

FLAVOURS OF THE LAND AND THE SEA, ACCORDING TO

JOSÉ AVILLENZ

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An autumn morning on Praia do Guincho, near Cascais. Hard to imagine a place like this in southwest Europe, in the middle of the Atlantic coast rather than the Mediterranean. A place where in November - after a night of intense rain - the sun shines, the wind drops (unlike in summer) and the temperature reaches 20 degrees. The area is really quite special, a nature reserve less than 30 km from Lisbon, where the rough sea, sand dunes and the Serra de Sintra blend in a unique setting. No wonder that this place has become a point of reference and inspiration for José Avillez. The Portuguese chef lived most of his life on his grandparents' farm, less than three kilometres from here. As we walk on the beach he recounts childhood memories: from the virtually self-sufficient farm to parties for the whole community, from the 'quite bad' wine produced by his grandfather to his youthful enterprise at age 10 selling cakes with his sister ("the most profitable activity that I've ever had, because the ingredients were financed by Mum").



Avillez still has a catering firm in Cascais, but for five years he has lived and worked in the fashionable district of Chiado, in Lisbon, where he is partner and chef of the Cantinho do Avillez and Belcanto restaurants. Things have been challenging recently and his face shows signs of fatigue. Starting up two successful restaurants in less than a year, managing the administrative part of the business, keeping his team motivated, meeting the constant demands (of partners, the press ...), reconciling all this with the needs of his family and, not least, finding the time to stop, think and create, can't be easy.

That's why simple moments like this are important to Avillez. "I needed this. Coming to the Guincho recharges my batteries," he admits. We jump over the fence of the wooden walkway which joins the road to the beach and reach a little wood. The sea is close by, you can't see it but you can hear the waves breaking. "This is the sound that I used to hear at home," he says. Nor is he indifferent to the green scrub or the aroma of damp earth, wet wood and pine needles. I pick a yellow clover and ask him: "Why you don't have a dish with these herbs? It's very fashionable!". He smiles, but does not respond to the provocation. Avillez is a contemporary chef, always attentive to new trends, but who tries to follow his own path. His appearance and manner are informal, but he's not the kind of super cool chef with tattooed arms, ready to kill and skin a rabbit as soon as he sees it and cook it there and then, with wild roots and herbs gathered on the spot. His menu in fact has no dish with yellow clover or other similar herbs, nor does he collect them, like the new Nordic chefs. In spite of everything he is a naturalist, in the figurative sense, as shown in some of his signature dishes, such as Paisagem alentejana (Alentejo landscape), Rebentação (waves breaking), No bosque depois da caça (In the woods after a hunt), Mergulho no mar (Dive into the sea), or Cabo da Roca (Cape Roca). "The interior and exterior worlds are endless sources of inspiration. Nature and, particularly, landscapes are my muses," he says. An inspiration which can also be influenced "by a memory, a flavour, a texture, a trip, a song, a film, a conversation, a technique or, why not, by an emotion," he adds.



José Avillez did not take the standard path through hospitality colleges or catering schools. He wanted to be an architect but, following the advice of a cousin, he graduated in Business Communication. However, the fascinating world of cooking got a hold on him towards the end of his studies, when he met José Bento dos Santos, “the greatest gastronomic expert in the whole of Portugal”, and Maria de Lourdes Modest, “the greatest expert in traditional Portuguese cuisine”, with whom he has maintained a strong bond.

Shortly after, the opportunity for an internship at the Fortaleza do Guincho (the Guincho features again!). The first day, walking through the kitchen door of this French restaurant (1 Michelin star), that boasts consultants of the calibre of Antoine Westermann, he had an epiphany: “my heart started racing and I was overcome by a strong emotion. At that precise moment I realised where my future lay, and my professional formation in the kitchen got underway”. His training would lead him to Alain Ducasse’s school and, subsequently, to an internship in Eric Frechon’s kitchen at the Hotel Bristol in Paris. What would radically change his way of thinking and acting as a chef however was the chance in 2007 to take another internship, this time at Ferran Adrià’s El Bulli, where he would spend six months, becoming part of the creative team. His previous experience running a restaurant (in collaboration with a former colleague from the Guincho) and the catering company he had created both faded into the background.

As soon as he returned to Portugal, he was approached to head the kitchen of the Tavares in Lisbon. The responsibility was enormous: it is one of the oldest luxury restaurants in the whole of the Iberian Peninsula, and on top of that the business was struggling. Critics said he didn’t have enough experience to take on the position and that he risked running before he could walk. Avillez, however, proved them wrong and in a short time he turned the Tavares into a gastronomic beacon of quality. A year later, in November 2009, he gained a Michelin star, something that no other chef of this legendary restaurant had been able to achieve.

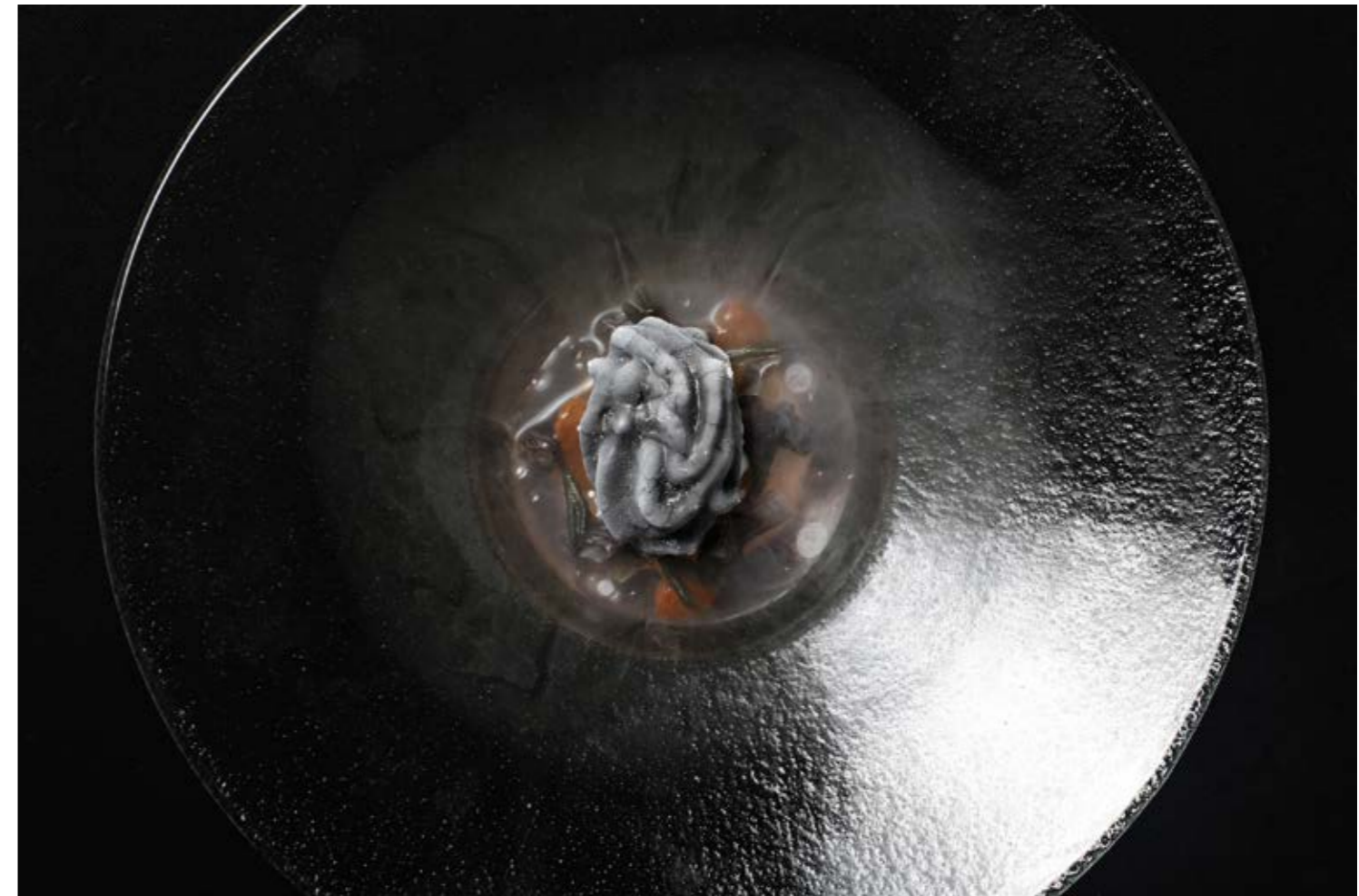
In January 2010, however, after a difference of opinion with the owners, José decided to leave. The following September he started running the Cantinho do Avillez restaurant, an informal space with simpler cuisine, while he was refurbishing another notable city restaurant, the Belcanto, that remains a flagship of his Portuguese-inspired signature cooking.

On entering the Belcanto, we are welcomed into a small lounge with a bursting bookcase. In the foreground is a phrase that is illuminated at night: “Para ser grande, sê inteiro” (to be great, be whole). This is an installation by the plastics artist Joana Astolfi, inspired by a poem of Fernando Pessoa, a poet who Avillez defines as one of his influences. The old restaurant retains some original features, but the refurbishments have created a lighter feel, lending sobriety to its contemporary classic style.

“THE INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR WORLDS ARE ENDLESS SOURCES OF INSPIRATION. NATURE AND, PARTICULARLY, LANDSCAPES ARE MY MUSES,”



Rebentação



Cabo da Roca

Tangerina



The kitchen is between the main dining room, that seats 23 diners comfortably, and the dining room for smokers (15 covers), with a window overlooking the corridor. Twelve chefs work in the small but functional and well-equipped space, most of them young like the floor staff who on average are all under thirty. Most of the team have been working together for several years, and among them David de Jesus has a key role. He is Avillez's right hand man and head chef, to whom some of the credit is due for the restaurant's success.

Following the opening of Tavares, José Avillez surprised everyone with food which no one was offering in the city or anywhere in Portugal except for Leonel Pereira of the Landscape restaurant at the

Sheraton Hotel in Lisbon. It was a period when he clearly felt the influence of the best-known Spanish chefs and new techniques. Meanwhile his new dishes began to assume an identity of their own, which would become clearer in the early Belcanto menus, where he put totally new creations next to other more traditional dishes and others that had evolved from previous dishes. The strategy seems clear: rather than being recklessly daring, Avillez's cooking seeks to be robust, coherent and full of personality.

While some appreciate this mature approach, others prefer his more creative side. Despite the desire and determination to push himself further, José Avillez is, however, satisfied with the results

he has achieved. And he has good reason to be: a few months after opening, the rigorous Michelin inspectors awarded him the coveted star. Reactions are also extremely positive, from customers and critics as well as from colleagues, who publicly shower him with praise.

A meal at the Belcanto – whether it's à la carte or the tasting menu - is a moment of pure pleasure, drawing choruses of ooooh! before the elegant presentations, the inspired pairings, the stylishly developed produce and the journey through flavours. We may feel like we are 'in the woods after a hunt' when we are offered the creamy scapece marinade of partridge; or that we're 'diving into the sea' when we savour the sea bass with seaweed and shellfish, or distinctly hear 'waves breaking' on the beach of the Guincho while we eat a pink shrimp with a clam, seaweed 'sand' and textured green apple juice. But even when the dish's name does not refer to any place or evokes any particular image, the combination of flavours is always inspiring. You only have to try the low-temperature egg with crispy bread A horta da galinha dos ovos de ouro (the garden of the hen that laid the golden egg) or the Leitão revisitado (suckling pig revisited) - a reworking of a typical Portuguese dish from the Bairrada - or the tangerina (tangerine), to understand what I'm talking about.

José Avillez has already shown he is not the type to rest on his laurels. He has the talent and determination to motivate a team, researching, reflecting and changing direction, despite the demands and pressures a business suffers during a recession and perhaps also because he knows deep down in his heart that the Guincho is always there, within reach.



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Suckling pig revisited

(Leitão revisitado)

for 8 people

For the suckling pig

1 belly of suckling pig

Salt as required

2 sprigs rosemary

2 sprigs thyme

3 bay leaves

6 garlic cloves

10 whole peppercorns

2 whole oranges

Remove the fatty parts from the pork belly, leave for an hour and a half in a briny marinade obtained using all the ingredients, then let it dry in a cool place, using a cloth to help. Bake for 36 hours at 68° C. Leave to cool for 30 minutes at room temperature, then 30 minutes in cold water and 1 hour in water and ice. Remove the bones and cartilage and put to one side. With a weight on top, grill the suckling pig on a tepan, until it is crisp and a nice golden brown.

For the orange zest puree

100 g of orange peel

30 g water

75 g sugar

100 g of orange juice

40 g kitchen syrup

15 g of oil

apple cider vinegar to taste

Clean the orange peel thoroughly, removing all the white part. Bake for 10 minutes in the syrup made with water and sugar. Drain. Chop finely and blend with the orange juice, syrup and oil. Strain with a Superbag, or with a fine mesh strainer and flavour with the apple cider vinegar.

For the pepper sauce

400 g of the discarded meat cut from the suckling pig

2 g of black peppercorns per 500 ml of sauce

Prepare the sauce with the scraps of meat and herbs. Add the blanched peppercorns.

To complete the dish

4 lettuce hearts

Black garlic

28 potato chips (homemade)

4 obulato edible bags

Place a piece of suckling pig cooked on the tepan, orange puree, a sautéed lettuce heart and a clove of black garlic on each plate. Serve immediately with the sauce and the potato chips as side dishes, presented in a closed obulato bag.





Hen that laid the golden eggs garden

(A horta da galinha dos ovos de ouro)

Belonging to the world of dreams and fantasy, the story of The Hen that Laid the Golden Eggs “inspired” the whole world. Who never fantasized of such good fortune with that blessed hen? In this interior landscape, we combine autumn flavours and colours to raise collective imagery. We offer our patrons a journey to this fantasy world. The complexity and diversity of the ingredients and techniques used in this recipe follow the same guidelines: earth, the egg... the origin.

4 serves

Eggs

4 organic extra fresh large eggs

Wash the eggs carefully rubbing them with a brush. Boil the eggs in bain-marie at 63,5° C for 45 minutes. Remove the eggs and dip them in cold water for 10 minutes. Then place them in iced water for 50 minutes. Dry well and put them in the fridge.

For the Cream of São Jorge Island's Cheese

75 g of gritted São Jorge island's cheese

Heat the cream in a small pot and add the gritted cheese. Let the cheese melt. Mix well and strain through a mesh sieve. Put aside.

200 g of cream

For the Texturized Black Truffle Juice

80 ml of Perigord black truffle juice

Add the xanthan to the truffle juice and whizz in the blender until smooth. Remove the air with the vacuum machine.

0,3 g of xanthan

For the Leak Straw

100 g of finely julienned leak (only the white part without the core)

Heat the oil to 140° C and fry the julienned leak until golden. Let it drain on absorbent paper and sprinkle with a pinch of salt.

0,5 l of peanut oil for frying

Salt to taste

For the Texturized Mushroom Stock

100 g of Paris mushrooms

100 g of oyster mushrooms

100 g of portobello mushrooms

3 crushed garlic cloves

1 shallot

0,5 dl of olive oil

40 g of unsalted butter

0,5 dl of mineral water

0,4 g of xanthan for each 100 ml of stock

Wash the mushrooms carefully and chop them. In a thermal bottom pot, heat the olive oil and add the mushrooms. Caramelize well and add the crushed garlic cloves and the peeled shallot cut into rings. Caramelize a little more and add the butter. Mix well and cover with water. Let it boil for about one hour. Strain the stock through a sieve. Heat again and let it be reduced by half. Add the xanthan (0,4 g for each 100 ml) and mix with the blender. Adjust seasoning, let it cool, and put aside.

Note: Keep a little portion of non-texturized mushroom stock to sauté the shimenji mushrooms.

For the Fried Bread Crumble Painted With Cuttlefish Ink

200 g of traditional Portuguese bread from Alentejo ground on the Bimby

20 g of cuttlefish ink

5 g of water

1 l of peanut oil for frying

Fry the bread in oil, pre-heated to 180° C, until golden and crispy. Remove and let it drain well on absorbent paper. Dissolve the cuttlefish ink in water and mix with the bread. Toss well and place it in a non-stick frying pan. Sauté the bread until it gets very crispy. Put aside. Store the crumble in vacuum.

For the Chicken Sauce

500 g of chicken wings

1 dl of olive oil

2 l of mineral water

Clean the chicken wings carefully and chop them. In a broad pot, heat the olive oil until it starts smoking lightly. Add the chicken wings and caramelize well on every side. Add a third of the water and let it dry to caramelize again. Repeat this procedure one more time and finish off with the last third of the water. Let it boil for a few minutes and strain the stock. Heat again and let it get reduced by half. Let it cool, and put aside.

For the Sautéed Shimenji Mushrooms

12 clean shimenji mushrooms

0,2 dl of olive oil

1 sprig of thyme

1 crushed garlic clove

10 g of unsalted butter

50 ml of mushroom stock

To Finish Off

20 g of distilled earth

4 slices of Portuguese bacon (toucinho) from Alentejo

40 g of butter

4 halved hazelnuts marinated in hazelnut oil

4 purple shiso sprouts

4 green shiso sprouts

4 gold leafs

Fleur de sel to taste

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the egg for 20 minutes in bain-marie at 54° C.

Sauté the shimenji mushrooms with the heated olive oil, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper. Add the mushroom stock and the butter. Heat the cream of São Jorge Island's cheese, the texturized mushroom stock, and the texturized truffle juice. Heat the chicken sauce and combine with very cold butter. At the bottom of each plate, place the cream of São Jorge Island's cheese, the truffle juice, the distilled earth, and the mushroom stock. Add a little bread crumble to serve as support base for the egg. On the sides, place the bacon and two hazelnut halves. Put the egg and cover with a gold leaf. Surround the egg with bread crumble and season it with fleur de sel and black pepper. Add the mushrooms and the chicken sauce. Finish off by placing the leak straw on top of the egg and the sprouts on the sides. Serve immediately.



Dive into the Sea

(Mergulho no mar)

for 4 people

For the sea bass

4 pieces of sea bass of about 170 g each

Put each piece of sea bass in a vacuum bag. Put to one side until ready to serve.

For the bivalve mollusc shellfish

12 mussels

12 razor clams (cannolicchi)

20 clams

sea salt

mineral water

Put a pan of salted water (15 g salt per litre of water) to boil. Bring to the boil and cook the different shellfish separately, calculating 30 seconds for the mussels, 13 for the clams and 50 for the razor clams sealed in a vacuum bag. For the latter there is no need for salt water. Cool the bag of razor clams in water and ice and put aside in a cool place. Using a small knife, remove the shellfish from their shells and keep them in a cool place.

For the sea water stock

400 g mussels, cleaned

100 g of water

Put the water into a wide saucepan and bring to the boil. Toss in the mussels, leaving them for 30 seconds. Remove from the heat, transfer to a Superbag and use all the stock (the mussels can be used for another dish). Cool the stock quickly.

For the seaweed and marine plants

60 g dilsea carnosa seaweed

60 g sea lettuce

40 g salicornia (sea asparagus)

40 g codium seaweed

Soak the dilsea in a bowl with cold water to remove the excess salt. Put to one side. In a saucepan, bring some water to the boil, add the sea lettuce and cook for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Drain and cool in very cold seawater. Serve the salicornia and codium raw.

To complete the dish

lemon juice

Put the sea bass (in their vacuum bags) in a bain-marie at 54° C for 20 minutes. Steam the shellfish and seaweed with sea water and the mussels stock at 80° C. Remove the sea bass from the vacuum bag and put it in the pan with the mussels stock at 80° C leaving for only 5 seconds. Remove and place on a plate. Strain the stock through a fine colander and add the lemon juice. Serve the sea bass with the seaweed and shellfish.



In the Woods after the Hunt

(No bosque depois da caça)

for 4 people

For the cream of partridge and foie gras

12 partridges	7 juniper berries
0.5 litre red wine	5 peppercorns
25 g port	1 sprig of thyme
125 g Kikkoman soy sauce	1 bay leaf
65 g carrots	foie gras - 75% of the weight of the cream of partridge
100 g French garlic	
65 g onion	
Half a head of garlic	

After leaving the partridges for 24 hours in a marinade made with all the other ingredients, brown them in a little oil and a tablespoon of lard. Once dry, add the marinade to cover them. Cook on a low heat in a covered pan for 2 hours. Remove the partridges and put them aside. They can be used for another dish. Strain the stock through a fine mesh sieve, let it cool and add to the foie gras using a food processor.

For the scapece marinade

4 partridges marinated for 24 hours
1 litre water to scald the partridges
165 ml white wine vinegar
130 ml oil
7 black peppercorns
3 bay leaves
2 juniper berries
10 cloves
700 g onion
200 g carrots
8 cloves of garlic

For the moss

125 g raw pine nut paste
125 g egg whites
80 g egg yolks
80 g sugar
20 g flour
1.5 g chlorophyll

For the rosemary sprigs

96 g wheat flour
3 g baker's yeast
1.5 g salt
57 g of milk
2 g of chestnut brown colouring
rosemary leaves

For the porcini mushroom earth

100 g of softened butter
100 g wheat flour
50 g sugar
50 g of powdered porcini mushrooms
2 g salt

To complete the dish

Fried breadcrumbs,
slivers of foie gras with grains of fleur de sel
beetroot juice with cloves
fleur de sel as required
freshly ground pepper to taste

In a large saucepan, cook the partridges with all other ingredients on a low heat. Once tender, remove from heat and cool slightly. Tear the meat into strips and flavour, using the stock the partridges were cooked in.

Mix all the ingredients together and put in a siphon with three gas charges. Transfer the mixture into a plastic cup in which you have made three small cuts on the bottom. Cook in the microwave for 40 seconds.

Combine all of the ingredients, knead and roll out the dough. Cut into thin strips, to form sprigs and insert the rosemary leaves. Bake in preheated oven to 160° C.

Work all the ingredients together with your hands until they form a paste. Form patties and freeze. Using a microplane, grate onto a baking tray and bake in preheated oven at 130° C for 30 minutes.

Place the cream of partridge at the bottom of the dish, dust it with the porcini mushroom earth and garnish with the fried breadcrumbs. Add the shredded partridge meat, moss and slivers of foie gras. Garnish with rosemary sprigs and finish with fleur de sel and pepper. Sprinkle with the reduced beetroot juice and cloves.