

# 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 naranja (orange facial tonic)

## Contact info:

- Website: [www.yerbasvivas.es](http://www.yerbasvivas.es)
- Instagram: [@yerbas\\_vivas](https://www.instagram.com/yerbas_vivas)
- Phone: 618 83 26 00

## 2. Vajillas By Nuria Blanco

VAJILLAS BY *nuria blanco*

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](http://www.vajillasbynuriablanco.com)
- Instagram: [@vajillasbynuriablanco](https://www.instagram.com/vajillasbynuriablanco)
- Facebook: [@vajillasbynuriablanco](https://www.facebook.com/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](http://www.sacstudio.es)
- Instagram: [@sacstudio\\_](#)
- Email: [hola@sacstudio.es](mailto: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.



## Contact info:

- Website: [www.nest-boutique.com](http://www.nest-boutique.com)
- Instagram: [@NestBoutiqueMadrid](https://www.instagram.com/NestBoutiqueMadrid)
- Facebook: [@NestBoutiqueMadrid](https://www.facebook.com/NestBoutiqueMadrid)
- Phone: 91 523 1061
- Address: Plaza San Ildefonso 3, 28004 Madrid

## 5. MAD Lola

# 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:

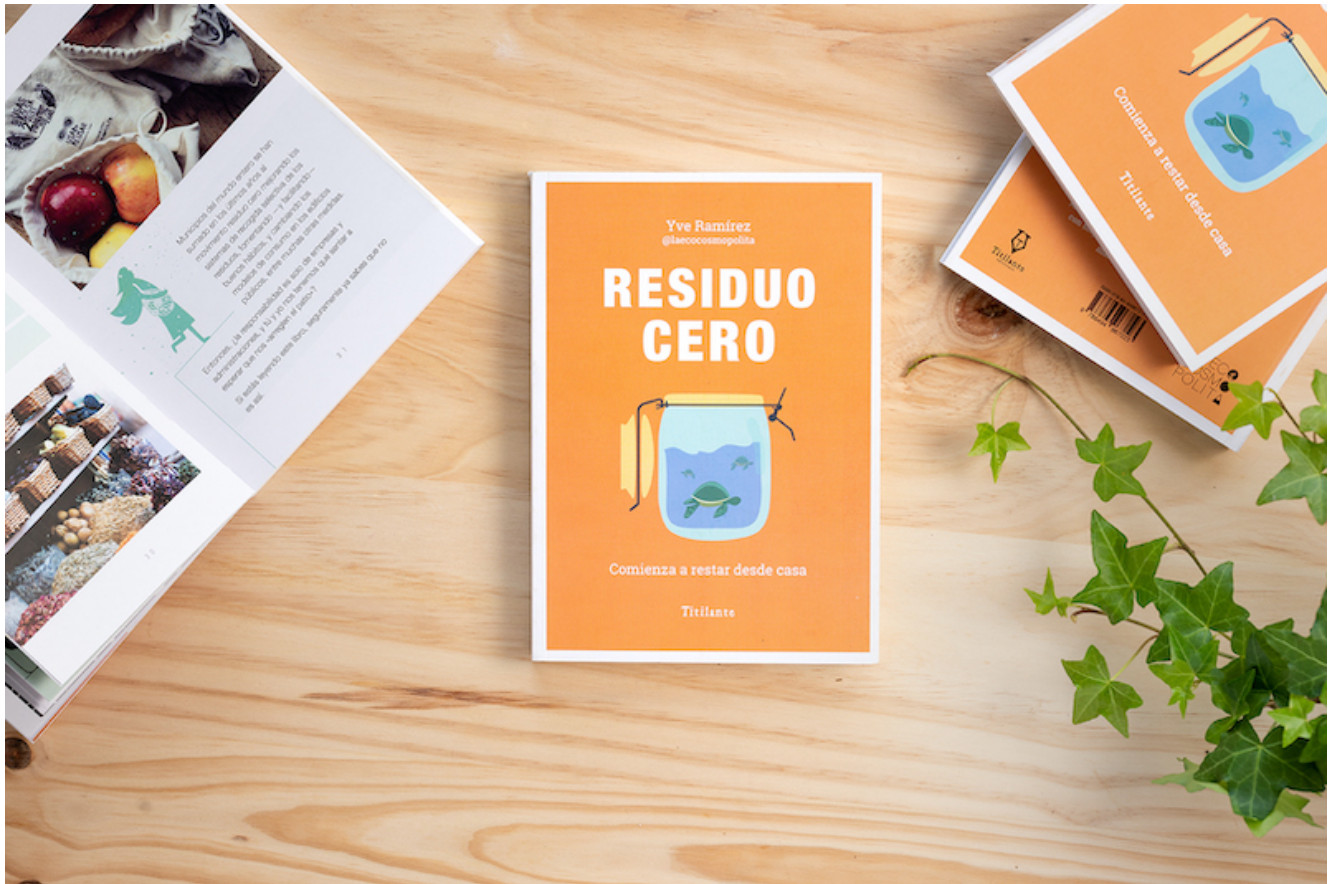
- Website: [www.madlola.es](http://www.madlola.es)
- Instagram: [@madlola.es](https://www.instagram.com/madlola.es)
- Facebook: [@MadLolaEs](https://www.facebook.com/MadLolaEs)
- Phone: 625013923
- Address: Madrid (no physical address)

## 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/](http://www.laecocosmopolita.com/usaryreusar/)
- Instagram: [@usaryreusar](https://www.instagram.com/usaryreusar)
- Facebook: [@usaryreusar](https://www.facebook.com/usaryreusar)
- Email: [info@laecocosmopolita.com](mailto: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 GOTTES.

## Holiday gift raffle donation:



Reversible bandana bib in blue organic cotton.

## Contact info:

- Website: [www.houseofbibs.eu](http://www.houseofbibs.eu)
- Instagram: [@houseofbibs](https://www.instagram.com/houseofbibs)
- Facebook: [@bibshouse](https://www.facebook.com/bibshouse)

## 8. 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](http://www.heppydesigns.com)
- Instagram [@Heppy\\_Designs](https://www.instagram.com/Heppy_Designs)
- Email: [HeppyDesigns@gmail.com](mailto: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, 28x18. 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/](http://www.grabadosplaza.es/)
- Instagram: [@grabadosplaza](https://www.instagram.com/grabadosplaza)
- Email: [info@grabadosplaza.es](mailto: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 EV00 (320 gr. ) and can of mackerel in EV00 (320 gr.)

## Contact info:

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



*Sustainable*  
**Holiday  
gift guide**  
& benefit raffle

Shop local this  
holiday season  
& take part in our  
**holiday raffle** to  
raise funds for:

*MadridforRefugees*

In collaboration with:

**NAKED MADRID**  
& **VeraContent**

**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](#)

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# **Living Room Concerts: Fighting for Madrid's artists with virtual concerts, small gatherings and more**

Madrid music artists need your help! The five-year-old concert experience project [Living Room Concerts](#) had to cancel their entire spring season of in-person live concerts and did a reboot to online interactive virtual concerts. They have refocused their aim to focus on independent singer-songwriters, bands, composers and musicians who make their living mainly or solely from their music and who are now struggling.

The struggle is very real with the entire arts and entertainment industry for these performers to pay rent, bills and buy food. Living Room Concerts (LRC) made a full pivot to online concerts but we will begin having small concerts in open-air spaces this summer. To ensure the safety of those who would like to attend, we will follow strict protocol in regards to gatherings.

In the beginning of the pandemic, LRC took two months off to develop an online model that allows for live-streamed performances while keeping the key aspect of the experience—bringing people together to socialize and meet new friends. Another important aspect that was incorporated was to make it a ticketed event that would both support the artists

and give people a private virtual space to interact with other people in an intimate and relaxed atmosphere.

**Many music artists were and still are giving their art away for free online, and this is a battle [Living Room Concerts](#) has been fighting on behalf of music artists for five years now...**

LRC strives to educate the public in understanding that making and performing music is a job, and that job should be compensated, not just in promotion, but with money—just like anyone else with a job. They have always priced their concert experiences very reasonably to make them as accessible and affordable as possible to all.

LRC is committed to highlighting music performers and entertainers in Madrid (or who have once lived in Madrid) in their regular concerts in-person and online. Concerts will be held all through June and into July. August is not yet decided, but in September they will return to a full programmed fall schedule, beginning the sixth series of the project. Concerts will be a mix of small in-person gatherings and virtual live streaming as needed.

Karla, LRC virtual concert attendee, says:

*This was one of the most fun experiences I've had in a long time. Who knew a livestream could be so much fun... I loved the intimacy, the collaborations, the stories. The (virtual) hugs!!! #mustdoagain*

# Upcoming show with Feroza Cayetano

This Saturday, talented singer-songwriter, entertainer and performer [Feroza Cayetano is performing a full virtual concert](#). In her music you will find strength, peace, love, beauty, an appreciation of self and the world, shelter from the storm. You can watch a [video of Feroza performing here](#).

[Feroza Cayetano](#) is a singer-songwriter whose roots are in Central America. Originally from Belize by way of Honduras and Guatemala, she has spent much of her life living as a foreigner in foreign lands—Jamaica, the US, Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago and now Spain. Her experiences of “otherness” had a deep emotional impact, and it was through song and melody that she learned to understand and harness her emotions.

With her guitar as her main medium, she write songs that come from the depths of her soul—songs of healing, light and darkness. Feroza writes about her personal truths and struggles with the hope that she is not alone in her feelings. Feroza believes in creating space for introspection and healing, and she encourages listeners to encounter their own emotions through hers.

She has been featured at the Belize International Yoga Festival 2017, the New Fire Festival 2018 and has performed on many platforms across the Caribbean. Two weeks ago, [Feroza was interviewed on live TV for the Open Your Eyes morning show in Belize](#), her homeland, talking about her latest single, “Prayer Song”, her Garifuna roots, her creative process during the lockdown in Spain, and the process of working on her upcoming album.

Feroza and the organizers at [Living Room Concerts](#) understand that everyone is itching to be outside after so many days inside, so they have three viewing options for attendees to help them support the project and the artist to keep both going.

## Viewing options:

### 1. Full Immersion

- *Join the livestream, participate in the online chat or organize a small watchparty with friends in-person in accordance with Madrid's rules on gatherings.*

### 2. Just Listening

- *Watch the livestream only. The same as above but skip the online chat either at home or wherever you go with your mobile device.*

### 3. Watch Later

- *See the live recording of the concert later at your convenience.*

All you need to do is to [click the ticket link in the Facebook event](#) to join concert-goers from all over the world online and [support this incredible independent music artist](#) by attending her live broadcast livestream show this Saturday.

# A history of the live concert series and new horizons

[Living Room Concerts](#) began as a members-only music group on Meetup of 2000+ members and hail from all different walks of life in Madrid, connected by our love and desire for indie singer-songwriters creating and performing their own original compositions for us. They ask unknown, little known, emerging, up-and-coming artists to come perform acoustic unplugged intimate concerts in private homes and unique spaces with attendance maximums of 20–50 people, depending on the size of the host's space.

[The LRC Meetup group](#) was started in June 2015 with three purposes in mind. The first is to discover new original music. The second is to remove the stage and have a more direct interaction and connection between performer and audience. The third is to create a space where concert-goers can meet new people and form genuine connections.

Over a year later they created a [Facebook page](#), [Instagram](#) account, and brought the option of attending to AirBnB Experiences. They were one of the first three music experiences in Madrid to appear on the AirBnB platform for the region.

And now that Living Room Concerts has moved their unique experience to the virtual world, they continue to bring the same intimate experience that made the unique experience so special and loved in the first place. Also, [Living Room Concerts](#) has some other offshoot branches with city- or country-specific focus on its roster for 2020: Tiny Kitchen

Concerts, Living Room Concerts NYC, Living Room Concerts Dubai, Living Room Concerts Amsterdam and Living Room Concerts Turkey.

## **Tiny Kitchen Concerts:** **baking and music combined**

### ORANGE ROSE BUD TART



[The first Tiny Kitchen Concert](#) scheduled is to happen this Sunday at 6pm Madrid-time and is open to the international online backing and music-loving community. [Living Room Concerts](#) has teamed up with three other collaborators to offer a new international virtual experience of an integrated baking class and music concert, combined. Here's the event link on Facebook: [Baking an Orange Rose Bud Tart // Tiny Kitchen Concert LIVestream](#)

The experience takes those bits of time to rest, chill in the fridge or baking in the oven and fills those moments in with a

live music performance and opportunities for conversation with other people in the class. Attendees can get to know people who share their same passions—music, baking and more. With this first offering, the dish is an original recipe of an [Orange Rose Bud Tart](#) created by chef [Florence Elisabeth](#) of [Slowpastry](#), and the original music of singer-songwriter [Spencer Ayscue](#) of the Americana band [Migrant Birds](#) who will be streaming and playing live direct from his kitchen in Winston-Salem North Carolina.

**What do an entertainer from North Carolina (US) and a French pastry chef have in common?**



Spencer, who once lived in Madrid, and was a part of the emerging singer-songwriter music scene, performed for [Living Room Concerts](#) in 2015 and 2016 and was one of the first six concerts that helped LRC become what it is today. Chef [Florence Elizabeth](#) is a French pastry chef who lives here in Madrid and is a member of [Valentina Ruffoni](#)'s group [Eat In Madrid](#) to which [Nichole Hastings](#) of [Living Room Concerts](#) also belongs.

Singer-songwriter Spencer says:

*Some songs are enjoyable because of a catchy melody, and some because of good beat or riff, but it seems like the songs that really stick with you, the ones that come to you in the quiet moments or the raw moments, are the ones whose lyrics mean something, that tell a story or strike that emotional chord.*

Chef Florence says:

*My goal is to transmit my passion for high-quality pastry and demonstrate its power to create connections!*

The organizing team of [Tiny Kitchen Concerts](#) believe that food and music bring people together, create connections, and those moments mean everything ... their memories stay with you like the last note of a song hanging in the air which lingers like a delicious flavor on your tongue.

For those who want a next-level virtual experience where you get the benefit of learning to bake a French pastry dish from a French pastry chef, hear some new and original music, and meet interesting people from all over the world, need only to [visit the website to see the full description of the experience and register](#).

# Living Room Concerts around the world



The other four offshoot branches—Living Room Concerts NYC, Living Room Concerts Dubai, and Living Room Concerts Turkey, Living Room Concerts Amsterdam—are currently in development, with a focus on jazz music with artists who have been out of work since the beginning of lockdowns due to the pandemic crisis, and will be releasing virtual concert experiences soon.

A live virtual festival, *Yalla Festival* will kick off the concert series in Dubai on July 10th and 11th. Announcements for all of these will be made on the [LRC's website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Stay tuned, follow them on social media, Bookmark their website or [sign up for an experience today!](#)

## LRC press coverage:

- <https://youtu.be/IB2goUiRWxE>
- [http://cadenaser.com/programa/2018/01/10/fuego\\_y\\_chinche\\_tas/1515601425\\_343482.html](http://cadenaser.com/programa/2018/01/10/fuego_y_chinche_tas/1515601425_343482.html)
- <http://www.nakedmadrid.com/2018/01/23/weekend-planazo-living-room-concerts/>
- [https://www.instagram.com/p/BgWgHqFj0\\_W/?taken-by=localeur](https://www.instagram.com/p/BgWgHqFj0_W/?taken-by=localeur)

## LRC social media & websites:

- Meetup – [www.meetup.com/living-room-concerts-official](http://www.meetup.com/living-room-concerts-official)
- Website – [www.stylemylife.us/livingroomconcerts/](http://www.stylemylife.us/livingroomconcerts/)
- Facebook – [www.facebook.com/pg/livingroomconcerts/](https://www.facebook.com/pg/livingroomconcerts/)
- Instagram – [www.instagram.com/livingroomconcerts/](https://www.instagram.com/livingroomconcerts/)
- Youtube – [youtu.be/Vg6A0FZmhG0](https://youtu.be/Vg6A0FZmhG0)

## By Nichole Hastings

*You can connect with Nichole on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) & [Twitter](#). Here's Nichole's [website](#) (her ceramic artist page).*

*Feature image by @TillyMayPhotography: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) & [Website](#)*

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# Visiting Madrid's museums in the age of corona

*Your relationship with the art definitely changes. There's less art and more space, so you're able to take a few extra minutes in front of each painting.*

Madrid's museums are finally open and the city feels alive again! The Thyssen, Reina Sofía and Prado—known as the “Golden Triangle of Art”—closed mid-March and reopened on June 6th, with the caveat of accepting only 30% of their regular capacities.

New safety measures have been put in place. Guided tours, group visits and audio guides are unavailable and several exhibits remain closed. Due to the limited availability, finding tickets is also difficult, especially during the free hours. But despite the drawbacks, the experience is actually better in certain ways.

I recently visited the [Reina Sofía](#) museum, while my friend Covadonga Romero, who is the President of [IE University's Arts & Business Club](#), was able to visit the [Prado](#). Here's what our experiences were like.



Climbing the stairs of the Lavapiés metro station and making my way down Calle Argumosa on a sunny summer evening, I notice Madrid's resilience manifesting itself in the form of friends gathering and enjoying a caña on a terraza. The happiness and laughter emanating from the streets is contagious, and with every step I take towards Reina Sofía, I feel my anticipation rise. This is my first visit to a museum since the start of the lockdown, and I was beyond excited to take it all in again.



I enter through the back entrance of the museum, encountering absolutely no one until I go through the customary security check and then am let in through to the exhibits. I was surprised to not undergo any more safety checks. Cova had reported that at the Prado, each visitor's temperature was taken using a scanner before being allowed to enter the museum. "It gave me a greater sense of security, it kind of felt like going through an airport," she tells me.

The lack of heightened checks at Reina Sofia may have concerned me had it not taken me passing by several rooms before encountering another visitor. I'm also reassured by signs indicating the safety precautions taken by the museum and the constant reminder to maintain two meters of distance from an apparently imaginary visitor who's in proximity.

I pass through several rooms of a temporary Jorg Immendorf exhibit that was unfortunately ending the very same day. The silence and emptiness allow me to flow through the rooms in a more natural way, not having to worry about bumping into someone or taking too long in front of a painting. Cova has warned me of this but it still feels uniquely unfamiliar: "Your relationship with the art definitely changes. There's less art and more space, so you're able to take a few extra minutes in front of each painting."



I start to get used to viewing art in this setting, comparing it to the usual experience of zig-zagging my way through a guided tour group to get a better view of Picasso's Guernica. In fact, the room where I encounter the most people is the one that exhibits the Guernica, but even that room has only around 20 people in it.

As vast sections of the museums remain closed (only the first and second floor of Reina Sofía is open to the public, whereas only approximately a third of the Prado is open), many of the main pieces of the permanent exhibitions have been moved to be included in the smaller space. This has both positive and negative effects on the museum experience.

“You’re able to see most of the main showpieces of the Prado in a few hours and you don’t have to walk as much whereas normally you’d have to spend all day to see them,” says Cova. “But it also slightly takes away from the experience. The way the art works were positioned before had a logical, historical and artistic flow to it. Now it’s all kind of mixed up.”

As an example, Cova mentions how El Bosco’s *The Garden of Earthly Delight*, the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* and other works were previously all situated in one room. Now, the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* is placed in a hallway and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is not even exhibited.

Cova gives another example: “Earlier, when you would see Goya’s paintings, you would first see the paintings depicting battle scenes, then you’d walk into a dark room where you would see the 14 Black Paintings that were taken from the walls of his house. Now, only three of those paintings are exhibited and are spread around in random rooms with paintings that have nothing to do with the theme. It takes away from the effect that walking into the darkened room has, and changes the atmosphere entirely.”



I complete my visit to Reina Sofia at the exact time that the museum closes. Two hours is all it took to view all that's displayed. As we are ushered out, I sit down on a step in Plaza de Juan Goytisolo in front of the museum, trying to take it all in. The pinkish blue sunset sky with its white wispy clouds remind me of a Magritte painting. It serves as the perfect backdrop to Madrid's bubbling life; young children playing and cycling, abuelos having a drink at the terraza and a few young boys practicing parkour.

Madrid feels alive again. I'm extremely grateful for this experience, and would absolutely recommend visiting the museums, especially while Madrid's treasures are solely for Madrid's residents, before the city is overrun with tourists once again.

**By Rishabh Agrawal (IG: [@rishabh.a](#))**

Also read our article on [Madrid's museums: The obvious and not-so-obvious \(and how to get in for free\)](#)

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# Lockdown diaries: Jake, musician usually on tour & performing concerts across Europe

*It's these small acts of kindness that help me survive as an artist, since my income evaporated due to the breakdown of the gig economy.*

Jake was on tour in Germany and had just finished up his second of 50 concerts lined up across Europe. Now that's all been canceled and he can't book any new shows, not even for the winter months, because venues don't know if they'll ever open up again. The music industry and artists in general are suffering greatly, but there are a few (little) things we can do to help.

Jake Shane is a professional singer-songwriter and guitarist who makes his living performing concerts in Europe. He's been living in Madrid for most of the last 7 years. You can check

out Jake's music on [Bandcamp](#), [YouTube](#), [Spotify](#), and follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Songs, videos and social media [links here](#).

## **What was your life like just before the lockdown vs. today?**

Much of my daily life is occupied by four main activities: writing songs, rehearsing them, booking concerts, and touring. I was on tour in Germany when I received news that Spain was going to shut down, having just finished the second of 50 shows I had planned for the first half of this year.

My remaining concerts for that and several subsequent tours were canceled. On top of that, I'm now finding that venues simply are not booking new concerts even for the winter months at the moment, because they don't know if their business will ever open again. Fortunately, in Madrid I can still rehearse (sorry neighbors!) and write, at least now that I've adopted measures to help me make the most of this time at home (more on that below).



## **How has the lockdown impacted your industry?**

The music industry is suffering greatly, and artists are struggling to figure out how to monetize their music during this time when all touring is prohibited and most people already prefer Spotify to purchasing albums. In addition to streaming concerts online and giving lessons, artists are asking people to purchase our music digitally and setting up Patreon pages. Especially now, social media is king, and sharing artists' music with your friends is an easy and free way to help.

## **Have you noticed any acts of kindness or uplifting**

## **things recently?**

I've had friends reach out to me and ask if they can help in any way which has been amazing. I've also made my online concerts donation-based with a link to a virtual tip jar and people from different parts of the world have been kind enough to contribute.

It's these small acts of kindness that help me survive as an artist, since my income evaporated due to the breakdown of the gig economy. I hope touring will be permitted at some point this year but I'm very grateful for the support I've received during this tough time.

## **How are you coping?**

I started not using the internet until 4pm! This one change sharpens my focus on writing, composing and reading, as well as reduces my stress levels and improves my mood dramatically. Usually I abide by a version of this rule, but found myself faltering during the first week and a half of the lockdown. I was glued to the screen, constantly checking for updates.

Waiting for the U.S. to suffer the same fate was like watching a ship sailing straight for Shipwreck Island and refusing to alter its course. I couldn't concentrate on my work at all. So I returned to my tested method of limiting internet usage. I turn my phone and computer on airplane mode at night, which helps avoid taking a peek at messages in the morning.

**What goals are you hoping to achieve as our time in lockdown continues?**

I'm working on new songs, deepening my knowledge of music theory, and figuring out how to make money with music from home. I've started giving songwriting and guitar lessons on Skype, and am trying to complete a certain number of instrumental songs before the lockdown is over.

**What's the first thing you'll do once this lockdown is over?**

Go camping.

**Have a listen to Jake's April Song**

- Check out Jake Shane's music on [Bandcamp](#), [YouTube](#), [Spotify](#), and follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Songs, videos and social media [links here](#)

**Check out all [Madrid lockdown diaries](#)**

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# Madrid Art Week 2020: a handy guide to make the most of it

It's the most wonderful time of the year! It's [Madrid Art Week](#) and that means that this weekend will be chock-a-block of art fairs. But how to you know which one to choose? If, like me, you have a *punte* and a free schedule, you might consider just hitting up as many as possible and it's certainly do-able but if you don't have as much time, money or energy, here's a handy guide.

## 7 Madrid art fairs to check out this weekend:

### 1. [Drawing Room](#)



I'm going to start out with [Drawing Room](#) which is my personal favourite and the one I try to head to every year. I like Drawing Room because it's smaller and a bit more intimate than a lot of the other fairs. It takes place at the Palacio Santa Barbara at Alonso Martinez which has 2 stories, I believe. As the name suggests, Drawing Room focuses on illustration and so you often get to see art that's a lot more naturally inspired, a bit more minimal and often very intricate. Drawing Room is open to the public from Thursday Feb 26th and runs until Sunday March 1st. General entrance is 10 euros.

## 2. [Art Madrid](#)



Next up is my second favourite, [Art Madrid](#). If you want a bigger art fair feel with more diversity of art styles and mediums but don't want to go for broke with ARCO, Art Madrid is a good alternative. I have come across many of my favourite artists there like Lino Lago and Alejandra Atares (seriously check their work out!) but as it's bigger, it does warrant a bit more time. I would say you should expect to spend at least

2 hours there. Art Madrid takes place at the Crystal Gallery part of Cibeles and it is already open to the public. It runs from Wed 26th to March 1st and a general ticket will set you back 15 euros. There is a student discount available though which will cost you 12 euros.

### 3. [Urvanity](#)



Next up, I would recommend [Urvanity](#) which takes place at COAM. If you like your art to be a little out there, brighter and more unusual, then Urvanity is the one for you. I went to Urvanity for the first time just last year and I quite enjoyed it. The art there is bursting with colour and a lot of the art was very political. There were lots of messages about the excesses of capitalism, feminism, the costs of war, and concerns about the environment.

Urvanity doesn't pull its punches and that social consciousness often carries over into the art talks that they

have every day throughout the fair. These talks are FREE and completely open (unlike at most of the other fairs where you have to reserve in advance) and they discuss challenges and concerns facing the contemporary art world and today's artists. Urvanity also takes art to the streets by sponsoring major street art projects throughout the city which you can find on their website under Art Walls. Urvanity is only open to the public from Friday 28th to Sunday March 1st. A one day ticket costs 10 euros while a 3 day *abono* costs 25 euros.

#### 4. [Hybrid](#)



The other big alternative art fair is [Hybrid](#). Hybrid is the cool kids art fair. It takes place in a swanky hotel in Malasaña, the art is set up in rooms on multiple floors and it boasts a ton of musical guests and a cool hang out/party space as well. Hybrid welcomes the more provocative works. If you're looking for art that's more experimental and if you want to get real up close and personal with the artists, then you would probably love Hybrid. Hybrid takes place at the Hotel

Petit Palace and is open to visits from Friday February 28th to Sunday March 1st. A one day ticket will cost 9 euros while the 3 day *abono* is just 14 euros. You can save a euro if you buy your ticket online.

## 5. [Salon de Arte Moderno](#)



[Image source](#)

Now if you want to get off the beaten path and head to an art fair that's a little bit less well known, head down to Salamanca for the [Salon de Arte Moderno](#). This art fair takes place at a nondescript building at Calle Velazquez, 12 which is actually where Drawing Room was held the first year I attended it. SAM is open from February 24th to March 1st. If you want some help navigating the artworks on display, you can sign up for one of their twice daily guided tours. There is also a fantastic gastronomic component to SAM where selected restaurants in the Salamanca neighbourhood like Amazonico or El Perro y La Galleta have a special, art-inspired dish just

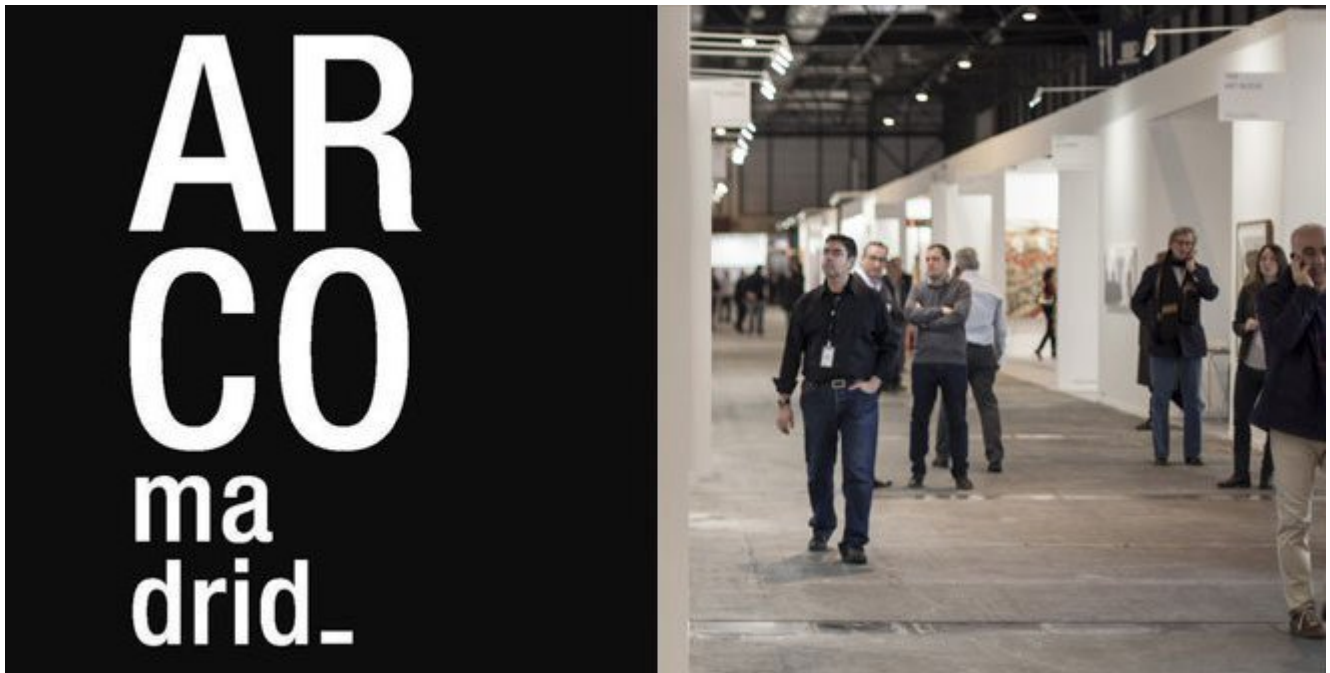
for the duration of the fair. SAM is free! You just need to sign up for an invitation on their website.

## 6. [Just Mad](#)



[Just Mad](#) is another pretty big fair which has a little bit of everything. I would particularly recommend it for fans of sculpture as I saw quite a few sculptural pieces there last year. It takes place at Palacio Neptuno just off the Triangle of Art. For me, Just Mad was the most impersonal art fair that I went to. I feel that it is garnered more towards art buyers and collectors instead of just the casual viewer but there are a lot of great pieces so if you're happy to let the art speak for itself and you don't necessarily want to meet a lot of artists, don't let me dissuade you. And of course, you can have wonderful, enlightening conversations with the gallery representatives as well. There are also guided tours you can sign up for on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. General entrance tickets cost 13 euros while the reduced tickets (for students) are just 7!

## 7. [ARCO](#)



And the last one is the elephant in the room, the big Kahuna, the mother of all art fairs in Madrid, [ARCO](#). I have never been to ARCO, although I want to, but I'm sure it's a tremendous experience and something you need at least half a day to visit. There are discussions and meetings between Spanish and international museums. It takes place at IFEMA and is open to the public from midday on Friday until Sunday 1st. General entrance on Friday and Saturday is 40 euros while it's 30 on Sunday. Students meanwhile pay only 20 euros any day!

**Hope you enjoy [Madrid Art Week](#)!**

Whoo, we made it to the end of the list! If you read all of this, I salute you and I hope you have a wonderful weekend, discovering new artists and talking to them about their work. Don't be shy! Remember, artists *want* their work to be seen and

I have honestly never come across an artist who wasn't happy and excited to talk about their pieces with me. Art is for everyone, including the non-industry casuals like you perhaps and me. Enjoy! But be sure to pace yourself and wash your hands.

*\*Most images are from [Esmadrid.com](http://Esmadrid.com), Madrid's official tourism website. Feature image is from [@artmadridferia](https://www.instagram.com/artmadridferia)*

**By Kristen Wiltshire (IG: @makidocious)**

*When she's not at a museum or the movies, Kristen can usually be found trying to make headway in her giant pile of books or her miles long Netflix queue. She also runs [Madrid Art and Culture](https://www.facebook.com/MadridArtandCulture), a Facebook group dedicated to Madrid's myriad cultural offerings.*

**Also check out:**

[Art lover's guide to Madrid: 7 resources to keep you up to date](#)

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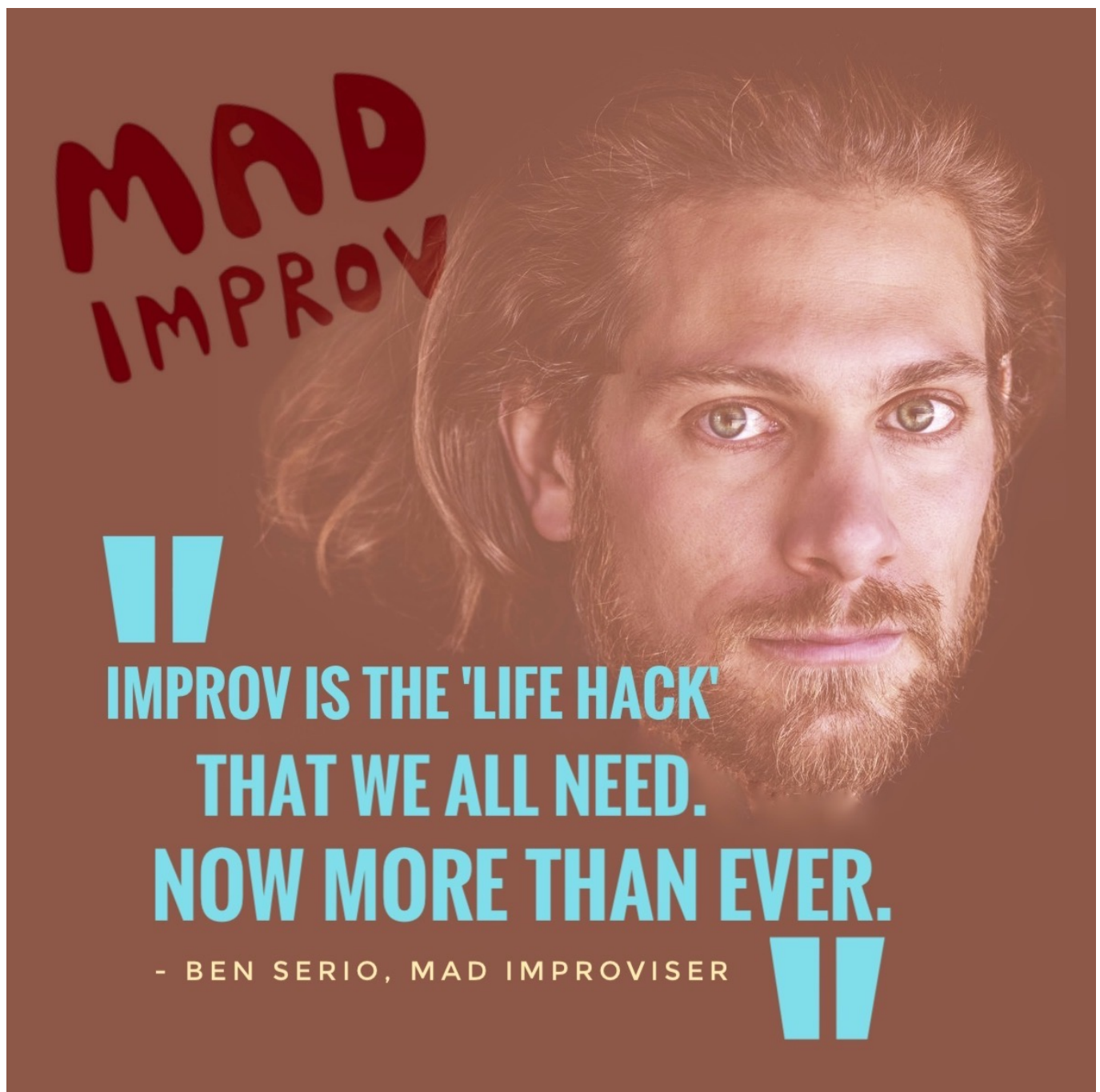
# Mad Improv – shows and courses of the unexpected

If you've ever ventured to Lavapiés on a Thursday night you may well have felt the vibrant pulse of English language entertainment beating to its own rhythm at [La Escalera de Jacob](#). The long-established indy theatre hosts [MAD Improv](#) – Madrid's go-to group for all things improv in English. The group offers up their [weekly show](#) (now in its third season) to audiences of native and non-native English speakers alike, as reflected in the multiple reviews on their [Trip Advisor page](#). They're now the 44<sup>th</sup> highest-rated show in all of Madrid, no less.



Their show formats include MAD About You, an improvised chat show complete with improvised interviews with audience members and an improvised house band, and MAD Monologues where fresh stand up material from comics on the local stand up scene inspires the mad improv that follows. But coming to see a MAD Improv show on a Thursday night is, for some, just the beginning of a deeper and ever-surprising journey into doing improvisation themselves.

## Improv training



That's because MAD Improv, which began life in 2014, run [courses and workshops](#). This month their flagship Green Course for beginners and near-beginners starts for the 7<sup>th</sup> time, as well as their Blue Course, specially designed for those with existing improv training, such as their own Green Course.



[Steve Loader](#), one of the founding members of MAD Improv, is the teacher of their beginners course. He describes the experience as:

*Witnessing a brilliant whirlwind of personal discoveries and*

*magic Eureka moments as participants grasp the basics of improv and run with them. The feedback we get from our alumni is proof that not only anyone can learn improv but also that improv turns out to be much more than just a type of performance, but something that feeds into everyday life.*

One student from their last Green Course, Carlos, put it like this:

*It's such a good environment, Steve is so enthusiastic and patient that we are all relaxed and lose our shyness and inhibitions. It's more than educational, it's therapeutic. I've received a training in spontaneity and I love it!*

## **Flexing creative muscles**



As committing to regular participation on a course isn't for everyone, every Sunday at [Espacio en Blanco](#) the MAD Improvisers offer their weekly [MAD Improv Gym](#), an open drop-in session for anyone who wants to try their hand at improv. The Gym also attracts a group of regulars and is always followed by post-improv drinks. According to Steve:

*Between 10 and 20 people come every week to our Gym. It's always formed the foundation of our community. We love offering the sessions.*



Steve has been a Madrid resident for 6 years and also runs [courses in clown](#), physical theatre and [scripted theatre](#). In fact, the MAD Improv community acts not only as a meeting point for anyone interested in improv in English, but also as a skills hub for the wider English-speaking arts community.

So, maybe 2020 is the year to find your own creative beat with some mad improv of your own.

# MAD Improv

- [Website](#), [Facebook](#) & IG: [@mad\\_improv](#)
  - [Show listings](#)
  - [TripAdvisor](#)
- 

## Art lover's guide to Madrid: 7 resources to keep you up to date

Happy 2020! Perhaps you're one of the many people who have made various resolutions to start the year afresh and become a better version of yourself. Is one of your resolutions to increase your cultural knowledge and take full advantage of the art offered by this great city? Even if you're not the resolution type and you're just looking for some guidance in terms of where to find out more about art in Madrid, never fear! We're here to guide you to the relevant information.

### 1. [EsMadrid](#)



Now let's say you don't speak Spanish. In that case, your best choice to find information about art in English in Madrid is from the Art and Culture section of Madrid's official tourism website, [EsMadrid](#). In addition to English and Spanish, this site is available in 7 other languages, including Japanese and Russian. Now one of its great pluses is that it breaks down the various tourist passes available like the Paseo del Arte Pass which grants the holder one visit to the permanent collection of each of the city's main museums, the Prado, The Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza. This pass is great for visitors who are just in the city for a short while and who only want to dive into the big ticket sites but there are other passes which give you access to more museums for periods such as ten to fifteen days for the consummate art lover.

EsMadrid's great strength is the breadth of its scope – it covers cultural centres to exhibition halls to house museums and contains the most pertinent information at a glance, including the location, price, opening hours and best transport options. And if you want a great overview of Madrid's art offerings, be sure to take a gander at the Art in Madrid Guide PDF which is an unbeatable introduction to both the leading museums and their holdings as well as some of the lesser known but just as formative art centres like the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, just off of Sol.

## 2. [Time Out Madrid](#)



Now if you're looking for information that is a bit more curated, don't miss [Time Out Madrid](#). While the English version of their website is not quite as comprehensive as the Spanish one, there are still a number of articles, which are constantly updated, highlighting the most popular, current exhibitions, free art, street art and graffiti as well as the city's most celebrated paintings and museums.

Time Out is an incredibly well-known and versatile publication with branches all over the world and it has even recently launched a print magazine here in Madrid which releases monthly. You can often find the print magazine being given out for free at major metro stations just after release, or later, in trendy cafes, independent bookshops and some libraries. I would highly recommend grabbing a copy if you can because it goes into even more detail of certain expositions and features some recommendations and interviews which are exclusive to the magazine.

### 3. [Madrid Diferente](#)



Continuing on to Spanish-language recommendations, another favourite is [Madrid Diferente](#). Similar to Time Out Madrid, Madrid Diferente publishes a [weekly agenda](#) of things to do over the entire upcoming week, not just the weekend. Their picks are often eclectic and a little bit off the beaten path. I almost always discover some activity or event that I've never heard of before and that is only happening for just this weekend and that's why I try to check every Thursday because you don't want to miss out!

Madrid has so much to offer it can be overwhelming but here you have a streamlined list of options. Now, if you check their "Es Capital" section, you will be exposed to a host of activities and spaces that are intimate and rewarding like Madrid's smallest photo gallery or a self-guided tour of Madrid's most unusual, outdoor sculptures. And if you want to kill two birds with one stone, Madrid Diferente's writers have recently begun including suggestions for recommended restaurants or cafes near to the gallery or museum they're currently highlighting. A win win, in my book!

#### 4. [Madrid Free](#)



Perhaps your number one New Year's resolution is to sort out your finances and you're afraid that this is all sounding very expensive. Well, did you know that there's a website dedicated solely to free cultural activities in Madrid? It's called [Madrid Free](#) and it has a [dedicated section for Expositions](#)

which is updated frequently. It also covers exhibitions from contemporary art galleries as well as the ones from museums and cultural centres like CentroCentro Cibeles and the Matadero. If you want even more up to the minute information on free activities, be sure to also follow them on Facebook if you have it because they update it often.

## 5. [Arte Informado](#)



So if you want the absolute, most comprehensive list of temporary art offerings in the city, look no further than [Arte Informado](#). This is basically a holy grail for art lovers as this website aims to serve almost every country in the Iberian-American space and includes a magazine, art courses and art prizes. However, even if you just want to know about art expositions, they compile those too with an incredible search engine that allows you to narrow down your choices by date, city or country and even specify the type of art.

At this very moment, if you search for exhibitions in Madrid, narrowing it down no further, it shows 19,787 exhibitions available. You can't deny – that's a lot of art. If that sounds like a bit much, Arte Informado also has a weekly newsletter which you can sign up for that delivers some of the most prominent exhibits right into your mailbox.

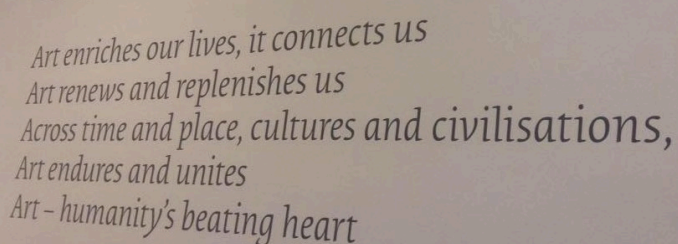
## 6. [Museo del Prado's Instagram account](#)

The logo consists of a solid red rectangle. Inside the rectangle, the text "MUSEO DEL PRADO 200 AÑOS" is written in white, sans-serif, uppercase letters. The text is arranged in five lines: "MUSEO", "DEL", "PRADO", "200", and "AÑOS".

## MUSEO DEL PRADO 200 AÑOS

If you want your Instagram experience to be more positive and enlightening, follow the [Museo del Prado's official account](#): @museoprado. Every weekday morning, they do an Instagram Live video highlighting either an art work or a room of the museum, which is then left up for the rest of the day so you can check it out when you can. Additionally, in their posts, they often share videos showing the mounting of exhibits as well as other day-to-day aspects of working and running a major museum. It's a fantastic, accessible way to flesh out your art history knowledge.

## 7. [Madrid Art and Culture Facebook group](#)

A rectangular image with a light beige background. It contains a quote in a dark grey, serif font, arranged in five lines.

*Art enriches our lives, it connects us  
Art renews and replenishes us  
Across time and place, cultures and civilisations,  
Art endures and unites  
Art - humanity's beating heart*

Finally if you'd like to get more of my insight into Madrid's cultural goings-on, feel free to join my Facebook group, [Madrid Art and Culture](#), which is meant to showcase the many different sides of this city, although it is quite heavy on art and film. I created it about a year and a half ago and the group now has just over 1400 members with frequent posts about film festivals, art exhibits, plays and much more.

Furthermore, as it's a Facebook group, all members are able to post about activities and events that interest them or that they are taking part in.

**I hope I've given you the tools to hit the ground running this year when it comes to art. To a culturally enriching 2020!**

**By Kristen Wiltshire (IG: @makidocious)**

*When she's not at a museum or the movies, Kristen can usually be found trying to make headway in her giant pile of books or her miles long Netflix queue. She also runs [Madrid Art and Culture](#), a Facebook group dedicated to Madrid's myriad cultural offerings.*

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## **Madrid Artist Showcase: Local Composer and Violinist Santiago Vokram**

Madrid's vibrant music scene is full of gems and untold stories. Despite winter taking hold, there are many upcoming gigs with emerging artists and performers. For each of these, there is an untold story waiting to be showcased. [Santiago Vokram](#) is a local performing artist who wields a violin to serenade his audiences. I have had the good fortune to witness him in action and interview him about his life and creative journey.

My first impression of him was that his attire and unique sense of style reflected that **he is a person who breathes in creative energy**. He can take the sound to areas I didn't think

violins were capable.

So without further ado, here's his story and upcoming dates so you, too, can experience his music.

## Santiago Vokram's musical story and style

Hailing from Mexico City, Santiago began his career as a musician there in Rock-Celtic fusion band *La Agonia de Leonara* at 13. He devoted himself fully to practicing the violin, and growing as a performer, citing it as an escape from the empty spaces of life. He would go on to study music at Mexico's elite *Escuela Nacional de Musica*.

Santi reminisced on how in his youth he was inspired by the Spanish band *Mago de Oz* and when he learned that the group had split, he relocated to Madrid to join José Andrëa & *Uróoboros*, the next project of original *Mago de Oz* members.

Santi remained modest when describing his ascension to **dreaming of meeting his heroes and then having the opportunity to create alongside them** in his newly adopted country. He became deeply embedded in Madrid's thriving creative scene and began performing alongside other revered local artists such as [Ataca Paca](#), and on the international circuit with renowned Gypsy musician [Robby Lakatos](#).

## Where he is now



Santi's current band, which reflects his personal expression, is *La Sonrisa de Cibeles*. This trio seeks to create something unprecedented as a cross-over fusion of world-classical and pop music. Its members are **Santi on Violin, Benja Bravo on Double Bass and Germán Nuñez on Guitar**. Their goal is to help a younger audience expand their perception of "classical" music and to disrupt the local music scene by introducing sounds with less precedent.

Santi's style as a performer ranges from classical to unconventional. The violin is an essential part of traditional mariachi groups and can be weaved into classical jazz, rock, folk and other improvisational contexts. In addition to his solo-acts and collaboration with other artists, Santi performs at upscale events and in luxury hotels seeking to provide a stylized ambiance. Notably, **Netflix has utilized Santiago as a creative asset** in the mariachi ensemble featured in *Narcos Mexico*.

# Our connection

What Santiago and I share is that both of us have collaborated on creative projects with the versatile public relations strategist, programmer, event planner, and art instructor Vesta Rounsaville. Vesta manages Santi's social media presence and coordinates his routine concerts in Madrid's venues. With her help, he has managed to expand his circle of collaborators to Madrid's international community of musicians, comedians, and actors. Additionally, his concerts have raised funds for [Madrid for Refugees](#), a prominent volunteer group.

Santi confided in me that as his visibility increased, he became exposed to uglier elements of the music scene noting that "adoration can become insanity or envy." He went on to say that **"If you have a vision, you need to improve it little by little."**

Despite a lack of a conventional road map to follow, coupled with at times a lack of financial security, **Santi never wavered in his pursuits** despite sometimes deeply missing his parents in Mexico, or his loved ones whenever he'd tour for prolonged periods.

## Upcoming shows

You can be captivated by Santiago's stage personality and violin prowess at Teatro-Bar Hipócritas (La Latina) this Saturday the 23rd at 22:00 where La Sonrisa de Cibeles will enchant their audience.

You can also catch them at [Microteatro Por Dinero](#)'s mini-concert festival Microsound in December (Malasaña/Gran Vía). Tickets for the concert in Teatro-Bar Hipócritas can be purchased via [Entradium](#).

# Santiago Vokram y La Sorrisa de Cibeles

POP jazz fusión Latina clásica

3 + 10 + 17 diciembre



microteatro

# Contact

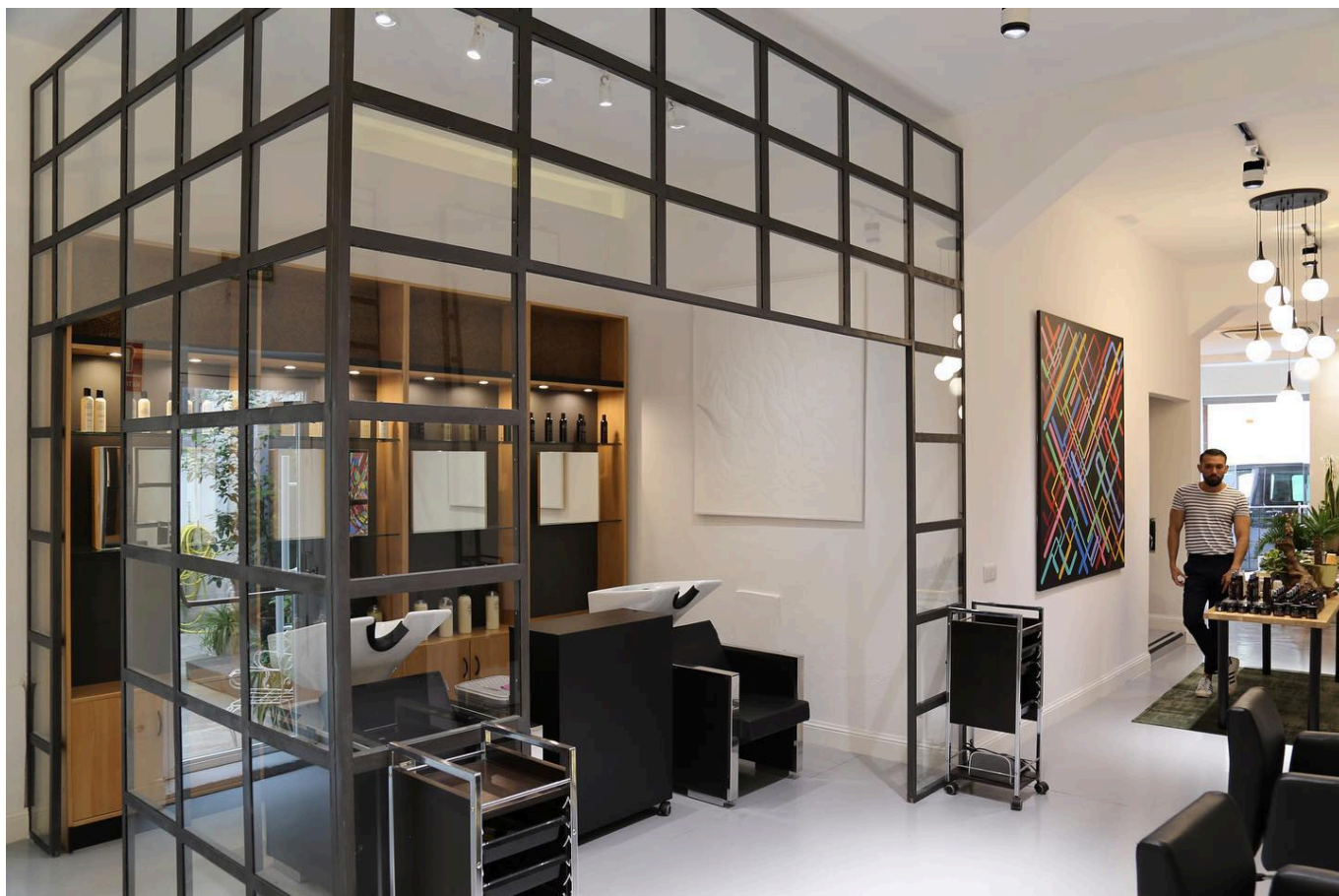
If you would like for Santiago Vokram to perform at an event, or to utilize his work for branded content, contact [Vesta Rounsaville](#).

*If you know of any other Madrid-based artists that you'd like to showcase on Naked Madrid, don't hesitate to [get in touch with us to submit a post](#).*

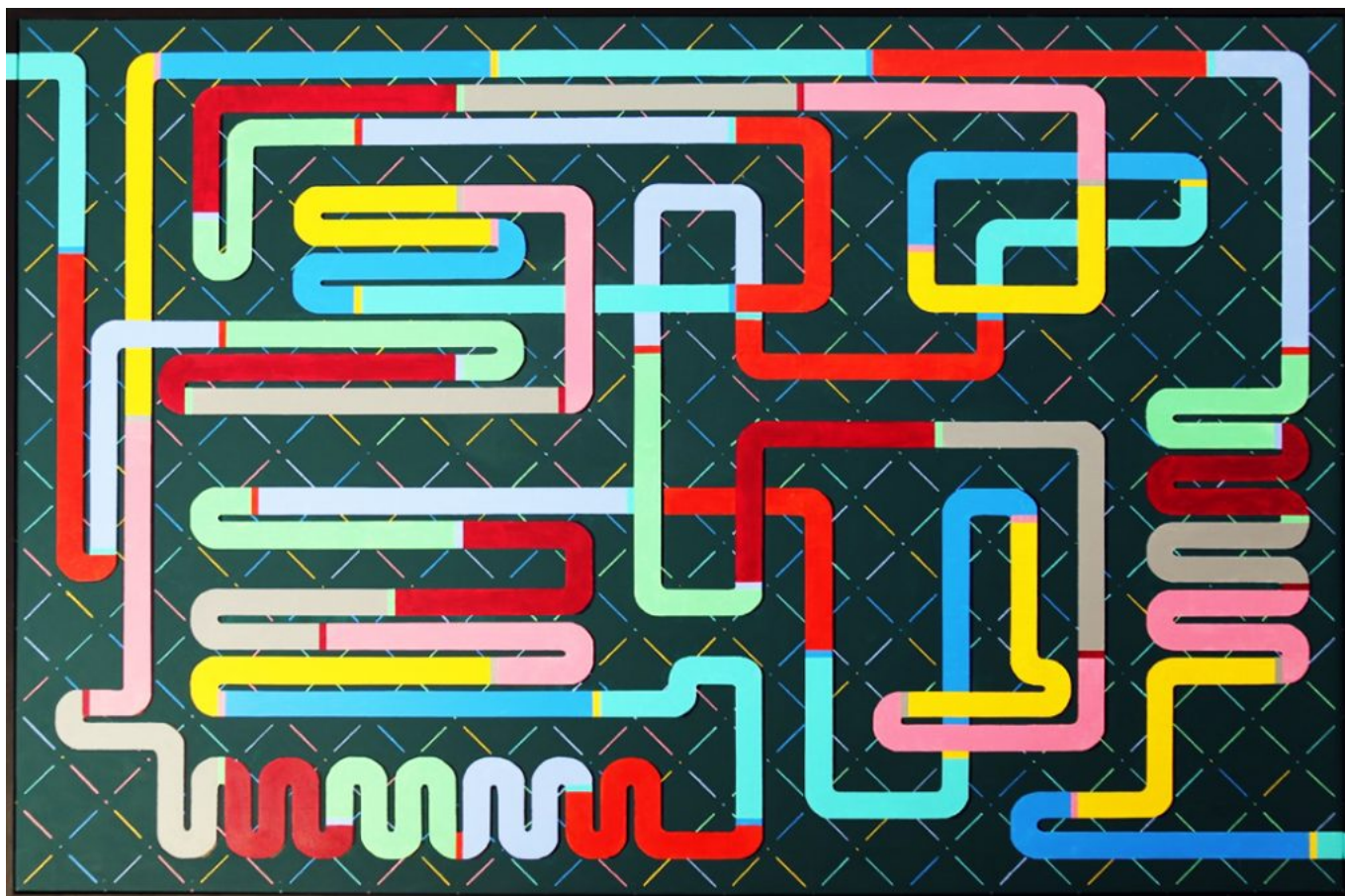
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## Ara Crinis – indulge in an artful hair salon experience

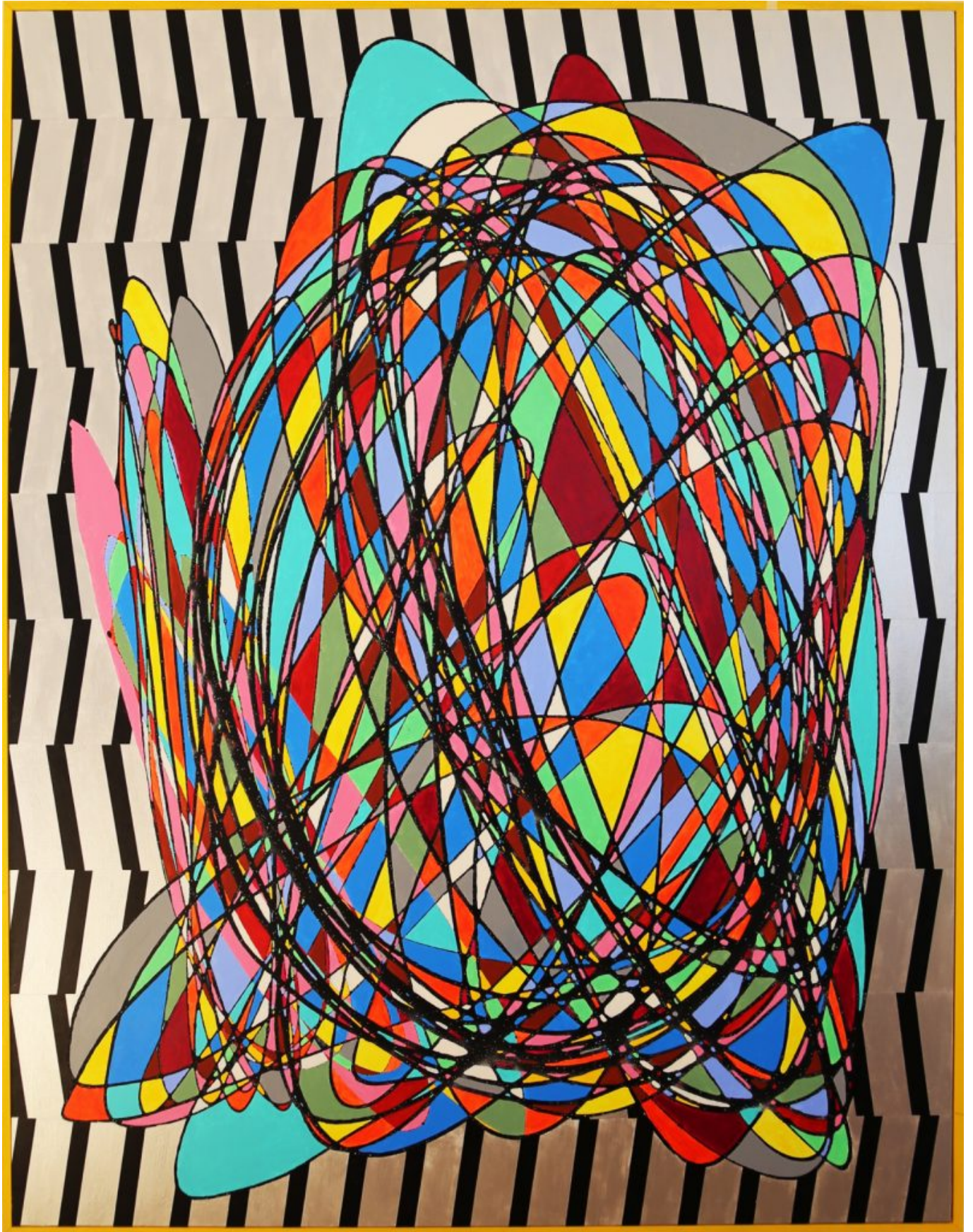
Soft lights. Greens. Pastels and contemporary art. Not something you expect of a hair and styling salon! Thus you're greeted by a surprise which then transforms into an inexplicable comfort – a place as delightful and friendly as its kind and charismatic owners.



As you walk in, you have the beautiful exhibit of contemporary artist Tomas Gracia. This particular one has been designed around the concept of chaos seeking its own natural order.



The more you reflect on it, the more lost you seem. Lines and hues seem to be in search of their own destinies. Maybe that's the exact point of the exhibit – to have your internal chaos muse over the edgy lines and vibrant tones of Tomas' artwork.



The exhibits are temporary and will include all categories of art and literature in the future, they tell me. The open patio will also house many interesting events.



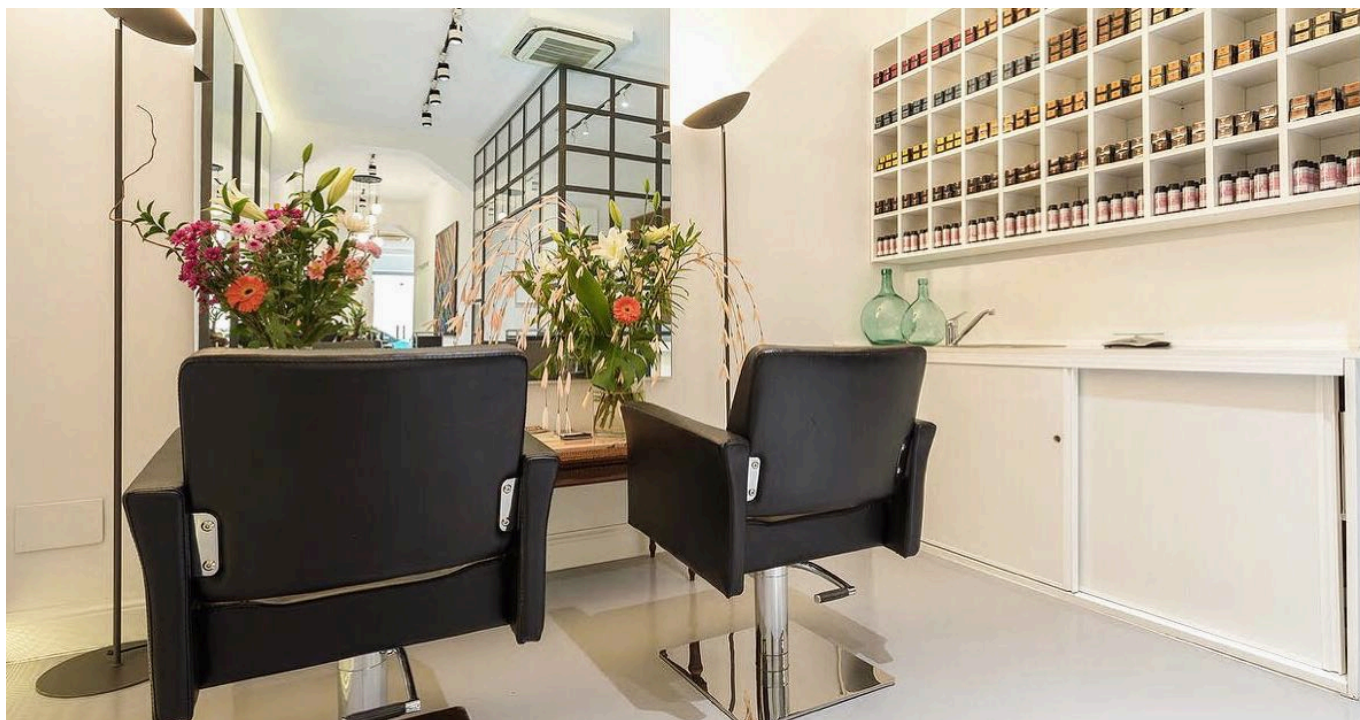
The area of the salon is beautifully decorated with lively greens and flowery tones, immediately transporting you into a spring-like feeling. The collection of books on display and the smell of freshly-brewed coffee add to the urbanism of the ambience.



The serene patio at the end, of course, completes the place beautifully.



As distinct as its name, *Ara Crinis* (which literally translates from Latin into 'a beautiful lock of hair') is the delightful service and experience you receive here. The salon works with the concept of aromatherapy and organics around every service they offer. The cherry on top are the very artful Neo and Carlo, who are the heart of the place.



Hop on over either for a walk around their artful decor, a pleasant cup of coffee with the owners, an exhibit of the next talented artist of the month or an indulgent hair experience – this little spot in Chueca is unlikely to disappoint.

***By Arabdha Sudhir***

***Photos by Carlo Calzolari***

## **Ara Crinis**

- [Website](#) [Facebook](#) & Instagram: [@ara.crinis](#)
  - **Address:** Calle San Lorenzo, 5
  - **Metro:** Tribunal or Alonso Martínez
-

# 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.

## // 100 OF MADRID'S NO-FRILLS BARS //

23 November 2018



*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)

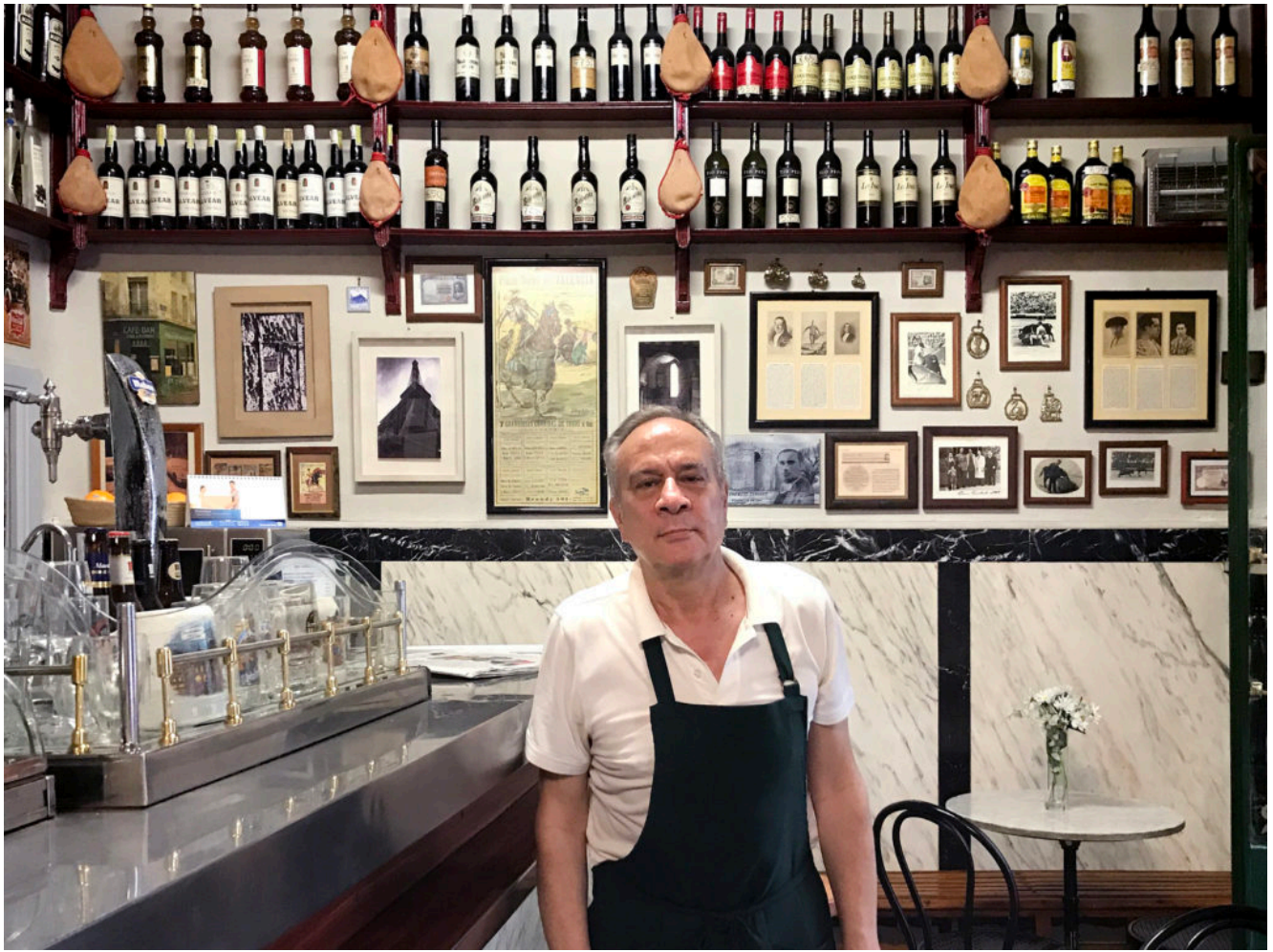


Botón de Oro, a centenarian haberdashery featured in: [An archive of places Madrid has lost](#)

## 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.