



Jordi Valles

Agua Restaurant's Executive Chef

by Lauren Johnson

Star chef Jordi Valles has been impressing Beijing with his innovative Spanish cuisine for several years. We sit down with the busy executive chef at Agua to talk beer, food and the finer things in life. With a strong passion for innovative, cutting-edge food pairings and culinary creations, Valles discusses the best use of beer when cooking, and after the fact. Plus, we take a peek at what one of Beijing's best chefs drinks when he's off the clock.

How long have you been with Agua?

I'm now working with Agua 3.5 years.

What types of cuisine are you bringing to the restaurant?

In our restaurant we do Spanish cuisine.

Why is there such a diverse food culture in China's major first-tier cities?

The capitals are always full of different food cultures because it is where the main part of the foreign population is living, working or doing business. And is also where the Chinese are more curious to try different food cultures.

Agua is a beautiful restaurant with beautiful food and drinks; does it attract a similarly beautiful crowd?

Agua is a cozy place with nice food, drinks and design as well, and of course this is an attraction for everybody who is looking for this kind of experience. We have all kinds of customers: business people, couples, birthdays, top models, and famous people. On the weekends we also have families for brunch. I think Agua is for everybody who likes to enjoy food and wine and a good atmosphere. Now we are opening our bar till 1am and it is becoming the place for hospitality people to grab a drink after work. (40rmb cocktails every day after 10am at the bar).

Have you ever cooked with beer?

I was doing a kind of beer dough for pizza in my set lunch, but in Spain we don't cook too much with beer.

Do you sell beer at Agua? Which ones?

We have Estrella Damm and also other imports (Hoegaarden, Duvel, Brooklyn Lager, and more).

What types of recipes would you suggest to people who are interested in cooking with beer?

Well I used to work with a Czechoslovak friend and he was always recommending me to cook pork with beer; he was a lover of this dish.

Beer is no longer seen as the "pub slosh" it once was. There are very creative chefs working with brewmasters to come up with innovative tastes. And, around the world, beer drinking is on the rise. Your thoughts on this?

Beer, as with wine, is a drink that you can have any time of the day- lunch, afternoon, evening, dinner, and it is good to have different kinds of beers to choose, [depending on] the mood you are in.

In terms of pairing foods with drinks, how much is the Agua menu set up to suggest complimenting drinks/food?

Well, everything depends on what you do for food, but in Agua we never did a beer-dinner.. yet!

Any suggestions for beers you love or beers you wish were in China?

Some of my favorite ones are Duvel, Guinness, Franziskaner, Chimay White, Brooklyn Lager. One of my favorites that is still not here is Voll-Damm, also from Barcelona.

Your thoughts on the recent surge in microbreweries and craft beers around China?

I always drink bottled beer. Of course if there is an interesting tap beer I do that too, but I'm very faithful with my favorite beers.