Nest Boutique: A local gift shop that’s far from an empty nest

Like most people who live abroad, there’s a multitude of things that I miss from home. Marmite, check. Being the happy recipient of a Colin the Caterpillar cake on my birthday, double check. Perhaps most surprisingly of all, I still pine for greetings cards. Back when I lived in London, I could spend hours (and inevitably a small fortune) in both Paperchase or Oliver Bonas. I’d gladly while away hours mooching through the aisles to find the perfect card for any occasion.

What came next was a move to Madrid; land of cheap wine, but sadly, no greetings cards. Save for some sad excuse of a birthday card in VIPs and El Corte Inglés, I felt almost tempted to make my own. You see, for me, the cards that you send are just as important, if not more so than the gift. You get to pen a heartfelt message, and show the recipient how much you care.

Papá Nº1
TOP DAD
MAMA ROCKS
M★M
Mamma Mia
Super Mamá
La Mejor Mamá
BRAVO
BRAVO
BRAVO
BRAVO
BRAVO
BRAVO
congratulations!
all you need is me
Words cannot describe how beautiful you are
LO MEJOR DE MI VIDA ES ESTAR EN LA TUYA
LA SONRISA ES MÍA PERO EL MOTIVO ERES TÚ
AMOUR
Enhorabuena
a los dos!
Hello Little One
hello baby goodbye sleep
IT'S BABY TIME!
Thank You
HASTA LA VISTA, BABY.
CIAO BELLA!
I AM thinking OF YOU

FARMERS
MARKET
COVENT GARDEN
FARMERS
MARKET

So with this in mind, Nest, the brainchild of Nadine Walker, was born some 13 years ago. Fed up and frustrated by not being able to find both cards and gift wrap, she decided to take matters into her own hands – and Nest, the shop, was born.

Having started her professional life in Madrid working as a personal assistant in recruitment, Nadine starting to float the idea of opening up her own store after growing tired of apologising for the somewhat lame cards that she was forced to send on special occasions. Having had tentative conversations with suppliers, fate played a hand in finding the perfect location for where Nest can be found.

The store enjoys pride of place on “Plaza San Ildefonso” – one of the most popular and picturesque squares in the thriving barrio of Malasaña. Nadine recalled shopping regularly at the clothes shop that was once next door, and as she got along with the girls who worked there, a good word was put in – and the rest they say, is history.

Nest is, and was, an original concept store in a city that is now awash. The idea of having a one-stop shop where you could buy cards, gifts, trinkets and more was completely novel back in May 2008, and its uniqueness played a huge part in its success. Coupled with the prime location, the fact that there was nothing else quite like it, enabled business to boom, and for the shop to become synonymous with good taste when you were looking to buy a quirky, yet affordable gift.

good
VIBES
Covent Garden
APPLE MARKET. STATION : SINCE 1620

Belle & Boo
Pirate Ship Kit
Belle & Boo
Pirate Ship Kit

Having spoken to Nadine at length, times haven’t always been plain sailing. With any small business comes inevitable challenges and those more “unprecedented” ones too – such as a nine-week lockdown. COVID obviously put the brakes on Nadine’s ability to keep the store open, but it did provide what Nadine referred to as “a much needed time to reset and reflect.”

Being given the gift of time, Nadine leaned in and nurtured her creative side, and began illustrating postcards and cards which can now be found on sale in the shop. A fact that I imagine conjures up great feelings of pride.

Feliz
Cumple
Guapa
Hola
Peque
I LOVE YOU...
STAYIN' ALIVE!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY

NOTES

As someone who is anchored by the routine that comes with being a teacher, I asked Nadine what was her favourite thing about running her own business – the answer was immediate. “I love being my own boss” was the response, without missing a beat.

As independent gift stores continue to pop up throughout the city, there is something to be said for being the OG. When guests visit, we always drop by Nest, safe in the knowledge that there’s always something that you will make you reach for your purse. Far from just being the top spot for cards, there’s candles, wall prints and jewellery all vying for your attention. A fact that even a global pandemic seems unlikely to change, as we continue to view our homes as our sanctuaries.

As the seasons change and those darker nights draw in, there's never been a better time to "Nest." If the last 18 months have taught me anything it's that Amazon doesn't need anymore of your custom, and the power of a good gift can never be underestimated. So for me, I will always support small, and support local.

These wonderful words are by Cat Powell (@littlemissmadrid)

And these beautiful photos are by Brett Hastie (@b.hastie)

Nest Boutique

- **Website** & IG: **@nestboutiquemadrid**
- **Address:** Plaza de San Ildefonso 3

Sustainable holiday gift guide & benefit raffle with Madrid For Refugees

After a year like this one, supporting our local businesses, artists and community is more important than ever. That's why we've teamed up with Madrid For Refugees (MFR) to put together this gift guide to help you buy sustainable, ethical, eco-friendly and local products for yourself and your loved ones

this holiday season.

To compile this list, we called on our audience to share their favorite small businesses and local artists with us. Thank you for participating!

You can also take part in our holiday raffle (€6) for the chance to win one of the gifts featured on this list. All of the proceeds will go to Madrid For Refugees, a non-profit organization that has been dedicated to aiding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Madrid since 2015 through numerous volunteer and community-led initiatives.

10 small businesses offering great holiday gifts in Madrid 2020:

These ten businesses are all independent, family-run, and committed to sustainability, community and local products. Don’t hesitate to purchase a wonderful gift from them! They’ve also kindly agreed to donate one of their gifts to our raffle.

1. Yerbas Vivas

Yerbas Vivas is an honest brand offering handcrafted cosmetic products, which has been committed to caring for the environment and sustainability for more than 40 years. They produce certified organic soaps, solid sulfate-free shampoos, creams, perfumes and much more, all made with natural and quality raw materials.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

1. Luna de Valencia (Valencian moon) massage oil
2. Jabón mar muerto (dead sea soap)
3. Jabón rosa mosqueta (pink mosqueta soap)
4. Champú sólido coco (solid coco shampoo)
5. Tónico facial naranjo (orange facial tonic)

Contact info:

- Website: www.yerbasvivas.es
- Instagram: @yerbas_vivas
- Phone: 618 83 26 00

2. Vajillas By Nuria Blanco

VAJILLAS BY nuriablanco

Artist Nuria Blanco crafts unique, hand-painted dishes, made of porcelain, earthenware and other materials. Each set comes with an exclusive and personalized design, which aims to compose a pictorial picture on the table.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

A hand-painted white plate with a fish on it.

Contact info:

- Website: www.vajillasbynuriablanco.com
- Instagram: @vajillasbynuriablanco
- Facebook: @vajillasbynuriablanco
- Workshop address: Calle Fernán Caballero, 2 bis, 28019 Madrid
- Phone: 609 17 79 14

3. SAC Studio

SAC Studio makes hand-sewn, sustainable pieces of lingerie that celebrate the female body and mother earth collectively. The designs are made to be flattering for all women, irrespective of age or body shape. All of SAC's pieces are handmade by Sophie in her Barcelona studio. Since the pieces are made-to-order, there is practically no wasted fabric, no environmentally or ethically damaging production processes, just Sophie and her sewing machine. All fabrics are sourced

within Europe from other small, independent businesses, or are deadstock fabrics from warehouses. All packaging is 100% recyclable and made locally using recycled materials.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

Handmade masks with three layers, including a filter layer in the middle. Each design is washable, reversible and made with deadstock fabric (shop cut-offs, old clothes, curtains etc). Check out their whole mask collection.

What's more, SAC has teamed up with @baobabbooks who have given recommendations of their favorite Black, female authors, and each mask is named after one of them. 10% of all revenue made on masks will go to BLM charity "Trans Housing Coalition," which is dedicated to helping get Black, trans women off the streets and into safe housing. Read more about the charity here.

Contact info:

- Website: www.sacstudio.es
- Instagram: @sacstudio_
- Email: hola@sacstudio.es

4. Nest Boutique

Nest is a cozy gift shop where you can find original items for family, friends or just something special for yourself. They have a wide selection of greeting cards, gift wrapping paper, home decor items, stationery and even a corner dedicated to the little ones. Now they also sell Christmas decorations.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

Christmas decorations, lavender-filled Christmas sachets, mini Christmas cards and a leopard snow globe. Everything comes wrapped inside a gift bag and the total value is €30.

Contact info:

- Website: www.nest-boutique.com
- Instagram: @NestBoutiqueMadrid
- Facebook: @NestBoutiqueMadrid
- Phone: 91 523 1061
- Address: Plaza San Ildefonso 3, 28004 Madrid

5. MAD Lola

Whether you're looking for a piece of jewelry for a special occasion, someone special, or to treat yourself, MAD Lola's silver- and gold-plated jewelry might just be the perfect gift. MAD Lola believes in women power and in accessories that inspire you to be yourself and love yourself madly.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

-

-

Two pairs of gold-plated earrings.

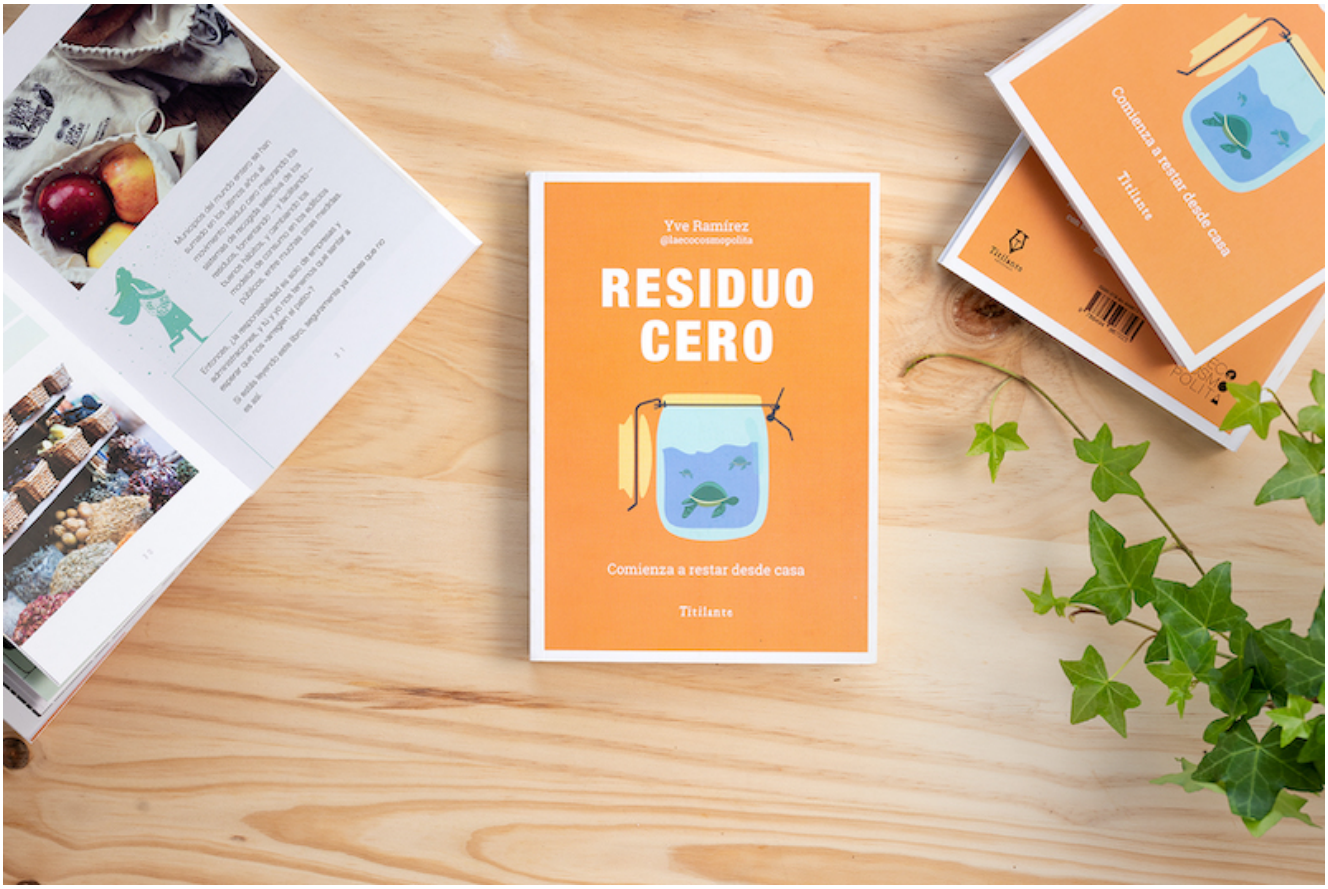
Contact info:

- Website: www.madlola.es
- Instagram: @madlola.es
- Facebook: @MadLolaEs
- Phone: 625013923
- Address: Madrid (no physical address)

6. Usar y Reusar online store

Founded four years ago in Barcelona, Usar y Reusar is a cooperative workspace and online store that aims to spread awareness about the Zero Waste movement across the globe. It provides sustainable, responsible and beautiful products for a zero waste life. You can find organic shampoos, cleaning products, reusable water bottles, an informative blog, and much more.

Holiday gift raffle donation:



A book entitled *Residuo Cero. Comienza a restar desde casa* (in English: “Zero Waste. Start reducing from home”) by Yve Ramírez, co-founder and author of the organization’s blog La Ecocosmopolita.

“Start reducing from home” is the guiding mantra at Usar y Reusar. This simple, entertaining and very light book is written with honesty. It aims to empower you to lead a life free of garbage and waste. From the first page, the book reminds you of the value of small actions and why putting them into practice can make a difference. More than a book of magic solutions, it’s an invitation to reflect on the way we consume food, fashion, cosmetics, and more. It will help you start consuming in a more responsible, critical and transformative way, based on reducing waste.

Contact info:

- Website (online store): www.laecocosmopolita.com/usaryreusar/
- Instagram: @usaryreusar
- Facebook: @usaryreusar
- Email: info@laecocosmopolita.com
- Phone: 623 145 547
- Hours: Mon-Fri 10am-2pm

7. HOUSE OF BIBS

House of Bibs is a brand that was born in London and grew up in Madrid, offering a combination of British fashion and classic Spanish-style children’s wear. Their contemporary designs are made of timeless and practical materials. All their products are handmade in Spain with quality fabrics, certified by OEKO-TEX and GOTTS.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

Reversible bandana bib in blue organic cotton.

Contact info:

- Website: www.houseofbibs.eu
- Instagram: @houseofbibs
- Facebook: @bibshouse

8. Heppy Designs

Heppy Designs

Heppy Designs is a Madrid-based family business that aims to bring environmentally friendly cosmetics and cleaning products to your home.

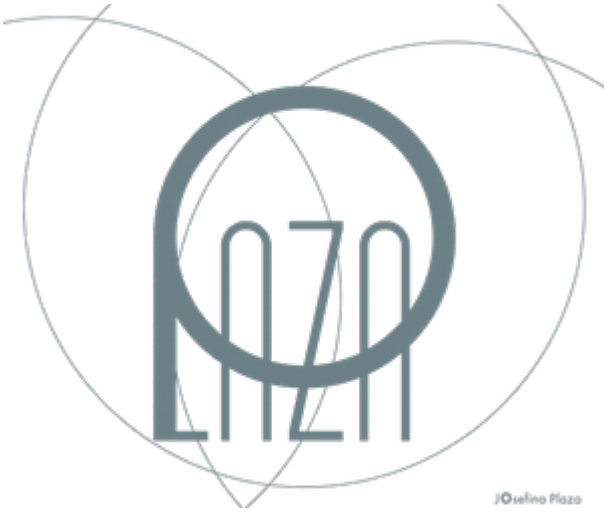
Holiday gift raffle donation:

A basket with moisturizer, lip balm, shower bar, hand soap and shampoo bar.

Contact info:

- Website: www.heppydesigns.com
- Instagram @Heppy_Designs
- Email: HeppyDesigns@gmail.com

- Phone: 622018935 (Rachel Hepburn)



9. Grabados Plaza

Grabados Plaza is a family project that allows artist and mother Josefina Plaza to make her art known to the world. The engravings and the work that you can find on this website are all made by Josefina who, with the help of her son, has created her online store.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

Original monotype print, 28×18. This unique print belongs to the Horizontes collection where geometric superposition and imperfection of shapes transport us to the intersection of two worlds.

Contact info:

- Website: www.grabadosplaza.es/
- Instagram: @grabadosplaza
- Email: info@grabadosplaza.es
- Phone: +34 678 863 665
- Address: Cea Bermudez 28, 1 Izqda, 28003 Madrid

10. Lambuza Tienda

Bar Lambuzo is a wonderful Andalucian eatery that's lovingly run by a family from Cádiz. They prepare authentic homemade dishes that have been passed on from generations. All the siblings work alongside their parents at their two Madrid restaurant locations, as well as their store in Mercado Chamberí.

At Lambuza Tienda, you'll find a selection of home-cooked stews made by the family's mom (and with recipes from their grandmothers, from Villarmartín, in Cádiz). You'll also find many classic dishes from their restaurants and delicious sweets. Everything is made daily with fresh products from Mercado de Chamberí, and ingredients brought straight from the mountains of Cádiz. They also offer delivery.

Check out all of their different holiday gift baskets to choose from, which you can order online.

Holiday gift raffle donation:

A basket with products from Lambuzo’s store (long-lasting

products from Cádiz, which expire in about a year and a half).

Organic olive oil (0.5 L. bottle with dispenser), Reserva Sherry Vinegar (390 ml glass bottle), mature goat cheese (1 kg.), can of red tuna loin in EVOO (320 gr.) and can of mackerel in EVOO (320 gr.)

Contact info:

- Website: www.barlambuzo.com/lambuza
- Instagram: @barlambuzo
- Facebook & Twitter: Lambuzo
- Address: Mercado de Chamberí. Puesto 46. C/ Alonso Cano, 10 28010, Madrid.
- Phone: 810 52 08 18
- WhatsApp: 676 17 11 01

Participate in our holiday raffle for the chance to win one of these gifts and support Madrid For Refugees!

If you're on the lookout for unique gift items this year, and want to support sustainable, family-run and local businesses,

then we hope this guide comes in handy!

You can also directly support Madrid For Refugees by participating in **our holiday gift raffle**. By taking part for just €6, you'll have the chance to win one of the items featured on this list, which have been donated from the businesses to MFR.

What's more, all the raffle's proceeds will go straight to MFR so they can continue to develop their efforts to support refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Madrid through ongoing education and training programs, donation drives and other community-led initiatives focused on employability and community integration.

Big thank you to all the businesses and artists that are participating, and to the volunteers from Madrid For Refugees, Naked Madrid and VeraContent for putting this together.

Happy holidays!

See also:

Refusion Delivery restaurant: Where refugee chefs prepare family-style dishes from Syria, Sudan and Venezuela

VeraContent unveils shared office space & partnership with Madrid For Refugees

Celebrating International Women's Day with Leah Pattem, the inspiring woman behind Madrid No Frills

> *All throughout the world I'm always seeking out the no-frills places. In the UK I'm always in the filthy pubs. Even in India, you'll find me in bars lit by one fluorescent light, where I'm the only woman. I love these really divey 'salt of the earth' kind of places. Pure, raw… no-frills.*

Today, in celebration of International Women's Day, I'd like to introduce you to Leah Pattem (UK), the creator of the truly extraordinary blog **Madrid No Frills**. Through her powerful stories and photos, Leah passionately documents the city's old-fashioned bars and traditional businesses, many of which are on the brink of extinction. She is one of the city's most inspiring independent female journalists, and is making her voice heard to support a sector that is often overlooked in the mainstream media.

Leah also explores Madrid's lesser-known neighborhoods and forgotten legends, revealing a side of the city that most residents rarely see: from **dark messages hidden in the city's street art** to **Spain's last toy hospital**. And her efforts are making an impact in the lives of many, including local shopkeepers, migrants and artists.

Madrid No Frills really took off last November, when Leah published a photo series of ***100 No-Frills Bars.*** The series went viral and was also featured in top publications like **El País** and **Cónde Nast Traveler**. Her website now receives

25,000 visitors per month. But despite all the acclaim she's earned, Leah has no plans to change the core purpose of her blog. This is her personal hobby – her incredible gift to the city.

That bar in the cover photo is the most famous bar in Spain right now. The day I published the photo series, I literally had to increase the website's capacity overnight. It's been shared by millions of people around the world, in Lithuania, Mexico, America… That's just amazing.

I actually first met Leah just before she started Madrid No Frills (MNF). She got in touch with Naked Madrid to write a piece about **an olive grove tour** run by her friends in the

outskirts of Madrid. Three years have passed since she embarked on her own mission – and now, it's my turn to write about her inspiring work. We met up for a coffee in Plaza Cascorro, and here's what went down:

How did it all start?

In a no-frills bar, just thinking: all of these cool, new chic bars get huge shout-outs all the time, with hordes of people coming to visit while, at the same time, these little bars – often tired, physically and emotionally – don't even have a location on Google Maps.

Nobody would ever write about these places but, to me, with an 'outsider's' perspective, they're the most special – they're unique to Madrid. One doesn't move a thousand miles to have the same thing you can get back at home, so I thought, these places need to be celebrated, or else they're going to close.

[The death of the Spanish bar and the invasion of the square plate]

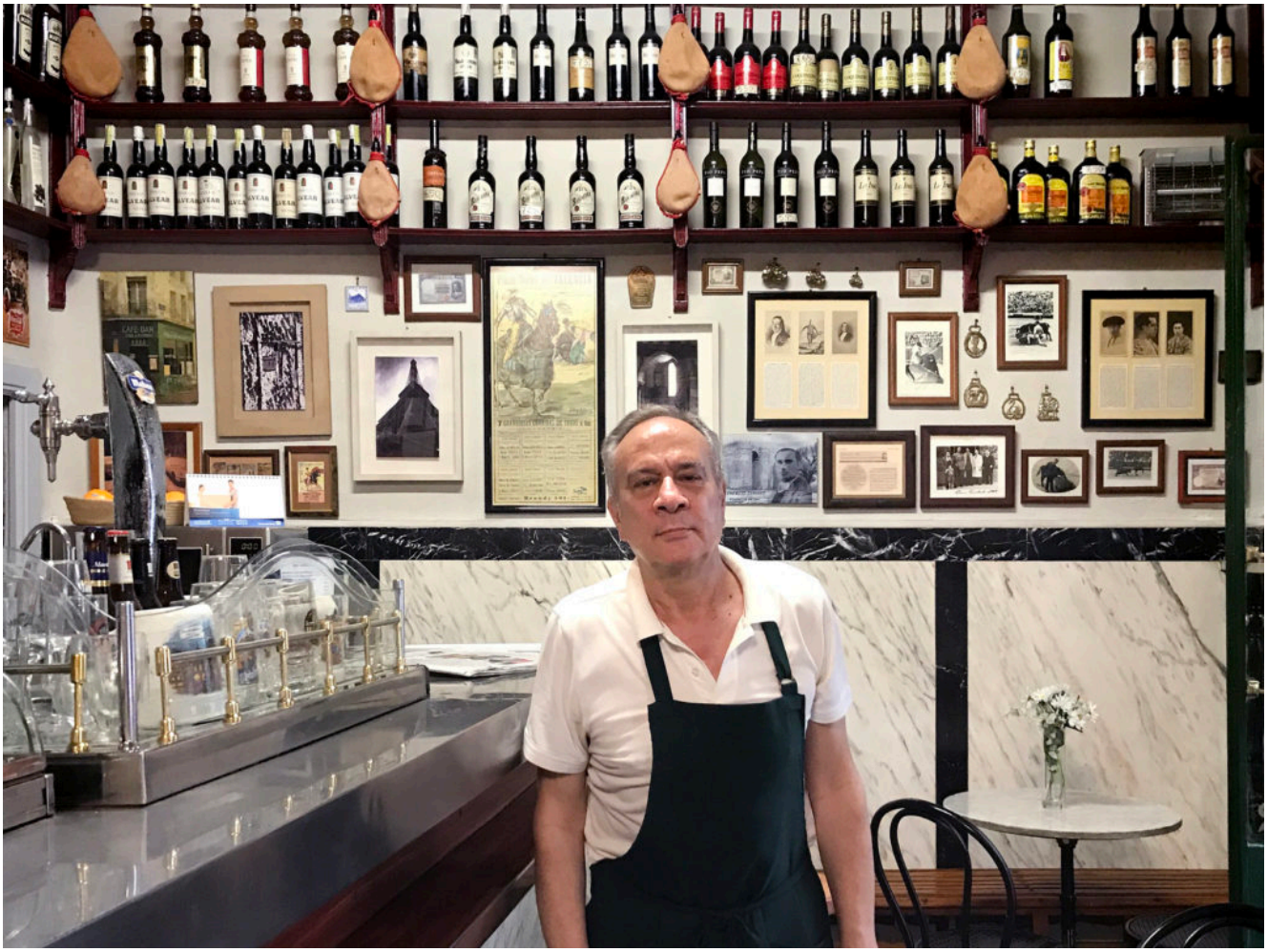
Bar Lozano: one of Malasaña’s last no-frills bars (closed 2018)

Botón de Oro, a centenarian haberdashery featured in: **An archive of places Madrid has lost**

Why do you do it?

I just want to raise awareness of the Madrid that very few know about. It may sound naive, but I got into journalism because I want to change the world. I've recently become a professional journalist and my blog is a part of that. But, you've got to be so sensitive about the information you receive and the way in which you share it, such as people's specific details and photographs of them.

I love to share my personal angle on things but don't want to cause controversy in doing so, but at the same time, I need to be bold and stand up for what I believe in. This combination is tricky, but it can be powerful.



[71 enchanting years of Bodegas Jiménez]

How did you get into photography?

Photography has always been a hobby. I've always loved taking photos, even in single digits. I used to process my own photos. Several years back, I dabbled in professional photography for a year and a half in Newcastle, mainly working with startups. Well, that was big mistake. I felt like I was selling my soul and was so traumatized that I didn't pick up my camera for three years. Once I picked it back up, Madrid No Frills started. That's a lesson I learned: don't sell your hobby. You've got to keep something for yourself.

Leah Pattem, the inspiring creator behind Madrid No Frills

You realize you've become an influencer, right?

I actually have influenced! Bar Cruz just over there [she points out the window] has been seen by millions of people on their screens and another 99 bars from **my 100 Bars** project have been seen by millions of people around the world. That's just insane.

Bar Cruz, featured on [100 of Madrid's No-Frills Bars photo series]

Is Madrid No Frills still a one-woman mission?

Yes, mostly. I also have a growing team of writers who are helping me try to save these authentic, time-warp kind of places. These no-frills bars. And it seems to be working! And that's what crazy. It seems to be *actually* working.

What are some of the other articles that have made a big impact?

The one about the Senegalese tailor, he had a really powerful story: **[How a starry-eyed rumour of a better life brought this young Senegalese tailor to Madrid]**.

And another article about Vallecas that went viral around Madrid: [Vallecas: Madrid's rebellious working-class neighborhood].

How do your articles affect the bars and people when you feature them?

A lot of the owners are quite old and they don’t even know what a blog is. They’re so unplugged, so unconnected to the Internet. I mean, many don’t even have Google locations for their own establishments. I’m the one who puts them on the map – literally.

Before writing an article about them, I’ll let them know and give them the option to say no, which they never have. Then, after writing the article, I’ll go later on and ask if my article may have made an impact on their bar. A lot of the owners do say: “I’ve suddenly received a lot of foreign people in my bar, from France, Germany, people from all around the world…” But usually they don’t understand why.

[Relive the old Vallecas in Bar Etiquio]

So what exactly is a no-frills bar?

It’s just really interesting to understand *what is a no-frills bar*. There are so many “codes” to learn, especially as an Englishwoman new to this whole thing. There’s the steel bar, the formica cladding, and the serviettes. Then on top of that,

you've got the owner's personality and that's what sets each bar apart.

Behind every no-frills bar you'll find family photos, a little mascot such as a teddy bear sitting on top of the oven or in the extractor fan area. And then a couple of little trinkets, souvenirs that people have given them.

They all have a beautiful, mid-century modernist design throughout, which, even though they were built to last, are beginning to fade. I'm trying to understand what this all means – trying to find the parallels and patterns. These specific designs and the personality superimposed on top of that.

What could a "new" no-frills place look like? For example, I saw you wrote about a new restaurant, 100 Mandela.

They've got a slightly different aesthetic. **100 Mandela** is more about the immigrant communities. I'm a huge fan of raising awareness and telling stories about ethnic minorities, the elderly and also women. I'm also working on an LGBT+ story as well.

I'm trying to raise awareness of these communities through physical access points like restaurants or shops, so you can actually meet them in person. Here they are, right here, right now. They're part of your community and here's how you can connect with one another.

[Mandela 100: Emblematic Senegalese diner opens on Plaza Nelson Mandela]

What makes Madrid No Frills so unique?

It's not just "I recommend this place." It's "understand the story and the history" and experience the very same thing that I experienced when I went there too. I'm trying to open people's eyes to see the city in a new way. Not just my way, but in a really special way that maybe people have overlooked or simply forgotten about.

I want you to think about what is around you – not just all the exciting new places, but be conscious of the harder-hitting truth: there's a lot of suffering that happens in Madrid, and it's often right in front you. The places where you're eating, the people you're talking to, the **scars that have been covered up on the walls**. It's all around us.

Every now and then, we should stop and think and process…. just by being aware of something helps, and simply discussing

it is huge.

Barrio Aeropuerto, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Madrid, captured in **10 no-frills finds (Vol. VI)**

[Discover the dark messages hidden in Madrid's street art]

Why should we make a point of going to these no-frills places?

Well, it's all about supporting the local community. I really appreciate my *barrio* [referring to the Rastro area and Lavapiés]. I've got my bread girls, my Spanish shoe guy, [my Mauritanian veg guy].

From the Jarama Valley to a Lavapiés okupa: Meet Usman, the alternative organic veg farmer

As foreigners, we often feel a lot more in common with people who are in the same boat as us – people who've come from another city or country, who've moved across Spain, or the Atlantic – to a new city. You find you have a lot in common with your community, and you might be surprised what your community looks like.

It's also about building bridges between communities, where everybody's welcome under one roof. For example, if you're a Brit in a Senegalese restaurant with Senegalese people, you're creating a bridge and simultaneously supporting a local business.

You've got to be a little bit adventurous. Sometimes it can be a little daunting being different. At a no-frills bar, you might be surrounded by a bunch of old men. But, if you go with a bunch of your girl friends, you've suddenly got a small

space that’s more representative of society. We’re bridging a gap between two sexes, two generations, and often between two ethnicities too, bringing everyone together and supporting the local communities as well.

What inspired you?

Honestly, Naked Madrid was a huge inspiration. As you know, I’ve written many articles for you. I remember how excited I was to have my first article published about the Italian place in Mercado Chamartín, and then **the olive grove run by my friends**. They’re also doing a kind of unusual thing: they’re millennials reconnecting with a traditional industry: farming. They’ve had a lot of English-speaking people come on their tours since that article came out, and they’re so grateful!

How much time do you dedicate to it now?

Quite a lot. I have full-time work – I’m a teacher and a writer – but I love Madrid No Frills so I don’t see it as work (OK, well it’s not work because I don’t get paid!). I currently put out one new article a week, plus research… if you even consider it research. It’s fun! It’s just that I fancy going to this place, so let’s go check it out…

It’s genuinely a reflection of my life, how I roll. I don’t want it to be the opposite, ever. Every now and then there might be a mission, for example, I **recently covered an eviction**. I knew it was going on. I was there for a few hours.

Madrid’s anti-eviction warriors

Is there a game plan?

For a long time, I didn’t have one, and that’s what’s been so fun about it. I’ve always been very spontaneous and I think that’s what’s made MNF what it is. There was no strategy – it’s a passion project. There are a lot of people who are asking me to write a book, and Madrid deserves a book.

I’ve been approached by publishers and even investors, but I’ve always said no because I want to do things my way. Also, if I did write a book, it would be a collaborative thing, bringing in illustrators and other writers. It also wouldn’t just be a guidebook, but more of a portrait of Madrid.

Having said all that though, I’ve recently hatched a top-secret plan to grow MNF, so watch this space!

How has Madrid No Frills changed over the years?

Looking back to the very beginning of Madrid No Frills, I've brought in a lot more human stories. But the core of MNF is still Madrid's no-frills bars. I absolutely love no-frills bars. I genuinely spend a lot of time in them.

[Bar El Jamón: the godfather of Lavapiés]

What would you say to people who don't see what's so special about no-frills bars?

I would say "take my hand and come with me, and let me show you why I love them so much." Maybe I could explain the

details and the hidden narrative of the place: the history, and what it all means from within.

[The 128-year-old Chueca hideout for generations of simmering lefties]

Would you like to see Madrid No Frills go global?

I would love to see Mumbai No Frills, London No Frills, Newcastle No Frills, raising awareness of those little places that are being overlooked all over the world. The No Frills mission is a great cause. If it turns into a global trend, that would be great.

What about if people start copying you?

I've already come across a lot of copycats, but I'm beyond fine with that. I'm so excited when I see a copycat – it means they're doing a service to their city. A hundred no-frills bars in Berlin? Go for it! 100 no-frills bars in Vallecas? Please, dude, go for it. Steal my ideas. You're going to be doing an amazing service. I never get worried about it.

Have you thought about monetizing the site?

I've been asked that question so many times [Leah laughs]. I'm lucky enough to earn a vaguely sustainable income through teaching and journalism, and still have just enough free time and energy to give to MNF. Not making money through my blog has meant that this is a project that is so pure…

The fact that it's not monetized means I've never been influenced by sponsored content. People have tried to get me to plug them for money or freebies but I've never accepted because I don't support their particular business.

If a no-frills bar approached me asking for a plug, I might accept, but they typically have no money, so I couldn't really ask for it. There's no money in the places I write about, and that's a big part of why I write about them. MNF is purely based on what I love. People can sense that. Money isn't the only resource – love and passion make the world spin too.

Any thoughts on Women's Day… in terms of Madrid No Frills?

It's not like blogging is a man's world or anything. But what's weird is that I'm a woman behind this, also of color, who goes to these predominantly white, male-heavy bars. That's kind of unusual. Not many people look like me here. I speak to

quite a lot of male migrants and old Spanish men. I do often find myself in a male-dominated space in many ways, but perhaps it’s made me more confident. I can hold my own more than ever before. I’ve had to learn to speak louder, be more persistent and I probably have to fight harder than men to be listened to.

Women’s Day has also made me more aware of myself as a woman, and it’s helped me realize that my voice is important. Through MNF, it now reaches 25,000 people a month, and I don’t take that lightly. I use my voice to fight for those who don’t have one.

I’m also working on having more women stories on the blog but they’re a lot more shy and a lot harder to find in certain professions, like being a *portero* (doorman). There aren’t as many female shopkeepers or female bar owners. I’m trying to find more, but here are some that I’ve written about:

Tale of a Lavapiés concierge

Meet Miss Beige, an ordinary Madrileña after all our hearts

Is Madrid No Frills going to keep its core?

Yes, definitely. The blog is based on passion, a personal passion. Also, the one thing that's consistent about Madrid No Frills and that's never going to change is that I'm behind it. I trust myself to keep it real, so I know that it's going to continue as it is, staying true to Madrid and its no-frills soul.

Thank you, Leah, for sharing your story with us! And Happy International Women's Day to all the inspiring women of the world – get your work out there and make your voices heard!

- **Please follow Madrid No Frills' incredible mission on Facebook and Instagram, too.**

- **You can also sign up for the newsletter to receive a copy of the free weekend guide.**

New Cucos, a family-style restaurant in Arturo Soria

Sometimes when I go out to have lunch or dinner I can't help but think that an important part of customer service is missing. So when I had dinner at New Cucos with my friend, when we went outside afterwards, we could only say how well we were treated and what a wonderful dinner we had.

New Cucos is a family-style restaurant in the neighborhood of Arturo Soria. This closeness and warmth can be seen in the way Juan (the owner) treats everyone who works there, as well as all the customers who are having dinner or lunch.

The restaurant is located on the quiet street of Arturo Soria. It is a large space with a perfect covered terrace for more intimate dinners or larger celebrations. The terrace provides a very cozy place where you can talk quietly without being bothered by the next table, and then there's also a smaller and equally cozy interior. The first day we decided to sit in inside, as Real Madrid was playing and we wanted to see the match. The second day we sat in the covered terrace, great decision.

The Food

New Cucos has a simple and traditional menu with very good quality ingredients. **The portions are generous, in fact, the**

most popular dishes on the menu are large sharing platters; these can be great among a group of friends, or even just for two.

First we went for the warm burrata salad with cherry tomatoes. It was simply delicious. Great quality, never tried the burrata and I have to say I totally loved it.

Burrata Salad

Then we decided to try the spring rolls with vegetables and prawns – a highly recommended and delicious dish as well.

Spring rolls

By the time we had to eat our third dish, we were already full, but how can you say no to a plate of ravioli? These were filled with pumpkin and cheese sauce – simply spectacular and very rich. In fact the second time we went we couldn’t help but order them again.

Ravioli

The second day we also ordered a delicious mixed salad. For me, nothing beats a well-prepared mixed salad.

Salad

As for the rest of the menu, in addition to the dishes to share, they have a small selection of fish and meat dishes. I have to say the South African ostrich burger looks delicious.

Prices are very reasonable. The first day we had three dishes, three glasses of wine and two beers for 47 euros. The second day our bill came out to 33 euros.

I'd also like to highlight once again that we received fantastic service both times we went; the staff was attentive, asking if everything was fine, and very importantly, without putting any pressure on us to leave. That sort of thing is very noticeable and makes your dinner even better.

Nothing else to add, **New Cucos** points out on Twitter: "*eat and drink in an oasis*" And I couldn't agree more.

So, "*Mucha mierda*" (or "break a leg") to Juan and the rest of his family. I'm sure we'll see each other again soon!

Info

- ***Where: Calle Arturo Soria 84***
- ***Metro: Arturo Soria***
- ***Tf: 913774039***
- ***Twitter***
- ***Monday to saturday 11 to 1.***

Zoco Comidero: Eat well and feel great at Madrid's first (and only) flexitarian restaurant

NOW CLOSED

I don't eat meat, but one of my life rules is: **never go to a Vegetarian restaurant.**

I've been jaded by too many poorly thought-out ventures where the food is created from fear of meat rather than love of veg. Vegan and vegetarian cuisine has existed all over the world for millennia, so where did the culinary black hole come from and why has it left us in such a veg-hating dark age feeling hungry and dehydrated?

Last week, a friend of mine recommended veggie-friendly **Zoco Comidero** and I might just have seen **the light at the end of the tunnel**.

Rarely do you come across a restaurant with this much respect for food. The concept: flexitarian – a primarily vegetarian diet which occasionally includes meat or fish. In other words, there’s something for everyone.

No longer does the vegetarian friend have to eat a *racion de patatas bravas* for dinner, or the carnivorous friend have to suffer through a fish-less fillet or a tofurkey burger (a what?).

At Zoco Comidero, the menu is hugely varied and every dish is put together professionally. Everything on your plate hit the kitchen worktop raw and intact and has been **prepared freshly with no external influences**.

We kicked off Tuesday evening with a kale and kiwi smoothie, an arepa stuffed with an almond-based vegan cheese and chlorella pesto (a delicious black seaweed pesto).

Feeling healthy yet? We shared two *tostas*: one with goat’s cheese and a juicy baked tomato and the other with a generous portion of beetroot-marinated raw salmon and homemade mustard. For mains we had a risotto made with kamut (an ancient large wheat grain), and prawn chop suey.

This was all underlined with a trio of deserts: an intense gooey dark chocolate brownie (the secret ingredient: avocado), quinoa ‘cheesecake’ and a face-twisting lemon curd.

By now the word “healthy” is in the background. **Exotic flavours, textures and presentation** of the food resonates more than anything else. I love Marbell’s zen and her way of transmitting it to us urban wildlife through edible flowers and doses of colour.

This is Marbell, the brains and owner of Zoco Comidero

Zoco Comidero is just off the beaten track but in the real

heart of Madrid's old town. The restaurant has an elegant interior with low lighting, good music and a bonus view of the palace. There's also a fun downstairs lounge which gets going on weekends. Every Saturday and Sunday, Marbell tries to organise a chilled bit of live music from 10:30 pm onwards **so stick around after dinner for good DJs and Venezuelan bands.**

Info

- **Web** & **Facebook**
- **Address**: Calle Moreria 11
- **Metro**: La Latina

La Nodriza, Madrid's loveliest health food store!

Around Christmastime I got an email from Terry and Charlotte who run **Desperate Literature**, an international bookstore that's just a street up from Opera. Here's what they wrote: "We came across a local health and organic food store that we fell in love with. The owner is great… and it's a crying shame that locals and health-conscious expats don't know about the place. It only has **Facebook**, but voila, now we've done our part and spread the good news," inferring it was Naked Madrid's turn to do the same!

Thank you, Terry and Charlotte, for sending me that email! I finally made it to **La Nodriza** today and I have to agree – how had I not known about it earlier? It's just a few steps from plaza Opera and lovingly run by a woman named Lucía, who handpicks each item with careful consideration to customers'

requests and also speaks English. Originally from Spain, Lucía has lived all over the world, having spent years in England, Sweden (she speaks Swedish, too), Chile and even Kuwait and Oman. Long story short, she's got a lot of stories. Eventually she decided to follow her passion and study nutrition, which led her to **open La Nodriza two years ago, "her dream come true."**

Although La Nodriza is small, it offers an impressive selection of handmade and organic products, ranging from cosmetics and olive oil to fresh produce and yogurt. You can even get a weekly order of local fruits and vegetables. Chances are you'll find that hard-to-find item here, or you can ask Lucía to order it for you! Not to mention, **La Nodriza is also a great place to find a gift for someone back home** (like locally produced olive oil or raw honey), **or even for someone in town** (like Burt's Bees products).

What I bought

What caught my eye the most was her wide selection of raw honeys. She has two large containers of honey from local producers that you can purchase by the kilo: one is made with lavender (*lavanda*), and the other with heather (*brezo*). Lucía let us taste both of them, which were so pure and delicious. **I bought a kilo of the heather honey (€10.50) because it was darker and richer, which is the kind I prefer, and I also got to pour it myself**.

The next thing I bought was **organic peanut butter by a brand called Monki**. Although it wasn't cheap (€7.20) and there was another less expensive option, Lucía assured me this one's quality was well worth it. As I sit here with my Monki peanut butter on toast, all I can say is I second her opinion.

While browsing, Lucía gave us both a piece of **dark chocolate with chilli peppers** because, "it's something different." As we were leaving, she popped two bite-size **red apples** into our bag. "They're small," she said, "but totally fresh and pack in a lot of flavor." And they do, indeed.

So, people of Madrid, if you're looking for a place to get your supply of organic, fresh and local products in the heart of the city, you've found it. These products may be more expensive than what you'll find at Mercadona, but they're oh so worth it!

Info

- Facebook
- **Hours:** Open Tues-Sunday from 12pm-10pm
- **Phone:** +34 912 50 29 65
- **Address:** Calle Caños del Peral, 5

You may also like:

- Best Gifts from Madrid
- Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid!
- Where to take your Mom in Madrid

Fogg Bar, Spanish Craft Beer and Artisanal Cheese in Huertas

Madrid's craft beer scene has been flourishing in recent years with several bars and vendors popping up to meet an increasing demand. Fogg Bar, a new establishment situated on C/ Moratin in Huertas, stands out for **serving exclusively Spanish-made artisanal beer on tap** along with delicious cheeses.

My friend Diana and I ventured in on a quiet Tuesday night and perched ourselves at the bar. We were able to chat with the charming proprietor, Marisol, who helped us decide which beers to sample. She and her husband opened this bar in September.

They take a lot of pride in **collaborating with smaller breweries and cheese distributors**, often hosting tastings and gatherings where attendees can meet the brewers.

First I sipped #5, the Columbus Goes North, an IPA from La Quince, a brewery in Madrid. This was followed up by #6, the Sweet Milk Stout from Four Lions, a distributor in León.

I was impressed with the presentation of the tapas that accompanied each drink, as well as the **butifarra, a typical Catalan sausage.** I was quite taken by this establishment and recommend it to all craft beer aficionados looking to taste Spanish-made beers.

Info

- **Facebook**
- **Website**
- **Address:** C/Moratin 5
- **Metro:** Anton Martin

For more on Madrid craft beer, check out:

- Beer State of Mind in Madrid
- Heightened Beer State of Mind in Madrid
- La Buena Cerveza, all things beer in Madrid

Forasteros, a Madrid-based swing, gypsy-jazz and folk band

As a hub for artists and creative are types from all over the world, Madrid's local live-music scene is energetic and diverse. As always, your friends at Naked Madrid are here to provide you with the best options as how to maximize the potential of your nights out. **The first local musicians to be featured in this series are the swing, gypsy-jazz, folk group Forasteros**.

They have an interesting backstory because their members had all met by chance. The band was formed when its founder, lyricist and guitarist, **Tom Buzz Cox** from London, crossed paths with **Tara** during a Vaughan System teacher training course. Swing instructor **Julia Hampson**, also from London, was brought onboard as the violinist after an encounter busking the streets in Lavapies.

Tom recruited **Hinata Myojin**, a bassist from Japan, through another band in the community. Clarinettist **Ricardo Vasquez** from Texas/Mexico was discovered upon his response to an advertisement. They are unclear on how drummer **Fernando Iglesias** from Madrid entered the fold, strongly implying that he materialized out of thin air.

They write in Spanish, English, French and even Japanese. Ricardo and Julia have a classical background and are well-versed in swing and Jazz. Overall the group combines aspects of **gypsy-jazz, folk and swing** while also being open to anything that takes their fancy: twisted Latin rhythms, funk, DnB hints.

Their ambition is to make people laugh, dance and feel while also “talking about difficult shit.” says **Tara Lowe**, their singer and lyricist, who I have known for the greater part of the year as two of my close friends were her flatmates. Lowe, a long-term expat from Cardiff enjoys writing songs about everyday life that are “**cheeky, honest and indulgent.”**

Forasteros' songs have addressed some of the more **relatable aspects of living in Madrid** with their songs "Landlord from Hell, title self-explanatory, as well as "Banks of June" which focuses on lust and broken hearts. Their track "Springtime Shuffle" centers on opportune new beginnings while "Cuando" is just about dancing.

Forasteros performs a lot in Lavapies in the venues of Gato Verde, Taberna Alabanda, La Tortuga, La Tabacalera and Centro de Creacion y Investigation. Their First EP, "Hello you!" was recorded at The Treehouse Madrid Studios on the label of Vestizo Azul Records. **It is available free on Bandcamp.** Check out their video of **"Devil in the Trees"** from their new EP.

FORASTEROS
PRESENTACION PRIMER MINI DISCO
"HELLO YOU!"
JUEVES 12 de NOV. 21H
GYPSY JAZZ FOLK
INVITADO ESPECIAL:
TAIACORE
INTRUSO
AUGUSTO FIGUEROA 3
FACEBOOK.COM/
FORASTEROS
MADRID
PUNTO DE
VENTA:
GIGLON.COM

Info

Follow them on **Facebook** & **their Bandcamp page** and be sure to see them perform live! Their EP *Hello You* launches **on the 12th November at Intruso Bar** – with supporting artist **Taiacore**. Tickets can be purchased at **Giglon**. The first 50 people to arrive will get a free EP and poster.

La Latina's 'seafood party' in Mercado de La Cebada: The place to see and be seen!

Mercados are the heart and soul of any Spanish city. If you want to get under the skin of the place you're visiting, make a beeline for the city's biggest food market. Wander around each section (meat, vegetables, fish, etc.) and you will instantly see what the region's all about. Then make your way to the *mercado*'s busiest bar, order what everyone else is drinking and demand your rightful complimentary *tapa*. If it's something you've never clapped eyes on, even better.

La Latina's [Mercado de la Cebada](#) is no exception. The place encapsulates Spanish culture to almost cliché levels: **the heart and soul of Madrid is right here.**

Every weekday, **Mercado de la Cebada** **will sell you fresh produce from all over Spain**. There’s also a good selection of local bars in the labyrinth of alleys both upstairs and downstairs, and even a few clothes stalls, toyshops and cobblers for some of the market’s more devout punters.

But then, every Saturday at lunchtime, **Mercado de la Cebada** transforms into what I will describe as nothing less than a **seafood party**.

LANGOSTINO
LISO·HUELVA

The atmosphere is electric; iced molluscs and pulpo are flowing, and groups of friends doing what they do best: sharing food and belly-laughing, plastic cup of valdepeñas in one hand, half-eaten shrimp in the other.

Grab a few friends and get there **no later than 2:30pm**. Find one of the aproned chaps hovering in front of his stall, affectionately touching everyone with his fishy hands, and place your order per *ración* or by weight.

Before you take your polystyrene plates to the nearest paper-covered stack of crates, don't forget to pick up your **complimentary bottle of wine or cans of beer. Yeah… COMPLIMENTARY!** Due to licensing rules, these shops can't sell drinks. I imagine there's a slight markup on the prices of seafood but, having said that, **the prices are some of the lowest I've seen in Madrid, and the quality is some of the best**.

There are cups, serviettes, toothpicks and mussel 'spives' (spoon-knives) strategically strewn around the stalls – a seafood spectacular with no frills, and all the better for it.

Info

- **Web – Facebook**

Address: Plaza de la Cebada, La Latina, 28005

Metro: La Latina (right outside)

Opening hours: Mon – Fri 9am-2pm / 5-8:30pm; Sat 9am-3pm

Another soulful neighbourhood market, not too far away, is Mercado de San Fernando in Lavapiés

---

Espadrilles: 3 places in Madrid to get your hands on one of Spanish footwear's greatest items

Summertime is here, and while many of us have already done a little bit of vacationing, there's a little **Made in Spain** thing that is made for a truly authentic *veraniego*: **the espadrille (*alpargatas*)**. Before I spent a lot of time in Spain, my summer footwear was just about limited to flip-flops and other summer sandals (and let's face it, they really hurt your feet, and in my case, your tolerance for them stands at zero when your heel cracks for the first time). But then when I walked around major Spanish beach towns, it wasn't flip-flops that were the main shoe of choice: they were espadrilles.

Now wait, you're probably thinking: All Spaniards wear the wedge ones everywhere? Nope (except for the woman at my gym who wears them on the exercise bike and to lift weights); there's actually a lot more variety of them than the ones you normally see in New York, Miami, LA, London, or Palm Beach. You can find them in just about every shoe store around (and even in Zara!), but as a true proponent of finding things that are **really authentic and handmade**, **here are three places where you can get your hands on them in Madrid, some more traditional and others more modern**.

10,95
10,95
10,95
10,95
10,95
8,00
37,00
24,75
37,00
27,75
8,75
146,50

1. If you're looking for something traditional… Casa Hernanz

A few years ago, when I was an *alpargata novice*, I checked, like any good New Yorker does, *The New York Times.* I had seen an article about Casa Hernanz, just off Plaza Mayor. And this is without a doubt the most emblematic place to get espadrilles in Madrid, While we often tend to get concerned about a place's proximity to Plaza Mayor because of the fear of it being a tourist trap, coming here, like going to the rooftop bar at The Hat or eating your way through the Mercado de San Miguel, is absolutely worth it (while an expensive relaxing cup of *café con leche* is not).

Founded in 1840, and in the fourth generation, you’ll find the wide selection of threads and fabrics the family produces. And

of course, the star product- the espadrilles themselves. It’s no wonder you’ll find a line out the door onto the street

…on a Friday at 10 AM

Be sure to try everything on! You want them to be snug at first because they stretch out over time!

Casa Hernanz
Calle de Toledo, 18

28005 MADRID
Tel.: +34 913 66 54 50
Hours: Mondays and Fridays 9:30 to 1:30 PM/4:30-8; Saturday 10-2 Closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays
Metro: Tirso de Molina (Line 1), La Latina (Line 5)
Website

2. If you're looking for a "capricho" (to treat yourself)… Mintandrose

Modeling my Skorpios along the Alameda de Apodaca in Cádiz

Mintandrose is a fairly new player in the espadrille market, but their 100% handmade models are making a splash not only in the fancier parts of Spain, but also abroad, including in American retailers such as Nordstrom and Anthropologie. With single-soled and double-soled models in a variety of hues (such as all black, white with a black tip, or marine blue with a white tip), this is your go-to for a splurge.

The main way to buy them is online, but in my experience the best thing to do is to try them on. You want them to be SUPER TIGHT because since they're all made by hand, they'll gradually grow looser (my first pair is now a little too big for my feet). They also make canvas models and the line has expanded to include sandals and bags.

Should you want to try them on, the website offers a list of stockists. I went and got one of my pairs at Etbang in Chueca (which I will have to go and write about at a later date).

Some of the selection of Mintandrose at Etbang

Mintandrose
Online Shop
stockists
If you want to try them on go to…
Etbang
Calle Pelayo, 66
28004 MADRID
Tel.: +34 626 56 04 82
Hours: Monday-Saturday 11:30-2:30 PM, 5 PM-8:30 PM
Metro: Alonso Martínez (Lines 4, 5, and 10), Chueca (Lines 5)

http://etbang.com/

3. If you're looking to go where the locals go (and for other shoes all year-round, too)… La Alpargatería

They say that Chamberí is one of the city’s most *castizo*, or authentic, neighborhoods, in this ‘hood (which is my favorite

to live in) there’s a hidden gem of a store at La Alpargatería. If you associate García de Paredes with the Extranjería office where your drop off your prórroga paperwork, than just know that this street is so much better than that. A lot of my haunts happen to be on this very street, and when it’s time for my pairs of espadrilles in the summer, this is my spot. I bought my family matching ones for our family vacation last year in Greece; let’s just say that I got them converted (or at least that’s what I’d like to believe).

The most basic model, which comes in a whole plethora of colors, is €7.50. That’s what I call a great quality/price

example. My favorite color is *crudo* (which is a type of off-white) because it’s the perfect neutral tone that goes with most of my wardrobe, and it deals better with urban wonders that would get a white pair very dirty in no time. I’ve also gotten my black wedges there, perfect for those who like the idea of tying the rope up your ankles, but would rather buckle in at the top.

They even have new models, which you can see in the picture above, that have a rubber sole as opposed to the traditional

one. This is perfect for city-dwellers who love their espadrilles, but want a little bit more safety in their step.

La Alpargatería isn't just a place for summertimes espadrilles; they also have Victoria sneakers, ballet flats (aka *manoletinas*) in a wide plethora of colors and fabrics (suede AND leather), and if you need some *zapatillas de casa* (because going barefoot in your *piso compartido* really isn't going to fly), they've got you covered.

La Alpagatería
Web
Calle de García de Paredes, 74
28010 MADRID
Tel.: +34 913 08 32 11
Hours: Monday-Friday 10 AM-2 PM/5 PM-8 PM; Saturdays 10 AM-2 PM
Metro: Gregorio Marañón (Lines 7 and 10)

Check out our new Made in Spain category for more on local designers and producers. And feel free to make some recommendations!

You may also like our previous post on: Best Gifts from Madrid