

Elemental Bistro, a local labour of love

Without doubt, we are a generation who want it all and we want it now. So if we're pretty much always used to getting our own way, particularly when it comes not only to dining out but also to dining in (Hello Deliveroo you absolute game changer), then **what is it these days that truly elevates a dining experience from mediocre to marvellous? Well in my humble opinion, it's the service.** The extra *Je Ne Sais Quoi* that turns a 'meh it wasn't bad', to a 'sign me up I want a loyalty card' kind of vibe.

Good food will always be good food, but **the story and the service at [Elemental Bistro](#) is the stuff that money can rarely buy.** Not many 20-somethings these days know what they want to do when they 'grow up.' Us millennials have risen up through the ranks being told that we don't have to stay loyal to a company and await retirement. We can chase our dreams and fulfil no end of goals. The issue being, where do you start?



Someone who faced that quandary head on and has lived to tell the tale is **Sergio**, the 25-year-old owner of the newly opened [Elemental Bistro](#) who spent years living in Paris and has brought some undeniable Gallic charm to the streets of **Malasaña**. 25 years old, I hear you gasp. Yes. I couldn't quite believe it (but pardon the French related pun) I expect him to become quite the *tour de force* when it comes to gastronomy on this side of Gran Via.

Located on **Calle Corredera Baja de San Pablo**, Elemental is in prime position to capitalise on the hoards of hipsters that

descend on this street daily. However, Elemental is far from being the only option for a foodie in that neck of the woods. So Sergio's menu (which is of a **French-Spanish fusion** disposition) is instantaneously eye catching in an area where menus are becoming more than a little generic in style.



It's not just the menu that is set to carve out a niche either. The décor is stripped back yet charming in equal measure. The walls are simplistic and white, with little nods to Parisian style through the flowers adorning the tables, to the antique typewriter that was perched atop a nearby table.

The owner Sergio who, might I add, won me over within minutes (largely due to his outfit and the soft sounds of the *La La Land* soundtrack playing in the background – a surefire winner for me) couldn't be more hands on in his approach as a restaurateur. His knowledge about wine was second to none.



It's worth noting at this point that the wine menu (along with all other drinks) were housed in old camera roll 'holders' for want of a better word. And as I've dined out about as many times as the late Hugh Hefner bagged himself a blonde, I can attest that I've never seen such a quirky and imaginative way to liven up a wine list.

The food was as downright tasty as anything I've sampled in Spain or fancied in France. The **goat cheese and pumpkin croquetas** were dangerously moreish. The duck salad had even a self-confessed carnivore eating her greens and the **Galician**

short rib, well that really requires no explanation.



Let it be told that I am very much in the camp of 'I'm a starter person' rather than being partial to a pud, but **Elemental may have just won the award for the best desert ever** – I may drop round a certificate and everything. It consisted of a chocolate fondant, violet ice cream and decorated with crystallized parma violet type sweets. It was almost too pretty to eat and the plate that it was served on was very nearly swiped by this vintage loving lady.

There's no shortage of fabulous places to eat in Madrid. Having said that, there's far fewer that I don't as much *suggest* that you should visit, but I positively implore you to frequent. Kudos to Sergio for marrying not just two nations (but two cuisines) and as a result, he brings the panache of Paris to the people of Madrid.

Info

- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)
 - **Address:** Calle Corredera Baja de San Pablo, 4
 - **Metro:** Santo Domingo
 - **Phone:** 911 475 237
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El Columpio and Fellina restaurants, two gems on Calle de Caracas (Chamberí)

For those of you who've read previous [posts of mine on Naked Madrid](#) (hopefully there's a few of you out there aside from my parents), you'll know that I borderline patrol Madrid on the lookout for all things new, with the dedication of a big cat searching for prey. The thrill of finding somewhere new to eat, or to simply raise a glass is basically akin to me finding the perfect winter coat – aka, it's seriously satisfying.

Now a couple of months back I wrote about the lovely [Le Coco](#); one of the long-time offerings from Grupo Le Coco. Now should you venture from Chueca to Chamberí, this restaurant group is slowing staking its claim on the Madrid restaurant scene with not one, but **two splendid spots on Calle de Caracas: [El](#)**

[Columpio](#) and [Fellina](#). And both restaurants are bound to whet your appetite, figuratively and literally.

First up is the perfectly pastel huesd [El Columpio](#)





It's a riot of colour upon entering and the menu reflects that. There's something for everyone. The Spanish classic that is ***salmarejo*** sits nestled next to ***tuna tartare***. Fret not, if you view all things fishy as belonging well under the sea, there's a ***rabo de toro lasagne*** that was hands down one of the best pasta dishes that I've gotten my chops around in this city.



Effectively, El Columpio is the equivalent of that friend you'll always be able to have as your plus one; a crowd pleaser. The décor is as delish as the food, but what particularly floated my boat was the unstuffy vibe, illustrated by the hordes of Madrileños animatedly drinking by the bar.



This place isn't just for food, it's for fun. And if you lay off the gin tonics, it's the kind of place that you can frequent on a Friday night and still have cash to scour Zara with the following day.

Next up is [Fellina](#) restaurant, just across the street



In complete contrast to El Columpio is the newly opened [Fellina](#), which literally waves to El Columpio from

across the calle. So if you'll indulge me with a little analogy, if El Columpio is your friendly Spanish locale, Fellina is the chic Italian cousin that just rocked up in town clad in some eye catching D&G.



Fellina's menu is an ode to all things from the land of style and spaghetti. Wander in and you'll be first hit by the piles

of fresh produce that adorn every nook and cranny. It's part Mercado, part 'waiting to be discovered bistro tucked away on a side street in likes of Naples'.



I was there on a Thursday evening and the service was spot on, as was the **carpaccio** that I devoured in all of about 47 seconds. It's nigh on impossible to pick out just one thing to try (as I happily chomped my way through the menu with gusto *all in the name of research of course).





But you'd be hard pressed to find a more impressive '**tabla**' of **antipasti** than if you were holidaying on the sunkissed and perennially popular peninsula that is Italy.

Like two latin lovers jostling for your attention, don't feel obliged to choose between the two. Akin to earrings, **El Columpio** and **Fellina** are to be found as a pair. Maybe lunch at one and do dinner at the other. But make no mistake, these two little gems are bringing the magic of that good old Mediterranean diet to Madders.

El Columpio

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address: Calle de Caracas, 10**
- **Phone: 913 78 75 12**

Fellina

- [Facebook](#)
 - **Address: Calle de Caracas, 21**
 - **Phone: 91 410 92 50**
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El Sombrero Azul – pupusas, yuca, enchiladas and more

It's not uncommon for even the most veteran *madrileños* to stumble upon tucked-away eateries they've never noticed. That's exactly what happened to me when I was strolling along the surprisingly calm **Calle de las Hileras** near Plaza Mayor. The spicy smells stopped me in my tracks, but what brought me inside was the *menú del día* written on the window in puff paint.

Monday through Friday, [El Sombrero Azul](#) offers a *menú salvadoreño-mexicano* that includes a *bebida* (Coke products, beer, sangria, or wine) with a starter big enough to fill you up (like the *pupusas* shown below), **a cocktail** (margaritas, mojitos, you name it) along with a delicious main entree. And for dessert, you can choose from coffee/tea, cheesecake, *bizcocho de tres leches*, and more. **All for 12€.**



What's a *pupusa*, you may ask?

Most countries have their own version of a warm, breaded 'sandwich' filled with meat, cheese, and/or veggies. Food pockets, if you will. **Pupusas are the food pockets of El Salvador**, and El Sombrero Azul has them down to a science. Shown above are two veggie versions, one with zucchini and the other with *frijoles* and cheese (my favorite).



Admittedly, I was a little disappointed in the main entree options, but only because I'm vegetarian. Meat lovers will feel right at home here among the ***pastelitos de carne, cazuela de cochinita pibil, tacos flauta, and the plato de carne.*** However, the accommodating staff offered me some pretty good alternatives, like fresh yuca (above) or ***huevos rancheros.***





If you have room after the first two courses, kick back with a fresh cocktail. Pictured is a delicious **blackberry margarita**, but they also have mojitos and micheladas, as well as fresh Mexican fruit juices and horchata (although those aren't part of the menú).

TIP: The best time to go is during the week, because on weekends and holidays the menú price is 15€.

Oh, and the same space hosts a totally different concept by night: it's called La Cueva de Lola, and it's all about Spanish food and flamenco shows. Post to come soon on that!

Info

- [Facebook](#)
- Address: C/ Hileras 6
- Metro: Ópera or Sol

- Phone: 910 18 54 53

Also check out:

- [Tacos, tamales and tequila: Madrid's best Mexican joints!](#)
 - [Sahuaro, Mexican magic in the heart of Madrid](#)
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Lady Madonna, because Sundays are made for brunching

As an ex-pat in Madrid there are a couple of things that I really miss from home. The M&S food hall (say no more). Boots – I mean who doesn't love a decent 3 for 2 offer; and last but by no means least, a Sunday roast. So in lieu of Roast Beef and Yorkshire puddings, [Sundays in Madrid are all about brunch](#), as opposed to lunch.



Image from Lady Madonna

[Lady Madonna](#) has always been a firm favorite of mine (*you can even read my review on the restaurant [here](#)*). With its pretty little *terrazza*, it's an ideal spot for a post-work drink, or a solid choice when you're looking for a decent dinner that won't break the bank.



Little did I know that brunch was an option and this was no half-baked attempt; they offer a set menu that will set you up for the day – I mean breakfast is supposed to be the most important meal of the day right?



I opted for eggs Benedict followed by carrot cake – both paired with coffee, juice and a mojito that proved to be quite the effective hair of the dog. But there were a good five savoury options as well as desserts, and if mojitos aren't your thing there's also Bloody Mary's and mimosas on offer.



I arrived feeling slightly fragile from my Saturday night antics and left with my appetite having been satiated and feeling virtuous that I'd even enjoyed a little bit of sun all by midday. The best bit, the fixed brunch menu comes in at only 18 euros. Well, it would be rude not to indulge at such a snip.

Lady Madonna

- [Facebook](#) & Instagram: [@ladymadonna_restaurante](#)
- **Address:** Calle Orellana, 6
- **Metro:** Alonso Martínez

▪ Phone: 915 02 41 82

Get interactive at “Mad Improv” theater workshops and shows!

Madrid’s theater scene is brimming with activity. You’ll find live micro-theater being performed in bathrooms and lingerie stores, as well as acting classes and alternative shows scheduled daily throughout the city.

But there isn’t much available in English, which is why I want to introduce you to **Mad Improv**, an English-speaking improv group that’s been shaking things up in Madrid’s interactive theater scene since 2014.



Mad Improv hosts shows and workshops on a regular basis, all run by its cast members in English. **Free improv workshops – called “gyms” – are held on Sundays from 5pm-7pm.** Gyms are purely donation-based and absolutely everyone is welcome so you never know who might show up. People have even come in on flight layovers!



They also hold **monthly open shows – called “jams”** – where anyone can get up on stage and play improv games. Jams cost €3 with a drink (which probably comes in handy).



Locations for gyms and jams vary from [Fundación First Team](#) in Sol to Retiro when the weather allows. And right now they have a new set of [upcoming shows](#) at La Escalera de Jacob!

So check out their [Meetup](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages to stay up to date. Once you attend an event you can also ask one of the organizers to add you to the whatsapp group.

My experience – great way to step out of your comfort zone

I had secretly always wanted to drop in on an acting class, but never got around to it until this summer when two friends, Riju (India) and Laura (Spain), enthusiastically agreed to join me at one of the Sunday gyms. This was in August so the workshop was held in Retiro behind the Palacio de Cristal.



An international group of about 15 people showed up – the different backgrounds and languages definitely added an element of fun and spontaneity to the mix. And our organizer, Summer Banks (in the photo below), did a great job at including everyone and making sure the exercises were easy to follow.



What started out with simple warm-up games quickly gave way to more challenging improv activities that admittedly made me feel ridiculous. But it's a wonderful way to get out of your comfort zone, connect with people and laugh a lot. My friends and I left with the feeling that we wanted to try our hands at improv again (and hopefully do it better next time), which meant **the fun far outweighed the awkwardness!**

Chat with the founder, Ben



Just before going to the workshop, I had met up with Mad Improv's founder Ben Nathan-Serio at the newly opened [Plántate Café](#). After studying drama in NYC and working in the field, Ben moved to Barcelona where he first started working in children's theater. Four years in he launched his own interactive theater production, *The Barcelona Time Detectives*, and was also a founding member of [BIG, The Barcelona Improv Group](#).

When Ben came to Madrid, he quickly became involved in Madrid's English-speaking theater scene and founded Mad Improv in 2014. Ben says, "The reason I started Mad Improv was because there was no improv community here; I wanted to reach out to the community in a bigger way, to get people involved."

What makes improv and interactive theater so special is that it's empowering, says Ben, as it allows for genuine human interaction and connection. Not to mention, getting out of your comfort zone is both invigorating and fun.

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In addition to Mad Improv, Ben also recently co-founded [Live in Theater Madrid](#), a NYC-based group whose hit interactive show, *The Lombardi Case*, debuted here in summer. It's a truly unique and entertaining two-hour event where the audience tries to solve a murder mystery – [read our previous article about *The Lombardi Case* on Naked Madrid!](#)

More to come

While Mad Improv and Live in Theater are alive and kicking in Madrid, Ben just relocated to Austin, Texas, where he's taking part in a 9-month research lab called [The Interactive Deep Dive](#). And he can't wait to "come back with some very fresh, invigorating ideas for Live In Theater, Mad Improv and just the city in general."

So stayed tuned, because we'll make sure to fill you in on what's in store.

Mad Improv Info:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Website](#)
- [Meetup](#)

Nudista restaurant, not naughty but very, very nice

So I have a confession to make. I hardly ever read. Whilst this might sound like a somewhat dramatic claim, what I actually mean is, I hardly ever read books (unless you count what I devour annually whilst on a sun lounger and manage to

bulldoze through in a day). I read the news, I read blogs and I read glossies, but it's rare that I sit down and take the time to turn actual pages – this is made all the more shameful by my day job being the lead of English in a primary school. Somehow life gets in the way (or perhaps more accurately, Netflix does) and books wallow neglected on my shelves.

However, this summer I read a book called *You are a Badass*. Now I loath to admit that I read the occasional 'self help' book, but this one resonated with me in a way that's not a particularly regular occurrence. It's based on the notion that everyone is capable of 'living our best life'. The premise is that we shouldn't just tread water because we're too scared to dive into the unknown; it's about unapologetically jumping in headfirst and being brave.



At this point I'm sure you're wondering how on earth these ramblings link to a restaurant recommendation but bear with me. Someone who most definitely took the stabilizers off and took a leap of faith is Micky. The owner and creative clout behind Nudista; the restaurant that he affectionately calls his 'fifth child' – he's a father of four. Having spent twenty years grafting away as a TV producer, he literally quit his day job to follow his dream – and from where I was sitting last Friday night, his dream has literally become a reality.

[Nudista](#) is the brainchild of Micky and the result of his

lifelong love affair with gastronomy. The concept behind the restaurant is disarmingly simple but achingly cool. Nothing is cooked. There's no kitchen. Everything is fresh. The food is either served from a jar or a tin without even a hint of a preservative or additive in sight. As the clean eating movement shows no signs of abating, Micky is striking while the iron is hot. The food is in a word – delicious, largely because you know exactly where your food is coming from (Navarra in most cases) and it's simply seasoned with olive oil and salt.



I ate leeks that literally melted in the mouth like butter (and as a Welsh girl, the bar for decent leeks is set pretty high but these were epic). Next I sampled some marvellous mackerel (I'm not one to shy away from some alliteration) and some zingy lentils that were lip smacking good. Served in tandem were two wonderful wines that were personally selected by Micky and partnered the food to perfection. What added further appeal to a place where I couldn't have felt more

relaxed, was that dessert was created by a friend of Micky's – a moreish cheesecake served in a dinky little sardine can. I'm a sucker for attention to detail and this had me reaching for my iPhone to pap.

Nudista almost felt like going round to a friend's house for dinner, albeit a friend's house with excellent taste and an eagle eye for interiors. We stayed until the early hours, such was the relaxed ambience and given its proximity to the always buzzing Malasaña is quite the rare find. In a city where restaurants are often becoming carbon copies of each other (exposed brick, aperol spritz and steak tartare – you know the ones). Nudista is refreshing for its lack of pretension and originality. Twenty somethings sat beside the neighbourhood abuelas, proving that Micky and his team have spotted a niche where there's something for everyone.

And the best bit, everything you've eaten is available to buy. I know what my fam will be getting for Christmas and I know what will be adorning my kitchen shelves. Despite the name, clothes are required but the stripped back charm of Nudista will keep you wanting to go back for more. Friends of mine know that when I like something, I go all in. I'm often zealous in terms of gushing about things/places/people but in the case of Nudista, it's more than warranted. I can't recommend the place highly enough, so to make sure that I'm not just all talk – you should take action.

Nudista

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-

Macera TallerBar, a modern twist on an old tradition

There are handmade cocktails and then there are *handmade cocktails*. [Macera TallerBar](#) is a pioneer in the latter. One look inside this hip bar and you may be confused—there aren't any familiar spirits lining the simple glass shelves.



Don't worry, though. What you'll find is much better. Because instead of the well-known brands of gin, vodka, or rum, there's only Macera's own hand written labels.



The idea behind Macera's name is also what makes its bar shelves so unique. Founder Narciso Bermejo took inspiration from *paxtaran*, a Basque liqueur made by soaking crushed sloe fruits (a blackish berry) in liquor. This traditional technique, called maceration, infuses the host liquor with the color and flavor of whatever ingredient is added.



Wanting to put a modern twist on a piece of Spanish heritage, Bermejo began experimenting with liquors and their complimentary flavors. The result is the many unique spirits that make up Macera's menu today. Think rum infused with cinnamon and orange, gin with rosemary and thyme or red fruit, and whiskey with cherries.

The cocktail menu starts with a list of classics, which are then personalized with your choice of flavor infusion. Turn the page to find the spirits categorized by type with a list of all the different varieties of macerated flavor. If you prefer, you can simply pick one of these and a mixer of choice. No matter which combination you choose, all drinks are accessibly priced at 7€.



Macera's interior is modern and clean with an industrial vibe. In front, a handful of wrought iron tables face glass doors that slide open on nice days. The openness makes you feel like there's always room for one more, a good thing since this

place gets packed in the evenings. When you visit make sure to take a look towards the back, where lit shelves showcase the spirits on deck, all full of spices, herbs, and fruits working their magic.



If it's too early for a tippie, Macera is also an excellent workspace. To keep you going, there are green juices, natural sodas, and coffee, as well as a small selection of toasted sandwiches and homemade desserts. It goes without saying that all of these are made with the same care as their cocktails.

Info

- [Website](#) & [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Calle San Mateo, 21

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- **Phone:** 910 11 58 10

By Danielle Owens

A former Oregonian, Californian, and Bogotana, Danielle is (for now!) settled in Madrid. Since 2014, she's chronicled her experiences living abroad on her blog, [No Longer Native](#) ([Website](#) & [Facebook](#))