

# Discover Madrid's passionate poetry community

When I landed in Madrid nearly three years ago now, one of my first orders of business was to figure out where the city's poetry community hung out. And I have to admit, it wasn't as easy as I had expected, given Madrid's reputation as a romantic and literary city.

But with time, I found some incredible little corners of the capital that attract talented and passionate poets from around the globe. Here are some of my favorite spots.

## Desperate Literature



Photo courtesy of Desperate Literature

Desperate Literature is one of those cozy little bookshops that make you feel instantly at home. But they offer more than just books (in Spanish, English, and French)—they put on events like poetry readings, chess nights, intimate concerts, and meet-the-author nights. Poets of all walks of life gather in this tiny space to connect, exchange ideas, and perhaps enjoy a cheeky glass of whiskey. **Check out our full-length post about Desperate Literature [here](#).**

- *Address: Calle de Campomanes, 13*
- *Metro: Ópera or Santo Domingo*
- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)
- *Phone: 911 88 80 89*

# El Intruso



Photo courtesy of Poetry Slam Madrid

Just off Gran Vía, this venue is spacious with a unique layout: designed in an L shape, one area is lined with couches and the other, the stage and dance floor—unlike other poetry hotspots in the city, Intruso Bar is first and foremost a place to cut a rug under the neon lights ‘til the sun comes up. On Mondays they have jam sessions (that usually lean towards jazz and R&B) and on weekends they have scheduled concerts, comedy shows, and you guessed it, poetry readings.

The first Wednesday of each month, El Intruso lends its stage to [Poetry Slam Madrid](#), where 12 poets give 3-minute performances. It’s just 6 euros and includes a drink, and anyone can sign up here (first come, first



serve): [participarslam@gmail.com](mailto:participarslam@gmail.com). It's a buzzing community of young, international artists that you don't want to miss.

- *Address: Calle de Augusto Figueroa, 3*
- *Metro: Gran Vía, Chueca, or Tribunal*
- [Facebook](#) & [website](#)

## Vergüenza Ajena



Photo credit: [camareroaponmeunverso.blogspot.com](http://camareroaponmeunverso.blogspot.com)

Any time I see a place that calls itself a “bar-librería,” I’m already sold. Vergüenza Ajena does it all: delicious homemade food, well-priced drinks, a laidback atmosphere with friendly service, and events that lure in the poetry community (namely readings). If you go on a night where there’s no event planned, there are hundreds of books to keep you occupied. I also hear the salmorejo is the best in town.



- *Address: Calle de Galileo, 56*
- *Metro: Quevedo or Moncloa*
- [Facebook](#)
- *Phone: 912 97 70 34*

## Café Libertad 8



Photo credit: [lanocheenvivo.com](http://lanocheenvivo.com)

You'd be hard-pressed to find anything else like Libertad 8 in the capital. It's a traditional, no-frills bar where primarily Spanish artists gather to do nothing more than share their love of music, poetry, painting, storytelling, photography, and more. It's neither hipster nor pricey, despite its prime location in the buzzing Chueca neighborhood. Skip the tourist crowd, grab a glass of cava, and meet the passionate poets of Madrid.

- *Address: Calle Libertad, 8*
- *Metro: Chueca or Banco de España*

- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)
- Phone: 915 32 11 50

## María Pandora



This gorgeous, borderline-creepy bar is dedicated to two things: champagne and poetry. Inside, you'll feel like you're in a haunted mansion: every inch of the walls is covered with sinister sketches, the tables are adorned with misshapen melted candles, and each piece of vintage furniture is unique.

The space functions as a stage (albeit a small one) for poetry readings, *microteatro*, and literary chats several nights of the week. Sign up for an event, order a glass of bubbly, and if you get there early enough, grab a window seat. Oh, and don't forget to begin or end your night of poetry with a visit

to the park just in front, Parque de las Vistillas. **Check out our full post on María Pandora [here](#).**

- *Address: Plaza de Gabriel Miró, 1*
- *Metro: La Latina*
- [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)
- *Phone: 680 37 31 08*

In addition to frequenting these amazing spaces, you can also connect with Madrid's poetry community by joining Facebook groups such as [Poetas en Madrid](#), following pages like [Poetry Slam Madrid](#), and staying in the loop on all things culture on Madrid's official [website](#) for cultural events in the city.

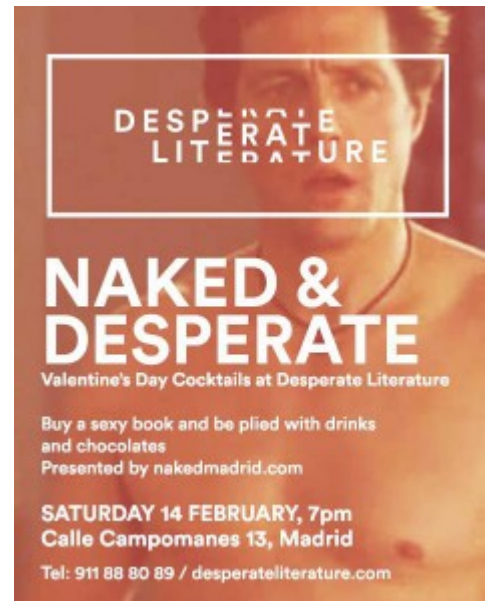
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## Desperate Literature, so much more than a bookshop

Four years ago I stumbled upon a newly opened gem, [Desperate Literature](#). I immediately went in, spoke to the staff (who were practically still building the place), and wrote an article about it: [Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid.](#)

Something about it felt so homey to me. Perhaps it was the English-speaking staff, the familiar titles on the shelves, or the fact that they were playing my brother's kind of music. It just felt like I was stepping into an avid reader's living room in New York rather than a bookshop in Madrid.





I haven't stopped going back since. Many of the times I've gone in with friends and family, we've either been offered a cup of green tea or a glass of whiskey. Naked Madrid even co-hosted a Valentine's event there in 2015. I remember there being lots of mulled wine, chocolate, and a discount in the erotica section.

So much has changed since then, yet the same wonderful vibe and essence remains. The staff is still rotating, international and friendly as ever. The book selection of both new and old titles in English, French and Spanish keeps on growing. With so many great additions, it was time for a new article, with updated pics too.

## **First some background info**

For anyone who hasn't been yet, Desperate Literature sells by far the best selection of English books in the city, from art and philosophy to history and sociology. Plus a nice "boozy books" section where you get a shot of free whiskey with every purchase. You can also find titles in other languages, as well as handpicked rare editions, signed copies, tote bags, postcards, maps, and more. There's even a kids' section!

Desperate Literature was founded by hardcore book fanatics:

Craig Walzer (UK), Corey Eastwood (US), Charlotte Delattre (France) and Terry Craven (UK). Between them, they also own [Atlantis Books](#) in Santorini, Greece, and [Book Thug Nation](#) and [Human Relations](#) in Brooklyn, New York.

Charlotte and Terry are currently running the shop (and living upstairs). Before coming to Madrid, they both worked for several years at the world-famous Paris bookshop [Shakespeare and Company](#). Lucky for us, they're bringing the same philosophy to Desperate Literature, making it much more than a bookshop – it's also a community, event space, publishing house, and a home. According to Terry:

*“Desperate Literature’s aim is to create a place where people meet for and through literature and to that end we’re developing not only our stock, focusing on having the best literature in English, Spanish and French, but a whole array of literary events, a literary magazine and all types of literary collaborations.”*



## Great events: readings, concerts, and more

Desperate Literature has truly blossomed into an international haven for literature and art. It collaborates with local and expat writers, poets, musicians, and artists on a regular basis. They constantly put on cozy concerts, trivia nights, chess events, readings, and talks, as well as fun holiday-themed events like Bloomsday and Christmas sing-alongs. All these intimate events are healthily booze-infused, and usually cost just €3 entry including a drink.



## Children's corner

In the back you'll find a very sweet children's corner full of class titles that will make you feel nostalgic, from Dr. Seuss to Roald Dahl. There's also a cute little couch where you can curl up with a good read.





## First literary prize

Desperate Literature launched its very own short fiction [prize](#) this year, receiving over 450 entries. They offered a €1000 prize, a stay at the beautiful Civitella Ranieri foundation, and publication in various literary magazines, as well as events at Desperate Literature and Shakespeare and Company.

*We'll be launching again in December 2018 and (hopefully) every year to come, with the aim of putting our small bookshop on the international scene for excellent experimental fiction written today.*

## And first magazine and book!

The shortlist from the fiction prize even led to the publishing of Desperate Literature's first book "[Eleven Stories](#)" in April. And they put out their first magazine last year, [La Errante](#).





While all these additions are undeniably impressive (and there's certainly more in store), what speaks to me most is that the shop continues to feel as warm and cozy as ever, almost as if you were walking into a friend's personal library. Plus the music is great, the signs are quirky, and you're likely to make a friend or get offered a drink if you stick around awhile.

If you're interested in getting to know more about Desperate Literature, definitely stop in and say hello. For more info, here's an insightful article written by Katie Dycus: [Portrait of a Bookstore: Desperate Literature \(Madrid\)](#).

## Desperate Literature

- [Facebook](#), [Website](#) & [Instagram](#)

**Address:** Calle Campomanes, 13

**Metro:** Santo Domingo, Opera, and Callao

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## Where to Take Your Mom in Madrid – Round 2

Knowing where to take your mom in Madrid can be tough, especially if she's already visited you five or six times. So here's a follow-up to my [first version](#) of this post with some fresh ideas, some favorites, and some recommendations from fellow Naked Madrid writers – and my mom, too, of course. She also helped me edit this whole piece. Thanks ma!

Not to mention these ideas are great for any out-of-town guests. Here goes:

## 1. Museo del Romanticismo for an intimate art experience



Madrid has several charming museums worth visiting, and if you're like me, you'll appreciate their small size. My mom and I loved [Museo de Artes Decorativas](#) and [Museo Naval](#); but we enjoyed [Museo del Romanticismo](#) the most. Something about wandering around someone's former mansion makes it unique, and each room tells a different story. Just stay on the grey carpet or the attendant will scold you, like she did my mom when she wanted to take a closer look at the 19th-century furnishings and art! Plus it has a wonderful tea room.

For more ideas, check out [Madrid's obvious and not-so-obvious museums \(and how to get in for free!\)](#)

## 2. Mad Improv events for fun and laughter



This was such a great discovery. My mom has been to Madrid several times over my ten years of living here, yet we never quite found the right way to spend an evening out that didn't just involve food. [Mad Improv](#) is an English-speaking theater group that holds shows (right now on Thursdays at La Escalera de Jacob) and regular workshops and jams at [VeraContent](#) (Naked Madrid's sister company).

Jams cost 3€ and include a first drink. Anyone is welcome to get up and join in on improv games, or you can just watch if you're on the shyer side – understandably so, as you'll see some pretty impressive improvisors up there. Either way, you're going to laugh a whole lot. I promise.

Here's a [full post on Mad Improv](#) to find out more.



### 3. Juana la Loca for excellent Spanish food



Juana la Loca is an exceptional family-run restaurant in La Latina, serving Spanish food with lots of fusion and lots of love. Everything you eat here is exquisite, from the *pintxos* at the bar to the main dishes. I had been several times before I finally got the chance to speak to one of the family members, the son, who explained everything on the menu with such passion. Culinary arts clearly run in the family.

### 4. Bosco de Lobos and Ana la Santa for cozy and chic dining



I wanted to include a few more restaurants on this list so I asked for recommendations from [Cat](#), one of Naked Madrid's most active writers. With no hesitation at all, she said: "[Bosco de Lobos](#) and [Ana la Santa](#) are both mum pleasers!" Bosco de Lobos is situated in a beautiful courtyard of an architecture school in Chueca, and its casual-chic look immediately lures you in. Ana la Santa also has a great location, right in Plaza Santa Ana. Cat especially recommends going here when it's cold outside, as it's the perfect place to warm up.

Check out [Cat](#)'s articles on [Bosco de Lobos](#) and [Ana la Santa](#) – I'd definitely take her word for it.

## 5. Chuka for Japanese ramen and gyozas





Once you've had your taste of Spanish food, you shouldn't feel bad about going to an [international restaurant](#). Really, it's okay. Madrid's culinary scene is full of fusion cuisine from all over the world, and Madrileños love it. [Chuka](#) is one of our all-time favorites for ramen, gyozas and baos. And we just found out the owners are actually two Americans who have been living in Madrid for over a decade. Go figure!

Here's a full post on [Chuka](#). Another great restaurant nearby is [L'Artisan Furansu Kitchen](#), offering French-Japanese fusion cuisine and a *menú del día* that changes daily.

## 6. Salmon Guru for fun cocktails

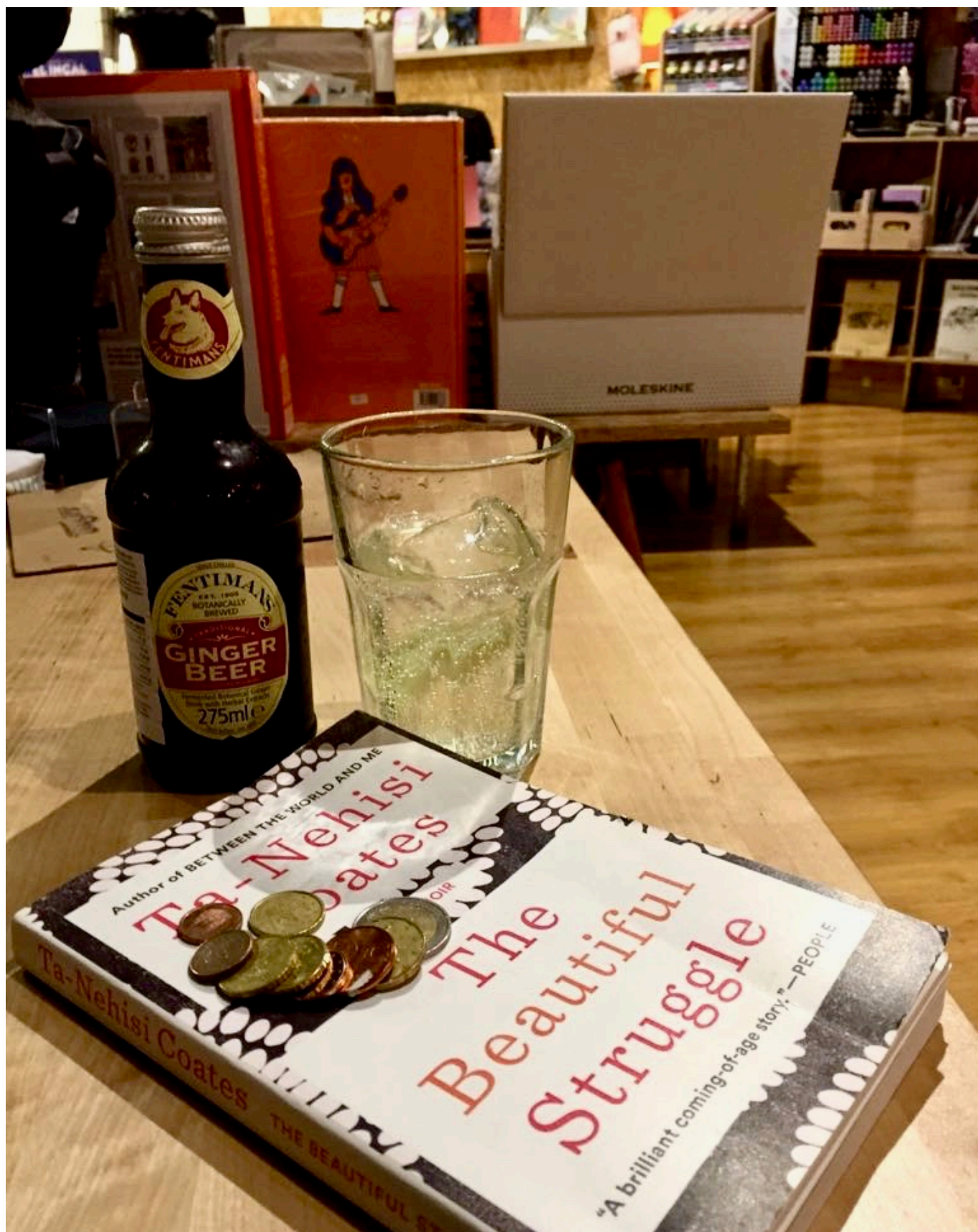




Before going into Chuka we had a half hour to kill so we walked down the street and got a drink at [Salmon Guru](#). This funky bar has a great cocktail selection and truly unique decor. If we'd stayed a little longer and sampled another round, my mom thinks we might have solved the mystery of what "Salmon Guru" actually means.

Read our full post on [Salmon Guru here](#).

**7. Swinton & Grant for when you're working**



Coffee shops are always great places to park your mom while you're working (or napping). If she hasn't brought her own book with her, she'll surely find something to read at [Swinton & Grant](#) – a café that sells art books and also has a



downstairs gallery – while enjoying a *cortado*, a spicy ginger soda, or a beer.

Another one of my mom's favorites, mentioned in the [previous article](#), is [Café La Libre](#), right by the Reina Sofia museum. She couldn't resist going back twice on her most recent visit. And we always make a pit-stop at [Desperate Literature](#) to check out their international book selection and delightful event calendar.

## **8. Templo de Debod for stunning views**





This beautiful ancient Egyptian temple is perched on a hill providing breathtaking views of the city, making it the perfect spot to watch the sunset or have a picnic. [Templo de Debod](#) is also a great place to walk to after a visit to the Royal Palace or the [Cerralbo Museum](#) which are both a hop skip away. You'll find a free-entrance museum inside the temple – one of [Mad Improv](#)'s organizers, Summer, said her parents loved

it.

## 9. Casa Pueblo for another cocktail



I've been going to this bar since my first year in Madrid. You can bring anyone here – a date, a friend, a colleague. There's something warm and special about [Casa Pueblo](#) that makes me keep coming back. And my mom couldn't agree more. There's also a small stage in the back where they regularly put on live music.

## 10. The Rastro for a Sunday flea market experience





pic from [Madrid No Frills](#)

When I asked for a recommendation from [Leah](#), she said: “My mum absolutely loves the Rastro, of course. She wants to buy everything but can’t fit it in her suitcase, but she always manages to squeeze something in like a spoon!”

Leah has been writing about and capturing the Rastro for years on her awesome blog, [Madrid No Frills](#), and instagram accounts [@rastrolife](#) and [@portaitofmadrid](#). Here’s her latest Rastro-inspired post: [Seven eccentric museum-worthy collections found only in the Rastro](#)

## 11. Shopping day in Malasaña – and a mandatory drink afterwards





Mojitos at Cubanismo, a rooftop bar in Malasaña

When it comes to shopping, I like getting it over with in one shot on Calle Fuencarral (which merges with Gran Vía if you want to hit all the big stores like Zara and H&M). Afterwards, there's beer and tapas waiting for you at some of our favorite spots. I recommend going into one of the happening food markets in the area – [Mercado de San Ildefonso](#) or [Mercado de San Anton](#) – both with great outdoor seating areas.

Another amazing place for a post-shopping drink is El Paracaídas. This multi-story and multi-purpose concept store actually has two rooftops – our favorite is [Cubanismo, a tropical rooftop escape!](#)

## 12. Food tour for insight into Spanish

## bar culture and cuisine



Another Naked Madrid writer, Melissa, recently went on the [Context Tavernas and Tapas Tour](#) in Barrio de las Letras. Melissa is a true foodie, and works as a full-time writer and translator at [VeraContent](#), where she researches Spanish food on a daily basis. She said the culinary tour was truly insightful, and a wonderful way to better understand the history and nuances behind Spain's delicious cuisine as you enjoy every bite.

Read Melissa's full article on the [Context Travel Tours](#) here.

Don't forget to read round one of [Where to Take Your Mom in Madrid](#) for more ideas!

You might also like: [Take a Peek Inside 5 Historical Madrid Bars](#)

Of course Madrid is full of more options that mothers will love, so please feel free to share in the comments!

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## What to See in Barrio de Las Letras

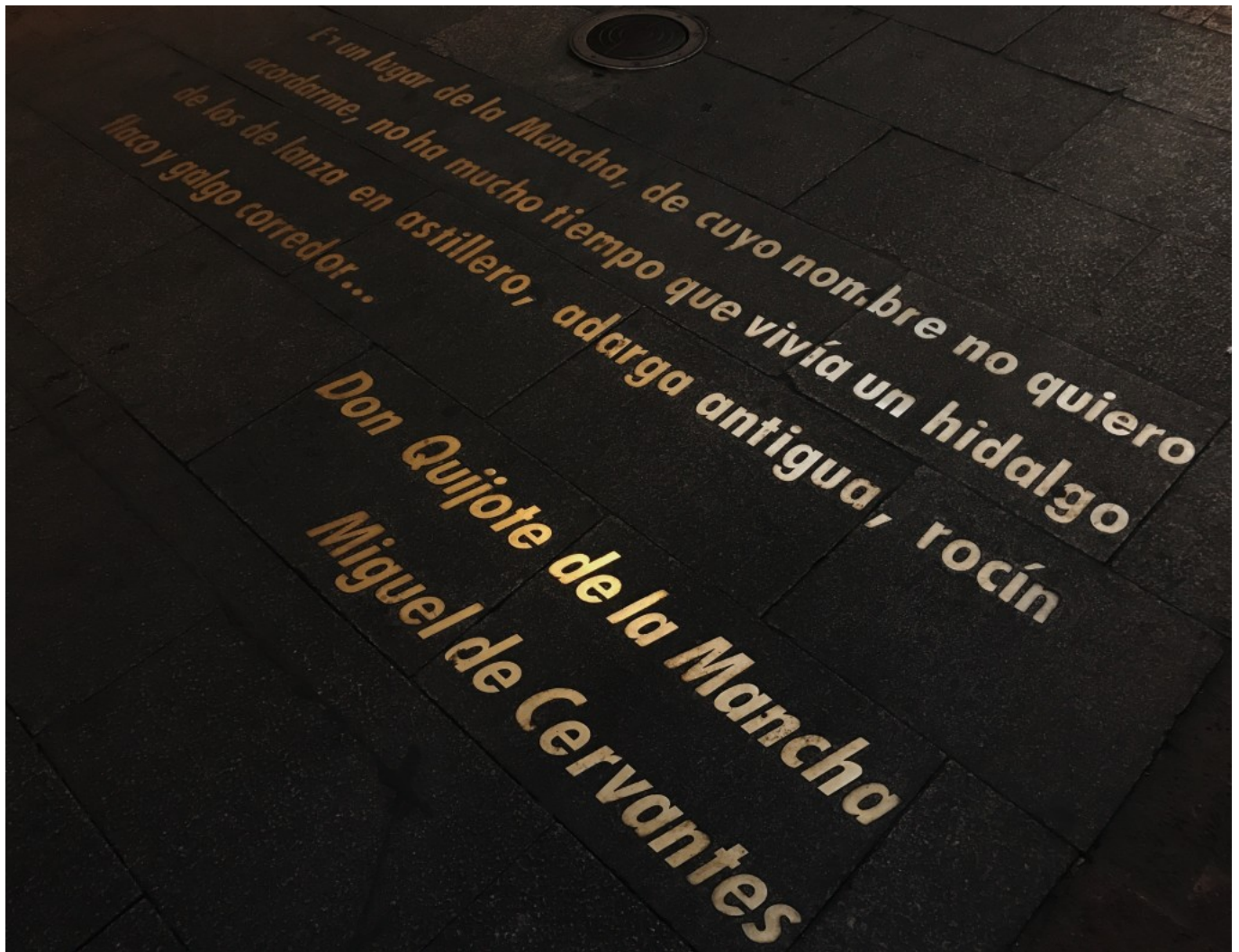
Madrid's [Barrio de las Letras](#) is a timeless neighborhood that stays true to its Spanish roots, while still giving a modern feel that leaves visitors coming back for more. With its amazing food, culture, and ambience, you can't go wrong when it comes to exploring this classic barrio.

Here are a few insights into its history, [hotspots](#) and 3 restaurant recommendations!

### History with a Modern Twist

Barrio de las Letras, also known as Huertas, is less than a 10-minute walk from Sol and was once home to some of the greatest Spanish writers. The streets are paved with recognizable quotes from writers such as, Miguel Cervantes and José Echegaray.





There are even plazas and streets dedicated to writers such as Plaza Jacinto Benavente and Calle Lope de Vega. The houses of some of these writers still stand today and are open to the public, such as [Casa Museo Lope de Vega](#) which offers free guided tours.



Plaza Jacinto Benavente





Calle Lope de Vega

Nowadays, this historic neighborhood has become a trendy spot for people to get together and have a drink paired with a few tapas. Calle de las Huertas is the main street where you can easily find great shops, cafes, and some of Madrid's finest eateries.







While exploring the side streets that branch off the main road, keep an eye out for the various boutiques, art galleries, bookstores, and antique shops that make this neighborhood so authentic.







## Must-Sees in Barrio de las Letras

**Plaza Santa Ana** is a well-known hangout spot in this neighborhood. Here you can find a number of restaurants with outdoor seating areas that are perfect for enjoying the ambience with a nice wine or beer.







**Plaza Santa Ana** is also where you can find monuments of Calderón de la Barca, Federico García Lorca, and the Teatro Español, making it a popular spot for tourists.



Monument Calderon de La Barca





Monument Federico Garcia Lorca



Teatro Español–Madrid's oldest theater

### 3 Restaurants in Barrio de las Letras

This neighborhood is a hot spot for some of Madrid's oldest taverns and restaurants that serve typical Spanish dishes and tapas. Here are some of the best ones.

[Cervecería Cervantes](#) is a favorite among the locals. It's decorated with beautiful tiles that give a traditional Spanish feel. Every time I walk past this bar, it's always packed with people enjoying tapas and beer. This *cervecería* is known for its seafood that can be ordered in small portions. So stop in and try them all!





Another go-to place is [El Lacón](#) on Calle de Manuel Fernández y González. This place has been around since the 60s and has been considered a classic ever since. It's known for its drink and tapa deal, meaning that with each beer you order, the waiter will bring a small plate of tapas to your table. Not only is this restaurant famous for its incredible deal, but it's also known for its full plates such as, *cocido Madrileño* and the meat or fish *tablas* that can easily feed 3 people or more.



And if you're looking for a place that has it all, [Casa Alberto](#) is the place for you. This restaurant is hard to miss with its red exterior, antique writing, and open door which allows people to take a peek inside.





When first entering **Casa Alberto**, it's hard to get past the crowd of people drinking and ordering tapas at the bar. But once you're in the dining room, you are guaranteed a great sit-down meal. For starters, the *croquetas de jamón* are an amazing way to start your meal. Another great starter is the *gazpacho de melon* with a prawn tartar. This gazpacho gives a modern twist on the classic Spanish plate by creating a sweet but savory infusion.

Not only are their appetizers high quality, but so are their main dishes. Casa Alberto makes an incredibly flavorful and hearty *callos a la Madrileña* that's perfect for a mid-day feast. As a U.S. Midwestern girl who loves red meat, I had to second guess myself after trying the *ventresca de bonito*. This fish plate was grilled to perfection topped with quality olive oil, fresh garlic, and a side of potatoes.

Make sure to leave room for dessert because **Casa Alberto** won't disappoint. Their cream-filled crepes topped with homemade blueberry and cheese ice cream are the perfect go-to dessert. But if you're looking for something with a bit of an alcoholic twist, the apple and cider sorbet is highly recommended.



Check out [all the spots in Barrio de Las Letras](#) featured on Naked Madrid!

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# María Pandora, a dark and artistic champagne bar in La Latina

If you've ever spent an evening watching the sunset with a liter of Mahou in Parque Las Vistillas (and if you haven't, get on that ASAP), you may have spotted this beautiful, borderline-creepy cocktail bar, María Pandora.







Cryptic, dripping golden letters read MARÍA PANDORA, and the sound of a dramatic poetry reading demand the curiosity of



passersby not yet in the know.



Once inside, you'll already be hooked: every inch of the walls is covered with sinister sketches, the tables are adorned with misshapen melted candles, and vintage furniture adds the finishing touch to make you feel like you're in a haunted mansion.





But despite the ghoulish vibe, the servers here are cheery and chatty. When we ordered champagne and white wine, our server plopped a frozen raspberry in our glass, assuring it would add a little somethin'-somethin'.

Oh, and the tapas here are my kind of food: mounds of candy and fruit.







But the best is yet to come. A meeting point for lovers of art, the bar also functions as a stage for poetry readings,



*microteatro*, and literary chats several nights of the week. The wall of antique books are for sale (but the century-old portraits of the owner's family are not).



Sign up for an event, order a glass of bubbly, and if you get there early enough, grab a window seat. María Pandora does not disappoint.

*\*Just note that their opening hours can be a little funky – they tend to open at 7pm except on Mondays, although sometimes they throw private events. So it's best to call ahead to make sure they're open!*

## Info

- [Website](#) & [Facebook](#)
- Phone: +34 910 42 82 13

- **Address:** Plaza de Gabriel Miró, 1
  - **Metro:** La Latina or Ópera
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## Street spotlight: Calle Ruda, a tiny portal between La Latina and Embajadores

It goes without saying that there's no shortage of things to do in Madrid. In fact, sometimes there's so much, you don't know where to start. On those days when the sun's shining and you're itching to get out of the house, **sometimes it's best to just walk to a cool part of town and let the city do its thing.** We're here to give you some inspiration.

### Calle de la Ruda

La Latina and Embajadores—bustling multicultural hubs—are connected by a string of tiny streets full of surprises. One of them is **Calle Ruda**, which takes you straight from Mercado La Cebada to Plaza Cascorro, and makes the very short walk well worth it.

### Onis, for old-school charm





If you enter the street from Calle Toledo, you're greeted by the classic corner bar, Onis.

This place is the definition of *castizo*. Tapas in the glass display case, tobacco machines, weird arcade games, and a grumpy server who has probably been here since the place opened (which was 1976, I've learned).

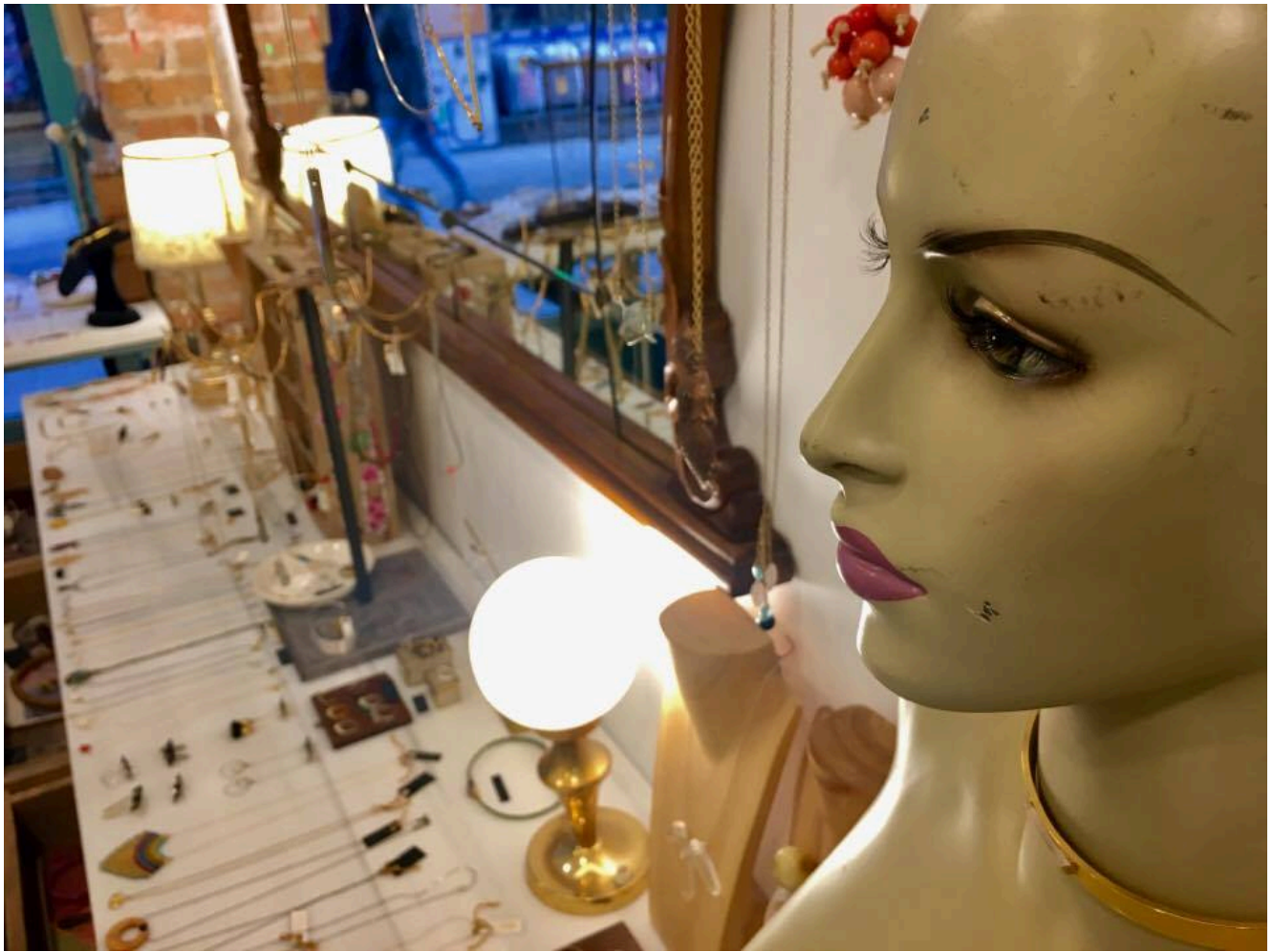
**Ruda Café, for coffee**



Looking for something more modern? We got you. Keep heading down Ruda and you'll come across [Ruda Café](#), a new (opened last year) coffeeshop that's riding the wave of java experts that has hit Madrid in recent years. We're not mad about this trend. And yes, they have wifi. They also sell packaged artisanal coffee and tea, jam, art, and coffeemakers.

**De Piedra, for handmade jewelry**





But there's only so much coffee you can drink (unfortunate, I know). So now that you're fueled up, you're ready to browse the cute little shops of this gem of a street. If you're a fan of jewelry and creepy mannequins, pay a visit to **De Piedra**, an artisanal jewelry shop at C/ Ruda 19. They haven't been at this location long, but the store has been open for some 15 years.

**Molar, for records, books and cassette tapes**



Next you'll come across my personal favorite place on the street, **Molar**. Think record store meets bookshop. They even sell cassette tapes, which is not something you see every day in Mad City.

**Mamá Elba, for something sweet**





Got a sweet tooth? [Mamá Elba](#) has been open a mere 3 weeks, and is already drawing a loyal customer base. Their selection of ice cream (including vegan and gluten-free), cakes, and coffee will leave you overwhelmed by heavenly choices.

**Erre Catorce (R14), for art and design**



[R14](#) is another **brand new spot** on the street, just open for a month. It's a modern interior design shop, with local art, restored vintage furniture pieces (from around the world, namely Scandinavia and the US), apparel, and lots of cool home decor.

Soon they'll be putting on events to promote and discuss interior design and art, so keep your eyes peeled and follow them on [Facebook](#).

## La Tienda de Cerveza, for craft beer





Next up: craft beer. Okay, I lied before, THIS place is my favorite. [La Tienda de Cerveza](http://www.latiendadecerveza.es) is a must in La Latina (and in the city, really). The shelves are lined with hundreds of bottled or canned craft beers and ciders from both Madrid and around the world. They have a few tables in the back, and they hold tasting events often. An absolute must for *cervecerxs*.

## **Tienda Biológica, for something healthy**

Something I love about Madrid is that **you can eat healthy without going bankrupt**. Tienda Biológica is living proof of this. This small organic food shop sells health products at reasonable prices, and it's run by the sweetest lady.

## **La China Mandarina, for a great meal in a modern space**



And last but not least (and not even covering half of the street's spots), for a great meal and a laidback ambience, visit [La China Mandarin](#) at the end of Calle Ruda (closest to Plaza Cascorro). It's one of those places that masters the art of offering both very traditional and very modern cuisine on the same menu. So if you're craving a *tortilla de patatas* but your friend has a hankering for a vegan burger, there's something for everyone.

They have great wifi and won't roll their eyes if you work on your laptop all morning (I know from experience).

There's also a mushroom-themed restaurant called El Brote! Check out Leah's article about it here:

[El Brote: a brand-new mushroom restaurant in the heart of El Rastro](#)



Calle Ruda is just one of a plethora of tiny goldmines in Madrid. If none of these spots call your attention (tough crowd!), we suggest you still come to the area on a beautiful day and just get lost. You can't go wrong.

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## Swinton & Grant: Art, Books, Coffee

We wandered Lavapiés on an overcast day, searching for our regular *dosis* of *cafeína*. As we crept to the door of [our usual haunt](#), my friends and I found a CLOSED sign awaiting us.

Spain's *siesta* schedule had tricked us yet again – even baristas need a break. The time had come to try a new café.



Open since last May, [Swinton & Grant](#) sits just off the Glorieta de Embajadores, amid North African falafel joints, street art, and cherry blossom trees. As you walk down **Calle Miguel Servet**, you'll first notice just how big the place is.

Natural light streaks through black velvet curtains, revealing two main areas: on the first floor, **Ciudadano Grant**, a café-bookstore. In the basement, the **Swinton Gallery**, a large space for local artist exhibitions.

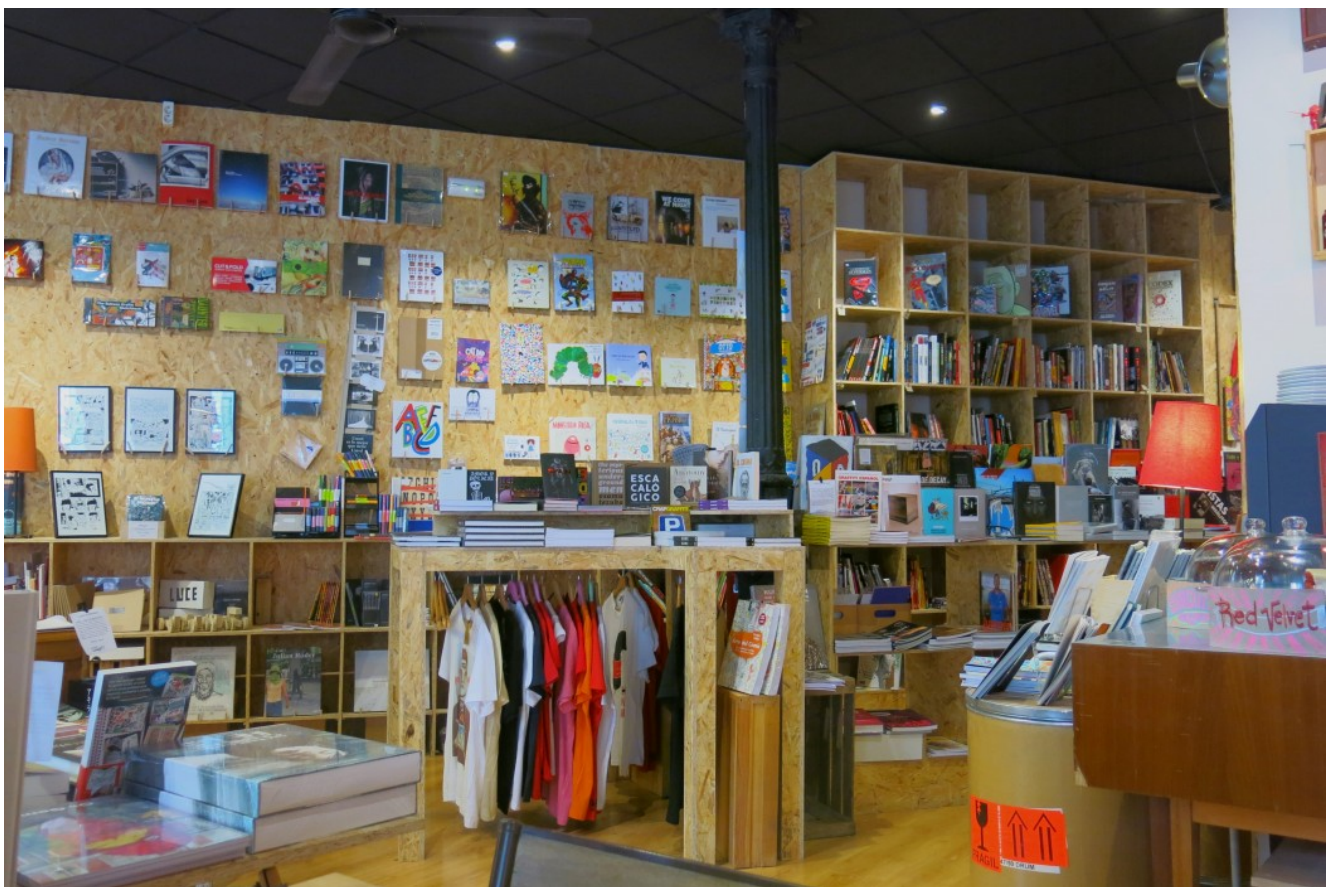
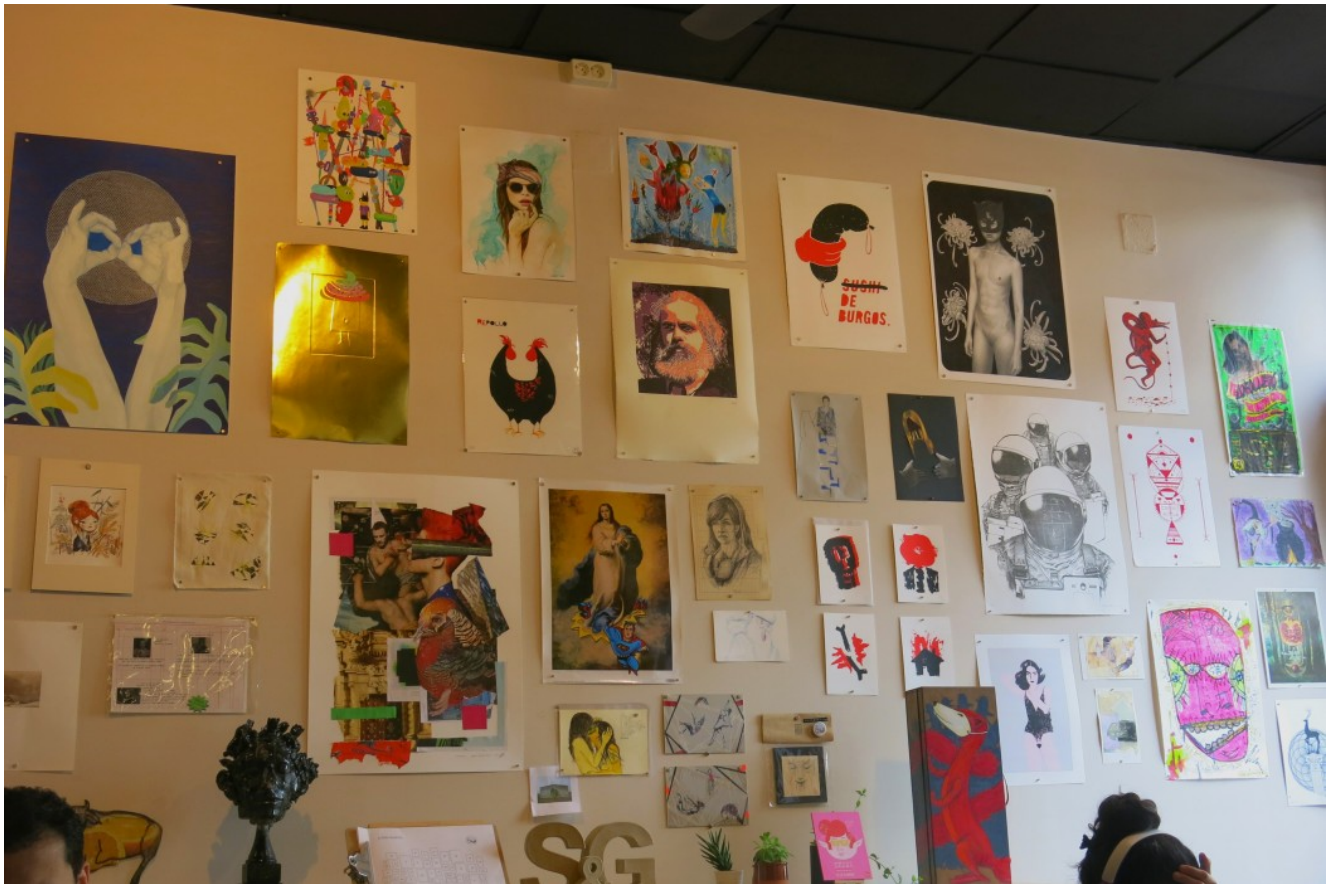




Swinton & Grant, Embajadores







Hip folks feel at home here. Bare bulbs and LEDs light customers' way to the pressboard bookshelves lined with English and Spanish biographies, comics, and children's



picture books. Jars of LEGOs and framed pictures of Leonard Nemo draw your eye to bottles of Arizona Tea, Jones Soda, and fresh cakes and cookies. Bon Iver, Jorge Gonzalez, and Fleet Foxes tickle the ears while you waltz through the space.

The menu, with its own abstract artwork, impresses. **Coffees** come cheap (around €1.40). For a small charge, you can enjoy the flavor palates of **special bean blends** from Costa Rica, Kenya, Colombia, and other countries. **Teas** come in all sizes, colors, and temperatures.



The café offers a **desayuno special** before 1PM every day.

While you appreciate the art that is half-Banksy, half-neoclassical, you can try the classic *pan con tomate*, a ham and cheese sandwich, or a slice of cake with your choice of beverage – all for **€2-4**. If you're still hungry, go for a full-size *bocadillo* or a giant cookie.









After your *sobremesa*, take a look downstairs, where artists hang their work in **rotating exhibits**. Next on the program are characteristic contemporary pieces from [Luis Pérez Calvo](#),

[Victor Solana](#), and [Antonyo Marest](#). If you're feeling fancy, feel free to buy the art, with prices ranging from a few euros to a few hundred.







Since my first fateful detoured day into Swinton & Grant's doors, it's quickly become one of my favorite Madrid spaces. These days, when I'm in the mood for comfort, cake, and

caffeine, I invariably make my way to Embajadores.

## Info:

[Web](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

*Address: Calle Miguel Servet 21*

*Metro: Embajadores*

*Some photos courtesy of Keith Lema*

## You may also like:

[Best Cafe-bookshops round 1](#)

[Best Cafe-bookshops round 2](#)

[El Cafelito – for coffee lovers in Lavapiés](#)

[Desperate Literature – Santorini, Brookly and now, Madrid!](#)

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## Moderna de Pueblo: A self-aware series of graphic novels about hipster hijinks in Madrid

I have been using Spanish graphic novels in an attempt to learn slang and expletive phrases in order to reinforce my grasp of the language. While browsing volumes in [La Central](#),



one book caught my eye. *El Cooltureta* is a relatable story because it follows a group of young people that live in Madrid. The creator, Raquel Córcoles, is credited by her pen name, [Moderna de Pueblo](#), which doubles as the name of the series.



The skyline of Madrid, as envisioned by the artist

The artist nails the portrayal of my adopted city. The first panel of the book begins with the protagonist on his balcony in Anton Martin, admiring the street below while thinking to himself, "*Acaba de mudarme y estaba totalmente enamorado del barrio.*"

The first story follows its titular protagonist as he adopts a hipster identity. **El Cooltureta relocated to Madrid from an unnamed, generic pueblo and seized the opportunity to recreate himself as a stylish, trendy, pseudo-intellectual.**

Each panel portrays a broad spectrum of scenarios that young people can relate with—**dealing with roommates, unrequited love, awkward communications via Whatsapp and the troubles that stem from relentless over thinking.**



El Cooltureta, the protagonist of the first book

The central conflict of this first story is that El Cooltureta wants to engage in the vast cultural offerings of Madrid, such as screenings in the Cine Dore, but he is too awkward to go alone. El Cooltureta searches for a social circle that he can thrive in, and **gradually meets several characters whose names are their endearing archetypes:** the tortured friend, the cinefile, *la chica de la bici*, *la mariliendre* etc.

The series is full of cultural references, both mainstream and otherwise. There is one instance where the protagonist is *de resaca* and watching the mindless television series *New Girl*. When a friend calls to check up on how he's doing, he lies to maintain the illusion of his dignity by telling her that he's watching (my favorite series) *The Wire*. A climactic scene of the story occurs during a performance by *Die Antwoord*, which



the protagonist only attended begrudgingly. At every stage the characters are either heavily endorsing, or making snarky comments about, various forms entertainment and media. One character is often seen wearing a shirt that says in bold lettering "All blogs post the same stuff."

After becoming heavily emotionally invested in the characters I picked up the second book, *Los Capullos no regalan flowers* (Dickheads don't gift flowers) which follows an unnamed female protagonist. The second book outshines the first in my opinion because it has more of a clearly defined plot. Similar to El Cooltureta, the female lead moved to Madrid from a generic pueblo and hopes to take advantage of her recently acquired freedom. Each chapter, titled after different *capullo* archetypes, follows her endearingly awkward search for love. It is neatly fitting that she has a poster of Woody Allen's classic film, *Manhattan*, right above her bed. She is a hopeless romantic **who gets swept up in the world of Tinder, nightclubs, & Whatsapp courtship**. Although her view on relationships and romance evolves as she adjusts further to her new environment, the old-school romantic in her secretly hopes that one of her partners will bring her flowers.



The female protagonist of the second book bears a striking resemblance to the series creator.

One of her many less than ideal dates was with the male protagonist of the first book, who stayed true to his character and talked her ear off. Her internal dialogue as she makes decisions throughout the story is quite comical. She does her best to be open to the various types of modern flings—open relationships, long distance relationships, and relationships with flatmates. As the chapters progress, the female lead becomes increasingly frustrated with her circumstances.



SE HABLA MUCHO DE SI ESTÁ BIEN TENER SEXO EN LA PRIMERA CITA PERO...  
¿Y SI NO HAY NI CITA? ESO ME PRODUJO UN DILEMA:



Internal dialogue

She returns to her pueblo temporarily to seek clarity. While away from Madrid she has the epiphany that I've had time and time again—**Madrid is a uniquely special city** to which my hometown (as much as I respect it) pales in comparison. Upon

returning to Madrid she continues her personal journey with further conviction.

Although both books were *lleno* with unfamiliar slang, which I've had to pause at intervals and ask my roommate to explain to me, **I was laughing at every turn**. This self-aware series is a must-read for young adults living in Madrid because it pokes fun at us and the spectrum of *tonterias* that we partake in. Numerous panels of the comic, which still make sense out of context, are free on their Facebook page & website, "Moderna de Pueblo." If you become hooked, I encourage you to purchase both texts at your nearest [La Central](#).

[Web](#)  
[Shop](#)

*Image credit: All of the imagery that appears above are samples from the Moderna de Pueblo website and their [Facebook page](#)*

**For more on good reads in Madrid, check out:**

**Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid**

**Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, round one**

**Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, round two**

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# Best Cafe-bookshops in Madrid, Round 1!

Coffee shops selling books? Bookshops selling coffee? However you call them, here are five wonderful café-bookshops in Madrid where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or a glass of wine while surrounded by good reads. (See [round two](#) for more!)

## 1. [Ocho y Medio Libros de Cine](#)



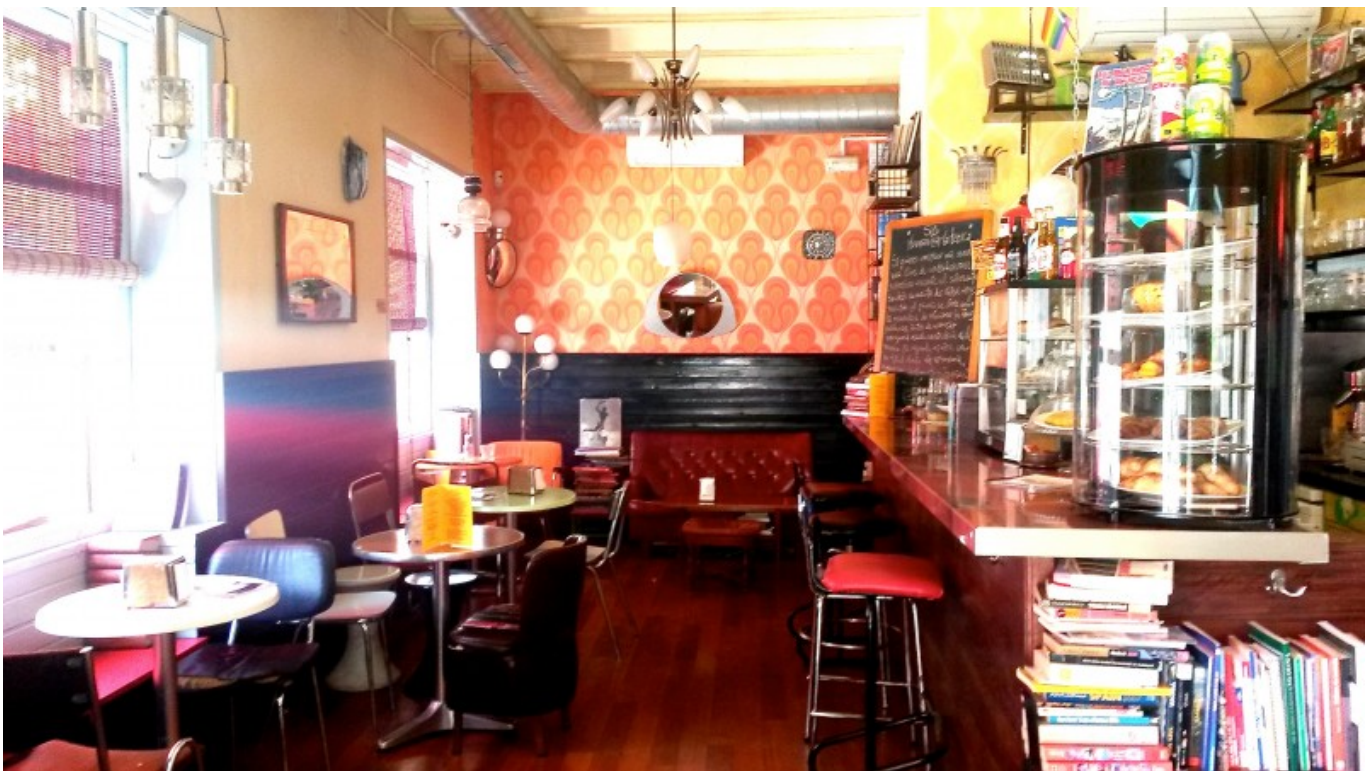
This charming bookshop (featured in the cover photo) specializes in cinema, and boasts a cozy café and outdoor seating area. I love going here for a drink and a *tosta* right before [seeing a film](#) at one of the independent movie

theaters just across the street. All screenings are in original version with Spanish subtitles. A tip: this makes for a great date night!

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** Martín de los Heros, 11
- **Metro:** Plaza de España

*Also read: [Where to enjoy good film in Madrid](#)*

## 2. [La Libre](#)



This is my mom's favorite cafe in Madrid. Why? Because a few years ago while she was visiting me in the dead of winter, we went in to warm up after a visit to the [Reina Sofia Museum](#) around the corner. When she ordered a coffee, the server said, "No ma'am, I think you need a whisky." He couldn't have been more right! They also have nice teas and snacks to nibble on, from breakfast pastries to empanadas.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Argumosa, 39
- **Metro:** Atocha



### 3. La Infinito



This little café-bookshop lies on a corner in Lavapiés and serves up coffee, books and art on a daily basis. Not only does it have a welcoming ambience and lots of light streaming in through its tall glass windows, but it also throws great events, from **micro-theater performances** (one of which took place in the café's bathroom!) to popular weekend brunches.

- *image from La Infinito*
- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ Tres Peces, 22
- **Metro:** Antón Martín & Lavapiés

### 4. La Fugitiva





Books are the centrepiece at this cafe, and I love how its window seats and tiny bar are nestled between towering bookshelves and overflowing tables displaying bestsellers and rare reads. La Fugitiva has all you need from a café (coffee and sweets) and all you could ask of a bookstore – readings, talks, workshops, and of course, that distinct smell of books.



- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ de Santa Isabel, 7
- **Metro:** Antón Martín

## 5. Tipos Infames. Libros y Vinos



**Wine and books? Quite a killer combination in my opinion.** Located right off the popular Calle Fuencarral, this trendy bookshop, café and wine bar is a favorite of many in Malasaña. Tipos Infames offers a much appreciated rest from the bustling shops and streets in the area. It has a lot of seating area, a full bar and high ceilings, making it feel open, friendly and comfortable. It's a great place to go with friends for a quieter conversation in the afternoon. Plus they throw fun events, so make sure to follow them on social media.

- [Facebook](#)
- **Address:** c/ San Joaquín, 3
- **Metro:** Tribunal

## **Keep reading Round 2 of Madrid's Best Cafe-bookshops**

**And if you're looking for a few of our favorite cafe in Madrid *without* books:**

- [Pepe Botella, a coffee place where you can think](#)
- [Toma Café, fuel up, feel hip](#)
- [Acid Café, seasonal, minimalist and just good coffee](#)