



**SEEING THE LIGHT:** The new San Pedro underpass has completely opened up the centre of San Pedro

## Tunnel vision

*Now that San Pedro finally has its underpass, Giles Brown believes it no longer suffers from a Cinderella complex*



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# Upwardly mobile

**Overlooked for years, San Pedro is now a desirable location in its own right**

It used to be little more than a shabby town with a bus station approximately half way between Marbella and Estepona. But the forgotten Cinderella of San Pedro Alcántara has suddenly found itself invited to the ball that its other Costa del Sol rivals have been enjoying for years. After half a decade of disruption installing an underground car park, a new sea-front promenade and, most importantly, its now-infamous

85 million euro underpass, San Pedro has suddenly emerged re-born, and with a distinct new swagger. A rediscovered destination for tourists and businesses alike, the once workaday suburb of Marbella is finally coming into its own. There is a definite buzz about the place, and although it's easy enough to walk around the town in little over an hour, there is more than enough to keep the visitor entertained. But first, a little history les-

son. Compared to the towns that surround it - Marbella, Estepona and Benahavis - San Pedro really is the new kid on the block. General Manuel Guterrez de la Concha, the first Marques de Duero, came up with an ambitious plan to convert land to the west of Marbella into agriculture in the middle of the 18th century. Aided by the Re-population Laws, the good general founded the farming colony of San Pedro Alcántara.



The colony took its name from the general's devotion to the patron saint of Extremadura San Pedro, as well as in honour of his mother Lady Petra de Alcántara Irigoyen. In the years 1860 to 1870 new crop systems were put in place and thousands of hectares were drained and ploughed. New irrigation systems and reservoirs were introduced, some of which are still in use and the settlement grew in stature. In addition to the main village the nearby smaller settlements of Cancelada and Cortes were also established, and workers from Valencia, Murcia, Granada and Almeria were recruited to help work the land.

The town carried on in a sleepy agricultural kind of way until the mid-40s, when street lighting and cleaning were introduced and the main road was paved in the 50s. Tourism soon followed and San Pedro grew quickly, resulting in Marbella Town Hall opening a special office to deal with the paperwork and transac-

tions. This has since become something of a sore point. 'Sanpedreños', as they are known, feel decidedly independent of Marbella and have repeatedly called for their own municipality, a call that has fallen on deaf ears. A stroll around confirms that San Pedro really does seem to encapsulate what is great about living on the Costa del Sol. The newly renovated promenade is easily one of the best on the coast with statues, exercise machines

natural living festival, concerts and even (bizarrely) a reenactment of the Normandy landings. If you are feeling really energetic and have the time it's possible to walk all the way to Marbella along the walkway and at the very least you can get to Puerto Banus in a quarter of an hour. Head back into the centre itself however, and you'll find yourself walking along well kept roads between neat urbanisations with cycle paths, impressive fountains and even a large fishing boat as a piece of public sculpture. At the bottom of the main road, next to the inevitable roundabout, you're standing on the roof of the San Pedro tunnel, the one piece of infrastructure that has transformed the town. Taking twice as long as planned and three times over budget it has however created a quiet, largely pedestrianised centre and a much easier walkway down to the



**OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR: San Pedro re-enacts the D-Day landings, while (above) its church**

and chringuitos and swish beach clubs rubbing shoulder to shoulder. The paseo has been the scene for an art and craft and

thankfully avoided the hordes of TOWIE wannabes and Stag and Hen parties that plague nearby Puerto Banus and therefore has a more relaxed and family friendly feel.



**ACTIVE: San Pedro's paseo is just a 15-minute walk to Puerto Banus, while (top) some exclusive homes**

beach. Although this area is currently a muddy impromptu car park, the authorities have plans to put in green areas with parks protected from the elements by giant sails. When completed it will be a fabulous area to enjoy the sunshine, and several restaurants with large terraces have already opened in anticipation.

One of these is the popular Rincon de la Sala, which was opened by owner Ian Radford with the help of some of his professional footballer friends, including David Bentley and Stephen Carr. As businessman Radford, one of Marbella's main employees explains: "The town has such a distinct feel to it. It's so different to Marbella, a proper Spanish town with all the local amenities and the cable beach to boot."

Local events organiser Lara Gonzalez agrees. "We are getting increasing numbers of people coming through and there is a real buzz about the town." There are certainly plenty of shops heading up the main street, Calle Marqués del Duero, which is partially pedestrianised and leads up to the main square and church. It bustles with restaurants, bars, cafes and ice cream parlours and really underlines

the surprisingly international nature of the town. There are Irish pubs, Asian restaurants, Cuban Mojito dens, Dutch bars and even a great value Filipino restaurant complete with game shows direct from Manila blaring out from the giant flatscreen all next to authentic tapas bars and Spanish restaurants. Best of all, the town has

There is even a Moroccan barbers, where this unkempt reporter had a trim and a shave courtesy of the extremely hospitable Jamal! The main square is dominated by the church, where Tony and Cherie Blair were spotted at mass a few years ago. Have a coffee up here on a sunny Sunday afternoon and you'll realise why it's nicknamed 'Plaza de las Americas', with central and south American workers enjoying the afternoon off. A bandstand in the plaza is an occasional venue for open air concerts, with the El Ingenio Cultural Centre on the western side of town also putting on all kinds of performances including flamenco, funk to comedy and serious drama.

If you fancy being a little more energetic with your spare time then there are plenty of sporting options. Golfers have the nearby Guadalmina Alta and Guadalmina Baja courses to choose from, and there is also a municipal driving range.

If you want to go water skiing, but haven't got your own speedboat, then head to the cable ski next door, it's the only one for 100 miles. The Nueva Alcantara Club has excellent tennis and padel facilities and San Pedro once also boasted its

own baseball team, the Sun Devils. But if you'd rather just cheer on the local team, UD San Pedro plays in the same division

as both Estepona and Marbella, which makes for some tasty local derbies. There are all the usual shops and services that you would expect in a town this size (approximately 26,000 inhabitants) and the town is also nowadays a petrolhead's paradise. It's home to several supercar garages selling dream machines such as the top-of-the line McLaren, Ferrari, Bentley, Pagani and Mercedes, while if your thrills are more on two wheels you can even get your chopper custom designed and built. Of course, the catalyst for the return of the feel good factor in San Pedro was the opening of the underground tunnel. Previously the area was a notorious traffic black spot producing huge delays. The tunnel and its supporting network of roads into the town and also up to Ronda has had a huge impact, a fact that

was underlined at the official opening last year. Marbella mayor, Ángeles Muñoz, was joined by the Minister of Development, Ana Pastor and stressed that it was a 'big day' not only for Marbella, 'but for the entire Costa del Sol' adding that the infrastructure would aid 'tourism development'. As Irish restaurateur Malcolm Spendlove, the owner of Passion Cafe and the recently opened Mr Gourmet Burger, explains: "My advice would be to come on holiday here. It's cheaper, more Spanish and more family orientated and you can pop down the road to Puerto Banus or Marbella for your fix whenever you feel like it." San Pedro Alcántara might have come late to the party, but she looks like being the belle of the ball.



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## San Pedro special



# The furniture triangle

*The San Pedro area is one of the best on the coast to furnish your home*

*AS GOOD AS NEW: Kristel with some of the recycled wood furniture at the Wood Factory*

It is slowly becoming known as 'the furniture triangle'. And the San Pedro area is literally full of excellent places to furnish your house. Whether you are looking for sumptuous sofas, decorative

pieces or antique doors there is plenty on offer. One of the best established is Imperial, whose Dutch owner Tony Beeks has been serving the coast up in the Campo de Gibraltar for years.

The shop in the San Pedro industrial estate is full of good quality furniture imported from around the world and Tony is a personable sort of chap always happy to help and advise.

Another interesting place around the corner is the Wood Factory, which provides furniture of a very different kind. Made entirely out of recycled wood, the majority imported

## San Pedro special<sup>29</sup>



from Holland, there is a huge range of tables, benches, sofas and chairs. Also available made-to-measure – a team puts it together in a workshop next door – the style is fast becoming the rage this year. As owner Kristel Schoeman-Daneel explains: "We are getting so many enquiries and are battling to turn things around quickly. "Best of all, because it is recycled wood we can keep the costs down." Another interesting place, also run by a Dutchman Jelle

**ALADDIN'S CAVE: Dutch antiques specialist Jelle at Cavon and (left) one of his team repairs a door**

Haagsma and his Swedish business partner Camilla, is the long-established Cavon. Hard to miss, sitting right on the main road after the tunnel, this is one fabulous Aladdin's Cave full of antique furniture, doors and other amazing artifacts.

Set up 35 years ago, this is one place you really must visit even if not buying... and particularly around lunchtime when you might get offered a glass of rose.

There is a stunning range of curios, as well as candlesticks, coins and chandeliers. "I have always been a collector," explains Jelle, sitting in front of a stack of manuals and encyclopedias on the antiques world.. "I got it from my grandfather who was a painter." Arriving in Andalucia as a sailor in the 1970s, he had ended up setting up a thriving antiques business, which continues to this day. The most incredible heavy oak doors – some which date back centuries – can weigh up to 500 kilos each and cost as much as 4,500 euros. But there is also plenty of good value furniture and collectible items well under 100 euros and they also make their own beeswax polish which is exported around the world. The polish is also for sale at his partner Camilla's daughter's exciting new shop Tejaime, up on the Ronda road. Finally another new shop House & Garden has recently been opened in the Guadalmina area. Formerly Batavia it stocks an excellent range of mirrors, lamps, pictures, outdoor furniture and sofas.



**GREAT STOCK:** Some of the wares at House & Gardens

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# 30 *San Pedro* special

WHILE Marbella's got the stars, San Pedro's got the talent. And while people head to Marbella or Puerto Banus to be seen punters go to San Pedro to be fed. And you can certainly eat well in San Pedro, where, in my opinion, there are three or four excellent restaurants.

Aside from a couple of great beachside joints, the real stalwart must certainly be Albert & Simon, which has perhaps been the coast's finest purveyor of French cuisine for nearly 30 years. It is little short of a scandal that this wonderful restaurant run by brothers Albert and Simon does not have a Michelin star.

Head chef Albert is constantly upping his game and producing food to put many of France's own top restaurants to the sword. Much of this is due to his selection of quality ingredients and a constantly evolving menu.

He is also the region's elected member of the Eurotoques group, which counts Spain's best eateries Arzak, Akelare and formerly El Bulli on its roster, not to mention many other European luminaries, such as Paul Bocuse.

Around the corner is another fine spot, also dabbling in

## WHERE TO EAT

# The real stars of Marbella

*Understated, but San Pedro is where those-in-the-know go to eat, writes Jon Clarke*



**TALENT:** Chef Albert

Another man on a mission to help change the face of San Pedro is Malcolm

Spendlove, who has been at the helm of the ever popular Passion Cafe for the last few years.

Not content to run, arguably San Pedro's busiest restaurant, he has now undertaken a new project Mr Gourmet Burger on the main drag. Only open for half a year, this fantastic spot is already getting a good name. Loosely modelled on the UK's GBK chain, it definitely provides some of the best 100% beef burgers on the coast.

"We get a huge cross section of people from groups of mums and toddlers to ladies in their fifties," explains the Irishman. "People like to eat a burger as simple as that

and this is my take." Kids will particularly like making their own 'Junior G' burgers in 'four easy steps', while there are other choices such as lamb tikka and an enticing chicken menu. By far the most exciting opening over the last year though has to be Rincon de la Sala however.

In pole position in the heart of the town with a great pavement location, it is this restaurant more than any other that embodies the revitalisation of San Pedro.

Part of the popular La Sala group, in my opinion the food here – care of former Albert & Simon trainee Manolo – is better than its sister restaurants. There is a busy menu that changes regularly and there is a daily 'menu del dia' with a couple of choices that weighs in at just over 12 euros.



**TASTY:** Ladies lunch at Umami

Oh and if you are lucky you might just bump into a range of footballers, who part own the restaurant including David Bentley, Paul Robinson and David Pleat. I had the pleasure of recently eating opposite former Spurs manager George Graham, who turned up with his leg in plaster.

# San Pedro

## Taste sensation

*Great burgers, great salads and cold beers at Mr Gourmet Burger*

THERE is a new guy in town! Mr Gourmet Burger on Avda Luis Braille 20 opened its doors to provide the town with a brand new funky restaurant, with a fresh take on burgers. A new concept in dining on the Costa del Sol, it brings together fun and informality with high quality cooking, to provide a unique range of luxury speciality burgers served in relaxed funky surroundings. Although the restaurant is owned by the team behind the successful nearby Passion Cafe Mr Gourmet Burger offers a completely different

dining experience. Eating out should be an enjoyable experience; food should be exciting, service friendly and the atmosphere uplifting – so why not apply this to burgers? Setting the tone, there is a life size Mr Gourmet Burger positioned outside the restaurant allowing for kids and the young at heart, to have a photo taken. The surroundings are modern, fun and equally appealing for families and those who simply enjoy substantial food, great flavours and cold beer. Forget traditional fast food,

this is the modern alternative. All burgers are made of excellent quality ingredients; we're talking about succulent lamb, juicy steak, caramelized onions, smoked mozzarella, pickled ginger and avocado. With over 20 years in the restaurant business and having weathered the storm of the San Pedro road closure, Passion Café is well placed to make this new venture a great success.

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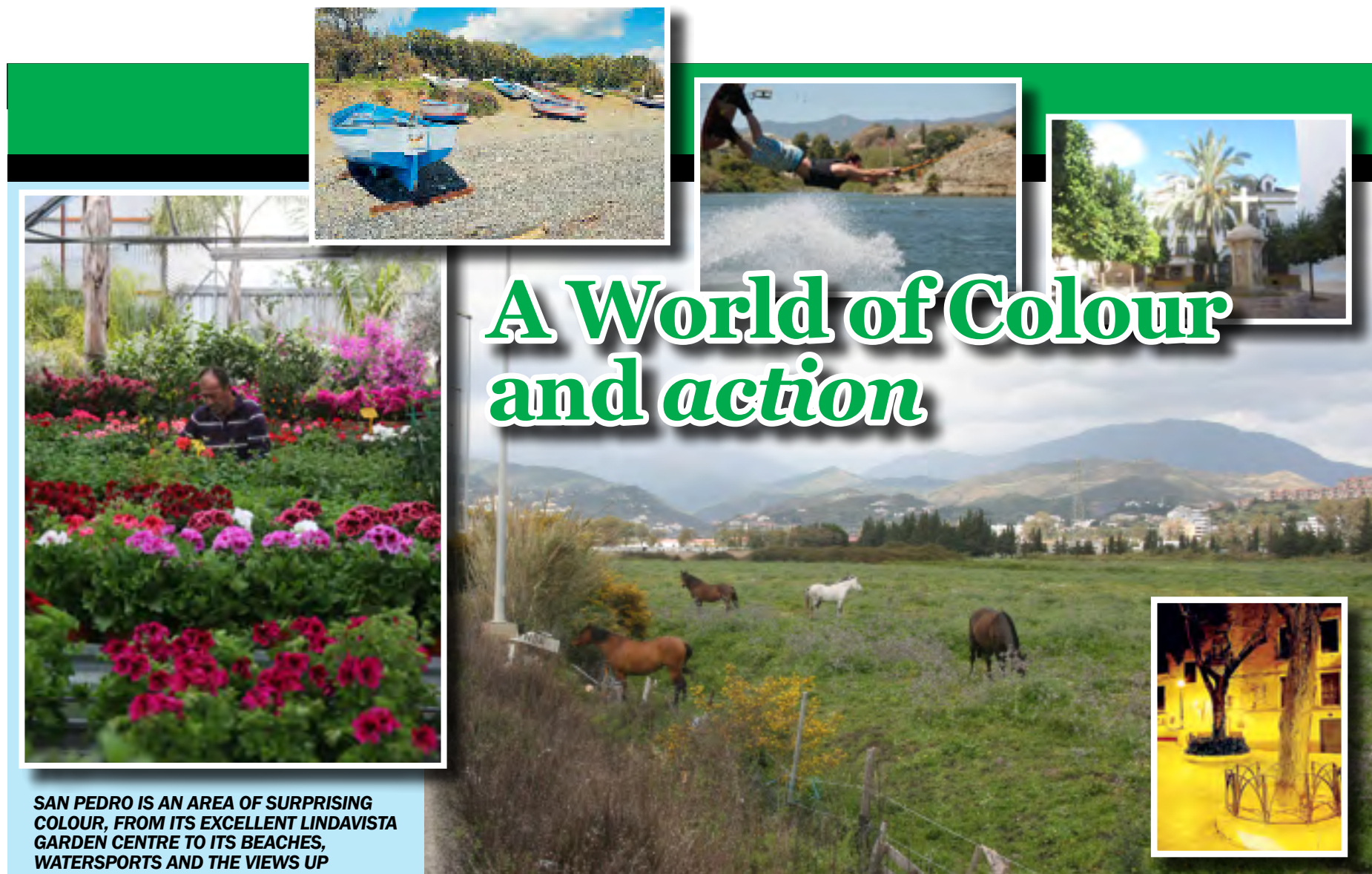
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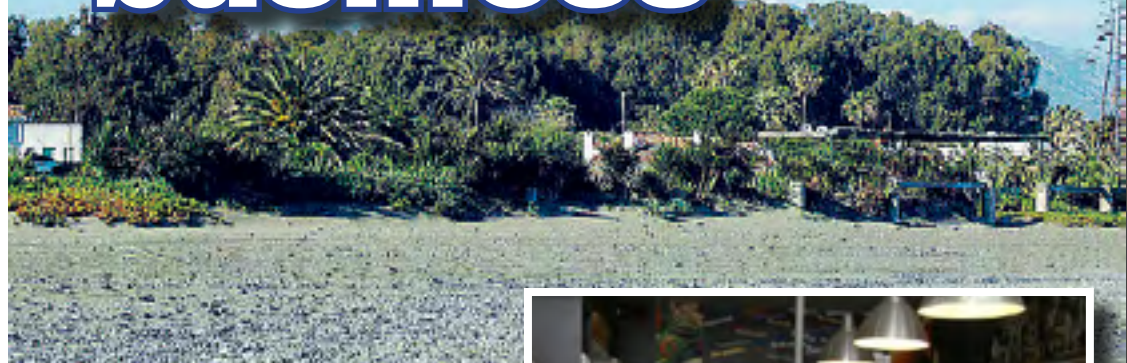


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## San Pedro special

# Guadalmina – Great for business



It is one of the most understated, yet exclusive areas of the Costa del Sol. Little known to tourists, yet for those-in-the-know Guadalmina is THE place to spend their holidays.

Located to the west of San Pedro, this is one of the oldest and wealthiest areas of Marbella.

A part from

boasting two top notch golf courses, there are dozens of excellent shops and restaurants and hundreds of mega-million mansions discreetly tucked away along the tree-lined leafy streets. It is here that Formula 1 world champion and playboy James Hunt once lived, frequently being seen jogging around the area, while former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar has a second home here.



**QUALITY: What's Cooking (above), while (left) Aznar at Albert & Simon restaurant**

Aznar's visits to Guadalmina always see a huge increase in security, with around the clock police protection outside his huge villa, as well as

perhaps rubbing shoulders with Aznar. It is not for nothing that the area gets the nickname 'Guadalpijo' during these months.

"It is certainly a well to do affluent area," says Tina Law, who owns upmarket deli What's Cooking opposite Supersol. "We can sell any number of upmarket gourmet items. In fact the better quality the better."

Her shop, which she runs with husband Adrian has a fantastic mix of fine foods and dishes ready to take away. There are wines from Ronda, ham from Aracena and cheeses from all over. And you can now even eat in the shop. Local businessman Paul Bevan, who runs a furniture shop in the main shopping area, says: "I think that Guadalmina has improved since the road got better. The reason that I moved here is the location."

"Basically I couldn't get this shop for what I paid in Marbella, so it was a no brainer. My unit has a great position, ample parking and it's easy to find us. It is a great place to do business."

**UPMARKET: Taking tea in Guadalmina**



fre-quent road blocks. Aznar's wife, Madrid mayor Ana Botella likes to spend her time hacking around the golf course, while Aznar eats at various restaurants, including Asador Guadalmina or drinking at the yuppie bar Donde Fatima. Every holiday season - especially during Easter and August - Guadalmina is packed with upwardly mobile Madrileños and the PP faithful who converge on the area with the hope of

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"Most of our students go back to the UK or the USA, with the majority of them wanting to get into universities in the UK if they can. We also have had a growing number of Russian students." Having been based in the area for over a decade, Dianne has seen dramatic changes in the area. "When we first started coming here, San Pedro was on its own. All this was just beach and fields. Now Guadalupe has almost merged into San Pedro."

"Getting to San Pedro now is very easy, with the tunnel and the new roads, and when they finish the landscaping and the planned parks that will go on top of the tunnel, San Pedro will be beautiful".



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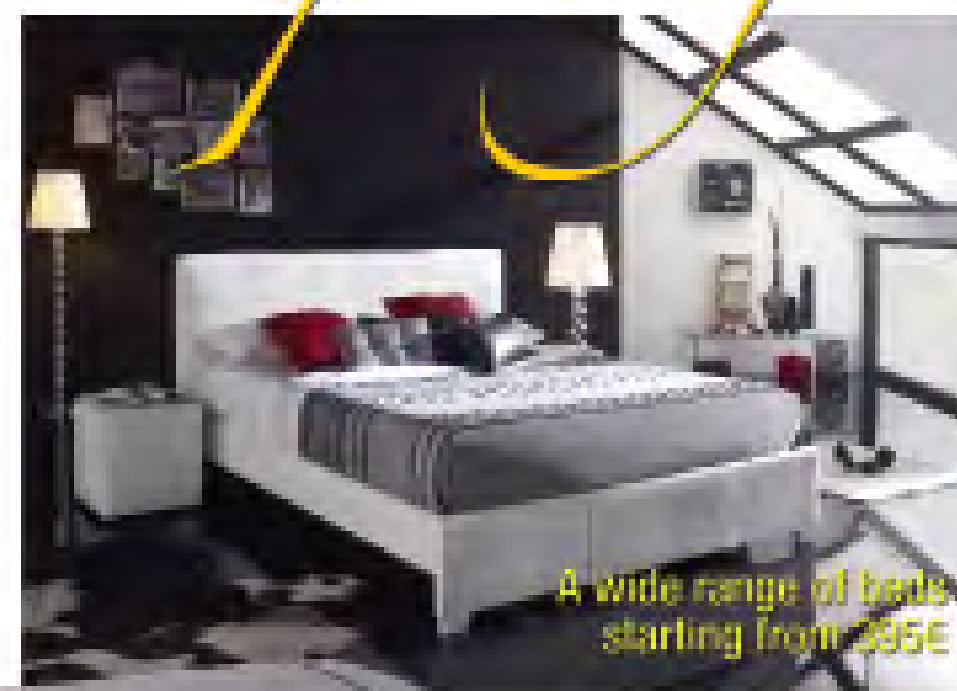
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Best of all, houses and apartments here come in at a much more manageable price.

"At the same time everything is on your doorstep and the infrastructure is more modern," explains Daniel Enquist, from estate agent Crystal Shore.

"San Pedro is one of the most sought after areas in the 200,000 to 250,000 euro range and there is plenty on offer," he adds.

And since the tunnel has been finished the area is seeing increasing demand.

"There is a good vibe here now and a real sense of possibility," he explains. "In fact we are so busy we are actually taking on new staff."

The agency, based in Guadalmina, was set up in 2006 by Peter and Paula Smith from Nottingham.

Previously in the textile trade, they have done well to build

**EXCLUSIVE: Some of San Pedro's most affluent villas**



up the company to one of the most popular in the area.

"In particular Guadalmina has a strong market. It is very Spanish and very popular with Madrilenos and buyers from the Basque Country," adds Enquist.

Another local agent Alistair Stephenson has a good range of properties with his agency Alcantara Estates.

"We have become very busy this year and the market seems very buoyant," he ex-

plains. Finally you will certainly want to take a look at La Heredia Real Estate Solutions website, which has a range of good properties in the area.

Set up by Tom and Fiona Sweeten in 2010 they have an office in the attractive same name development up on the Ronda road.

"Now is definitely the time to buy and demand is strong with often more buyer competing for the same property," explains Fiona.

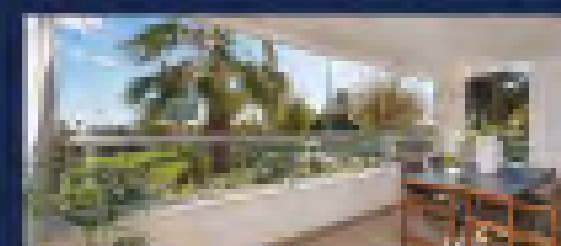
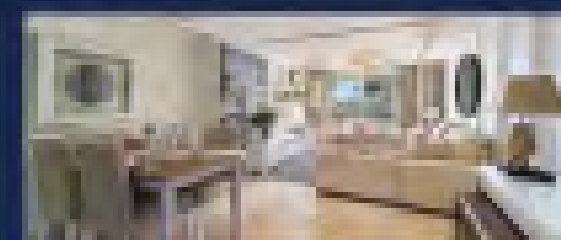
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# San Pedro and Puerto Banus beachside property



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# La Sala style in San Pedro



## Going the extra nine metres

IT is an original new concept. The interesting shop Tejaime, up on the Ronda road, involves a clever idea where local artists, designers and other clients literally rent out space to show off their wares. "We have had so much interest up and down the coast for the idea," says owner Pernilla Smidt. Using a 'M2' logo similar to music station MTV, the things on sale are an eclectic mix of jewelry, furniture, artwork and even wine. "I even have estate agents renting some space," she adds.

**The hippest new Rincon de la Sala restaurant has created a distinctly hot vibe in the heart of the old town, writes Giles Brown**

IT has completely taken the town by storm since opening last year. Revolutionising the centre, El Rincón de La Sala has very much the same vibe as its sister venues in Puerto Banus... but there is a distinctly more Spanish flavour. Much of its success is thanks to the vision of its owner Ian Radford. But a lot is also to do with the capable chef Monolo de la Chica, who trained under Dani Garcia at La Moraga, as well as San Pedro stallward Albert & Simon. The extensive menu contains an array of Sala Group's firm favourites such as 'Chateau-briand served with baby potatoes, grilled tomatoes, mushrooms and Béarnaise sauce,' along with an exquisite selection of authentic Andalusian-style dishes including 'shrimps served in a paper cone' and 'crayfish served with garlic and chilli.' In addition to the gourmet



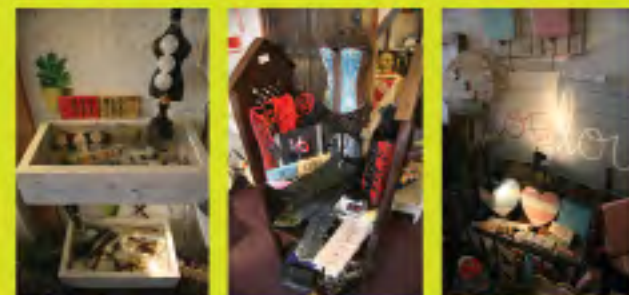
a la carte menu, there is a snack menu containing the El Rincón Burger and a light bites menu boasting Fried Aubergine with Cane Honey and Curried Tempura Chicken

Salad. The restaurant meanwhile is run by Miguel Mena, who previously worked at Gorki. As Sala Group's chairman Ian Radford explains: "Our aim

for El Rincón was to not to stray from our roots, giving it the same feel and fondness our clients love at La Sala but adding an authentic Spanish twist."



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