

palate

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS, DELECTABLE DESIGN AND THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE



Cane bull busts in Madrid tapas bar Celso y Manolo, by local artist Javier Sánchez Medina. Details, last pages.



NEW GUARD

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW IN SPAIN AND THIS TAPAS BAR TYPIFIES THE TREND FOR CLASSIC FARE.

PHOTOGRAPHER **PABLO ZAMORA**
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FROM ABOVE: owner Carlos Zamora (right) with brother Pablo. The painting behind the original marble bar is thought to be by either Celso or Manolo Arguelles and the mirrors are custom-made. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: the sparsely decorated interior; the menu features classic Madrid dishes.

According to Carlos Zamora, the owner of newly revitalised bar Celso y Manolo in Madrid's Chueca district, "going out, eating and drinking is the sport of the Madrilenos". Granted, it is in Carlos's interest to say so, but there is truth to this observation, and by reinterpreting a traditional *tasca* (a neighbourhood bar that serves tapas) he has created the city's new favourite training ground.

Carlos is less concerned with innovation than updating classics for the long haul. His family runs five other establishments, including Restaurante Deluz in their northern Spanish hometown of Santander, and Taberna La Carmencita, one of Madrid's oldest venues. So when the owners of a restaurant close to the latter retired — namesake brothers Celso and Manolo Arguelles — it was Carlos they trusted to take over and polish up its marble bar.

Dining in the Spanish capital is an unforgettable experience.

In the *tasca*s and bars of Madrid, the national pastime of taking a drink and a small bite, then rolling through the night from locale to locale, is taken to its extreme. The city's round-the-clock hedonism makes eating there far from the average night out. It's a parade of endless drinks and gutsy, salty snacks. A can of anchovies ripped open in one spot leads to a plate of thinly sliced *jamon iberico de bellota* seasoned by years of cigarette smoke in another, followed then perhaps by a plate of alien-looking *percebes* (goose barnacles) in the next.

Several years ago, when Spain was at the top of the international fine dining tree, some of that simplicity was lost; dining became about something less democratic. Many restaurants aimed to emulate the idiosyncratic style of restaurants like El Bulli and El Celler de Can Roca, often with clumsy results.

However, one of the few silver linings of the country's recent recession has been a return by many Spaniards to their gastronomic roots. Over-designed restaurants with 25-course tasting menus now look like white elephants — a hangover from a headier time — while the more traditional bars and *tasca*s are packed.

The popularity of Celso y Manolo typifies that shift; on any given night the bar is filled with a mix of Madrilenos that is reminiscent of another era of Chueca. The former clientele have stayed (surely a good sign), but now they are mixed with a bohemian crowd of artists, designers, writers and photographers.

One such photographer is Carlos's brother Pablo — a regular contributor to *Vogue Living* and *Vogue Entertaining + Travel* among many others. Celso y Manolo is a project that is not only close to his heart but also his doorstep. A long-time resident of Chueca and staunch advocate for his adopted city, Pablo has helped Carlos create the kind of bar he and his friends want to drink and eat in. The restaurant has been a brotherly collaboration of sorts, with Pablo lending his sharp eye for timeless beauty and modern design — the signature of his work.

"Many of the old bars have taxidermy in them and I found these cane woven bull busts, which I thought would be a clever contemporary update," says Pablo. The lighting has also received his stamp of approval — with fittings by New York design firm Apparatus — while the eight-metre-long centrepiece bar was never going to be altered. "It was love at first sight," he says of the extraordinary slab of marble, which somehow echoes the deeply rich red colouring of Spain's legendary cured meats *jamon*, *lomo* and chorizo.

Meanwhile, the food and drink choice remains the preserve of Carlos. "We wanted a bar that would serve the best edit of tapas from around Spain," he says. There are Madrid classics such as the *bocadillo* with fried prawns and aioli, or a plate of the finest acorn-fed *jamon*, as well as dishes that come from Santander, honouring the family's roots. They also retained some of the dishes from the bar's Asturian origin and, as such, rice dishes enriched with game or *morcilla* (blood sausage) feature. It is one of the first bars in Madrid to embrace natural wines, with an enviable list that pushes the boundaries for what appears to be a traditional *tasca*.

Celso y Manolo is symbolic of the fresh and vibrant energy returning to Spain's dining scene, one that is no longer solely focused on the world-beating avant garde but what the Spanish do best — very late nights fuelled by bold food, bolder drinking and the camaraderie of close friends and family. **VL**

THE ZAMORAS' MADRID

EAT: RESTAURANT SALVADOR is a 1940s *casa de comidas* in Chueca where all the bullfighters go to eat old-style Spanish dishes. Calle Barbieri 12, (+34) 915 21 45 24; casasalvadormadrid.com.

DRINK: BAR COCK has been the hangout for actors, painters, photographers and other artistic Madrileños since 1920. Calle de la Reina 16, (+34) 915 32 28 26; barcock.com.

SHOP: MINI sells the latest fashions for men, stocking everything from Acne to Kenzo and Comme des Garçons. Calle Limon 24, (+34) 915 48 08 35; minishopmadrid.com.

SEE: GALERÍA MORIARTY is one of Madrid's most interesting art galleries, established during the 1980s countercultural movement Movida Madrileña. Tamayo y Baus 6, (+34) 915 31 43 65; galeriamoriarty.com.

MATADERO MADRID The city's contemporary arts centre, located in a former slaughterhouse, is a must-visit. Paseo de la Chopera 14, (+34) 915 17 73 09; mataderomadrid.org.

EXPLORE: CHINCHÓN, a town 50 kilometres south-east of Madrid, has an amazing circular *plaza mayor* that is ringed by 15th–17th century houses and cafes.