanyol, and more than 60% tell us that someone told them about it and recommended it to them. This means that people like it. Improving our relationship with the local community is still unfinished business, although not a major criticism. In this regard, the great project for the future consists of improving our culinary

offering. In other words, a gastronomic itinerary needs to be added to the architectural one, so that people can sample the different typical regional dishes and produce at the Poble Espanyol. This itinerary will be just as interesting for tourists as locals.

**Why is it such an effort for the local residents to come up to the Poble Espanyol?**

Maybe for the same reason it's an effort for them to visit the Sagrada Família or other city attractions where only tourists go. Notwithstanding this, local residents make up for 10 or 12% of the total number of visitors, accounting for some one hundred thousand people a year: more than those that go to many theatres, museums or other tourist attractions. We try to attract the local community with other activities, such as summer concerts and the children's activities on Sundays. And then, of course, there are the 25,000 students who take part in our educational programme every year.

**All the autonomous communities of Spain are represented at the Poble Espanyol except the Canary Islands. Have you thought about including any landmarks from the archipelago?**

Well I must say it's a personal ambition of mine. My family lives in Tenerife and I grew up there. There are no landmarks from the Canaries because the people who designed the Poble Espanyol almost one hundred years ago travelled around the country by car. Obviously, they couldn't get to the Canaries. They couldn't get to the Balearic Islands either but they were able to include elements because someone sent them photos. Now we're thinking about how to include the culture of the Canary Islands.



**MONTSE AGUT, co-owner of the Barcelonese restaurant “Can Culleretes”**

Montse Aguat has spent almost all her life inside the walls of “Can Culleretes”. She is aware - together with all her family - of the pride and responsibility of running the oldest restaurant in Barcelona. It was opened, as a milk bar, back in the year 1786. She strongly believes that the third generation ( her parents started running the restaurant in 1958 )– is getting ready to take over.

**“Quite often 80% of the clients eating at “Can Culleretes” are tourists”**

**XAVI CASINOS**

**Imagine that it’s my first time in “Can Culleretes”. I have no idea of what to ask and you are supposed to offer me a menu in order to attract me as a regular client. What are you going to serve me?**

We could start with our “cannelloni” which are very famous. Afterwards we could serve you a special wild boar stew or a suckling pig the Catalan way. If you prefer fish, then we can suggest you a sole cooked with almonds. Talking about desserts we can serve you one of our specialities, such as a home-made cake with chocolate mousse and crunchy cover of nuts with a taste of vanilla.

**This special dedication about desserts is it perhaps an homage to the origin of the house which started in the year 1786 in the same premises as a milk bar...**

As a matter of fact I created the list of desserts at the same time in which my parents took over the restaurant. I didn't even know how to make a simple bisquit, absolutely not a clue about pastries. I attended the “Hofmann Cooking School” in Barcelona and there I learned a lot. This is the reason why we have this list of desserts, a little bit off the beaten track, which we think it's a plus for our clients.

**What about “Culleretes” (coffee-spoons)? Do you have enough or are you running short of them?**

Ja, ja, I see you know very well that story. Of course; we have coffee-spoons over and above. That story goes back when the premises were a milk bar, in the 18th century. It is said that the milk bar was always in need of coffee-spoons. Because of the lack of the spoons, clients were screaming all the time asking for them. The waiters were asking continuously for: “ more coffee-spoons, more coffee-spoons boys”. Apparently from that episode comes the name of the restaurant. There is another story which claims that the name of “coffe-spoons” is because it was the first place in Barcelona having coffee-spoons made in brass. But I think that the first version is the good one.



**Can Culleretes is registered as the oldest restaurant in Barcelona, even though in the old days it wasn't a restaurant but a milk bar.**

Well, The Guinness Book acknowledges that we are the oldest. We won't say the contrary. Furthermore, we never accept to pay for publicity.

**And why not? Nowadays it seems quite uncommon not to do it. Don't you think so?**

Because until today we thought we didn't need it. Only once we placed an ad at "El Periódico" ( daily newspaper ) in a Summer column called " We are open in August". We pay as well to be in the "Yellow Pages". It goes without saying that we are in Internet. And this is feasible because the premises are always in the same place as a restaurant.

**It's like a miracle to find a restaurant like yours in Barcelona while franchises and restaurant chains are expanding more and more all over the world. One has to fight very hard to survive in this business, and to keep on working like you are doing at the present time ?**

Well, yes. Our main point is that the restaurant is a family business. The whole family is joining efforts. It's only closed one month in Summer time. The rest of the year we are all rowing the boat in the same direction.

**And the family will be doing so in the future ?**

Yes, yes. At least you can surely count on the third generation.

**You and your family are aware of your responsibility to keep the charme and crossbeam of a place so historic and unique for Barcelona like “Can Culleretes”? Do you feel this responsibility?**

By all means. It wouldn't be serious not to.

**How many people work in your restaurant ?**

Around twenty people. In the week-ends a little more.

**How many tables do you serve daily?**

Around 150 at lunch time; in the evenings it depends of the time of the year, and on the week-ends we can easily get to 300 people.

**What is your opinion about restaurant business in Barcelona ? Is there a good offer ? Is it deteriorating? One has to keep on promoting this business even more?**

The well-known ones are keeping high standards, as usual. But unfortunately in the Gothic Quarter the old section of the city, too many restaurants are operating without taking good care of tourists nor serving them good quality food. There should be more supervising on that. To add insult to injury those restaurants are really outrageously high-priced. This gives us a very bad image, altogether. Nowadays there are many tourists asking for the menus in Spanish or Catalan besides the one in their mother tongue because they know that some restaurants have two prices, one for locals and one for foreigners. Some restaurant owners couldn't care less and they have the nerve to say that tourists don't come back. This is half true. When tourists come again to our city, they go back to restaurants in which they

had eaten very well and they also had a very good price and service. Not to mention that if they don't come back, they recommend those restaurants to their friends.

**Approximately which is the percentage of tourists you have among your clients?**

Well, some days it reaches the percentage of 80% of tourists. Considering that, like for publicity, we don't give any commission to hotels and taxi drivers to send us clients, we are most convinced that it's a big success.

**Public opinion in Barcelona has mixed feelings regarding tourism. Some think that tourism is very important for our economy, but there are others who think of its negative impact. What's your opinion about it ?**

I also complain about certain kind of tourists. Depending on their attitude, I don't allow them in my restaurant, like farewell bride parties and people who don't behave in a normal way. Luckily, I have to admit that these kind of people are a minority for our restaurant.

**Do you think that restaurant business has a strong support by Official Authorities in Barcelona ?**

To be honest with you I don't think so, specially when talking about local regulations. For instance, in a place like ours, built so many years ago, it's quite impossible that we can fulfil the same regulations the same way that other brand new restaurants. To give you an idea: we had to remove the original 18th century wooden beams from the ceiling. We couldn't keep them in spite of our efforts. Regulations are regulations: You can't fight against City Hall...

**And what about a city promotion through organisms like Turisme de Barcelona (Barcelona Torist Board)?**

I am pretty sure that all of you are doing a good job. The outcome is the number of tourists coming to Barcelona. It's quite clear that touristic promotions are very effective.

**Here goes a difficult question for you. Please suggest us a Barcelona restaurant apart from Culleretes”.**

Ha, Ha. I go quite often to “Merendero de la Mari” and to “Ca l’Agut”. I also like very much the Hofmann restaurant... and the “Botafumeiro”... To be honest with you, there are many good restaurants in Barcelona.

**Your happiest day in Can Culleretes ?**

Perhaps the day we celebrated the first 50 years of being owners of the restaurant. A lot of people came and it was really fantastic. We received so many bunches of flowers we did not where to place them and we were offering them to the guests who were leaving the restaurant. I also have very good memories of many clients, like, for instance, Mario Cabré (bull-fighter and film actor), who was a really good friend of ours. I also remember the day in which President Jordi Pujol came for the first time (former president of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia) little after leaving the prison. He didn't come for a long time until recently. He was no longer president and still remembered about the old times.

**And a sad day ?**

Sad, very sad... I don't recall such a day.

**Who would you like to enter "Can Culleretes, one day ?**

Well, let's say George Clooney ?, ha, ha. !! You don't have to write that, ha, ha!