

**THE GENTLEMEN OF  
LE BASQUE SERVE UP  
CULINARY ARTISTRY.**

BY JOHN DANGARAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
CHRISTINA MENDENHALL



*Symphony  
of the  
Senses*



Alex Muguerza, president of Le Basque, has the kind of vision that sets the stage for a legendary event.



On either side, Muguerza is flanked by his business partners, Executive Vice President Ian Perris and Chief Operating Officer Jim Mozina. Muguerza may be taking the creative lead, but the three circle and dance around one another, each taking in the situation from a different angle. Today, everything will take place outdoors: the hors d'oeuvres, the cocktails and the buffet. Once a decision is made, as fast as they came together, they break: Perris corrals the waitstaff, Mozina orchestrates arrangements and Muguerza heads to the kitchen.

Donning a pair of plaid pants, a thinly striped guayabera with a popped collar and thick-rimmed glasses hanging off the top button of his shirt, Muguerza exudes confidence with creative flair. A few dashes of salt-and-pepper are sprinkled over his neatly trimmed beard and slicked back

comb-over. In contrast, Perris is clean shaven. Streaks of silver shine through his flyaway hair. His years of experience within the service industry are obvious. Even at ease, he stands tall with both hands clasped behind his back. On first glance, he comes across as the most serious of the three, but gives himself away when he cracks a wide smile. Mozina sports a dark beard and khaki chinos. The sleeves of his blue plaid button-up are rolled to the elbows. He seems to be giving everything a calculated look as if trying to figure out how to make Muguerza's concepts reality.

The three partners may seem like an unlikely trio: Muguerza, a Basque, was once a corporate lawyer; Mozina, a Canadian by way of the Midwest, was an engineer; and Perris, an Englishman, ran some of the most prestigious households in Britain,

including that of the Lord Mayor of London, Dorothy de Rothschild and the late Earl Spencer — father of the late Diana, Princess of Wales. But together they founded Le Basque in the winter of 1992. "We all have our *métier* in the company," Mozina tells me. "I'm more logistics in the office. Ian deals with staff and service on a day-to-day basis; and Alex is coming up with new menu ideas, bringing menu ideas back from the Basque country. We all have our focus, and we also intermingle in each other's jobs." The three do have one thing in common: their love for the Basque Country.

In case you are unfamiliar, the Basque Country is an autonomous region in a northern corner of Spain. It is sometimes difficult to define on a map, as it culturally

transcends the borders between the northwest of Spain and southwest France. Though Le Basque takes its cues from this part of the world, the approach is decidedly international.

"[Our] recipes are from and inspired by Basque dishes, but then we give them a twist," says Muguerza. "You go to a traditional Basque restaurant [and] you know you are eating incredibly well, but then you go to one of the three Michelin Stars in San Sebastian, and what you are eating is fusion. It's fusion with a Basque touch."

Le Basque specializes in personalized catering and event planning for corporate and private clients. No two projects are alike, quite simply because no two events are the same. They seem to

really enjoy focusing on the distinct features of each client, the event space and the guests who will be in attendance. The "party reflects the best of the clients themselves," explains Muguerza. "It's almost like branding themselves. It's customized to them."

Le Basque does have a recognizable style though. Much like a piece by a well-known artist, you can instantly tell who is behind the creation, even if you are unable to express how you know it. Le Basque has its own

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Poised and proper, Ian Perris believes the key to a successful event is discretion.



The moment he arrives Alejandro Muguerza, president of high-end catering company Le Basque, is on the patio setting up. In his mind, he is arranging trays laden with food, garnishing nonexistent cocktails and filling imaginary Champagne flutes. As he moves, he directs what should go where and when each dish should exit the kitchen. He's like a thundering thoroughbred straight out of the gates.



A consummate engineer, Jim Mozina sees to it that creative visions become sublime reality.



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signature. It could be the décor, the warm ambient lighting, the uniformed staff, the seamless service or a combination of all of these. In fact, authenticity and seamlessness are crucial when they stage events. "One of the most important things in catering is the look of the whole event," says Perris. "If it's a private house... you don't want it to look catered or produced."

Mozina takes this concept a step further, "A big part of

what we do is disappearing. We wouldn't be working in the kitchen. We would be working in the garage, because we'd want it to look like the home is undisturbed," he says. "We always try to hide and disappear and blend in, and make the home, the guests and the environment the star."

That's something Mozina believes sets his company apart. "I think a lot of caterers have it backwards where they have all the waiters with the logo," he says pointing at his chest, "The napkins are printed, there's business cards on the table. They think it's a corporate meet and greet. It's not; it's a private affair."

Perris emphatically agrees, "At the end of the day it should help doing the party. That's the look you want."

"The best compliment to a hostess is: 'Oh, I didn't know it was catered,'" says Mozina.

"Sometimes people find it's a big hurdle to hire a caterer... they may feel it's a point of pride. Our goal is to make it look like there is no caterer in your home."

"It has to be discreet," Perris insists. "Discretion is very important. That's a big part of the company."

So what's their take on the holidays and all the entertaining that usually takes place at that time? "I think what's nice about the holidays are the traditions," Mozina explains. "We've had some clients who've had the exact same menu for 20 years. They don't want something modern they saw in a restaurant or hotel yesterday. They want something that reminds them of being with family. Sometimes we'll be cooking the recipe of their grandmothers. Everyone has in their mind a little bit of a Norman Rockwell scene of what a holiday party



Chef Mike Veloz is the man in the kitchen at many Le Basque events, making everything from Quail with Fagiole and Potato Parmentier to Salmon Tartare.



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should have in it. You have to have some of those elements for it to feel authentic.”

Of course, talk about holiday plans is not complete without a discussion on how to throw a proper New Year's Eve bash.

“A lot of drink,” says Perris. “A bar is vital. I think the food is really secondary. You need food, but it should be a late-night type of food.”

“The ideal food for New Year's is a buffet,” adds Mozina.

“You're never going to rope everyone into arriving at a certain time. They're coming from many different places. You just want people to be done eating with enough time to get happy before the clock strikes, and from that point on it's just drink. Then maybe at two or three o'clock in the morning you can pass some little hot things.”

In retrospect, looking at all the work that took place throughout the day, what's left is a gorgeous setting with a staff that is impeccably dressed, knowledgeable and prepared to serve. It's pure magic. As much as the event is staged — with menu and presentation carefully calculated — it all comes across as incredibly natural. And that is what Le Basque does.

There are no unplanned props. The bar is not set near the koi pond because it looks pretty. It's there because when guests decide to head to the patio, their eyes naturally

gravitate toward the water. There is no better place to make a drink and explore the deeper recesses of the property's lush landscape. That kind of forethought entices guests farther into a home.

At any given moment someone could walk up the to the bar and pour themselves a drink or help themselves at the buffet table.

There is indeed magic in what Le Basque does. Their execution often makes the time spent at an event feel surreal. But it's actually the honesty of their conviction and the sheer delight they take in what they do that has me daydreaming about taking off to northern Spain. •

*Hair and makeup: JPenn Hair and Makeup Artist  
Photos shot on location at the Betancourt family home, an enchanting tropical estate within Snapper Creek Lakes in Coral Gables. For more information, contact Vivian R. Serralta with EWM Realty International at 305.960.2616.*

