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All about **S**an Pedro de Alcántara

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San Pedro, actually ...



Marbella's kid sister is sporting a sassy new identity as distinct from her glitzy sibling as Hove is from Brighton, writes Laurence Dollimore

WHERE snarled lines of traffic once backed up along the coast road, a striking urban boulevard sprouting trendy pavement cafes has reclaimed the once maligned San Pedro de Alcántara.

With a new skating rink, a skate park and a hat trick of new children's parks, the seaside town is unrecognisable from a few years back. Out are the traffic fumes and tawdriness. In is a sense of space and style.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the town's head-turning new footbridge with its serpentine coils. It is doing for San Pedro what the Golden Gate did for San Francisco, or the Guggenheim did for Bilbao.

But although very much part of the municipality of Marbella, let there be no confusion: The people who live here are from 'San Pedro actually', a town that has forged its own shiny new identity that's quite separate from Marbs, yet complementary to its jet-setting sibling.

It's not unlike the evolution of Hove, in England - a borough in East Sussex that lived under the shadow of its better-known neighbour, Brighton. 'Hove actually', residents would retort with indignation when asked whether they lived in Brighton.

And so it is with San Pedro, a town 10km west from Marbella which has been reborn over the last decade as a modernised microcosm of Spain.

But some things have never changed in the 15 years I have been visiting the town named after 16th



century Franciscan friar, St Peter of Alcántara. The evenings still see veteran San Pedranos gather on shady benches around St Peter's statue, outside the parish church; the traditional Saturday market remains a weekly highlight; and you can bet your bottom *centimo* the pavement cafes and ice cream parlours are heaving on Sunday nights in summer, when Spanish families enjoy their ritual *paseo* along the prom. What has kept San Pedro special has been its ability to hang on to its Spanish persona in the face of massive investment from Marbella Town Hall - nearly €100 million.

It must have felt like winning the lottery jackpot but San Pedro has apparently spent the money wisely.

The new central boulevard, crowned by its snaking pedestrian bridge, has turned the town from an also-ran suburb into a spanking new social hub where whole families come to skate on the all-weather artificial ice rink and enjoy the regular food truck festivals.

A victory for urban planning, office workers make a beeline for its congenial cocktail bars on Friday nights.

The bridge may be more Gehry's Guggenheim than typical Andalus but it has forged strong new connections with visitors who used to think Marbs ended at Puerto Banus.

The €6 million boulevard it meanders over boasts a new amphitheatre and children's play areas and is now the official site of the town's four-day feria, the last of the year in Andalucía, timed to celebrate St Peter's feast day on October 18.

Other welcome upgrades include the €85 million tunnel diverting dangerous high-speed traffic below the town centre, and a much-needed underground car park.

"San Pedro really does have it all," says Sean Woolley, 47, CEO of Cloud Nine Properties, who has run his company from town for 15 years.

"The new boulevard and urban park have become a magnet for new restaurants and bars and it has created a place that now offers some-

pub
Charles



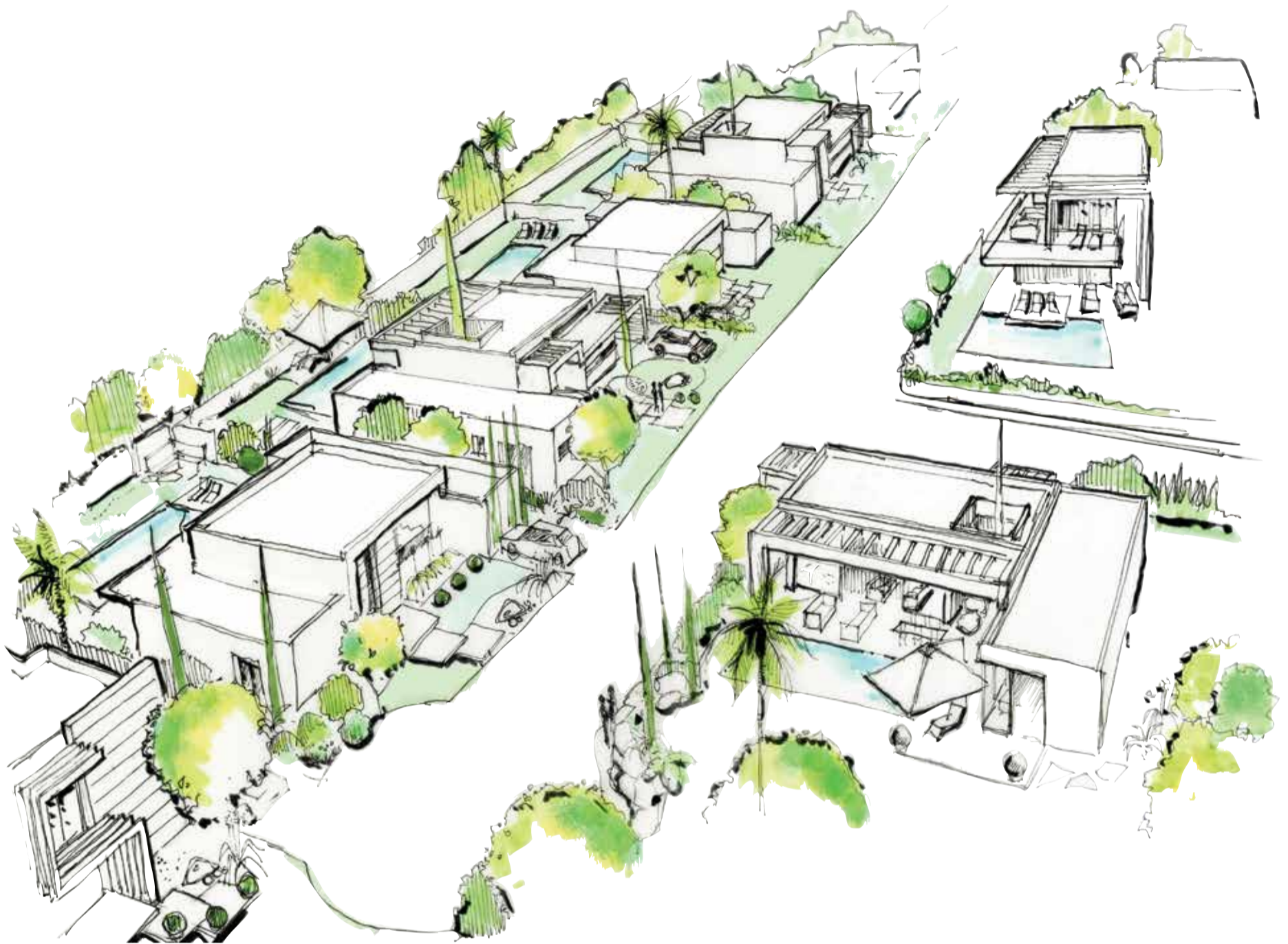
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Friendly and welcoming

From Page 19

everyone.”
 “There is this charm and tradition of a typical Spanish town fused with trendy and cosmopolitan additions, from organic cafes to lively wine bars. When you couple this with its sandy beaches and fabulous promenade, San Pedro is pretty much perfect.”
 Beneath the glitzy exterior, *sanpedreños* are as friendly and unassuming as they were in their 19th century farming days.

And if anything is a reminder of those rustic origins it's San Pedro's resident pig! On any given Sunday this sociable creature and town mascot can be seen strolling around its new neighbourhood, uttering contented grunts of approval.

Army General Marquez Manuel Gutierrez de la Concha founded the farming colony in the 1860s when he acquired nearly 5,000 acres of agricultural land spanning Marbella, Benahavis and Estepona.

But with malaria scything through the local populace and poor irrigation, the Marques introduced a series

of innovative reforms, including an agricultural school for local farm workers, river bridges, dams and state-of-the-art machinery. Workers soon flocked from



CHEERS: Writer Laurence with pals

Valencia, Murcia, Granada and Almeria, and San Pedro grew into a size-

able municipality.

A statue of Gutierrez now stands next to the old town, keeping paternalistic vigil over his creation.

Although development slowed during the early 20th century when Spain was ravaged by civil war, the town bounced back during the late 1940s and 50s, with street lighting and a main road. But San Pedro has never seen the rampant over-development of other costa resorts. Central to its evolution has been its bustling beach promenade that

links seamlessly to Banus and Marbella, putting the town on the map for cyclists, joggers and walkers. Its beaches fly the prestigious blue flag, the world-wide standard of excellence, while fantastic chiringuitos like Macaao and Guayaba are hotspots for the cool and hip.

The once-barren wasteland between the boulevard and the ocean now sports shops, restaurants, residential communities and world class amenities



SWEET: (Above) sugar mill and (right) beach promenade

like Nueva Alcantara paddle and tennis club, which hosts regular international tournaments. The beachfront also reveals clues to the presence of less-recent visitors – a 3rd century Roman baths and a 16th century watchtower looking out over the panorama of sun worshippers and jet skiers. A new road network has also made San Pedro more accessible to visitors and local chefs have cooked up an exciting dining scene in response.

Just behind the boulevard, Alfredo's traditional Spanish fare is always in big demand while next door La Bodega del Cantinero offers an exciting foodie fusion featuring foie gras with apple and honey, tuna tataki with wasabi mayonnaise and shelves of vintage sherries.

There is this charm and tradition of a typical Spanish town

Further additions like L'impronta, La Buena Vida and Restaurant 1870, where you can enjoy spider crab gazpacho in a scenic garden setting, have made San Pedro a key dining reference.

And there's more. San Pedro has its own leafy satellite suburb in the shape of Guadalmina (Baja and Alta), just west of the town centre.

This exclusive neighbourhood – a kind of western golden mile - boasts multi-million euro mansions galore. Guadalmina Baja is home to ex-Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, who is often seen jogging along the tree-lined avenues, flanked by four burly bodyguards.

Guadalmina Alta, on the opposite side of the A7, has an 18-hole course and the coast's only cable ski lake which thrill-seekers can circuit on water skis or a wakeboard.



Walkie porkie

A LARGE boar-like pig heads San Pedro's list of famous residents and is rapidly becoming the town's mascot.

Mythical creature or not, locals report regularly spotting the porker roaming the streets.

Rumour has it the animal has lived in the town since he was a piglet, and often enjoys a stroll around the old quarter at the weekends.

Friendly to all-comers, the sociable cerdo is especially fond of greeting the dogs that share his 'patch' and reportedly has a special affinity for his canine friends.

Try not to squeal if you cross his path- He's a VIP pig and deserves your respect.

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If you're hunting for a home on the Costa, gorgeous Guadalmina ticks all the boxes, writes Laurence Dollimore

Peaceful Pueblo



THE leafy enclave of Guadalmina on the westerly fringes of San Pedro has become as sought-after an address as Marbella's own 'Golden Mile'. I was lucky enough to spend the summers of my youth here, when Guadalmina Alta became my home away from home. Some 15 years later and this village-sized resort still has an enviable location and a neigh-

bourly feel. It's just five minutes from Puerto Banus, ten minutes from Marbella and an easy seafront stroll from San Pedro and there are all kinds of reasons to make that journey - not least an 18-hole golf course

and a cable ski lake offering adrenalin-charged thrills for the watersports set. The local dining scene is also a lot tastier than 10 years ago, with a score of restaurants offering a feast of multi-ethnic fare, from a new vegan cafe and Japanese wok restaurant to the unrivalled La Rosa Argentinian steak house and the long-established Tricky Ricky's, still doing a roaring trade in traditional English breakfasts.

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TEED UP: Guadalmina golf course

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RESIDENT: Aznar

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PERFECT PARTY

The ideal spot for your kids birthday party...

It's one of the toughest decisions a modern parent has to face: Where do they go for the perfect kids' birthday party? What with peer pressure and finding a venue that will please both the children and their parents, do such places exist? Well, at the Marbella end of the San Pedro Boulevard you'll find Happy Days, an original concept thought up by owners Pascal and Sean. Being family men they were fed up of constantly looking for places to take their kids where everybody could have a great time. This is where the idea of combining an American street food-style diner, an all-weather ice rink and a mini-golf course came from.

RETRO: San Pedro burger bar

Everything in one place! The nine-hole pirate castle is a hit. The Bouncy Castle keeps the smaller and bigger kids entertained for hours. There's even the new addition of 'Foot Pool', what's not to like?! It's easy to see why Happy Days has become a go-to destination since it opened last year. But what about the food? Simple, just visit the authentic Airstream American Diner the epitome of 60's retro cool. If Burgers, hot dogs, buffalo wings, pizzas and nachos don't whet your appetite then the bar most certainly will. "Kids parties are our speciality, they can play mini-golf, jump on the bouncy castle, ice skate and eat their favourite food all in one place," says manager Sebastian. "We offer great all inclusive packages so you are always in control of the cost, we are here to help deliver the perfect party". The Happy Days ethos is to provide their customers with great entertainment in a family friendly and safe environment. Even the dads aren't left out with Live Sports and cold beer served all day long. Choosing Happy Days to host your kids birthday party is an easy decision.

FUN: Treasure chest and bouncy castle

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All about CC La colonia

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San Pedro's evolving one-stop shopping destination is steeped in history and was built by an expat, writes Laurence Dollimore

It is probably best known as the home of McDonald's and Dia, sitting beside the A7 on the outskirts of San Pedro.

But La Colonia shopping centre has so much more to offer, with a fantastic range of shops, services and restaurants, all in one easy location and ample parking for free. One of the true nerve centres of San Pedro, anybody who has lived on the coast for a while will have used the Passion Cafe for meetings, both social and business... before perhaps popping into the clothes shop Twist boutique, next door, or the interior shops such as La Casa Bonita and, now, The King of Cotton across the way.

Yes, this is a great one-stop shop for most things you need, with a golf emporium, an opticians, a card shop, florist and even a pet shop all sitting cheek by jowl.

And don't forget the trades and services specialists, who line the upper floor and include estate agent KMS, currency specialist Rational FX, and interior designer Liana Varini, who is just about to open.

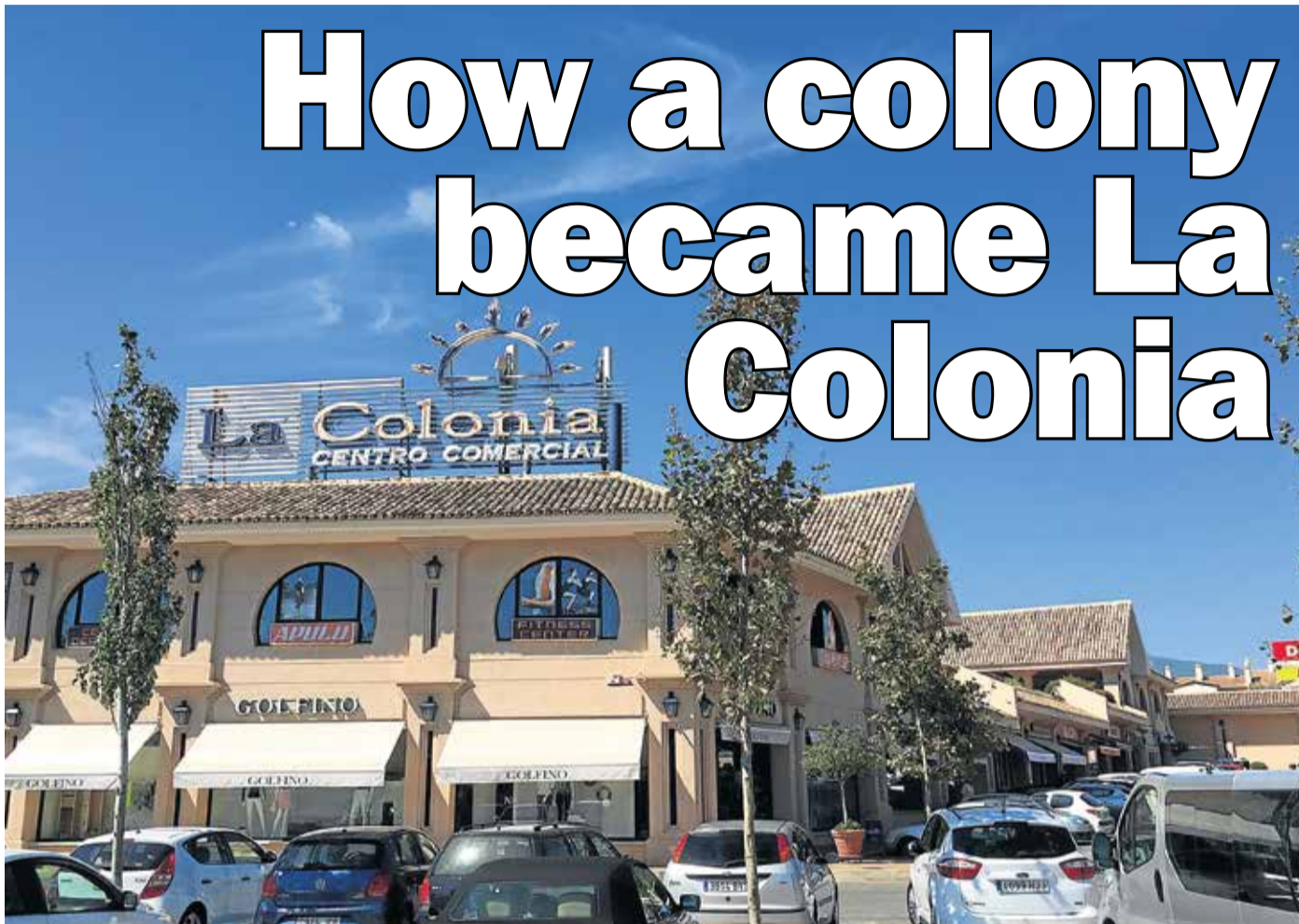
Yet, few people know the great historical significance of the name La Colonia, which comes from its farming colony days and was launched by one of the coast's earliest expat families.

The story starts when Scottish miner John Charles Mackintosh, swapped the chilly Highlands to found his own coal mine just inland from the coast in the early 19th century. He amassed a vast fortune over the next few decades, in particular by exporting his coal from a port depot near Funny Beach, just east of Marbella centre.

Much of it was sold to the British navy.

However the family's luck was not to last and when civil war broke out in the 1930s things became tough and his son John Mackintosh was forced to flee from Marbella to Gibraltar, having much of his property confiscated in the

Continues on next Page



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One-stop shopping

From previous Page

process. He lived out the rest of his days on the Rock, and left £20 million to the government when he passed away in 1940 - much of it helping to fund university fees for Gibraltarians.

He is remembered today, having given his name to the social centre, the John Mackintosh hall.

However, it is back in Spain that he had the most impact, buying up large swathes of land around San Pedro for an unofficial family he created with a Catholic lover from Sevilla.

The Protestant felt so bad about neglecting this 'illegitimate' lover, who he could not marry due to their families' opposing religions, that he gave all the land to her family in his will.

Cue La Colonia, built by the third generation of the Mackintosh family, and still owned now by the fifth generation.

Few people know the history as well as north Londoner businesswoman Jane Waters, who was previously married to a Mackintosh, and now runs popular home decor store La Casa Bonita.

"The history is so interesting," she says, "Even the square here is named after John Mackintosh's mother Maria Luisa.

"It's a great spot, we are so easy to find and there is fantastic parking which makes it really accessible."

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Today the centre is thriving and continues to attract new businesses, like King of Cotton, the place to go for beautifully soft bed linens, towels and other bed and bath accessories. Supplying many leading hotel chains, including the Four Seasons, Hilton and Marriott, the chain realised it would do well when hotel guests kept asking where they could find their sheets, dressing gowns and scented candles. "The king has arrived," store manager Max Bosse quips. "We have stores in the UK and Europe but now we are tapping into the Spain market and this location just off the A7 is perfect for us. "There's a lot of footfall here because you have everything you could need." No one knows that better than Irishman Malcolm Spendlove, who brings foodies from far and wide to his famous Passion Cafe. Its legendary breakfasts and international dinner menu has seen it notch up over 15 years on the coast, making it one of the most successful cafes around. "We are open throughout the day seven days a week

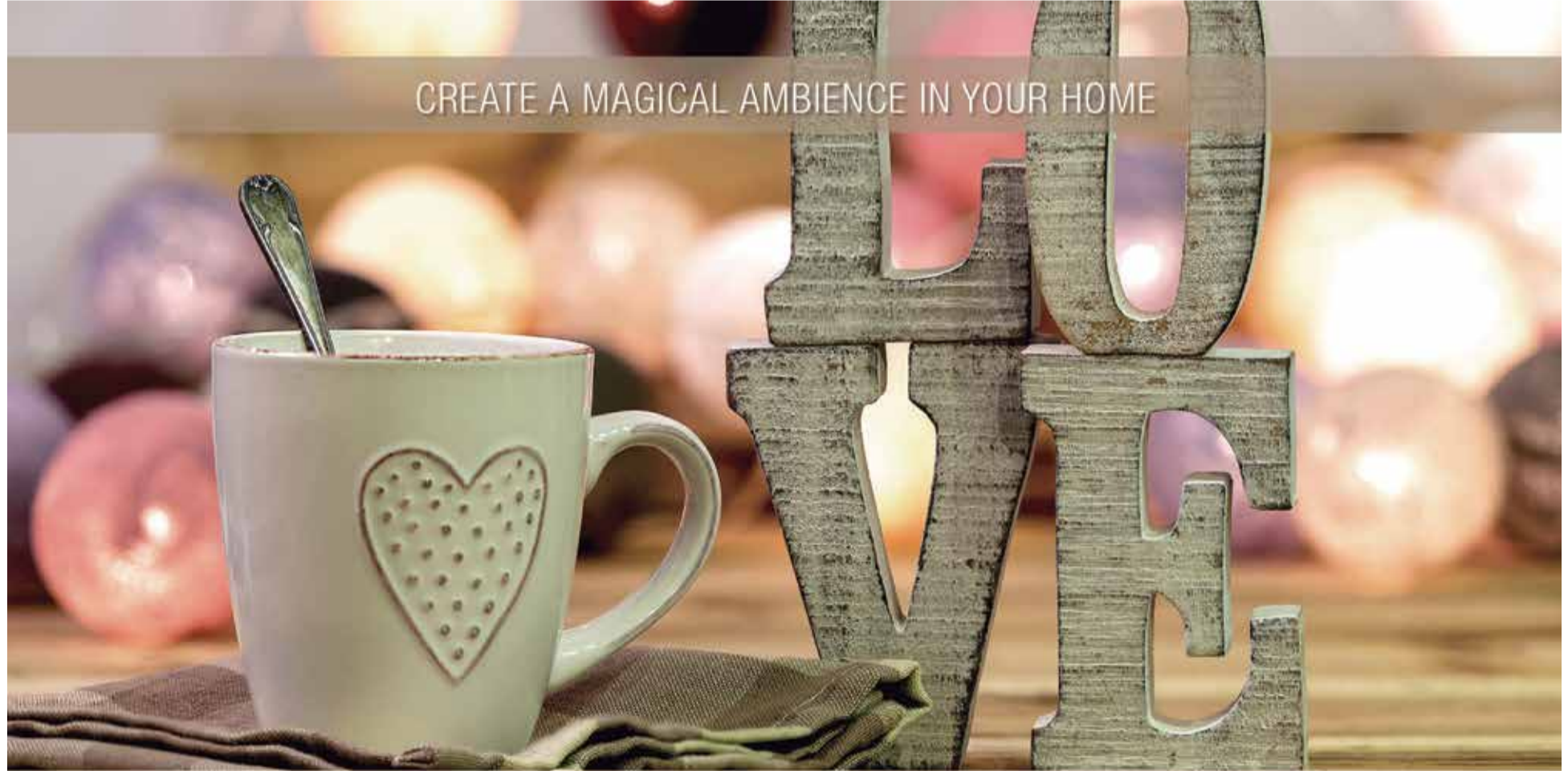
from 9am - 10pm, so we see all types of eaters," explains the hard-working chef, who also owns Gourmet Burger nearby. "You have a lot of businessmen having meetings here but also families grabbing lunch and we have people from the UK, Ireland and, of course, the locals." Liana Varini is also hoping to take advantage of the international clientele that La Colonia brings. The former Emirates air hostess, who got her architecture and interior design qualifications in her home country of Italy, all while serving high-flying travellers, is looking to diversify the clientele of her company, Interiors by Liana. "I want to tap more into the European and Russian market as well as hold on to my Middle Eastern ones and this spot is great for that," she says. "It's very central on the costa, right next to Marbella and Banus but also Estepona, and the roads make it very accessible so I

can travel back and forth very easily." The clientele has expanded over the years, with the new boulevard and road upgrades bringing holiday-makers as well as the locals. "There is a lot more footfall now," explains Jane Clark, owner of Twist Boutique for nine years. "The shops bring a wide group of people which means more business... you can literally get everything you need from one centre." Twist offers fashionable easy wear and dresses made from high quality materials, and from a range of hip brands. Pair this with its golf shop Golfino, the Apollo gym and Rational FX and you'll have to think hard of what else you could possibly need. They even have the Playskool creche upstairs where you can leave your children to play in safe hands. So don't let its seemingly small exterior fool you, La Colonia can be your one-stop destination.

The shops bring a wide group of people which means more business



VARIETY: Mix at La Casa Bonita and (top) new arrival Liana



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On the up and up!



TASTY: Buena Vida dish

San Pedro is becoming one of the key Costa del Sol restaurant hotspots, writes Jon Clarke

WHILE Marbella's got the stars, San Pedro de Alcántara's definitely got the talent... and best of all, there are plenty of new restaurants opening up every year. With a focus on quality and style, the sheer variety of places to eat is what most impresses these days. "San Pedro has completely changed over the last few years,"

explains Ross Duggan, manager at the Hogan Stand. "It has a completely different atmosphere and all the scruffy builders and fraudsters have moved on, meaning we can concentrate on quality." Fellow businessman Pascal van der Broek, of Happy Days, who once cooked for President Clinton, agrees: "Before the tunnel, everybody avoided San Pedro but now there are a lot of good

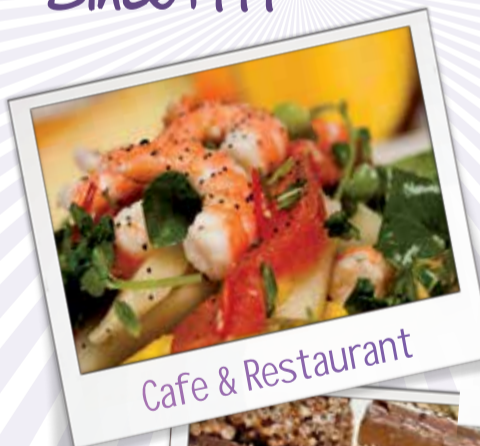
restaurants opening. It's definitely the new foodie area for the whole costa." The leading purveyors of this drive for haute cuisine include L'Impronta, Macao and La Buena Vida recently opened alongside the boulevard, while the town's most famous chef Albert Benisty of Albert & Simon sadly passed away last month (see tribute on page 45). His legacy has now fallen to Francisco Vacas at elegant L'Impronta, an upmarket joint, that is constantly upping its game. Highly seasonal in his use of ingredients the Cordoba chef left school and began cooking at the age of 13, and always insists on fresh pasta and the best line-caught fresh fish. Best of all, when in season he is also a massive fan of mushrooms and truffle and you will not be disappointed with quality. Around the corner, look out for

Hotspot for 30 years!

PUB CHARLES has been the coolest secret haunt for Sanpedreños since 1982. At its helm throughout has been charismatic owner Jesus Leal, who insists on talking to everyone who walks through the door. The 64-year-old hasn't had much time off since he began the bar 34 years ago, even completing a brand new refurb last year. "People come here for the attentive service and the ambience," he explains. "Everyone is welcome here." He's not wrong. Any given night sees Spaniards and expats sipping on their fishbowl G&T's or beautifully decorated cocktails.

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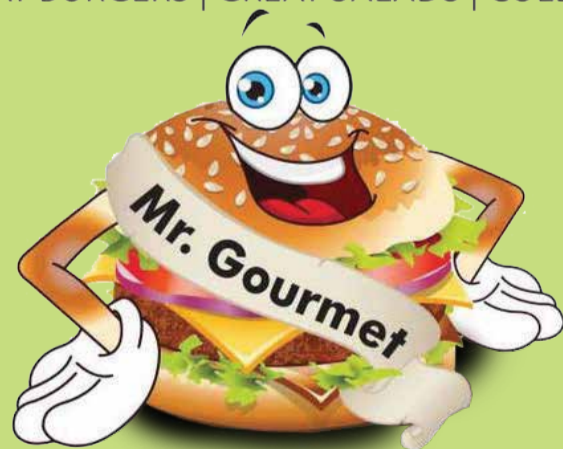
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TASTY: Francisco Vacas, (below) Gourmet burger and (right) Alberto at Cantinero



La Buena Vida, recently opened under the watchful eye of Chilean chef Gaston Aigueuren and Irish owners, well established foodies, Des and Roisin.

Attractively designed by Roisin, alongside local designer Jonty Lewis, the place has a bright, exotic feel and feels warm and welcoming.

"We've been in the restaurant trade back home for generations so we know what we are doing," explains Roisin, 29. "We are trying to do something different, change the menu regularly and create a bit of excitement here." Chef Gaston, who worked for five years at *La Sala*, certainly has it in him, having won prizes around Spain, including at Madrid Fusion.

His tuna salad with generous portions of marinated tuna in seeds showed some skills, while simpler fare, such as potato skins with cream cheese and bacon, plus a pulled pork burger were tasty and well executed.

Another man helping to change the face of San Pedro is Mal-

colm Spendlove, who has been at the helm of the ever popular *Passion Cafe* for nearly two decades and now heads up one of the coast's best hamburger joints, *Mr Gourmet Burger* on the boulevard. It counts on 100% beef burgers, halal too, while Kids are encouraged to make their own 'Junior G' burgers in 'four easy steps'.

Next door and rarely quiet look out for popular Irish pub and restaurant *Hogan Stand*, named after the famous Gaelic football stand at Croke Park. As well as having its typical bar snacks it also has a good mix of quality dishes, including rack of lamb and fish, and you dine on a nice terrace at the front.

And then there is the new *Gym Junkie Cafe*, Spain's first protein eatery, serving up vitamin-stacked meals - ideal before or after a workout. The cafe's mouthwatering menu includes grass-fed beef, protein pancakes and an omelette bar - complete with seaweed, bro-

coli and tuna omelettes. Last, but not least, if you are looking for something between traditional and modern Spanish, look out for *La Bodega del Cantinero*, run by amazing host Alberto, who has been working in restaurants since he was 14.

His place is THE place on the coast for lovers of sherry and he has hundreds of them and many going into the dozens of euros, including a 1946 Pedro Ximenez and a 40-year-old Amontillado from Azuleta. But aside from the wine list the food is excellent and varied and there are always plenty of specials, including one of the best *ajo blancos* I have tried on the coast.

Best of all though - in fact maybe the winning dish in San Pedro - was the amazing tartaki of bluefin tuna, with a wakame salad, egg roe 'tobiko' and mayonnaise wasabi. In a word; perfect! (see above).

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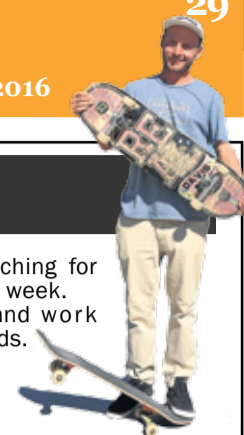
GET YOUR SKATES ON

IT is one of the coolest skateparks on the Costa del Sol. Opened a year ago the San Pedro park is a real treat for bladerunners, roller skaters, bikers and skaters alike. The 3,400sq metre skate park, which cost €592,000, has certainly given San Pedro

competitive edge over its neighbours. Surrounded by palm trees and just yards from the brand new boulevard, it is a cool space. As skate teacher Alex Petrntsov explains: "It is perfect for beginners and kids of all ages, with just the right combination of obstacles."

The Ukrainian, who has been teaching for five years, offers classes to kids all week. "I insist on protective equipment and work at all speeds and abilities," he adds. "Safety is paramount."

Contact Alex at 603612600



Wood Factory: Dutch owned business with focus on quality

THERE'S a good reason why WoodFactory's designs can be found at the coolest spots along the Costa del Sol.

The San Pedro-based company creates naturally beautiful, functional and durable furniture for both interior and exterior spaces.

Just check out the works at restaurants, including Siroko Beach, Dezentral and Finca Besaya. The Dutch-owned company uses the best quality recycled wood from Holland, selecting every plank by hand to ensure it will work with the furniture.

The carpenters can optionally treat the wood with an oil to ensure they are smooth and these treatments can be chosen in different colour options, like white-wash, grey-wash or natural-wash. They employ an ancient, hand-crafted technique enabling an extremely strong fit without noticing hardly any screw or nail in their furniture.

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about the perfect bespoke sofa, chair or table to fit your home.

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