

Madrid

Once the bastion of stately, old-fashioned food, the Spanish capital is suddenly a hotbed of new-wave creative talent. Now's the perfect time to visit

Words CLAYTON MAXWELL Photographs MYLES NEW

In love with tradition, Madrid is loyal to *cocido Madrileño* (the city's famed meat and chickpea stew), sucking pig roasted in slow-burning ovens, jamón serrano and manchego cheese. Sun-filled plazas see locals lingering over long lunches – those famously social events that start with a good rioja and end many hours later with flan and a *café con leche*. Old neighbourhood markets are still the best places to shop and ancient tiled tavernas serve world-beating tapas late into the night.

But change is bubbling up in the Spanish capital faster than a briskly shaken bottle of cava. Eating has always been a favourite Madrileños pastime but with more disposable cash (the Spanish spend more on lunching out than any other Europeans apart from Scandinavians) and a new openness to the rest of the world, the city is becoming increasingly adventurous. The result? An explosion of high-end restaurants, delis and bars to match those of long-time style capital Barcelona.

Madrid sits proudly in the centre of Spain, a country whose Basque and Catalan chefs, such as Juan Mari Arzak of Arzak in San Sebastián (Spain's first and longest-standing Michelin three-star restaurant) and Ferran Adrià (the super-star chef behind El Bullí, near Barcelona),

have rocked culinary foundations for the past two decades. With their nueva cocina, they've introduced the world to edible foams, improbable flavour pairings and wild contrasts of texture and temperature. How something so experimental finds itself at home in custom-bound Madrid is all down to the city's new have-it-all attitude.

Take the *tortilla Española*, a Madrid classic. A simple Spanish version of the potato and egg omelette, it can be found in any of the neon-lit cafés that dot every block of the city. Now there's chef Paco Roncero's version: a layer of potato foam sitting on top of sweet sabayon (a mix of egg yolks, sherry or rum and sugar), with an onion hidden below – all served in a martini glass. This deconstructed tortilla is a hybrid of tradition and invention. And Roncero says that even his grandmother loves it, almost as much as the traditional version.

Roncero heads up La Terraza (Alcalá, 15; 00 34 91 532 1275), the restaurant at the old Casino de Madrid in the heart of the city. Here, contemporary food is served in a traditional plush setting of gilt, swirled carpets and faded stucco. Roncero works in tandem with Ferran Adrià, who oversees La Terraza's menu. There are other Adrià disciples but Roncero is the only gato (true Madrileño). ►



Above: a street near the food market San Miguel. Opposite top from left: making churros (deep-fried, sugar-sprinkled dough) for breakfast; Kabuki's raw tuna with toasted breadcrumbs and tomatoes; manchego cheese at a food market. Middle: a sweet red vermouth aperitivo. Bottom left: an innovative dish of melon 'caviar' with passion fruit and mint from La Terraza del Casino (middle)

The locals' drink

Walk through La Latina neighbourhood on a Sunday afternoon and you'll see terrazas and bars overflowing with Madrileños. What are they drinking? If not a cold beer, then it's sweet red vermouth. Served from the tap, it is a Sunday ritual as old as the plazas. Tradition requires it be served with a wedge of lemon, a few ice cubes and seltzer water to soften the punch. As one bartender explains,

'I don't know why, but, for Madrileños, it's a religion.'

And this religion holds fast for old and young. Café Del Nuncio (NUNCIO 12; 00 34 91 366 08 53) and Corazón LOCO (ALMENDRO 22; 00 34 91 366 57 83), within a minute's walk of each other, are good spots to practise this Sunday ritual. Or order it as an aperitivo before a big weekend meal.

Although he shares the pride all Madrileños have in their city's food, he's also the perfect ambassador for nueva cocina. As Roncero explains, 'We must always respect our traditional cooking. Leaving it behind is like leaving behind a part of who we are. But that doesn't mean we can't explore the new.'

Another Adrià acolyte, Sergi Arola, is Madrid's foremost celebrity chef (pictured page 127, top left). He is a familiar face on the Madrid scene: in magazine interviews, on TV ads and zipping about the city on his motorbike (before he became a chef, he hoped to be a rock star). As well as his restaurant in Barcelona at Hotel Arts, he has the hyper-sleek Madrid restaurant, Arola (Calle Argumosa, 43; 00 34 91 4670 202), in the modern wing of the Museo Reina Sofia. In a metallic space-age setting, Arola offers everything from simple tapas to a three-course meal of lentil soup, grilled foie with potato soufflé and a perfectly put together salad. Lunch here is great value.

But to taste Arola's true talents you need to book a table at La Broche (Miguel Angel, 29-31; 00 34 91 3993

Opposite: The Royal Palace is the perfect backdrop to an afternoon coffee. Come sunset, the Madrileños come here to take a stroll and take in the views across Madrid

437). With two Michelin stars, white, minimalist décor and clued-up, friendly staff, this is the place to sample the latest innovations in ultra-modern eating: scallop carpaccio with green apple purée, turbot stewed with cockscombs, foie gazpacho with garlic ice cream.

La Broche is also at the forefront of the recent renaissance of hotel restaurants. Once, the only people likely to dine in a Madrid hotel were guests too weary to venture elsewhere. Over the past five years, however, La Broche and other hotel restaurants like Santceloni (see Top Dollar box, page 128) have become magnets for the Madrid glitterati and food savvy.

Nueva cocina is not the only import redefining the city's eating habits. As the immigrant population grows, Madrid has opened its doors to food from abroad. Moroccan is very popular, Mexican restaurants are packed with enthusiastic margarita swillers and crowds also throng the best Italian, French, Cuban, Middle Eastern, Thai, African, Turkish and Japanese restaurants.

Leading the international food scene is Ricardo Sanz, the chef who bravely crosses classic Japanese sushi techniques with traditional Spanish dishes – with masterful results. Although he trained as a traditional Western chef, he also studied Japanese food and his restaurant, Kabuki (Presidente Carmona, 2; 00 34 91 417 64 15), has Madrid fish fans swooning (oddly, land-locked Madrid has the highest fish consumption per capita in the country). Sanz, like Roncero, tips a hat to Spanish mainstays: his bone-marrow nigiri with cabbage leaf is a take on *cocido Madrileño* while his tuna with *pa amb tomaquet* (bread with tomatoes) references a signature Catalan dish.

Along with the foreign food has come the fast. The menú del día ►

Check in

Tucked away on a scenic street behind the opera, the sleek, modern Hotel Mario is housed within a charming 19th-century apartment building. This hotel was once the popular Campomanes, but changed its name after a re-fit last year, when it became a part of the budget-conscious Room Mate hotel



group. Designer Tomas Aria has created a contemporary but warm interior with cosy rooms and furniture by Philippe Starck, a draw for design savvy travellers.

Under the Room Mate concept, each of four new boutique city hotels is named and styled after a different 'room mate'. Mario is an intelligent, cultured modern composer who invites you in to share his music collection (the hotel has a record library). The recently opened Alicia, located near the Prado museum, is a fun-loving artist, while Oscar and Laura are due to reveal their personalities late in 2006. Doubles from £65, including breakfast.

(HOTEL MARIO, CALLE CAMPOMANES 4; 00 34 91 548 85 48; ROOM-MATEHOTELS.COM).

When to eat

- Everyone knows that Spaniards eat late. But not everyone knows that many restaurants have strict hours and close their doors between lunch and dinner. Go for lunch before 2pm, and you will likely be dining alone, but go after 4pm and you might be ushered back out the door.
- Dinner is usually eaten at about 10pm, even later in the summer, although most restaurants open by 8.30pm. You can find places open between 4.30pm and 8.30pm but they're mainly for tourists.
- It's advisable to book a table for Friday and Saturday night, and at other times if you're in a big group.
- Many restaurants close on Sunday evening and for the whole of Monday.
- Be aware that, while August is livelier than it used to be, most restaurants still close for at least two weeks.

(three-course set lunch menu) may be a Madrid institution but it is not the best option for time-strapped office workers. Hence the rise of noodle bars and sandwich stops throughout the centre, offering Madrileños the kind of lunch that doesn't require a siesta to sleep it off.

A walk through artsy Chueca is one of the best ways to witness the phenomenon. Stand at the corner of Calle San Marcos and Calle Libertad and take a look around you: on one corner there's the Café Diurno (San Marcos, 37; 00 34 91 522 00 09), a café/takeaway/DVD rental hot spot. The owners – young Spaniards who lived in New York and London – have blended Manhattan style with quick snacks and good coffee, and the locals love it. On the opposite corner there's the Dosa Grill (Calle Libertad, 17; 00 34 91 360 47 50), an airy little café serving delicious stuffed dosas (Indian rice pancakes). Nearby is the gourmet Deli Deluxe (San Marcos, 35; 00 34 91 522 42 04) and next to that is The Wok (San Marcos, 33; 00 34 91 531 69 79 99314), which attracts lines of stir-fry hungry Spaniards.

But no eatery in Madrid more typifies change than Fast Good (Padre Damián, 23; 00 34 91 343 06 55), a collaboration between NH hotels and (once again) Ferran Adrià. The idea is quite simple: quality ingredients and a handful of easy hot options such as paninis and 'Gorganzolaburgers' made with unusual gourmet touches, such as substituting olive oil for fat and using the best Pata Negra ham. Fast Good is set in a colourful locale in the heart of Madrid's business district, but there are plans to roll out a chain across the city.

So does all this mean that the days of the long Spanish lunch are numbered? Not in a million *menú del día*s. The long lunch hour continues to thrive. Smaller shops and businesses still close at midday and while many people ►

Best market

Every neighbourhood in Madrid has a good market, but the Eiffel-inspired Mercado de San Miguel near the Plaza Mayor ranks top. Here you'll find some of the city's best seafood and cheeses, ranging from Idiazabal to Cabrales. Look out for stall number 31, the Setería del Alberto, which sells wild mushrooms for good prices.



Chef's secret address

DON NORBERTO, OF CASA BENIGNA



'I have one place that stands out as a favourite – Casa Salvador. It serves tripe, croquettes and black pudding. For me, a chef, the experience at Casa Salvador is parallel to that of a bullfighting aficionado when watching a masterful bullfight. This old restaurant, favoured by writers, bullfighters and politicians is true Madrid eating.'

CASA SALVADOR (BARBIERI, 12; 00 34 915 214 524).

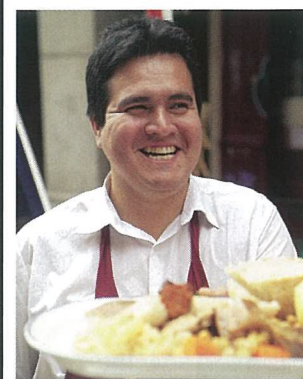
Fill your suitcase with...

For all kitchen gear – paella pans, olive-oil cruets, Spanish wine glasses – go to Alambique (PLAZA DE LA ENCARNACIÓN 2; 00 34 91 559 78 58; ALAMBIQUE.COM). Alongside the Convent of the Encarnación, this shop has it all and also holds cookery courses. For unique Spanish sweets, try the famous violet bon-bons (made with real violets) from the 19th-century La Violeta (PLAZA DE CANALEJAS, 6). And stop off at Casa Mira (CARRERA DE SAN JERÓNIMO, 30; 00 34 91 429 88 95), the shop that's been selling the city's best turrón (nougat candy) for 150 years. Try its heavenly caramelized egg-yolk variety.

What's what (glossary)

cañas small beers. One's never enough.

cocido Madrileño (pictured below) a stew of meat, chick peas, offal and vegetables served in three courses. It is eaten religiously during the winter, particularly on weekends.



cordero asado or **lechazo asado** roasted baby lamb, a specialty of equal stature with the sucking pig.

crianza wine aged two years, with at least six months in the barrel.

croquetas it is rare to find a tapas bar that doesn't serve croquetas, the Spanish version of a fried cheese and potato dumpling.

Gran Reserva wine aged five years in total, two in the barrel.

jamón serrano cured for at least a year, this high-quality ham is so rich you're obliged to eat it with a good red wine. The pride of Spain.

lechón/tostón/cochinillo roasted sucking pig, one of central Spain's most revered dishes. It is a common weekend midday meal—in the old mesons (bars that serve food), families will order a roast pig or two to share.

morcilla blood pudding made with paprika and rice, a popular tapa.

patatas bravas another Madrid tapa; fried potatoes topped with a spicy red sauce.

Reserva wine aged three years total, at least one in the barrel.

turrón nougat typically made with honey and eaten at Christmas.



may not be able to take two- to three-hour lunches every day, they do it frequently enough. Weekends, meanwhile, remain the preserve of the leisurely family meal, from aperitivo to coffee, in a true Spanish restaurant.

Sharing good food and drinks with family and friends is a Madrileño rite, as essential to the city's identity as the Prado or the Plaza Mayor. And, while new influences may shift the culinary terrain, Madrid is still the grande dame of Spain – proud of its tradition and loyal to what it knows. Even Paco Roncero has yet to mess with *cocido Madrileño*. 'That is still too difficult,' he says with quiet reverence, 'but maybe in the future.' Madrid's food revolution, he says, 'is a work in progress.'



Food writer Clayton Maxwell lived and worked in Madrid for five years. She has written for *In Madrid Magazine*, *Time Out*

guides, *Spain Magazine*, *Wallpaper* and *Condé Nast Traveller*. During her time in Madrid, Clayton explored the city's best eateries and left no tapa unsampled (almost). She has recently relocated to US, and desperately misses the Museo de Jamon.

Top dollar restaurants

■ Named after the village where famed restaurateur Santi Santamaria was born, and run by his protégé Oscar Velasco, the Santceloni (pictured) is the place to go for classical cooking. Santamaria is famous for using only the best local ingredients – he allows the quality of the raw materials to shine through. Try his trademark dish – ravioli of sliced raw prawn with a filling of



ceps. The Gran Menú, his elaborate tasting menu, changes daily, depending on available

ingredients. £60 to £105. (HOTEL HESPERIA, PASEO DE LA CASTELLANA, 57; 00 34 91 210 88 40)

■ Tucked away on a nondescript

street, Casa Benigna is an intimate, family run restaurant, which Penélope Cruz has declared as one of her favourites. Owner Don Norberto passionately discusses his wine list and olive oil selection as only a true gastronome can. The menu is traditional food from Alicante (the *arroz abunda*, a type of paella, is the best in Madrid) with a few Scandinavian surprises, like the excellent herring flown in from Norway. £50 to £85.

(BENIGNO SOTO, 9; 00 34 91 413 33 56)

■ It doesn't get more traditional than Casa Lucio. This is old Madrid, where ancient ovens roast suckling pigs and the waiters resemble characters in a play by Cervantes. Don't be put off by the tourists; this is the domain of true-blue Spain: King Juan Carlos and Prime Minister Jose Zapatero both have reserved tables. But royalty and politicians aside, Casa Lucio knows how to cook a cracking *solomillo* (prime fillet of beef, lamb or pork). The owner, Lucio Blazquez, says the key to Lucio's glory is to use a coal-fired oven and the best olive oils. Another star dish is a starter of lightly fried eggs served on crisp, thinly cut chips. Ask for a table on the first floor. (CAVA BAJA, 35; 00 34 91 365 32 52)

Under a tenner eateries

■ Viuda de Vacas never disappoints. With a rustic chipped tile and refectory table interior, the setting feels like an old Spanish movie set – and indeed Almodovar has filmed here. The food is Castilian home cooking (pictured); try the stuffed and breaded zucchini and the baked hake. (CAVA ALTA, 23; 00 34 91 366 58 47).

■ Opening its doors long before the current international food boom, Moroccan-

influenced Al-Jaima has been a Madrileño favourite for years. Snack on hummus and falafel or share a tagine – try the lamb with dates and mint tea to finish. (BARBIERI, 1; 00 34 91 523 11 42)



■ Tapas bars are usually crowded and don't take reservations, so be prepared for limited elbowroom. Try Maceira, a boisterous Galician restaurant in the Barrio de las Letras. Its *pulpo a la gallega* (Galician style octopus) and *pimientos de padrón* (grilled green peppers) are legendary – and best when washed down with a cold white Ribeiro wine. Maceira is so popular it's almost always full, so go early (8.30pm); there are two within a brief walk from each other, so try them both. (JESUS, 7; 00 34 91 429 15 84; AND HUERTAS, 66; 00 34 91 429 5818)

■ Malasaña, the preferred neighbourhood of hip young Spaniards, is home to some of the city's best tapas. Leading the pack is La Musa. The fried green tomatoes with goat's cheese is sensational, as is the *bomba* – a baked potato stuffed with meat or veg. The *degustaciones* (tasting menus) change regularly and are always interesting. Breakfast at La Musa is a treat – *pan tomaca* (tomato, garlic and olive oil on toast) and coffee for under £1.50. The new branch in La Latina is the chic spot for Madrid's post-flea market Sunday drinkers. (MANUELA MALASANA, 18; 00 34 91 448 75 58; AND COSTANILLA DE SAN ANDRES, 12; 00 34 91 354 02 55)