

All about Malaga

December 2010

A 12-page Olive Press insiders guide



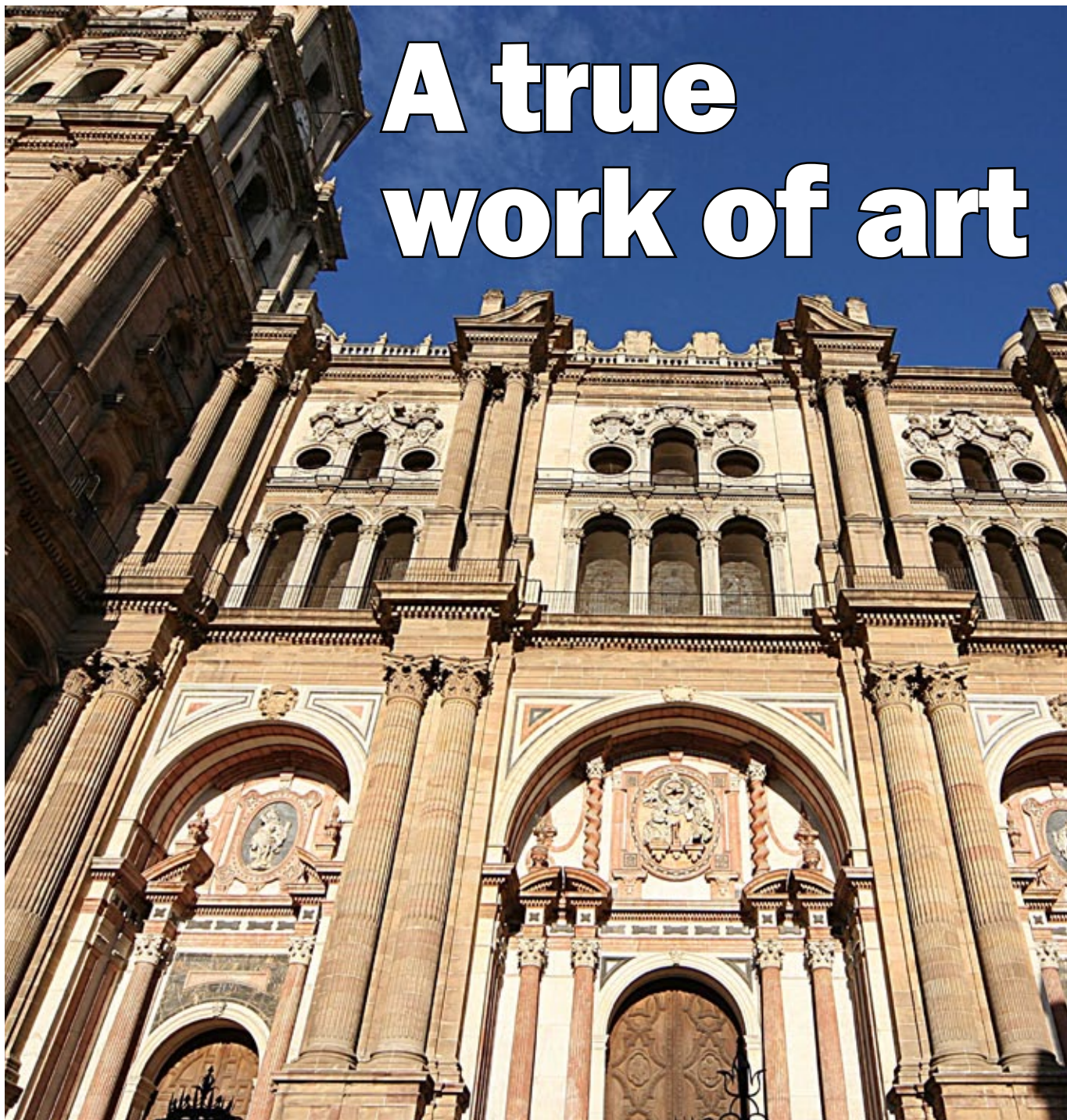
A true work of art

Malaga can rightfully claim to be Spain's second city of art and culture... particularly with the opening of the new Thyssen Museum

By Jon Clarke

WHEN the owner of the world's best private art collection started looking around for somewhere to expand, she inevitably looked south. Already a confirmed fan of the Costa del Sol and the southern Spanish climate, it was no surprise that Baroness Thyssen Bornemisza plumbed for Malaga. A city not short of classical 18th century buildings, it had just the right type of space she needed for her burgeoning collection estimated to be worth up to a billion euros. But, more importantly, the city had just the right cache and artistic creativity to make the new project work. And so it comes to pass that six years after the Baroness sent her close friend Antonio - himself a Malagueno - to start scouting out the city for venues, the new Thyssen Museum is on the cusp of opening. Indeed, the first 200 paintings of the remarkable collection - which will link to the main museum in Madrid - are to go on display in March. Set in the stunning Palacio Villalon, in the heart of the old town,

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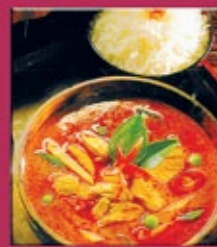
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From Page 1

the museum is expected to have a similar effect to that of Bilbao's Guggenheim. And it is not as if the city is short of good art galleries. For Malaga is, arguably, Spain's second city of art.

With a fabulous modern art museum the CAC, a city museum full of interesting exhibits and, of course, the evocative Picasso Museum, it is certainly Andalusia's main creative hub.

In the last few months alone, two fabulous new attractions have opened up. The first is the wonderful conversion of an ancient townhouse to house the first art museum for local artist Revello de Toro.

A delightful museum, it sits on three floors of the classical Andalusian mansion and features the best of the artists work, including a series of portraits of his family, not dissimilar to the works of Joaquin Sorolla.

It has an intriguing-looking visitor centre, reminiscent of a portacabin

The second, the Roman amphitheatre, has been around for a while to be fair. But, having been knocked about during the Franco era, and after 20 years of painstakingly slow excavations, it has finally been opened to the public.

It has an intriguing-looking visitor centre, which while reminiscent of an upmarket portacabin, is 'all part of the experience', a local architect told me.

Either way, it has certainly brought an excellent new focus to the centre of the city, which is brimming with history spanning back more than two thousand years - and way before the Romans turned up - as it happens.

Malaga is quite literally crammed with interesting monuments and wonderfully cheap and unpretentious bars and restaurants.

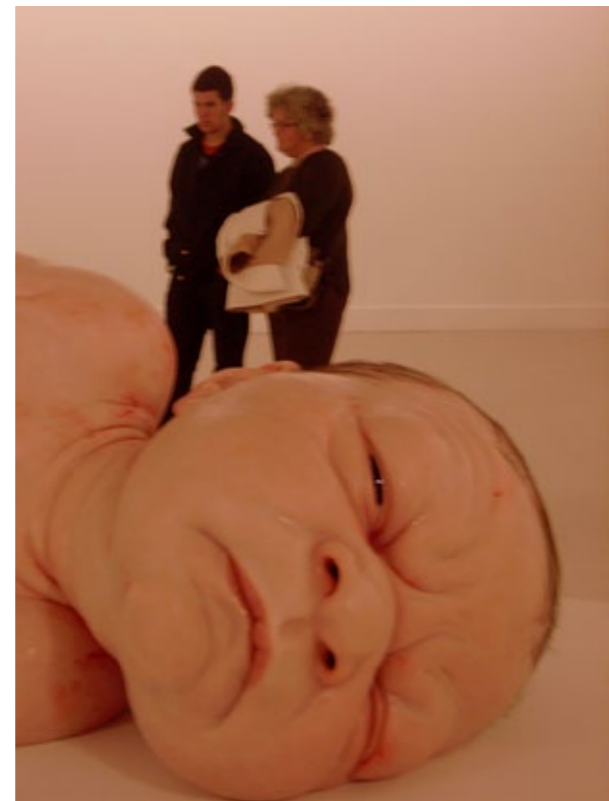
A city of open and friendly people, it also has a great mix of markets and shops, not to mention frenetic nightlife, miles of white sandy beaches and even green surroundings that include one of Spain's most alluring national parks, the Montes de Malaga.

All of which makes you wonder why for so long it was off the tourist circuit.

Indeed as recently as five years ago, over 99 per cent of the travellers to the Pablo Ruiz Picasso Airport did not visit the city, but jumped straight into their hire cars to hit the fieshspots along the coast.

The fact is that Malaga has lost out massively in the pro-

A city of open friendly people



BABYBOOM: Modern art at CAC Museum of Art

motional stakes in recent decades, the Spanish authorities favouring the famous Alhambra skyline of Granada, the famous mesquita of Cordoba, or the Moorish Giralda of Seville to spearhead its frequent and effective advertising campaigns.

Consequently few people had any idea what was to offer in Andalusia's second biggest (and Spain's fifth biggest) city of 500,000 people. Things really started to change since the opening

of the Picasso Museum five years ago. Installed in a glorious 400-year-old palace, the 40 million euro museum completely revolutionised the heart of the city.

It was somewhat appropriate that Malaga's economy got a major kickstart not from spin or PR, but from its most famous former resident, who fittingly once said: 'Give me a museum and I'll fill it' something that, it should be noted, he has already managed to do on quite a few occasions around the world.

While Paris may be the biggest and Antibes the prettiest, Malaga's Picasso museum (largely comprising works donated by the artist's daughter in law Christina and spanning all the major periods of his life) is certainly one of the most elegant.

Installed in the delightfully restored (and named) Palacio de Los Condes de Buenavista, a 16th century aristocrats mansion, in the medieval heart of Spain's fifth biggest city, visitors are just as likely to marvel at the architecture as the artwork.

Since it opened in 2003 there has been quite a remarkable transformation of the once shabby district, which was badly bombed in the civil war. Previously the haunt of stray dogs and junkies, the cracked pavements and graffiti-strewn walls have now given way to new shops and bars, and

IN the quiet back streets of Moorish Malaga it is often not hard to find yourself drifting back to the days when the Califate of Cordoba ruled the roost.

But amid the shady corners and hidden courtyards of the ancient quarter you can actually experience one of the Moors' ancient customs with a bath and massage at the Arabic Bathhouse (or hammam) in the tiny street Tomas de Cozar.

Split into three rooms, filled with steam and piping hot and cold water, it is where much of the socialising in the days of Al-Andalus took place. Indeed, such was the importance of washing to the Moors, that the Christians banned such bath houses after the reconquest in the 15th century and even specifically forbade taking baths.

Today you can see what all the fuss was about in the attractive space, lit by star-shaped skylights.

Either strip off for a bath and relax or go for an invigorating massage, either way it is the perfect chill out after a hard night out or long morning shopping.

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The Moors last bath



Malaga special

All aboard the ramparts

Take a stroll up to the city's best bird's nest, the Gibralfaro castle



FRAMING the backdrop of the city from whatever angle you look, the majestic Gibralfaro castle and Alcazaba palace below it are a fascinating tour. Soaring high above the city the remnants of Malaga's Arabic past are clear to see. Built in the 8th century by the Emir of Cordoba, the rampart-top walkway of the Gibralfaro offers the best view of Malaga by a long chalk. The

stiff walk up (you can take the No 35 bus if you're feeling lazy) is rewarded with a cool drink in the enormous castle courtyard, before you amble down to the Alcazaba, which

was the model for Granada's more famous Alhambra. The Muslim governors of the city presided here for some 700 years, and fittingly it is a well-planned and intricate affair. Full of shady corners, water features and arches, it was here (at the Arco de Cristo) where the first mass was celebrated when the city fell to the Christians in 1487.

- with the exception of siesta time, when like most of Andalusia, little moves - there is a real buzz about the place.

"There is now so much to see and do in central Malaga," explains town hall spokesman Gonzalo Padron. "We now have 30 museums and the number of tourist beds in the city has soared from 3,000 to 7,000 in just 10 years."

Many of the new tourists have arrived thanks to the introduction of the fast track AVE railway line from Madrid, while a series of improvements in the port has seen numbers of cruise line passengers soar from 95,000 to 640,000 a year.

With each of them spending an average of 67 euros, this is an enormous 43 million euro bonanza for the city every year. "Tourism has grown massively here since the mid 1990s," continues Padron, a Madrilenian, who has worked for the town hall for years. "In the Franco era it was woefully ignored."

"All the authorities did in those days was promote Torremolinos, which was once part of

the city. When it separated from us in 1981 we were left to fend for ourselves."

Whatever you do though, make sure you spend at least one night out in town

It took a while, but over the last decade the authorities have little by little pedestrianised the town centre and improved the tangled web of streets within it.

This all makes for pleasant retail therapy and eating. There are dozens of excellent tapas bars and increasingly stylish restaurants opening up in the handsome buildings in the centre.

In stalwarts such as Cafe Central you will see some lovely old black and white photos of the town, while in the likes of Pimpi and Mariano you can see where the celebrities have been out to dine.

Most bars have their own speciality - usually shellfish,

such as *Concha Fina* (razor shells) or lightly fried fresh anchovies - and most sell by the glass the often wonderful sherry-like local wine, known as *Vino do Malaga*. Famous since Roman times, and first planted by the Phoenicians around 800BC, the largely sweet Malaga wines were in the 18th century more popular in Britain than sherry, but sadly lost favour as the demand for drier, less alcoholic, wines grew.

Wandering around the compact centre it is impossible to miss the imposing bulk of the cathedral, which feels somewhat oppressive in size. Towering over the surrounding buildings, it is firstly surprising to discover that it is only three-quarters finished, and then amusing to notice why it has a nickname *La Manquita*, or 'the one-armed lady'.

It is in fact lop-sided as one tower on the front facade was never finished. The money put aside to build it was channelled instead to help fund the American War of Independence against the British. Behind it and dominating the skyline to the east of the



BRIGHT LIGHTS: Malaga's centre during Xmas

centre is perhaps the city's most impressive monument, the Alcazaba built by the Moors from the 7th century. Tumbling down from the hill-top fortress, known as the Fibalfaro, that once defended the city from invaders, the turreted Moorish fortifications are a maze of well-planned alleyways opening onto numerous pretty squares, full of orange trees and bougain-

villa. Later protecting an 11th century palace, not dissimilar, but certainly smaller in scale, to the Alhambra in Granada, it is pleasant late afternoon walk. Whatever you do though, make sure you spend at least one night out on the town with the natives, who are said to be among the friendliest in Spain. Poet Garcia Lorca's favourite people, the Malague-

nos have an incredible knack of making you feel at home. Surely in part due to the city's climate - even average winter temperatures stay in the mid-60s and rainy days are extremely rare - they are a happy and animated bunch, all too happy to go out of their way to help and ensure that you have a fun time.

My advice would be to hit the tapas bars from around 9pm, standing up and moving along fairly briskly towards the area around Calle Granada and Plaza Merced, where by mid-night, the world and his wife seems to be heading. After a spot of flamenco (and tapas) at the atmospheric *Vino Mio* I would head to the excellent *Pimpi* bar, which over three floors of two merchants houses is worth visiting even without a drink.

Then finally take a walk a few blocks over to Calle Mendez Nunez, where a series of nightclubs and bars should keep you occupied until almost dawn should the mood take you.

You might not see any art, but there will be plenty of *alegría*, as the locals like to call it



SCARY STUFF: Semana Santa headwear

Bustle and Banderas – Semana Santa in Malaga

SEMANA Santa in Malaga is said to rival anywhere in Spain. Certainly, it's an amazing feast of processions with an emphasis on passion. Here, Andrew Lowrey gives a rundown of how to tackle a day or two in Andalusia's second biggest city at Easter.

What's to see?
Un Paso is where two processions cross each other's paths, normally one carrying Christ and the other the Virgin. It's like a motorcycle display team in slow motion. Look out for the paso of La Virgen de la Esperanza and El Cristo de la Mena along the tree-lined thoroughfare

of La Alameda on Jueves Santo.
Where to see it from?
The streets, but don't plan too much, the special moments are when you catch a chance sighting of Jesús Cristo floating past the end of the street on a night out or you see an uplifting paso on your way to catch a train. It's less overpowering than Sevilla and a bit more manageable.

Who's there?
Apart from the great and good from the political world of Andalusia, you can always hang out outside the Hotel Larios for a



glimpse of actor Antonio Banderas (pictured above) and his family.

What to wear?
Make like a Malagueño and get dressed up to the nines. For those slightly chill evenings, a fur coat draped over the shoulders for the ladies is *de rigueur*. For the gents, arms must be slotted firmly into a camelhair overcoat. Ties, please! You wouldn't want to look like a gaping tourist now, would you?

What's the highlight?
It's a straight toss up between Los Gitanos, on Lunes Santo, when hordes of all-singing, all-dancing gypsies follow the procession of La Hermandad de Jesus de la Columna y María Santísima de la O, and the culmination of El Rico, on Miercoles Santo, when a prisoner is traditionally set free from nearby Alhaurin prison.

What's special about this particular celebration?
Passions run high. Expect laughter, singing and tears – the latter especially when it rains on the parade, which happens at some point each year.

What to say
"¡Viva la Rocío!" (Long live the Virgin of the Rocío – the 'bride' of Malaga)

What not to say
"A mi me gusta más los pasos de Sevilla." (I prefer the processions in Sevilla)

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Lose yourself in the jungle

IN the hills on the edge of the city is a glorious spot, rarely visited by foreigners. With shades of the Amazon or darkest Africa, the Finca de la Concepcion Botanical Garden is one of the lushest and most verdant in Europe. Due in part to the incredibly long growing season on the coast, it owes most of its existence to the eye of Amelia Livermore, the daughter of a former British consul, and her

Planted by the green-fingered wife of the former British consul the Botanical Gardens are an amazing tropical journey

husband Jorge Loring. Set over dozens of hectares the gardens include nearly 500 tropical and sub tropical species alone, brought into Malaga by boat from Africa and South America. Adapting perfectly to the weather, they make for a delightful blanket of greenery, criss-crossed by streams and embellished with lakes, wa-

terfalls and Roman artefacts. The grand old mansion of the couple is currently being given a spruce up and its iron arbour covered in wisteria and bougainvillea, is a delight in early summer. It's a three-mile drive north of the city, or take bus 61 from Alameda Principal in the centre every hour on weekends and bank holidays.



NEAT: Malaga's Botanical Garden

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THE perfect escape from the metropolitan heat lies a mere 15-minute drive north of the city. The Montes de Malaga natural park, an enormous pine plantation installed to prevent flooding in the city in the 18th and 19th century, is a joyous area for a walk and a picnic. Soaring to around 1,000 metres the wild space can be seen from most parts of the city, but is only reached by a curious cork-screw road (the N345), that winds up the mountain side offering tremendous views. From the visitor centre in the middle of the protected area a series of walks head off in all directions and there is a good chance you will see a deer, pole cat and certainly vultures. On the outskirts of the park you can still find evidence of the celebrated Malaga Sack wine that made the area famous in the 19th century. Using the sweet Moscatel and Pedro Ximenez grape, which is left to dry on the ground for up to 20 days to concentrate its sweetness, the end result is something to give Sauterne a run for its money and keep diabetics at bay. There is even a 400-year-old restaurant called Venta Galway (originally set up by an Irishman) that serves up a charming, if rough and ready, mix of stews and steaks, particularly on Sunday when half of Malaga alights here.

Run to the hills

Looking for a true escape... the Montes de Malaga is a great spot for hiking and sightseeing



SPECTACULAR: View inland

A small corner that is forever England



The fabulous English cemetery in Malaga is nearly 200 years old

THERE is a small corner of Malaga that is forever England. Sandwiched between the bull ring and the Gibralfaro is a beautifully preserved British graveyard. The oldest such burial site in Spain, it was constructed in 1830 in a bid to end the barbaric practice of burying Protestants up to their necks on the nearby beaches to be dragged away by the tide. Opened after continual pressure from the British consul stationed in Malaga, it has provided a burial place for all Protestants, including a dozen German sailors who drowned off Malaga in 1900. It even has graves of Muslims and Hindus and more recently the burial place of celebrated writers Gerald Brenan and Marjorie Grice-Hutchinson, the Danish novelist Hans Christian Andersen wrote: "Passionflowers flung their tendrils over many gravestones, pepper trees waved their drooping branches amid this place of repose." Little has changed and today it is a fascinating spot full of wonderful shrubbery, roses and even, fittingly a family of robins. Even better, after years of concern for its future – at one time there was talk of selling the land for flats - it has finally been protected by a fundraising foundation.

RESTING PLACE: The English Cemetery counts many celebrated writers as residents

For more information visit www.stgeorgemalaga.org

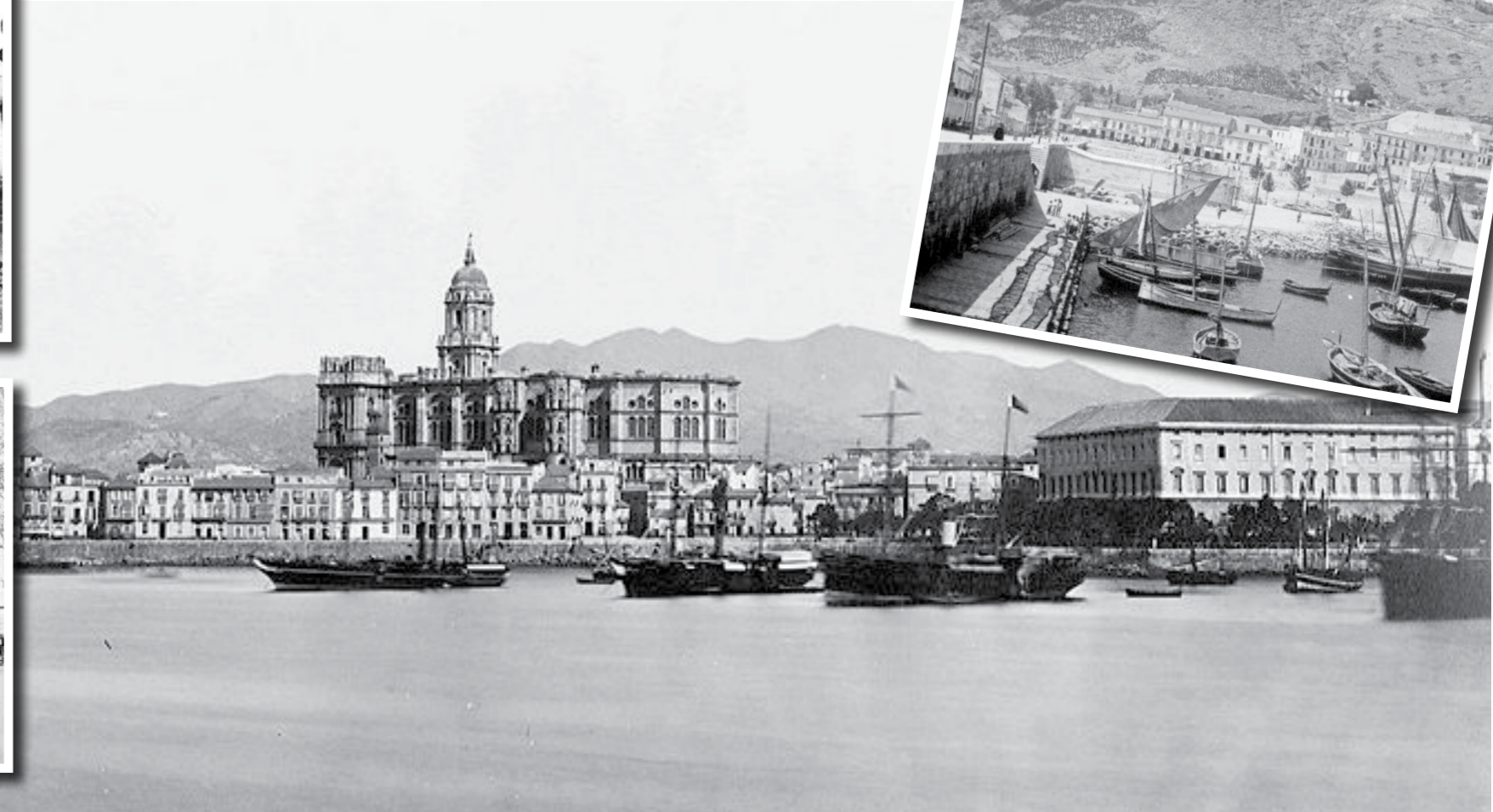
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6 Malaga special



Pictures by Javier Chaoui, Salva Maine, Javier Gil Molinero, Javier GV and Scott Hargis



A port of changes

MALAGA has been a key trading post since the times of the Phoenicians. Themselves a great trading race they helped to put the port of Malaga on the map... and it has grown and grown every since. Clockwise (from below), a grilled sardine salesman, Malaga Alcazaba sees snow in the 1950s, Ernest Hemingway enjoying a drink at La Consula, in Churrriana, slum housing in the 1930s, great central planning at the beginning of the 20th century, transport by donkey, the town centre in the 1930s, and two ancient views of the port.



Why Irishman Robert Boyd has become one of Malaga's key cultural heroes

Quiet riot

HIS name has become synonymous with the rich and cultured history of Malaga. Robert Boyd – an unlikely revolutionary – has left his name on a street in the city, not to mention pubs and shops, the most recent to open being the Robert Boyd Restaurant and Bar in Calle las Navas. Boyd, from Northern Ireland, was shot by a firing squad on the beach on December 6 1831. His crime; that he had helped to finance General Torrijos' uprising against the rule of King Ferdinand VII. He – and 64 other rebels – had joined the revolt against the cruel regime of the Bourbon king, which had been heavily criticised. The group had been wrongly under the illusion that the Governor of Malaga would join them. It was not to be, and the band were ambushed by a Spanish cutter as they sailed from Gibraltar. The rebels landed and took cover in the Alhaurin hills where they were surrounded by King's soldiers. The revolutionaries were marched to Malaga where they were summarily executed in front of the city's crowds. The following morning Boyd's coffin was carried through the streets to the English cemetery in Malaga, where his body was buried.

Robert Boyd

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WHERE TO SHOP

MALAGA is one of the best places to go shopping in Andalucía. And particularly now that the authorities have practically pedestrianised the whole town centre.

While the city counts on over a dozen shopping centres - Plaza Mayor en route to the airport being the biggest - there are literally hundreds of quirky, fashionable and stylish boutiques worth hunting down in the old town.

Any shopping tour should begin at the bottom of Calle Larios, which is the fifth most expensive shopping street by rental values in the country, after three addresses in Madrid and Paseo de Gracia in Barcelona.

Costing 1,740 euros per square metre in annual rent, it is not for your small individual boutiques, but more your global brands.

Named after the Larios gin and textile family, it is a pleasant place for a stroll and has all of Spain's best shops, plus the leading global brands, like Rolex.

But the best shops in Malaga are actually in the backstreets behind Larios, both to the east and west.

Heading off in any direction, just follow your nose to find a massive range of exciting fashion and food shops and excellent cafes and restaurants. There are hat shops, tea shops and wine and cheese shops.

The best of these include wine shop Puro Nectar on the narrow Calle Martínez, which not only boasts a great selection (including EVERY wine from the Malaga province) but in owner Silvia Alarcon, a knowledgeable and hospitable host.

The utterly enchanting Segunda Epoca, near the Bull Ring, is a magical kingdom of decorative furnishings and accessories for you and your home. Owner Gabriela Garcia Lopez has crafted a delightful little shop worthy of a Jane Austen novel. Segunda Epoca is located on Avenida de Pries.

Even more exciting, there is now a whole new area springing up north of the city centre, broadly bordered by Calle Alamos and Calle Carretera.

Calling it the 'new Soho' this area - the Barrio Buenaventura - is an area of cooky clothes shops, hairdressers and interior design emporiums.

"There are great new restaurants, cool shops and a great mix of stuff," says Frederic Cloempoel, co-owner of the hip clothes shop Adicto and restaurants Clandestino and Il Laboratorio.

He and his business partner Hichame have worked hard to reinvigorate the area by putting on concerts in the near-



STYLE: Design at Segunda Epoca

Fred Perry, Ben Sherman and the best shopping in Andalucía

Dale Nottingham and Jon Clarke give a run-down on the hottest places to shop in Malaga



LATEST HIT: Adicto shop has all the latest UK fashions

by square. Called 'Plaza Activa' there are also free tango classes, a Halloween bash and various free kids events. "Central Malaga is coming back. There is lots of new stuff going on and finally more tourists are coming in," adds Frederic.

"Seven years ago only about one per cent of our clients were foreign... now it is about 15 per cent."

This is not surprising with fabulous shops like his Adicto, where you can pick up all the coolest UK brands like Fred Perry, Lyle & Scott and Ben Sherman.

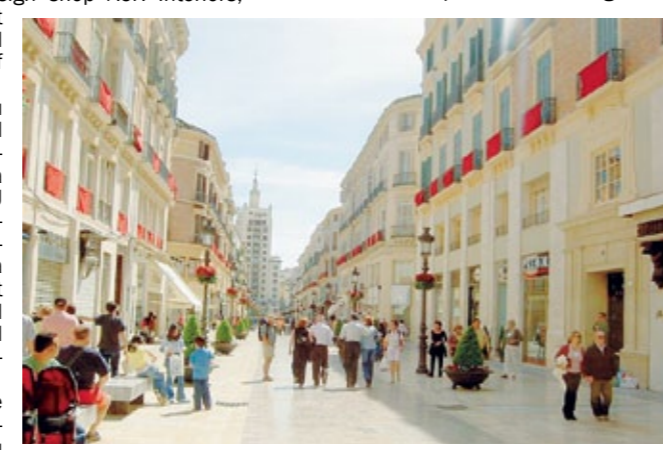
Nearby, make sure to look out for the very cool design shop ACR Interiors, which is built into the old Arabic wall of the city.

Nearby you will also find the hip Tesoros de Senda shop, a DJ shop, a marijuana-growing shop, a host of great second hand shops and some antiques shops. Just up the street on Calle Alamos you will find the

latest cool addition to the city - Vinoteca Cropani. It was set up by celebrated sommelier Antonio Pacheco, who won the national wine tasting competition, *Nariz de Oro* in 2008. As well as selling the best Spanish wines he has a great selection from around the world too.

With the snow-covered Sierra Nevada and the stunning Serrania de Ronda just over an hour away, Malaga is also the perfect base camp for those looking to combine culture and climbing.

You are certainly spoilt for choice on Calle Carretera, where you have El Yeti, specialising in climbing, caving, canyoning and trekking, and nearby, the excellent La Trucha which also specialises in diving.



TOP SPOT: Larios is one of Spain's leading shopping streets

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On the Picasso trail

BEING the birthplace of the 20th century's most popular artist Pablo Picasso, it is fitting that the city has a museum dedicated to its famous son.

Installed in the delightful 400-year-old Palacio de los Condes de Buenavista - which as a building is a star in its own right - the 200-plus paintings are an interesting trawl through the artist's life.

Nearby in Plaza de la Merced, you can visit the home where as a toddler Picasso began drawing pigeons and bizarrely *churros*, a doughnut-type breakfast fare.

And that's not all. With the city fast becoming known as Andalucía's art capital, various new galleries have opened over the last couple of years.

Keep an eye out in the Olive Press for news on all the latest exhibitions... and above all make sure you check out the permanent collection of the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo (CAC), which is always a chuckle.

A converted wholesale market on the river, it has a range of weird and wonderful stuff by Juan Munoz and Nan Golden, and has had a string of well-known international artists exhibiting including Tracy Emin, Louise Bourgeois and Gilbert and George.

Back on the Picasso trail, it is a short stroll from here up the pedestrianised Calle Granada, which is one of



CREATIVE: Some of Picasso's works, the artist (inset left), while (right) the fabulous new Revello de Toro Museum and (inset) one of his evocative paintings

the city's most famous tapas haunts, to the Plaza Merced, and in particular No. 15, the house in which the artist was born in 1881.

He later moved to another house in the square, where he lived until a teenager. Now a foundation, which dedicates itself to the academic study of the artist,

there are some interesting photographs, his christening clothes and a mock up of how the house used to look. Perhaps the most interesting part is seeing the works

How Malaga pipped Sevilla to win the 'Battle of the Baroness'

IT was a battle worthy of a Goya painting. But after a huge tug of war between Sevilla and Malaga Baroness Tita Thyssen chose the coastal city for her huge Andalucía collection. The huge collection of nearly 200 paintings is to get its first airing at the new Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in March.

An initial decision to share the paintings between the two cities was shelved last year. The Baroness announced that she had made the decision in part because "Malaga is more forward looking."

It is a great victory for the city, which officially signed off the plans for the museum earlier this year.

The museum, to which she is loaning the art until 2025, will open in the 16th century Palacio Vilalón, in Calle de los Martires.

Works on the 18 million euro project, which is in three separate buildings, are well advanced and the museum will also incorporate a cafe and a gift shop.

The exhibits comprise paintings of Andalucía mostly from the 19th and 20th centuries. There



WINNING GRIN: Mayor de la Torre with the Baroness

will be works by Zurbaran and Sorolla. Over a third have never been on public display. The collection was put together with money from former husband, industrialist Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Art lovers will enjoy tracing the steps of the modern world's definitive artist who was born and raised in Malaga, not to mention its other great galleries



of his father himself an artist and curator of the Municipal Museum. Pigeons were apparently his favourite subject, which is not altogether surprising going by the number of flying vermin that crowd the square in front of the house.

The latest addition to the Malaga art scene is the wonderful Museo de Revello de Toro, based in a beautifully converted 18th century townhouse, which was once owned by celebrated scul-

tor Pedro de Mena. And then there is the biggest art gallery to open in Andalucía for years, the Thyssen Museum, which is scheduled to be up and running by Easter.

Nearby you can visit the home where as a toddler Picasso began drawing pigeons

the museum will open with initially 200 paintings and exhibitions by early 20th century Spanish avantgarde painters.

It will cement the city as Spain's second and Andalucía's first city of art.



ORIGINAL: A Gilbert and George painting at the CAC Museum of Modern Art

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10 Malaga special

WHERE TO EAT

THE city rightfully has a reputation as being a great place to go out. Malaga is certainly bustling during the evenings, particularly at the weekends. The perfect evening might start at one of the excellent tapas bars around 9pm just off Calle Larios.

I particularly like the excellent wine bar Gorki on Calle Strachan, but have often recommended El Tapeo de Cervantes, and the fabulous *boquerones abiertos* at Restaurant Mariano, in Plaza del Carbon.

In terms of restaurants the city keeps getting better and better. While the city has its own Michelin-starred restaurant Cafe de Paris, other places really shine out.

Montana, in particular, on the Compas de la Victoria at the top of Calle de la Victoria, is a fabulous dining spot. A beautiful and stylish space set in a huge townhouse with a big courtyard and garden, its dishes are adventurous and the place has rightfully won awards.

Back in the heart of the old town, a number of places stand out. Now stalwarts of the dining

Dining and dancing

By Jon Clarke

scene. Clandestino and Il Laboratorio come in third and fourth on *Trip Advisor's* top 400 restaurants in the city. Owned by the ingenious trio Frederick, Hichame and Maria, they are hip and frequently full, helped by the fact that their kitchens are open all day.

Clandestino has been around for over a decade serving up a brasserie-style menu created by its team of international chefs, while Il Laboratorio has a more Italian flavour, with specials changing often daily. "You can now find a very cosmopolitan mix of dishes," explains Frederick. "Five years ago the locals did not even

know what carpaccio was or *foie gras*... now they happily eat both."

Nearby, you should also look out for the excellent Pomelo run by Belgium restaurateurs Benjamin and Sara.

In terms of restaurants the city keeps getting better and better

It has a real international menu with mousaka, red chicken curry, duck ravioli and *foie gras*, as well as one of the best Belgium chocolate tarts I have ever tasted. To cap it all, there were 20 different Belgium beers, including the delightful Kwak, which

was first brewed in 1791. If Japanese food is your thing, then just around the corner is the very exciting new restaurant Asako, which is a really buzzing place.

It has an enticing menu of Mediterranean and Asiatic dishes and an excellent wine list. It also has a sister restaurant, the very capable Tapadaki, on Calle Carretera which has a mix of Spanish tapas and Asiatic dishes.

If you fancy other Asian food, then Oriental Gong is most definitely one to visit. With dishes from Thailand, Vietnam, China, Indonesia and Malaysia, to mention but a few, this menu has it all.

In the centre you might also want to check out the new restaurant Amador, where chef Amador has created an imaginative menu. It's a pleasant spot to eat in and the bright, colourful paintings of his mother – a Dutchwoman – really catch the eye.

Another terrific spot worth visiting is Alea, in Calle Fajardo, which has been recently created out of an 18th century flour mill. It is a true architectural gem.

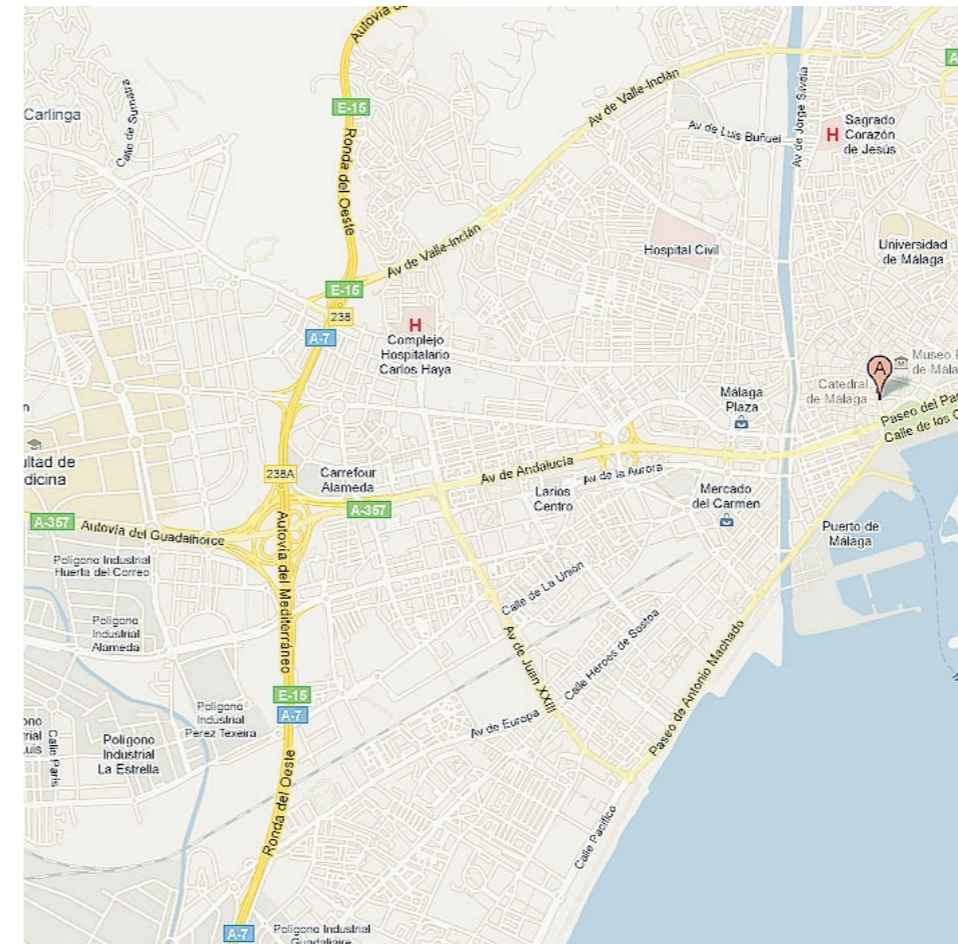
Finally, and without a doubt, one of the true gems of Malaga (*Trip Advisor* puts it second) is the thoroughly excellent Vino Mio restaurant on Calle Alamos.

Attractively laid out, Héléne Mostertman's cosy eatery cooks up a great atmosphere, thanks in part to the regular flamenco shows that entertain the crowds three nights a week.

The staff are super friendly and the food, prepared by head chef Simon Robson and his truly multinational staff (there are currently eight different nationalities working in his kitchen) is fabulous. Simon trained in the UK with Jamie Oliver and has worked at various Michelin-rated restaurants so he knows a thing or two about cooking.

I particularly liked his duck ham served in a crispy puff pastry with sweet cranberry sauce and goats cheese, while his piña colada ice cream and Guinness and co-coa tart were top desserts. Host Héléne gaily floats around with a graceful exuberance that belies her fastidious attention to detail and the pleasure of her customers. Don't miss it.

Malaga special



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WHERE TO STAY

The quiet revolution

IT has taken a few years, but finally Malaga has the sort of hotels such as a fine city deserves.

Until relatively recently, tourists had to make do with a string of very average three star hotels in the centre, or the charming, but isolated paradors at the top of the Gibralfaro hill.

But over the last couple of years there has been a quiet revolution as up to a dozen new hotels have appeared in the centre.

These include the city's first five-star hotel, the charming Vincci Posada del Patio, which sits alongside the River Guadalmedina.

It is a lovely place to stay and worth a visit just to see the remains of the old Arabic, and even Roman, walls of the city, which have been carefully preserved in its basement.

You see them below - over reinforced glass - in both the bar and reception area, which is a light and well designed

space, with a central atrium with a long traditional drinking trough for animals.

The bedrooms are stylish and decorated in earthy hues and fabrics, while the real *tour de force* is the rooftop terrace with its stunning swimming pool and great views across the city.

Not far away the Room Mate chain has a couple of decent hotels in the centre, while the French-owned Hotel Atarazanas, opposite the bustling same-name market, isn't a bad bet.

Other great options, and even better value on the wallet, are the two new boutique hotels on the charming narrow backstreet Calle Hinestroza.

Here, you will find Casa de las Mercedes, a beautifully converted former townhouse, with some calm and quiet bedrooms and one of the most fabulous suites in Malaga.

Its owner Ignacio is a cultured Madrilenian, who is bound to make you feel at home. Practically next door look out for the French-owned Riad Andaluz, which is an atmospheric space full of nooks and books.

The French couple and their charming children, make this place a joy to stay and the rooms are of exceptional value too.

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