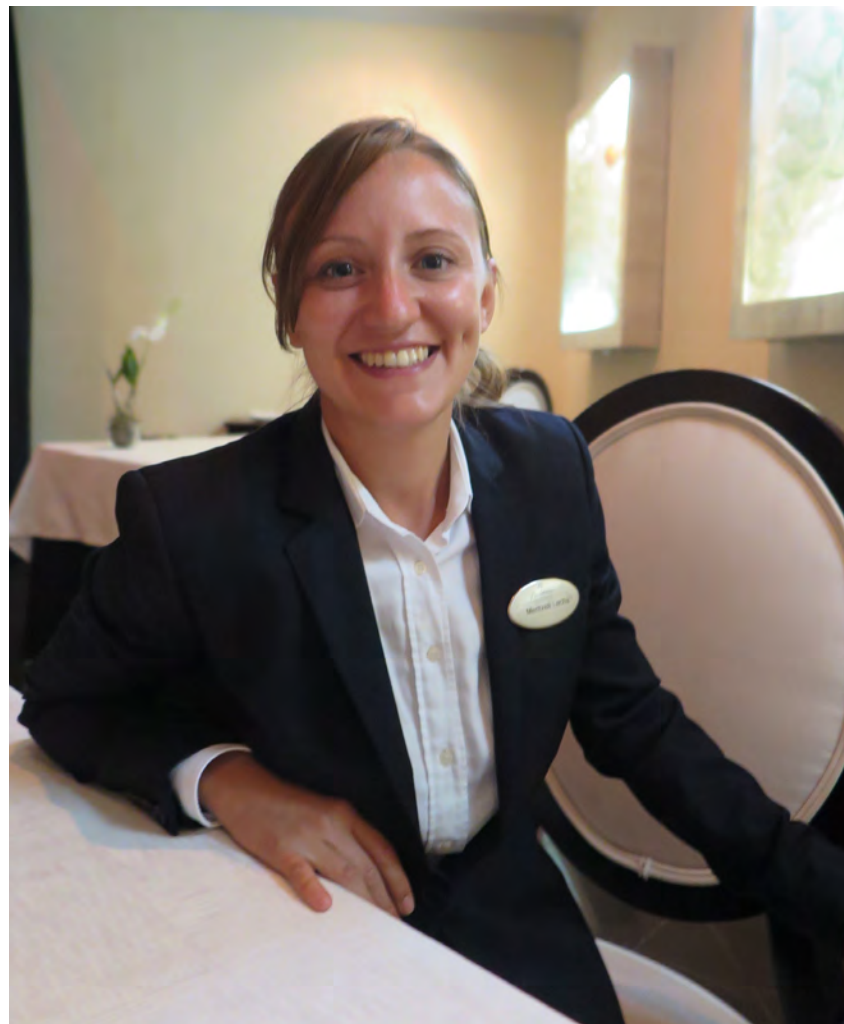
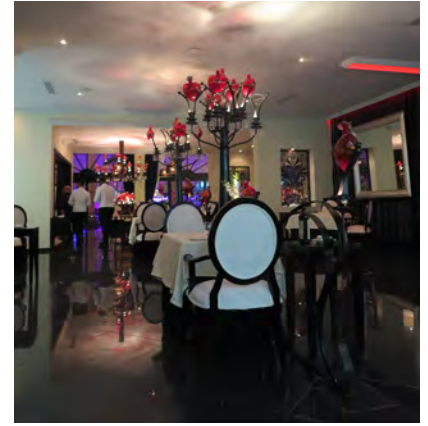


Passion's Meritxell Lecha Vinuesa

By Liz Palmer





Before assuming her current role as the Manager of Passion, Paradisus Palma Real, Dominican Republic, Meritxell Lecha Vinuesa worked with Martin Berasategui for seven years in managerial positions at Restaurante Enoteca, Hotel Art (2 Michelin star restaurant in Barcelona) and Restaurante Lasarte (2 Michelin star restaurant in Barcelona), and Restaurante Gaig (1 Michelin star restaurant in Barcelona).

Martin Berasategui winner of 7 Michelin stars, and for the last six years his restaurant San Sebastian, Spain has been listed as one of The World's Top Fifty Restaurants.

I sat down with Meritxell to discuss everything from the restaurant Passion, to Chef Martin Berasategui, to glassware, and of course Champagne. Step into Meritxell's world with me.

To understand the Michelin star rating, here is an overview:

Michelin Star Rating System

- * A very good restaurant in its category.
- ** Excellent cooking and worth a detour. First class cuisine of its type.
- *** Exceptional cuisine and worth a special journey. Often extremely expensive, and with an extensive wine list.

Liz Palmer: I understand that

Paradisus Resorts are responsible for bringing Martin Berasategui, the seven star chef, to the Caribbean two years ago. Can you tell me has it been a success?

Meritxell Lecha Vinuesa: According to Trip Advisor, Passion is the number one restaurant in Punta Cana, and the number two restaurant in all of the Dominican Republic – that tells us!

LP: Has Passion won any recent awards?

MLV: I'm very proud to say that we received four months ago the 4-Diamond Award by AAA.

LP: What is Passion by Martín Berasategui's signature dish?

MLV: That's funny that you ask this – the signature dish at Passion and all of Martin's restaurants Spain is Egg cooked at lower temperature with fine-herb liquid salad. People all over the world ask for this dish – it's a very popular on the menu.

LP: How often does Chef Berasategui come to the Dominican Republic to oversee his restaurant and brand?

MLV: Martin comes three to four times a year to review the menu. His presence also impacts the selection of products, staff training and standard operating procedures.

One of Martin's philosophies is that he works with local produce and fruits and meats. In the Dominican his menu and recipes

are 50/50: 50% Spanish and 50% Dominican influence.

When Martin changes a recipe he changes it gradually and slowly.

Every two to three months he changes two to three dishes.

One thing to note is that the chef is very flexible in changing the menu for customers that have food allergies and for strict vegetarians.

LP: Tell me about the wine list, like who selects the wines?

MLV: The wine list is developed by the head sommelier, who works together with the chef and the tasting menu.

The specially selected wine pairings have been developed from three separate wine lists, created exclusively for the restaurant.

LP: Which stemware does Passion use?

MLV: We use Stözlze from Germany. It's innovative, excellent quality and lead-free for wine glasses – the various shapes and flutes. We also use their decanters.

It's important that the team undergoes training and learns to understand the importance of each wine and food pairing.

LP: Every year we see new and interesting restaurant trends develop. What do you do to keep up

and pushing the boundaries?

MLV: It's important to compare competitors and to learn what they do and how they do it. It's also good to travel to different countries, and see and experience different cultures and bring this back home.

LP: On a personal note, what is your favorite dish on the menu?

MLV: I have a few favorites: the turbot fish, slow cooked veal with potato risotto.

LP: What is your favorite restaurant around the world?

MLV: I have two favorites: Restaurante Martín Berasategui, in Lasarte. This restaurant has maintained a three star rating from Michelin since 2001, and El Celler de Can Roca is at heart a local family-owned restaurant rooted in the fiercely independent state of Catalonia and named one of the top 50 restaurants in the world.

LP: You have an opportunity to taste lots of interesting and unique wines. Do you have a preference for Champagne?

MLV: Yes absolutely. My favorites are: Bollinger 'Grande Année, Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame, and Cristal Champagne and I do collect.

Type of Cuisine:

Berasategui has incorporated Caribbean flavors into his signature cuisine. Local seafood has a starring role. Dining a la carte or enjoy the full sampling menu with wine.

Atmosphere:

Rich with design and colour - airy vaulted ceilings with whimsical lighting features and stunning art pieces.

Opening Times:

This gastronomic experience serves dinner nightly or Private Parties

Dress Code: Resort Elegant

Passion by Martin Berasategui is accessible to local residents and visitors.