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Interview with Roberto of Barcelona's **Vegan Tapas Bar**

**Meet Roberto Didonè, owner of Barcelona's
entirely plant-based tapas sangria bar.**



In the heart of tapas town, Roberto Didonè is going against the grain. BarCeloneta Sangria Bar prides itself in experimental plant-based cuisine and boasts five different sangria recipes on its menu! We caught up with Roberto to find out about how he came to own this amazing business, his greatest challenges and his plans for the future.



Tell us about how you started BarCeloneta Sangria Bar and why you decided to make it a plant-based restaurant?

I took on BarCeloneta Sangria Bar five years ago. The premises was already a tapas bar, but its menu focused on the traditional Spanish cuisine that is still common now - fried foods, meat and cheeses - of course not a huge amount of vegetables!

Growing up in Northern Italy, I have been vegetarian since childhood, and later turned vegan, so, for me, it was a no-brainer to transform BarCeloneta Sangria Bar into a fully plant-based tapas bar.

I am very interested in experimenting with food, and the challenge of creating a fully plant-based tapas menu, taking inspiration from traditional Spanish cooking and beyond, was very exciting.

I turned vegan from vegetarian for many reasons, particularly because I saw this as the cleanest way of eating - for both ourselves and the planet. As you can imagine, it's easy for my competitors to continue doing things the old way and focusing their menus around meat and cheeses, as tapas restaurants have done for generations, however I feel that the tide is changing and people want more exciting and experimental food, that is still healthy, this is why I work so hard to build my vision at BarCeloneta.

When I first acquired the business five years ago, I started from scratch - I even built the restaurant's furniture by hand, because I wanted every detail to match my vision. I started creating tapas, which means small portions, using simple recipes, which have since developed to be much more experimental and exciting. I am inspired to keep changing and developing the recipes all the time, I never want to stand still.

What is your most popular dish and why?

We have two dishes I would say are our "most popular" - one because of quality and the other for tradition. The first is our tempeh skewers. Unlike traditional tempeh, which is soy-based, we have developed a chickpea product, which is worked differently to the traditional method for making tempeh. Along with flavours of garlic, eggplant, sundried tomato and also a secret ingredient, which I can't share, this dish is a particular favourite of mine and our customers.

Also, we have a vegan take on the traditional dish of paella. Very popular with our customers, this version of paella really is the best. For me, it's got to be the tempeh skewers. I am incredibly proud of this dish as I feel it really pushes the boundaries of traditional tapas.

What are your top tips for making the best sangria?

When making the best sangria, there are a few things we consider. We always use the best quality products, that means organic, and often local, wines. When making great cocktails, it's all about the love you put into them. Each wine we use matches the specific flavours of the sangria, which is why we have six different sangria recipes on our menu, with more added seasonally. In the summer, we develop new white wine variations, and focus on red and rose sangria in the winter.



It's one step beyond the traditional sangria of red wine with orange and brandy.

What is the greatest challenge you've faced when opening a fully vegan tapas restaurant in Barcelona?

I have faced a few challenges in the last five years. First of all, I took this place from a previous owner that was not vegetarian, nevermind vegan! So I had to invest a lot of time and effort into changing opinions and developing a menu to satisfy everyone - not just vegans and vegetarians!

Over the last couple of years, I have worked alone and focused entirely on this project. I keep my eyes open and my ideas clear in my mind, it's not just about serving food for me, it's about the whole experience.

Even the music we play is special. We play music from artists you don't always hear on the radio or in bars and restaurants. We always greet every customer with a big smile. It's about exceeding, not just matching, the expectations of every single person who walks through the door - regardless of whether they're vegan or not

So, overall the biggest challenge was creating and channeling my vision of vegan food while working to change perceptions. I have found that many people who come to Spain think that plant-based food has to be boring and tasteless and it's nice to show people that that's not always the case.

Do you think Spain's relationship with animals is changing?

Yes, I can certainly see a change in Spain's relationship with animals, as we strive to respect European standards and minimise the violence towards animals in all areas of society.

It's about compassion, not just with animals but towards our fellow humans too. I definitely think this is becoming more prevalent in Spanish society.





What are your plans for the future?

I have a lot of hopes and dreams for the future, but I don't have the budget yet! I would love to invest in a second premises, and I am working towards this dream, but at the moment I am putting 100% of my focus and attention on Bar-Celoneta Sangria Bar.

In the future, I see more focus on fine dining and a shift towards more exotic and exciting products - it's always about experimenting for me.

Do you think veganism is becoming more popular? Where do you see it going in the future?

I have definitely seen an increase in popularity of veganism in recent years, but more so 'plant-based diets'. I find that not everybody is defining themselves as vegans, for a number of reasons.

Veganism isn't just a diet, it's a lifestyle choice, one that many people aren't ready for or don't even know the true depths of. By keeping things more relaxed, and adhering to a plant-based diet is an easy way for people to show their compassion while making delicious and healthy choices.

Every individual makes their own choices. But everyone can agree that it's all about minimising the violence in the world and following a plant-based diet is a popular way to do this. It's not just about the animals, we see many peo-

ple choosing a plant-based diet for the health benefits too, as clean eating continues to gain popularity.

In my opinion, a plant-based diet is the future. Growing up in northern Italy, it was very difficult to be vegetarian in a society which took so much pride in its quality animal products. They even thought it was healthy! And eating vegetable-based meals was simply for poor people who couldn't afford good quality meats and cheeses. In my family, if you didn't eat meat then you'd undoubtedly die of some disease or other, that was the common opinion in the North of Italy!

In the late 80s and early 90s, it was nearly impossible to find products like tofu, tempeh and seitan. If you didn't want to eat meat or fish, then you had leaves and some cheese. The way I see it, vegetarian and vegan should be the same thing - vegetarian means vegetables, so why eat cheese or eggs?

We have so much amazing technology to produce delicious and healthy rich complete plant foods, so there's no reason to consume any animals products. It's been proven time and time again that a plant-based diet is an incredibly healthy way of life for the modern human being. We have everything we need.