

S P A I N

# GOURMETOUR

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE



SAFFRON. THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD RED GOLD  
DESSERT WINES  
RONDA. THE ROMANTICS' BALCONY

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# S P A I N GOURMETOUR

**T**he use of spices in Spanish cooking is a long-standing tradition. The Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs all left their mark on our cuisine and Spain itself was later to introduce into Europe many new condiments, discovered in America.

But of all the spices that are produced and used in Spain today, perhaps one of the most typical is saffron. This is due not only to its aroma and taste but also to the almost mystical aura that surrounds it: the beauty of its flower, its price, almost as precious as gold, and the sheer effort that goes into harvesting it, all mean that saffron is held by some to be king among spices.

But if our cuisine is a good enough reason for visiting Spain, then a combination of tourism and good cooking make it irresistible. Sightseeing in *Ronda*, windsurfing on the *Tarifa* winds or seeking refuge in the peace and quiet of a monastery, all of these will allow you to get to know another side of Spain which is just as appealing as the one you already know, but which has the added attraction of being something completely new.

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COVER

*Fotography by Antonio de Benito*

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1<sup>st</sup> quarter 1987

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# AN IMAGE OF RONDA THE ROMANTICS' BALCONY

Text: José Carlos Capel    Photos: Pablo Neustadt

*Ronda dreams over the deep-flowing Tagus, which marks the land like a metaphysical wound. Ronda, stopping-place for romantic travellers, land of bull-fighters and generous bandits, city of Muslim ruins and whitewashed Christian convents. To a great extent, the impassioned image Europe has of Spain could be said to spring from the surprising geography of the region.*

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*Between the void and the town wall spreads the old quarter, which the people of Ronda feel is the real town.*

**T**he conglomeration of white-wash, iron and slates made the immense rock shimmer. Drowsy and silent, the town awaited the passing of the afternoon sun with an acceptance born of routine.

Crossing the *Puente Nuevo*, a few sightseers stretched their cameras out into the void, trying to capture unusual views of the Tagus from between the railings. Viewed from above, the river *Guadalevín's* cavernous throat revealed crags and hollows, tortured, irregular patches of light and shade. The chasm, cleft by the caws and coos of birds, echoed louder still with the humming of crickets.

Only the heavy vehicles crossing the bridge, a main city artery and part of the *Málaga-Jerez* highway, drowned out the voices from the abyss.

Standing on the edge of a precipice, on the rocky platform that splits the *Guadalevín* in two, *Ronda* stretches between the three main areas that make it up: on the left bank of the Tagus, the Town, and the area know as *San Francisco*; on the right, *El Mercadillo*.

*In the depths of the Tagus,  
as seen from the piles of the  
Roman bridge, the gorge  
evokes chaos.*

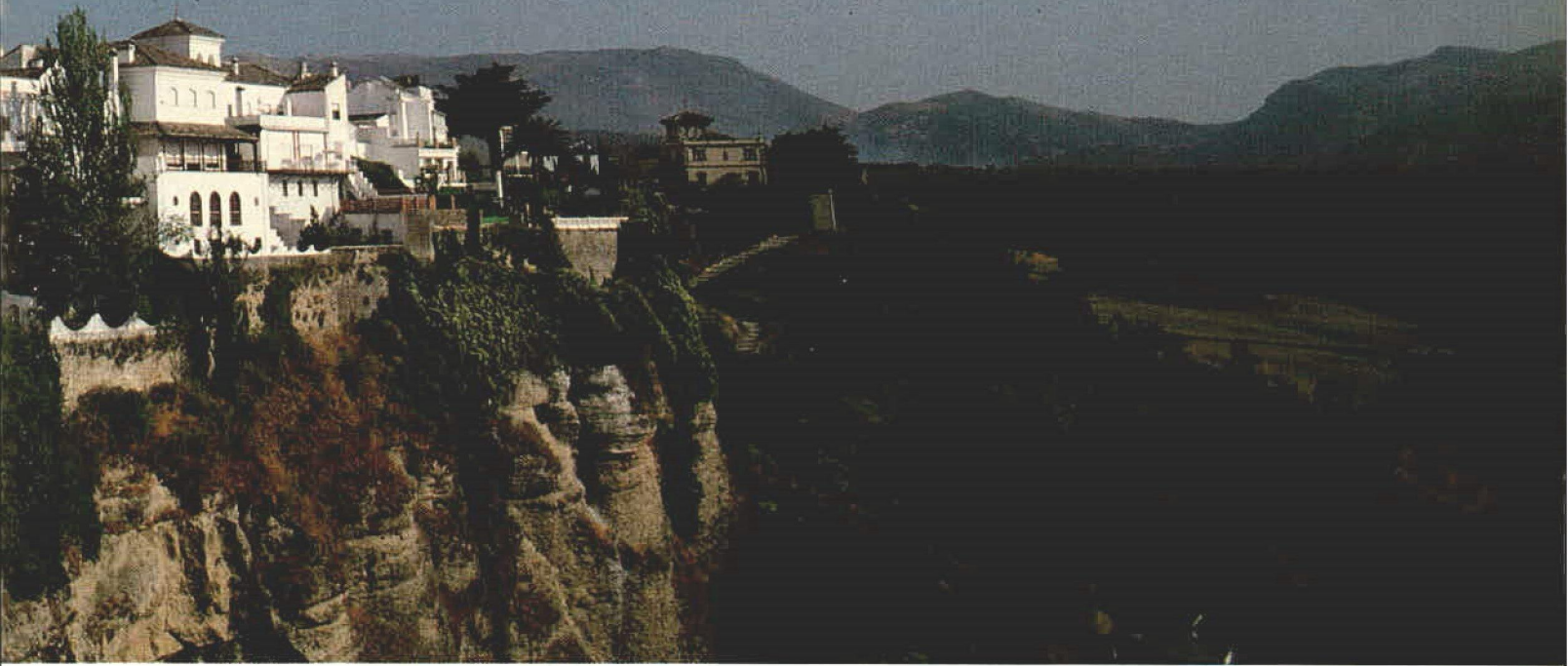
Between the void and the town wall spreads the old quarter — which the people of *Ronda* feel is the real town — a citadel and maze which, impregnable in times past, seems to have been left

behind in time and legend through its isolation.

Narrow and twisting terraced alleyways slip down to the river. Gothic convents, mansions with Renaissance doorways, ancestral homes, fountains and peaceful squares lie nestled together, their wrought ironwork and white-washed walls forming a constant interplay.

A dialogue of textures which has been described with artful ingenuity by the writer Eugenio d'Ors in this fashion: «The house in this *Ronda* street with their shutters at street level, seem to be developing a paunch... These others, with their shutters on the upper floors, lean towards each other across the street. One might think they did so in order to whisper some malicious gossip about those who pass by.»

In the depths of the Tagus, as seen from the piles of the Roman bridge, the



*Narrow and twisting terraced alleyways slip down to the river.*

gorge evokes chaos. The geological fault pushes our imaginations and fears to new limits. *Gustave Doré* is supposed to have taken inspiration for his illustrations of *Dante's Inferno* from this telluric nightmare.

As it rises, the cavernous visage folds back in frightening outlines. High up, the crags frame tangles of greenery that hide the point at which the rock meets the houses and gardens which protrude over the edge of the chasm, almost hanging in midair. Behind, the diaphanous back-cloth of whitewash and poplars...

#### A LEGENDARY BRIDGE

The Arabian bridge is silhouetted further above, and at the top of the canyon stands the *Puente Nuevo*, the

stereotyped romantic image of *Ronda*.

From the beginning of its construction, its grandeur spun a shroud of mystery.

As legend has it, the architect *Martín de Aldehuela*, who regularly checked the

*From the beginning of its construction, the Puente Nuevo spun a shroud of mystery.*

progress of the work while hanging from the pillars in a wicker basket, fell to his death in 1788, just as the work was nearing completion.

This legend may be inspired by sto-

ries from the *Thousand and One Nights*, which end with the death of the designer of any outstanding building, so that he cannot usurp any glory from the building's owner, nor create anything which may overshadow that work.

It was said that those condemned to death spent their last night on the bridge. They watched their last day dawn while hanging out over the abyss.

Perhaps it was here, in the cold winter of 1913, that *Rainer Maria Rilke's* dream was answered. Here, opposite the amphitheatre formed by the blue mountains, this luminous world exudes harshness and death: «*The view of this town is indescribable, and surrounding it there is a wide valley with cultivated fields, olive groves andholm oaks. And there, in the background, as if filled with renewed strength, peak after peak, the mountain range rears up, forming a most splendid horizon.*»

## RESTAURANTES

**Pedro Romero.**—Virgen de la Paz, No. 18, Ronda. Tel: (52) 87 10 61.

**Don Miguel.**—Villanueva, No. 4, Ronda. Tel: (52) 87 10 90.

**Mesón de Santiago.**—Marina, No. 3, Ronda. Tel: (52) 87 15 19.

**Mesón del Escudero.**—Marcos Obregón, No. 14, Ronda. Tel: (52) 87 13 67.

**Hôtel Reina Victoria.**—Dr. Fleming, No. 25, Ronda. Tel: (52) 87 12 40.

## TAPAS

In the *Plaza del Socorro*, the bar of the *Casino de Artistas* serves acceptable *tapas*, good cheese and excellent *Montecorto* pork sausage. The *El Portón* bar (*Pedro Romero*, 7) which hides anonymously with no sign to indicate its presence, offers a good variety of seafood cocktails and salads. Also worth trying are the *tapas* in the *Mesón* of the *Hotel Reina Victoria*, which

Access to the high part of the town is by way of cobbled slopes. Between *Armiñán* and *Salvatierra* Streets, a quiet little square conceals the St. Sebastian minaret with its horseshoe-shaped arches, to which the rays of the afternoon sun lend a Koranic air; this minaret, in the absence of the expected mosque, stands as alone and as innocent as an orphaned child.

The primitive citadel is crowned by the *Plaza de la Ciudad*, or *Plaza de las Armas del Castillo*, in olden times the scene of jousting and tourneys. It is flanked by the militia barracks, the convent of the Order of *Santa Clara*, *Santa María la Mayor* Church... Behind lie the ruing of the old wall; in the centre there are trees and gardens, and a bust of *Vicente Espinel*, an important sixteenth-century musician and writer, a native of *Ronda*.

Behind the cathedral, stillness and silence reign. A tightly-knit maze of old ancestral homes leads to the *Plaza del Campillo*. Next to the balcony is the old

can be found at the entrance to the hotel gardens.

## SHOPPING

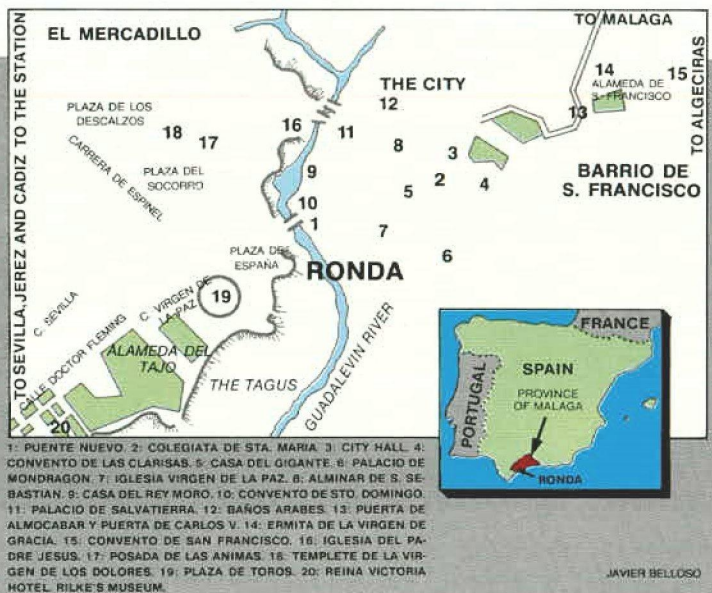
*Ronda's yemas* (a sweet made from milk and egg yolks) should be bought in *La Campana* (Plaza del Casino, 7) or *Harillo* (Carrera de V. Espinel, 42).

At the Carmelite convent (Plaza de la Merced, 2) the nuns sell home-made sweets—*Ronda* bread, *sultanas*, *borrachuelos*, honey-coated pancakes

and orange marmalada—through the revolving hatch at the main entrance door.

Outside the town wall, in the Franciscan convent (*San Francisco* neighbourhood), the same method is used to sell wine-, egg-, or honey-rolls, and pudding.

*Ronda's* antique dealers are spread throughout the old quarter near the *Puente Nuevo*. There are well-stocked shops at numbers 40 and 44, *Calle Armiñán*, and next to the minaret in *Marqués de Salvatierra*, 2.



1: PUENTE NUEVO. 2: COLEGIATA DE STA. MARIA. 3: CITY HALL. 4: CONVENTO DE LAS CLARISAS. 5: CASA DEL OIGANTE. 6: PALACIO DE MONDRAGON. 7: IGLESIA VIRGEN DE LA PAZ. 8: ALMINAR DE S. SEBASTIAN. 9: CASA DEL REY MORO. 10: CONVENTO DE STO. DOMINGO. 11: PALACIO DE SALVATIERRA. 12: BAÑOS ARABES. 13: PUERTA DE ALMOCCABAR Y PUERTA DE CARLOS V. 14: ERMITA DE LA VIRGEN DE GRACIA. 15: CONVENTO DE SAN FRANCISCO. 16: IGLESIA DEL PADRE JESUS. 17: POSADA DE LAS ANIMAS. 18: TEMPLETE DE LA VIRGEN DE LOS DOLORES. 19: PLAZA DE TOROS. 20: REINA VICTORIA HOTEL. RILKE'S MUSEUM.

JAVIER BELLOSO

*Puerta de los Molinos*, from which a narrow path winds its way down the rock to the Arabian mills which dot the valley, built in order to take advantage of the powerful flow of water.

On one side is the splendid sight of the *Puente Nuevo* and the *Mercadillo*, ahead the rocky *Asa de la Caldera*, on both sides the ever-present sense of vertigo and cataclysm.

## BANDITS AND SMUGGLERS

Almost hidden in the distance, the narrow, rocky mountain passes of *El Viento*, *Montejaque* and *Arrebatacapas* can be made out, as well as the mountain ravines, eternal scene of the romantic exploits of bandits and smugglers.

The primitive guerrilla force organized in Ronda in the early nineteenth

Looking around, one may discover interesting ceramic plates, tiles, lamps, wood carvings or even pieces of Renaissance of baroque furniture.

Of the numerous workshops which manufactured the wrought iron that gave character to the town in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, only a very few remain, manufacturing lamps and other small articles. There is a good workshop, at present undergoing restoration, opposite the *San to Domingo* convent.

At *Calle Armiñán*, 26, *Rafael Rojas* sells leather and embossed goods.

## HOW TO GET THERE

You can get to *Ronda* by air, using *Málaga* airport, about 100 kilometres away.

You can also go by car: take the highway 340 *Málaga-Cádiz* to *San Pedro Alcántara* (near *Marbella*). From this town you can take the direct road to *Ronda*.

century to harry the Napoleonic army, whose strategy was to occupy impregnable strong points, proved eminently successful, leaving behind it a tradition of pillage and banditry.

A breed of daring, valiant men—*José María El Tempranillo* (The Early Bird), *Pasos Largos* (Long Steps), *Los Siete Niños de Ecija* (The Seven Boys from Ecija)—the scourge of the powerful, whom they robbed, and the hope of the needy, to whom they donated the fruits of their felonies, became legendary figures. Through the romantic stories of travellers such as *Custine*, *Cook*, *Ford*, *Merimée*, *Dozy* and *Davillier*, some of them gained fame throughout Europe.

In his *Journey to Spain*, *Charles Davillier*, Master of Horses for *Napoleon III*, wrote a passionate description of these nineteenth-century characters, who wore blankets around their shoulders and carried blunderbusses, as in *Gustave Doré's* illustrations:



*On the other side of the Tagus stretches modern Ronda, a suburb which grew up thanks to the merchants.*

*«The most singular of those who inhabit the mountains of Ronda is the smuggler. These steep mountains, criss-crossed by paths which are often impassable even for mules, are alive with agile, daring people who run provisions from Gibraltar.»*

On the other side of the Tagus stretches modern Ronda the *Mercadillo* — a suburb which grew up thanks to the merchants who, over the centuries, came together in an attempt to evade the old town's taxes. From the end of the eighteenth century, after the completion of the *Puente Nuevo*, the suburb developed at an astonishing rate.

Bustling and lively, present-day Ronda offers in its corners and squares a very special, almost indefinable provincial flavour.

In contrast, the *Plaza de España*, next to the Tagus, is today a sleeping crossroads. It no longer pulses with the daily comings and goings of people and goods — lottery-sellers, gypsy women, carriers and salesmen touting almost anything — as it did in the past, when the Central Market was housed in a big, rambling house which now lies empty.

*Richard Ford*, in his *Travellers' Guide to Andalusia*, praised the bittersweet sharpness of Ronda's pears, the gentle fragrance of its peaches, and the smoothness of its quinces.

The small, beautiful, neo-classical bullring, which was completed in 1784, keeps silent vigil over the town's daily bustle. The contemporary Andalusian writer *José María Pemán* wrote of its importance to the town: *«In Ronda, bullfighting is a style, a philosophy, a way of understanding life.»*

Tuscan columns and arcades crowned with rampant arches lend a ceremonial, almost dramatic harmony to the arena, a stage which boasts, apart from its bullfighters, the most brilliant, passionate poetic output of Ronda (*F. García Lorca, J. Bergamín, F. Villalón, G. Diego, R. Laffon...*). It is not to be missed.

On one side of the square, a wide, modern avenue leads to the unbounded madness of the Tagus.



*Behind the cathedral, stillness and silence reign. It is a tightly-knit maze of old ancestral homes.*

On the other side, the old suburb opens onto a platform suspended in midair —the *Alameda*. Gardens full of benches, fountains and the scent of flowers accommodate groups who converse in varied tones: circles of elderly people chatting pleasantly, children, furtive couples...

And once again, beyond the balcony railings, the fever of vertigo and fear. Referring to this ring of emptiness, *Pemán* insisted: «*The Tagus has made no concessions to the tour guides; one can lean out and discover fear, prophecies, prayers or poems at its bottom.*»

Next to the *Alameda*, in the *El Carmen* convent, the religious sweet-shop attracts both the devout and those with a sweet tooth. Its specialities are displayed in a discreetly hidden interior window, next to the *torno*, a kind of rotating serving hatch.

The avenue named after *Vicente Espinel* becomes *La Bola* street and runs lengthwise through modern *Ronda*.

All kinds of shops, bars, cafes and neon signs surround the hustle and bustle.

The bright, geometrical paving of the pedestrian walkway seems to denote a desire for abstraction, a challenge to the past and to time itself.

At number 50, the old *churro* shop maintains the last vestiges of local colour. From early morning onwards, these portions of fried batter, wrapped in cones of brown paper, are lined up on the counters of nearby bars.

The bloated *porras* are no longer made by those potbellied old ladies in white aprons and cuffs, who used to man their steaming stoves in the street and who were a source of inspiration for neo-impressionist watercolor painters.

## A PROVINCIAL LIFE

In the *Plaza del Socorro*, the first signs of an aspiring restaurant trade imbued with airs of modernism can now be seen. Some establishments offer fast food, sandwiches and hamburgers, in contrast to the usual bars and shellfish restaurants.

This contrast is heightened by the proximity of the *Casino de Artistas*, which is ancient, loyally provincial, and as anchored in the past as a nineteenth-century spa. Around it today, gather the bright young people who tend to look down on what surrounds them.



*Bustling and lively, present-day Ronda offers in its corners and squares a very special, almost indefinable provincial flavour.*



*All kind of shops, bars, cafes and neon signs surround the hustle and bustle.*

«The building dates back to around 1906», explains one of the senior employees. «It was created by the guilds of locksmiths, plasterers, cabinetmakers and other craftsmen who abounded in Ronda at that time. Today it's a place of relaxation for elderly people. They chat, play cards, pass the time... There's a waiting list of at least two years for membership.»

At the end of Fleming Street, right on the edge of the precipice, stands Ronda's most eccentric monument. Green and white, pointed, Machiavellian, the hotel has a strange poetic charm in spite of its utilitarianism.

There is a tea-room atmosphere, the smell of long-cut tobacco about the decadent cretonne, the marble fireplaces and the creaking parquet.

«It was built in 1906 by Morrison & Co., the company contracted to build the Bobadilla-Algeciras railway. They built the Reina Victoria hotel here, and the Reina Cristina in Algeciras. It was to accommodate the English engineers who were working on the project. The hotel enjoyed special prerogatives. The British flag flew on the flagpole. During the war of '36, it was considered neutral ground. It served as a refuge for many people», explains the manager.

Room 208, which is not in use, is preserved as a museum, with the same furniture that it contained during the stay of Rilke, the poet from Prague, from January 27th to February 2nd 1913.

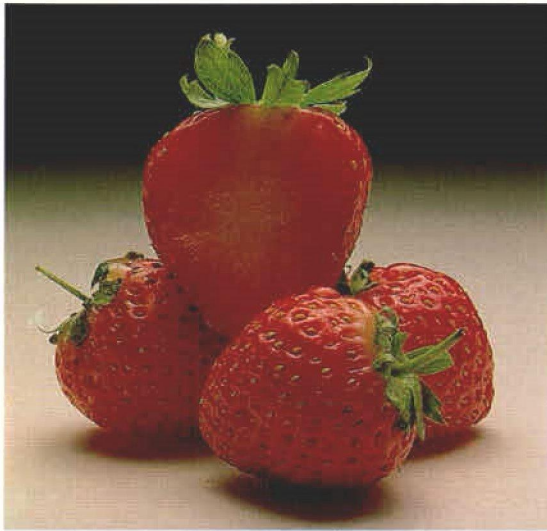
Facing the mountains, in the Andalusian winter, Rilke must have minutely examined his projection towards the cosmic, and increased the sense of dramatism and death that pervades all his work.

In Ronda, in January 1913, he completed *The Spanish Trilogy*, and also the poem *To an Angel*, from the collection *Poems to the Night*.

In a letter he wrote to the sculptor Rodin from the *Hotel Victoria*, he expressed his impression of the town of his dreams in these words: «Spain gives me so much. Ronda, where I am at the moment, is incomparable, a giant made of rock who holds a small, whitewashed town on his back.»



*The streets and cafes are a place of relaxation for elderly people. They chat, play cards, pass the time...*



# HUELVA STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOR EVER

Text: Sonia Ortega  
Photos: CORA

*It all began a few years ago, and what started out almost as an experimental crop has today become a real boom. Here, in a little corner of Spain, life revolves around this red fruit, especially during the harvest. At this time, from February to July, everything has a distinct strawberry flavour about it.*

**J**ust a few yew years ago, nobody, not even the inhabitants of these lands in the south-west of Spain, would have dreamt that their province would become the second strawberry-producing «country» in the world, and the number one exporter. But figures do not lie, and this is their expectation for the season just begun. The special attributes of the climate, and the quality of the soil have made the province of *Huelva* Top of the Crop, bringing wealth to the region, revolu-

tionizing its lands, covering them with gorgeous red fruit at a time when the strawberry fields in the rest of Europe are still sleeping under a thick layer of snow. But when and how did this rush begin?

## THE TRAWBERRY FREAK

It all began thousands of miles away in California. At *Davis University*, a pioneer in world state-of-the-art research into agricultural matters, studies have





**DURING THE SEASON,** *which lasts almost six months, harvesting is carried out daily, since the strawberries keep on gradually appearing.*



**Tioga, Douglas and Chandler, the three Californian varieties which miraculously have turned an agriculturally poor area into a prosperous one.**

been carried out for more than forty years to obtain new varieties of strawberries. They have been trying to produce varieties which, while maintaining their aroma and flavour, would grow bigger faster, and have the texture required for easier handling and transport. Gradually, by dint of constant research, the innumerable hybrids started to produce the desired results, mainly thanks to the efforts of one man who was already a myth in this field, Professor *Bringhurst*, also known in those parts by the nickname «the Strawberry Freak».

Meanwhile, in the province of *Huelva*, in the region of *Palos*, to be more exact, there already existed a tradition of growing strawberries on dry-farming

land; these were old-fashioned varieties, with a very low yield, and hand-grown practically according to time-honoured, traditional methods. It was during the sixties that the present situation began to take shape. The pioneer was *Manuel Medina*, on his farm called *Las Madres*, in the region of *Moguer*. «*We began*», he said, «*by trying out Central European varieties. That didn't work out, so then we experimented with seventy varieties from different parts of the United States. The best ones for the climate and soil of this area were the ones from California, so we decided to import the plant. Not on its own. And this is the main reason for the success of the operation, along with all the technology they used in the States. After a period of adaptation, we added bit by bit local innovations of our own; like the*

*plastic coverings, which are a great help in bringing on the fruit more quickly.*»

The starting-point is obtaining the variety which is best adaptable to the area. It is a very slow job, which takes more than ten years of experimentation and study. «*In Spain nothing like this has been done yet*», comments *Manuel Medina*. «*Other countries, like France and Italy, have done a bit; but the fifty years' advantage the States have got over us makes a lot of difference, and we still haven't obtained varieties here in Europe which you can compare with those in California.*» The first variety introduced was the *Tioga*; however, the most popular one is the *Douglas*, a large strawberry, which looks as wonderful as it tastes. A new variety is gradually being introduced, the *Chandler*, which



*Hundreds of women —they are swifter than men— work checking and packing thousands and thousands of these little panniers every day.*

has managed to surpass even the qualities of the *Douglas*, both in flavour and texture, and eventually will probably become the star of the plantation.

After selecting the variety comes the disinfection of the soil, irrigation, and drip-fertilization; disease prevention treatment, the spreading of plastic materials either flat on the ground, or in the shape of big or small tunnels...; in short, measures which are not adopted in other areas, where production costs are lower, but then again so is profitability.

#### **COLD HEAD AND WARM FEET**

As if all this love and attention were not enough, it just so happens that the

soil and climate of *Huelva* possess certain qualities exceptional for the growing of strawberries, which need, according to the theory of a well-known Israeli expert, a cold head and warm feet. In these parts, the earth warms up the plant by day, and cools it down by night. All this leads to productivity which is two or three times greater than the average in the rest of Europe, because the plant blossoms four, six, or even ten times, whereas in other parts, it does so only once.

Planting takes place in October and November, and harvesting runs from the middle or end of February until the end of July. This is the time when the population of the area increases three- or fourfold, for you need all the help

you can get for harvesting, which is done manually. Up till now, all efforts to mechanize harvesting have failed, since the strawberry is a delicate fruit which lacks a protective covering. Genetic engineering would be needed to obtain a new variety bearing firm fruit which would ripen at a later stage, so that a machine could pick them all at the same time. Sooner or later, it may well be that such mechanization can be attained, especially for the harvesting of strawberries grown for industrial purposes (jam, yoghurt, etc.), which do not need to look perfect; but as things stand at the moment, strawberries grown for direct consumption need to be picked with a degree of care that it is difficult to imagine machines being

## Strawberries: Facts and figures

When Professor *Bringhurst* was invited to visit the strawberry plantations in the province of *Huelva*, he was thrilled to see how well his «little offspring» (*Tioga*, *Douglas* and *Chandler*) had taken to these lands. *California* and *Huelva* do, after all, lie on the same latitude. But his enthusiasm is shared equally by the strawberry growers of *Lepe*, *Moguer* and *Palos*, the three main strawberry-producing areas. The Californian varieties have in fact miraculously turned and agriculturally poor area into a prosperous one, and what is more, in less than no time. In 1980, there were only 600 hectares given over to strawberry growing in *Huelva*; five

years later, this figure had become 2.500, and the 3.000 odd tons harvested in 1976 had risen to the staggering

figure of 100.000 by 1986 (more than half of Spain's total production, which was 160.000 tons that same

year). Exports have gone the same way; Spain has managed to oust Italy, traditionally Europe's number-one strawberry supplier.

For many years, there was no change in the world ranking for strawberry production: the United States, Poland (whose production was almost entirely taken up by the food industry), Japan, Italy, and Spain. However, the *Huelva* miracle has caused such a turnabout that in 1986 Spain overtook Italy, and almost caught up with Japan. This year, if all goes according to plan, Spain will become the second strawberry-producing country in the world, as well as the number-one exporter.



*This year, if all goes according to plan, Spain will become the second strawberry-producing country in the world.*

capable of achieving. During the season, which lasts almost six months, harvesting is carried out daily, since the strawberries keep on gradually appearing, with successive blooms following on from the previous ones. It is hard work, and needs people who are used to spending seven hours a day bending time and time again over the plants, so that they can carefully select only those strawberries which have just reached their peak. Within two or three hours at most, the strawberries are taken to the warehouse, where they are pre-cooled so as to remove the warmth that builds up in the fields, and to facilitate their subsequent handling. Afterwards, they are weighed; those strawberries that do not meet the standards of quality required are rejected, and the little *panniers* containing the fruit are wrapped in plastic film. This entire process is carried out by women, since their hands are swifter and more careful than men's; there are hundreds of women

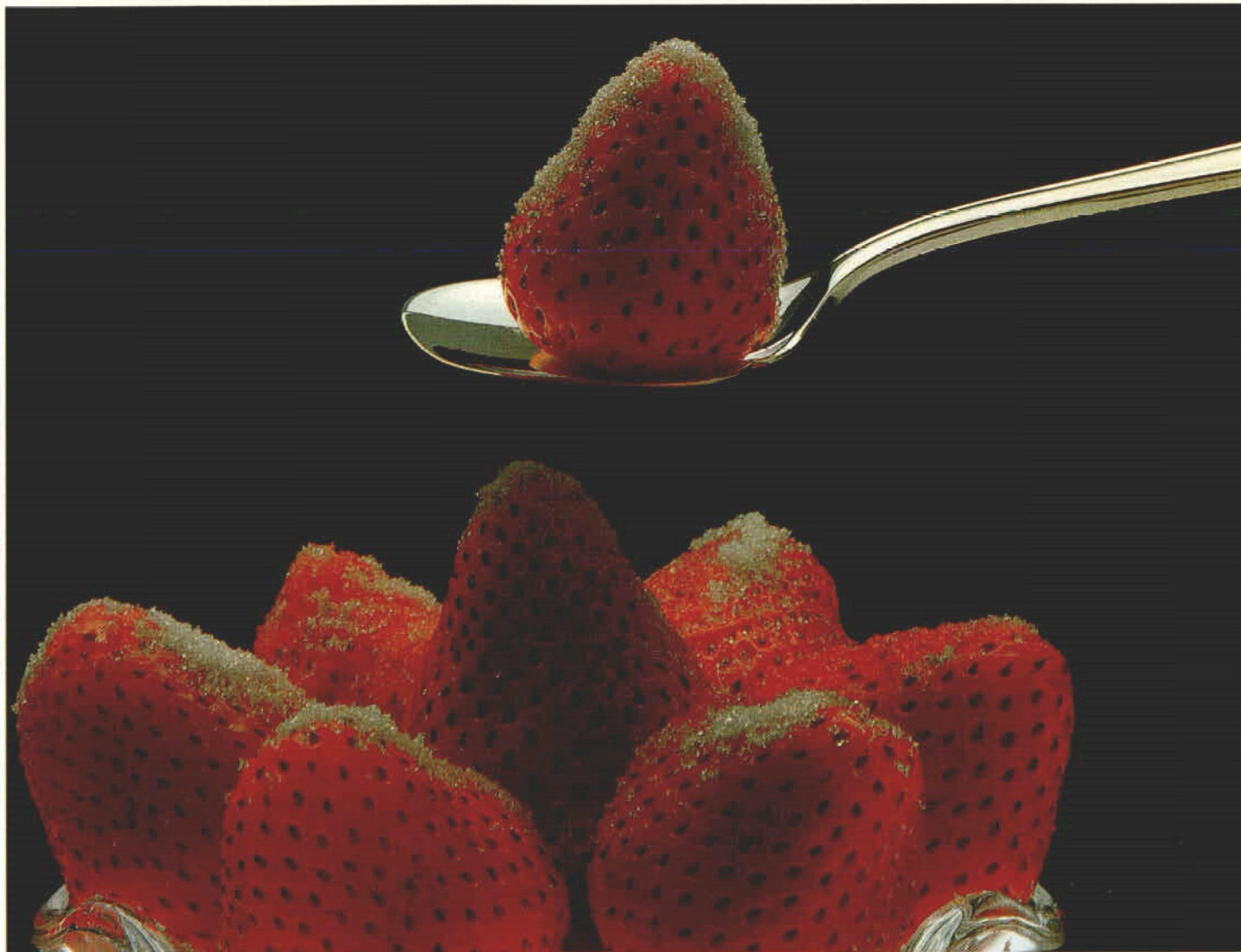
working in these enormous cooperative packing plants, checking and packing thousands and thousands of these little *panniers* every day. The strawberries then go to refrigeration tunnels to reduce their temperature to 1° C, so that they can then be transported to markets at home and abroad, where the *Huelva* strawberry has gained unquestionable prestige over the last few years, which has enabled it to compete most successfully with its keenest rivals.

### THE FIRST ON THE MARKET

In principle, the main aim of the *Huelva* strawberry growers was to produce an early crop. With their varieties and technology, they achieved this goal, getting their products onto the European market as from the end of February. Sometimes, however, the earliness of the crop can be something of a risk, since the consumption of strawberries—especially in certain countries—fol-

lows set patterns and the demand for them arises only at specific times of the year. Therefore, the British housewife buys strawberries when «strawberry buying time comes around», and this traditionally coincides with *Wimbledon*: that is to say, the last week in June and the first week in July. However, the fact of the matter is that the supply of early fruit is gradually changing this kind of habit, and little by little «non-seasonal» strawberry consumption is becoming normal.

But earliness is not the only predominant factor; for some time now the strawberry growers of *Huelva* have set themselves a new goal, and they are trying to achieve tiptop quality, by improving their crop each season. They feel sure that within short the temptation will be so irresistible that *Wimbledon* will no longer start the ball rolling, so that the most demanding consumers will now start to court *Huelva's* early strawberries, and relish them.



## Recipes

### *Sherry strawberries with whipped cream*

Strawberries;  
whipped cream with sugar and vanilla;  
sherry.

Clean the strawberries well, sprinkle with sugar and soak with sherry.

Leave them to soften in the fridge for an hour. Then place the strawberries in the centre of a sundae-glass and top them with whipped cream. It is best to pipe the cream using an icing-bag with a long nozzle. This should be done just before serving. Serve very cold.

### *Strawberry sorbet*

For 4 people;  
1 kilo of strawberries;  
500 g sugar;  
1/2 l water.

Wash the strawberries, blend and then sieve.

Prepare a syrup with half a kilo of sugar and half a litre of water. Chill. Add blended and sieved strawberries. Place the sorbet into the sorbet-maker. Should you not have this appliance, place the mixture of syrup and strawberries in a dish, put into the freezer, and stir every five minutes until the right sorbet consistency is obtained.

### *Fruit aspic*

500 grammes strawberries;  
3 strips of gelatine;  
2 bananas;  
2 oranges;  
1 500 g tin of cling peaches in syrup;  
6 Maraschino cherries;  
100 g sugar;  
1 brandy glass of rum.

Wash the strawberries, putting a few to one side for decoration, and dice together with the bananas, Maraschino cherries and cling peaches. Soak the gelatine in water for half an hour and melt *au bain Marie*. Add the rum, the orange-juice, sugar and the peach syrup. Add the diced fruit.

Wet a crown-mould and pour in the

mixture. Cover and leave in the fridge to set for about eight hours. Take out of mould and decorate with strawberries.

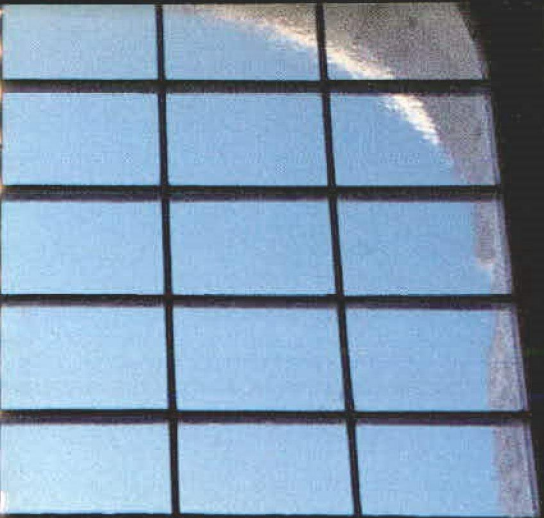
### *Strawberry bavaois*

For 8 people:  
3 egg yolks;  
125 g sugar;  
1/4 l boiling milk;  
10 g gelatine;  
250 g whipped cream;  
300 g ripe strawberries;  
100 g sponge fingers;  
3 brandy glasses of Kirsch.

Clean the strawberries, slice finely and leave them to soften for two hours in the liqueur. Prepare a blancmange- or crown-mould (wet previously) and place on crushed ice. Add first a layer of cream, then a layer of sponge-fingers previously soaked in the liquid in which the fruit has been standing, another layer of cream, a layer of strawberries, another layer of cream, etc. Leave to set in the fridge.

To take out of the mould, wipe a hot damp cloth around the outside of the mould.





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## MONASTIC HOSTELRIES

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# A PEACEFUL REFUGE

Text: Gonzalo Sol

Photos: Pablo Neustadt

*Many people have sought communal isolation throughout the centuries. Monasteries came into being to fulfil this need and they have always been a place of refuge for those in search of peace.*

**I**n the third or fourth century, the idea of this isolation as a way of resolving religious disquiet converted Saint Anthony into the first official hermit of Christianity. At about the same time another saint, Saint Pacomius, also suggested this idea of isolation, but in some kind of community, in order to defeat more easily the temptations of the devil which were even to be found in the monasteries themselves. This gathering together in a community went on to be a way of finding support through mutual vigilance so as to obtain *apa-*

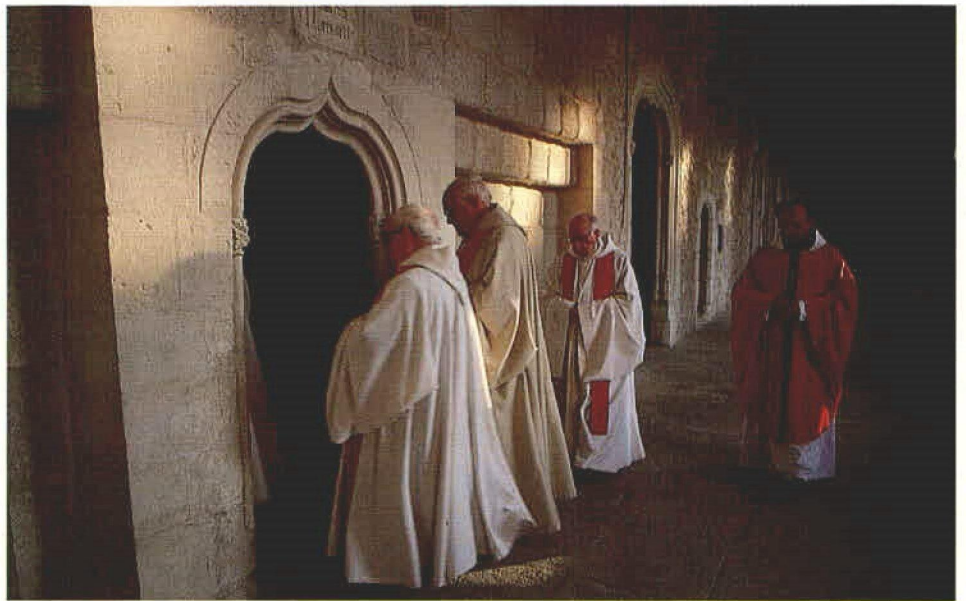
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*theia*, the *dharma* of the western world, with a greater degree of success. Later, Saint Basil created the figure of the superior. But it was Saint Benedict (480-547) who really established the basis of monastic life with the founding of a Council. This Council was responsible for naming the abbot and above all for its famous «Rule», which was a summary of all the community norms being used at the time to which some new ones were also added.

This Benedictine Rule, in the same form or with slight alterations, became the norm for virtually all the monastic orders that grew up during the Middle Ages. However, it was the monks of the Cistercian Order who copied the Benedictines' attitude towards guests, pilgrims or even ordinary travellers. Taking adequate care of the guest (article 53), even sitting him at the Abbot's table (article 56), are norms which both orders carry out with extreme generosity since they are for them steps to heaven which they hope to reach after their seclusion.

*The day begins early, at about half past five to attend Matins at six o'clock sharp.*

Today pilgrims and travellers have their essential requirements of food and shelter catered for, in establishments of every type, price and category. However, neither the Benedictines nor the Cistercians have abolished articles 53 or 56 from their Rule. Some monasteries have modified it in two ways: either they only receive guests whose prime intention is to pray, or they have installed simple but comfortable lodgings which are very reasonably priced for those visitors whose objectives are not strictly religious. The map of Northern Spain which was Christian during the time of monastic expansion on the one hand, and which offered a perfect climate for the cultivation of the vine on the other, is dotted throughout with Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries. The atmosphere of these «guest houses» offers a marvellous mixture of art, history, the Middle Ages, religion, nature, culture, simplicity, work, silence and tranquility which unite beautifully with another hundred sensations and circumstances which are difficult to explain.



*The atmosphere of these «guest houses» offers a marvellous mixture of art, history, the Middle Ages, religion, nature, culture, simplicity.*



«I have been coming to this place for twenty-five years. I often used to stop to look at the enormous cypress tree which is by the entrance, and quite a few times I went in to see the beautiful capitals in the romanesque cloister. However, until I decided to write down a dramatic chapter of my life, it hadn't occurred to me that behind those walls, in one of their cells, I would be able to find the peace necessary to do it in the way that I wanted and needed. The atmosphere and the silence (you'll see that my book contains a lot of silences; silence is the key for a writer) are fantastic here. Sometimes, I went out, of course, but in search of silence, the silence of the countryside. I used to go on small trips with a herb expert from that area. He was the perfect companion», Alejandro Ruiz Huertas, concluded.

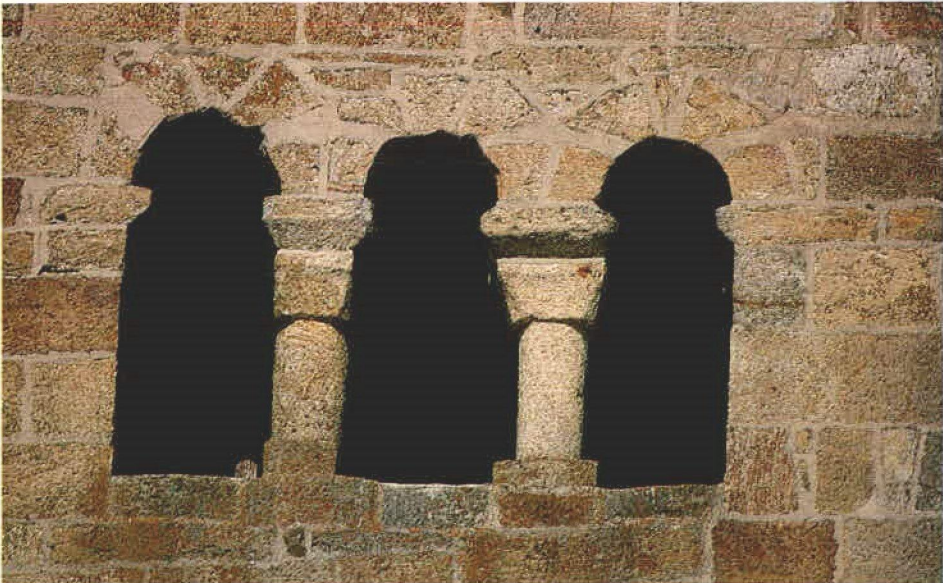
### FEELING AT HOME



The writer, *Alejandro Ruiz Huertas*, brought to light many of the reasons why a man in our day and age might want to escape behind the walls of a monastery, living close to its inhabitants or even coexisting with them; to go away feeling enveloped in the peace that they emanate with the same penetrating intensity with which noise and uneasiness fill the streets of any big city.

«There, in the monastery of Silos (Burgos), everybody feels at home immediately. But not me, not at the beginning at least. Everyone quickly opens up to their fellow guests but I had too many secrets. However, as time went on, I felt an increasing desire to speak. You know that in these monastic hostels you may only stay for a limited period of time; well I ended up staying for periods of up to three months. They allowed me to do so. I've tuned into their wavelength perfectly», he said referring to the monks, «and also with all kinds of guests, above all with those who share my love of writing, of course. I'm agnostic, but people go there for all sorts of reasons; from the religious to the final stage of preparation for important exams..., or to keep a promise».

When I stopped the car next to the enormous cypress tree at *Silos*, I hardly had time to take out my travelling bag. It was half past seven in the evening and Vespers was about to begin. I did not want to miss it. After Vespers, *Father Faustino*, who was in charge of the guests, accompanied me to the enormous orchard while he explained how the master key opened all the doors in the monastery that the guests might need. Then he gave me the timetable. «It's purely voluntary», he said, «you only have to respect the meal times and confine yourself to your room at the time indicated. If you



*Work, silence and tranquility united beautifully with another hundred sensations and circumstances which are difficult to explain.*

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# SAFFRON

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The best part  
of a choiced dish



  
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want, you can stay around here and have a stroll before dinner... that's what everyone else does».

He left me, in order to go to the kitchens and I did as he said, strolling along the narrow paths that separate the onions from the potatoes and the garlic from the lettuce. I looked at the vegetables, the sky was still filled with light... and I observed how the monks met in small groups to chat among themselves or with other guests; they laughed a great deal. «It's our greatest moment of recreation and relaxation», Father Faustino had said to me. Before dinner I still had time to walk through the cloister and once again contemplate the beautiful romanesque capitals, which have been made smooth with time.

First they served some tasty stewed potatoes, plainly but lovingly prepared. «I'm here to learn obedience and I try my best», the cook commented. Then a mushroom omelette followed by peaches and cherries for dessert. «A family of growers from Aragón bring us the wine and it suits us well. And it's good, isn't it?», said the Father in charge of the meal, when I told him that it didn't taste like wine from the neighbouring area of *Duero* or even *Rioja* which is also close-by. The bread was also home-made and smelt of good wheat.

«I come here from time to time. I'm an economist and I need to get away from home and the office to finish work which requires my undivided attention», commented one of my two table companions.

In some monasteries the guests eat with the community and in others they eat apart. This varies from abbey to abbey and does not depend on what religious orders they belong to. In *Silos* for example, guests used to eat with the monks until the fire in 1970, that destroyed the refectory. When they rebuilt it, they made another for the guests. «Sometimes the guests impede the seclusion that we need. We have many days of fasting during the year and it was made much more difficult having the guests around us eating abundantly. It also meant that in order to be polite and sociable we had to spend longer at the table than we normally would.»

At exactly ten o'clock we all went to our rooms. In *Silos* every room has a bath and a shower with hot water, thanks also to the fire of 1970. Such facilities are being installed in other monasteries now. It's advisable to check this detail and any other which may be important... including the possibility of help for some reason or oth-



PROVINCE LOCALITY	MONASTERY	REL. ORDER	TELEPHONE	NO. OF ROOMS	MAXIMUM STAY
ALAVA Argandoña	Estibaliz	Benedictine	(45) 28 37 65	6	10 Days
BARCELONA Monsterrat	Monsterrat	Benedictine	(93) 835 02 51	6	A Week
BURGOS Burgos Burgos Pala de Benavente Sto. Domingo de Silos	Las Huelgas San Pedro Cardena San Salvador Silos	Cistercian Cistercian (Trappist) Benedictine Benedictine	(47) 20 16 30 (47) 29 00 33 (47) 45 10 09 (47) 38 07 68	6 28 4 24	A Week Varies Varies 15 Days
CACERES Cuacos	Yuste	Hieronymite	(27) 46 05 30	6	A Week
CANTABRIA Cóbrecas	Viaceli	Cistercian (Trappist)	(42) 72 50 17	9	5 or 6 Days
GERONA Gombreny Stra. Cristina Aro	Nuestra Sra. de Montgroy Santa M.ª Solius	Diocesan Cistercian	(72) 73 00 53 (72) 83 70 84	24 6	Varies A Week
GUADALAJARA BuenaFuente Valfermoso	Madre de Dios Valfermoso	Cistercian Benedictine	(11) 83 50 32 (11) 28 50 02	37 24	10 Days A month
GUIPUZCOA Lazcano Lazcano	Lazcano Lazcano	Cistercian Benedictine	(43) 88 05 52 (43) 88 01 70	11 12	Varies A Week
LEON San Miguel de Dueñas Gradafes Sahagún San Pedro de Dueñas	San Miguel de Dueñas Gradafes Santa Cruz San Pedro de Dueñas	Cistercian Cistercian Benedictine Cistercian	(87) 46 70 46 (87) 33 30 11 (87) 78 00 78 (87) 78 01 50	5 6 23 14	5 Days Varies Varies A month
LERIDA El Miracle	El Miracle	Benedictine	(73) 48 00 02	3	A Week
LUGO Samos	Samos	Benedictine	(82) 54 60 46	8	A Week
LA RIOJA Valvanera Cañas	Valvanera Santa M.ª La Real	Benedictine Cistercian	(41) 37 70 44 (41) 37 90 83	5 5	15 Days Varies
CORUÑA Sobrado	Santa M.ª Sobrado	Cistercian (Trappist)	(81) 78 90 09	13	A Week
MADRID El Paular Valle de los Caidos	El Paular Valle de los Caidos	Benedictine Benedictine	(1) 869 31 41 (1) 890 54 11	11 9	10 Days 10 Days
NAVARRA Leyre Carcastillo	San Salvador De la Oliva	Benedictine Cistercian (Trappist)	(48) 88 40 11 (48) 72 50 06	7 10	10 Days A Week
ORENSE Osera	Santa M.ª Osera	Cistercian (Trappist)	26 of Cea	12	10 Days
PALENCIA Venta de Baños Alar del Rey	San Isidro de Dueñas San Andrés Arroyo	Cistercian (Trappist) Cistercian (Trappist)	(88) 77 07 01 (88) 13 32 23	13 25	A Week 3 Days
SALAMANCA La Alberca Alba de Tormes	Peña de Francia Santa M.ª de la Asunción	Dominican Benedictine	(23) 30 01 10	40 5	Varies Varies
SEGOVIA El Parral	El Parral	Hieronymite	(11) 43 12 98	3	3 Days
SORIA Santa M.ª de Huerta	Santa M.ª de Huerta	Cistercian (Trappist)	(75) 32 70 02	12	A Week
TARRAGONA Poblet	Santa M.ª de Poblet	Cistercian (Trappist)	(77) 87 00 89	12	10 Days

er, involving for example study or religious seclusion, because having as they do very few rooms and a great demand, they can often only offer a place for those in search of God and not for any other reasons.

The window of my cell gave a view of the impressive cypress tree. The full moon could also be seen, accompanied by a brilliant evening star. The background was the blue-grey and red of the Castillian summer sunset and behind everything the silence which was violently shattered from time to time by the uneasy flight of swallows.

## GREGORIAN CHANTS

The lights went out one by one. The day would begin early, at about half past five to attend Matins at six o'clock sharp. Then Lauds at half past seven and at nine o'clock the most interesting of the Gregorian chants, which is sung place during the mass.

*Silos* is an authentic refuge of the purest Gregorian chant. Hearing Gregorian Chants in *Silos* is a privilege, a joy. The echo of the final syllables remains floating through the vault, colliding and rebounding against the granite of the apse, like a finely tuned hunting horn, like the peaceful end to a gale. During the silences between each phrase the horn continues sounding out after the monk's voices and above them. It's like an extra instrument, hardly human, vocal, diatonic..., very, very beautiful.

«Yes, that's right, the great Gregorian tradition in Spain belongs to the Benedictine monasteries and above all *Silos*. But we don't do a bad job either and our roots are in *Subiaco* (Italy)», said Father *Idelfonso* smiling. Father *Idelfonso*, prior of the Benedictine monastery of *El Paular* (Madrid) and a native of *Burgos*, spoke to me as we walked through the beautiful orchards and fields. «These fields are vital to the monasteries, not only to provide us with food but also as a place to meditate and pray», he continued. «We must meditate and pray in silence».

The land at *El Paular* (seven hectares surrounded by a wall two kilometers long and five meters high) is made up of a dark fertile soil and it has an abundance of excellent water. But the land is used more as a place for strolling than working because at 1,200 metres, at the foot of a mountain, there are very few months of the year when cultivation is possible.

The cheese factory at *El Paular* is very important. Modern machinery, excellent baths for the brine, large rooms for conservation and curing, a laboratory, refrigerated lorries...

## WINE, CHEESE AND KITCHENS

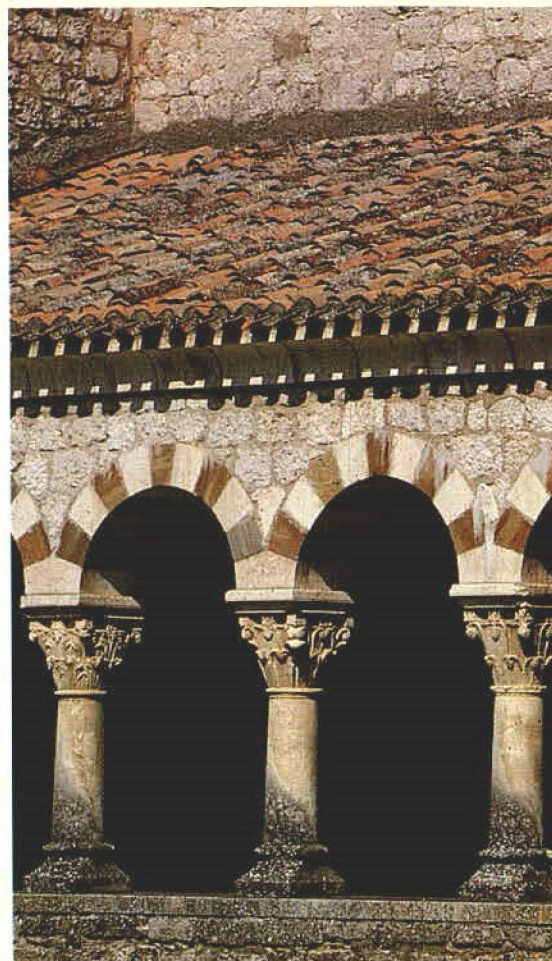
The Cistercian monks of the *Viaceli* monastery in *Cobreces* (Cantabria), also make cheese, as do the monks of *Olive* in *Carcastillo* (Navarra). Although wine extended throughout Europe thanks to the Benedictines, the monks of today and especially the Cistercians dedicate themselves to the manufacture of spirits. *Valvanera*, *Montserrat*, *Montgrony*, *El Miracle*, *La Oliva*, *Osera* and *San Pedro de Cardena*, all prepare their own spirits. In the latter three monasteries, wine is also produced.

In *Montserrat* (Barcelona) the hostelry isn't public but it is a place for meditation. For those who wish to spend a few days in the sanctuary, strolling through the tranquility of its pine trees, there is some accommodation available but it isn't run directly by the Community. Between 10 and 12 guests can be seated at the abbot's table, and the place is famous for its excellent cooking.

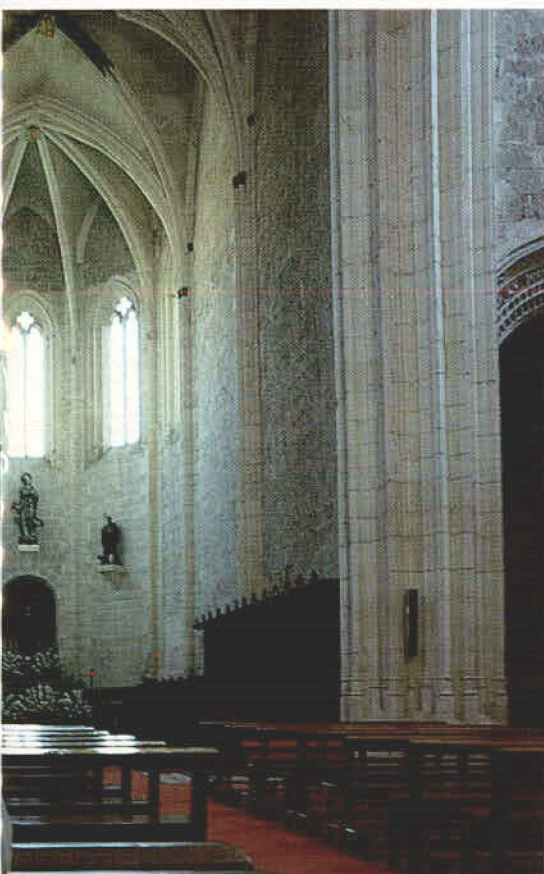
«Kitchens worthy of note, more for their grandeur and architecture perhaps than the characteristics of their food are those of *Sobrado*, *Osera* and *Santa Maria de Huerta* as far as I can remember. Well, also this one of course», said Father *Idelfonso*, back in *El Paular*, whilst pointing to his kitchens as we returned from our stroll in the orchard.

Finally, we went inside. A building of masonry and stone built in the 17th C. along side the 15th C. refectory. High above the noble, square floor was an enormous vault which gave an easy escape for the fumes generated within. Although much smaller and less sophisticated than their French counterparts for example, they are still of great importance. There is now a modest gas-cooker where the fire-place was, where a big friendly monk was happily at work.

Beside this, after passing through the austere atmosphere of the room that was until the 17th C. the kitchen, I found the actual refectory that the Carthusians used at the time of the Catholic Monarchs. Even the seats conserve their original walnut backs from that time. Everything is the same except the tables which are new. An



*One must live, even if it's just for one day*



*among those stones to share their silences and their chants, hearing the echo of the final syllables floating through the vault.*



*Those that go to pray get preference. However, there's no discrimination.  
You can go there to study, to write, to read, to rest...*

impressive place. The guests share it with the Benedictines monks.

*«The first nobles of Castile considered this as their own home», Father Pablo, Abbot of San Pedro de Cardena (Burgos) told me. «This was probably Spain's first Benedictine abbey. We, the Cistercians, built our first monastery in the peninsula at Sobrado», he continued. «That was in 1142. We've been here since 1942 and we've been receiving guests since then: it's a rule of our Order, just as it is for the Benedictines of course. People come here in search of isolation, silence, peace, seclusion... Those that come here to pray get preference. However, there's no discrimination. They can come here to study, to write, to read, to rest..., we only ask them to respect our way of life».*

## RECOVERING THE PAST

In the 19th C. all those abandoned buildings already badly damaged or almost completely destroyed by Napoleon's troops only a few years previously, became exposed to bad weather and pillage. Rain, freezing conditions, fires started by people who did it

maybe to fight off the cold, the dismantling of walls in order to provide material for houses or stables... Spain was really at the point of losing its historical heritage.

There exist documents in nearly all of the monasteries, often in photographic form, and always shocking, of the state of these places only a few

*Communities of eight, twelve or twenty monks do the work of four times as many, and still have time for six or eight group sessions of prayer per day.*

years ago. They show ruins in what appears to be an unsavable state. The religious orders that were given the task of rebuilding and supervising these places showed the same capacity for organization and work as their ancestors at the beginning of our era. A capacity which compensated for the small number of workers due to a

quantative loss in monastic vocations, although today it appears that the number of vocations is once again on the increase. They have amazing strength, not only when one thinks about their work in the last forty years, but also their daily achievements, in the fields, in the work-shops, in the library, in the kitchen, in the hostelry itself, the cleaning that must be done and the maintaining, restoring or even enlarging of these marvellous places. Communities of eight, twelve or twenty monks do the work of four or five times as many. Even with all this work they still have time for six or eight group sessions of prayer per day, time to make cheese, distil spirits, or produce wine and time to attend to the guests with friendship and understanding. All these activities represent their *modus vivendi*. One must live, even if it's just for one day among those stones, to share their silences and their chants. One must sit at the monks' table, even if it's just for one meal, to share their good, simple stews, good bread and wholesome wine.

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# SAFFRON

## THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD RED GOLD

Text: José Carlos Capel  
Photos: Félix Lorrío

*For centuries its aroma has accompanied the finest oriental dishes. Now, this legendary spice, which is grown more in Spain than in any other country, is once again making its presence keenly felt in the west. Revered and cherished like the most precious metals, it is born of a flower, the saffron rose, so capricious and mysterious that she grants but a few hours for her priceless treasure to be plucked.*

**A**round St. Teresa's Day (October 15th), in the cold mornings of La Mancha's approaching autumn, amazing carpets of violet-blue begin to appear among the harsh dryfarming crops.

This is the first sign of the saffron crop, a plant which for a period of ten to fifteen days provides the raw material for a product as precious as gold, a principal source of income for some rural Spanish families.

Although it is grown on a wide strip of the Castilian plains, from Toledo to Albacete, many experts agree that the prime area is

the Manchuela formed by the eastern boundaries of the provinces of Albacete and Cuenca: Motilla del Palancar, Campillo de Altobuey, Ledaña, Iniesta..., a strip of land within a larger one, which yields over sixty per cent of the world's saffron production.

Originally from Persia, or some other country in Asia Minor, saffron came to the Iberian Peninsula with

the Arabian civilization, and found excellent growing conditions in La Mancha. Although there are those who think it was the Carthaginians or the Phoenicians —peoples who coloured their brides' veils with the yel-





*Seated around long tables, the women who strip the flowers face the piles of flowers which cover the table-tops.*

low pigment of saffron—who first introduced this plant into Spain, this appears unlikely: not only because the word derives from the Arabic *zahfaran*, but also because no written reference to this valuable spice appears before the second half of the thirteenth century.

Saffron was known in ancient times, and was used by the foremost *chefs* of Ancient Greece. *Homer* himself sang the praises of the tiny stamens of the *kerokos*, which is the Greek name for the flower. Remains of saffron have also been found in Egyptian mummies, and even *Solomon* referred to *korkom*, which is its Hebrew name.

During the voluptuous, decadent orgies of the Roman civilization, it was common practice to drink infusions heavily laced with saffron before giving oneself up to the refined pleasures of *Venus*. Apparently, ancient pharma-



*According to one old tradition, marriageable girls who helped in the harvest invested their earnings in the finest jewellery.*

copoeia had already discovered a narcotic derived from the plant, which produced growing euphoria and convulsive laughter, leading to an agitated state of well-being: an intense stimulant which, taken in excessive amounts, could cause death.

Throughout the Middle Ages, when the spectre of starvation hung over even aristocratic tables and opulent cookery reached its highest level of refinement in the extravagant use of spices, saffron attained enormous culinary prestige.

Starting in the fourteenth century, Spain became an exporter of saffron, when the use of spices declined considerably and the famous *risotto* became a common dish in Italian households. Hundreds of years later, in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries, when the use of spices declined considerably, saffron sank into oblivion.

At present, thanks to its aromatic



*Before midday the saffron fields, stripped of roses, lose their romantic hue until the following dawn, when they once again present the blooming picture of the day before.*

properties, there is a growing demand for saffron, not only in Asian and Middle-Eastern cooking, but also in numerous European countries such as France, Italy, Switzerland and Spain, where the stigmas of the flower are used to flavour such traditional dishes a *pae-lla*, *bouillabaisse* and *risotto*, as already mentioned.

In the last few decades, avant-garde cookery, led by *Guérard*, *Girardet* and *Robuchon*, among other great European *chefs*, has rediscovered saffron, and its subtle aroma is used to flavour original new creations: mussel soup, oyster salads, steamed turbot with anchovies...

#### THE SAFFRON ROSE

Saffron (*crocus sativus*) is a plant of the *iridaceae* family, whose delicate purple flowers conceal red stigmas which,



*Faithful to tradition, the Town Council of Consuegra (Toledo) celebrates «Saffron Rose Day» every year. They elect a queen of the festivities.*

when dried, become the valuable filaments used as a condiment.

It grows from a bulb which is planted in August or September in small plots (about 500 square metres), since it is cultivated by hand, on a family basis.

Saffron requires clay soil rich in quartz, gypsum and lime, and it can be cultivated by dry-farming methods or, even better, by irrigation farming.

It is a very demanding crop which calls for special attention on the part of the saffron farmers at harvest time. Ever capricious, surprising and mysterious, the saffron rose blooms at night, covering the previous evening's ochre-coloured land with delicate shades of violet. It is at daybreak when the flowers should be picked, before the sun's rays and the bees' gluttony ruin the precious treasure, thus preventing the extraction of the fruit.

Despite the increasing mechanization of agriculture and the imminent application of new technology to harvesting, the delicate nature of the crop has ensured the survival of age-old techniques. Slowly, demonstrating the incredible strength of their backs, row upon row of peasants work hunched over, picking the roses between the thumb and index finger of one hand; in this manner, they collect the valuable fruit, which they deposit in wicker baskets carried over their free arm.

Before midday the saffron fields, stripped of roses, lose their romantic hue until the following dawn, when they once again present the blooming picture of the day before. During harvest time, flowering reaches its height on only one day, known as the «blanket» day, which is long-awaited and celebrated by the saffron farmers.

After harvesting comes the stage of stripping the roses, a task which involves opening the stem of the flower and separating the stamens. Now the scene takes on shades of pure impressionism. The bright red and purple of the saffron is superimposed upon evocative traditional scenes enacted by those who are carrying

out the stripping operation, scenes worthy of the greatest Spanish descriptive writers of the nineteenth century.

Seated around long tables, the women who strip the flowers face the piles of flowers which cover the tabletops. With prodigious skill, they break off the three stamens at the point where they join the stem, place them on white plates and throw the rest of the flower to the floor; their hands, almost invisible due to the amazing speed of their movement, tirelessly repeat the delicate fingerwork.

The work is carried out in a festive atmosphere going on well into the night if the amount of flowers harvested so requires. As we have already mentioned, the flowers must be stripped on the day of harvesting. Therefore, whole families usually share the work: while some members pick the roses, others strip the flowers.

Occasionally, the harvest is so good that it requires the help of whole villages. At these times, the help of chil-

dren and elderly people is not enough, and if necessary, nuns and monks join in, and even the wealthier people, to whom the roses are delivered, to be picked up later. The system of payment may vary; sometimes a cash payment is made for every pound stripped, and sometimes this payment takes the form of one third of the amount extracted, a traditional system which is still used today.

The next stage is the roasting, which takes place simultaneously with the stripping. A carefully-controlled temperature is required to provide the delicate stamens with the necessary degree of fineness and the exact conditions required for preservation. In olden times, the sieves were placed near wood embers; nowadays, they are placed on metal plates heated by butane. During roasting, the houses are

filled with a perfume, which, while intoxicating to those who are not used to it, is barely noticed by the saffron farmers themselves.

Once thus prepared, the valuable merchandise is then stored in trunks or chests of drawers, which become impregnated with its smell. It is essential that it be stored

away from heat and cold and, even more importantly, it must be kept away from dampness; saffron never spoils, and can be hoarded like gold, with the certainty of its ever-increasing value.

The saffron farmer does not always sell his harvest. Aware of the constant demand for it, he sometimes keeps part of the harvest to guard against some future need. For a long time, many villages in *La Mancha* used saffron as money. This is not surprising, since the stamens have always offered the same qualities as gold and silver coins: general acceptance, stable price, durability, high value in relation to size, and easy divisibility.

Even jewels were linked to the value of saffron. According to one old tradition, marriageable girls who helped in the harvest invested their earnings in the finest jewellery. *López de la Osa*, a priest from *La Mancha*, has described how, at the end of the last century, the Cordovan silver-smiths spent two or

*The work  
is carried out in  
a festive atmosphere  
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harvested so requires.*



three months in the saffron-growing region in order to increase their sales, seeking the high earnings provided by the annual saffron harvest.

#### THE MATHEMATICS OF SAFFRON

Just as it did centuries ago, the surprising world of saffron still uses its own system of weights and measures which serves to quantify the volume and proportions of the harvests.



*During roasting, the houses are filled with a perfume, which, while intoxicating to those who are not used to it, is barely noticed by the saffron farmers themselves.*

With the exceptions of *Cuenca*, where the metric system of kilos and grammes is used, the saffron-producing provinces talk in terms of pounds and ounces: Castilian pounds of 460 grammes, and aliquot parts of 28.75 grammes, or ounces, which are equal to one-sixteenth of a pound.

Experience shows that five pounds of roses produce five ounces of raw saffron and one ounce of roasted saffron, a proportion which reflects the considerable amounts lost in the pro-

cess of extraction, cleaning and drying. This same proportion, when translated into metric measurements, gives the following result: 2.3 kilos of roses produce 143.75 grammes of raw saffron, and 28.75 grammes of the roasted product. This means that 80 pounds (36.8 kilos) of roses are needed in order to produce one pound (460 grammes) of saffron for consumption. This is a little less than the overall yield of a *celemin*.

A *celemin* is a unit of area used to

measure agricultural land, and is equivalent to 537 square metres (about an eighth of an acre). A dry-farming *celemin* produces about a pound and a half of saffron, whereas in irrigation farming, the same area yields up to three pounds per season.

To sow a *celemin*, from seven to ten *fanegas* of saffron bulbs are required. (A *fanega* is a unit of capacity still used in some rural areas.) In the first and fourth years, the harvest is virtually nil, while in the second and third

years, the land ends up exhausted and must be left fallow for ten years before it can be sown with a different crop.

In this extraordinary process, the figures are striking and confusing, due to the fact that some of the proportions seem unreal. But figures do not lie.

Even an expert in stripping does not extract more than two or three ounces of saffron per day, using between ten and twelve thousand flowers.

The astounding degree of manual labour involved is one of the factors which contribute to the high price of the end product («more expensive than saffron» is an old Spanish saying); a price which fluctuates as do those of precious metals. The differences in price vary from the 60,000 *pesetas* per pound which it reached a few years ago, to the 40,000 it fetched recently. Generally speaking, the saffron market is completely risk-free, since constant consumption guarantees the stability of demand on an international level.

## TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION

Times of change and transformation seen to await the so-called «red gold». In the not-too-distant future, the traditional farming systems will enter the age of technology. Robotics and electronics will be used in the tasks of harvesting, stripping, roasting and packing this much sought-after product.

For the first time in the history of saffron production, one of the main Spanish producers and exporters is investing heavily in the development of technological processes and the full mechanization of production. Therefore, the years to come will see a considerable reduction in the labour force and in the total production cost.

Faithful to tradition and oblivious to technological progress, the Town Council of *Consuega (Toledo)* celebrates «Saffron Rose Day» on the last Sunday of October every year. Representatives from all the saffron-producing provinces gather in the town to take part in a great saffron-stripping contest. They elect a queen of the festivities, who is given the title of *Dulcinea de La Mancha* and they pay tribute to the humble work of those men and women who, through their craftsmanship, almost miraculously maintain the continuity of a crop which features Nature's most highly-valued rose.

# Recipes

## SOUPS *Seafood soup*

For 8 people:

1/2 kilo white fish;  
1/4 kilo langostines;  
1/4 kilo clams;  
1 onion, finely chopped;  
3 cloves garlic;  
1/2 cup olive oil;  
4 slices bread fried in olive oil;  
1 tbsp. chopped parsley;  
15 roasted almonds;  
1 tsp. paprika;  
4 ripe tomatoes;  
1 glass white wine;  
8 threads saffron.

In a large saucepan, gently fry the onion in the olive oil. When the onion is transparent, add two cloves of garlic, very finely chopped. After one minute, add the paprika and tomatoes (peeled, seeded and chopped). Stir gently and wait until the juice from the tomatoes has begun to evaporate. Add three litres of water and the wine. Bring to the boil and add fish and shellfish. Simmer for 10 minutes. Strain liquid through a sieve and place in another saucepan. Crush saffron, remaining garlic clove, almonds, parsley and fried bread. Add to liquid and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Peel and bone fish and shellfish, arrange in bowls, and pour liquid over before serving.

## *Saffron oyster soup*

For 12 people:

10 cups fish stock;  
1 1/2 cups vermouth;  
1 cup dry, white wine;  
3/4 tsp. saffron threads (forty/fifty threads);  
4 carrots, julienned;  
4 leeks, sliced thin;  
3/4 tsp. dried thyme;  
48 oysters, shucked with their liquor

Steep saffron in white wine.

Prepare vegetables.

Heat fish stock with vermouth, wine, thyme after saffron has steeped a minimum of 30 minutes.

Bring soup liquid to a boil, then add vegetables and continue boiling 6 minutes. Reduce the heat to a simmer, add oysters and their liquor, and continue cooking soup until oysters have plumped up. Be careful not to over cook the oysters or they will become tough.

Adjust for seasoning, adding salt if necessary.

Serve immediately, 4 oysters per soup bowl.

## RICES *Paella*

For 6 people:

1 kilo chicken, cut into 8 serving pieces salt and freshly ground black pepper;  
100 ml olive oil;  
1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped;  
2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped;  
2 sweet red peppers skinned, seeded and chopped;  
350 gr. tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped;  
24 mussels, thoroughly scrubbed and soaked;  
450 gr long-grain rice;  
1 litre chicken stock;  
1/2 teaspoon ground saffron, or saffron threads;  
100 gr. green beans cut into pieces;  
225 gr. peas, if frozen thoroughly defrosted;  
225 gr. uncooked prawns (medium-sized shrimp);  
100 gr. defrosted frozen prawns (shrimp).

Season the chicken pieces with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat the oil in a *paella* pan or heavy frying pan and *sauté* the chicken pieces until they are lightly browned all over. When the chicken is half cooked, add the onion, garlic and peppers. When the onion is soft, add the tomatoes. Simmer the mixture for about 10 minutes. Add the mussels and cook, covered, for 3-4 minutes, or until the mussels have opened. Discard any that do not open.

Add the rice and stir it into the mixture. Mix the stock with the pulverized saffron and pour it into the pan. Bring to the boil, cover and cook over a very low heat for 20 minutes or until the rice is tender and has absorbed all the liquid. When the rice has been cooking for 5 minutes, add the green beans and peas. Five minutes before the rice is finished, add the prawns (shrimp). Let the *paella* rest, covered, for 3-4 minutes before serving. Serve directly from the pan.

## *Risotto*

For 6 people:

1/4 cup chopped onion;  
1/4 cup finely chopped *prosciutto* or fully cooked ham;  
2 tablespoons butter or margarine;  
1 cup rice;  
2 reaspoons instant beef bouillon granules;  
1/8 teaspoon thread saffron, crushed;  
1/8 cup grated *Parmesan* or *Romano* cheese.



**Paella**

## How to use saffron

In a medium saucepan cook and *prosciutto* in the butter till onion is tender but not brown.

Add rice, bouillon granules, saffron, 2 cups water, and dash pepper. Cover with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cook, covered, 15 minutes; do not lift cover. Remove from heat. Let stand, covered, for 5 to 8 minutes. Rice should be tender but still slightly firm and the mixture should be creamy. (If necessary, stir in enough water to make mixture creamy.) Stir in cheese.

### MAIN DISHES

#### *Noodles with saffron sauce*

For 2 people:

1 cucumber (approx. 250 gr.);  
200 gr. noodles;  
150 gr. cream;  
6 threads saffron;  
1 egg yolk;  
2 tbsp. olive oil;  
salt.

Peel, seed and slice cucumber, then *sauté* gently in a covered frying pan for 10 minutes. In a separate saucepan, cook noodles in salted water until *al dente*, then drain thoroughly. Boil the cream with the ground saffron until it is reduced a little. Add egg yolk, stirring constantly, and season with salt.

Arrange noodles on plates, put cucumber on top and cover with sauce.

#### *Salmon steaks with saffron*

For 4 people:

4 skinless, boneless salmon steaks;  
1 glass dry white vermouth;  
1 glass dry, young fruity white wine;  
1/4 litre cream;  
1/4 litre concentrated fish stock;  
saffron threads;  
salt and pepper.

Season salmon steaks with salt and pepper, and place them in a lightly-buttered casserole dish. Cook in medium-high oven for approximately 4 minutes, removing them from oven while still juicy.

In a saucepan, boil fish stock, vermouth and white wine until liquid is reduced by a third. Add cream and saffron threads, and evaporate until the sauce becomes creamy.

*When saffron is in strands or threads*

Put the saffron in a mortar to powder it with a pestle, and either add it directly to a dish or steep it in a liquid first.

*When saffron is in powder*

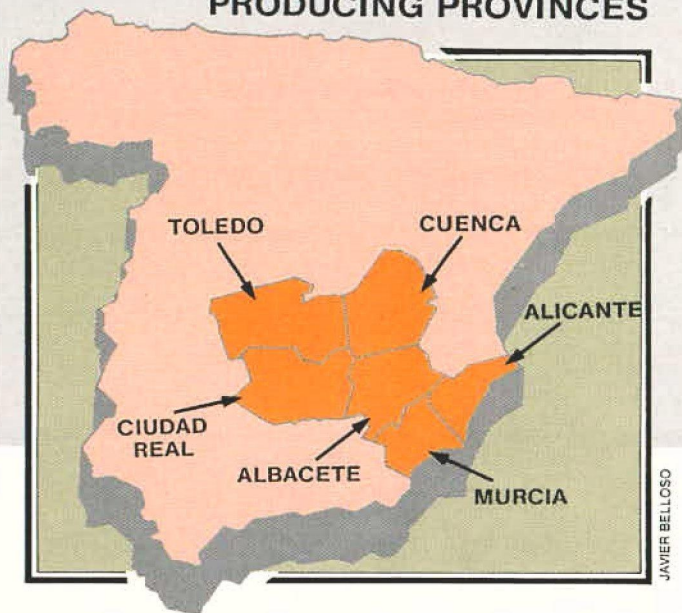
Disolve powdered saffron in a liquid and then pour it out into what you are cooking.

*Quantities of saffron to use*

One bag 0,125 gr./0.004 oz. of powdered saffron or forty filaments (threads), serve four/six persons.

Use saffron according your own taste and judgement and depending on your other ingredients.

### SPANISH SAFFRON PRODUCING PROVINCES



Adjust seasoning. Place salmon steaks on plates and cover with sauce. Serve with steamed vegetables, such as Brussels sprouts, leeks or carrots.

#### *Foil-baked chicken legs with saffron*

For 2 people:

2 chicken quarters (thigh and drumstick);  
1/2 leek;  
1 small onion;  
2 tsp. butter;  
1 large carrot;  
2 stalks celery;  
8 threads saffron;  
juice of 1/2 lemon.

Peel and finely chop onion and leek. Finely chop carrot and celery. Rub chicken with salt and pepper, and place each quarter

on a large sheet of foil. Place saffron threads and chopped vegetables on top of chicken. Top each piece with 1 tsp. butter and half the lemon juice. Close each «packet» and bake in medium-high oven for 40-45 minutes. Remove from foil, serve with the vegetable garnish and baked potatoes.

### DESSERT

#### *Saffron Buns*

Makes six to twelve

1 cup warm water;  
1 teaspoon ground saffron;  
50 gr active dried yeast;  
40 gr. sugar;  
450 gr. (4 cups) plain (all-purpose) flour;  
1 1/2 teaspoons salt;  
150 gr. each lard and butter;  
350 gr. mixed sultanas and currants;  
a little peel, chopped.

Heat half the water until lukewarm. Stir in the saffron. Put the yeast into a bowl with 1 tablespoon/15 gr. of sugar. Add the water, mixing well. Leave in a warm place for about 10-15 minutes until it bubbles. In a large mixing bowl combine the flour, salt and the rest of the sugar. Cut the lard and butter into small pieces and rub into the flour with the fingertips to make a coarse meal. Add the mixed fruit and peel. Make a well in the centre and pour in the yeast mixture. Stir to mix, adding enough of the remaining water to make a soft but not sticky dough. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured board and knead it for 15 minutes. It will be smooth, satiny and elastic. Lightly grease the bowl. Form the dough into a ball and return it to the bowl. Cover with a clean cloth and let it stand in a warm, draught-free place until it has doubled in bulk. This should take about 2 hours.

Divide the dough into six equal portions and pat into circles about 7 in/18 cm. in diameter. Put the buns on greased baking sheets and stand, covered, in a warm, draught-free place for about 30 minutes until risen again. Bake in a preheated, moderately hot oven, 400° F, 200° C, for about 35 minutes or until they are lightly browned and sound hollow when they are tapped on the bottom with the knuckles. If preferred, the dough may be divided into twelve equal portions for smaller buns.

**Not all that seduces,  
incites passion and  
is addictive is forbidden.**

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# Dessert Wines

*It is difficult to say why, but sweet, made-rised and fortified wines have fallen out of favour to a degree which may well be irreversible. Taste in wine is becoming uniform, despite the adage that monotony is never a virtue. Easter holidays with its opportunities to linger over dessert, might well be a good time to rectify matters.*

Text:  
Xavier Domingo  
Photos:  
Antonio de Benito





# Dessert Wines

With the passage of time, the taste for wine, and indeed the taste of wine, has become distressingly uniform. The palate of any wine-lover at the end of the last century was familiar with a much wider range of flavours than any of today's wine experts.

A glance at any pre-1930 menu reveals that at a banquet worth the name, wines would be served which nowadays would never appear in the same circumstances: maderised wine, sweet wine, fortified wine...

There are various possible explanations for their disappearance: dietetic, economic and commercial —all the usual reasons which combine to render such and such a thing in or out of fashion.

I always recall, when this subject is brought up, that until recently sweet, full-bodied *Sauternes* was served as an accompaniment to oysters, yet most people today would refuse it even with foie-gras. And it seems possible that if things go on the way they are, we shall see, in the not too distant future, the depreciation and even disappearance of this oenological gem, most famously represented by *Château d'Yquem*. Although *Sauternes* is not strictly speaking what one would call a «sweet wine» or a «dessert wine», it is currently out of favour for very similar reasons.

Yet a recent survey carried out in France revealed that many people prefer sweet wines to dry and that they would drink more of them if they didn't in fact know that they were drinking sweet wine. Human beings are strange creatures, full of oddities and complexes.

The South of France boasts winegrowing areas historically famous for sweet wines like *Banyuls* and the *blanquettes* of *Limoux*, and traditionally exclusive growers of *Moscatel* or similar varieties of grape. The shift of public taste dealt these sweet wine producing areas a severe blow.

However, they responded bravely in two ways. First, the area underwent a radical technological revolution. The use of cold and controlled fermentation was introduced, alcoholic strength was reduced and the flavour of the wine was altered, removing some sugar and add-



Try accompanying a  
Cabrales or Roquefort  
cheese with dry oloroso.  
Or dry, piquant cheeses like  
real Manchego or  
Gruyère with a good  
amontillado.

ing pungency. Meanwhile, winegrowers and cooperatives got together to finance enormous and well-judged promotional campaigns on a national scale. Both policies achieved a spectacular recovery in the consumption of sweet wine in France.

But the true point of this article is not sweet wine as such, but rather wine, sweet or not, as a feature of that final stage of a meal which we call dessert. But as *sweet* wine has come to be synonymous with *dessert* wine, it seemed as well to start off by putting in a good word for sweet wine given the pretty general ostracism from which it suffers nowadays.

## THE CLASSICS...

In a modern meal it is quite possible to highlight the dessert by suppressing first courses and featuring two classic wines to finish things off perfectly.

Let's imagine, for example, a savoury first course served with a brut *cava* or *champagne*, and a light meat course served with a red. Then a creamy cheese like a Portuguese *Serra* or a *país* or *tetilla* from Galicia with a Vintage, Late Bot-

tled or Character port, followed by a fresh fruit salad with a glass of *Pedro Ximénez*.

It would be a good idea in the fruit salad to use fruit which are not over-sweet, but have a hint of sharpness. Kiwi would come into its own, for example, or mango with lemon.

But given the immense warmth and energy of these two wines, I must stress that what precedes the dessert courses should be as light as possible, both on the plate as well as in the glass. It is a good idea, then, to take a fresh look at the role the dessert today, if one wants to make a feature of wine at that stage of the meal.

We should stop thinking of dessert as an obligatory and routine appendage to the meal, and start thinking about cheese, puddings and fruit as an integral part of it, bearing in mind that although the tooth may be as sweet as ever, people's capacity, especially urban dweller's, for ingestion and digestion is not what it used to be.

The ideal should be to leave the table feeling almost as light as when we sat down, without sacrificing delicious sensations on the way. Watch what goes on the next time you dine with people and you will notice how many of them refuse dessert, because they «couldn't eat another thing».

The art of serving a meal today lies in balanced variety rather than in quantity. But by «balanced variety» I do not mean those fashionable «long, narrow» menus, but rather short, delicious combinations in which the wine is as important as the food.

This opens up boundless possibilities for pleasure, which I would agree with the Renaissance author of *De Honesta Voluptate* in considering virtuous.

## ...AND THE MODERNS

One of these possibilities is the use of dry fortified wines with dessert, like for example, *oloroso* and *amontillado* sherries, especially very mellow ones.

Try accompanying a *Roquefort* or *Cabrales* cheese with a dry *oloroso*. Or dry, piquant cheeses like real *Man-*



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before Spain  
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EEC...

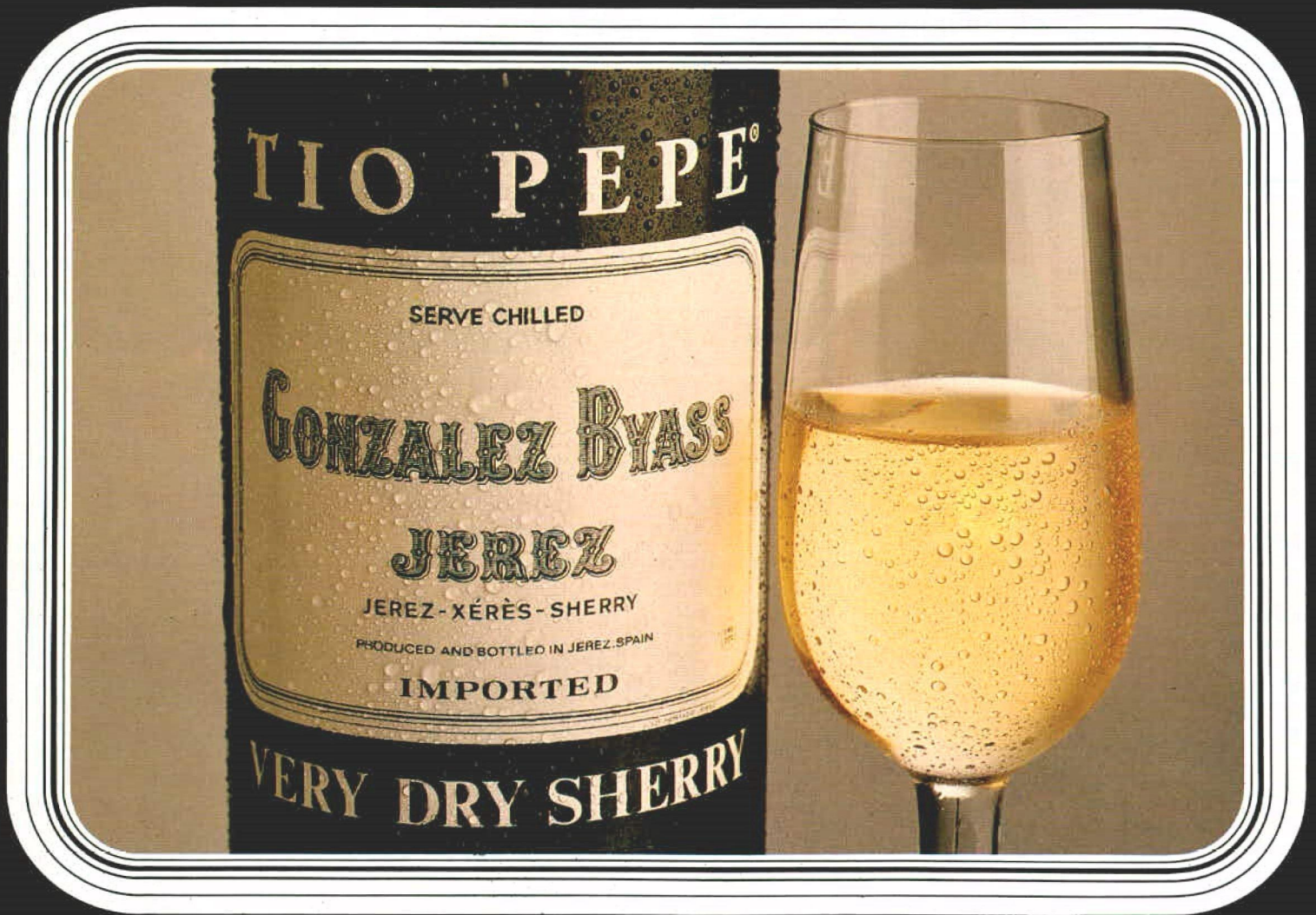
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# Dessert Wines

*chevo* or *Gruyère* with a good *amontillado*.

And, of course with puddings, though especially with sharp fruit tarts, like apple, redcurrant, strawberry, lemon, blackberry, or modern innovations like tomato and marrow.

When serving these wines with dessert, it is best to serve the *oloroso* with the first dessert or cheeses and the *amontillado* afterwards. The shift from *oloroso* to *amontillado* is a lovely taste sensation.

This same sweet-dry combination can also work well with Christmas desserts—the rich sweetness of Spanish *turrón* would be nicely counterbalanced by a mature *amontillado*.

Remember that these sherry wines can be served very cold, which gives still more scope for the imagination. However much one insists on moderation in the hope of giving impact to the dessert, it is not easy to get cooks to go easy on the earlier courses. And after a large lunch or dinner, a glass of cold wine may not help the calorie count but it can be very welcome.

There are other wines, too, not often sold or even made nowadays, which would be well worth reviving for drinking with desserts. Like the maderised wines of *Alicante* or *Campo de Tarragona*. Of the *Alicante* ones, *fondillones* deserve a special mention. They have an advantage over the others in that they are oxidised or maderised in the cask. These are wines with a glorious past. They once graced the best tables in Europe, and have been among the saddest victims of the change in taste. They are made from *Monastrell* grapes, whereas the Catalan maderised wines are made from *Garnacha* or *Cariñena*.

The Catalan *Garnacha* wines are maderised by a curious process which involves burying the wine in large unstoppered demijohns in ground exposed to the sun.

Both these alternatives offer exciting possibilities for serving with desserts. *Tarragona* maderised wine served with ice cream is always a success. *Fondillones* go beautifully with puddings and fruit, and especially with walnuts, pine-kernels, almonds, hazels or pistachios.

Then there are home-made desserts



*If you are serving a dry, farinaceous dessert like turrón, pastry biscuits or chocolates, sweet sparkling wine can be a surprisingly good accompaniment.*

using wine, from complicated cooked puddings to the simplest of fruit salads macerated in wine. Sweet wine is always better than dry in a fruit salad.

## DESSERT WITH BUBBLES

I would like to see the last of the dreadful habit of serving *cava* or *champagne* after a meal. It is the best way I can imagine of the pleasant sensations which have harmonised on the palate during lunch or dinner, leaving only an ephemeral carbonic impression in their stead. Nevertheless, there is a range of sparkling wines, the semi-dries and sweets, which could solve the problem of continuity, provided that they appear during the dessert and not after it. We are now tending to forget these wines which were once so popular, which reflects the general tendency against sweet wines.

If you are serving a dry, farinaceous dessert like *turrón*, pastry, marzipan, nuts, biscuits or chocolates, sweet sparkling wine can be a surprisingly good accompaniment, whilst the semi-dries add an excellent touch to chocolate *mousse* or cake, or other members of the vast chocolate/coffee/mocha family. But if you do opt for sparkling wine

with dessert, do not serve any other wine at the same time.

Sweet and semi-dry sparkling wines should be served very cold, even colder than bruts, and it should be remembered that the nomenclature for Spanish *cavas* does not coincide exactly with that for *champagne*. Spanish sparkling wines are always a little sweeter than French, so that a dry *Penedés cava* would be the equivalent of a French semi-dry. The explanation for this is that Spanish grapes are richer in sugars.

## WINTER DELIGHTS

These, then, are some of my suggestions for bringing back wines which are tending to fall into oblivion. Unless we rescue them, they will disappear for ever and we shall have lost oenological treasures at the same time as doing harm to entire producing areas. Many of these wines are classically served at other times of day rather than at table, but to reintroduce them or serve them at table for the first time seems to me to be an interesting and rewarding exercise.

Throughout this article, we have been considering special occasions, which is, after all, when a range of wines is served. As I have pointed out, wine was used much more imaginatively in the past than it is at present.

It was not exceptional, in days gone by, to serve wine with dessert every day, especially in winter—probably ordinary table wine—even at the humbler levels of society. One of the most usual was «hot wine», often made using very interesting ideas. It is really a sort of punch using red table wine. Obviously, the better the wine, the better the end result. Here is one of the most sophisticated recipes: heat red wine with a stick of cinnamon, a coffee-spoon of sugar per person and some orange and lemon peel stuck with cloves. Allow to boil until it starts to reduce, and when it has reduced by a finger's breadth, serve, preferably in porcelain cups. If you like, you can add slices of apple, pear, strawberries or other fruit. Serve it very hot. After a light winter dinner out in the country, this is the perfect dessert.

# BIG ROCK

## *The Future is Here*

Text: Sobremesa  
Photos: Pablo Neustadt

**C**arles Camós opened the *Big Rock* in Palamós thirteen years ago. Since then, he has built up an exclusive and faithful clientele, has made his mark among the great restaurants of the *Costa Brava*, and his reputation has spread far and wide. The major gastronomic guides have granted him star after star.

Moving a business which had taken over ten years to establish was a risky undertaking, but *Carles Camós* and his restaurant had reached the stage where his business did not depend on newly-arrived clients, or those who just happened along. The *Big Rock* is patronised by people who really know what they are looking for and those to whom it has been recommended.

*«The old place was getting a bit small. We had been looking for a place like this for two or three years. I only want the best for my clients —and for myself.»*

For *Carles Camós*, the best turned out to be a garden with fountains, statues and balustrades; several dining-rooms with oriental carpets and paintings by famous artists; a *façade* with roman-escque arches; and above all,



*Carles Camós' friends and clients couldn't believe their ears when he told them he was leaving the old Plaza dels Arbres in Palamós and moving 15 kilometres down the road to Playa de Aro (Gerona), which enjoys less of a reputation for good food, although it is infinitely busier in July and August. He was encouraged only by his closest friends, those who were in on the secret: the *Big Rock* was going to occupy a magnificent 17th-century house which is just high enough to give an unobstructed view of the Mediterranean. It was a real find.*

the availability of a few rooms —five suites in this case— in a place designed with tranquillity in mind. *Carles Camós* does not seem to find any of this important, not even the genuine 16th-century altarpiece which adorns one of the rooms, *«because we must not forget that the main thing here is what comes out of the kitchen»* —although he cannot hide his satisfaction when he shows his clients this private museum.

*Carles* did not have to go through the agony of deciding what to do when he grew up. His family owned a small hotel in Palamós, and he was in charge of the kitchen, while his brother ran the dining-room. In those twelve or thirteen years, he also found time to work in restaurants in France, Italy and England. He now looks back on those years, and recalls how he learned to perfect the dishes that his mother had taught him to prepare. He returned from London with something very important: the decision to open a pub in Palamós, inspired by a tavern called the *Hard Rock*, which he used to frequent in London, and which holds special memories for him.





*Rabbit with mustard sauce.*

He opened the pub, aiming at a young clientele: it would be a place to have a drink, listen to good music, and eat savoury local *tapas*. He started with four tables, then four more, then the floor above, and the one above that, until it became what it is today. «We never imagined that it would turn into a real restaurant.»

Nobody would say that the foundations of the present *Big Rock* are made of cod and hake, but *Carles* is not ashamed to admit that he owes his success to these two modest products. *Camós* defines his cooking as «simple and straight-forward Catalan cooking, based on seafood»: *escalivadas* (roast eggplant and peppers), black rice, broad beans, *suquets de peix* (fish stews) and, above all, lots of cod and hake.

*Carles Camós* says he is self-taught, and claims that in this business, the secret is simply hard work and honesty, never defrauding the client. «It embarrasses me to say that my mother taught me to cook, but that's the truth. I've always

been willing to learn, and I've followed the progress of the great chefs.»

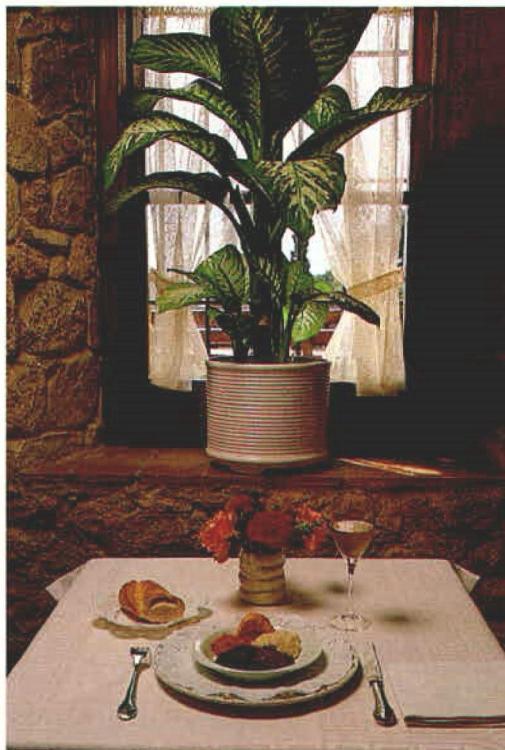
Certain things cannot be re-created outside their original context, because they would lose their charm and would not be the same. *Camós* is well aware of this,

and so when people have suggested he leave the *Costa Brava* and go to *Barcelona* or *Madrid*, he has always responded simply but logically: «I started in this business in a natural way, and that's how I want to retire. If I moved to *Barcelona* and made a lot of

money, I'd spend it on a house like this, right here, so I could get away at weekends. This way, I save myself the journey. Anyway, if people want to try our cooking, they can come here —we're not moving.»

Meanwhile, *Carles Camós*, who is one of those people who like to know where they will be ten years from now, lives happily with his two daughters and his wife, *Mari Carmen* —who is also his right-hand woman in the dining-room— and prefers not to take it too seriously when people tell him his is the restaurant of the future on the *Costa Brava*.

*He started with four tables, then four more, then the floor above, and the one above that, until it became what is today.*



#### *A selection of cod sauces*

For 4-6 people:  
500 gr. «white-lipped» cod;  
1/3 litre olive oil;  
1/3 litre cream;  
juice of 1 lemon;  
2 cloves garlic;  
white pepper;  
1 sweet pepper;  
1 egg plant;  
50 gr. red cabbage;  
50 gr. spinach;  
10 gr. grated Emmenthal;

1 tbsp. tomato sauce;  
50 gr. butter.

Desalt, rinse and skin the cod, removing any dark flesh.

*Base:* Cook the cod in plenty of water, leaving it to simmer for ten minutes after it comes to the boil. Allow to cool, and break up with the fingers.

Place the olive oil in a bowl, add the crushed garlic, stir and add the cod. Add the cream little by little, while stirring vigorously with a wooden spoon until the mixture forms a smooth white paste. Season. Divide into five portions, saving two for the end.



*A garden with fountains surrounds the restaurant.*

*Colouring:* Roast the pepper and the egg plant, peel, remove seeds and *purée* in food-mixer. When cold, add to one portion of cod base, making sure it does not become too thin. Add grated cheese. Put aside.

Boil the spinach, *purée*, and when cold, add to another portion of cod base, along with the tomato sauce and a little cream. Put aside.

Boil the red cabbage, *purée* and mix with remaining portion of cod base. Put aside.

*To serve:* Heat the cod sauces in separate non-stick frying-pans, using a little butter. Serve in small clay dishes, forming small mounds with a spoon.

### ***Hake with red peppers***

*For 4 people:*

4 cross-cut hake steaks;  
1 tin red peppers;  
1 small onion, cut into fine julienne strips;  
3 cloves garlic, peeled;  
2 small ripe tomatoes, quartered;

1/2 litre white fish stock;  
olive oil;  
salt;  
pinch of sugar.

Set aside 12 of the peppers, placing the rest in a saucepan, and fry lightly in a little olive oil with the onion, garlic and tomatoes. Cook over low heat for 20-30 minutes. Add salt and pinch of sugar. Add fish stock and continue cooking until it thickens. Blend in a food-mixer and strain. Put aside.

In a lightly-oiled baking tin, place the hake (salted) and the 12 peppers. Bake in a very hot oven for 15 minutes. Remove from oven. Add sauce and return to oven until done.

### ***Rabbit with mustard sauce***

*For 4 people:*

4 hind quarters rabbit;  
2 green onions, finely chopped;  
100 gr. mushrooms, finely chopped;  
30 gr. butter;  
8 tbsp. olive oil;  
1/2 bottle sparkling white wine;  
300 ml. cream;  
salt and pepper;  
1 tsp. mustard seed.

Brown the rabbit quarters in the oil and butter. Add onions and mushrooms, fry gently for five minutes, then add wine. Cover and cook over low heat until the meat is tender; if necessary, keep adding a little water. Remove rabbit and keep warm. Reduce the cooking juices. Add mustard and cream. Thicken and replace rabbit, cooking for two minutes each side. Serve with mushrooms fried in bread-crumbs.

### ***Tocino de Cielo (Egg yolks pudding)***

180 gr. sugar;  
60 ml. water;  
6 egg yolks;  
glucose.

Dissolve sugar in water, boil a few moments, and remove from heat. When cooled, wait until it begins to crystallize then add yolks, little by little. Line moulds with glucose, fill, cover and cook in *bain-marie*.

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# TARIFA WINDSURFING PARADISE

Text: Manuel Rocha  
Photos: Image Bank

*The southernmost town in continental Europe is to be found in the province of Cádiz, in Spain. The climate and the wind have turned it into the mecca of this thrilling sport.*

**W**ind, which years ago was a disruptive element, has become a source of income, due to the great influx of leisure-seeking tourists attracted to these beaches.

For those who have yet to visit the area, here is some useful information: to start with, where to windsurf. In *Tarifa*, there are five easily-accessible areas which are ideal for this sport.

In the town itself, on the way to the tourist beach: the sea is marvellous, and there's a bar where you can shelter if it's too windy, or have a drink to refresh yourself.

Near the *Hotel Dos Mares*, easily accessible, with parking facilities. The complete absence of rocks on the beach, the high tide and the west wind make this a fantastic place to practice jumps. And, of course, you've got all the comforts of the hotel a few steps away.







*The average windspeed is 34 k.p.h., and the maximum speed is between 90 and 125 k.p.h.*

Between the *Torre de la Peña* camping site and the *Hotel Hurricane*, where conditions are unbeatable. There's only one minor problem, which may even be a pleasure: to surf here, you have to be a guest at one of the establishments that have direct access to the beach. Rumour has it that they're going to clear all the rocks from the beach in front of the hotel...

In *Casas de Porro*, there's a track that leads to the beach. 100 metres away, over the white sand, is the water. It's one of the best places to catch the west wind, and it's very isolated, so much so that we recommend you take a picnic basket.

Finally, *Punta Paloma* is one of the most beautiful places in Spain to go windsurfing. The enormous dune at the western end of the cove affords spectators wonderful sunbathing and a fantastic view of the surfers, from a height of

*One of the advantages of Tarifa, from the point of view of the solitary, intrepid windsurfer, is the west wind, which blows 43 % of the time. Of course, the east wind also blows but it's not as good for windsurfing.*

20 or 30 metres. There are also a couple of small, well-stocked restaurants, 100 metres from the water. The only thing you need to bring is your sun-tan lotion.

One of the advantages of *Tarifa*, from the point of view of the solitary, intrepid windsurfer, is the west wind, which blows 43 % of the time. Of course, the east wind also blows, but it's not as good for windsurfing, and you have to be careful, because it blows at an angle of about 45° from land to sea.

The average windspeed is 34 k.p.h., according to figures from the *El Semáforo* observatory, and the maximum speed is between 90 and 125 k.p.h.

When you finally decide to leave your board, even if it's only for a while, it's worth taking a walk round: the Roman ruins of *Baelo-Claudia* (4 km. from *Punta Paloma*), *Costillas de la Fronteira*, a village with painters and potters and a castle, or a visit to *Gibraltar*.

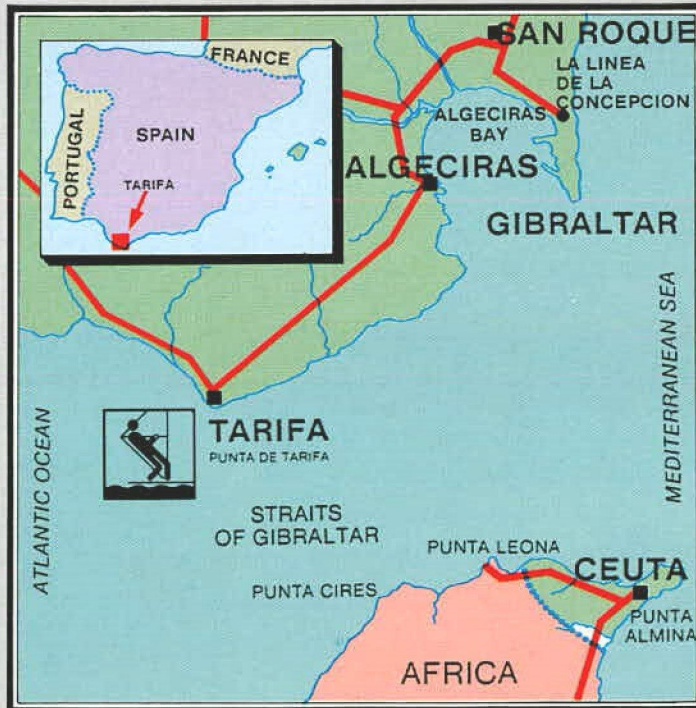
And only 12 kilometres away: *Africa*. Just a boat trip away from *Tarifa* or *Algeciras*.

# Agenda



## WHERE TO STAY

- **Hotel Balcón de España.** 3 stars. 40 rooms. Km. 76, Highway 340 (Cádiz-Málaga). Tel: (56) 68 43 26.
- **Hotel Dos Mares.** 2 stars. 17 rooms. Km. 78, Highway 340 (Cádiz-Málaga). Tel: (56) 68 41 17.
- **Hotel Mesón de Sancho.** 2 stars. 45 rooms. Highway 340. Tel: (56) 68 49 00.
- **Hostería Tarifa.** 2 stars. 14 rooms. In the town. Tel: (56) 68 40 76.
- **Hostal la Codorniz.** 2 stars. 12 rooms. Km. 77, Highway 340. Tel: (56) 68 47 44.
- **Hostal Villanueva.** In the town, next to the *Puerta de Jerez*.
- **El Cuartón Apartments.** Opposite *Mesón de Sancho*.



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- **Río Jara Camping Site.** Km. 80, Highway 340. Tel: (56) 68 42 79.
- **Torre de la Peña Camping Site.** Km. 76.5, Highway 340 Telephone (56) 68 49 03.
- **Torre de la Peña II Camping Site.** Km. 74, Highway 340.
- **Paloma Camping Site.** Km. 72.6, Highway 340.

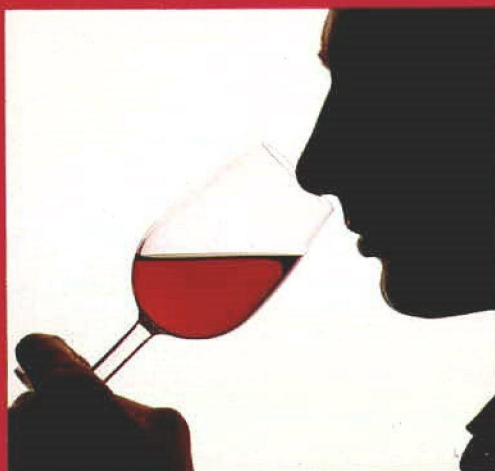
## HOW TO GET THERE

You can get to *Tarifa* by air, using either *Málaga* or *Jerez* airport, both of which are about 130 kilometres away. You can also go by train, to *Algeciras*, which is 18 kilometres away from *Tarifa*.

There are frequent bus services to *Cádiz* and *Málaga*, and a good road network.

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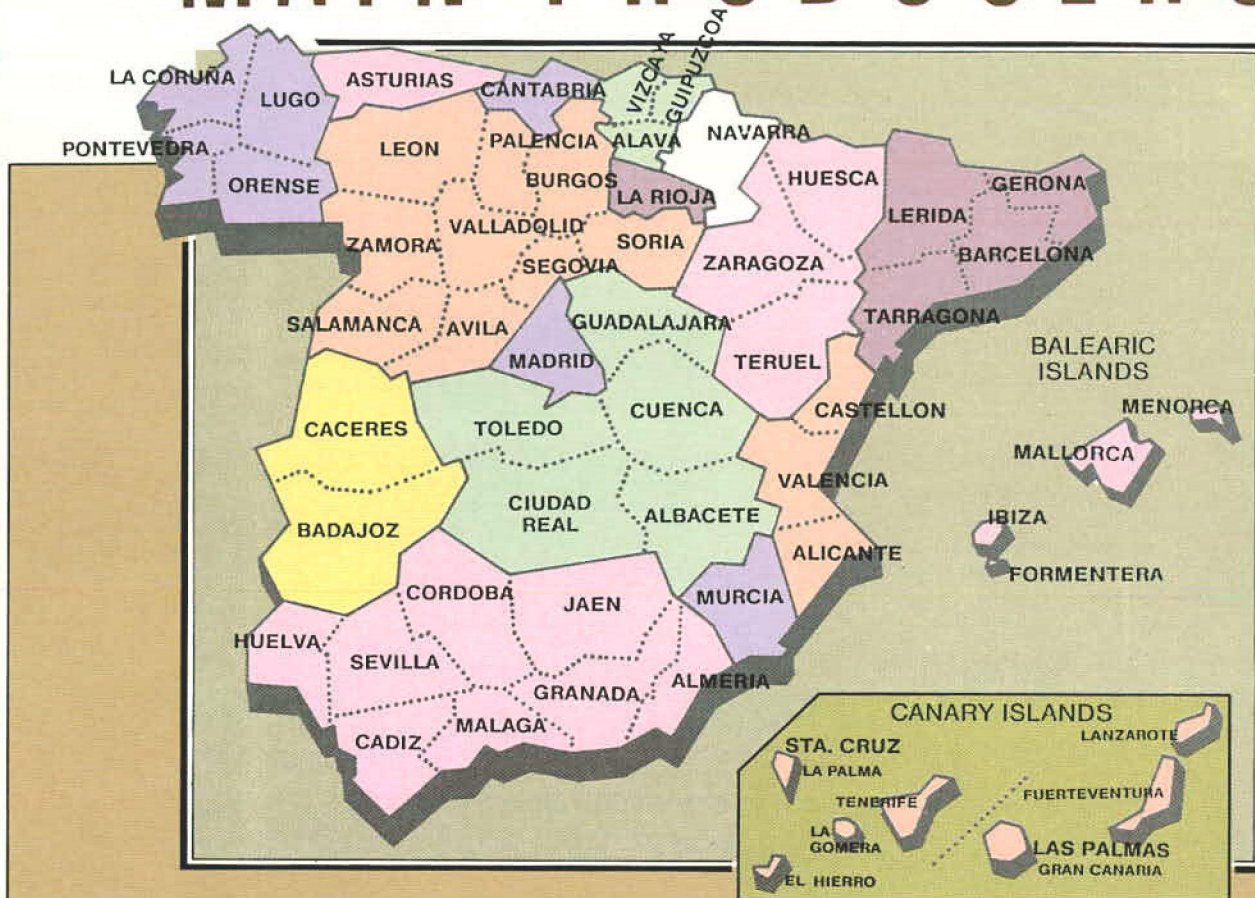
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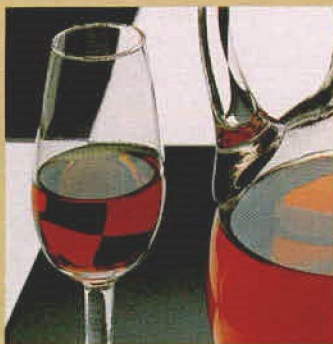
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# T H E C A P E R

**O**n the clay-covered slopes of *Andalucía*, in the limestone of *Cataluña* and between the great walls that, from centuries past, have overlooked the old Mediterranean Sea, flourish plants which on contemplation take us back to the mythical contrast between life and death. Perhaps the reason is that these plants, although humble, form garlands on the barren hill, fertilize the arid dryness and clothe the nakedness of ruins. These plants are capers, caper bush or what the Ancient Greeks knew as the *Capparies*.

The stems, which have little thorns at the beginning of each petiole, entwine, serpent-like when young, and crunch and crackle, when old and dry. Its leaves are a bluey-green; they are fleshy with a blunt, rather low-down tip. However, the caper can appear in



different guises. According to botanists, there are over one hundred and fifty varieties in the warmer regions of the planet; among these there is a deciduous Spanish variety which has no prickles or thorns.

Between April and June a little plum bud appears from one of the leaf axils. These buds must be picked when young, then matured and pickled in vinegar. *Juan de la Mata*, in his *Art of Pastry-making* edited in the Court of Madrid in 1791, gives us some advice on how to do this: «some salt and ground pepper should be added and a pinch of spice. They can be increased in size by adding vinegar in the measure of three quarters of a gallon.»

The flower is pretty in a Baroque-like manner and has numerous, long, peacock hued stamens. These will give way to the caper or *tapeort*. This fruit can be harvested from May onwards and its culinary possibilities are enormous.



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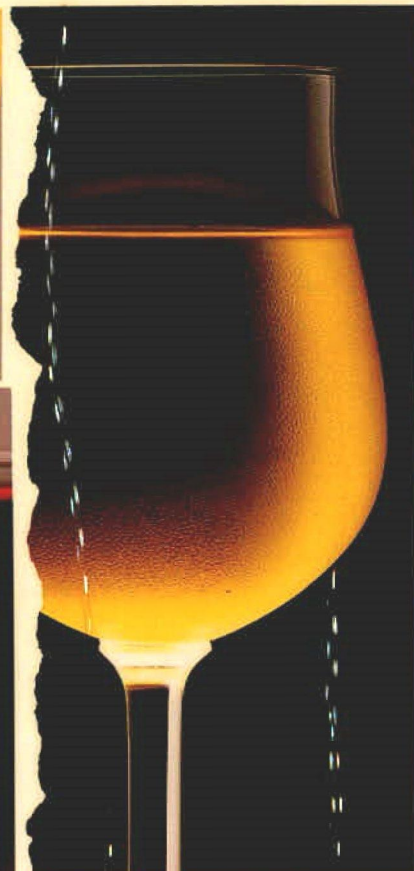
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