

Going Out › Restaurants

# Going Out with...Nemanja Borjanovic: The Serbian restaurateur behind London's best of Basque

Ben Norum meets the Serbian you'd think was Spanish, who runs Donostia and Lurra restaurants along with premium wine and beef import businesses

**BEN NORUM** | Wednesday 25 November 2015 | [0](#) comments



Foodies: Nemanja with his partner and co-owner of Lurra, Melody Adams

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**If you've enjoyed top Basque food in London, then there's a high chance that Nemanja Borjanovic has been behind it in one way or other.**

Not only does he run restaurants Donostia and Lurra in Marylebone with his partner Melody, but he's also behind two import businesses bringing Spanish wine and beef to the capital.

**You were born in Serbia. How did you end up specialising in Spanish food in London?**

Although I was born in Serbia, I lived in London with my parents between the ages of 10 and 15. After that I went to high school in Belgrade but returned to London for university.

When I graduated I started working in the City, but I hated it. I set-up up a wine importing business on the side, which I hoped would grow so I could leave. It was this that led my girlfriend and I to visit wineries in San Sebastian in the Basque region of Spain. We fell in love with the area and the food, and decided to open a restaurant inspired by it – Donostia.

**And what was the thinking behind opening Lurra across the road?**

We never thought we would open a second restaurant, but when we spotted the site it just felt like a good option – Donostia was so busy that we needed extra room. Opening so close was a big risk, but it paid off.



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## What do you think of the Spanish food scene in London?

There are a lot of excellent Spanish restaurants, but I think the focus is still very much on mainstream Spanish. Our Basque concept is more unusual – it is riding the Spanish wave but without paella, sangria and the more touristy side of Spanish food.

## Do you think this is changing?

Yes, but not particularly quickly. I think of it in a similar way to Thai food. There was always green curry and and red curry available, but not much else and now there's lots more choice and many regional variations. The same is happening with Spanish food.



Basque beef: A marbled steak, as served at Lurra

## Your beef importing business **Txuleta** specialises in old cows, is that right?

Yes. We import Galician and Basque dairy cows which lived to be much older than many will ever get. Most cows in this country and others are slaughtered at the age of two or three, but our cows live until they are at least eight, often 10 and sometimes 14.

These cows are fatter, which leads to more marbling in the meat and a lot more flavour. They are also all free range and grass fed – they have a depth of flavour which is similar to that of an oak-aged red wine.

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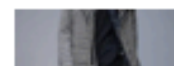
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### **This beef is on the menu at Lurra, but where else?**

We supply a lot of London restaurants – in fact, sometimes it's hard to get enough beef to go around. The beef is on the menu at [Chiltern Firehouse](#), [Kitty Fisher's](#), [Goodman](#), [Barrafina](#), [Brindisa](#) and [Bar Esteban](#) among others.

### **And can it be bought to cook at home?**

Yes, it's available at [Turner & George](#) in Clerkenwell.



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### **Does your wine company [Mountain Valley Wines](#) specialise particularly in Basque wines? Where do you supply?**

We sell a lot of Basque wine as well as bottles from small producers across Spain, but we also offer American, Croatian and other wines. We supply [Goodman](#), [Vinoteca](#) and [Granger & Co](#) among others – plus Donostia and Lurra, of course.

### **Do you find that it helps to be on both sides of the supply chain?**

Yes, definitely. Having my own restaurants where I stock the products I'm selling sets me apart from being just another salesperson trying to flog a product – I have a vested interest beyond the solely commercial.

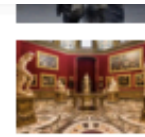
### **Have you got any more projects up your sleeve? Another restaurant, maybe?**

Definitely no more restaurants! I've had enough. Restaurants involve a lot of employees and are really difficult businesses to run – two is enough.

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