



# Spain

THE ROUGH GUIDE

Mark Ellingham and John Fisher

## ANDALUCÍA, December 2000

To travel in Spain is to visit an outpost of the Roman Empire. That is a given, of course, anywhere in Europe. In Spain you still see Roman aqueducts and cross Roman bridges and speak a version of the Roman language. Another very different kind of empire arrived in Spain in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, an invasion whose effects are also visible today.

The Moors crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in 711 and swept quickly across Spain, making it a colony of North Africa. This was the golden age of Islam, an age of great art and architecture, science and commerce, all supported on the base of their military success. This heritage is still apparent in the Spanish architecture, language and music.

Christian and Muslim armies contended for centuries on a border that moved up and down the map of Spain until, in 1492, the Moors were finally defeated at Granada. They retreated across the Mediterranean where they remain to this day a defeated and colonized people regretting the loss of past glories and looking for a way to recover. But that's another interesting story.

Also in that year of 1492, King Fernando, goaded on by the inquisition, enacted a religious purity law that brought about the expulsion of all remaining Muslims and Jews. With the loss of these educated people - the best craftsmen, professionals and businessmen, Spain became a nation of peasants ruled by the evil twins of religion and militarism.

Christopher Columbus sailed westward for China, also in that pivotal year, and started the sorry history of the conquest of Latin America. For centuries, the galleons would sail west loaded with priests and soldiers, and return with cargoes of silver and gold. All this booty enriched the evil twins but did little to improve the lot of the Spanish people.

Spain missed out on the protestant reformation, the age of enlightenment, the industrial revolution and the development of democracy until the veil of medievalism was lifted upon the death of the mass murderer Franco in 1975.

When I first travelled in Spain in 1964, the consequences of those 1492 events were still in effect, except that the empire had fallen apart. Travelling in Spain today, you are surrounded by echoes from that long ago year. You meet an older generation who grew up with the boot of Fascism on their necks and the under-thirties who don't remember it. It's an exciting time to be Spanish, or to just be a visiting fly on the wall.

28 November, 2000

We arrive in Malaga on a last minute bargain flight out of Toronto, and continue by bus to Granada. The part of old Granada near the university is lively and informal, populated by students and not by tourists, a good place to rest and recover from jet-lag. We deliberately ask for a quiet room high up under the roof at Hostal San Joachin where we can sleep in late. Then we seek out a small comedor behind a café, for a good dinner.

It occurs to me this attic room would not be the best place to be in case of fire. There is a comforting notice on the door in several languages, including English:

IN CASE OF FIRE, KEEP CALM: DO NOT SHOUT OR RUN.  
IF YOUR CLOTHES CATCH ON FIRE, STOP AND ROLL.  
WHEN CAUGHT IN SMOKE, CRAWL.  
NEAREST STAIR IS \_\_\_\_\_ m ON THE RIGHT / LEFT.  
AN ALTERNATE ESCAPE ROUTE IS \_\_\_\_\_ m ON THE RIGHT / LEFT.

Thus reassured, we turn in early and sleep til noon.

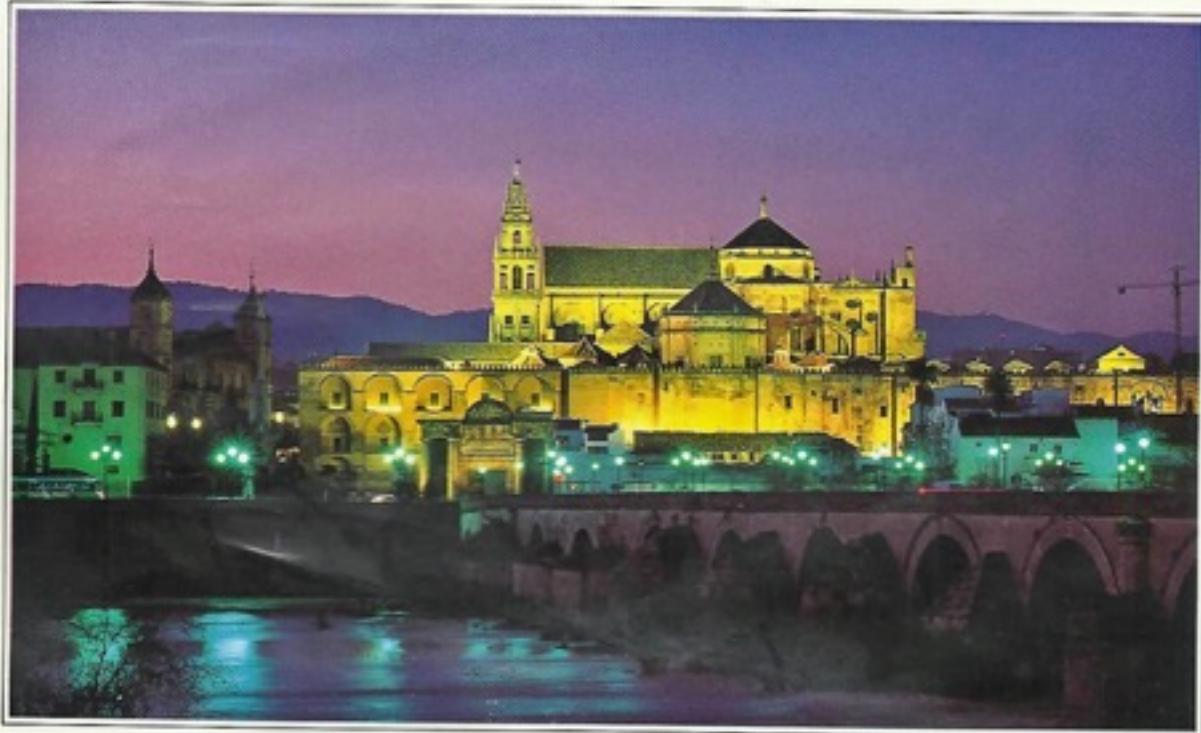




Off to Cordoba. On the train we meet Roya, a young woman from Mississauga, who wears the iron ring as I do. Having finished her Engineering degree, she has been on the road with a back-pack for six months, much as I did at her age. And, like me then, she hasn't a clue what she will do next.

We walk into town together in a light rain and take rooms at Hostal Milagrosa (Miraculous Hostal)





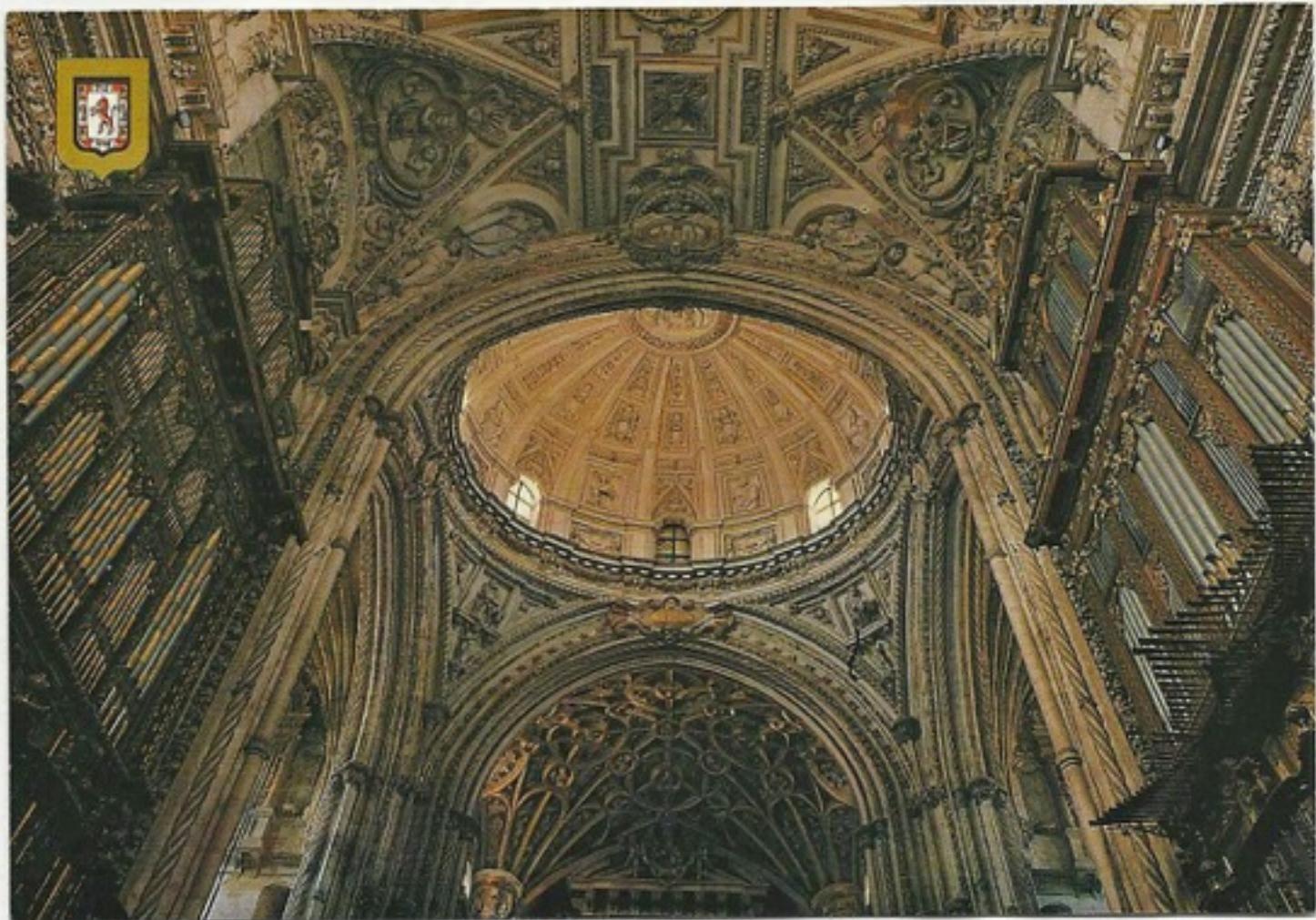
## CORDOBA

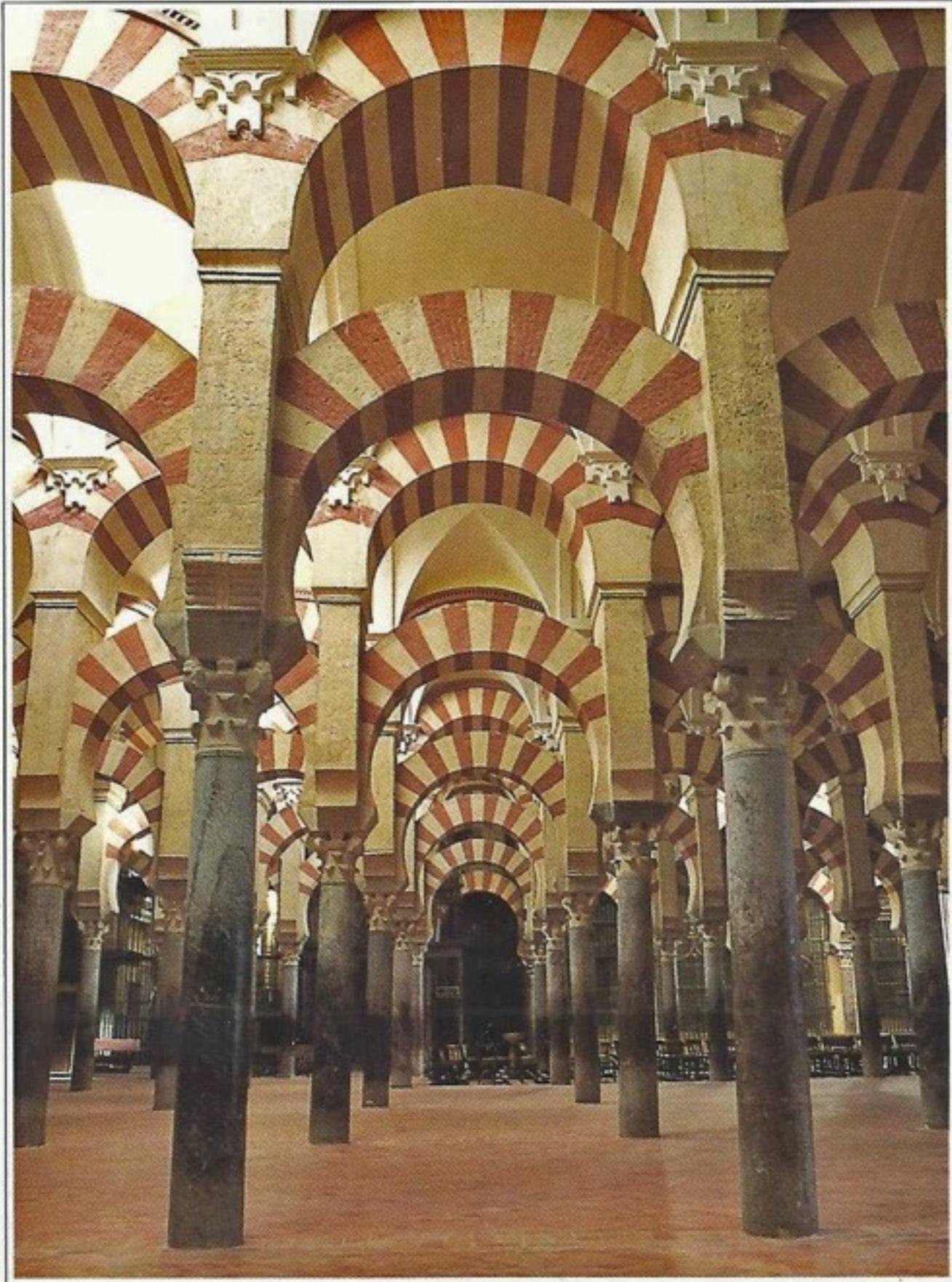
When Christian armies reconquered Cordoba in 1236, they gained a vibrant city, with a university, libraries, lively commerce, running water and street lights. It was not the reconquest but the edicts of 1492 that ended a civilized era and established the regime that would impoverish the Spanish people until late in the twentieth century.

The owners of God's one true church drove out all Jews, Moors and other non-Catholics, and set up the Inquisition. In 1523 they built a towering cathedral that sticks up through the roof of the mosque. What an opportunity was missed here to build the new church **beside** the mosque and respect the long-established tradition of tolerance. Many voices at the time called for this; the civil authorities always insisted on preservation, but the clerics persisted and badgered a succession of kings for nearly three centuries until they got their way.

I am wrong, I think, if I hold one belief system in contempt more than the others. I knew about this sorry history but really, it's nothing special if you look at the broad range of the history of mankind. But I'm no academic and can't maintain a professional detachment. I have walked in the place, listened to its echoes and touched its stones. To be there is not the same as to read about it.

We sit in the cathedral and look up at the dome, the carved stones, the gold, all in total contrast to the mosque. Quite apart from the dark history of this particular place, cathedrals always affect me in a similar way. The engineering and craftsmanship are magnificent, the gold decoration is too, too much, but the intended effect misses its mark. For one like me who lacks the gift of faith, the place is uncomfortable and intimidating.





CÓRDOBA

We walk to the public market at Plaza de la Corredera, where Roya loads up with bread, cheese and olives. A long ramble across the Roman Bridge and we lunch on a park bench.

I used to do this all the time, eat out of street markets, sitting on a bench or a sea wall or someone's front steps. We haven't done it in years. The reason, I think, is that the sixty year old legs are talking to us, and they're saying - "Wouldn't it be nice to take a table in that little café and just wait for people to bring food? And could we maybe pull the shoes off too?"

But today, Roya is leading the tour and our long ramble takes us into and over the ruins of old mill buildings and mucking about the marshy bottom of the Rio Guadalquivir.







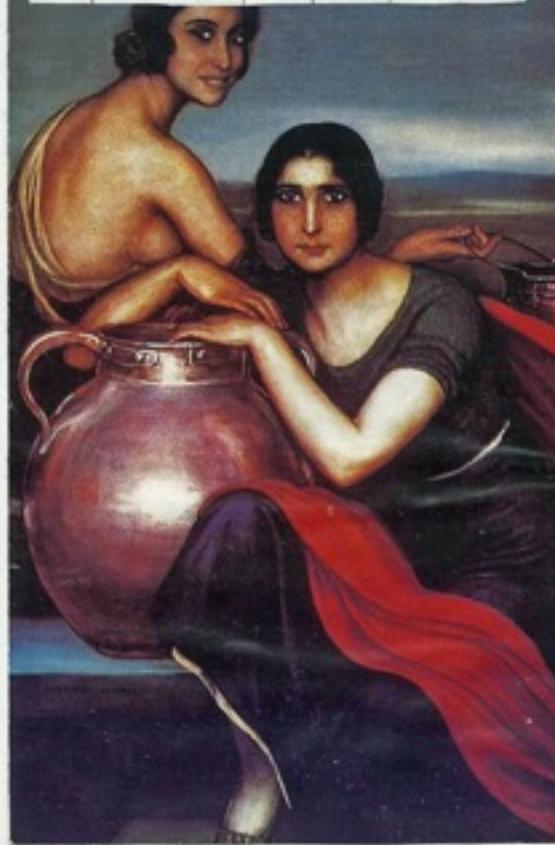
The streets adjoining the Cathedral are filled with souvenir shops, but you can quickly get beyond that to a compact city of narrow walking streets and delightful plazas. We wander about, we eat and drink, we enjoy.



CÓRDOBA



## CORDOBA



My first visit to Spain was in 1964. I rode down from Paris on my motorcycle, with David Faulk, a Scot whom I had met in the Paris Youth Hostel. David had a scheme to buy up antique weapons which he thought would be plentiful in Spain and bring them back for sale in the flea market at Clignacourt.

1964

*"Don't go there", some people said. "It's dangerous. It's not like Europe. Europe ends at the Pyrenees." There was an apocryphal story going around the hostels about a young man who was caught smuggling drugs from Morocco into Spain. In the story, he was sentenced to be garrotted, but the sentence was reduced on appeal to life in prison.*

*When we got to Spain, we met the most gracious people in all of Europe.*

*We popped into a small shop to ask for directions. Our host had some difficulty because we had no Spanish. He pulled us out of the shop, drew down the shutter and took us to the place we wanted. Invariably, people would answer our requests patiently and would stand by, waiting until we understood and dismissed them with a "muchas gracias".*

After a couple of days in Cordoba, we go on by train to Madrid, walk up the long hill from Atocha Station to Plaza Mayor where we take a room in Hostal TIJKAL. This name is an acronym, for what I know not.

*David and I, on our second arms buying expedition to Spain, hitch-hiked all the way from Paris to Guadalajara, then went by train to Madrid Atocha Station. We walked up toward the centre looking for signs of a hostal in the dark streets. Nothing. Then we saw the sereno.*

*The sereno was a figure out of medieval times, with a long coat, heavy boots, a floppy hat, a big staff and a ring of keys. You stopped outside the door of your building and clapped twice. He would come on the double with a step-step-thunk rhythm and let you in. This was a useful service in an age before intercom systems, and it remained very useful to a fascist regime that wanted to know everything about everybody. The sereno knew who your friends were, who you slept with, when you came and went, and he was of course a totally reliable supporter of the regime.*

*We asked him about a hostal, and with a follow-me gesture he ran up the street, step-step-thunk with the heavy staff. He opened a door and took us to the top floor where an old woman had a room she would let for about a dollar. I presumed he got a little cut, though I didn't see it happen.*

Atocha Station is much changed since I last saw it. In 1964 it was a great dark cavern, the air heavy with coal dust, steam and grease. Its dark corners reeked of piss. Now the old Catholic-Fascist regime is gone and Spain has done a lot of catching up. Estación Atocha has become a bright, beautiful garden.

ESTACION DE ATOCHA



M A D R I D

PLAZA MAYOR



M A D R I D

PLAZA MAYOR



M A D R I D

Some people compare Madrid to Paris, and while these may be the same people who would compare Toronto to New York, in one way at least Madrid is world class. It's about La Madrileña, the fashionable young woman of Madrid.

La Madrileña has the stereotypical tall, slender body of a Spanish dancer. She is wearing skin-tight pants with no bulging pockets, with a fine straight seam in the centre that pulls up into her ass. There is a short blouse or jacket that covers nothing below the belt line. What you see is two perfect little buns dancing down the street. "And what about the dreaded panty line?", you may well ask. No, nay, never. No panties, I suppose. It didn't seem right to ask. Perfection in this as in other things can only be achieved through careful attention to detail.

Completing La Madrileña's costume is a completely confident attitude, a cigarette in one hand and a cell phone in the other. The cigarette apparently is compulsory for young women in Spain, though foreign tourists are excused.

*Standing at a pedestrian crossing in the Plaza del Sol, we asked the young woman next to us for directions. She looked straight ahead and ignored us. Talk to a strange man in the street? It just wasn't done. We asked a man and got the information we needed.*

G R A N V I A

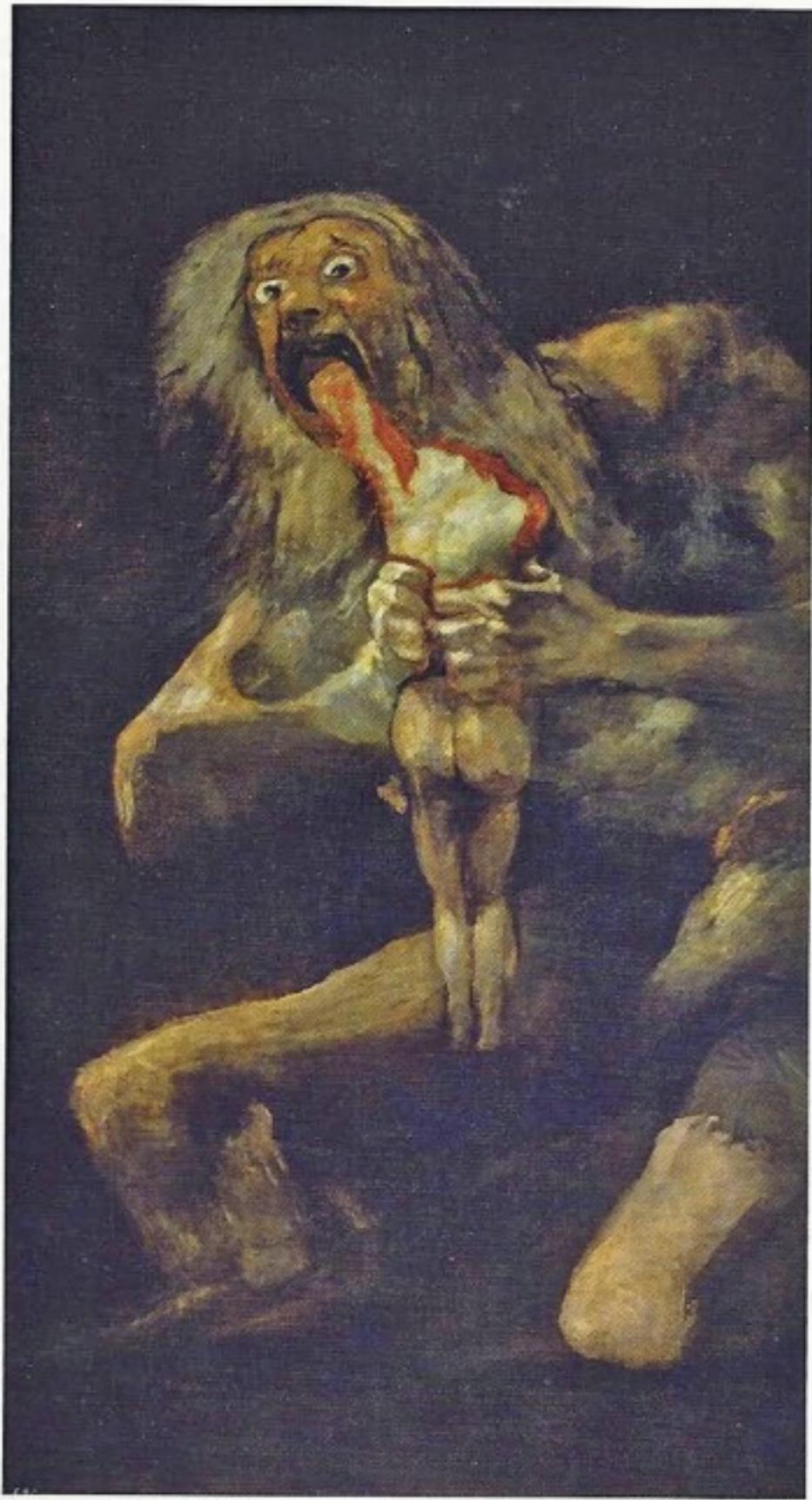


We attend the Palacio Real, as much disgusting in its opulence as the Palace of Versailles. Next door is the Cathedral, where our visit coincides with a high mass. A dozen white-robed priests, a choir, an organ, incense, bells, golden sceptres, all the power and wealth of the Church on show, and a full house of the faithful, all on their knees. Surely God hears these prayers. How could He miss this?

We attend the Prado art gallery too. A common theme in the Spanish collection appears to be the martyrdom of Santo so-and-so. Poor so-and-so is always being torn limb from limb or beheaded or disemboweled or burned or fed to the lions. Young ladies around the margins are praying and looking heavenward with that look of religious rapture that is frequently captured by painters but seldom by photographers. In one scene, five angels are hovering overhead while the carnage goes on. One of them would appear to be saying "O.K, you four guys pick up the body and I'll grab the head." I want to look and pass on and not be involved, but the galleries go on and on without end like the dark centuries of the middle ages.

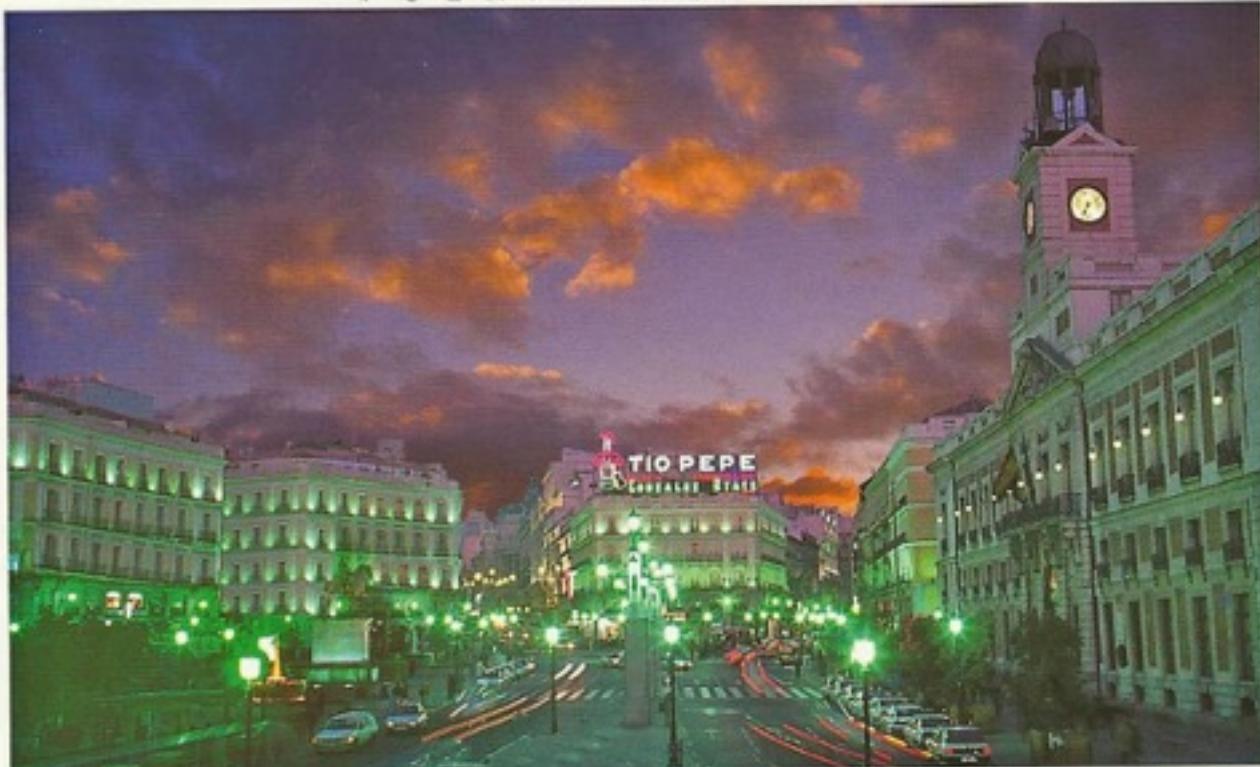
I am oppressed by these terrible images. A theocratic regime that thrived on superstition and fear through many centuries has collected its commissioned work in this place to be celebrated as art. The very nadir I find in the galleries dedicated to Goya who was clearly affected by this institutionalized horror. He painted, in his own original secular style, nightmare images that connect back to the earlier religious artists just as the Franco regime connected back to the medieval Church. I have to get out of here.

Outside, there are no monsters devouring maidens. We find a grey sky, drizzle, traffic in the streets and lights in the shops, people going about their ordinary business, walking dogs, chatting, shopping, apparently indifferent to the chamber of horrors just across the street.



The Spanish daily schedule is an adaptation to the frying pan heat of summer afternoons, but it continues in winter as well, when the temperature in Madrid plunges to about ten degrees and people wear their fur coats. I refer of course to the siesta, when everything closes from two to five and then opens up into the evening. In the cool of the evening, it's time for the paseo when everyone hits the street just to walk around and take the air, meet the neighbours or poke into the shops. Puerta del Sol is the focus of much of this activity in Madrid.

PUERTA DEL SOL

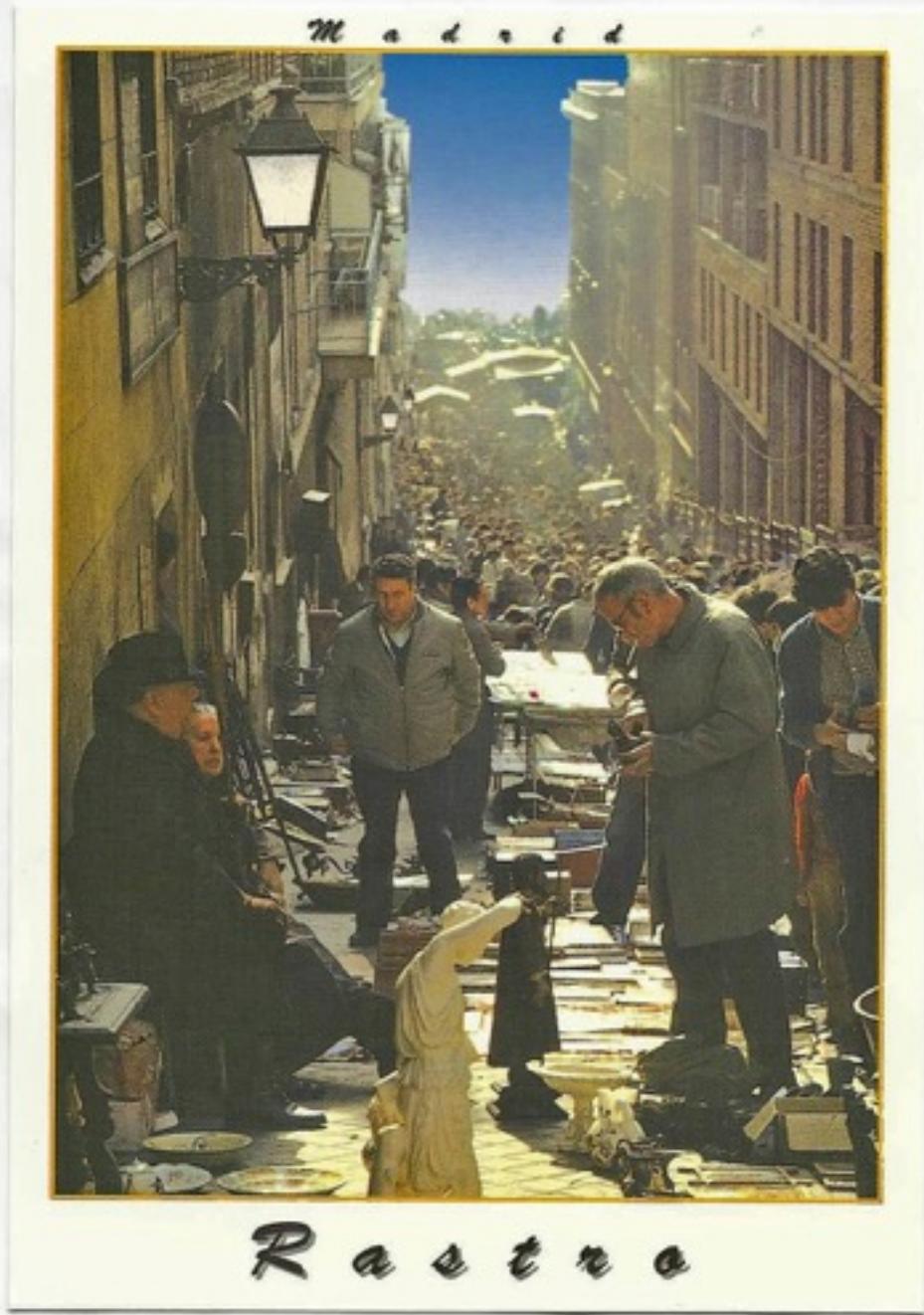


M A D R I D

Puerta del Sol is the centre of the universe because it is the place in Spain from which all distances are measured. A plaque in the sidewalk marks the exact centre of the Spanish Empire. Standing on this spot, we hear the music of the Andes. We follow the music across the plaza through the crowds to the wall of El Corte Inglés, the classiest department store in Spain.

Using El Corte Inglés as a backdrop, the buskers have set up their drums, pan pipes, mandolins, guitars and a sound system powered by Honda. Children of the empire, short, stocky and dark-skinned, long black hair, they play to a crowd of well-dressed, long-noses in the centre of the universe.

On Sunday, we attend the Rastro, the giant flea market that covers a neighbourhood of Madrid just down from Plaza Mayor. I know this street, but I can't identify the shop where I was in '64. Everything is available for sale in the crowded streets of the Rastro. Everything.



We walked down to the Rastro, where it was quiet, a morning of a non-market day. We poked into junk shops until we found one that had everything we wanted. We bought guns and swords, enough to fill our back-packs, the swords sticking out above our heads. Off to the station.

We take the train to Sevilla, a high speed electric train on a special high speed track. They give out earphones so you can hear the movie or tune into a music channel. They pass around free candies. The train feels as if it were sitting in the station, but the scenery is flying past our window.



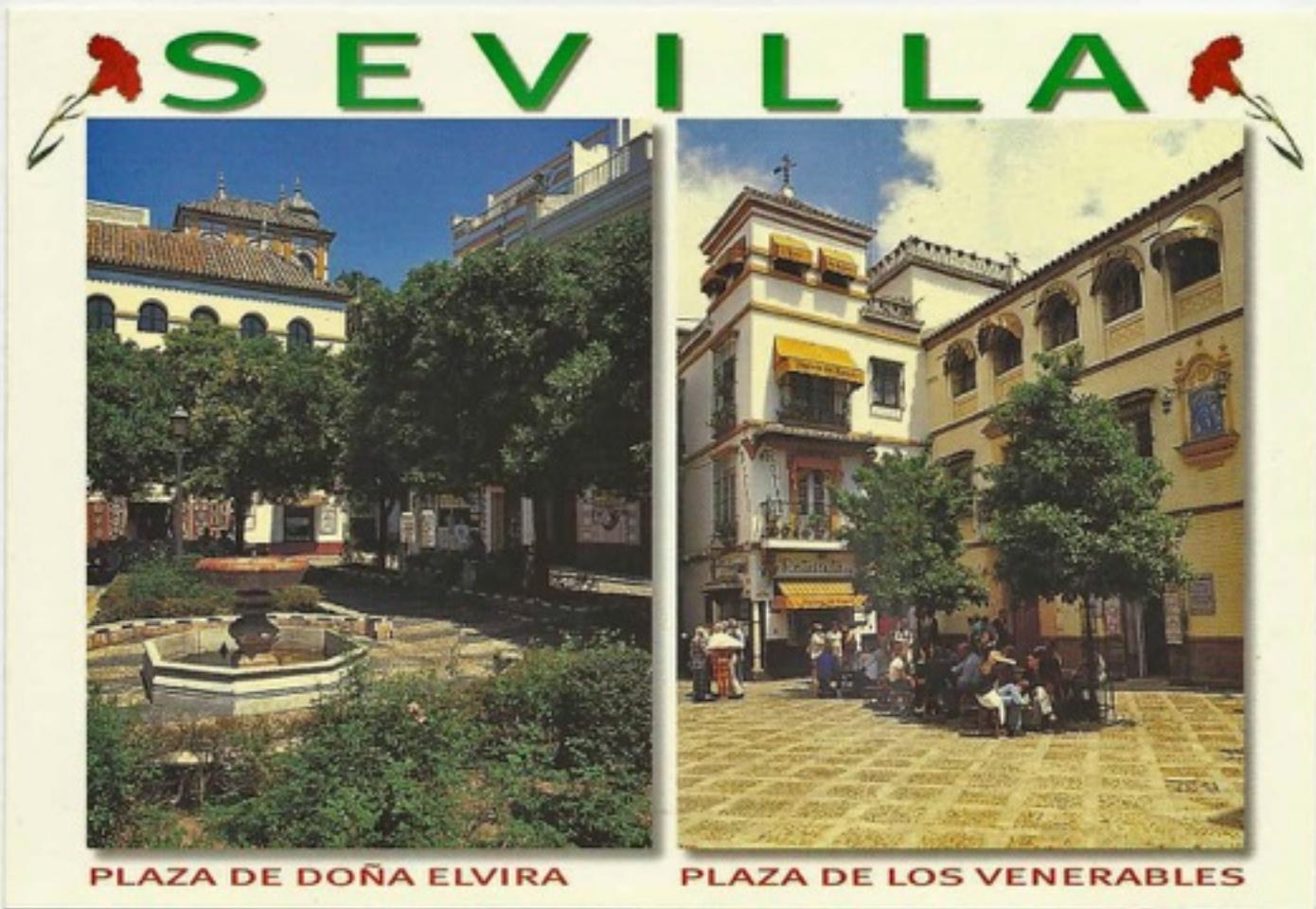
*We took our guns and swords to Atocha Station and boarded El Rápido, the express train to the French border. Part of the line was electrified, but work was only complete here and there. Our train would stop in the middle of nowhere and wait. Eventually, a steam engine would come chuffing up the line and hook us up. It took twenty hours to the border.*

*Twice during our journey we were boarded by the Guardia Civil, who went through every passenger's documents and poked into baggage. The fear among the people was palpable; all conversation stopped, eyes were averted, heads down.*

We land in Sevilla at Hostal Torregrosa and wander out in a light rain to nearby Plaza de Santa Maria la Blanca. There's an outdoor cafe with huge umbrellas and radiant heaters powered by bottle gas. A film company is at work across the way, setting up for a balcony scene. We have a long evening ahead with nothing better to do than observe the hurry-up-and-wait of filming, and enjoy a dinner and a bottle of wine.

There are buskers here too, not for our entertainment, but to remind us that there is unemployment and suffering still, beneath Spain's new found prosperity. One fellow, lacking a guitar, plays a scrap of corrugated cardboard, a pizza box. It's tuneless, but it does give a rhythmic base line to his flamenco song. He gets some coins from the audience, mostly from sympathy I think.

The next performers are a young couple, he with a real guitar and a tolerable voice, and she with a frightened look, holding on to him and singing to him only, not able to look at her audience. Trouble is, she sings like Edith Bunker. People cringe as they approach, people cover their ears, people try to wave them away. They get no coins.





TORREGROSA  
ROMMS-CHAMBRE

**PENSION  
TORREGROSA**

VIDRIO, 9  
Tlno. 95 441 07 65

41003 SEVILLA



According to our Bible ( Rough Guide To Spain ), someone has taken the trouble to measure up the Cathedral of Sevilla, St. Peter's of Rome and St. Paul's of London, to determine on the basis of internal volume that Sevilla's is the biggest in the world. The vandals of Sevilla demolished the pre-existing mosque and converted the minaret into a bell tower, and surpassed the vandals of Cordoba who merely built their church up through the middle of their mosque without totally destroying it.

We climb up the minaret which offers good views of the town and the church as well as the minaret's internal construction. It's easy to disparage the intentions of those who commissioned the work, and natural to sympathise with the faithful poor who had to pay for everything, but the work itself, the craftsmanship, the art, the engineering are all magnificent.

The cathedral retains its Moorish patio, shaded by orange trees and enlivened by flowing water. The patio is paved in brick, and cut by small channels where water flows to every tree. Katie trips into one of these channels and injures her foot.

# SEVILLA

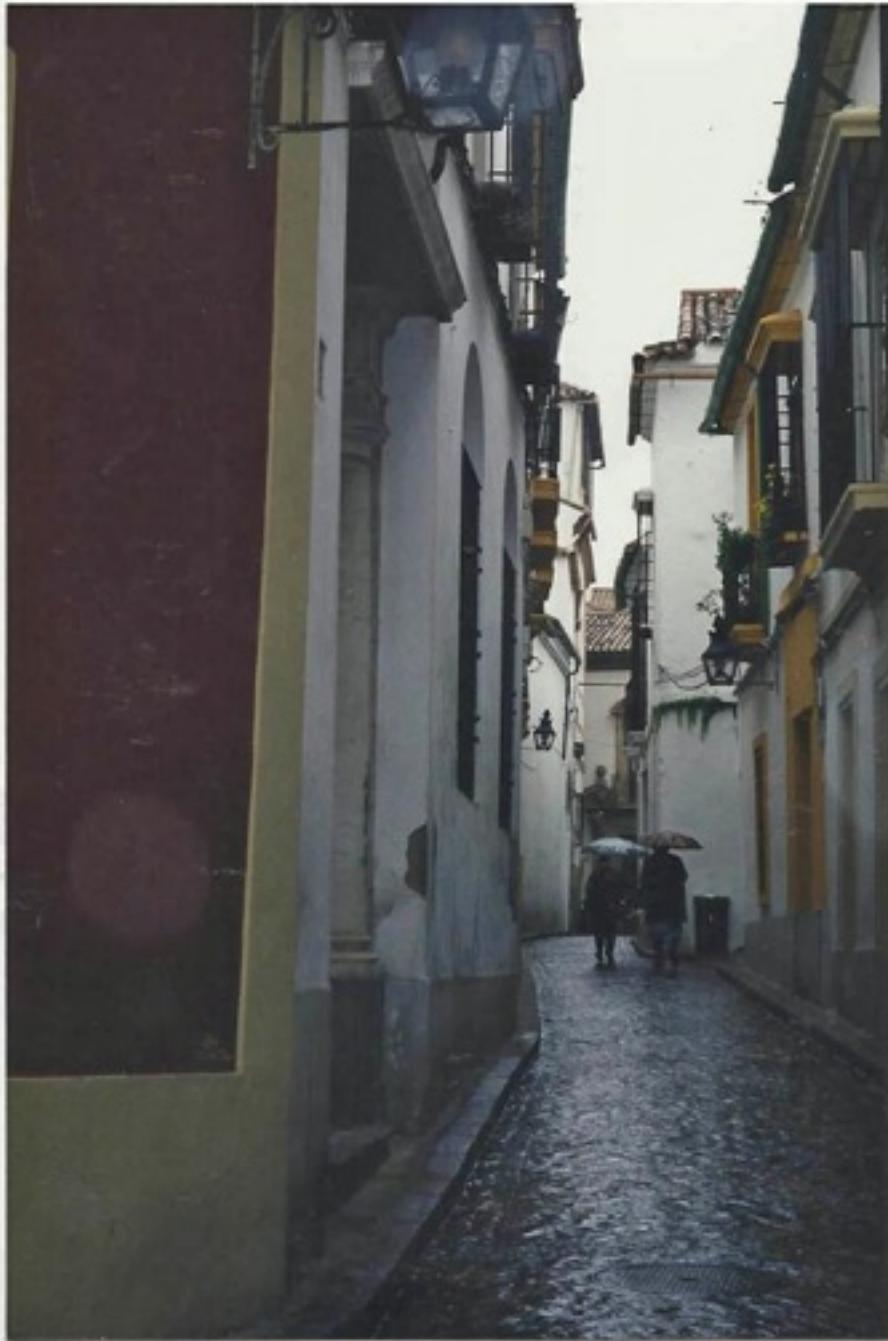


LA CATEDRAL Y LA GIRALDA



I try to hold her up as we limp back to the hostal. We feel like rats in a maze, trying, and failing, to navigate by the shortest route through these passageways in the rain. Kate has a lot of pain. She flops on the bed and sends me out to find a cane.

I bring back a cane, but she isn't ready to try it. I go out for a long walk and leave her to rest in bed. When I return, she is gone. Cafe Piletas is at the nearest corner, the first place to look, and that's where I find her, hugging a cafe con leche.



This is a typical small neighbourhood bar, finished in brick, tile, stucco and noise. The street noises enter through an open door, dishes are always thrown, not placed on the counter, a washer grinds away below, the espresso machine has its own harsh sound, and conversations rise above all of this.

On the wall there is a row of dried hams, jamon serrano, each with its little pig's foot tied up in a rope. At the bottom end, the thigh, a little cup with a spike in it stabs into the ham to collect the last bit of juice. Behind the bar, the expected stuff, - bottles, glasses, dishes, espresso machine.

On the bar, a glass cabinet contains tapas, - tuna in tomato sauce, capelin, cod, mussels, spinach in oil with chick peas, green beans in oil, sausages, pork loin, potatoes in spicy oil, and more. There's a beer pump and a bucket of olives. Order a beer or wine and you get a dish of olives too. The jamon serrano of the day, the one on active duty is mounted on the bar with its foot held up in a clamp and slices taken off as they are ordered.

Wooden stools by the bar, some tables beyond, a lipton tea clock on the wall and some toreador pictures, a cigaret vending machine and a video gambling machine with bells and whistles. I watch, disapprovingly, as a young man dumps his hard-earned pesetas into the slot. But he scores. All eyes are on him as bells ring, lights flash and coins clatter into a metal tray.

*We stopped into a typical bar in northern Spain for wine and tapas, a room finished in wood and stucco, with some tables and chairs and a bench along one wall. A single bare lightbulb hung in the centre of the room. Several men were here, middle-aged and older, dressed in dark colours, wearing berets and smoking foul cigarettes.*

*Everyone was drinking red wine, some from burettas. This was a blown glass flask with a long spout. The drinker would tip up his buretta, draw it away to arm's length, and dump the thin stream of wine into the back of his mouth without spilling a drop. It made a loud pissing sound but I was told it enhanced the taste of the wine.*

*On the wall was a big, framed colour photograph of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, captioned "El Caudillo" across the bottom. Franco in his military uniform with an imperious expression looked down upon the drinkers. On another wall, was a smaller picture in a fancy gilt frame, a figure of Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns, blood running down his face, his eyes cast upward, toward Heaven.*

We travel on to Cadiz, an island city walled in against the sea, the last view of Spain for the many who sailed to the Americas. Not strictly speaking an island, Cadiz is connected to Spain by a trackless marsh, spanned only by a railroad track and a highway. The marsh is now being developed into a grid of dykes and ponds which must look from the air like a giant waffle iron. The ponds are to be used to evaporate sea water and make salt. It's a city of crumbling old buildings, narrow walking streets, plazas that you come upon by surprise and a beach facing the open Atlantic. We head for the centre of town and check into Hostal Ceuta, a very basic place with the tiniest patio in Spain.

The patio should be explained. Your typical Spanish house is built around a central patio, an open air living space that can usually be seen through an iron gate at the street. It is furnished with flowers, fountains, statuary, singing birds and serves as a showpiece and a welcoming place. It allows the house to be open, to have moving air without breaching privacy or security. The narrow streets and the patios of southern Spain and North Africa where they originated serve to keep out the sun and permit an exchange of air. As cold air tends to seek low places and hot air rises, the patios act as air conditioners. The higher the density of buildings, the more effective they are.

Our patios in Cordoba and Sevilla were much as described above, but the one in Cadiz is strictly functional, a passageway under dripping laundry that leads to a stair and open corridors above.



In the evening we go out to a flamenco show at La Cava, a narrow hole in the wall with a bar along one side that widens out in back, enough for a small kitchen and performance room. The cover is 1000 pesetas ( about \$8 ) and this includes all you want to drink. We arrive early for the 10 o'clock show to get barstools near the stage. We're sipping sherry here but others who arrive are ordering hard liquor perhaps because of the price. Four barmen are working at full speed filling tall glasses with ice cubes, filling the remaining space with booze.

The kitchen door has a small opening with a wide sill for slinging plates of food. Antonio is the cook; we know this for the barmen are constantly shouting orders to Antonio. Antonio, who looks like a madman, glares and shouts back at them, waving his knife. Like a caged animal, he paces back and forth chopping, slicing, mixing, throwing plates up onto the sill. The place has filled up, the noise level is deafening, long drinks are going down uncounted, Antonio, I fear, is going to explode. The whole place is going to explode if the music doesn't start soon.

The musicians arrive at eleven thirty. The guitar player is a fat, sleek fellow with a bland smile, apparently unaware of the chaos he has entered, a Buddha of the flamenco world. The singer sits down to his right, a wiry man with wild hair, deep-set eyes and a tormented expression. He hunches forward like one in pain, clasps his hands. They are ready.

Everything stops. The room is absolutely silent. You could hear a pin drop. No drinks are being poured; the waiters are all lined up, eyes on the stage. Antonio has come out, turning off the kitchen light, rubbing his hands in his apron. They start.

How to describe this music? To compare it to the blues is inadequate, but perhaps a starting point. The songs are about the human condition, about suffering, poverty, death, lost loves. Our singer's raspy voice can hold a single note soooooo long and add to it more grace notes than all the olives in Spain. His hands are constantly working, rubbing together, clenching, slapping, pulling. His face is in torment, and his voice filling the room with raw emotion. There are shouts of olé, spontaneous applause, sighs and moans, there are tears.

When he finishes the set, he appears to be an exhausted and broken man. The lights come up, the room fills with noise, glasses are refilled and the kitchen re-opens. We stay through both sets and then make our way back through the dark streets in a drizzle, to Hostal Ceuta. We have had a good introduction to the flamenco.



Today, we slept in after our big night at La Cava. The showery weather that has been with us all along appears to be clearing off. It's a great little walking town and Katie's foot seems to be working better.

In Plaza de las Flores, I spot a sign: "Calzados El Barato". It would translate as "Shoes El Cheapo". This appeals to me. On one shoe, I can press a thumbnail in and feel it on my foot, though it hasn't holed through yet. El Barato has just the right shoes for about \$25.

I bought these old shoes from Sam the Shoe Man on Weston Road in 1994, preparing for a trip to Hungary with Frank Sarai. "Sam", I said, "I'm going on a trip and I need good walking shoes. I've seen the posties coming in here, what do they use?" He pulled out these shoes, leather tops, thick rubber soles, cheap. They walked me all over Hungary, Vienna, Prague, London, Paris, New York, Mexico, Spain and Morocco. I leave them on the counter at El Barato. "You don't want them?" asks the man. "No, throw them away, thank you."



*I bought the motorcycle, a B.S.A. 350 single, in Belfast for £18. Bikes were a drag there; everyone wanted the new Austin 850 minicar. It carried me over to Edinburgh, down to London, Paris, Marseilles, Nice and north again through the Swiss Alps to Paris, where I met Faulk. We rode it to Spain, but on our journey north the engine began seizing up. Then, high up in the Pyrenees on a chilling November day, we got a flat tire. We stood there looking at the dead bike, rain on our heads, dark mountains all around and the Rio Bidasoa churning far below. We pushed the bike over the side and hitched back to Paris.*

Our little room at Hostal Ceuta has only a window into the patio. With no street exposure, it's quiet once everyone settles in for the night. Signs in the corridor command SILENCIO, Do not disturb the other residents.

I can't tell you what time this is, but we are awakened in the night by voices coming through the paper-thin wall, young voices talking and giggling, and then the sounds of love-making. The young lady goes on - oh oh oh oh and then the spanking begins - smack smack smack smack and she climaxes quickly - hah! hah! hah! hah! Limbs crash randomly against our adjoining wall, and she comes down to ooooooooh. My, that was fast.

There's some chat, some giggling and smooching, and then the process begins again. How many times, my fogged brain can't be sure, five or six I think. At the end, it's taking much longer, and the spanking is more intense.

In the early morning light, I hear the young lovers dressing and they slip out on tippy-toe, laughing and talking in low voices, not to disturb the other residents.

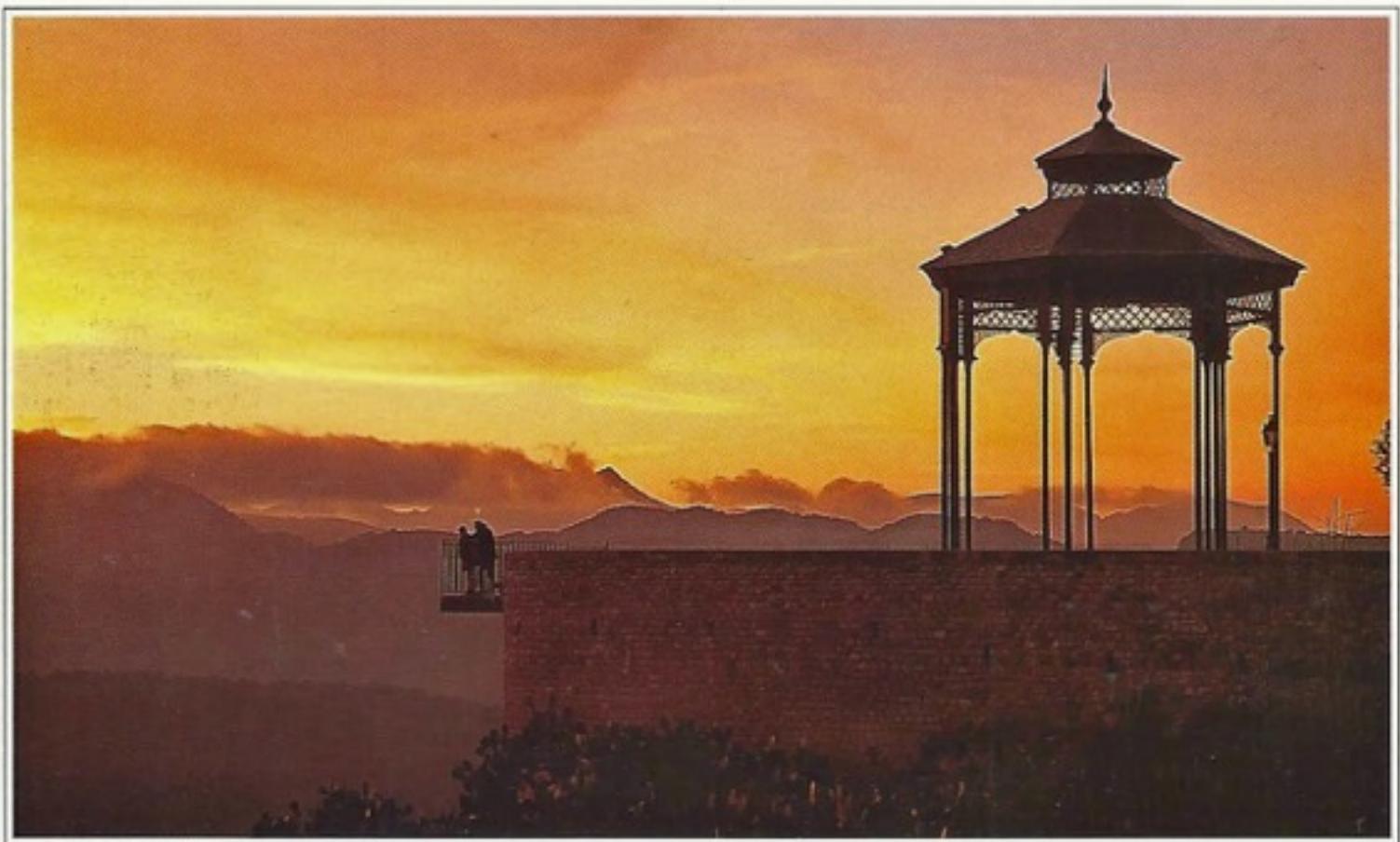
We drift off to sleep and awaken late morning a bit dazed.

We take a bus to Ronda, a mountain town with breath-taking views especially when you look straight down from the top. This is a popular day trip and weekender from the Costa del Sol and today is Saturday; hotels are full. We take a luxurious and too expensive room right on top of the cliff, which compensates, I suppose for our very basic digs in Cadiz. A good night's sleep will be appreciated after our night of rough sex.

There isn't much to say about Ronda; it's a tourist town because it makes good pictures.



R O N D A



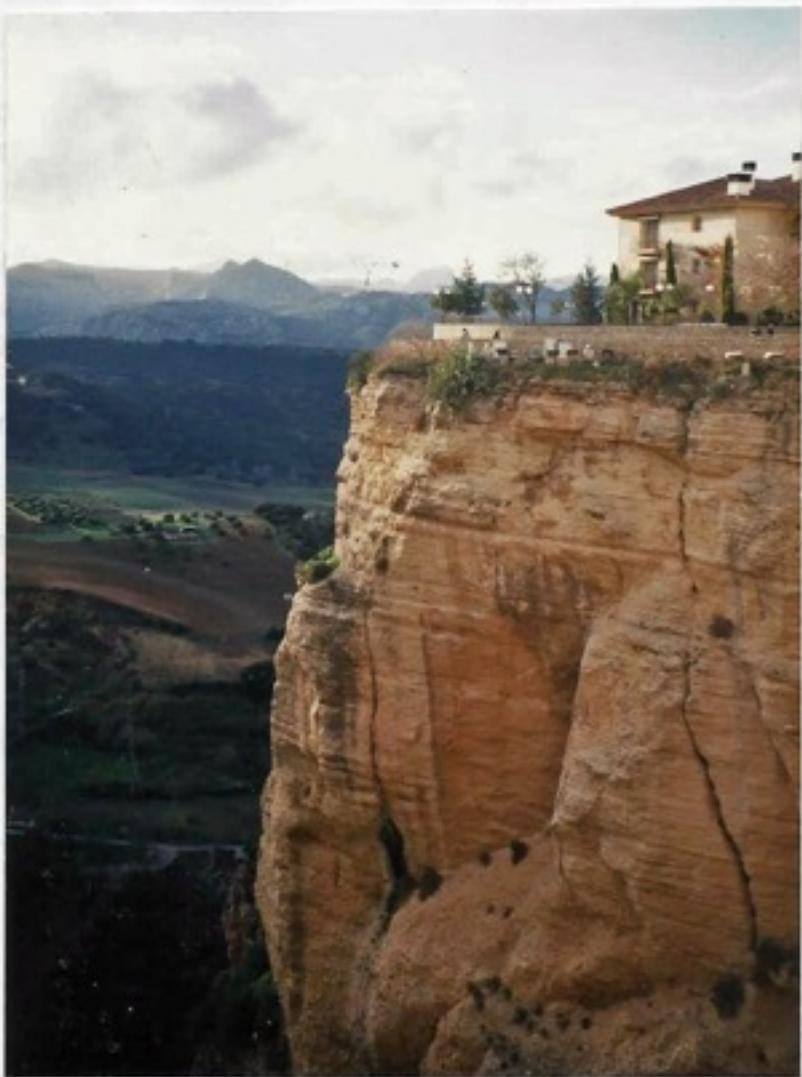
# RONDA



***HOTEL \*\*\****  
**"LA ESPAÑOLA"**

*"Buenas Noches"*

*"Good Night"*



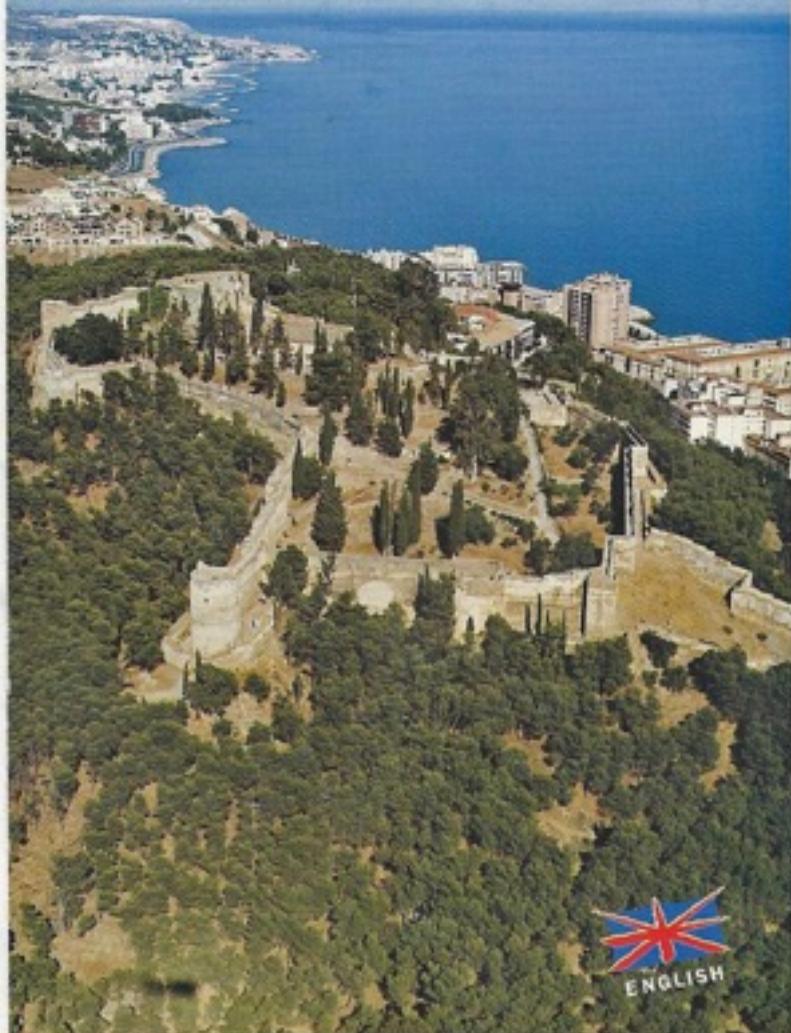


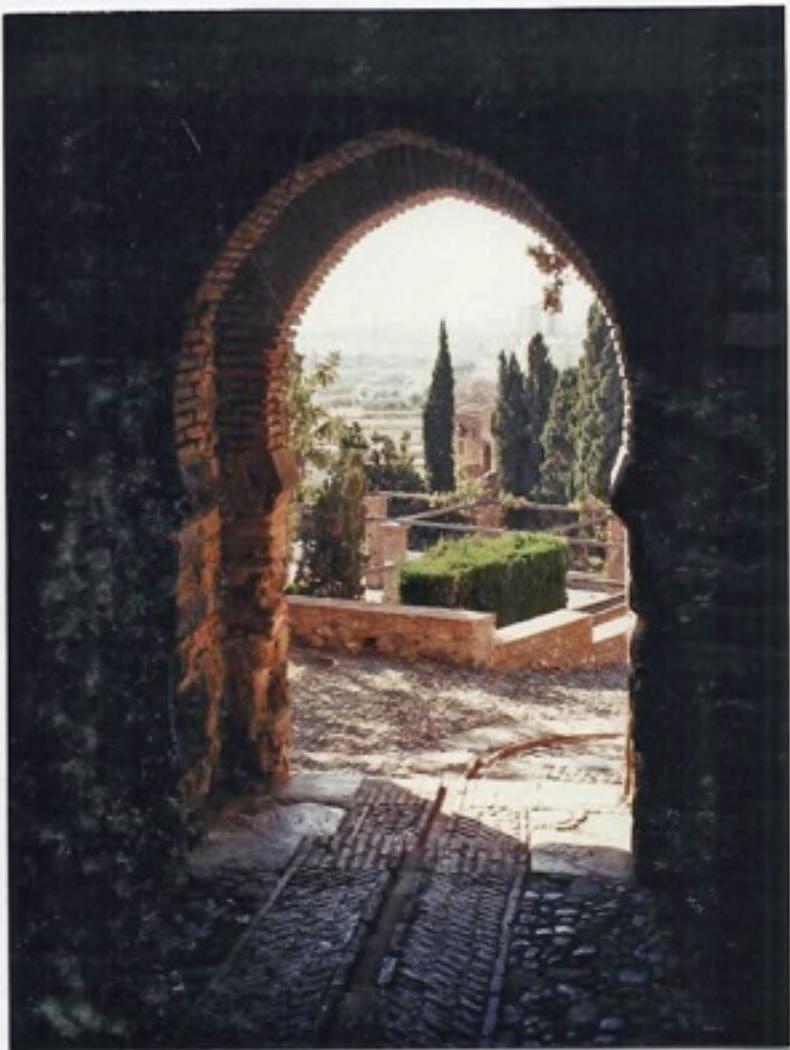
We move on to Malaga, where we have one more day before our flight departs to Canada. Malaga is a harbour town and a booming construction site even while it suffers from high unemployment and a run-down core. They have recently discovered their historic sites and started to develop them. I want to see this town again in five years.



We walk a lot, Kate's foot seems fine, and we climb to the top of the Gibralfaro to look back down on the town as if from an airplane.

# Castillo de Gibralfaro





In the evening, we come across a well-dressed crowd waiting outside El Teatro Miguel Cervantes. The playbill shows a contest of Spanish song. When the door opens, I ask the ticket taker if we can get tickets. "No" he says, "It's by invitation only." I go and report to Kate, waiting on the steps. We are approached by an older man wearing an "organizacion" badge. "You want to see the show?" After a discussion with the house manager, he gets us in, for free.

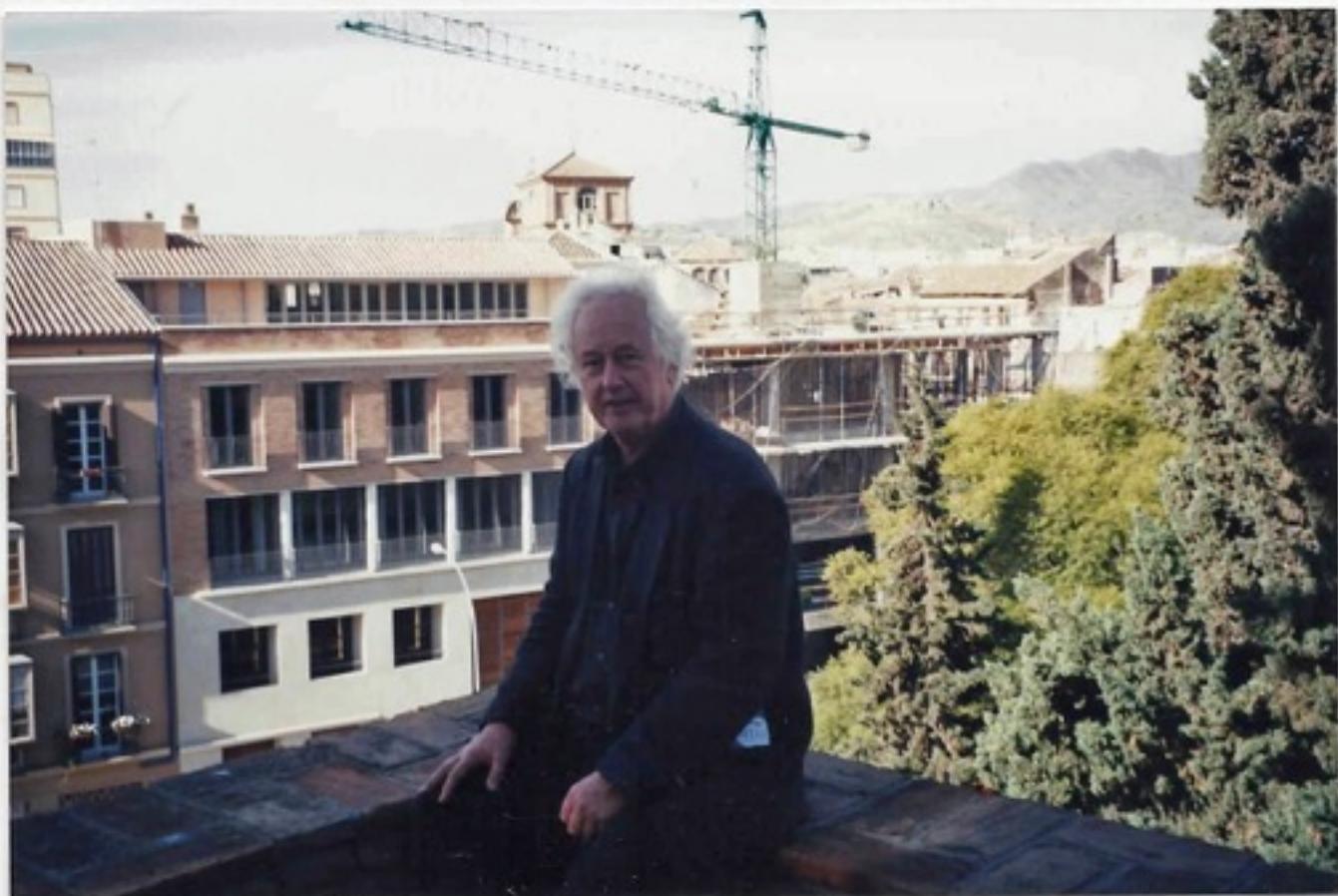
The singers, young women all, are dressed in these great long frilly affairs that drag along behind. They kick their trains around, turn and strut across the stage, leaning far back, heads held high. The song are in the flamenco manner, of suffering and lost loves, highly stylized with hundreds of grace notes and sweeping gestures. One sings of "Amor Maldito", cursed love, another sings "Sin Embargo, Te Quiero", I love you, even so.

This is a theatre in the old European opera house style, with short but steep sight lines. Our seats are up top, where the floors and seats are all bare wood and audiences can be a bit unruly. We have a bull-fight crowd up here, shouting out or cheering, making requests, teasing, being part of the show.

The first half closes with a pre-pubescent little girl, not four feet tall who struts and belts out songs of love's griefs just like the adults. Where does she find the emotions, I can't imagine, but the audience just love her; everyone wants to take her home.

The closer is a big song and dance with everyone on stage, and then presentation of awards. These are all young, unknown performers brought from every corner of Spain to entertain us on our last night.





## HOW TO DO IT

We are frequently asked about independent travel. The questions indicate that people are interested, but afraid to try it.

"Do you go outside the resort? Isn't that dangerous?"

"How can you go without hotel reservations? What if you can't find a place?"

"How can I get around if I can't speak the language?"

We never go inside the "resort"; we buy last minute air-only deals that we find in the Toronto Star Saturday travel section. If you want to go to a resort and lie on the beach, then go for it. We see some great resort deals in the paper.

Is it dangerous? No. You can spot a creep in a foreign country as well as you would in Toronto. When you need some guidance, pick someone to ask and you will find them happy to be of help. If someone approaches you to offer some unsolicited service, then you should be on guard. They may or may not be legit. Spain, for example has its "rosemary ladies" near every cathedral. They pick sprigs of rosemary in the public parks where it grows wild. They will offer it to you, hoping for a small coin in return, or better yet a chance to pick your pocket.

You don't need reservations if you pack lightly. This means a backpack or an overnight bag that you can carry comfortably for any distance. Every article of clothing must match with the others. Stuff will have to be washed out in your room and hung overnight. If it gets cold, you will wear everything you have, in layers. If you can't carry your stuff, you will be obliged to take a cab from the station to a room you have reserved in advance, sight unseen. This means you have to pay North American prices and stick to a fixed itinerary. You will come to hate your baggage. Travelling with big baggage is like travelling with your crippled auntie.

There is always a room for you if you travel in low season. ( If you travel in high season, you should travel early in the day and secure your room just after check-out time at noon. ) The best bargains are in low season. You may be surprised to learn that winter is low season in such warm places as Mexico, Spain and even Morocco. The hotels are empty.

Mexicans, for example, go to the seashore in summer. They have modest needs for accomodation; they just want a clean, basic room not too far from the beach for about \$30. Is this O.K. for you? All winter, this room is sitting empty.

Europeans flock to Morocco in summer when it resembles a blast furnace. In winter when the weather is temperate, they stay home. And Spain, like the rest of Europe has its tourist season in the summer holidays.

Do not look for luxury. Basic hotels have small, clean rooms, mostly with toilet and bath or shower and that is all. In Spain, they cost about \$30 to \$60 a day, double. We went as high as \$115 in Ronda, which included a breakfast buffet and as low as \$25 in Cadiz.

Getting around is easy. Go with a Rough Guide or Lonely Planet book; it's like travelling with a friend who has been there before. When you need help, ask. If you can't speak the language, point to a text or work it out in mime.

Go with a good attitude. Things will not always be comfortable or convenient. The places you visit were not put there to entertain you, though they are very interesting. The people you meet are not your servants, but they will be happy to help you along. They are pleased that you are interested to visit their country. You are a babe in the woods here, go with a smile and learn how to say "thank you" in the local language.

THE TORONTO STAR Saturday, November 18, 2000 L19

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