

Maria's: Sensational Sweets on Calle Zurbano

I heard from a few friends that a [recent New York Times article](#) had rated **Calle Zurbano** one of the writers' "favorite streets in Europe." I remembered Zurbano; I had stayed in a hotel on the north side as my introduction to both Madrid and my teaching program. While the people I met and the things I learned on Zurbano were of the highest quality, the street itself did not surprise or amaze me eight months ago. Nevertheless, my friend and I committed to revisiting Zurbano and seeing if anything inspired us. We stumbled upon inspiration. Hidden in the article's recommendations sits a tiny bakery hiding between ritzy hotels, bustling banks, and mainstream restaurants: **María's Bakery**.



The New York Times
Favourite Streets
in 12 European
Cities



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in 12 European
Cities

by
Celia Zorbas
Illustrations

With this book, you
can learn about the
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Maria's
Desayunos
2:30 Café +
con agua
+ Harina
3:30 Café +
plancha
3:30 Café
3:30 Café
Café

María's looks like it crashed onto **Calle Zurbano** straight out of your Pinterest news feed. The place oozes chic hipness—grey wood panels lead to off-white walls, chalkboard paint menus, reclaimed benches with homemade cushions, and wooden card tables covered in doilies and faux-70s tablecloths. Like your Staten Island grandmother got a hold of a Paula Dean magazine.



The bakery's eponymous María is apparently famous around these parts. **Locals pop into her ten square meters of space just to say hi**, read her newspapers, drink her coffee, and grab a baguette or a pastry to-go. Even the other staff know visitors by name, asking about babies or job lay-offs or who won the Real-Juventus match.

And, of course, there's the food. María and company arise before the sun to proof, knead, and bake the day's glutinous goods. *Pistolas*, *artisanas*, croissants, cookies – all things line María's stuffed shelves. **The cake selection includes dozens of decadent decisions:** "Muerte por chocolate," "mousse

de Bailey's," "tarta de queso con salsa de mora," even the oft-elusive "red velvet."



Maria's Bakery in Zurbano

As you get a high from the smell of bubbling yeast and caramelizing sugars, take a look at **María's eclectic selection of international sweets**, like *bonbones*, *alfajores*, tarts, *pasteles de Belén*, *dulces de leche*, macarons, and much more.

However, a proper critic has to judge any bakery by the Spanish classic: *pan con aceite*, with a coffee. Luckily, María's does not disappoint, masterfully toasting its 8-cereal brown bread, complimenting its nutty savoriness with peppery Andalusia olive oil and ground rock salt. Washed down with frothy milk and brewed beans, it makes for a **great breakfast deal around €2**.



Stick around long enough and you'll get to try some of **María's** newest experiments. While we crunched and munched our *pan*, we also were brought small plates of other samples, new treats that the bakery's working on right now. This season, María's is toying with **nut and oat hard crackers**, thin biscotti to market as "light" for snacking clients. To go with the recent holiday, we also tried María's ***rosquillas de San Isidro***, the *listas* covered in orange and lemon glaze, the *tontas* smacking of anis and cloves.



Chocolate con Queso
Chocolate negro con Naranja
Mousse de Baileys
Zanahoria
Crumble de Manzana
Crumble de Frambuesa
Tarta de Queso
Tarta de Queso con Dulce de leche

PASTALES
Belen, Confit, Jugo, Queso
Chocolate, Frutas del bosque

BIZCOCHOS
Naranja y Yogurt Azucarado
Chocolate integral con Cacao

BOLLERIA ARGENTINA
Medias lunas, salsas y dulces
Vigilantes

BOLLERIA FRANCESA
Croissant, Napolitas, Corocitos
Mayas de frutas, Sanfobones milaneses

CAFES HELADOS
Intenso, Pasion Menta, Tiramisu, etc...

ZUMOS NATURALES
Mango, Kiwi, Platano, Fresa, Melocoton, etc...

SANDWICHES
Jamon y Queso, Jamon y Huevo, Salmon,
Salmon y Huevo, Salmon y Queso crema,
Atun y Huevo, Atun aceituna negra y lechuga,
Pavo Queso y Curry, Pollo y tomate

CATERING
Mini Bocaditos salados con
Croquetas, Tartaletas, mini Quiches
Rollitos chinos, Hojaldres rellenos, etc...

COMIDAS
Empanada Argentina, Morsalle,
Empanada (Atun, Carne, pollo), Pasta,
Pollo al Curry, Pollo a la Mexicana,
Pisto, Ensaladas variadas, etc...

MONTAJE & BODEGONES
Para Cumpleaños, Bodas e
Primeras Comunion

Debido a la frescura de los productos, se requiere ENVIOS PREVIO!!!

As we got *napolitanas* and *medias lunas* filled with *dulce de leche* to go, Erika told us from behind the cash register that we weren't the first Americans to visit; the **New York Time's** "favorite streets in Europe" gave the bakery a steady drop of international attention. Since then, Anglos amble around Zurbano, waltzing into María's and placing their orders with a combination of gestures, grunts, and broken English. While we laughed, I taught the staff how to say "home made," hoping it would help guide our more linguistically ignorant compatriots.

If you're walking down Zurbano and trying to see what all the fuss is about, give María's a try. It's small, it's strange, it's out of place – and it's adorable.

Info

Web

Facebook

Address: Calle Zurbano, 15

Metro: Alonso Martínez

Phone: 91 702 63 02

Also check out:

Mama Campo – a restaurant/market of organic delights in Plaza Olavide

Harina – for something sweet or savoury

Pan Comido – a French bakery where our bread will most certainly be eaten all up

4 Coziest Cafes in Chamberí

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.

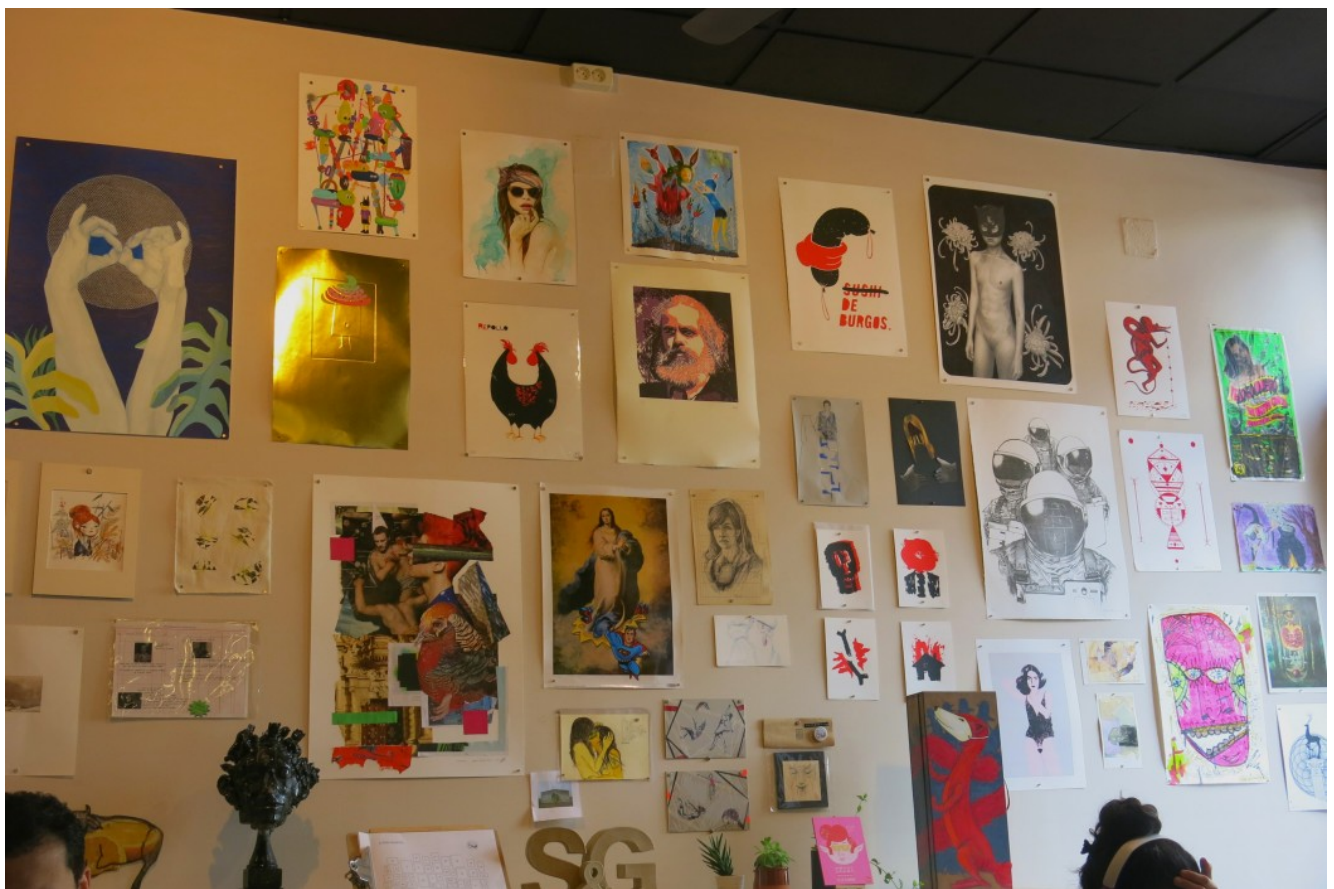


Open since last May, [Swinton & Grant](#) sits just off the Glorieta de Embajadores, amid North African falafel joints, street art, and cherry blossom trees. As you walk down **Calle Miguel Servet**, you'll first notice just how big the place is.

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 Nemoy 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!](#)

Ostras! Spanish food phrases for aspiring natives

Want to sound like a true *madrileño/a*? Then you'd better learn about food. When foreigners first arrive in Madrid, eavesdropping can confuse. Why is everyone talking about milk? What do politicians have to do with cured sausages? Why do my students shout "oysters!"?

The answers lie somewhere in Madrid's food culture.

All things Madrid revolve around food. Work, school, family, and free time all have their feet firmly planted in gastronomy. Veteran Auxiliares not-so-fondly remember that first day home from school. Bewildered that Spaniards go 8 hours between *desayuno* and *comida*, you greedily shove muesli, bread, and ham into your starving jaws—a cruel introduction into how Spaniards think of food.



Other mealtime nuances scream “welcome to Madrid!” No, you can’t find a good lunch before 1PM, or any food except cold *tapas* and coffee between the hours of 4PM and 7PM. Half of the reason for eating *cocido* is for the next day’s *ropa vieja*—always made best by someone’s *abuelita*, who fusses over you and asks why you don’t want another glass of wine at 3PM during your *sobremesa*. Sharing *churros con chocolate* with your friends at dawn after a night of *discotecas* is a rite of passage into *la vida castiza*.

Madrileños have always loved food, and their language is no exception. Madrid’s people garnish, pepper, and marinate their speech with **food phrases**. From idioms to exclamations, residents of Madrid use food and food words to discuss politics, time, emotion, death, and much more.

So, here’s my guide for the aspiring hispanophone to some of Madrid’s best food phrases.

You’ll see the usual (I’m convinced that oblong vegetables in any language are *always* sexual) and the not-so-usual (playground bullies “give you milk” while they take your milk money). And all will help you spout the foodie Spanish of a proper Madrid resident.

We’ll stick to a typical Madrid diet: a mountain of bread, a hunk of meat and seafood, good eggs, milk & dairy, a glug of booze, and a small side of greenery and citrus.

Bread

Al pan, pan, y al vino, vino



Quick-marts have plenty of idioms for the curious linguist.

Let's start with two of Madrid's favorites: bread and wine. For these two cornerstones of Spanish food, *madrileños* would appreciate you to be direct—the meaning of this particular phrase. “Al pan, pan, y al vino, vino” (“To bread, bread, and to wine, wine”) is a request to be direct. Using this phrase means you want someone else to call it like it is. Don't beat around the bush and talk in circles—call your bread “bread!”

Hostia

Speaking of bread and wine, Madrid's food phrase dictionary deserves an entire page to Communion bread (*la hostia*). The supposed body of Christ can mean anything from a grave insult to a killer descriptor. Simply shouting “hostia!” (if you're surprised, or you just smashed your toe on a sofa, or Sunday's *El Clásico* is not going your way) is kosher between friends or younger people, but many *madrileños* may take offense. To describe something as great or large, try *de la hostia*. After a night of a few too many, you may hear “**Hostia! Tengo un melocotón de la hostia!**” (see “Fruit & Vegetables” to know why).

Con las manos en la masa

Even the beginnings of bread are not sacred from Spanish turns of phrase. To see someone “con las manos en la masa” (“with their hands in the dough”) is to catch them red-handed. Did you just see Jesús cheating on his exam for the hundredth time? His hands were in the dough!

Estar empanado/a



This one is a great image. To describe the time when someone’s brain isn’t operating at full capacity, a *madrileño* will say “estoy empanado” (“I am breaded”). Whether that person needs a coffee, is distracted, or simply doesn’t want to focus, their brain is battered.

Un churro



While these [fried chunks of bread and sugar are usually excellent](#), using “churro” to describe something else means that it lacks quality. For example, you may hear one of your students complaining “he hecho un churro en ese examen” (“I made a churro on that exam”), meaning he or she utterly failed.

Esto es pan comido

Is something incredibly easy? Then you may hear a Madrid resident exclaim “esto es pan comido” (“this is eaten bread”). English speakers aren’t too far off from their “[piece of cake](#)” or “easy as pie” with this one. Practice these phrases enough, and they’ll be like eaten bread.

Meat



Beautiful people and corrupt politicians.

Estirar la pata

Are there things you want to do before you go into the great beyond? Is someone going to croak? Kicking the bucket? Well, in Madrid, death is like a slaughtered animal—they lie you down, do the job, and then you “estirar la pata” (“stretch out the hoof”).

Jamón

Madrid and pork go together, and so do Madrid Spanish and pork products. After seeing someone attractive across the room, you may hear them described as “el/ella está jamon” (“he/she is ham”). If you refuse to do something, shout “Y un jamón con chorreras” (“Ham with frills!”) to show your disgust.

Chorizo

Pork sausage gets a special mention. While usually a spicy, smoky treat, the word *chorizo* also means “thief.” A *carterista* (“pickpocket”) may be described with “qué chorizo!” (“what a sausage!”). Sausage also extends to politics—protestors love the phrase “no hay pan para tanto chorizo” (“there isn’t bread for all this sausage”) to describe corrupt politicians.

Poner toda la carne en el asador

If you’re taking a huge risk, then you’re putting all your meat on the grill (“poner toda la carne en el asador”). Best used at gambling halls, or literally when at a barbeque.

Seafood



Sure it's on sale, but who's cutting it?

Ostras!

The quintessential exclamation of Madrid, outside of *joder*! My guess is that “oysters!” (“ostras!”) is a tamed-down version of “hostia.” Akin to the English “darn” and “damn,” just more nautical.

¿Quién corta el bacalao?

A phrase asked of mafia bosses is “who cuts the cod?” (“¿quién corta el bacalao?”). While seemingly random, the phrase has its origins in industrial traditions; in the *comidas* of old Madrid, guild masters and supervisors were the ones who served fish to their underlings. Whoever was at the head of the table carving the filet was the big boss.

Me siento como un pulpo en un garaje

Feeling out of place? Like a fish out of water? Then say that you “feel like an octopus in a garage” (“te sientes como un

pulpo en un garaje”) for the authentic Madrid vibe.

Eggs



You're worth a lot!

Tener huevos

Aside from the obvious connection between eggs and rounded male genitalia, *madrileños* will also shout “la cosa tiene huevos” (“the thing has eggs”) if something doesn’t work properly. Did your blender just start to spark and smoke? It has eggs.

Pisando huevos

Like any big city, Madrid’s day-to-day life can be pretty fast-paced. And, like any big city, you’ll come across people on the sidewalk who are simply walking too slow. While you dodge tourists to get around them, you can mutter that they’re “pisando huevos” (walking [on] eggs).

Te quiero un huevo

Are you crazy about your significant other? Then you “love them an egg” (“querer un huevo”). It’s because “un huevo” can mean “a lot.” Don’t ask. Just say it.

Hasta luego, cara huevo

If you want to sound cutesy, try the Spanish version of “see you later, alligator”: “until later, egg face” (“hasta luego, cara huevo”). It makes about as much sense.

Milk and Cheese



Bags have this stuff printed on them.

Ser la leche

If “hostia” deserves its own page in Madrid’s food dictionary, milk merits its own chapter. As an opaque white liquid, milk has its sexual euphemisms. But, if something “is the milk,” it’s quite awesome. If everything’s going your way, try “hoy ha sido la leche” (“today has been the milk”).

Estar de mala leche

Milk is good, but all milk will go bad. In this case, Madrid speakers say someone “está de mala leche” (“is of bad milk”) when they’re grumpy. Chronic/permanent sufferers of bad milk “tienen mala leche” (“have bad milk”) in their systems.

Me cago en la leche

By itself, “I crap in the milk” (“me cago en la leche”) can be a general exclamation of disappointment or anger. But, in conversation, it can hold all the hatred and disgust that a bowl of milky waste can possess. Save this one for when you mean it: “me cago en la leche de la puta que te date la luz/la puta madre que te parió” (“I crap in the milk of the whore mother that birthed you”).

Ir a toda leche

When someone is “going full milk” (“ir a toda leche”), they’re running full out. Full milk’s opposite would be “pisando huevos” (see “Eggs”).

Dar una leche

When someone smacks or hits you, they “give you milk” (“te da una leche”).

Que no me lo des con queso

A bit of gastronomy trivia: very high-quality wine is enjoyed by itself. For the snobby, consuming cheese with wine ruins the experience of both. The fats from the cheese coat the

inside of your mouth, limiting how much you can taste the wine.

As such, *madrileños* shrewdly ask “que no me lo des con queso” (“don’t give it to me with cheese”) to tell someone to stop ripping them off. It’s to help avoid life’s various glasses of *tintorro* (see “Alcohol”).

Blanco y en botella? Leche

Do you want to say that something’s obvious? As obvious as something that’s white and in a bottle (“blanco y en botella”)? Then try this phrase. Duh.

Alcohol



Botellón

Stay in Madrid for more than an afternoon with the younger crowd, and you’ll have learned *botellón*. Part hang-out, part

pre-game, part illegal, Madrid's party crowd gather in public spaces to drink "a big bottle" ("botellón"), usually of *tinto de verano* (red wine and fruit soda), *calimocha* (red wine and Coca-Cola), beer, or something harder. Controversial yet characteristic.

Garrafón

Some people swear that some bars will "give it to you with cheese" by filling their empty bottles of fancy liquor with trashy, bottom-shelf spirits. These liquors, the ones that melt your brain and lead to the worst *resacas* you've ever had, are called "gas cans" ("garrafones").

Tintorro

There is [the good stuff](#), and then the not-so-good stuff. The wine equivalent of a *garrafón*. Usually used to make *calimocha* during a *botellón*.

Fruits & Vegetables



Ajo y Agua

The Hispanic world likes optimistic phrases. Some choose “no pasa nada” (“nothing happens”). Others choose “resolver” (“determine”). Some *madrileños* go for the vulgar: “garlic and water” (“ajo y agua”), a shortening of *ajoderse* (“to f*ck yourself”) and *aguantarse* (to suck it up). A nice message wrapped in a bitter casing.

Campo de nabos

What did I say about oblong vegetables? A “turnip field” (“campo de nabos”) is a “sausage fest”—a party with only men. You understand the image.

Melocotón

If you “have a peach” (“tienes un melocotón”), you have a hangover. An alternative is *cebollón* (“big onion”), meaning

the same thing. Who knew having produce meant you had one too many last night?

De uvas a peras

There's someone you get along with really well, but you only see him/her once a year or so. What we'd call "once in a blue moon" in English changes to "from grapes to pears" ("de uvas a peras") in Madrid Spanish. The expression comes from the agriculture—vintners harvest grapes in September, and farmers pick their pear orchards in August. If counting from grapes to pears, there's nearly a full year before you'll see that person again.

Also check out Madrid Food Tour's post – [5 Spanish Food Idioms and How to Use Them!](#)