

# S P A I N GOURMETOUR

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

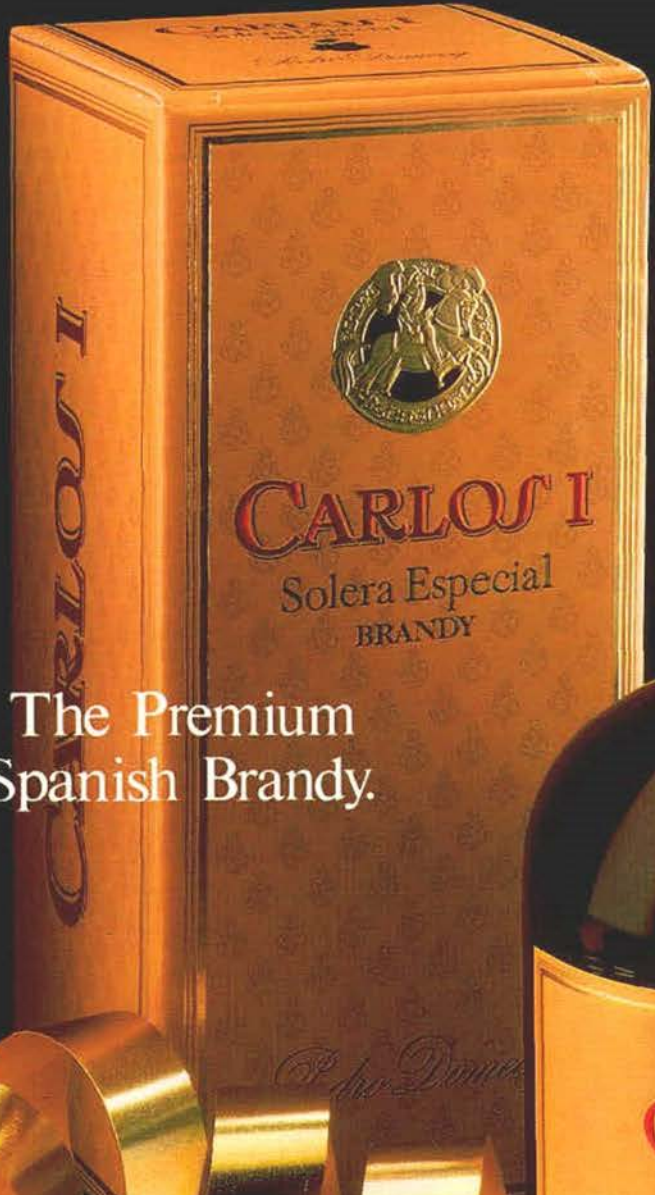


## ASPARAGUS OF NAVARRE

A GOURMET TREAT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

SPANISH CHEESE ACROSS THE BOARD

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO, THE LONGEST WALK



The Premium  
Spanish Brandy.



**CARLOS I**  
DOMECQ

# Contents

4th quarter 1989

**T**he small region of Navarra in north-eastern Spain, producer of great wines and the best vegetables, has a star product in its gardens: asparagus. Navarre asparagus is of exceptional quality and can be incredibly large. It is packaged in water, ready to eat, using the most modern technology. How many unexpected meals have been saved simply by having a few cans of asparagus and mayonnaise at home? Undoubtedly, plenty! But packaged asparagus also lends itself to many more elaborate culinary preparations, with the advantage of being available throughout the year, regardless of good or bad harvests.

Navarra, however, is not just a garden. Many churches and buildings of artistic interest are the legacy left by pilgrims who traveled across the region for centuries on the Camino de Santiago, or St. James Way, which stretches across Spain from Aragón to Galicia. A center of pilgrimage for millions of people in medieval times, the Camino de Santiago is without doubt the oldest cultural route in Europe. Today thousands of visitors, who in one way or another are looking for something different and authentic, still travel the route to its final destination, the marvelous city of Santiago de Compostela.

Surely those ancient pilgrims had an opportunity to sample the cheeses of the regions they crossed. Although Spain is not well-known as a cheese-making country, numerous varieties are made here thanks to Spain's diversity of climates and customs. We here at SPAIN GOURMETOUR want to introduce them, starting with the most classic of all: Manchego cheese.

And so that your Christmas menu will not be the same this year, chef Irizar presents a very special collection of Christmas dishes gathered from the different regions of Spain.

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#### COVER

*Still Life by Menchu Artime*  
*Photography by Anna Löscher*  
*Design by ANC*

#### WINES

The New Wines of La Mancha. 38

#### GASTRONOMY

Luis Irizar's Suggestions for Putting Spain on your Christmas Table. 4  
Tapa-Tasting in Santiago. 24  
Casa Vilas. A Taste of Galicia. 62

#### PRODUCTS

Spanish Cheese across the Board. 30  
La Mancha. Source of Spanish Classics. 45  
Asparagus of Navarre. A Gourmet Treat at your Fingertips. 52  
Canned Fruits of Spain. 66

#### TOURISM

Camino de Santiago. The Longest Walk. 14  
Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims' Progress. 20  
Hostal de los Reyes Católicos. Five Stars for Five Centuries. 27  
Spain Through Foreign Eyes. They Came, They Saw... and Wrote about it. 70

#### ART

The Shepherd's Worship. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.

#### RECIPES

##### FIRST COURSE

Garlic-Dressed Cauliflower and Potatoes. 6  
Manchego Cheese Salad. 50  
Manchego Cheese Sauce. 50  
Aubergines with Cheese. 50  
Cheese and Bacon Cake. 50  
Fresh Boiled Asparagus. 61  
Asparagus and Salmon Gratinee. 61  
Mixed Vegetables with Asparagus. 61  
Puff Pastry Filled with Asparagus and Norway Lobster Tails. 61  
Coquille Saint Jacques. 64

##### MAIN COURSE

Sea-Bass in Sparkling Wine with Wild Mushrooms. 8  
Roast Snipe Flambé with Sherry Brandy, Served with Potato Puffs. 10  
Asparagus with Clams and Poached Eggs. 61  
Stewed Hock of Beef. 64

##### DESSERTS

Yule Log. 12  
Fried Cheese. 50  
Imperial Cheese Mould. 50  
Ground Almond Tast. 64  
Filled Pancakes. 64

#### MAIN EXPORTERS

D. O. La Mancha Wine. 77  
D. O. Manchego Cheese. 77  
Canned Asparagus of Navarre. 77  
Canned Fruits. 79

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Round about this time of year, our thoughts at Spain Gourmet generally turn to Christmas Dinner. This annual feast, eaten at night on Christ-

mas Eve or at lunchtime on the day itself, is an institution throughout the western world though the menu can vary considerably. Regular readers will recall that in the past we have given recipes for the most traditional Spanish Christmas classics, like almond soup, sea-bream, and turkey. This year our suggested menu is a little more adventurous, made up of dishes from different regions of Spain. This is still traditional Christmas food, but with a difference.

The menu was thought up and cooked for us by Luis Irizar of Madrid's *Restaurante Irizar*, long considered a mecca of Basque cuisine. Irizar is, quite simply, the tops and his name is uttered with awe by the maestros of Spanish cuisine, many of whom are graduates of his kitchen. Basque-born Irizar believes that one of the duties of any cook is to ensure that his art is passed on to succeeding generations, which explains why there are so many young people on his staff. To his delight, one of his four daughters, Visitación, has inherited his flair and is now his indispensable assistant.

When we briefed him about what we wanted — a regional Christmas menu that was traditional yet different — Luis Irizar came up with several options. We chose this particular combination not only for its obvious attractions but also because the ingredients are easy to come by outside Spain.

Irizar also suggested the wines to accompany each course, and specified that he would start off with a very cold dry sherry. As an alternative, you could consider drinking a good cava all the way through, from aperitif to dessert.

To provide a suitably stylish setting for this undeniably stylish menu, we chose dishes, glasses, linen and so on from Artespaña, the nationalized chain of shops which promotes and sells work by Spanish

Art Direction:  
**Menchu Artime**  
Photos:  
**Antonio de Benito**  
Chef: **Luis Irizar**  
Text: **Sonia Ortega**



S T I O N S F O R P U T T I N G



C H R I S T M A S T A B L E

# La Rioja

A simple dish to start with, typical of La Rioja — a region as famous in Spain for its vegetables as it is for its wine. Cauliflower is at its best at this time of year.

## GARLIC-DRESSED CAULIFLOWER AND POTATOES

*(Coliflor con patatas al ajillo)*

Serves 4

1 large cauliflower

1 kg potatoes

1 dl olive oil

2 cloves garlic, finely sliced

salt

Put a pan of salted water on to boil while you peel the potatoes and cut them into largish chunks. Boil them for 5 minutes, then add the cauliflower divided into florets. Allow to cook for 10 minutes longer, then drain well and place in a serving dish. Heat the olive oil in a little frying pan, then fry the garlic slices until golden. Pour the lot over the vegetables and serve.

**WINE:** A D.O. wine from Penedés, such as Pescador de Perelada.

**Dishes:** Castellón pottery  
**Glasses:** Majorcan blown glass  
**Cutlery:** Meneses, made in Madrid  
**Linen:** Lagartera (Salamanca)





# Catalonia

Sea-bass, one of the most delicately-flavoured fish, makes a change from the traditional sea-bream or *angulas* (baby eels). This dish, usually cooked with white wine, is now made with cava in Catalonia.

## SEA-BASS IN SPARKLING WINE WITH WILD MUSHROOMS (*Lubina al cava con rovellons*)

Serves 4

4 pieces of sea-bass weighing 250 gr each

1 carrot, 1/2 leek, 1/2 onion, all cut into fine strips

100 gr butter

2 finely chopped shallots

200 gr wild mushrooms, cleaned and finely sliced

2 glasses cava

1 ladleful fish stock

100 gr single cream

8 potatoes

salt and pepper

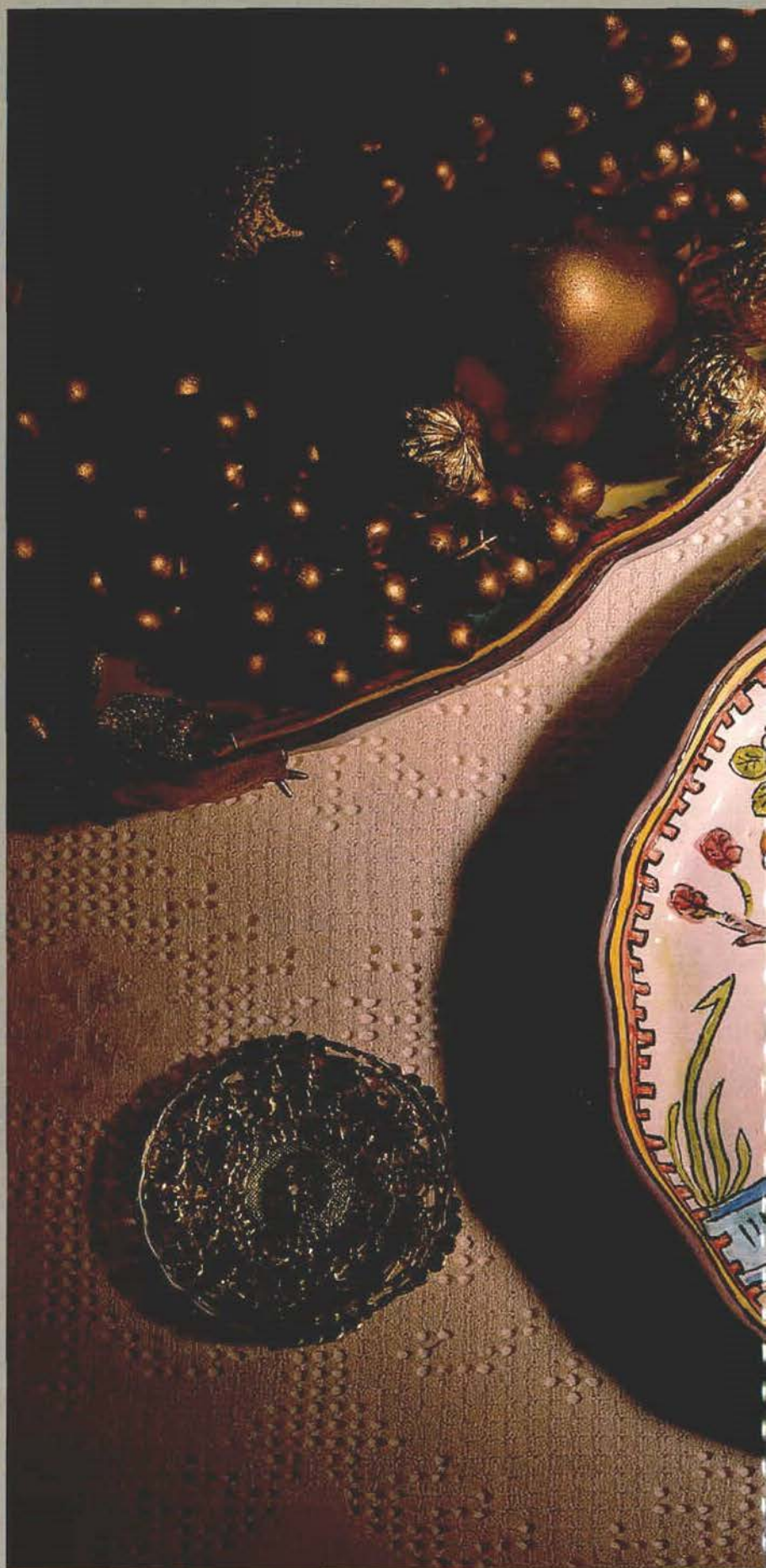
Place the pieces of fish, seasoned with salt and pepper, in an ovenproof dish with the butter, chopped shallots and mushrooms, and pour over the cava and the fish stock. Place the dish in the oven, preheated to 160 degrees C (320 degrees F) for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, boil the vegetable strips for 5 minutes and, separately, the potatoes until done, and set aside. Transfer the fish to a serving dish, and top with the mushrooms and the vegetable strips. Reduce the cooking liquid from the fish by about a third, then add the cream. Reduce further until the sauce is thick and rich, check the seasoning, then pour over the fish. Serve with the boiled potatoes sprinkled with chopped parsley.

**WINE:** Cava or the wine you served with the cauliflower.

**Dishes:** Ebanar pottery from Valencia, hand-painted by a family of craftsmen with 150 years of experience

**Glasses:** Catalan glass

**Linen:** Lagartera (Salamanca)





# The Basque Country

Connoisseurs consider snipe the queen of game birds. In the Basque Country it sometimes outsts the venerable turkey.

**ROAST SNIPE FLAMBE  
WITH SHERRY BRANDY,  
SERVED WITH POTATO PUFFS**  
(*Becada asada flambeada al brandy  
de jerez con patatas soufflés*)

1 snipe per person

1 large crouton per person

1 slice fat bacon per person

a little oil or goose or duck fat

1 glass sherry brandy

*mousse de foie* (light liver paste)

salt and pepper

potatoes

Clean the snipe ready for roasting but do not gut them yet (you will be using the giblets for the sauce). Place the birds in a greased roasting tin, a slice of bacon over the breast of each, season with salt and pepper and place in a medium to high oven for 15 minutes, basting frequently. Remove from the oven and spoon out the giblets. Discard the stomach then mash the rest with a spoon together with a little *mousse de foie* and a dash of brandy.

Spread each crouton with the resulting paste and place a bird on top. Use the rest of the paste as the basis for the sauce, adding a little water and more brandy. Pour a little sauce over each bird before serving, and put the rest on the table in a sauceboat. Serve with potato puffs.

**POTATO PUFFS:** Peel good, healthy potatoes, square them off and cut up lengthwise into 3 mm slices. Wash in cold water and dry well on kitchen paper. Drop them one by one into hot, but not very hot, oil, gradually turning up the heat. Keep the pan moving constantly and when the potatoes are almost done (they will start to rise to the surface), remove and drain them with a large slotted spoon and transfer to another pan of clean, very hot oil, where they will puff up immediately. Drain well and sprinkle with salt.

**WINE:** *Viña Contino 82* or another Rioja of the same year, such as *Viña Ardanza* or *Viña Arana*.

**Dishes:** Imperio design by La Cartuja (Sevilla)

**Glasses:** Reproduction of glasses once made in the Royal Glass Factory of La Granja (Segovia), currently made in Madrid

**Cutlery:** Meneses (Madrid)

**Linens:** Lagartera (Salamanca)





# Madrid

A Yule Log is always irresistibly evocative of Christmas at home by the fireside. Not all Spanish Christmas Dinners have a special dessert, though there is always *turrón* (almond nougat) and marzipan galore.

## YULE LOG (*Brazo de Nochebuena*)

### SPONGE

8 egg yolks

250 gr sugar

200 gr flour

7 eggs whites, beaten stiff

zest of lemon

chocolate icing

### CUSTARD

1 litre milk

6 egg yolks

250 gr sugar

50 gr cornflour

30 gr flour

vanilla essence

Beat the egg yolks with the sugar and the lemon zest in a warm bowl, gradually folding in the flour and finally the beaten egg whites. Spread the mixture in a thin layer in a greased and floured baking tin and bake in a low oven for 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from the tin, spread with custard (made with the above ingredients) and roll up. Place on a wire rack and coat with chocolate icing, aiming for a log-like texture.

**WINE:** Time for a dessert wine. A *fondillón* from Alicante would be perfect, though hard to come by. Otherwise, an Osborne Cream sherry would do very nicely.

**Dishes:** Hand-made by Madrid based craftsmen  
**Glasses:** Reproduction of the glasses once made in the Royal Glass Factory of La Granja (Segovia)  
**Linen:** Lagartera (Salamanca)





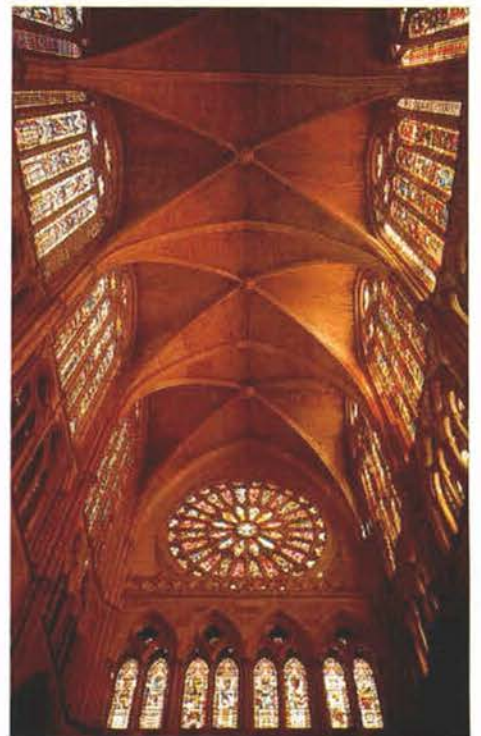


# THE LONGEST WALK

Text: Robert Latona  
Photos: TURESPAÑA

Each year, pilgrims from all over the world follow the Route of Santiago from the French border to the shrine of Saint James in Galicia, just as millions have done before them.

*The first waves of pilgrims began to trudge along the tracks leading from León, Castile and Navarre as a spontaneous act of religious fervor.*



**N**ot a car in sight for miles, not even a solitary cow out straying in the fields. Here on the edge of the lush, rain-lashed valleys where Galicia is at its steepest is the last place on earth you'd expect to find a footsore but determined backpacker braving the 1,300 metre ascent from Piedrafita.

Inside a newly-rebuilt hostelry next to a 10th-century chapel, from behind a curtain of heavy-duty hiking socks hung up to dry in front of the smouldering log fire, there comes an enthusiastic polyglot garble of German, English and broken Spanish.

Warmth, wine, and the fellowship of the road have brought together a mixed half-dozen pilgrims just come into the home stretch of the medieval trek that would bring them in sight of the twin spires of Santiago cathedral within a week.

How did they happen to coincide here at O Cebreiro, on a flange of the Sierra de los Ancares straddling the provinces of León and Lugo? Simply by following the stone causeways laid by Roman legionnaires, medieval cow-paths and superimposed Spanish motorways to retrace the route that once channelled up to half a million people in a year through the Pyrenees, across the hills, walled fortress-cities and rocky wastelands of northern Spain, all the way to the ends of the earth — literally the end, so far as anyone knew in those days.

Six hundred years ago, on arrival in Santiago, you would be assured of receiving something worthwhile in exchange for your trouble: the perpetual remission of a lifetime's worth of sins, and a chance to jump any queue forming at the pearly gates of paradise.

Nowadays, the Church puts no such sweeping guarantee, though you do get an embossed certificate (called the *Compostelana*) from the sacristy of the cathedral, upon demonstrating that you have walked, cycled, or ridden on horseback, for at least 100 km. (62 miles) of the 800 km. (500 miles) Way of Santiago. No one insists that the pilgrimage be undertaken for doctrinaire religious reasons — certainly not Canon García, who is in charge of administering the pilgrim arrangements. But some sort of spiritual, preferably Christian commitment is required.

You are welcome to spend up to three nights in some of the numerous convents and Church-run establishments clustered in the Galician capital, and the management of the luxury Hostal de los Reyes Católicos will stand you three simple, nourishing meals daily in the upstairs employees' dining area, up to ten people at a time (see box).



***It is not always easy  
for today's pilgrim to know with  
precision that  
he is on the road.***

Last year over 2,000 people young and old, male and female, of almost any nationality you might care to name, made the pilgrimage. Spanish frontier guards say the numbers have been doubling each year since the early 1980s.

Whatever their motivation may be — and this goes for devout Catholics, adventurous -alternative- travellers, and the culture-conscious tourist with an insatiable appetite for Romanesque apses and naves — nobody who sets out on the pilgrimage is particularly bothered by the open question of who the bone fragments in the crypt under the cathedral's main altar may or may not have belonged to.

### **SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE**

Early in the 9th century AD, word first began to get around that a sarcophagus containing the remains of St. James the Apostle had washed ashore at the former Roman capital of Iria Flavia, some 40 km. south of present-day Santiago. Already there was a story that the saint had been dispatched to the Iberian peninsula to have a go at converting the inhabitants, and returned to Jerusalem where he suffered martyrdom.

With some angelic help, his followers shipped the relics back to Galicia, where they remained hidden away until a local hermit was directed to the spot by a divine light. Hence one possible derivation of -Compostela-, from *campus stellae*, the field of the star. (Another theory links it with the Latin word for a burial site.)

Christian kingdoms of the peninsula were still very much on the defensive following the Moorish take-over of Iberia, so it is easy to see how the gentlest of Christ's disciples became transformed into *Santiago matamoros*, the sword-waving scourge of Islam and Spain's patron saint.

Almost as soon as the earliest, successively more grandiose basilicas went up by royal decree to house the holy relics, the first waves of pilgrims began to trudge along the dirt tracks leading from León, Castile and Navarre as a spontaneous act of religious fervour. The migration was well underway in 951, when the bishop of Le Puy, in south-western France, got his name down on the parchments as the first dignitary of consequence to cross the Pyrenees expressly for the purpose of paying homage at the shrine of St. James.

By the early years of the 12th century, the multinational mix could have included Franks, Normans, Scots, Basques, Saxons, Bretons, Cornishmen, Sicilians, Cretans and Bulgars, identified as pilgrims by the scallop shells they carried.

-To that place come the poor, the rich, criminals, knights, princes, governors, the blind, the crippled, the well-to-do, the nobility, the heroes, the dignitaries, bishops, abbots; some arriving barefoot, others completely destitute of means, and still others weighed down by iron they bear as a sign of penitence.-

-Some, like the Greeks, carry a cross in their hands, others distribute their remaining possessions among the poor; others come with offerings of lead or iron to be used in the construction of the basilica dedicated to the Apostle, and some of them carry iron chains and manacles slung over their shoulders, from which, as likewise from the tyrant's prison, they were delivered by the grace of the Apostle, doing penance and bewailing their sins.-

Always there was a minority of idle wastrels living off the hospitality of their fellow Christians. The Church was much at pains to suppress this itinerant sub-culture, and as late as the 16th century an abbots' conclave had to be held at Roncesvalles to deal with a wave of mountebanks falsely claiming to have suffered captivity in the Moorish jails of Turkey and Algiers.

Most real pilgrims came in fulfilment of some personal vow in exchange for divine favours received or a miraculous recovery from illness. Some made the journey in obedience to a testamentary obligation that would deliver a departed relative that much sooner out of purgatory. Merit received was transferrable from one heavenly account to another, and pilgrims-for-hire plied their trade on behalf of well-off sinners.

Others went because they had to, as a penitential act for their sins and often enough for some infringement of worldly laws as well. Recently, judges in Belgium have revived the practice, offering juvenile offenders the choice between hoofing it for the 1,600 km. (932 miles) from Paris to Santiago, or serving out their sentence in the reformatory.

## 20th C. PILGRIMS

Don Emiliano is the parish priest of Castrojeriz, just the right distance from Burgos — about 28 kilometres due west across the bleak Castilian meseta — to make for an easy day's walk and welcome stop-over in the shadow of the 18th century castle still lordling over the hillside town.

-Pilgrims? We're prepared to handle 20 or 30 of them at a time-, he says. But only occasionally in summer do you get that many all at once. The rest of the year is mostly a trickle that starts picking up along towards the end of April.

*"... All those millions of people who have made the journey before you, they've left something of themselves behind."*



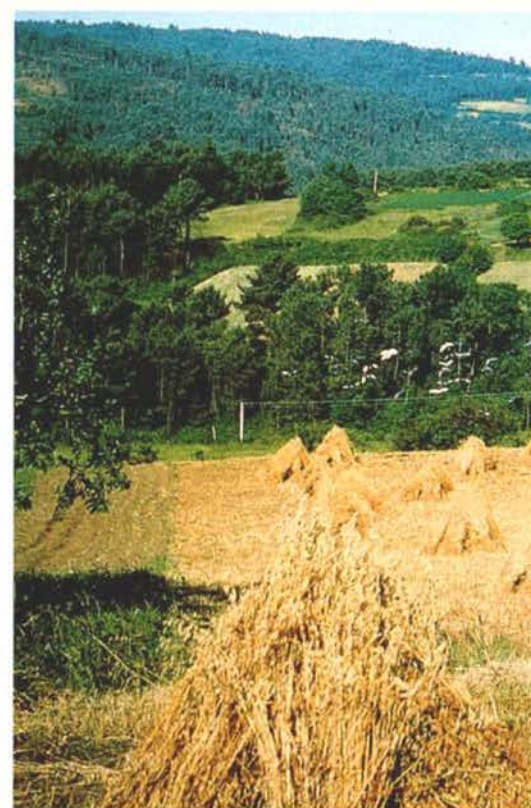
*The today's Hostal of San Marcos, in León, is the ancient pilgrim's hospital, a huge building transformed in the 1970's into a luxury hotel.*



Asked how many appear to be making the trek for religious reasons, Don Emiliano drums his fingers for a long moment on the rectory table. -Maybe one in every four, it's hard to say. I really don't like to ask. But they are all good people to begin with. Why else would they go on such a long journey?

-We do what we can. There's always bread, wine, cheese and *chorizo* to spare if they're really hungry, but most go to the *fonda* for a hot meal. Our doctor is a good man; he's treated more cases of swollen feet and sunstroke than I can keep count, and never charges them a thing.

-I'll have Vicente the sacristan show you the place we're fixing up: it's an old schoolhouse. Nothing very fancy, just concrete bunks and cold showers, but it'll do when you're tired and worn out



from walking. We don't get too many complaints. Once in a while the Germans say they aren't used to the food...-

Vicente takes us round to the hostelry, still tangled in the stonemasons' scaffolding. -Two million pesetas it's costing-, he notes proudly.

Out at the back there is a walled-off courtyard. -For the animals-, he says. Do that many people actually pass through on a beast of burden or with one in tow?

-Last week we had this young Frenchwoman with a donkey. Her little girl was travelling with her, you see. And then she met this man somewhere back along the road. I forget where he said he was from. The donkey was for the little girl, a fine-looking beast it was — the donkey, I mean. She had just been divorced...-



***Nowadays, not that much has changed of the successive landscapes through which the journey unfolds.***

Rather than backtrack to make sure we don't go away thinking it was the donkey that got the divorce, Vicente decides to let the story trail off as is.

Just outside of Castrojeriz, there is a ruined Gothic arch whose finely-chiselled stonework has survived in better condition than the 14th century monastery it once supported. The niche where the long extinct order of Antonines left out baskets of food for passing pilgrims and the stone font at which they slaked their thirst are still intact.

It is not always so easy for today's pilgrim to know with such precision that he is on *the road*, the 11th century -Camino Francés-. For just under half the distance from the Pyrenees to Santiago the traveller has to resign himself to dodging whizzing traffic on the shoulder of

modern motorways, like the N-VI from Madrid to La Coruña.

Time and topography offer no guarantees of authenticity regarding the dirt tracks that run parallel to the roads, and braid in and out on each side. It's a good sign you're on the old path if you find yourself up to your ankles in manure. The medieval route is too practical in its layout to go neglected by farmers still living in the towns and villages it connects.

The road apart, what of the successive landscapes through which the journey unfolds? Really not that much has changed if you compare what you see now with what was set down in the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, a helpful guidebook for Santiago-bound travellers written about 1130 by one Aymery Picaud, a monk at the Clunian abbey of Parthenay-le-Vieux.

If your Latin is up to the job, you may leaf through the manuscript in Santiago cathedral looking in vain for contemporary sightseeing tips or nuances of individual observation. Not a pilgrimage in the 12th century was but the sort of thing anyone did for fun, and Picaud wrote a practical survival handbook because that is what his readers needed.

Prominence is given to the useful hint that might just prove a last-minute lifesaver: an out-of-the-way spring of drinking water, the best way to get across the Ebro, and how to orient by natural landmarks to keep yourself from getting lost in the mountains of Lugo.

There are some, mostly scathing, asides on the characters and customs of the region through which he journeyed, and cautionary admonitions about contemporary tourist traps. It was handy indeed to know exactly where you were most likely to be devoured by wolves, massacred by highwaymen, or fleeced out of your last sou by a cunning innkeeper.

Picaud seems to have carried a particular grudge against Navarre, whose inhabitants are lambasted for their impiety and bizarre, unspecified sexual practices; and liked Galicia best of all — just as many modern pilgrims report — though taking note of its primitiveness.

Picaud was very thorough about setting down the good and bad points of every stop along the way, -so that the pilgrims who journey to Santiago are forewarned by these remarks of the provision that must be made for expenses along the way.-

There follows the monk's itinerary, exactly the same one the pilgrim follows today. Estella, -a fertile land, with good bread, most excellent wine, meat and fish, a source of every type of delight-; Logroño, Nájera, Santo Domingo, Villafranca, Burgos, Frómista, Carrión and Sahagún, -prodigious in every kind of goods, where is found the meadow of which it is said the champions of God's glory stuck their lances into the ground which did thereupon burst into flower.-

And so on, to the royal court of León, then Astorga, Rabanal, the barren Monte Irago, Ponferrada, the valley of Valarce to O Cebreiro, where Galicia begins.

That night at O Cebreiro, Juan, a 62-year-old shepherd from Vich in Catalonia, rolled a cigarette and confessed that he had been guilty of -cheating- along the way.

-Doctor's orders-, he said. -I can't manage all the 40 kilometre stretches like these hot-blooded youngsters here-, indicating his companion Jaime, who looks to be a tender 45 if he's a day. -I walk as far as I can, then ring for a taxi to fetch me to the next village and wait for Jaime to catch up.-

Paternina



Greatness from Rioja.



That being the case, why push on at the cost of so much effort and possible risk to his health? Jaume answers. -Because once he's made up his mind, that's it. The priest in our town tried to talk him into going to Lourdes after his operation — he had a kidney removed — but I think he's had the idea in his head for years and was just looking for a good excuse to do it.-

Both agree that the most memorable part of their journey was the empty stretch of tableland between Burgos and Castrojeriz. -No people, no animals, not even birds out there. Just the open sky and this incredible stillness all day long. It gives you a feeling of inner peace like nothing you've ever experienced before.-

Juan excuses himself to make a call to his family back in Vich, and Jaume takes advantage of his friend's absence to add. -He sold one of his cows to pay for this trip.

-Do you know what he likes best about the whole thing? Just stopping to talk with the other shepherds and field-hands he meets along the way. He loves it. It's a funny thing, I guess. City folk like you and I could chat for hours, and still not be communicating the way they do.-

## A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

From the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*: "... once you are past the mountain of Cebreiro, you have come to the land of the Galicians; an agreeable land abundant in forests, rivers, meadows, prolific apple orchards, excellent fruit and crystalline springs, though cities, towns and cultivated fields are hardly to be seen in this region. Wheat bread and wine are uncommon, rye bread and cider abundant, as are cattle, milk, honey and ocean fish, both large and small. It is a land rich in silver and gold, fine cloth and furs, and Saracen treasure. Our Gaulish people are well-received by the Galicians, who are, however, an irascible race much given to pointless quarrels.-

Midway between Cebreiro and Santiago, the Camino Francés passes through Leboreiro, a village of fewer than a hundred people that appears to have changed not the slightest in the last thousand years.

In front of the humble Romanesque church is the ancient pilgrims' hospital, which still shows the coat of arms of the house of Ulloa, its medieval benefactors. Black-draped women in their eighties still avert their eyes from strangers as they

lead haltered cows down Leboreiro's single street.

For the next few hundred yards, you are walking along a stone-paved track about two metres wide and time rolls back even further. This is the original Roman highway, only slightly the worse for wear, that people have been tramping for something like two thousand years.

You come to a single-arched foot-bridge over a stream. The bridge looks new. Although it appears perfectly sound in photographs, the original Roman-built structure was demolished in 1984, following a study by civil engineers sent from Madrid with a view to making the



*Last year over 2,000 people young and old, male and female, of almost any nationality you might care to name, made the pilgrimage.*

pilgrims' path to Santiago more -accessible- to modern travellers.

It's hard to say how much more of this sort of thing is likely to recur. The Galician regional government was just handed 180.000 million pesetas by the Ministry of Culture, a good part of which is destined for the -restoration- of the road and its principal monuments.

Some of the ideas put forward sound good, such as rehabilitating sections of the road that have since become impassable — though what can be done at Labacolla, where the path is buried under the tarmac of Santiago's airport remains to be seen — or fixing up the medieval pilgrims' hospitals like Laboreiro's.

In Santiago, you have to go round the back of the world-famous Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, entering through the garage into the bleak, white-tiled inner hub, reeking of disinfectant, to find the partitioned alcove where pilgrims are fed safely out of sight of the paying guests.

Bob, an Australian in his late 20s, tackles the formidable fried fish staring up from his plate, while Joao and Eduardo, who have come all the way from Brazil, wait their turn in the cafeteria line.

Says Bob, -You can say that I'm here because I believe in romanticism as a kind of intellectual game to help you get through life. In that sense, the pilgrimage

has been a spiritual experience. Just by forcing you to walk until you forget that you're walking and about everything else. You have to cope with the challenges. Hunger, thirst, and getting to where you're going — nothing else matters.-

-Experiences are good and bad, and you learn a lot from both. The lorry drivers who make like they're trying to run you off the road are not so different from the wolves or the robbers you had to deal with before. Galicia is wonderful. Old people who look like they've grown right out of the earth. The people here are fantastic.-

Joao, who has just come in, is quick to agree with that. -But I shouldn't be the one to judge, the Galicians speak the same language, practically, that we do (Portuguese and Galician). You can tell, though, that they'll

go out of their way to help you without being asked. Especially when they know you're doing the pilgrimage.-

Joao says that he and his friend Eduardo don't plan to stay long in Santiago, they are on their way to visit friends in the north of Portugal and maybe look for work.

-But there's a special mass for pilgrims on Saturday and I'll probably stay for that. You have to separate the pilgrimage from the symbolism it's wrapped in, but it does make it richer somehow to follow the tradition.

-No, I couldn't begin to tell you what it means, not even for me, personally. Only that the spiritual energy is something you experience long before you get to Santiago. All those millions of people who have made the journey before you, they've left something of themselves behind.

-It's when you're absolutely alone and you know that you're not alone. They're a part of the road and after a while you are, too.-

**Note:** This article has been previously published in *Lookout Magazine*.

# SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

# PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

**There was a time in the Middle Ages when all roads led to Santiago de Compostela. The «discovery» in the 9C of the tomb of the Apostle St. James —Santiago— was to send repercussions throughout the Christian world and to transform a remote corner of Galicia into a place of pilgrimage for tens of thousands from all over Europe.**

Text: **Hawys Pritchard**  
Photos: **TURESPAÑA**

**I**n their wake, they brought prosperity, new attitudes and, most enduringly of all, the Romanesque style of architecture whose evolution in Spain can be traced along the *Camino de Santiago* — St. James' Way — as the pilgrimage route is known, from the Pyrenees westwards to Galicia. Sceptics will enjoy the fact that the discovery of the Apostle's remains by a pious hermit led by a star (*Campus Stellae* — field of stars — is the origin of the suffix -de Compostela-) came at the ideal psychological moment for the Christians in their long-drawn-out efforts to reconquer Muslim Spain. The Christian victory at the battle of Clavijo in 844 was attributed to the miraculous intervention of Saint James, mounted on a white charger, an event which earned him his title of *Santiago Matamoros* — St. James the Moor-slayer. This apparent proof that God was on their side against the Infidel was given still further credibility by the discovery coup, of which news travelled fast, not only north into Europe, but also south to the Muslim kingdoms of Al-Andalus.

## IN THE STEPS OF ST. JAMES

Saint James was a fisherman (hence his scallop-shell emblem), the brother of John, and is believed to have preached in Spain in the 1C, though the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church puts something of a damper on

*The cathedral. The twin towers of its soaring Baroque facade etched in silhouetted detail against the sky. The patches of ochre lichen on the stone are a product of the Galician climate.*



this by stating that «the tradition of the early Church according to which the Apostles did not leave Jerusalem till after his death... is against the authenticity of this story...». The Galician tourist authority is not so sceptical. I followed a route this summer signposted the «*Ruta Jacobina del Mar*», up the southern arm of the Ría de Arosa estuary in the Rías Bajas, as far as present-day Padrón, once *Iria Flavia*, where not only was the miraculous discovery made but where James is also believed to have landed



on his evangelizing mission centuries before.

Driving through the Galician countryside, there were moments when one could imagine that he would have felt quite at home. In the microclimate of the Rías Bajas, palms, maize and vines grow side by side, often, because of the traditional pattern of land inheritance, in tiny holdings. Though agriculture is rapidly being mechanized and locals zip about on motorcycles and diminutive tractors, there are still timeless sights

— fat, conical haystacks, ancient wooden carts laden with cut maize being pulled by oxen, stocky, black-clad women carrying heavy loads on their heads yet moving with the grace of ballet dancers. The juxtaposition of sights like these with hand-painted roadside signs offering *ostras y Albariño* (oysters and the best of the local white wines) — food fit for the gods — are what so seduce yet fit for the gods — are what so seduce yet rich at the same time, depressed yet hugely humorous, a phenomenon

which engenders a kind of bittersweet atmosphere which it shares with other Celtic Fringe areas, particularly Ireland and Wales.

The local building material, granite, is a contributing factor. It is ever-present, even in the rural landscape. The vines, grown high to protect them from the wet in this rainy area, are supported on granite posts. The curious raised granaries, like outsized kennels on legs, known as *bórreos*; are also made of granite, as are the many roadside *cruceiros*,



*The narrow picturesque streets known here as the rúas, retain a delightful passé charm. Some of them are beautifully porticoed.*

or crucifixes. It is a material which changes drastically according to the weather — grey and bleak when wet, it looks golden and benign in the sunshine.

The *-Ruta Marina-* passes through Cambados, where it is market day (the stalls sell potted plants, huge flesh-coloured corsets, day-glo bikinis...), Villanueva de Arosa, Villagarcía... then Padrón, probably best-known today as the birth-place of Galicia's beloved 19C poetess, Rosalía de Castro, and as the source of *pimientos de Padrón*, tiny, delicious green peppers which are a feature of spring and summer eating in Galicia and other parts of Spain. From here on, we join the main road to Santiago, and exhaust-fumes triumph over the smell of the eucalyptus trees which has predominated up to now. One faces the fact that one is approaching the city which is not only a major university town and administrative centre, but also a huge tourist attraction.

And this is, after all, what Santiago de Compostela has been for centuries. Though today's tourists arrive by coach and car, festooned with cameras, haversacks and transistor radios, they are no more assorted a bunch in terms of provenance (allowing for a wider catchment area) or reasons for visiting the city than the pilgrims of hundreds of years ago. The hospices, inns and churches which sprang up all along the ancient route were, essentially, tourist facilities. Pilgrims travelled in groups so as to feel better protected against the various perils that travelling alone implied — surely one of the huge selling-points of today's

*Santiago remains a place of pilgrimage for countless thousands. In the 15C, it was elevated to the same rank as the Holy Places in Palestine.*

package tours — their scallop-shell badges guaranteeing them admission and respectful treatment. While many must have visited the shrine for purely devotional reasons — as they still do today — it should not be forgotten that some were criminals complying with a judicial sentence, while others were simply along for the ride, like Chaucer's much-married Wife of Bath. In *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) we are told that she was something of a professional pilgrim, having been in Galicia at Seynt Jame among other shrines before setting off for Canterbury, more than likely on the lookout for her next husband.

#### **SANTIAGO IN CLOSEUP**

To arrive in Santiago by car in mid-August in the late 20C, one either has to have enough faith to move mountains or to know where to park. Foreign visitors would do well to capitalize on the



***Even if one is limited to a fleeting visit to Santiago's tourist highlights, one realizes that they are just one aspect of a city that is many things to many people.***

fact that the Spanish like to drive door to door. If you are prepared to walk a little, it is not too difficult to park on the outskirts. Otherwise, the best bets are the city's two multi-story car-parks, one in the Plaza de Galicia and the other — more convenient still — in the Avenida Juan XXIII. Leading off from Juan XXIII, the flagged Calle San Francisco takes you directly into the focal point of the whole city, the Plaza de España, popularly known as the Plaza del Obradoiro, on which the cathedral stands.

To step into the Plaza del Obradoiro is to feel diminished. Its proportions are vast, and are best taken in gradually. To your right as you enter from San Francisco is the Hostal Reyes Católicos, originally built as a pilgrims' hospice by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, in the late 15C, and today a luxury hotel. Walk along in front of it as far as the stone balustrade from which you can look down on the higgledy-piggledy russet rooftops and winding

streets of everyday Santiago below and the green countryside beyond. Now turn round. Facing you is the cathedral, the twin towers of its soaring Baroque façade etched in silhouetted detail against the sky. Saint James in his pilgrim's hat and robes looks down from a great height at today's tourists milling about below, their bright summer clothes and the flags flying in front of the Reyes Católicos the only patches of vivid colour in the subtle granite hues of the plaza. To the left of the cathedral stands the 18C Archbishop's Palace, still known as the *Palacio de Gelmírez* after the influential 12C bishop who masterminded the

*The local building material, granite, is ever-present, even in the rural landscape. It is a material which changes drastically according to the weather.*

building of the cathedral. Parts of the present palace still date from his time. The building on your right, facing the cathedral, is the 18C *Palacio de Rajoy*, originally built as a seminary and now the seat of regional and local government. Flanking the fourth side of the square is the 17C *Colegio de San Jerónimo*, today the Chancellery of Santiago University.

Lounging figures playing guitars, shapeless bundles of minimal luggage beside them, beneath the arcades of the Rajoy Palace; vendors of cheap tourist trinkets; a student *tuna* — a group of songsters in their traditional academic robes and bright trailing ribbons; a boozy-faced figure in red and black Galician regional garb playing the *gaita* (the local equivalent of bagpipes)... these people, or their ancestors, have been here for centuries.

#### **ROMANESQUE GENIUS**

Now for the cathedral. Though the building itself dates back to the 12C, its

# A Guide to Galician Tapas

As one would expect from an area of Spain with such a long sea-faring tradition, Galicia's *tapas* tend to be fishy, but not always...

**Pulpo a la gallega**, or *pulpo a feira*: Boiled octopus dressed with olive oil and paprika, sprinkled with sea-salt and served hot on a wooden plate.

**Empanada**: Large flat pie made with yeast dough and a large variety of fillings, including squid, mussels, cockles, scallops or meat. Served in little squares as *tapas*.

**Vieira**: Scallop baked in its shell with onion, ham and breadcrumb topping.

**Salpicón de mejillones**: Poached mussels with

dressing or chopped hard-boiled egg, onion, gherkin, red pepper, oil and vinegar.

**Pimientos de Padrón**: Tiny green peppers fried in very hot oil and sprinkled with sea-salt. Eaten with the

fingers. Deliciously sweet and juicy in general, the very occasional one is as hot as a chili and can bring a tear to the eye.

These are the classics which you will find in all the bars in the old quarter

of Santiago, in constant demand by locals, students and tourists. **Submarino**, Rúa Franco, 49, with its engaging hand-painted submarine sign, does an excellent *salpicón de mejillones*; served with local Ribeiro wine in white china bowls. The bar of the **Restaurante Victoria** a little further along the same street offers all the classics and some extras, such as *champiñones al ajillo* (mushrooms with garlic) and **Suso**, in the parallel Fúa del Villar does good *croquetas*. For coffee and a slice of *tarta de Santiago* to finish off with, head for the **Derby** café in Calle Huérfanas — a must for lovers of period decor.



*Bars and restaurants show their window-displays of typical Galician food, veritable still-lives of crabs, oysters, octopus...*

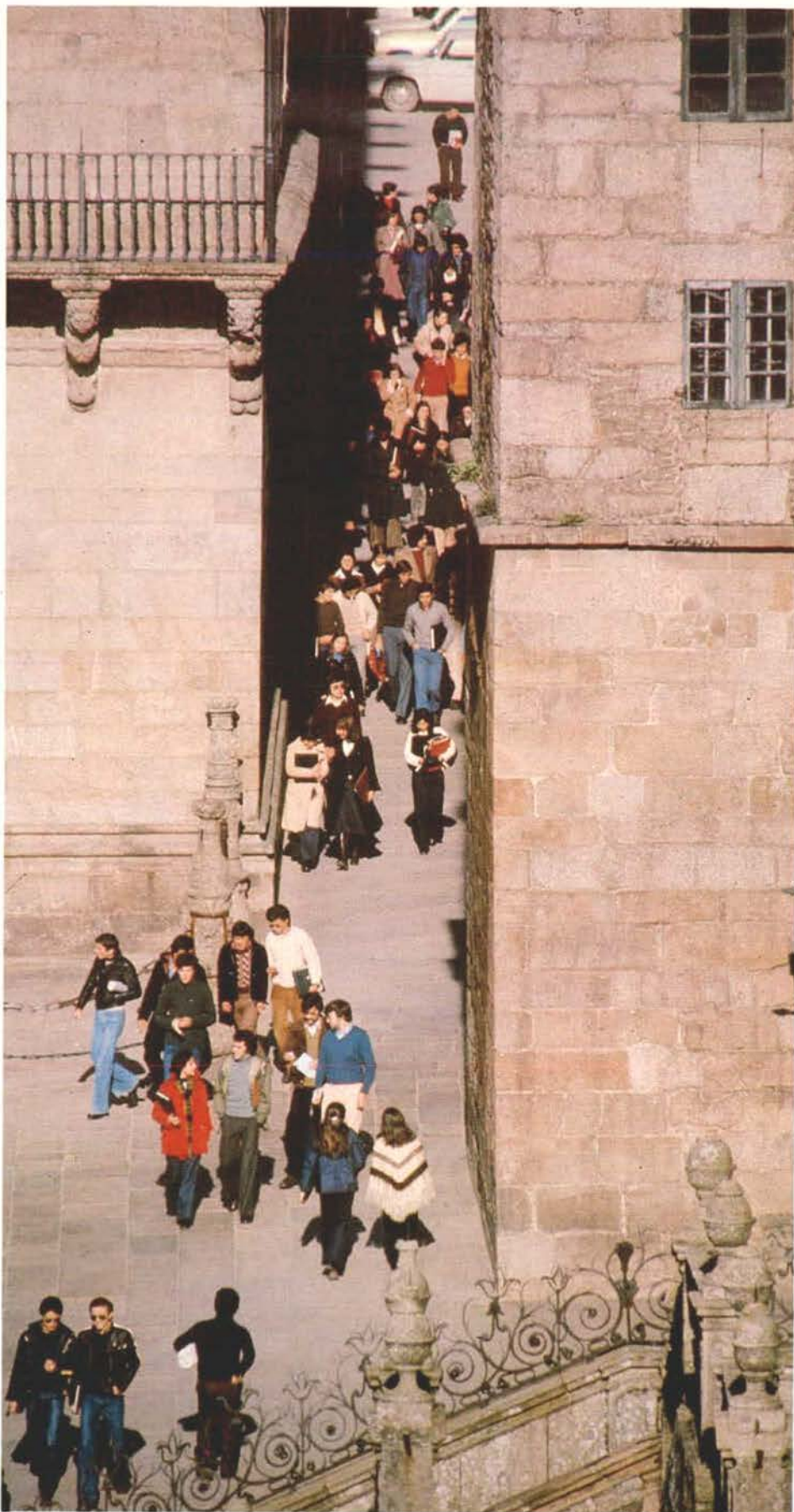
exterior was considerably altered in the 17-18C. The Obradoiro façade is in the Baroque style, its intricate detail compounded still further by patches of ochre lichen, product of the Galician climate. Imposing in its own right, this façade conceals a universally acknowledged masterpiece of 12C sculpture, Maestro Mateo's *Pórtico de la Gloria*. This three-arched portico represents the Christian Church and its rivals, but one need know nothing of iconography or artistic periods to recognize its genius. Its countless figures, many larger than life, lean towards each other, gesticulate and smile in a way which stirs us even today and must have thrilled its contemporary public. At the foot of the central column representing the Tree of Jesse is a deeply indented hand-print, eroded over the centuries, to which few can resist making their own infinitesimal contribution. The kneeling figure below is said to be a self-portrait of Mateo, and it is traditional to bump foreheads with him in the

hope that some of his enduring genius rubs off.

The interior of the cathedral is simple and vast, a pilgrimage church *par excellence*, its spatial organization designed especially to allow huge crowds to circulate freely without detracting from the solemnity of their surroundings. The signs above the confessionals along the walls — *Pro Linguis Germanica et Hungarica*, *Pro Linguis Itala et Gallica* — remind us that they still cater to the faithful from all over the world. In the half-light of the cathedral's austere interior, the High Altar looks almost oriental in its glittering richness, the seated figure of the patron saint at its centre. There are constant queues around the altar, one leading up to the figure of Santiago, whose robes the faithful may touch, and one to the crypt beneath, where the casket containing the saint's remains is displayed. One could spend the whole day exploring the cathedral, but those with limited time will need to be selective.

## THE RUAS

Emerging once more onto the plaza and turning left, one is very quickly back to a more human scale. A little flagged alley leads to the Plaza Fonseca, a tiny square with bars and restaurants which have open-air terrazas in summer, and thence into the web of narrow picturesque streets known here as the *rúas*. Though lined with souvenir shops, bars and restaurants, the *rúas* retain a delightful passé charm. The Rúa Franco, for example, straight on from the plaza Fonseca, is full of bars and restaurants, each with its refrigerated window-display of typical Galician food, veritable still-lives of crabs, oysters, octopus, cuts of meat and, almost invariably, a *tarta de Santiago* almond cake with the saint's broadsword emblem traced in icing sugar on top. *Hay camas* (Rooms available), announce signs in many of these windows, and looking upwards to see where the offered accommodation could



**Santiago is not only Galicia's regional capital, but also a university city of ancient tradition which receives an annual rejuvenating shot with its intake of new students.**

possibly be, one realizes that there are further charms above eye-level... geranium-laden balconies, old iron street lamps, white-painted glazed *miradores*, and always, in the distance, a dome, a spire or a terra-cotta roofscape.

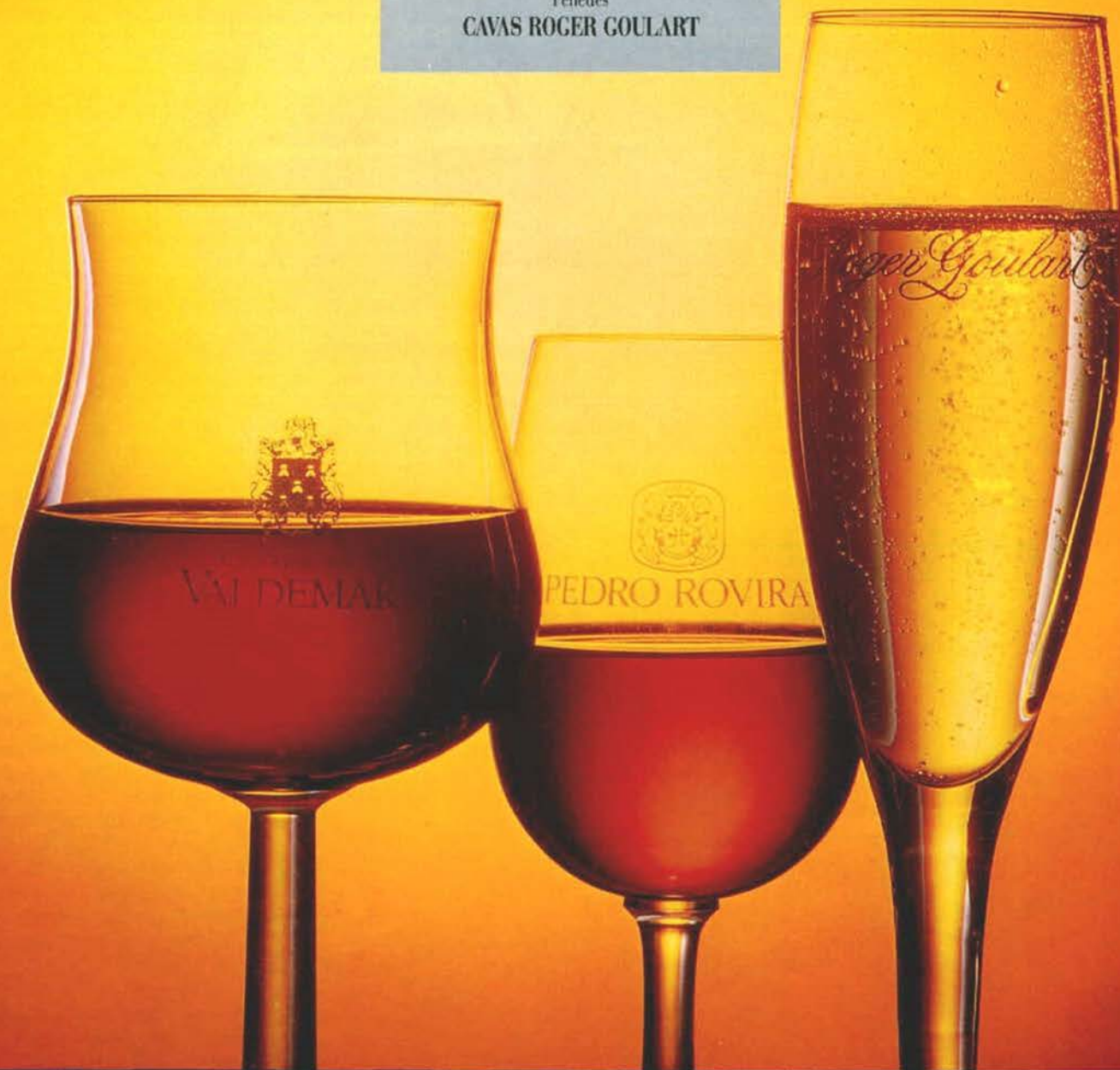
Rúa Franco emerges into Porta Faxeiras, from which one turns left into the Calle de Bautizados. This is a good street for food shopping and for photographers with an eye for picturesque urban detail. It still has lovely old-fashioned shop-fronts, one of my favourites being the *Casa de los Quesos*, the House of Cheeses. The window display featured local honey, smoked sardines and an array of Galicia's creamy, breast-shaped cheeses known as *queso de tetilla*. Further up the street past a good pastry-shop, a shop selling Basque berets and, apparently, a sleeping cat, and another -select grocer's-, one turns left into Rúa Nueva, a beautifully proportioned porticoed street containing a little 12C church with the lovely name of Santa María Salomé. Then first left and first right into the split-level Plaza de la Quintana with its elegant 17C houses, the Casa de la Parra and the Casa de los Canónigos, and the east door of the cathedral, the Puerta del Perdón.

Up from the Plaza de la Quintana is the part of the old town known as the Azabachería, while down is the Plaza de las Platerías. These take their respective names from the jet and silver craftsmen who traditionally worked in these streets around the cathedral, and jewellery and other ornaments made of jet and silver, often in combination, are typical mementoes of Santiago de Compostela, rather up-market from the ubiquitous key-rings and toy *gaitas* on sale in the cathedral square.

Even if one is limited to a fleeting visit to Santiago's tourist highlights, one realizes that they are just one aspect of a city that is many things to many people. A multi-level city in all senses, various factors contribute to elevating it above the merely monumental, albeit richly endowed. Not only is it Galicia's regional capital, and as such seat of its government and parliament, but also a university city of ancient tradition which receives an annual rejuvenating shot with its intake of new students. Meanwhile, Santiago de Compostela remains a place of pilgrimage for countless thousands. In the 15C, it was elevated to the same rank as the Holy Places in Palestine by Pope Sixtus IV. In August 1989, it was visited by Pope John Paul II, and viewers of Spanish T.V. news saw modern-day pilgrims in bermuda shorts and cutaway vests mounting the cathedral's steps on their bare knees. *Plus ça change...*

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HOSTAL DE LOS REYES CATOLICOS

# Five stars for five centuries

**A stay at this hotel, located on one side of the magnificent Obradoiro Square, offers an excuse to submerge oneself in unique surroundings, alive with history.**



I awoke in what looked like a wing of the Prado Museum. From my four-poster bed, I could see antique furniture, fine tapestries and time-darkened paintings of kings and noblemen.

The Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, in Santiago, is no ordinary hotel. It was built in 1501 on the express orders of Ferdinand and Isabella as a refuge for poor pilgrims and converted to shameless luxury 34 years ago.

Undoubtedly one of the

most magnificent hotels in the world, the Hostal includes four arcaded patios with playing fountains, a museum, an art gallery and a church within its walls.

The Hostal has become so much a part of Spanish history, religious tradition, and international tourism that it is difficult to imagine the shock with which the city of Santiago learned the news in 1486 that the building had been commissioned by Ferdinand and Isabella.

To say that the townsfolk weren't exactly keen on the idea would be an understatement. Somehow, they had the nasty feeling that it would cost them money. They were right. To put it bluntly, the monarchs were broke and to finance the building taxes were levied both on the city and on goods like wine, meat, cloth and fish.

To play safe, the monarchs made two financial estimates — one for the hospital and one for the completion of the war against the Moors in Granada, which they feared might bankrupt them. As it turned out, the conquest of Granada

in 1492 was easier than they had imagined, freeing a large sum of money for the hospice, which also received extra funds from taxes on the vanquished area.

Ferdinand and Isabella hurled themselves into the new project with their customary enthusiasm. They placed Hernando de la Vega as overseer and appointed the brilliant Enrique Egas as architect.

No detail of the building was too small to escape the attention of the two monarchs, who bombarded de la Vega and Egas with suggestions. They advised (or maybe interfered would be a better word) on carving and gilding, the precise position of the royal arms, the

type of stone to be used, the location of the fireplaces, the construction of window frames and even the number of steps leading up to the patios.

The people of Santiago, however, saw the project in a less enthusiastic light. The farmers who owned the land on which the hospice was to be built resented being turfed out. There were endless arguments over compensation, with some townsfolk seeing it as an opportunity to inflate the value of their property.

Text:  
**Perrott Phillips**  
Photos:  
**TURESPAÑA**



*The Hostel has become a part of Spanish history, religious tradition and international tourism.*



Another row blew up when the mayor learned that he was expected to provide free board and lodging for the hordes of workmen. In the great tradition of local dignitaries, he pleads -pressure of work- and forgot the whole thing.

Despite recurring financial problems, the hospice was ready for its first pilgrim in 1509, though it was not completed until two years later; fast work by medieval standards.

The people were stunned at its magnificence. The Plateresque façade was etched as finely as silver. The stained-glass windows glowed brilliantly. The patios were supremely elegant. Even the 32 gargoyles on the façade excited interest as the townsfolk tried to recognize the features of anyone they knew.

#### **A MODEL HOSPICE**

But endless lawsuits — mainly over compensation

— proved a drain on the hospice's resources. By 1535, funds were so low that the hospice had to abandon its care for healthy pilgrims and concentrate solely on treating the sick.

Fortunately, the medical facilities at the hospice were far more efficient than its financial arrangements, and often years ahead of their time. There were strict rules concerning antiseptics, sanitation, the storage of medicines and the separation of contagious patients. The medical director and his wife controlled a large staff, who were under constant supervision and inspection. The hospital pharmacist was forbidden to make up prescriptions without the doctor checking the contents first. The surgeons had to display -up to date- ranges of instruments and nurses were not allowed to leave patients in the care of unqualified staff. Some of the regulations would do credit to a modern hospital. All the water had to be boiled, the

wards ventilated and perfumed and patients provided with a little bell to summon help. -All doctors-, said one rule, -should treat patients well and never utter a harmful word-.

For 450 years, the hospital progressed in time with history. Then, in 1953, the sick were moved to a modern, roomy clinic and on July 25 of Holy Year 1954, the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos opened its doors to a glittering religious procession. Among the first guests was Cardinal Roncalli, the Patriarch of Venice who later become Pope John XXIII. Since then, the -new pilgrims- have included King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia, the King and Queen of Belgium, Prince Philip of Great Britain, Don Juan de Borbón (father of the Spanish king), Princess Irene of Holland, President Perón of Argentina, the composer Joaquín Rodrigo and the late, great guitarist, Andrés Segovia, who had his own, private practice room.

The Hostal which was recently added to the stateowned Parador network, has just undergone a facelift costing 500 million pesetas, which involved renewing all the bathrooms and reducing the number of rooms from 157 to 142, creating space for more luxury suites.

But in all this modernization, the original function of the Hostal has not been forgotten. By law, the Reyes Católicos still has to provide sustenance for genuine pilgrims.

To qualify, you have to arrive by bicycle, on foot or on horseback, with confirmation that you have passed through various points on the old pilgrim route through northern Spain. Armed with a final certificate called a *Compostelana*, issued by the cathedral, the pilgrim can then claim three meals a day for three days in the staff canteen, but no lodging.

A fascinating tradition... and a direct link with the Middle Ages.

# Idiazabal Cheese

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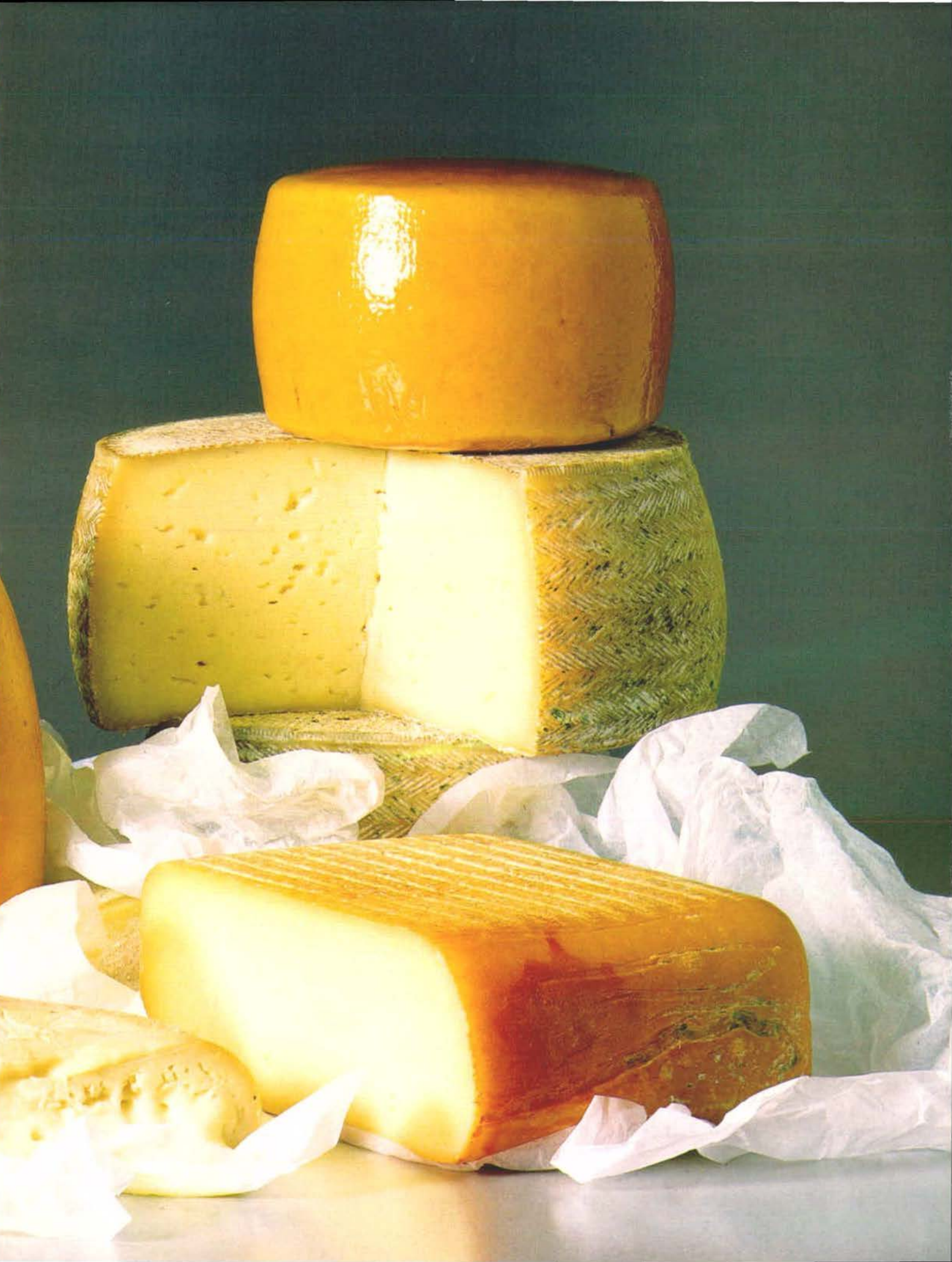
# SPANISH CHEESE

## ACROSS THE BOARD

Text: **Enric Canut**  
Photos: **Enric Canut and ICEX**  
Still Life: **Anna Löscher**  
Stylin: **Menchu Artime**

As Spain reveals more and more of its true self to the rest of the world, all those old tourist-brochure clichés are coming to be recognized as just that. There is a grain of truth in every cliché, and of course Spain is a sunny country which grows a lot of oranges and loves bullfighting and flamenco. It is that, and plenty more.







*The Basque Country is the original home of the affable, long-fleeced oveja lacha, the classic milk-yielding breed of sheep which, grazed on the evergreen local pastures, gives a milk which is at once refined and rich.*

The Iberian Peninsula, Europe's westernmost extreme, with its varied terrain and climate and wealth of natural resources has been a magnet for explorers and colonizers throughout its long history, and all have left their cultural imprint, of which oranges, bullfighting and flamenco are just a tiny part. Spain's wine, olive oil, fresh produce and preserves have been appreciated and exported for many centuries, yet only now is our cuisine coming to be known and understood beyond our shores. And who would look to Spain for cheese? Even the experts seem to have little idea of the vast range of traditional cheeses still made here. In its world-wide catalogue of cheeses, the International Dairy Produce Federation (FIL) describes over a thousand, only one of which — Manchego — in Spanish. It is certainly the best known, not least for being Don Quijote's favourite, but there are in fact over a hundred different types of cheese in Spain, made from cow's, sheep's or goat's milk, either separately or in combination and in many cases with the most fascinating regional variations.

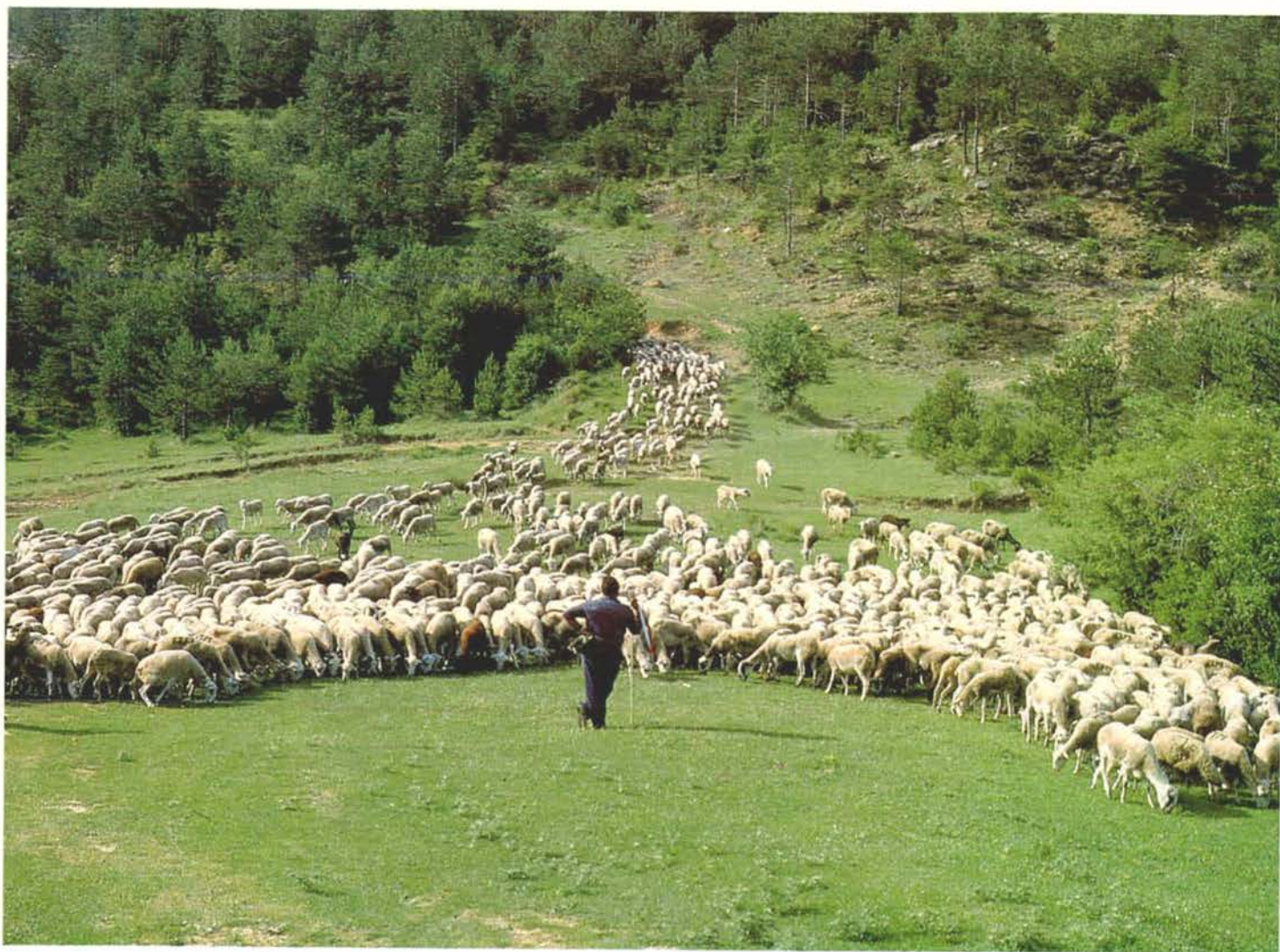
#### CHEESES WITH A PAST

Archaeological and documentary evidence which has come down to us from the beginnings of time shows that the earliest inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula were farmers and livestock breeders. The Roman historian Strabo, in Book III of his *Geography* which deals with Iberia, mentions King Geryon, traditionally associated with what is now Cádiz. His were the herds which gave milk so rich that it produced no whey. There have also been archaeological finds of ancient perforated pottery vessels clearly once used for cheese-making. Later, the Carthaginians and Romans, the nomadic Indo-European tribes of central Europe, and most durably the Arabs were all to superimpose their own particular cultural strata on the original agrarian culture of Spain's first inhabitants.

Among their contributions were breeds of livestock from north Africa and central Europe which, crossed with the Peninsula's native breeds, were to produce new strains: the pedigree of breeds of sheep, cow and goat characteristic of certain regions of Spain today can be traced back to this period.

When the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, finally succeeded in ousting the Arabs from Spain at the end of the 15C, the newly unified nation underwent a process of territorial and legal organization which was to provide the basis for its long-term social structure. Essentially a rural society, based on agriculture and livestock rearing, Spain's was a subsistence economy, pro-





ducing a few exportables such as cereal, wool, wine and cheese. Not until well into the 19C did Spain's food production begin to reflect the advances achieved by the Industrial Revolution. Only then did mass-production and, consequently, the concept of the mass-market come into being in the food sector. Industrial-scale butter and cheese manufacturing began in Spain at that time, to be followed after the turn of the century by processed (condensed, dried, pasteurized and sterilized) milk and yogurt after the turn of the century. Albeit with something of a time lag, the effects of the second Industrial Revolution on food production in general, and dairy products in particular, were eventually felt in Spain. Today it seems cleverly to have embraced modern technology without allowing the general trend towards homogeneity to make too many inroads into its traditional approach and products.

All things considered, this is hardly surprising. Spain is the third largest country in Europe, including Russia; the second most mountainous, after Switzerland, with an average altitude of over 600 metres (1,968 ft.); its terrain is

*With an average altitude of over 600 metres (1,968 ft.) Spain's terrain is extremely varied, with imposing mountain ranges, deep remote valleys and vast plateaux with fertile plains and depressions.*

extremely varied, with imposing mountain ranges, deep, remote valleys, vast plateaux with fertile plains and depressions and over five thousand kilometres of craggy coastline where the Peninsula's several peripheral mountain chains slope down to the sea. This is matched by climatic conditions which vary from subarid to alpine, passing through the Continental and the Mediterranean in varying degrees of intensity on the way. In consequence, Spain is a patchwork of subcultures and ways of life which makes it difficult to label anything as -typically Spanish-. Take cheese, for example...

#### **THE CHEESES OF NORTHERN SPAIN**

The cheese map of Spain can be divided into three main areas each embracing cheeses of common, though by no means identical, characteristics. The first big area is broadly contained within the top third of the Peninsula, extending from Galicia on the Atlantic coast, over to Catalonia on the Mediterranean. In other words, over a thousand kilometres of high, steeply sloped mountain ranges punctuated by valleys, gorges, high plateaux and their foothills.

This is cow and sheep country. Galicia produces four types of cheese, all made from the rich, fatty milk of the charmingly-named *rubia gallega*, or Galician blonde. They are soft, moist cheeses, one of them — San Simón — smoked with birch-wood.

The Cordillera Cantábrica range forms a narrow, jagged backbone, whose rocky northern and southern slopes have been made habitable only by generations of determined farming. Yet each little nook and cranny of this challenging landscape produces its own, highly individual cheese. There are over 40 of them, either

*In the last few years, the first tentative moves have been made in exporting certain types, chiefly sheep and goat cheeses and exports are expected to increase considerably within the near future.*

one-milk cheeses or made from a mixture of milks as availability and the seasons decree. Copious rainfall, hot mountain sun, salt winds which blow inland from the nearby ocean and a chalky subsoil all combine to give the lush, flower-strewn pasture which provides the raw material for the rich milk which, in turn, has made skilled cheese craftsmen of the local inhabitants. The cheeses range in size from great six-kilo ones (13 lbs.) to tiny ones which fit into the palm of your hand; some are made by acid coagulation, others enzymatic (using natural setting agents) or a mixture of the two; they come both blue and white and with internal or external mould; peppered, smoked, washed and with various outer dressings. There is even one, from La Armada (León), made with colostrum, or first milk.

One of the most impressive features of this mountainous landscape is the soaring rocky outcrop known as the

Picos de Europa — the Peaks of Europe. Contained within a perimeter of barely 100 kilometres (62 miles), its landscape swoops and soars by as much as 2,000 metres (6,568 ft.). This cheese-lover's Shangri-la, boasting ten different varieties, is the home of one of Spain's Denomination of Origin cheeses, Cabrales, which takes its name from a little area which contains a cluster of villages. Cabrales are cylindrical, medium sized (2-4 kg., or 4.5-9 lbs.) cheeses, made from mixed cow's, goat's and ewe's milk. Their particular characteristic is that they are matured for at least two months in caves, where they develop an internal mould like a Stilton.

Not far away is the area of Cantabria known as Liébana, which produces four cheeses covered by an overall Denomination of Quality. These are Quesuco, Pido fresh cheese, a smoked cheese from Aliva and the Cabrales-like Picón, all exclusively farm-made.

On the eastern, sea-facing slopes of the Cordillera Cantábrica lies Cantabria itself, home of another D.O. cheese — queso de Nata de Cantabria, or Cantabrian cream cheese. As its name suggests, this is a very smooth, elastic, soft, fatty cheese. Made in small family-run factories, it is reminiscent of a Port-Salut.

Between the Cordillera Cantábrica and the Pyrenees, the natural border between Spain and France, lies the Basque Country, whose untamed landscape has played its part in keeping alive ancient and highly local traditions traceable back to the first indo-European cultures which swept across Europe from the Urals to Spain. This is the original home of the affable, long-fleeced *oveja lacha*, the classic milk-yielding breed of sheep which, grazed on the evergreen local pastures, gives a milk which is at once refined and rich. This milk, in conjunction with natural sheep's rennet and centuries-old techniques provide the basics for another of Spain's D.O. cheeses — Idiazábal, which comes both smoked and unsmoked.

In the Pyrenees themselves is the Navarrese valley of Roncal of ancient sheep-breeding tradition where, historically, the use of mountain pastures in summer and transhumance, the migration of flocks to pastures new in winter, were democratically organized (see Spain Gourmetour No. 10). The local cheese, Roncal, a genuine long-cured ewe's milk cheese, was the first in Spain to be awarded D.O. status. The ancestral skills of this upland region, extending over as far as Catalonia, produce several local specialities using both ewe's and goat's milk. One particular, highly individual gem is known as *queso de tupí*. Made from drained ewe's milk curds fermented with marc or aniseed liqueur it is extremely hard to come by.

### Spain's Cheeses with Denomination of Origin (D.O.)

D.O.	Date	Regulations in Force	
		Ministerial Order	Official State Gazette
Roncal .....	26-07-75	2-03-81	9-04-81
Mahón .....	12-11-80	25-06-85	5-07-85
Cabrales .....	9-05-81	—	—
Manchego .....	2-07-82	21-12-84	5-01-85
Cantabria .....	—	29-10-85	13-11-85
Idiazábal .....	—	1-10-87	8-10-87
Liébana (Generic D.) .....	—	6-10-87	14-10-87

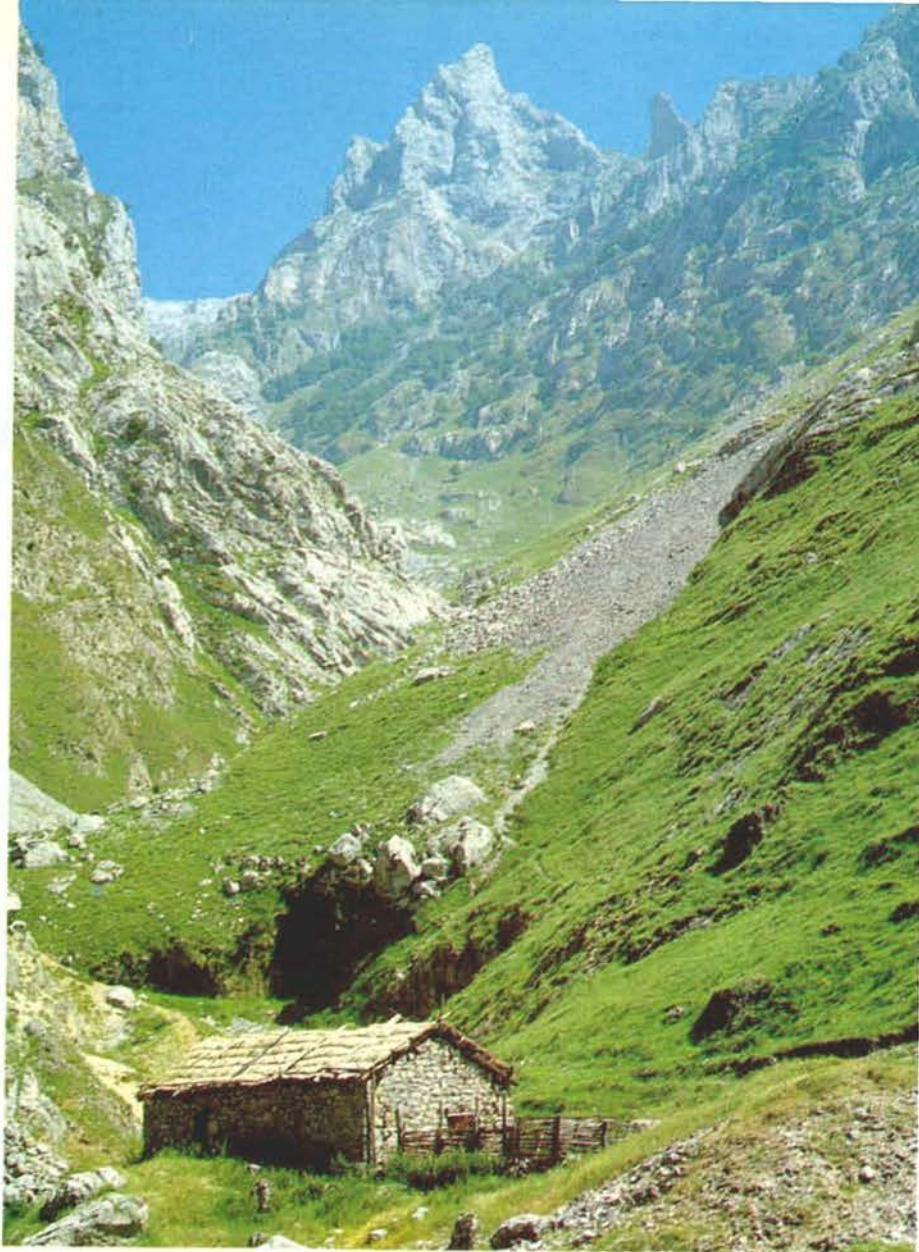
### Denomination of Origin Cheeses 1988 Statistics

Denomination of Origin	Number of Head of Registered Livestock			Liters of Milk per kg. of Cheese	Cheese Production (kg.)	Cheese Factories	
	Cows	Sheep	Goats			Artisan Cheese-makers	Mass-production
Cabrales .....	1,343	5,847	4,451	10.00	107,075	134	—
Cantabria .....	2,570	—	—	10.77	213,845	—	6
Liébana .....	373	1,155	727	9.48	44,073	17	10
Mahón .....	6,688	412	—	9.28	2,335,479	130	4
Manchego .....	—	476,001	—	4.60	1,536,377	26	29
Idiazábal .....	—	22,080	—	6.17	350,000	86	—
Roncal .....	—	39,000	—	6.93	395,000	10	1
NATIONAL TOTALS .....	10,974	544,495	5,178	—	6,081,849	403	50

Source: INDO (National Institute of Denomination of Origin).

### THE CHEESES OF THE INTERIOR OF SPAIN

The second main area of Spain's cheese map is the interior, composed principally of the two great upland plateaux of Castile-León and Castile-La Mancha. This is a vast area whose climate is best described as extreme continental, which is to say freezing in winter and blisteringly hot in summer, and where the average altitude is around 700 metres (2,300 ft.). Breeds of sheep like the *churra*, the *castellana* and the *manchega* have acclimatized perfectly to



**The Picos de Europa —a cheese-lover's Shangri la, boasting ten different varieties— is the home of one of Spain's best D. O. cheeses, Cabrales.**

these extreme conditions so that they not only survive but give a rich, fatty, characteristically flavoured milk nourished by the vegetation available on the moors, scrubland and fallow areas, particularly the many aromatic wild herbs so characteristic of this sort of terrain in Spain. The best sheep's milk cheeses in the country come from this region. They are pressed cheeses, compact and hard, and originally intended as a storable product which could be used for bartering at livestock markets. They were also made in such a way as to provide durable food for the shepherds who accompanied the flocks on their long annual migrations in search of fresh pasture. The southeastern part of this area is made up of a naturally delimited region known from time immemorial as La Mancha, source of Spain's best-known cheese, Manchego (See next article). Manchego has been a D.O. cheese since 1985 and is made exclusively of raw milk from *manchega* ewes by traditional methods and cured for a minimum of 60 days. Its outward appearance is very readily recognizable, albeit similar to other cheeses from southern and central Spain. Manchego cheeses are cylindrical, each weighing around three kilos (6½ lbs.), the top and bottom imprinted with a characteristic flower and the sides with the zig-zag impression left by the esparto-grass binder — nowadays, the same impression is made with plastic moulds.

Spain's central plateau, or meseta, was where the historic *Honrado Concejo de la Mesta* (see Spain Gourmetour No. 13) operated for over six centuries. This association of Castile's big livestock breeders was founded in 1273 by Alfonso X, The Wise, as a sort of union for the various regional guilds. Its function was to organize how best to use the winter pastures of Extremadura and Andalusia in southern Spain and the summer ones in the mountainous north and north-east, to safeguard the intricate network of tracks followed by the flocks during their long migratory journeys (Madrid's main north-south thoroughfare, the Paseo de la Castellana, was originally one of these), and to collect the taxes payable to the Crown.

The organization developed into a powerful livestock-breeders' lobby before gradually declining and disappearing in 1836. Part of the legacy it left behind was the merino sheep, a strain which had evolved over the centuries into a sturdy, resilient animal capable of walking great distances and the source of the best wool in the world. Once exclusively Spanish, the merino breed spread throughout Europe and Oceania in the 18C at a time when other wool-producing breeds were also being improved and advances in the textile industry were any way making wool less

important. Although it seemed that the merino was doomed to decline, it turned out to have other qualities which were to maintain it in its position among the top breeds. In addition to its excellent fleece it also gives good meat and, although in small quantity, milk. The milk is used for the best and most expensive farm-made sheep's milk cheeses in Spain, known as *tortas* (literally -cakes-) from El Casar, La Serena, Los Pedroches and the Alcudia valley. They are made with a vegetable rennet which gives a smoother curd and a proteolytic capacity which softens the cheese so that it flattens into a *torta*.

### THE CHEESES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST

The third of the great cheese families occupies the Mediterranean coast, from Catalonia down to the Straits of Gibraltar. This long, narrow stretch is made up of coastal mountain chains running parallel to the coast, sometimes with gentle fertile, seaward slopes and sometimes ending abruptly at the sea's edge in steep cliffs and rocky outcrops. In brief, the ideal habitat for goats.

Goats are sprightly, independent creatures which thrive on dust, rock, hot sun and dry conditions. They make the most of the sparse mountain pasture, uncultivated Mediterranean vegetation and, as a luxury, the by-products of fruit and vegetable orchards and vineyards. On the strength of this, they yield immensely rich and strongly-flavoured milk which, until just thirty years ago, was in the main drunk just as it was. Any surplus was used for various types of fresh, soft cheeses, salted or unsalted, which, in the form of fritters, biscuits, soufflés, stuffings, or simply fried, baked or raw, played a key role in the local everyday peasant diet. The fact that the Mediterranean was the route by which so many foreign explorers and invaders approached Spain is evident in the excellent and eclectic cuisine of this coastal belt.

The use of vegetable rennets (extracts of thistle and fig) almost certainly dates back to the Romans, while salting as a preserving method smacks more of Greek influence and the use of cloth or canvas for moulding cheeses is clearly an Arab contribution.

Within this general Mediterranean area lies the island of Menorca, the most north-easterly of the Balearic Islands. In this context, it constitutes the exception

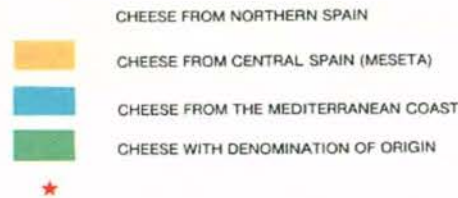
that proves the rule. This is where the famous Mahón comes from, another of Spain's D.O. cheeses which is made, curiously, of cow's milk. The simple explanation for this initially surprising fact is that the island was held by the British for a large part of the 18C. The English gradually substituted selected milk cows for the native herds of sheep and goats, and the traditional cheese continued to be made, though now using cow's milk. This is the Mahón that is still with us today, with its characteristic round-edged truncated pyramid shape achieved by pressing the curd in a *fogassa* or cotton

off the coast of Africa are great cheese producers and consumers. Each island has its own particular cheese, though they are all quite similar, traditionally eaten just as it is or used in regional dishes like the delicious local green sauce, or *mojo verde*, made of fresh goat's cheese, olive oil and coriander and served with fish or the islands' typical *papas arrugadas* (literally -wrinkled potatoes-) — potatoes boiled in their skins in very salty water.

In the Canaries, one can see quite clearly the way in which cultural mix and successive occupiers have left their mark. Goat's milk is obtained in the main from the *canario* breed, the end product of interbreeding African, Maltese and Spanish goats, which has adapted to thrive in tough, arid, even desert conditions. All eight local cheeses are made from the milk of this low-yield breed. They are cylindrical in shape, moulded in palm-leaf bands similar to, though thicker than, the esparto-grass bands used, in other times, in the centre and south of the mainland. However, the Canary cheeses are bigger in size and some are smoked outside and share certain characteristics — such as the use of animal rennet only — with cheeses from northern Spain.

This then, in broad outline, is the cheese map of Spain, in all its ecological and cultural variety, unrivalled even by those countries traditionally associated with cheese the world over such as Holland, Germany and Denmark. Spain has over a hundred traditional types of cheese, produced in quantities which amount to some 200,000 metric tons a year. Of these, ten per cent are entirely artisan-made and five per cent have an officially recognized denomination of either quality or origin. Most of the overall production (over 60%) is accounted for by mixed-milk cheeses (cow's, goat's and ewe's) of medium size and a shape similar to the typical Manchego, now something of a Spanish archetype.

In the main, all this cheese has traditionally been for local consumption. But in the last few years, the first tentative moves have been made in exporting certain types, chiefly sheep and goat cheeses, and exports are expected to increase considerably within the near future. History and geography have combined to keep Spain's authentically traditional cheeses thriving. At a time when the developed nations are starting to realize that bland is not beautiful after all, there's a whole world market waiting to be conquered.



*The cheese map of Spain can be divided into three main areas each embracing cheeses of common, though by no means identical, characteristics.*

cloth knotted so as to form a hermetically closed bag.

Throughout Andalusia in southern Spain, the influence of the two adjacent areas, the Mediterranean and the central plateau, is obvious in its goat cheeses, shaped into cylinders with the same sort of plastic moulds imitating the old esparto-grass binder used for Manchego.

### THE CANARY ISLANDS

An enclave worthy of attention in their own right, the Canary Islands not far

# LA MANCHA

Tierra de vinos



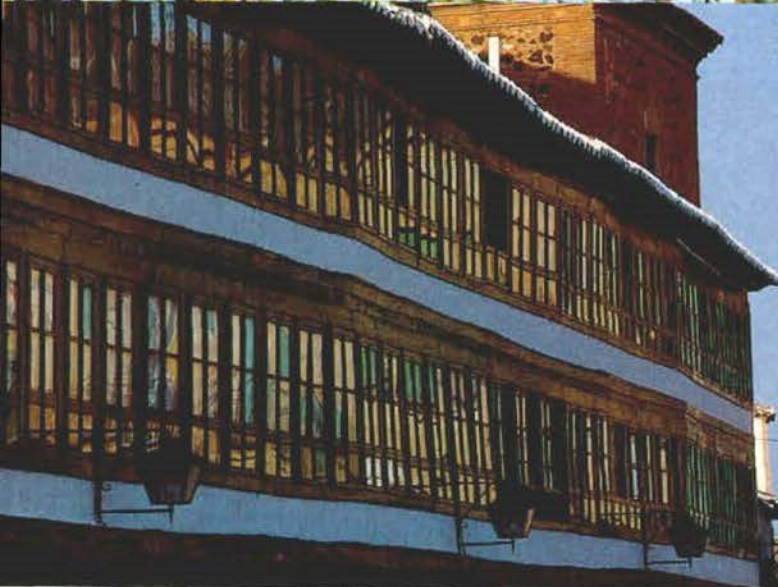


# THE NEW WINES OF LA MANCHA



Text: **John Reeder**  
Photos: **P. Sancho-Mata**

**W**hat first strikes you about La Mancha is its size — not for nothing is it the largest officially delimited wine-making region (Denominación de Origen) in the world, with around half a million hectares of land under vine. Mile upon mile of flat table land, veritable seas of vines stretching as far as the eye can see, the land of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, an austere and impressive landscape dotted with farmsteads and small ochre towns and villages, Manzanares and Tomelloso, Socuéllamos and Villarobledo, all redolent of the smell of wine-making.



*Time was when a winery in La Mancha meant a long white-washed outbuilding and rows of huge clay wine-jars. Now you are more likely to be confronted...*

**L**a Mancha occupies the greater part of the southern half of Spain's seemingly unending high central Castilian plateau, a steppe with long hot dry summers, cold continental winters and relatively low rainfall, the word *Mancha* itself coming from the Arabic word *Manxa* meaning drylands. This relatively harsh but predictably stable climate means that bad years for grape growing are almost unheard of in La Mancha — every year the indigenous long

acclimatised white and black grape varieties, the Airén and the Cencibel, ripened under the summer sun, will produce fine, high yields; every year the literally millions of vines which cover La Mancha, hugging closely to the soil to protect themselves from the burning sun, will provide an abundant harvest of grapes, the raw material for the region's wines.

In this largely agricultural region of Spain the chalky, sandy soils also support cereal production, sheep rearing and olive groves. Don

Quixote's windmills, perched high above the plain on rocky outcrops, now alas mostly abandoned, are not just picturesque relics but the remnants of a highly efficient preindustrial technology for the grinding of wheat in a major cereal producing area where rivers weren't — and aren't — abundant. Small flocks of sheep straggle across the stubble, sheep whose modest appearance belies their fame, for the milk from these sheep is used to make one of Spain's — and Europe's — great cured cheeses,

the famous *Queso Manchego*.

As befits a farming region there are no really large cities in La Mancha, but a great many small bustling agricultural towns, towns like La Solana, San Clemente or Daimiel.

A typical wine town on the main Madrid-Sevilla road is Manzanares, which apart from being home to one of the largest viticultural and wine producing co-operatives in the area with a production figure of 200,000 hectolitres of wine a year, and which makes a fruity first year red wine



*... with a spotlessly clean modern installation containing gleaming arrays of stainless steel fermentation tanks and rows of the latest French or German horizontal presses.*

called Yuntero, is also where Vinícola de Castilla, the pioneers in the introduction of the new oenology into La Mancha around a decade ago, have their winery. Time was when a winery in La Mancha meant a long white-washed outbuilding and rows of huge clay wine-jars. Now you are more likely to be confronted with a spotlessly clean modern installation containing gleaming arrays of stainless steel fermentation tanks and rows of the latest French or German horizontal presses. What has been perhaps lost

in picturesqueness has been more than compensated for by the gain in the quality of the new wines produced, fresh, delicately fruity first year varietal whites and fine young or mature complex reserva reds.

#### **A LIGHTER AND FRESHER WINE**

Thanks to massive capital investment in the most modern plant installations available at the end of the 1970s and the beginnings of the

1980s, and the importing of some of the finest young oenologists from the Rioja and Andalusia, Vinícola de Castilla became the leading pioneers in the making of a new style lighter, fresher Mancha wine. Together with other innovators in the Mancha Denominación de Origen, such as the Riojan oenologist Angel Artacho at his small winery, Bodegas Saviron, or Rodríguez and Berger, a larger winery encouraged to modernize by their principal British importers, Grants of St. James, Vinícola de Castilla led

the way in changing old customs. Firstly, for instance, they persuaded grape growers to harvest their grapes much earlier and thus keep down the alcohol content. Whereas of old in La Mancha the grape harvest — the *vendimia* — would not get into full swing until the end of September, now the vineyards are full of pickers by the last week of August. Careful picking, destalking and pressing, the use of scientifically selected yeasts, strictly controlled cold fermentation in huge stainless steel vats, all these factors

have gone towards the making of a new style of wine: a fragrant, crisp, young white varietal wine completely in accord with modern consumer preferences, wines such as Vinícola de Castilla's Señorío de Guadianeja, Saviron's Campo Almaina or the Manjavacas Co-operative's Zagarrón.

These new style whites will clearly play an important role in the future of La Mancha, an area with an overwhelming predominance of white grapes. The region's wine-makers are aware of this and are anxious to respond to the new patterns of consumer preferences both on the home Spanish market and on international export markets. The newer wine drinkers of the 1970s and early 80s cut their teeth on uncomplicated cheaper wines but are now seen to be moving on. Current consumer trends seem to point to a new, more demanding, more sophisticated wine-drinking public, drinking perhaps less quantity but

## DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN LA MANCHA



JAVIER BELLOSO

*La Mancha is the largest officially delimited wine-making region in the world, with around half a million hectares of land under vine.*

expecting higher quality from their wines. Recent figures for the British market for instance show an increase of over a third in the total value of the higher quality Spanish wines exported to Britain during 1988 together with significantly a corresponding fall of nearly 10% in the total volume of all Spanish wines imported into Britain. It is to this expanding market for medium priced higher quality wines that La Mancha's new young varietal whites are directed.

### CENCIBEL AND AIREN VINES

Over 80% of the vines planted in La Mancha are of the white variety Airén,



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which, as we have seen, when carefully harvested and vinified, produces a fine, fresh young white wine. The black variety, the Cencibel, although far less abundant than the white Airén, with considerably lower yields per vine, has, in my opinion, even greater possibilities. Cencibel is the La Mancha version of Spain's principal thoroughbred black grape variety known as Tempranillo in the Rioja, Ull de Llebre in Catalonia and Tinto fino in the Ribera del Duero, the variety which lends personality and breeding to the excellent cask-aged reservas of the Rioja, to the opulent rich red wines of the Penedés, and to the elegantly structured claret-styled reds of Vega Sicilia.

Long neglected however in La Mancha it is only recently that the full possibilities of *Cencibel* in the making of a high quality red wine have been explored. In the small wine town of Villarrobledo, the third generation family winery of Torres Filoso originally founded just after the first world war, specializes in cask-aged Cencibel varietal red wines. Taking a leaf from the Rioja wine men's book, Torres Filoso ages his reserva Juan José wines in American oak barrels before bottling. The 1982 I tested, with an alcoholic strength of around 12%, was a velvety smooth wine with a pleasing touch of oakiness, and a distinctly varietal bouquet. The use of the oak cask plus bottle aging for reserva reds is becoming more and more widespread in La Mancha. Other distinctive Cencibel varietal reservas I tasted were a particularly fine 1982 at Vinícola de Castilla, a woody but well balanced 1981 Estola from Bodegas Ayuso which had spent 18 months in oak cask, and the clean, well-made Don Fadrique '84 from Bodegas Santos Aguado. As a counter-balance to these red reserva varietals, many bodegas are also experimenting with young, first year, beaujolais nouveau style fruitier varietal Cencibel reds. Both the Cuevas del Granero 1988 red from the winery of the same name and the Vinícola de Cas-

tilla's Castillo de Alhambra 1988 seemed to me to be excellently made examples of the aromatic fruity younger style of red wine.

### CARE, TECHNOLOGY AND CLEANLINESS

Almagro is the old university centre of La Mancha. A splendid, peaceful white town of Renaissance houses, with an elegant green-shuttered square, and the oldest working theatre in Europe, it was here that I had arranged to meet one of La Mancha's most experienced and most successful winemen.

When I asked him what was the secret of his impeccably made white wines, he replied with three words: Care, Technology and Cleanliness. As these three key concepts revolutionize wine-making in this, Europe's largest wine-producing region, perhaps La Mancha's new wine makers as relative newcomers in the field of high quality fine wines can take heart from the result of a recent tasting of Spanish wines in London. One of England's most important wine journals, *Wine*, held a massive competitive tasting of wines from all over Spain this last autumn. In what is probably the most prestigious category, vintage red wines, the top rating was won not by a Gran Reserva from the Rioja Alta or a fine vintage from Penedés or the Ribera del Duero, but by a wine from a wine producing area which had only been officially recognized as a Denominación de Origen six months previously: Toro. Yet another case of the wealth of fine wines Spain produces. With its stable micro-climate, thoroughbred grape varieties and massive harvests which would permit the selection of only the finest grapes for special vintages, might not La Mancha in the not too distant future provide a similar surprise?



*Stainless steel fermentation tanks clad in cement and whitewashed to retain the flavour of earlier times.*

# Gourmets Club IV Show

## Madrid 25th, 26th, 27th, and 28th of May, 1990

### II Spanish Chefs Championship

**A**s in other years, the IV Show will be the meeting point for the best gastronomic products from Spain and abroad, high-quality goods produced by both craft and industrial techniques. The Gourmets Club IV Show has found it necessary to double the area needed to house the exhibition. It will be held simultaneously in the Convention Hall and in "La Masía" of the Corporation of Madrid, both of which are to be found in the enclosure of the Casa de Campo. At the same time, the final of the II Spanish Chefs Championship will be held, the winner of which will represent Spain at the World Chefs Championship, the Bocuse D'Or trophy (January 1991, Lyon).

#### 95 % OF PROFESSIONAL VISITORS

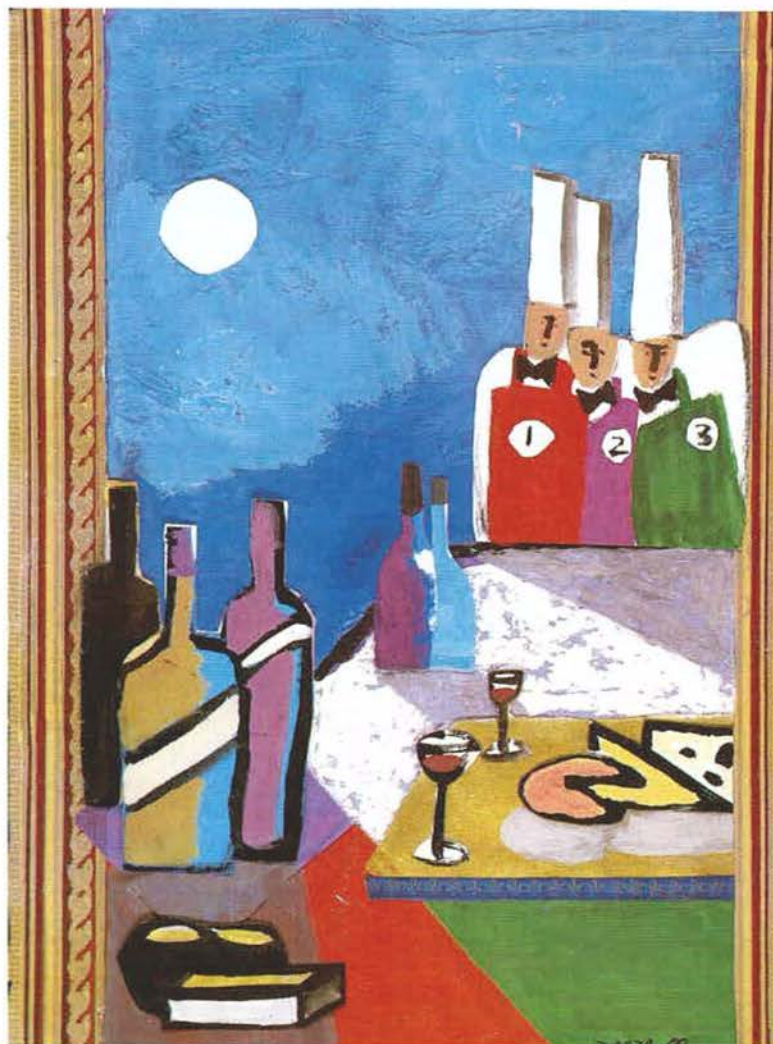
In 1989, 130 exhibitors participated and 10,452 people visited the Show, 95 % of which were professionals (owners and managers of the best restaurants, hotels, bars and gstronomic shops in Spain, as well as purchasing managers from the big supermarkets and chains of select food stores.)

#### SELECTION OF PRODUCTS TO BE EXHIBITED

As in former editions, the Organizing Committee will maintain a rigorous quality control of the products to be exhibited.

##### Products to be exhibited:

- Wines, spirits and liquors.
- Sweets, chocolates, biscuits, etc.
- Condiments, spices, oils and vinegars.
- Aperitives and beers.
- Cheeses and perishable products.
- Preserves, vegetables, fish and meat.
- Smoked products, caviar, etc.
- Pork products.
- Patés, foie-gras and duck and goose products.
- Tableware (dinner services, glassware, tablecloths, trolleys, and accessories).
- Various (kitchen utensils, gastronomic publications, computers, etc.)



For further information about the Gourmets Club IV Show, send this coupon to Progourmet, S. A. Calle Velayos, 4 (bajo). 28035 Madrid, Spain. Tel.: (1) 373 60 42. Fax: (1) 373 60 77.

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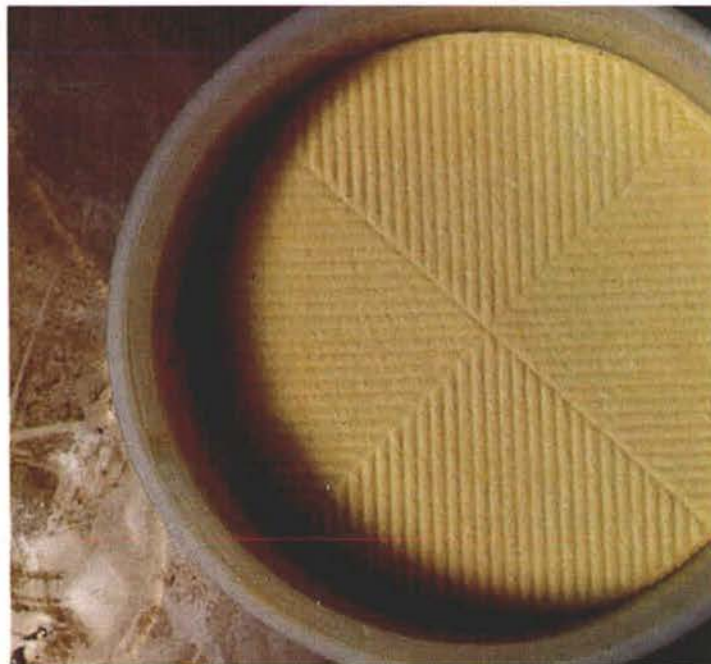
# SOURCE OF SPANISH CLASSICS

Text:  
**Enric Canut**  
 Photos:  
**P. Sancho-Mata**

**M**iguel de Cervantes' classic work, often described as the first modern novel, was written in 1605. This was a period when livestock breeding in Castile, controlled by the *Honrado Concejo de la Mesta* guild (see SPAIN GOURMETOUR No. 13), constituted a key sector of the Spanish economy, providing as it did the basis

of the flourishing *merino* wool trade with the rest of Europe. It is hardly surprising, then, that sheep, shepherds and cheese should feature prominently in the adventures of Don Quijote de La Mancha and his faithful sidekick, Sancho Panza.

But sheep-breeding in La Mancha dated back many centuries before this period of economic protagonism. This area of central Spain had been inhabited since the Iron and Bronze Ages (1700 BC), and archaeological remains which have come down to us — bones, sheep's wool, cheese moulds and perforated vessels for draining curds — reveal that it was a sheep-breeding and cheese-making area even then. By Greek and Roman times, writers and historians such as Diodorus and, later, Columella were leaving written records of Spain's livestock rearing and of the fact that the local cheese, particularly from the *Campus*



*Espartarius*, as the Romans called La Mancha, was particularly appreciated by the conquerors.

The Muslims established themselves in this vast arid area of the Iberian Peninsula in the 9C. They remained unousted for two hundred years and left an enduring legacy here, not least its very name which derives from the Arabic *manyá*, meaning 'waterless', which evolved by stages (*Mangla* and *Mancla*) into its present form of 'Mancha' by the 13C.

## PASTURES NEW

The etymology of the name La Mancha clearly reflects the area's outstanding characteristics, outstanding even for an invading force accustomed to the arid conditions of North Africa. La Mancha is an

Manchego is unquestionably Spain's best-known cheese, both at home and abroad. Though an excellent cheese in its own right, one cannot help suspect that, on an in-

ternational level at least, it owes its fame as much to literature as to its intrinsic qualities. It takes its name from La Mancha, the barren, elevated Castilian plateau which provided the scenario for the chivalric adventures of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance, better known to us all as Don Quixote.

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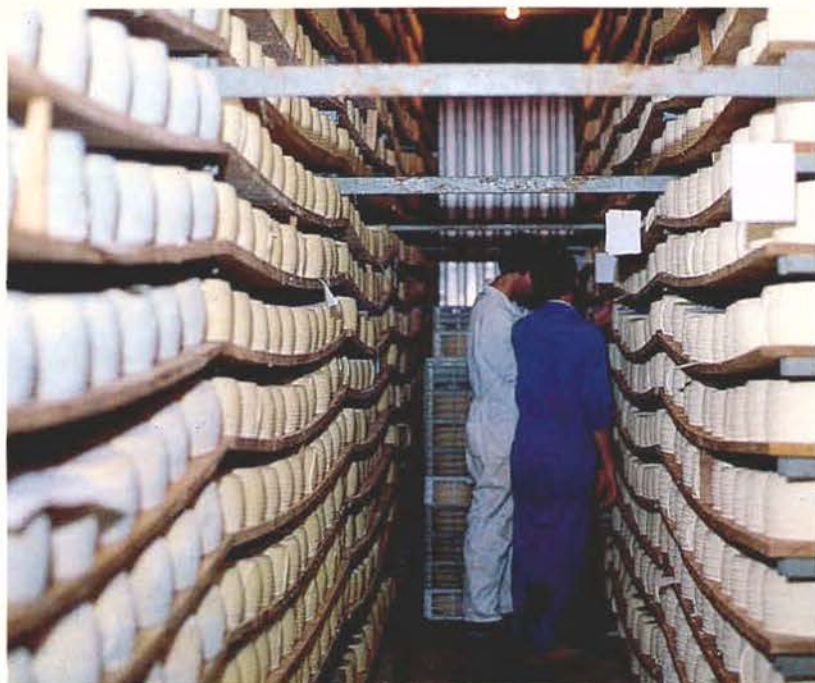
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elevated plateau, between 650 and 800 metres (2,000-2,500 ft.) above sea level, 300 km. (185 miles) long from east to west and some 200 km. (125 miles) wide. This amounts to an area of some 35,000 square km. (13,500 square miles) of rolling plains and low hills whose extreme continental climate makes for bitterly cold winters and long, hot summers. In combination with scant, seasonal rainfall and temperatures which can vary as much as 50 degrees C. (almost 110° F.) within one day, this means that living conditions in La Mancha are tolerable only to hardened natives and the local *manchega* breed of sheep. The fact that major rivers — the Tagus and the Guadiana — flow through La Mancha on their way from the surrounding mountains to the Atlantic has done nothing to alleviate the area's unsurprisingly ascetic lifestyle and attitudes of which Manchego cheese could be seen as something of a symbol.

This vast area of central Spain was a disputed frontier zone during the long push-pull struggle between the Muslim kingdoms of the south and the Christian kingdoms of the north of the Peninsula, not least for its sought-after winter pastures.

Only by adopting the technique of transhumance — moving the flocks from pasture to pasture — could sheep-breeding flourish in this testing physical environment. Thus it was that the first sheep-breeders' guilds, or *mestas*, came into being to organize the migration of the flocks and their protection by knights and members of the religious-military orders from Saracen raids. It was a situation in which the very basis of the local economy — sheep — had to be surrounded by the accoutrements of war.

In the 12C, Alfonso VI took Toledo from the Muslims, pushing them back as far as Andalusia. Relative peace and stability ensued, and in 1273 Alfonso X, The Wise, ratified the *Honrado Concejo de la Mesta* as the official overall body incorporating the various original sheep-breeders' guilds. From then on it was to constitute one of the Crown's political and economic pillars, providing, among other things, consistent and rational control of wool production.



*Manchego is defined as a pressed and uncooked cheese, made by enzymatic coagulation. It can be made from either raw or pasteurized milk. Some 15% of the total production is for farm-made cheeses, while the rest is produced industrially.*

## FROM WOOL TO CHEESE

Cheese was made during this period, though only on a small family, or at most, local scale. The population increase in the 17C saw much former pasture-land being given over to cereal crops and a change in the whole pattern of farming in Castile. Among the long-term effects of this phenomenon was the gradual decline in importance and political influence of the *Mesta* until it was finally abolished in 1836. Another was that the former sheep-breeders of La Mancha took up cereal-farming in parallel, still rearing sheep but now, instead of travelling the country in search of fresh pasture, grazing them on stubble or fallow fields and supplementing their feed with barley, oats and vetch.

Transhumance became unnecessary with this shift to mixed, relatively large-scale farming, and the pattern changed further with the emergence of an intensified, more specialized approach to livestock breeding. The importance of wool waned in favour of meat and cheese, and breeding priorities changed accordingly, the *manchega* breed of sheep gaining sway.





**Living conditions in La Mancha are tolerable only to hardened natives and the local manchego breed of sheep.**

The first studies of Manchego cheese appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Conde de Retamoso, an influential figure in the development of Spanish agriculture, laying the technological foundations for its future manufacture and characteristics. In our own century, specialization and rationalization in stock-breeding and, most importantly, the introduction of irrigation into the cultivation of fodder crops have been the decisive forces in transforming it from a side-line into a main-line activity. A flourishing cheese industry has developed in consequence, and La Mancha boasts some of the biggest cheese factories in Spain. Meanwhile, however, artesan-scale Man-

chego is still made in the many small and medium-sized intensively-farmed holdings which still thrive.

Since 1984, Manchego cheese has been covered by a *Denominación de Origen* (D.O.), whose terms stipulate that it must be made entirely of *manchega* sheep's milk and cured for at least 60 days. According to official figures, there are almost half a million head of this breed producing an annual total of around 7.5 million litres of dense (17% dry extract), rich (over 6% fat content) milk which is low in acidity and highly aromatic.

#### FARM AND FACTORY

Some 15% of overall production figures is accounted for by farm-made cheeses, while the rest is produced industrially. Manchego cheeses are still made in the traditional, highly characteristic cylindrical shape, the top and bottom stamped with the so-called *flor*, or flower, design and the circumference with the zig-zag pattern traditionally left by the esparto-grass binder though nowadays imitated by a plastic mould. Medium-to-long cured cheeses, they weigh around 3 kilos (6.6 lbs.). The manufacturing method still adheres very closely to the traditional one, though vegetable rennet has now been substituted for animal and modern stainless steel and plastic machinery and utensils have taken over from pattery, wood and esparto-grass.

Manchego is defined as a pressed, uncooked curd cheese, made by enzymatic coagulation. It can be made from either raw or pasteurized milk which is coagulated for between 45 and 60 minutes until it



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forms a hard, compact curd and then chopped up finely to the size of grains of rice. This mass is then drained, compressed and then moulded and subjected to heavy pressure until all whey has been expelled and it takes on its final shape. It is then usually salted in a strong brine for a maximum of 48 hours. It is left to mature in a cool (8-12 degrees C. or 50° F.), humid (80-85%) atmosphere, being turned over periodically until it is ready for eating.

On the outside, Manchegos can be ochre yellow, in the case of washed or oiled cheeses, or blackish green, in the case of brushed cheeses which retain the mould typical of cellar-maturing. Inside, they are close-grained, compact and rather inelastic with tiny regular holes produced by fermentation. Ranging in colour from off-white to pale yellow, Manchegos have a very definite, complex flavour, slightly piquant and salty, and buttery or even oily on the palate. The long, strong aftertaste smacks very clearly of sheep's milk. Although imaginative restaurateurs, particularly in Madrid, have incorporated Manchego cheese into their cooking — in sauces, stuffings and vegetable dishes, for example (see Recipes) — it is a cheese best appreciated just as it is. For me, it is the perfect aperitif with a good chilled *fino* sherry which allows you to appreciate the full range of its flavour. It is also hard to beat the delicious simplicity of Manchego eaten with fresh crusty bread and a glass of red wine (something with not too much alcohol but plenty of body and a touch of wood, like a D.O. Rioja, Valdepeñas or La Mancha wine). Or to finish off a meal, it juxtaposes well with the sweetness and texture of fruit such as grapes, fresh figs, peaches and apples or — a typical Spanish combination, this — *membrillo*, or quince paste.



Most of Spain's Manchego cheese is taken up by the domestic market though it is exported to various European countries and to the United States. The *Queso Manchego* D.O.'s Regulatory Council stipulates that all registered manufacturers, both artisan and industrial, must attach casein labels bearing the legend -Manchego — España- and a code number on the outside of their cheeses to protect this Spanish classic from adulteration or imitation. While applauding these safeguards, one can not help feeling that, with its characteristic shape and unmistakable flavour, a genuine Manchego is unmistakable. Once tasted, never forgotten.

*According to official figures an annual total of around 7.5 million litres of dense, rich milk is used for the elaboration of manchego cheese.*

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# Recipes

## **Manchego Cheese Salad** (*Ensalada al queso manchego*)

Serves 6

1 large lettuce  
200 gr. cured Manchego cheese  
2 onions  
2 small cucumbers  
6 tomatoes  
3 hard-boiled eggs  
parsley  
1/2 l. mayonnaise

Wash and dry the lettuce and arrange the leaves concentrically on a circular serving dish. Slice the tomatoes and arrange in a circle on top of the lettuce, then top with a layer of peeled, finely sliced cucumber. Cut the cheese into fine strips and place in the centre of the salad, then cover the lot with mayonnaise and sprinkle with chopped onion and parsley. Arrange the quartered eggs around the edge and serve immediately.

## **Manchego Cheese Sauce** (*Salsa de queso manchego*)

100 gr. Manchego cheese  
3 egg yolks  
2 dl. olive oil  
parsley, basil, salt and pepper

Grate the cheese finely, having first removed the rind. Chop the parsley and basil and mix in with the cheese. Place the mixture in a bain-marie and, stirring continuously, gradually add the beaten egg yolks and the olive

oil. Allow to cook gently, still stirring, until the mixture thickens to the desired consistency. Check the seasoning. This sauce is delicious with vegetables or salads.

## **Aubergines with Cheese** (*Berenjenas con queso*)

Serves 6

6 plump aubergines  
240 gr. medium-cured Manchego cheese  
3 glasses white wine  
6 tablespoons olive oil

Cut the unpeeled aubergines in half lengthwise. Score the surface of the flesh, sprinkle with salt and set aside for half an hour.

Place in an ovenproof dish with the flesh side up, pour on a little oil and cook in a medium-to-hot oven, basting them from time to time with their own juice. About half-way through the cooking time, pour on the wine. The aubergines are done when they are golden brown and the flesh has collapsed. Fill the cavity with finely chopped Manchego and return to the oven until it has melted. Serve hot directly from the dish.

## **Cheese and Bacon Cake** (*Pastel de queso y bacon*)

Serves 6

150 gr. bread  
1/2 l. milk

3 eggs

100 gr. mature Manchego cheese  
4 slices bacon  
salt and black pepper

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees C. (400 F.). Cut the bread into little cubes and place in a baking dish. Beat the eggs in a bowl, adding the milk, grated cheese and a little salt and pepper. Mix well, then pour over the bread and leave for 15 minutes so that it absorbs the mixture. Arrange the bacon slices on top then place the dish in the oven for 30-40 minutes until the bacon is done and the cake is puffy and golden.

## **Fried Cheese** (*Queso frito*)

This ancient, traditional recipe crops up all over Spain and is still eaten today in some regions. Here is one version, taken from Antonio Aragonés Subero's *Gastronomía en Guadalajara*

In olden times, the shepherds of Berniches used to get together during Lent to eat fried or spread cheese. They would first toast bread dipped in oil in the embers of a good fire. In a little frying pan, they would heat up pork dripping or olive oil, drop in a slice of bread and when it was brown, take it out and remove the pan from the heat. They would then drop in slices of aged cheese, stirring until it melted and

would then spread it on the ready-toasted bread. Sometimes they mixed the melted cheese with honey, calling the mixture *quesomiel*.

Another version of fried cheese is made by dipping it in beaten egg before frying. Salt and garlic or fresh herbs are also sometimes added.

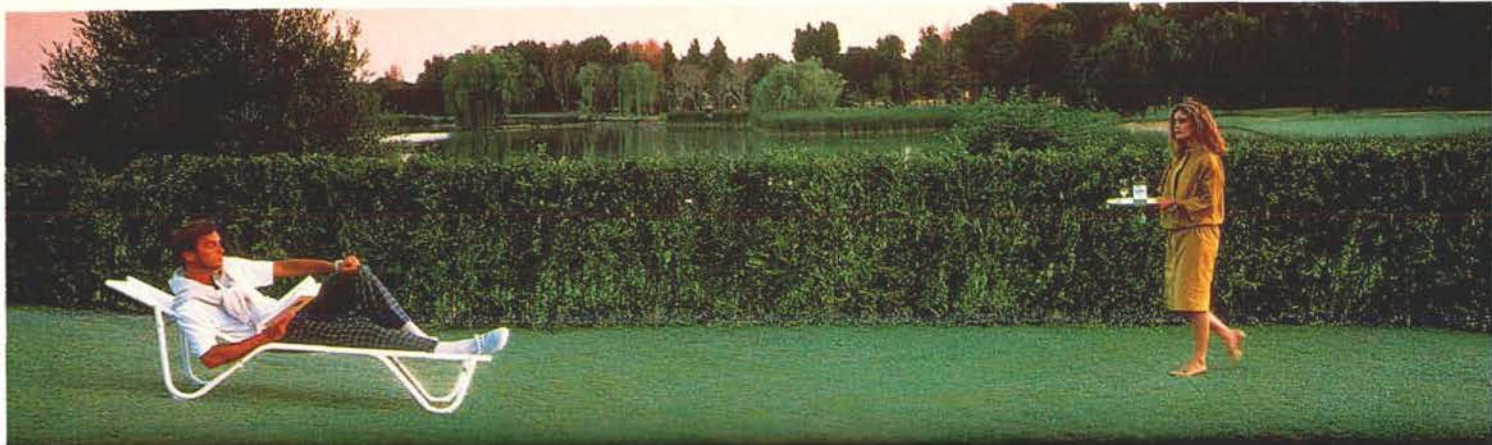
## **Imperial Cheese Mould** (*Tarta imperial de queso*)

Serves 6

10 eggs  
1 l. single cream  
400 gr. sugar  
300 gr. cured Manchego cheese, grated

Put half the sugar into a saucepan and heat gently, stirring continuously, until it caramelizes. Use this to coat the inside of a mould and set aside. Break the eggs into a bowl and add the remaining sugar, the grated cheese and the cream. Beat vigorously and pour the mixture into the mould. Place the mould in a bain-marie and bake in the oven for 20 minutes. Serve chilled.

**Note:** The recipes are from the book *La Mancha y el Queso Manchego*, and are reproduced with the kind permission of the publisher, the Agricultural Office of the Castille-La Mancha Regional Council.



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ASPARAGUS OF NAVARRE

# A GOURMET TREAT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Text: Ana Westley  
Stylism: Menchu Artime  
Still life: Anna Löscher  
Photos: Miguel Pérez Pardo

Popular wisdom claims that anything good is bound to be either sinful or fattening. Alas, most gourmet delights fall into the second category. But white asparagus is one of the few exceptions. Although once considered sinful, asparagus is totally non-fattening. So enjoy without remorse this delicate feast!

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No Spanish restaurant is without them. They're white, tender, delicious, and highly esteemed by German and French gourmets. And they have practically no calories! Yes, we're referring to white asparagus, a culinary delicacy that has been savoured by epicurean palates since the dawn of civilization. Long prized in Europe, the star vegetable of Spain's northern province of Navarre promises to take root in hautes cuisines around the world.

Few gourmet glories have tickled fine palates for thousands of years. Cultivated since time immemorial, asparagus is believed to originate in the eastern area of the Mediterranean basin, in what is now Greece and Turkey. The ancient Egyptians considered asparagus a food for gods and the Greeks are credited with introducing the delicacy to the Romans, who soon incorporated asparagus as a must on any feast.

### ROMAN APHRODISIAC AND PASSION OF LOUIS XIV

The subtly flavoured vegetable was believed to have aphrodisiac properties by both the Romans and Arabs. In an early historical reference, Apicius, a famed Roman epicure of the First Century, extolled the erotic powers of asparagus prepared as follows: Fry previously boiled asparagus in lard, adding egg yolks and hot peppers. One wonders if this recipe bears any relation to the Spanish saying -Go fry asparagus-, which usually means a totally useless activity.

Galen, a 2nd Century Greek physician and philosopher who was the supreme authority in medicine for centuries, claimed asparagus had more edifying medicinal properties, some of which modern medicine has corroborated. Pliny the Elder of 1st Century Rome had already termed asparagus *prodigia ventris*, loosely translated as -good for digestion-.

Throughout the Middle Ages asparagus, along with other vegetables and Roman delicacies, fell into sorry oblivion. However the famed plant was triumphantly rediscovered as an exquisite delicacy fit for the aristocratic tables of the French court of Louis XIV, *Le Roi Soleil* (1638-1715). France's most extravagant monarch was reported to be one of the first European asparagus buffs, devouring bowls of creamed white asparagus before meals. To keep up with demand, the royal kitchens of Louis XIV began their own exclusive garden cultivation.

Asparagus beds proliferated and the preferred royal vegetable was soon in vogue throughout France and later the rest of Europe. French writer and man of letters Bernad le Bovier de Fontanelle, who lived to the ripe old age of 100 minus a few weeks (1657-1757), attributed his longevity to his passion for asparagus *a la flamande* (with melted butter and chopped hard boiled eggs).

### DANGEROUS TEMPTATION

Nevertheless, the epicurean springtime feast of white asparagus fell into disrepute



**To obtain white asparagus, the plant must not receive any sunlight, so it is buried well below the surface and small mounds are carefully made where the shoots will appear in the spring.**

in Victorian days and the early 20th Century. Due to its suggestive shape, the vegetable was considered obscene in polite society. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, introduced the concept of phallic symbols and clearly asparagus was an all too obvious example. No decent young woman or respected lady would be caught dead eating juicy large white asparagus in public. And conversely, only women of loose morals enjoyed the succulent vegetable, thereby

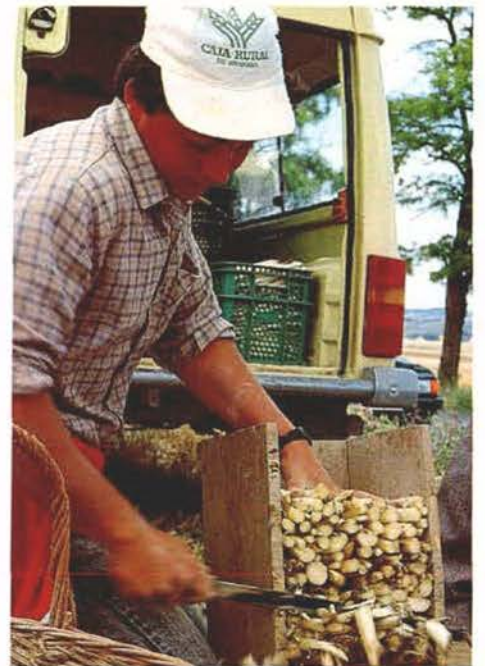


ragus is not only delicious but healthy and nutritious.

Weight watchers, rejoice! There are few gourmet delights that are not fattening and asparagus is one of them. With only 20 calories per 100 grams and containing practically no fat or sugar, asparagus is an unlimited filling vegetable. You can stuff yourself and not gain weight... just be careful with the mayonnaise and sauces! But take heart, for true asparagus connoisseurs insist that the vegetable's subtle flavour is best savoured at room temperature au naturel without any sauces.

Navarre experts claim fresh white asparagus is best served slightly warm, after it has been allowed to cool a little from cooking. The smooth velvety flavor melts in your mouth with a long lasting delicate aftertaste. -Like fish, if the product is really fresh, you don't need anything else-, affirms a popular saying.

Not only are asparagus extra low in calories, but can be, and should be, eaten with your fingers, according to the most rigorous dining etiquette, which makes it an even more succulent mouthful.



flaunting their easy virtue. Once again, asparagus was thought to have aphrodisiac powers, hence a -dangerous- temptation for innocent young women.

Throughout this century white asparagus has made a glorious comeback and has recovered its place of honor among fine gourmet foods. However, it's erotic prestige dies hard. Zsa Zsa Gabor, one of Hollywood's most famous vamps, confessed being an insatiable asparagus buff, and claimed that -power, wealth, and asparagus were the most powerful aphrodisiacs-.

#### DIET AND HEALTH

While we will leave claims of aphrodisiac powers for the reader to decide for him or

herself, recent scientific studies in the United States support evidence that asparagus may help prevent certain types of cancer. It's high fiber content has been pinpointed as one factor, but other unidentified properties may also be present. Doctors now emphasize the need for diets rich in fiber, and asparagus is an ideal source that helps regulate intestinal functions.

Asparagus also has diuretic properties recognized by ancient civilizations, making it beneficial for kidney function and a valuable aid to dieters. Recent studies have found that an asparagus extract also has a beneficial action on the heart muscle, confirming the observations of the Greek physician Galen. The vegetable also has a slight sedative or relaxing effect making it an ideal food to calm tense nerves. Rich in copper, phosphorous and essential amino acids, aspa-

***Each sprout is harvested individually, and necessarily by hand. The farmer — who must actually guess where there might be a full grown sprout — carefully uncovers the asparagus and cuts them at a standard length.***

Asparagus can be used in everything from hors-d'oeuvres, entrées, to main courses. Canned asparagus make ideal hors-d'oeuvres any time of year, and dress up the most ordinary salad. In Spain, canned asparagus has long been a favourite first dish, especially for festive occasions, or an easy tasty entrée to prepare for unexpected dinner guests. No Spanish restaurant menu is without them. Thick white asparagus from Navarre is a deluxe delicatessen food in



«Noble Label»

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ESPARRAGO  
DE NAVARRA  
CONSEJO REGULADOR  
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The "Consejo Regulador de la Denominación Específica ESPARRAGO DE NAVARRA" Board of Control for the Specific Denomination "ASPARAGUS OF NAVARRE", established in 1987, guarantees the origin of the production and the quality of its elaboration.

Germany where it is a must on any Christmas table. In France, green and purple tipped asparagus are as popular as the white, and are less expensive as well.

As a first dish, asparagus is usually served with mayonnaise, a vinaigrette sauce, or hollandaise sauce, although true gourmets insist that au naturel is the best. Asparagus au gratin is another favourite, or chopped and served in omelettes, or in a cream soup. In main courses, asparagus add the gourmet touch. (See recipes.)

#### CULTIVATION AND PRODUCTION IN NAVARRE

Cultivation of asparagus was introduced in the northern region of Navarre in the early days of Spain's Arab occupation which began in the 8th century. Widespread production began about 50 to 60 years ago and is now concentrated around the fertile and muddy Ebro River banks and its tributaries throughout an area of 8,000 to 10,000 hectares covering 130 townships.

The vegetable is also grown in Andalusia and Extremadura in the south and a slim green variety known as *triguero* is also cultivated throughout Spain. But the northern white Navarre variety is considered to have the best quality. White asparagus with the Noble Label of Specific Denomination is regulated by a Control Board of Asparagus of Navarre since 1987 and guarantees the origin and quality of elaboration.

This year Navarre is expected to produce approximately 24,000 tons of asparagus, roughly about one third of Spain's entire estimated production. Last year, considered a poor yield season due to unfavourable weather, Navarre produced 20,400 tons, followed by Andalusia (19,000 tons) and Extremadura (14,300 tons). In Navarre over 95% of processed asparagus is of the white variety. Exports account for about half of production.

The asparagus plant belongs to the Liliaceous family (*Lilaceae*) which consists of some 150 varieties. Only *Asparagus officinalis* is cultivated for consumption. It is a hardy plant in temperate climates that lives for 6 or 7 years. It thrives best in loose, deep, sandy soil that is well drained and can be grown on both irrigated and unirrigated land. It can be found growing wild along the roadsides of Navarre.

The asparagus plant has large fleshy roots and an underground fleshy stem system shaped like a claw which is termed Rhizome. Small buds appear on the Rhizome and in the spring, these buds shoot up as sprouts which become the edible part of the plant. Temperatures during this period (April to June) should be between 12 and 20 degrees C. with a minimum temperature no lower than -1 degree C. If the shoots are allowed to flower, they develop into a plant with fern-like foliage that grows to about 0.5 to 1.5 meters (18 to 54 inches). In Navarre, asparagus connoisseurs claim the best asparagus is the first of the season. A popular saying insists:



***Canneries have very strict quality controls and sprouts are carefully selected by hand at several stages of production.***

*-Los de abril para mí  
Los de mayo para mi amo  
Los de junio para ninguno.*

(April's harvest for me / May's harvest for the landowner / June's harvest for no one).

#### **THE SECRET OF WHITE ASPARAGUS**

Many years of experimentation and investigation have developed today's white asparagus of Navarre. Two years of cultivation are necessary before the plant is ready for market production, and then only half a season is harvested. One plant may yield from just 2 or 3 sprouts to eventually a hundred per season.

To obtain white asparagus, the plant must not receive any sunlight while the tender sprouts are shooting up from the Rhizome. The asparagus roots and Rhizome are buried well below the surface (about 0.5 meters or 18 in.) and small mounds are carefully made where the shoots will appear in the spring. From a distance, asparagus beds appear to be row after row of mounded earth. The loosely packed earth covering the asparagus shoots not only protects the sprouts from sunlight, which would turn the tips green, but supplies needed moisture and protection from overnight frosts.

*Many connoisseurs insist that canned asparagus are actually better than fresh. That may be because canneries process the shoots in less than 24 hours after harvest.*



#### **HARVESTING BY HAND**

Each sprout is harvested individually, and necessarily by hand. The farmer must actually guess where there might be a full grown sprout just below the covered surface. There will usually be a tiny tell tale crack or fissure in the mound indicating a subtle movement of earth caused by a ripe sprout just below. The farmer then carefully uncovers the asparagus, without cutting other sprouts, and cuts it at a standard length.

However, there may be no sign of a stalk coming up and by the next day, the asparagus tip may have broken through the surface. Once this happens, daylight immediately triggers the production of chlorophyll and the tip turns purplish, and later green. These asparagus will be of lesser commercial quality and must be separated by the farmer.

White asparagus harvesting continues to be practically medieval involving back breaking labor. Early in the morning, sometimes at the break of day, farmers can be seen in the misty fields, rectangular baskets in hand, patiently uncovering the mounded earth, plant by plant. The work must be done daily, sometimes even twice a day, rain or shine. Even rainy daylight is enough to turn the asparagus tips green if they emerge.

One local farmer commented that even during the three day festivities in mid May

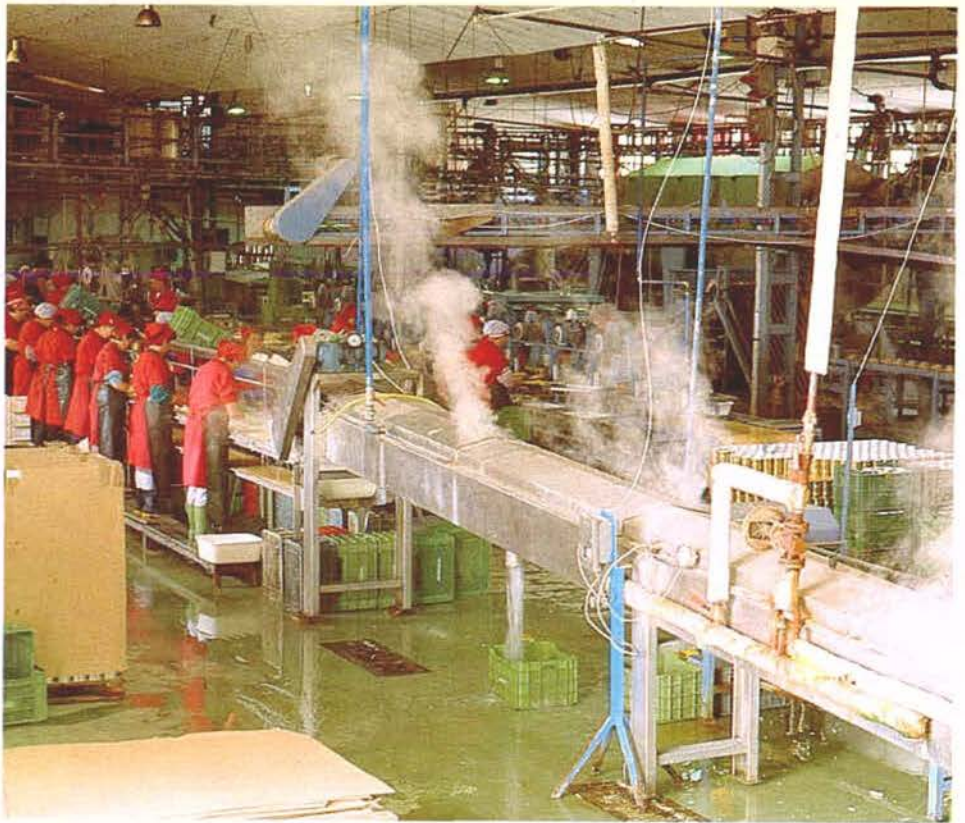
of Saint Isidro, patron saint of farmers, the asparagus must be collected. -It's quite a spectacle... workers struggle to the fields with hangovers, some have to stop and lie down, others are holding their headaches with one hand and digging for asparagus with the other... Because the asparagus must be collected.

White asparagus may be sold fresh, usually in bundles of 1/2, 1, and 2 kilos (1, 2 and 4 lbs.), and will last several days in the refrigerator. However, most of Navarre's production is sold directly to nearby processing factories. Over half of the factory production is sold in Spain and the rest is exported, mainly to Germany and France, traditional asparagus addicts.

### BETTER THAN FRESH

-Asparagus is difficult to cook perfectly-, explains Ricardo Armendáriz, General Secretary of Agrucon, a vegetable canning industry federation based in Pamplona, Navarre. If the stalks are overcooked, they become mushy and turn brownish. If they are undercooked, they are too fibrous or stringy to eat and may have a slightly bitter aftertaste. -In Navarre, the canning industries know how to cook asparagus exactly right and have specialized machinery just for asparagus-, he says.

Indeed, many connoisseurs insist that canned asparagus is actually better than fresh. -That may be because canneries



*In Navarre, the canning industries know how to cook asparagus exactly right and have specialized machinery just for them.*

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process the shoots in less than 24 hours after harvest, and usually within hours, explains José Luis Mañu, executive secretary of Asparagus of Navarre, the regulating board for the specific Denomination. -Canneries, of course, also have much stricter quality controls for their products-, adds Mr. Armendáriz. -Sprouts are carefully selected by hand in several stages of production and laboratory controls supervise all stages of processing-, Mr. Mañu affirms.

### ROBOT PEELING

Asparagus selection begins in the field during harvesting. Pickers separate perfect white stalks from purple or green tipped ones. Once delivered to the canneries, the asparagus begin processing immediately or are stored, even for a few hours, in large refrigerated rooms.

Processing begins with washing and peeling that is generally done by hand, and more recently by special peeling machines, such as one in Conservas V. García. Asparagus sprouts are held vertically by a robot machine. While being rinsed continually, the stalks are rotated twice while small special blades make twelve peels per sprout. -We feel the machine gives as good or better quality than hand peeling which tends to square off the stalk-, claims Adrianus Suijkerbuijk, a Dutch engineer at V. García and inventor of the machine in use.

However, Nicolás F. de Barrera, owner of Conservas Barco, S. A., claims that no machine can duplicate the perfection of hand peeling. -But machinery is inevitable... we too are investigating the possibility because every year it is harder and harder to get good peelers and the cost per kilo is rising steadily-.

Next, the peeled asparagus is washed, scalded and then selected again by hand. Perfect asparagus stalks are cut to uniform lengths, usually from 17 cm. to 22 cm. (6.8 to 8 inches). On conveyor belts, pickers classify the asparagus according to caliber, color, and general condition. The categories approved by the Specific Denomination Board include -Extra-, -I-, and -II- for fresh asparagus, which includes frozen asparagus. Within these categories, the asparagus may be white, green, or white with green or purple tips. Only asparagus of -Extra- and -First- categories are protected by the Specific Denomination for preserving. The highest prices go for extra thick totally white asparagus, most of which is consumed within Spain, especially in expensive restaurants. Within the different categories, the asparagus is also classified by its caliber or thickness: extra thick (over 19 mm. or 0.76 inches in diameter), very thick (14-19 mm. or 0.56-0.76 inches), thick (11-14 mm. or 0.44-0.76 inches), standard (9-11 mm. or 0.36-0.44 inches), and thin (under 9 mm. or 0.36 inches). Crooked, and defective pieces (hollow stalks, stained stalks, spiny or flowered tips) are weeded out.

Although a machine could theoretically distinguish size and caliber, it is still color blind. Nor could a machine detect defects

## ASPARAGUS PRODUCTION IN SPAIN

Year	Area in hectares	Tons (in thousands)	
		Total in Spain	Navarre
1979	13,961	48,249	25,976
1980	14,740	50,686	29,412
1981	14,687	51,335	28,874
1982	15,617	49,619	25,874
1983	17,261	55,863	28,757
1984	18,997	54,672	24,001
1985	18,799	69,150	25,055
1986	19,730	67,700	24,620
1987	20,732	73,900	24,963
1988	22,050	72,250	20,400
1989 (estimated)	—	—	24,000

Source: AGRUCON.

## SPAIN'S ASPARAGUS EXPORTS TONS (in thousands)

Year	E.E.C.	Others	Total
1983	6,925	373	7,375
1984	7,793	736	8,635
1985	10,811	753	11,823
1986	7,123	546	7,985
1987	10,352	135	11,217
1988	9,007	130	9,137
1989 (estimated)	—	—	11-12,000

Source: AGRUCON.

## NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF ASPARAGUS (Per 100 grs.)

	Fresh, raw	Fresh, cooked	Canned
Calories	21	20	18
Water	91.7-93	92.5-93.6	92.3-93.6
Protein (grs.)	2.2-2.5	2.2-2.4	1.9-2.1
Fat (grs.)	0.2	0.2	0.3-0.5
Fiber (grs.)	0.7	0.7-0.8	0.5-0.8
Ash (grs.)	0.6-0.7	0.4-1.3	1.3-1.5
Calcium (mg.)	21-22	19-21	16-18
Phosphorus (mg.)	62	50-53	41-43
Iron (mg.)	0.9-1.0	0.6-1.0	1.0-1.7
Sodium (mg.)	2	1	236-410
Potassium (mg.)	240-278	183	130-140
Vit. A (i.u.)	900-1,000	900-1,000	80-600
Thiam. or B1 (mg.)	0.16-0.18	0.13-0.16	0.05-0.07
Riboflav. or B2 (mg.)	0.19-0.20	0.17-0.18	0.06-0.1
Niacine (mg.)	1.4-1.5	1.2-11.4	0.7-0.9
Vit. C (mg.)	33	23-26	15

Source: The Heinz Handbook of Nutrition. Composition of Foods. Raw. Processed. Prepared. Agricultural Handbook no. 8.

such as hollow stalks or unsightly stains due to disease.

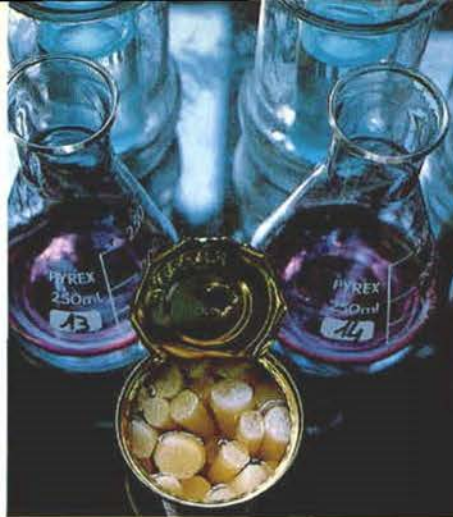
Nothing is discarded in the selection. Broken tips are canned separately in cans or jars of asparagus tips. Broken or left over stalks are also chopped and canned separately, and broken pieces of tips and stalks can be sold for asparagus cream soups. Even the peelings are sold for livestock. Cows are said to increase excellent milk production when fed asparagus peelings.

### CANNING AND QUALITY CONTROLS

Next, the asparagus may be scalded again and ultrafrozen for exports or cooked in dry vapor, drained, weighed individually, and canned before sterilization in sealed cans or glass jars in large vats. Pressure, temperature, and time are controlled by computers. Frozen asparagus are just beginning to gain popularity, especially for exports.

Laboratory controls are carried out by the canning factories themselves, but are also checked by industry federations such as Agrucon, Asparagus of Navarre Control Board, and Consebro, which maintains a huge laboratory AICV (Association for the Investigation of Canned Vegetables) in the heart of asparagus country in San Adrián in Navarre.

From factory laboratories to outside controls, asparagus of Navarre are guaranteed to be the very best. Quality controls include



**Quality controls include — among others — net weights, color, fibrosity, caliber, clarity of packaging water, defects and acidity.**

net weights, color, fibrosity (the perfect asparagus cannot be stringy or tough), caliber (thickness), clarity of packaging water, defects, and acidity. Microbiology is strictly supervised to assure perfect sterilization. Finally the type of container and sealing is also checked. Glass jars must be sealed correctly and cans are checked for rusting or corrosion and metallic contamination due to defective seams. -Strangely enough, many consumers preferred the old unvarnished cans-, explains chemist Jesús María Ayechu, laboratory director of Conservas Barco. The inside of the can appeared slightly blackened due to a chemical reaction between the asparagus and tin. -Although harmless, this gave a slight flavor that some consumers came to like. But others, alarmed by the dark color of the can would think the product had become contaminated and would throw it away-, he said. -Today, all cans are varnished to avoid any chemical reaction with tin-, adds María José Autor Martínez, laboratory director of AICV.

-Our asparagus of Navarre is about 40% more expensive in Europe than oriental imports-, confesses Mr. Armendáriz of Agrucon. However, Navarre's white asparagus is recognized as the best. -You get what you pay for-, he warns. -Our asparagus from Navarre is the preferred one for true connoisseurs throughout Europe-.

For those gourmet readers who want to experiment with white asparagus gastronomy we suggest some recipes supplied by two of Navarre's best restaurants. ¡Buen provecho!



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TOLEDO-ESPAÑA

WINES FROM LA MANCHA (SPAIN)

# Recipes

**RESTAURANTE JOSETXO**  
(four forks, one star in the Michelin Guide)  
Plaza Príncipe de Viana 1  
Pamplona  
Owner: Ricardo Eceolaza and family

"One can't conceive of Navarre without asparagus," affirms Ricardo Eceolaza in his chic restaurant in the heart of Pamplona. At a table with a lacy tablecloth over a blue embroidered undercloth, Mr. Eceolaza explains that fresh boiled asparagus is one of the most difficult vegetables to cook correctly. Here follows his secret:

## Fresh Boiled Asparagus (Espárragos frescos hervidos)

Serves 4

- 1 kilo fresh white asparagus of Navarre
- 1 large pot of water
- Salt to taste

Cut off asparagus stalks to desired length. Peel from just below the tip. Wash. Place asparagus stalks in abundant cold salted water. The asparagus should be able to "dance" once the water begins to boil. Let boil for 1/2 hour and remove from heat. Let cool in the boiled water at room temperature. (The broth can later be used for cream of asparagus soup.)

Once the asparagus is cooked, it should be kept uncovered in its broth at room temperature. Asparagus ferments easily and should be eaten soon after it has been cooked. The secret to success is to place the asparagus in abundant cold water. The stalks should be peeled enough not to be stringy and to be eaten comfortably with your fingers.

Serve slightly warm. White asparagus connoisseurs prefer no sauces, but the dish can be served with mayonnaise, vinaigrette, or with a hollandaise sauce.

## Asparagus and Salmon Gratinée (Gratinado de espárragos y salmón)

This is a recipe created by Felisa García, a member of the extended family owning Josetxo.

Serves one

- 200 g. per person of salmon escalopes. (Escalopes are taken from fillets of salmon cut when raw. The escalopes are trimmed if desired to an oval shape.)



Asparagus with clams and poached eggs.



Asparagus and salmon gratinée.



Puff pastry filled with asparagus and Norway lobster tails.

- 2 thick white asparagus per person, cooked (see above) or canned
- 100 g. butter
- 1/2 tsp. flour per person
- 1 tbsp. per person hollandaise sauce

One parsley sprig per person

Split white asparagus stalks lengthwise and place in a greased baking dish, cut side up. Baste lightly with melted butter and place in a hot oven for a few minutes. Remove and place aside.

Cut and trim salmon escalopes. Grill until golden. Place over asparagus. Baste with melted butter and sprinkle with flour. Place in a hot oven for 2 minutes. Remove and top with a light hollandaise sauce. Decorate with parsley. Serve immediately.

This dish can be served as a starter or main course and goes well with a Navarre Rosé or white wine.

## RESTAURANTE TUBAL (two forks, one star in the Michelin Guide)



Mixed vegetables with asparagus.

## Plaza de Navarra 2 Tafalla (Pamplona) Owner: Achen Jiménez Esquiroz

In Tafalla, south of Pamplona in the heart of asparagus country, couples wishing to get married must first make a reservation at El Tubal. Then they can set the date with the priest. On a busy spring week day, Achen Jiménez shares a few of her favorite asparagus recipes.

## Mixed Vegetables with Asparagus (Verduras variadas con espárragos)

Serves 4

- One 1/2 kilo can of white asparagus
- 8 fresh artichokes
- 100 g. fresh peas
- 100 g. fresh green beans
- 150 g. fresh borage stalks
- 150 g. fresh broad beans (habas)
- 16 stalks white asparagus
- 50 g. oil
- 3 garlic cloves, slivered
- 1 cup of lightly cured Serrano ham cut in small cubes
- 1 tbs. flour

Cook all vegetables separately to avoid over or under cooking. Drain, and mix together. In a frying pan, lightly brown cured ham cubes. Add garlic slivers and sauté until golden. Sprinkle in flour. Add vegetables and sauté lightly. Place in serving dish and add asparagus on top at the last minute.

## Asparagus with Clams and Poached Eggs (Espárragos con almejas y huevos)

Serves 4

- 1 kilo can of white asparagus
- 800 g. fresh clams
- 3 cloves garlic, cut in slivers
- 4 eggs
- 1 tbs. flour
- 1 cup olive oil
- 4 sprigs parsley

Heat oil in a frying pan and lightly sauté garlic slivers until golden. Sprinkle in flour and add clams. Stir in liquid from asparagus can. Once the clams have opened up, remove shells.

In a clay baking dish, place asparagus. Add clams with their sauce. Break in one raw egg per person (4) over mixture and bake in a medium hot oven until the egg whites gel. Remove from heat and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley.

For those more adventurous chefs of nouvelle cuisine, Achen Jiménez suggests one of her favorite recipes:

## Puff Pastry Filled with Asparagus and Norway Lobster Tails (Hojaldre relleno de espárragos y cigalas)

Serves 4

- 4 squares of puff pastry
- 16 asparagus stalks (cooked or canned)
- 300 g. borage stalks (may be substituted for another green vegetable)
- 8 Norway lobsters (cigalas)
- 4 garlic cloves, slivered
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tbs. butter
- 1 tbs. flour
- 4 sprigs parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Olive oil

Cut puff pastry into 4 rectangular squares, about 12 cm. x 4 cm. (6 in. x 2 in., approximately). Brush with egg yolk and bake for 15 min. in a hot oven.

Cook fresh asparagus and borage separately. (Canned asparagus may also be used.) After cooking, cut off asparagus tips which will be used for filling. Chop asparagus stalks and puree in an electric blender together with asparagus liquid, butter, and salt and pepper to taste. (Optional: fresh asparagus can be boiled with one small potato to give a thicker puree.)

Divide the borage stalks into two equal parts. Reserve one part for filling and repeat the same puree procedure with the other half. (Optional, 1 potato for a thicker puree.)

In a frying pan, lightly brown 2 of the slivered garlic cloves. Stir in the reserved half of the borage stalks and sauté lightly.

Separately, lightly brown remaining slivered garlic cloves. Add 8 peeled Norway lobster tails and cook until tender. Boil the heads separately. Sprinkle flour into the lobster tails and add enough broth from the boiled heads to make a light white sauce (bechamel). Salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat and add 1 tbs. butter and 2 egg yolks, stirring continuously. This will be the filling for the puff pastry.

Cut puff pastry open in the middle and fill with asparagus tips, Norway lobster tails, borage stalk mixture, and bechamel sauce.

Serve the asparagus and borage purees, one on each side of the puff pastry. Decorate plate with Norway lobster heads.

# CASA VILAS



## A TASTE OF GALICIA

Text: **Leopoldo González Espejo**  
Photos: **Manuel Santos Alguacil**

**N**o-one can visit Galicia without realizing how important food is there. People just back from their seaside holidays will talk not about the weather, but about how the *mariscos* (seafood) were this year. Habitues press their lists of favourite restaurants on first-time visitors, and only then go on to suggest places to visit and things to do. When a Galician restaurant is near the top of everybody's list, you can be sure that there's a good reason for it.

Santiago de Compostela's Casa Vilas is one of these. Its eighty-year reputation is sustained today with style and aplomb by Moncho and Paco Porto Vilas, grandsons of its original founders. It was first opened in 1915 by Ramón Vilas and his wife Rosalía Raña as a little eating house on the Camino Nuevo, a street then on the outskirts of town and by today part of the city centre and now named after Galicia's illustrious poetess, Rosalía de Castro.

Their daughter Josefina, Moncho and Paco's mother, is still a very active member of the restaurant's team. Though now getting on in years, she still works a full day wielding the

pots and pans and making the dishes which, in many cases, she first introduced into the repertoire. She has a vivid memory and chats nostalgically about the old days when Spain's star bullfighters used to perform at Santiago's bullring near the original Casa Vilas, and fans would crowd in to buy their snacks to eat as they watched the fight. Casa Vilas was also a meeting place in those days for academics, both teachers and pupils, from Santiago's ancient university. By today, they have been replaced by figures from the arts, industry and politics.

What is it that gives a restaurant star status? Good food abounds in Galicia, and Santiago itself is full of eating places, from simple to very smart indeed. This is, after all, Spain's original tourist boom town, the pilgrims' goal, with centuries of experience in catering to clerics, academics and visitors from all over the world. The secret of the Vilas' success, handed down from mother to sons, in this competitive environment has been to concentrate on top quality and good preparation. They have a knack of choosing the best from among the wide range of local products and then, though

faithful to Galician tradition, adding a subtle something to their flavour which makes them their own. All over Galicia you will be offered *caldo gallego* (a rich soup with meat, potatoes and greens), *empanada* (a sort of puff pastry or pie with various meat or fish fillings), and the octopus, fish, shellfish and meat for which this part of the country is famous. Here in Casa Vila you will be presented with the classics with a difference — supreme quality, subtler seasoning — to which it owes its status as a place of pilgrimage in its own right.

### NOTHING BUT THE BEST

All that being said, it has to be admitted that Santiago is something of a restaurateur's dream. Not only is it a great historical, cultural and religious centre, with all that implies in terms of potential customers, both in terms of numbers and degree of discernment. It is also ideally placed for access to the best *percebes* (goose barnacles, one of the prime local luxuries) from Cedeira, turbot from the Muros estuary, Amandi wine, exquisitely de-

*The secret of the Vilas' success, handed down from Josefina to her sons Moncho and Paco, has been to concentrate on top quality and good preparation.*

VDA DE R. VILAS  
CAFÉ BAR ROSALIA  
VINOS Y COMIDAS



# Recipes

## Coquille Saint Jacques (Vieira a la Gallega)

Serves 6  
6 scallops  
1 onion  
breadcrumbs, saffron, oil  
and salt

Open and clean the scallops and place in their shells in the oven for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, chop the onion finely and fry until soft with a few fronds of saffron. Cover each scallop with a layer of onion, then sprinkle with breadcrumbs and return to the oven to brown.

## Stewed Hock of Beef (Jarrete Guisado)

Serves 6  
1 beef hock  
400 gr. small potatoes  
1/4 l. white wine  
8 small onions  
1 head garlic  
olive oil and salt

Cult the meat into pieces and marinate it in white wine with the peeled garlic and



Coquille Saint Jacques.

salt for 6 - 8 hours. Heat a little olive oil in a casserole and brown the whole onions and then the meat. Add the marinade, cover the casserole and allow to cook over low heat. When the meat is beginning to get tender, add the potatoes and place the casserole in a slow oven until completely done.

## Ground Almond Tart (Tarta de Santiago)

Serves 6  
1/2 kg. ground almonds  
350 gr. flour



Stewed hock of beef.

1/4 kg. butter  
1/2 kg. sugar  
8 eggs  
grated rind of 1 lemon  
1/4 l. water  
icing sugar

Beat the eggs with the sugar, butter, flour and water until smooth and light, then fold in the ground almonds and lemon rind. Pour the mixture into a greased, low-sided baking tin and bake at 250° C. (482° F.) until set (about an hour). Allow to cool, then remove from the tin and sprinkle with icing sugar.

## Filled Pancakes (Filloas rellenas)

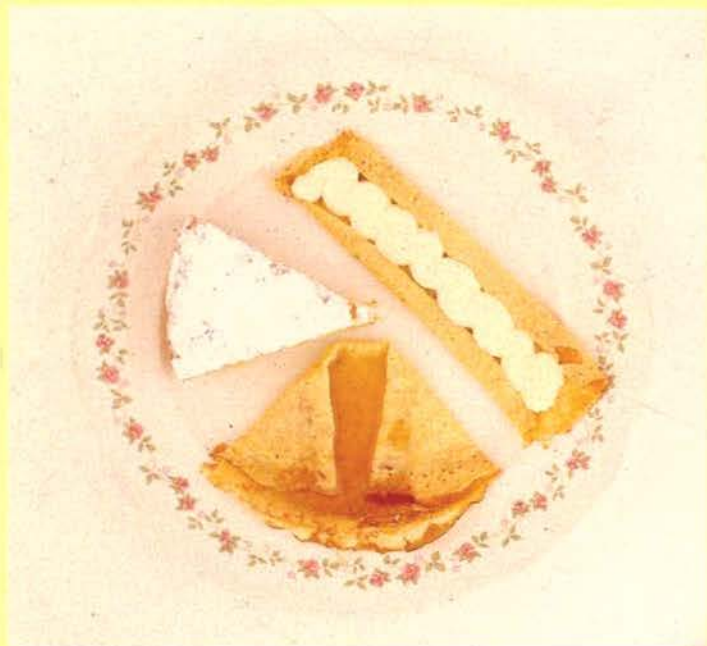
Serves 6  
1 l. meat or chicken stock  
1 l. milk  
500 gr. flour  
6 eggs

Beat the eggs, then add the stock and milk. Gradually add the flour, and beat thoroughly for about 5 minutes. Set aside for the mixture to rest. Heat a little butter in a small frying pan and add enough mixture at a time to make a thin pancake. Serve spread with honey and cream and rolled up. Any number of sweet fillings could be used in this recipe — custard, fruit purées...

licious and always in short supply, and cheese (Casa Vilas' particular favourites are farm *tetilla* cheese from Arzúa or Orense, and *San Simón*). Catering for a discerning clientele has fostered the invention of new uses for and combinations of classic local ingredients: *grellos* (turnip greens), traditionally served with ham or in soup, turn up as an accompaniment to fish; ray and clams are served together; beef hock is made into a rich stew, as is that local archetype, the octopus. In the dessert department, perennial Galician classics like *filloas* (feather-light pancakes — see Recipe) are served with imaginative fillings; then there is a sweet sausage whose secret is known to Josefina alone, and the Vilas' version of *Tarta de Santiago* (see Recipes), an almond tart which it is claimed was invented to use up the basic supplies which pilgrims brought with them on their travels.

The Vilas brothers have carried their best of Galicia policy through to their wine list, too, gradually replacing wines from Rueda, Rioja and Bierzo with local top quality wines: white Ribeiros, Albariños and Godellos, red Barrantes, Amandis and Ribeiros, and *pétillant* El Rosal. After coffee, they recommend the house *aguardientes*, which they buy from the Ulla area of Galicia, and their own home-made strawberry, lemon, orange, blackberry and kiwi liqueurs.

Unsurprisingly, Casa Vilas' fame has spread. In Santiago itself, there is now an Anxo Vilas, and Moncho and Paco have joined the gastronomic circuit, taking part in special events all over Spain — Asturias, Seville, Cordoba, Madrid — and even as far afield as Brazil and Argentina. New ideas picked up on the way have been adapted to conform with the Vilas approach to food in general and Galician food in particular. In conjunction with five other top restaurateurs and a journalist, they have founded a society for the protection of Galician cuisine, whose members call themselves the *Amigos de la Cocina Gallega*. The fact that the region's six big names are involved just goes to show that even in this day and age you can still be a purist and flourish.



Filled pancakes and almond tart, two very Galician desserts.



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# PEACHES IN WINTER, MANDARINS IN SUMMER

Text: **Sonia Ortega**

Still Life: **Antonio de Benito**

Stylism: **Menchu Artime**

Photos: **Fernando Briones/Sobremesa and ICEX**

At this point, when nutritionists have pondered their thousand and one wonders, little can be added concerning the virtues of fruit and its habitual consumption. However, although greenhouse cultivation has produced miracles, Mother Nature still maintains her tyranny over winter and summer fruit. A tyranny which is even stricter in those countries where winter frost prevents almost all fruit cultivation. Does this then mean it is impossible to enjoy peaches in winter or mandarin oranges in August? No, thanks to canned and preserved fruit products.

In Spain, a portion of the best fruit crops of the season are reserved precisely for the canning industry, which has converted our country into one of the main producers on the world-wide market.

**W**hen man learned to cultivate the land, he immediately saw that agriculture is not an exact science. An excellent crop year may easily be followed by a catastrophic one. These whims of nature, combined with the survival instinct, motivated our ancestors to try and conserve, in some way, what the earth — and the sea — yielded as sustenance. Salting, brines, vinegar, oil, liqueurs, have been inseparable companions of the human diet throughout history.

Sometimes dried, or candied, or preserved in liqueurs, fruit has always formed part of this tradition. Since Roman and Greek times, when fruit conserved in honey was first introduced, the techniques for conserving fruit have obviously evolved. Traditionally, many fruits have been put up in homemade fashion by families taking advantage of their own crops. But it was not until the XIXth C. Industrial Revolution that we saw fruits preserved on a wide scale basis, with the introduction of metal containers and new methods.

In Spain the canned fruit industry found an excellent raw material to develop, primarily along the Ebro River (Navarra and Aragón), and in the Levante region (Valencia and Murcia).

The Mediterranean climate in the latter region and its rich subsoil allow for a tremendous variety of fruit crops — oranges, mandarins, peaches, apricots, strawberries, pears and so forth — with successive harvests year round.

## CULTIVATED PLAINS IN MURCIA

The canned vegetable industry is one of the principle activities in the Murcia plains. The Murcia region is privileged with an average of more than 2,800 hours of sunlight a year, and in some cases with more than 3,000. This insolation is what gives the fruit in the area its extremely high quality and exquisite flavour.

Murcian orchards lay along a labyrinth of rural roads where you find a series of different crops, traversed by irrigation canals, whose structure goes back to the

days when Arabians inhabited the region. They were the creators of a complex irrigation system which succeeded in solving the main problem in the area: the lack of water. This scarcity of water resources has systematically forced a rational distribution and careful use of the precious

Spanish Canned Fruit Exports in 1987		
Product	Tm.	Pesetas/ Millions
Mandarins .....	101,724	10,947
Apricots .....	35,381	3,927
Peaches .....	13,689	1,178
Other Fruit, including mixtures.	52,363	5,347
TOTAL .....	203,157	21,399

Source: Customs Bureau and Alimarket Magazine.





element. The first dams built in Spain, which date back to the XVIIIth C. are found here. The sporadic rainfall converts the Segura River — without a doubt the vital axis of the Murcian plains — into a fountain of life, but which also brings desolation with it at times. Without this river the Murcian land, which is among the most productive in Spain, would be nothing more than barren steppes. But the low river lands have also lived for centuries with the constant threat of catastrophic floods. Today, the various control measures installed around the river and its tributaries have considerably transformed the hydrology, converting the Segura into the most completely regulated and exploited water bed of all the large Spanish rivers.

This environment is where the fruit trees grow that provide the raw material for the Murcian food canning industry, the most important one in Spain.

The canneries buy the fruit directly from the farmers, at times buying it in advance, but most often the crops are bought at harvest auctions.

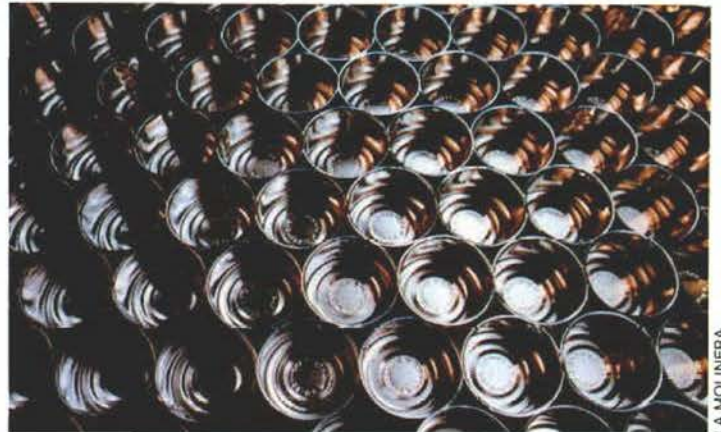
The long tradition of these companies in the Murcia region have made the sector excessively divided at times. Although the companies range in size from small family businesses to large companies, equipped with both a large production and commercial infrastructure, the present trend tends toward bigger concentrations.

The Murcian canneries, both large and small alike, also have long experience in exporting trade, to the extent that some of the companies have ignored the domestic market and dedicated themselves exclusively to exporting. Among the larger companies, Cofrusa is a clear example of a company specialized in foreign trade, although they also trade actively on the domestic market. La Molinera or Comuna, other big companies in the sector, distribute their products on a more even keel. But all the companies have one thing in common: demanding and maintaining a high quality level in their entire line of products.

#### **CLASSICISTS AND MODERNS**

Peaches, apricots, cherries, pears, and strawberries are among the fruits that have traditionally been used in canning or preserving.

Fruit salads and cocktails, as well as figs — which are sometimes used instead of olives as the garnish in martinis in West Germany — are some of the newer additions to the industry, as well as mandarin sections. The latter have become the highest export fruit in Spain, and in fact Spain is the foremost supplier of this product on the world-wide market.



CONSUMIA

LA MOLINERA

***In Spain, a portion of the best fruits crops of the season are reserved for the canning industry, which has converted our country in one of the main producers on the world-wide market.***

Mandarins are a typical winter fruit. They require a temperate climate free of danger from frost, such as found all along the Spanish Mediterranean coast, from Castellón to Murcia.

It is quite curious to note that in spite of the importance of mandarins as an export product, it is not a fruit (in preserved form) traditionally eaten in Spain, except as confectioner's candied fruit. Almost 100% of the canned mandarin production is exported to West Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Spain presently exports 6 million cases — each case containing 48 eleven-ounce cans — of canned mandarin sections, which makes Spain the undeniable leader on the world market, after surpassing Japan.

Fruit salads and cocktails are both products with a bright future in store. Both of them are made with a selection of fruit (peaches, pears, cherries, apricots, etc.), with the only difference being that in cocktails the fruit is diced, and in salads it is cut in different sized chunks. Spain is also a big international supplier

of canned fruit salads, especially on the European market where it holds a 60% share.

Peaches are perhaps the most classical fruit among preserved products. Coming from China, it was introduced in Europe in the Middle Ages and later carried to America by Spaniards. Many consider it to be the unquestionable king of fruits — both fresh and in preserved form — due to its delectable flavour and smell, as well as its attractive velvet-like skin. In canned form it is especially tasty and

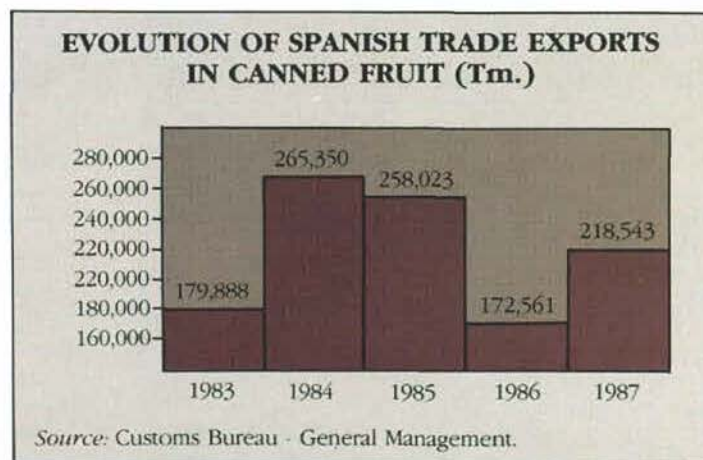
appealing, and makes a perfect complement for ice cream, custards, and, naturally, the essential ingredient in the famous Peach Melba dessert.

However, of all the fruit found on the Murcian plains, perhaps the most characteristic is the apricot. Sunshine, soil and climate combine to produce a bouquet that would be difficult to outdo. Almost all of the numerous varieties of the apricot family are especially for eating in fresh form. The *Búlida* variety is the exception to the rule, given its extraordinarily high content of sugar and vitamin C, and is cultivated expressly for canning.

#### NEW TRENDS

The incorporation of new fruits — kiwis, grapefruit and orange sections — to the range of canned products is foreseeable in the future. But the biggest innovations in this industry probably lie in the liquid or syrup with which the fruit is preserved.

The -light- tendency has also had its effect on the canning industry. The use of pre-



servicing liquids with fewer calories is replacing the traditional canning syrups. The natural juice of the fruit itself, syrup sweetened with saccharine rather than sugar, water, thinned fruit juice, and dietetic products, are among the new preserving liquids with which canned fruits are processed and marketed.

As far as the physical presentation of the fruit, it varies from one product to another. Mandarins are always canned in sections, without seeds or skin, while peaches are canned in halves, cubes, or even whole at times. When canned whole they are considered a delicatessen product. Apricots are never canned whole, as it is difficult to pit them without cutting them.

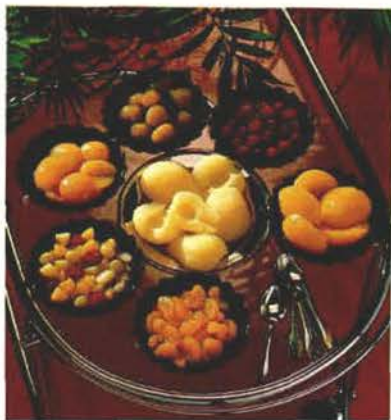
As far as packaging is concerned, new designs and materials are being introduced all the time. Metal tins or cans are still the most often used because of their low cost and the quality of preservation the container offers. The inside of the tin may be coated with a double layer of varnish, or lacquer, depending on the technique used. Glass containers are another traditional means of packaging, but the most innovative aspect is in transparent containers made of special plastic products, although Cofrusa is the only company using them up to now. Along with the attractiveness of being able to see the product, clear plastic containers also offer the advantage of being unbreakable. There are, however, two drawbacks: fruit conserved in this type of container has an average life-span of only ten months; the product carries a higher price than cans, although it gains in value with the attractiveness of the packaging.

Regarding expiration periods for conventional canned products, apricots and pears are the most sensitive. They really should be consumed within twelve months of the packaging date, as they tend to go soft. Other fruits conserve their flavour and texture perfectly for up to two or three years from the time of packaging, or even longer. Tests have been carried out in special ovens or furnaces that simulate the effects of the passing of time, and it has been proved that in some cases fruit may last in good condition for up to twenty years.

Demands for quality control and modernization of techniques in packaging

are increasingly stricter. La Molinera, for example, has a coding system that registers their entire production: the specific packing plant that produces each container, the product it contains, the day and time of packing, and so forth. If any problems with the product arise, this system allows for extremely rapid detection and location of all other containers in the same lot.

At the same time, the quality control personnel at the factory are continuously examining the containers of each lot to ensure that everything is up to par. All products that are to be exported are submitted to another control by Spanish authorities. This consists of an exhaustive inspection to ensure that all the required information is properly registered on the containers: net weight, quality indicated, number of pieces, condition of fruit (no spots), correct syrup concentration (Brix degrees), etc.



*The Mediterranean climate in the Levante region and its rich subsoil allow for a tremendous variety of fruit crops: mandarines, peaches, apricots, figs, pears...*

experienced in their field. Almost all of them began as small family businesses, gradually growing into large companies or holdings, with various packing plants equipped with modern machinery. This machinery is highly specialized, given that the handling of fruit is quite delicate, and great care must be taken to avoid damage to the product, especially mandarin sections.

Generally speaking, given that the Murcia plains area is especially abundant in all kinds of fruit crops, companies that specialize in canned fruit products also pack vegetables, such as tomatoes, artichokes, peas, and so forth. This is also a way of ensuring their overall production and subsistence; if the harvest of a particular crop is poor one year, they can always rely on one of their other products for compensation.

These are the advantages of a fertile soil and a privileged climate, with fruit that possesses all the energy of the sun, even when preserved in a can.

## COCKTAILS WITH CANNED FRUITS

Text: **Martine Beaulieu**

*Fruits of Spain with sherry, the big Palomino's wine and Jerez brandy*

### Apricot's Dry Sherry

Combine in a tall highball glass with some ice cubes 1 1/2 parts of dry Sherry, a twist of lemon peel and some canned apricots as you like. Stir and top with Ginger Ale very cold. Serve with two straws.

### Peach and Love

Fill a large goblet with canned peaches. Fill the shaker with a lot of ice. Shake together 2 cl. of red Martini and 2 cl. of cold dry Sherry. Shake well and pour into the goblet over the peaches.

### Mandarine's Pale Dry Cocktail

Combine in a highball glass. Cut little pieces of canned mandarines and mix it in a bowl with crushed ice. In the glass, 2 cl. of Amontillado (pale dry sherry) with equal part of Dubonnet. Stir with a spoon and fill with the bowl's contents.

### Andalusian Cuban Cocktail

Place in a large bowl some pieces of canned pears, two thin slices of lemon, three slices of green lemon and mix well with a cup of crushed ice. Add a glass of Amontillado with 1 cl. of Havana Club 3 years- light dry rum and two cups of very cold water and stir well. Serve in goblets.

### Andalusian Cherry Brandy Cocktail

In a mixer with ice, place canned cherries without the syrup and mix. In the shaker with a lot of ice, 2 parts of Jerez brandy, 1/2 part sweet vermouth and the same quantity of syrup from the canned cherries. Serve in a large tumbler. Add a dash of angostura; stir and serve with two straws.



**ERNEST HEMINGWAY.** His passion for Spain was immediate and enduring. Unsurprisingly, he became as much an *aficionado* of the bullfight as any Spaniard, and, for years, he attended Pamplona's San Fermin Festival.



## SPAIN THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

# THEY CAME, THEY SAW... AND WROTE ABOUT IT

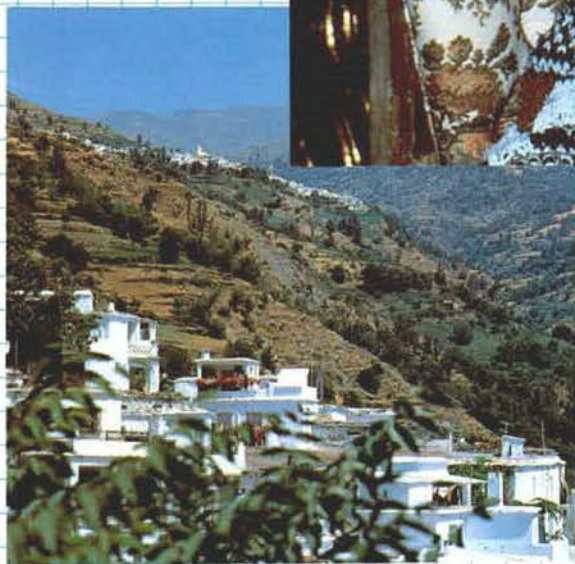
Text: **Jesús Torbado**

Photos: **EFE, TURESPAÑA and THE IMAGE BANK**

Our series on foreign visitors to Spain through the ages who have left a written record of their impressions for posterity reaches the twentieth century in this issue. Rainer Maria Rilke, John Dos Passos, Robert Graves, George Orwell and that most famous hispanophile of all, Ernest Hemingway, all found at least their spiritual home in Spain, and in some cases have found they could not bear to leave.



**GERALD BREMAN.** *Don Gerardo* to his Andalusian neighbours, arrived in the remote mountainous region of Granada known as Las Alpujarras in 1920, and spent the greater part of his life in Andalusia, sharing the life and customs of his adoptive countrymen.



It was the Romantic travellers of the 19th century who refocussed the sights of Europe on a nation on which it had effectively turned its back three centuries before. This ongoing ostracism of Spain was largely attributable to what is known in Spanish as the *leyenda negra* — the black legend — a sinister amalgam of truths, half-truths and myths concerning the Discovery of America, the religious wars in Europe, the Inquisition and so on, much of it alarmist propaganda put out by Spain's rivals for power, the Netherlands and Britain. This was the shroud which the Romantics lifted, and Europe was enchanted by what was revealed beneath.

Thus, at the turn of the century, Spain began to attract foreigners in search of inspiration,

*At the turn of the century, Spain began to attract foreigners in search of inspiration, visiting with the express purpose of recording what they saw.*

visiting with the express purpose of recording what they saw. They were to play an important role in popularizing Spain for more run-of-the-mill tourists and more importantly in penetrating beyond the picturesque clichés to encounter the subtleties and complexities of the *real* Spain.

**RILKE AND JOHN DOS PASSOS**

Chronologically speaking, the first major literary hispano-

phile of our century was the Austro-German poet Rainer Maria Rilke who, as a student in 1895, had already shown his penchant for things Spanish with a sonnet dedicated to Velázquez. He arrived in Spain in 1912 and, like so many before him and since, fell in love with Toledo. *‘This is Toledo!’* exclaimed the author of the *Duino Elegies*, utterly seduced by the city as a whole and particularly by the painter inextricably associated with it, El Greco.

He spent four weeks exploring the streets he had longed

to explore, and travelled enthusiastically to Madrid to see other works of El Greco's, though he found that the capital itself held few other charms for him. When the Castilian winter proved too much for him, he headed south, first to Cordoba, where he enthused about the Mosque, then to Seville, whose Hospital de Caridad impressed him hugely, and finally to Ronda, Andalusia's answer to Toledo. He stayed there for over two months, writing in a little hotel room which has been preserved just as he left it and is now a local tourist attraction. During his stay in Spain, he not only worked on *The Spanish Trilogy*, but also wrote assiduously to many friends, among them the French sculptor Rodin, to whom he extolled



**THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES.** The Civil War broke out in Spain in 1936. This conflict between the Republic and the military insurgents was to capture the loyalties and imagination of many literary figures who supported the Republic and actually experienced the suffering of the Spanish people at first hand.

the virtues of El Greco and Toledo. *-I mean to spend several months in Spain*, he wrote, *-and have started in Toledo, which exerts a powerful attraction for me and which both fills me with wonder and satisfies me utterly.*

French novelist, critic and intellectual Valéry Larbaud, translator of Joyce's *Ulysses* among many other works, travelled all over the world, but few countries were to impress him as deeply as Spain, which he visited for the first time in 1896. He returned for a longer visit two years later (this time accompanied by a Swedish dancer) during which he followed an itinerary much like Rilke's, though taking in Granada, Zaragoza and Barcelona, where he struck up a friendship with the composer Manuel de

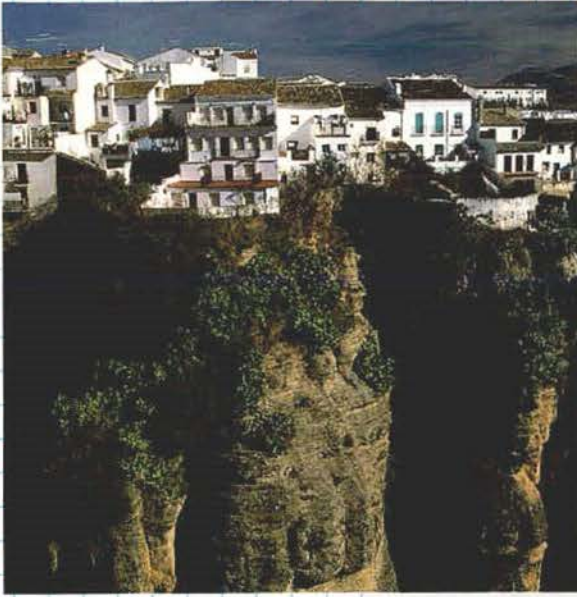
*Those foreign travellers were to play an important role in popularizing Spain, penetrating beyond the picturesque clichés to encounter the subtleties and complexities of the real Spain.*

Falla. During his trip to the south, he curiously declared himself unimpressed by Seville yet fell in love with Alicante which was to serve as his refuge during the First World War. He spent four years there in various hotels and lodgings, translating happily and revelling in its provincial Mediterranean lifestyle and charms of the local girls — Amparito, Rafaela, Araceli — whom he described as *-whirlwinds of pleasure*, though he declared that he had no intention of *-taking advantage of the inexperience of these young*

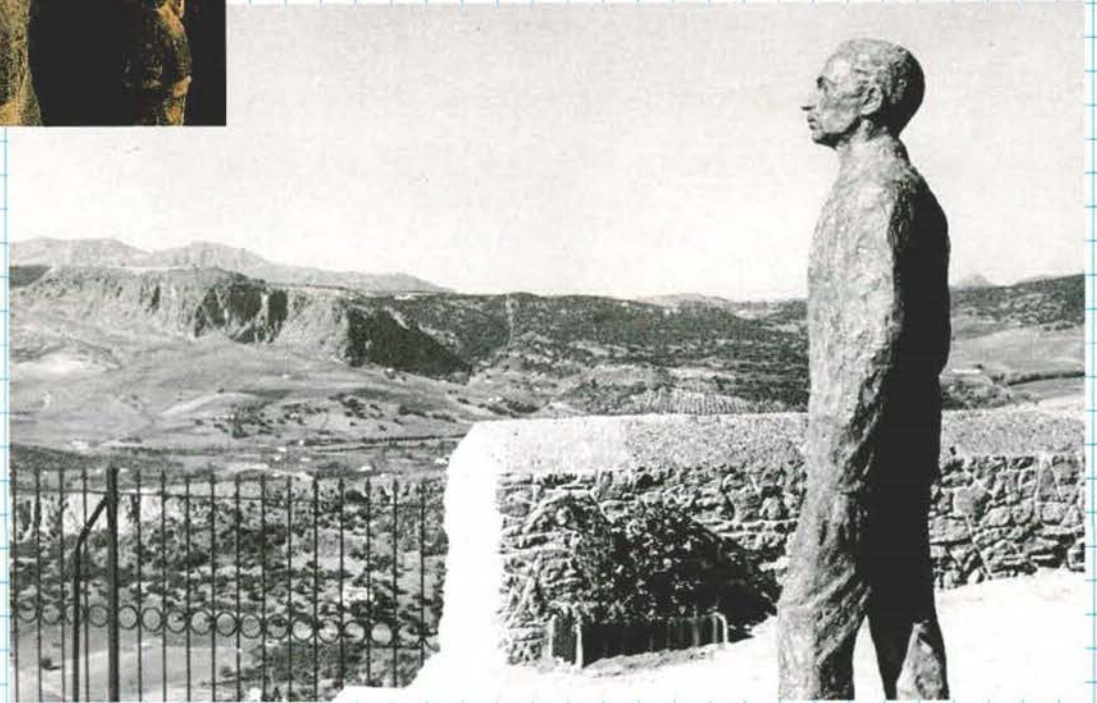
*girls*. During this period he kept a fascinating diary in which he makes various observations on the Spanish as a people, and also became a great friend of the writer Gabriel Miró. *-Barcelona*, he writes, *-seems to me to be the biggest and most modern of all the Mediterranean cities I know: it is bigger and more modern than Marseille, Genoa, and even Naples. I have to give Spain credit for having created the loveliest maritime city on the Mediterranean.*

John Dos Passos was probably the first North American to

fall in love with Spain. Everything about it fascinated him: the strumming of a guitar, the clicking of fingers, a gypsy's red sash... Himself of Portuguese descent, he felt a strong spiritual bond with Spain. He made his first visit, to study Spanish architecture, in 1916, and returned in 1919 when he stayed for a whole year. This was to be the first of many long stays (in 1933, 1937, 1960...), and in consequence the observations contained in his books and many articles on Spain are perhaps the most astute and penetrating of all from among the foreign commentators of the first quarter of this century. *Rocinante* (1922), which recounts the travels of two fictional characters, Telemachus and Lyaeus, around Spain qualifies as a genuine in-depth



**RAINER MARIA RILKE.** The Austro-German poet arrived in Spain in 1912 and fell in love with Toledo, Cordoba, Seville and finally Ronda, Andalusia's answer to Toledo. He stayed there for over two months, working on *The Spanish Trilogy*. Today, a statue is a reminder of his stay in that city.



study of the country and its inhabitants.

#### HONORARY SPANIARDS

Two Englishmen, Gerald Brenan and Robert Graves, not only found their spiritual home in Spain but were to live there for so long that they came to consider themselves honorary Spaniards. Nevertheless, Robert Graves, best-known for his historical novels such as *I, Claudius*, wrote little about Spain except for the *Deyá* poems, named after the Mallorcan village where he lived from 1929 on. He later wrote: - *Thirty-five years ago I emigrated to Spain, which had attracted me since childhood... This is a very clear, clean language. If only they taught it in our schools instead*

*Of all the foreign travellers to have committed their impressions of Spain to paper few have loathed it, most have loved it. Certainly none have remained indifferent.*

*of German and French. Many years later I discovered my preference (frowned on by others as unsophisticated) for Spanish wine over French, and Spanish painting over Italian. I chose Mallorca on the recommendation of my friend Gertrude Stein: Mallorca is a paradise, if you know how to live there.* Graves died in Spain in 1985.

Gerald Brenan, *Don Gerardo* to his Andalusian neighbours, arrived in the remote mountainous region of Granada known as Las Alpujarras in 1920, later moving to the vil-

lage of Alhaurín, near Mijas (Málaga). He died in 1986, having spent the greater part of his life in Andalusia. Unlike Robert Graves, Brenan was a hispanist through and through, and his works include many which became classics during his lifetime — *The Spanish Labyrinth, South from Granada, Saint John of the Cross*. Yet he was no distant scholar. He was thoroughly accepted by his adoptive countrymen, shared their life and customs and became, insofar as it is possible for a foreigner to do so, an *andaluz*.

Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth* explored the origins of the Civil War which broke out in Spain in 1936. This conflict between the Republic and the military insurgents was to capture the loyalties and imagination of sympathizers from all over the world, many of whom actually fought and died on Spanish soil. W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Miles Tomalin and Clive Branson were among the many literary figures who supported the Republic and actually experienced the suffering of the Spanish people at first hand. George Orwell, who fought in the ranks of the Marxist Unification Workers' Party, was wounded at the Front and later hounded out of Spain for his Trotskyist ideals, left a vivid account of this tragic period of Spanish history in his *Homage*



**ROBERT GRAVES.** He found his spiritual home in Spain, in Deyá (Mallorca) where he lived from 1929 to his death in 1985. He wrote: «Mallorca is a paradise, if you know how to live there».



to Catalonia. It was a war which made waves throughout the literary world, and reams were written about it, works like Georges Bernanos' *Les Grands Cimetières sous la Lune* (translated as *A Diary of My Times*) and Arthur Koestler's *Spanish Testament* among the most outstanding. That the Spanish Civil War should have had a profound effect on the literature of neighbouring France is unsurprising: the classic is André Maurois' *L'Espoir*.

#### **STARKIE, WRIGHT AND GREENE**

Irishman Walter Starkie, one-time teacher of Spanish at Dublin University and founder in 1940 of the British Council in Madrid, was something of a spe-

*John Dos Passos was probably the first North American to fall in love with Spain. Everything about it fascinated him: The strumming of a guitar, the clicking of fingers...*

cial case. He explored the south of Spain in 1933 fascinated, like George Borrow before him, by its gypsy culture. He lived as a sort of wandering minstrel, studying and absorbing the folk culture of the region as he went (his findings were later published as *Don Gypsy: Adventures with a Fiddle in Barbary, Andalusia and La Mancha*) and embarking on a love affair with the country in which he was to choose to die in 1976.

Another exceptional figure, though for very different reasons, was the black American

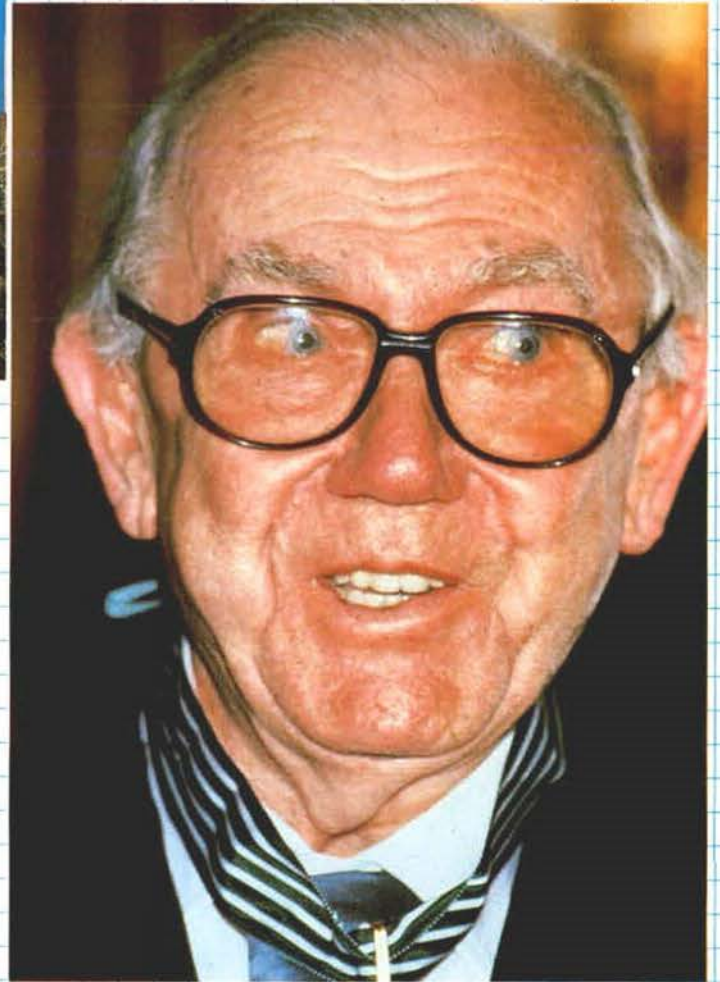
novelist Richard Wright. He visited Spain in 1954, and his observations on the Spanish people's reaction to the dictatorship and to racial differences (he encountered total acceptance) are contained in his travel-novel *Pagan Spain*.

British novelist Graham Greene, a world traveller, revealed his knowledge of Spain relatively late in his impressive literary career. His admiration for Cervantes and his love of La Mancha, Don Quijote territory, are celebrated in his *Monseñor Quixote*, published in 1982. Though

undeniably a minor work, this novel, based on his travels and conversations with a close friend, a Spanish priest, is interesting for what it captures of the Spanish landscape and people.

#### **...AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

The most famous of this century's foreign observers of Spain has to be Ernest Hemingway, or *Ernesto*, as he liked to be known. His passion for Spain was immediate and enduring: in 1923, just a year after his first visit, he was extolling its virtues as the best country in Europe, unspoiled, tough and altogether wonderful. Its rivers teemed with trout and salmon, its beaches were dazzling, its sea green... Elsewhere he was to speak of Spain's heat



**GRAHAM GREENE.** His admiration for Cervantes and his love of La Mancha, Don Quixote territory, are celebrated in his *Monseñor Quixote*, where he captures the Spanish landscape and people.

and dust, the dry cold of Madrid, its boundless skies. For him, the Spanish were -the only people-. Hemingway also grew to know their literature (he is said to have told novelist Pío Baroja on his deathbed that he, rather than Hemingway, should have won the Nobel Prize), learned to speak excellent Spanish, and even to write it. In 1956 he was officially declared an -American-born Spanish writer-.

He was a man who seemed to need to dice with death to know that he was alive, a motif which appears again and again in his novels. Unsurprisingly, he became as much an *aficionado* of the bullfight as any Spaniard, even taking to the ring himself on occasion. He named one of his sons Nicanor in honour of one of his bullfighting heroes, Nicanor Villalta.

*Some of these travellers not only found their spiritual home in Spain but were to live there for so long that they come to consider themselves honorary Spaniards.*

He travelled widely, and there are mementoes of him all over Spain, like his usual table in a Madrid restaurant. He gave lectures in the United States to raise money for ambulances for the Republicans during the Civil War, on which he reported as a war correspondent. His experiences were to provide the material for one of his best-known novels, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Indeed, his entire literary output is charged with his fascination for Spain: *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Old Man and the sea* (based

on a fisherman he had known in the Canary Islands), *Death in the Afternoon* (on bullfighting), *The Fifth Column* (a play set in besieged Madrid)... His love for Spain lasted throughout his life, and one of his last acts before committing suicide, ill and depressed, in 1961 was to send a telegram cancelling his usual reservations for Pamplona's San Fermín Festival which he had attended for years.

Some years before, in 1953, he wrote that he felt imprisoned when not in Spain:

*-I thought that I should never return to the country I love more than any other, except for my own-. That Gautier before him, a man of a different era, a different culture, should have expressed much the same sentiment on his return to France says much about Spain's universal appeal. Of all the foreign travellers to have committed their impressions of Spain to paper, few have loathed it, most have loved it, some very deeply. Certainly none have remained indifferent.*

**Note:** The four chapters of -Spain Through Foreign Eyes- have been reproduced with the kind permission of *Mediterranean Magazine*.

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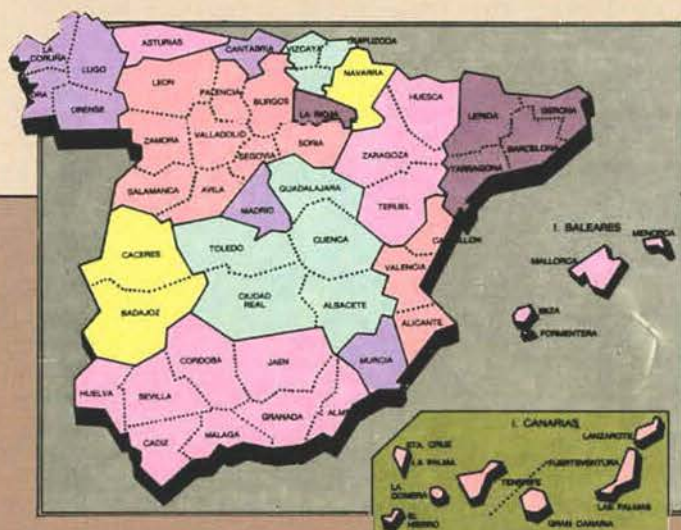
# A source of tradition

*This is how food articles with a name of origin are. All different and all **ours**, with Christian name and surnames, with **date** and **place** of birth, with own style: Name of origin, a source of tradition.*

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# QUICK CONVERSION

In our recipes, quantities are given in metric measurements. The charts on this page show approximate equivalents between Imperial or American measures, and metric measures.

## FLUID MEASURES

METRIC/BRITISH STANDARD

10 MILLILITRES = 1/3 OUNCE	1 TEASPOON = 5 MILLILITRES
50 MILLILITRES = 1 3/4 OUNCES	1 TABLESPOON = 18 MILLILITRES
100 MILLILITRES = 3 1/2 OUNCES	1 OUNCE = 28 MILLILITRES
250 MILLILITRES = 8 1/2 OUNCES	1 PINT = 570 MILLILITRES
500 MILLILITRES = 17 1/2 OUNCES	1 QUART = 1.14 LITRES
1 LITRE = 1 3/4 PINTS	1 GALLON = 4 1/4 LITRES

## FLUID MEASURES

METRIC/U.S. STANDARD

10 MILLILITRES = 2 TEASPOONS	1 TEASPOON = 5 MILLILITRES
50 MILLILITRES = 3 TABLESPOONS	1 TABLESPOON = 15 MILLILITRES
100 MILLILITRES = 3 1/2 OUNCES	1 OUNCE = 30 MILLILITRES
250 MILLILITRES = 1 CUP + 1 TABLESPOON	1 CUP = 235 MILLILITRES
500 MILLILITRES = 1 PINT + 2 TABLESPOONS	1 PINT = 475 MILLILITRES
1 LITRE = 1 QUART + 3 TABLESPOONS	1 QUART = 950 MILLILITRES
	1 GALLON = 3 3/4 LITRES

## OVEN TEMPERATURE

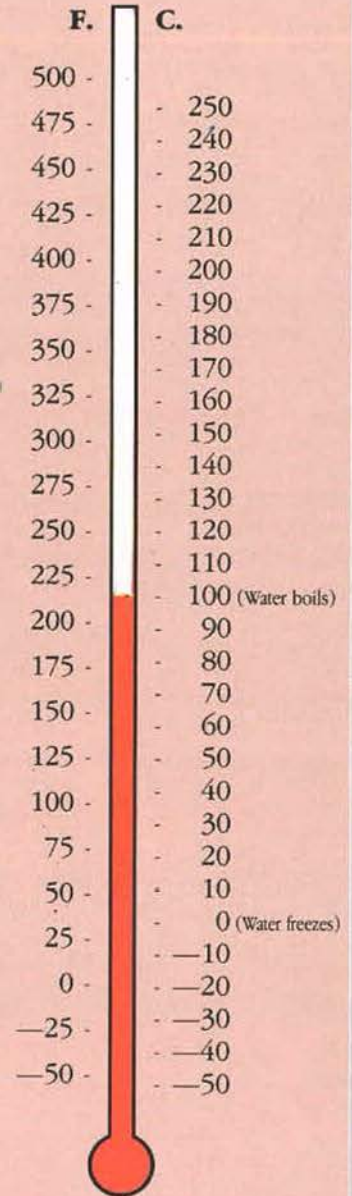
TEMPERATURE	DIAL NUMBER
VERY SLOW = 250F/120C.	= 1/4
SLOW = 300F/150C.	= 1
MODERATE = 350F/180C.	= 4
HOT = 400F/200C.	= 6
VERY HOT = 450F/230C.	= 8

## WEIGHT

METRIC/OUNCES & POUNDS

10 GRAMS = 1/3 OUNCE	1/2 OUNCE = 14 GRAMS
50 GRAMS = 1 3/4 OUNCES	1 OUNCE = 28 GRAMS
100 GRAMS = 3 1/2 OUNCES	1/4 POUND = 110 GRAMS
250 GRAMS = 8 3/4 OUNCES	1/2 POUND = 230 GRAMS
500 GRAMS = 1 POUND + 1 1/2 OUNCES	1 POUND = 450 GRAMS
1 KILO = 2 POUNDS + 3 1/4 OUNCES	

## TEMPERATURE



## SPANISH OLIVES

### Packed with hidden potential

In our issue n.º 15, we published by mistake three photographs on pages 40, 48 and 49 which, although sent to us by ACEMESA,

actually belong to the California Olive Committee, original owner of these photographs.

**The Editor**

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# The Shepherd's Worship

BARTOLOME ESTEBAN MURILLO



Photo: © Prado Museum

## THE PAINTER

Born in Seville in 1618, Murillo began his study of art in the studio of Juan Castillo. It was there in Seville where he later became acquainted with the Italian school of painting that would greatly influence his own work. However Murillo quickly moved from the dark and gloomy naturalistic style, into what would be his own unique spontaneous inspirational style of painting. The easy style and delicacy he uses to illuminate the beauty of the -child Virgins- and describe the -street children- suddenly transformed Murillo into a successful artist, with many requests for copies of some of his paintings.

The glowing grace, spontaneity, and inspirational quality that flowed from his

brush established Murillo and his style as the -typical Andalusian- painter.

Although best known for his paintings of Virgins, Murillo also painted serious portraits and country scenes. The strength and power in these paintings single them out as possibly the best of all of his work.

With the Church as his main client, Murillo received many commissions for altarpieces in Andalusian convents. In 1682, while painting one in the convent of the Capuchinos of Cádiz, Murillo fell to his death from a scaffold.

## THE PAINTING

Some of the dark gloomy tones of the Italian school of painting, as in Caravaggio's

work, are still evident in -The Shepherd's Worship-.

However the Virgin and the Child are highlighted against this background with the inspiration and grace that was to become the stamp of Murillo. The uniqueness and delicacy of the Child and the Virgin are merely enhanced by the dark and dreary characters and surroundings. The brilliantly cold tones seem to evoke almost a supernatural quality. But just as other artists of the time, Murillo reflects a strong tendency toward realism, converting this pious work into a simple, realistic, everyday event, without the overdone theatrical perfection of preceding painters.

The different -periods of man's development- are clearly reflected in the creation of each distinct

character. There is a keen and loving precision in the fashioning of each of the painting's characters. The hands of the kneeling shepherd in the center of the painting, and his posture focus our attention on the central theme of the painting: the Virgin and the Child.

Murillo was a master in painting the inanimate. This painting is a good example of the exquisite work he did when creating different qualities and textures. For example, the lamb's wool, the fuzz on the shepherd's leather jerkin, the chickens, the basket of eggs, etc., all seem so real you feel as if you could reach out and touch them.

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Joaquín Pacheco

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# Off the rocks.

(It's Tio Pepe)



To really enjoy what's going on, it's a good idea to get off the beaten track now and again.

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