

# All about Casares

## Manilva & Duquesa



November 2011

An 8-page Olive Press special supplement

# A Roman Holiday

**Casares was named after Julius Caesar, who cured a nasty skin complaint while staying there, discovers Jon Clarke**

**T**HERE are few places where you can genuinely say you have felt the force of the Romans.

But, as I dangled my legs into the sulphurous springs, known as La Hedionda, between Casares and Manilva I had a strange flashback to the days of Julius Caesar.

For here, in this sleepy, undeveloped valley is the still-standing Roman bathhouse, where it is said Caesar himself once bathed around 60 BC.

Having survived for over 2000 years, it is a privileged place to spend an hour and the perfect reminder of the rich heritage that has been left on the Andalusian coastline by a succession of marauding cultures.

Casares actually inherited its name from Julius Caesar, who is said to have ridden himself of a nasty skin complaint thanks to his visit to the Hedionda baths, which literally translate as 'foul-smelling woman'.

But these days there is nothing foul about the classic 'white town', which was first shaped by the Romans and later the Moors, who inhabited the region for over 700 years.

Perched on a rocky outcrop and pouring down two sides of a ridge, this most spectacular of Spanish towns looks impressive from every side.

A photographer's dream, few towns can compare in terms of subject matter.

Backed by the soaring peaks of the Sierra Crestellina, and views towards the

Med and Africa, Casares is also blessed with fabulous walks and wildlife, including a colony of vultures and other rare birds, including eagles.

An enterprising company has recently produced an excellent map of the nearby walks, one of which ascends straight out of the village on a steep path into the verdant hills.

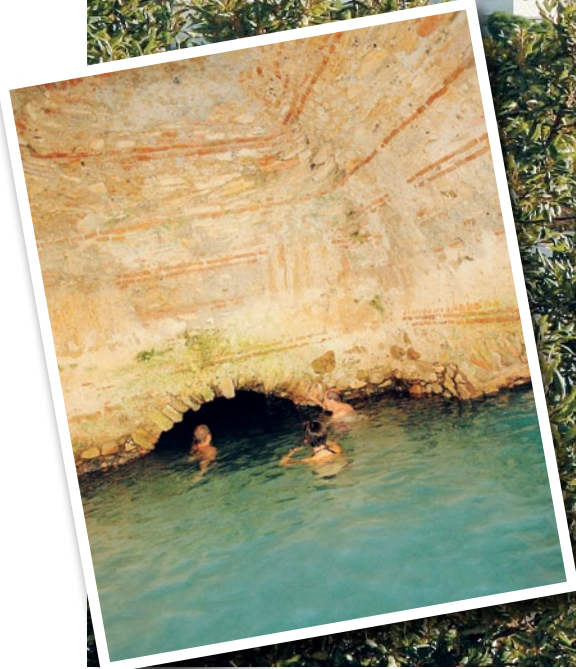
Up here the views stretch all the way to Gibraltar and Africa and you will find yourself completely on your own. Well apart from the odd sheep or goat.

In fact, the town is fast becoming known for its excellent goats cheese and yoghurts. Award-winning Quesos Crestellina produces a fantastic range of organic cheeses from its herd of 400 goats that spend the day up on the peaks.

A family-run affair, which dates back over a century, owners Ana and Juan run a tight ship, aided by their son Juan, who does all the marketing.

"We sell the cheese all over Spain and

**Turn to Page 2**



**STUNNING:** Casares enjoys superb views across to Gibraltar and Africa. While (inset) the Hedionda baths



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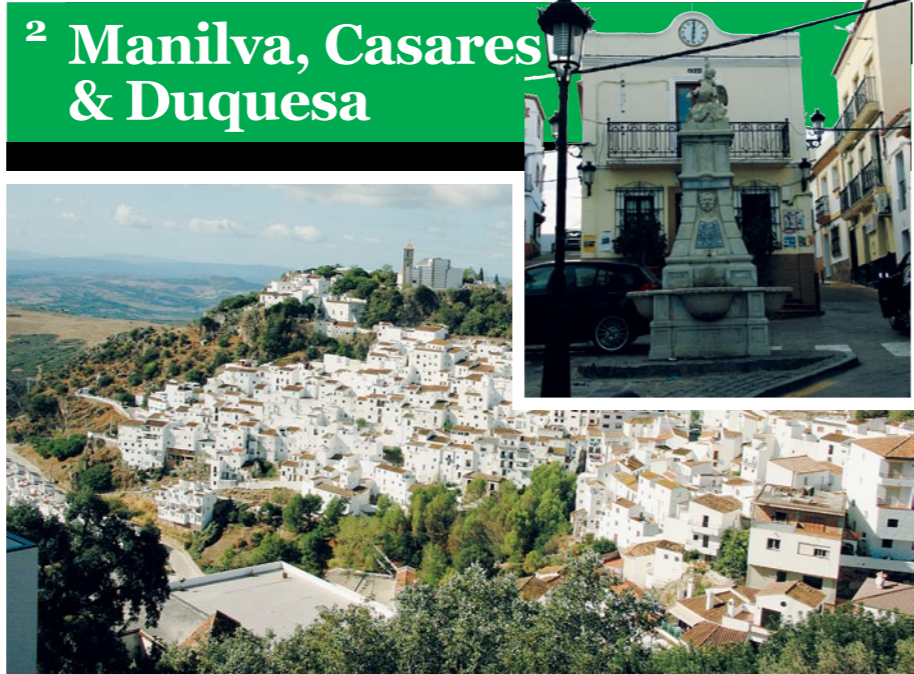
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**INVITING:** Casares has a maze of streets to explore, while (inset) Manilva centre

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**In Caesar's footsteps**

From Page 1

yoghurts to the local school, as well as the five star Finca Cortesin hotel," explains Ana, whose shop also stocks some of the region's best quality local produce.

Head up into the village for a general wander, in particular admiring the labyrinthine Arabic quarter, with its narrow streets and low rise houses. The most impressive part is the Alcazar (or fortress) at the top of the town, first built by the Romans and later strengthened by the Moors. From here you have spectacular views and an attractive 16th century church that has been recently renovated. On your way down take a look out for the street Calle Carrera, where one of Andalucía's heroes Blas Infante was born. Infante, who was shot during the Civil War, was the man who planned, forged and declared Andalusian independence (in nearby Ronda, for history buffs), before being killed at the age of 41. Nearby Manilva also has its fair share of history. This is clear from the huge expanse of ruins - much of them Roman - that lie, largely ignored, next to the fortress at Manilva port, known as Duquesa. It is an interesting area, including a bath house, villas and a necropolis, most of which was discovered in the late 1980s, and which one hopes will be properly excavated in the near future. The fort itself is well worth a poke around. Built in the 1760s to protect the town against continual incursions by pirates, it is incredibly solid and earned its builder Francisco Paulino a title and the honour of commanding a cavalry company. It is here where the town hall of Manilva has its archaeological team, which has recently been busy investigating an exciting Roman discovery in the town. The substantial remains of a kiln dating back to 2AD are in a good condition and were found alongside a series of fragments of pottery.

It is thought the unique design may be the only existing example in Spain and could serve as further evidence of the town's key role in exporting 'garum', one of the most popular products during Roman times. Then known as Saltum, Manilva became famous for the delicacy, a pungent paste made from fish guts. Exported to the Eternal City of Rome via boat, it needed to be stored in well-made pots, called amphoras. And it now seems likely that the recently discovered kiln may be where these were made on an almost industrial scale. While the centre of Manilva is not of great interest, one of the things you cannot fail to miss is the large amount of vineyards clinging to the

**The fort was built in the 1760s to protect the town against pirates**

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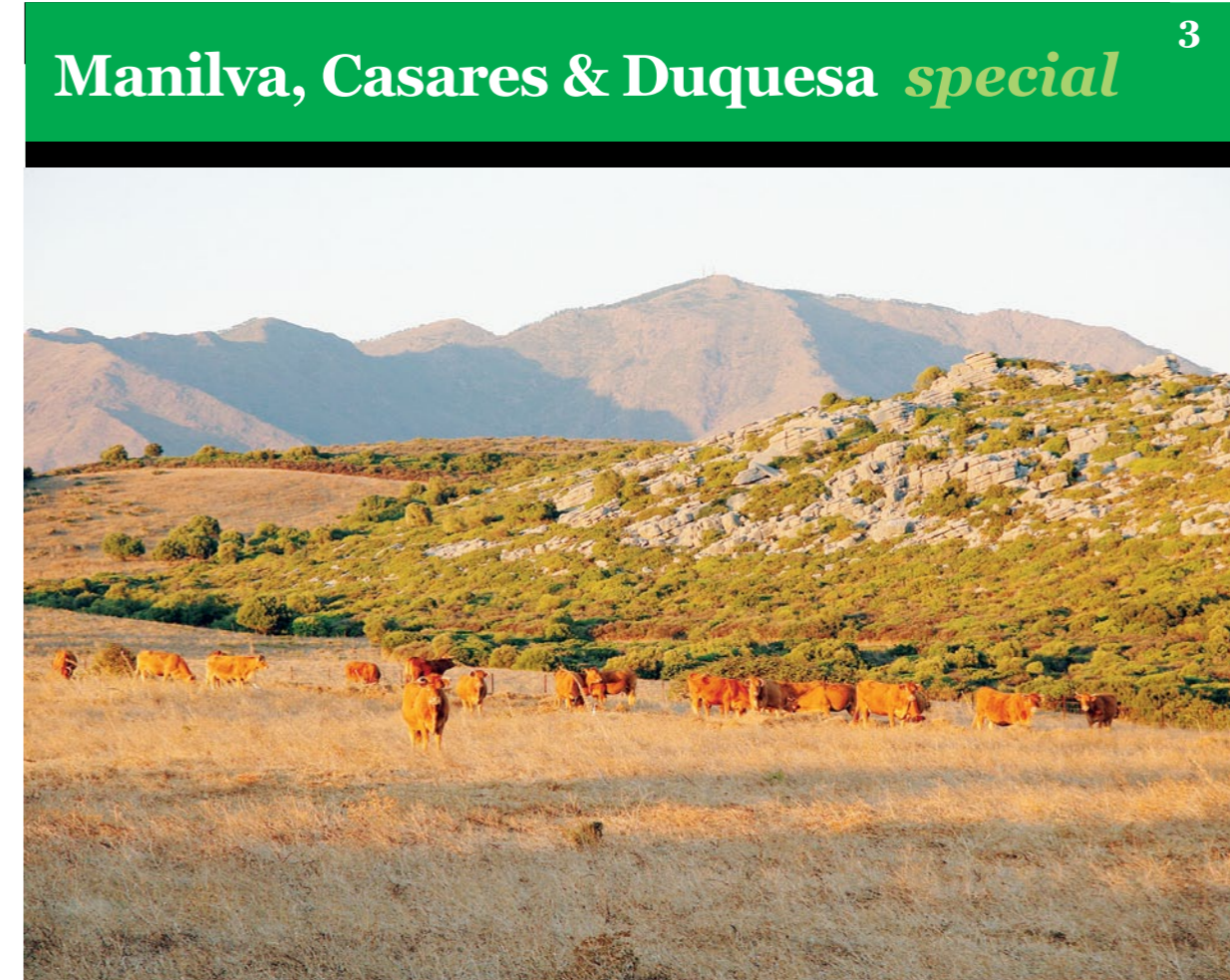
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**BULL REARING:** Fabulous grazing land in the hills between Casares and Manilva.

steep slopes that drop away from the town. Mostly Moscatel, the vines are largely for growing grapes for raisins, although in recent years there has been an attempt to return to winemaking, with some astonishingly good dessert wine.

"We have seen a lot more people interested in buying the sweet wines over the last few years," explains local shopkeeper Maria Esteban, who sells the wine, plus a lot more local produce from her unmissable shop Frutas Pascal y Hijos on a bend on the way into town. As well as nuts and pulses, there is a huge range of almost tropical fruits such as avocados and cherimoyas, which come from the Andes and grow well here in the protected coastal valleys that are fed by the rich sulphurous waters. You will find this and many other products available at the regular Sunday rastro, which - whether rain or shine - brings out the best vegetable sellers around. Few of the farmers use or have a need to employ chemicals and depending on the season they often build their makeshift stalls from the stream-side cañas. Expect to find excellent local honey, cheese and home-baked bread, as well as herbs and spices. Among the cheaper 'boot sale' wares, you will often find a gem, an unrecognized treasure among the household chuck-outs. Also around the area you will expect to find other excellent artisan products, in particular at Sebastian Fisher's workshop in Casares and also at the well-established and popular La Tienda on the road down to the coast. Here, you will find some excellent porcelain and pots, alongside clothes and jewellery.

**CREATIVE:** They are the local businesses and craftsmen, who bring a difference to the area. (From top left clockwise) La Tienda ceramic shop in Casares, Ana stirring the goat's milk at Quesos Crestellina, Sebastian Fisher in his forge, and Maria Esteban with her marvellous display of local produce at Frutas Pascal in Manilva

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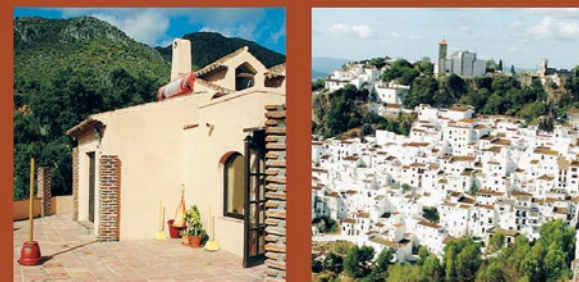
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### WHERE TO EAT

# The Camino of Cuisine

Jon Clarke is amazed by the quality of food on a back road to Casares

ON the Costa del Sol, the term 'Fish Alley' is often used to describe a road full of restaurants. But the MA-546 back road up to Casares from Sabanillas is truly a 'Camino of Cuisine' with its excellent range of exciting - and varied - places to eat. Few places in Andalucía have such a grouping of quality restaurants, with half a dozen worthy of mention. "Everyone talks about the Casares road as being the place to come and eat," explains Michael Forge, an English expat, who opened his restaurant The Forge with his wife nearly two decades ago.

"It sort of happened out of the blue, and now you would be very lucky to get a table here on Sunday unless you book a week in advance," he adds. With regular diners including Cecil Parkinson, Timothy Christopher and a variety of musicians, The Forge is certainly one of the true dining secrets of Andalucía. Nearby you will also find Arroyo Honda, now running for a decade, with the very capable chef Christian and his charming Japanese wife Noriko at the helm. One of the hottest places to eat, the menu is adventurous - thanks to Christian's time spent in London at Soho House, as well as Tokyo and Hong Kong - and diners feel spoilt by the charming atmosphere. The squid tempura was fresh and light with a horseradish sauce, while bulls cheek (*carillada*) was perfectly braised



INSPIRING: (From far left, clockwise) Ana at Huerta el Pozo, Christian and Noriko at Arroyo Honda, diners at Mi Cortijo, Jesus at Venta Garcia and Michael at The Forge

and served with a carrot, parsley and celery sauce. A meringue pavlova with fresh raspberries was amazing. Just down the hill, it is impossible to miss stylish Venta Garcia, a family affair, which has garnered a fantastic reputation thanks to the creative eye and sheer hard work of owner Jesus. The place is packed most days of the week for lunch and the good-value *menu del día* is both tasty and original. And then there is more, with the recent opening of the beautiful new restaurant Celima, hidden away in the hills inside the Hotel Hermitage.

Another decent option in Casares, nestled in the valley just below the town, is Huerta el Pozo where Marie Cruz and her husband use good local produce to cook up a storm. A charming rural location, this place is rocking at the weekend and is a must for its excellent wood oven and organic vegetable dishes. Finally, on your way down to the coast again you might be tempted to try the highly-rated Schilo, in hotel Finca Cortesin, probably Andalucía's most exclusive hotel these days, where rates start at 450 euros a double.

### Its reputation is down to hard work and a creative eye

But, assuming you haven't got a pile of cash to burn (I recently heard a tale about a group of diners paying nearly 15,000 euros for a meal, including pink Champagne, of course), then head down into Duquesa. Here, you will find one of the coast's most highly-rated fish restaurants Marlows, near the castillo. Situated at the back of Los Hidalgos Commercial centre and run by Stevie Marlow, this modern outfit is buzzing with life. Eat in, or take away, the varied menu offers a mix of and Spanish delights: a refreshing change from your average English chippie.



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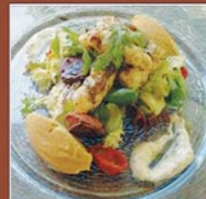
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## Getting high

### WHERE TO STAY

YOU are already high up in the Sierra Crestallina when you finally come across the sign for Hotel Hermitage. Take a right and you still have a few kilometres drive up a wonderful country lane through a mix of cork, pine and oak forests. Arriving at this new hotel really is a joy and, set in a nature reserve, the location could not be more privileged.

"We get wild boars literally sniffing around the pool throughout the summer," explains friendly manager Juan Miguel de Jesus, who worked in the hotel business in the UK for many years. Walk straight from the door, or simply relax in the gardens by the pool, from where there are amazing views to Gibraltar and Africa in the distance. Even better, there is now a new restaurant Celima, with an ambitious chef Isaac, really starting to go places (see adjacent review). Equally stunning is the amazing retreat of John Waddington and Henry Were on top of a high hill facing Manilva.

### Historical

Aside from the lovely views towards the coast and inland past Manilva to Casares and even Gaucin, you are garreted in one of the coast's most historical guesthouses. A protected building, this former bodega has been breathtakingly restored and is sumptuous in the extreme with amazing public rooms and countless places to relax. But in many ways it is your charming hosts that make this one of the Costa del Sol's most memorable places to stay. Having run pubs, restaurants and hotels in the UK, this talented pair know a thing or two about catering and will not fail to entertain you. Expect to be regaled with a



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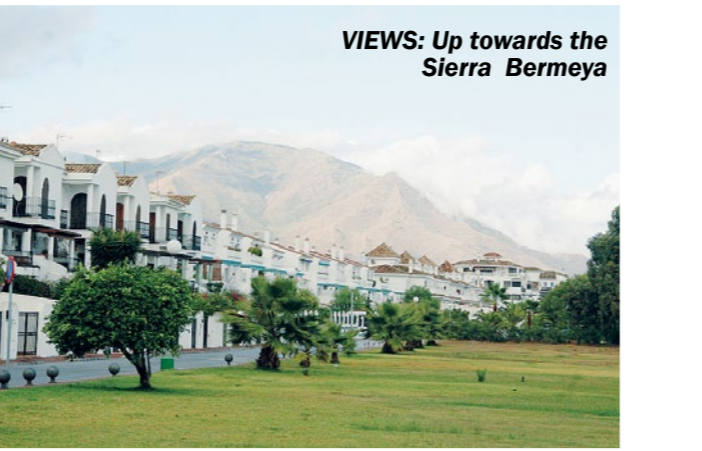
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**MY MINI PUERTO BANUS**

**Jane Jewson on the port where she and her children have spent much of the last few decades**

ALTHOUGH Puerto de La Duquesa sounds Spanish, it is anything but. Apart from the odd restaurant serving Spanish food and a few fishing boats that still land their catches here, there is very little about Duquesa that gives off an Iberian air. This is a largely international zone, a privileged place full of restaurants from around the world (an excellent Thai, an Indian and numerous Italians, for example) and a very northern European clientele. A great place for yachters and lovers of the easy life.



**VIEWS: Up towards the Sierra Bermeja**

**Manilva, Casares & Duquesa special**

**MY MINI PUERTO BANUS**

30 years ago this port did not exist, and was part of an uninterrupted stretch of sandy beach that ran from Punta Chullera to Casares Playa. Building began in the late 1970's, and by 1980 a new harbour with moorings for 80 boats was completed. Surrounded on three sides by a complex of tall white apartments topped shops and restaurants below, this was intended to be a mini Puerto Banus. Since then an increasing number of apartment blocks have been added creating something of a buzz, and there is an excellent range of services and shops. Accessed through various arches and walkways that run through the main apartment blocks, the port has become a world within a world, a popular home for home for local and visiting expats who can while away the hours sipping cocktails with the added advantage of sunshine, palm trees and sparkling views of the Med.

A range of excellent businesses exist within the complex: a newsagent selling all publications, Bruno's car rental, an English butcher, a golf shop, two hair salons, a gym, two beauty salons, a laundry, business centre, yacht brokers, a bank and the statutory estate agents and lawyers offices. English supermarket Costcutters, run by a friendly British family, can also be found at the first level outside Las Galerías, inside which is an upholstery, a beauticians and



**STURDY: The 'Castillo' was built to protect the locals against Barbary pirates**

an incongruously placed fine jeweller. Chirine Ayoubi, a Yorkshire lass, arrived here in 2002 with an honours degree from Guildhall University and numerous prestigious prizes under her belt. It is no surprise that since she set up her jeweller's workshop in Duquesa she has never been short of work. As well as her fine jewellery, she shows off a big range of products from other local artisans. As she explains: "My mother once said: 'A large part of your life will be spent working so look for something

you truly love', well I have certainly found that." From here it is only a short walk to the wonderful Castillo, an 18th century fort that was built to protect the coastline and inland villages of Casares and Manilva from marauding Barbary pirates. There is a series of interesting ruins next door, which are due to be properly renovated and open to the public soon, and the views from here up towards the Sierra Bermeja are wonderful. The fort is always a hive of activity: housing the foreign resident's association, two small museums, (a collection of Roman artifacts and 'a history of fencing', no less) classes in dance, art exhibitions and quite a lot more. Without a doubt, one of the most successful businesses here is Duquesa Estates, a slick estate agency that has been promoting properties here for more than a decade. Owner Tim Watts is proud of the company's reputation: "We have stamped our mark on Duquesa and are now reputed as the place to go for exemplary property management and sales." He also explains that the demand for apartments has gone up over the last few months and they are extremely busy. Last, but not least, at Bruno's Car Hire, Linus (nephew of Bruno) says that he enjoys making things easy for visitors. An upbeat fellow, his company offers peace of mind with drop off and pick up services at Malaga airport as well as



**CRAFT: Chirine at work on her jewellery**

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**CHAPEL: In Duquesa**

Duquesa, located on the rise of the hill below the urbanization of Duquesa Hills. With its pretty square and just a sprinkling of shops and cafes, this is a more subdued affair offering a place to drink a morning coffee and watch the world go by: all in English of course! Unless you happen to meet Italian-born Oscar, or one of his team from A Plus Law, a community administration and legal services company, which also looks after property. Oscar Bornico heads this friendly family run business which combines many services and languages, including Spanish, English, Italian, French and Polish. You see, I told you it was an international set up in Duquesa.

at various points along the coast. Meanwhile, a little way inland you will find Monte

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# Celima

RESTAURANTE



Located in a dream setting, with spectacular views of the Mediterranean Sea and Moroccan coastline, Celima restaurant fuses international and traditional cooking with a special passion for excellent service.

Celima Restaurant would like to introduce its new chef, Isaac Gomez. After previously working for Schillo and Las Dunas Hotel, he has now come to Celima to offer you his unique fusion cooking with an artisanal touch, always using the fresh, high quality products that his gourmet experience demands.

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