

MARIBEL'S DINING GUIDE TO MADRID ©



INDEX

- My Madrid Dining Guide – Page 2
- Early Dining – Page 3
- My Favorite Restaurants
- From Top Tables to Modest Eateries:
  - Haute Cuisine Temples – Page 5
  - Less Formal Haute Cuisine – Page 9
  - Fine Dining in High Style – Page 12
- Moderate to Moderately Expensive:
  - In the Elegant Salamanca district – Page 16
  - Near Plaza Mayor, the heart of old Madrid - Page 20
  - Heavy Traffic, but worth a stop – Page 24
  - Six Good Bets for Carnivores – Page 28
- Moderate (not tourist filled):
  - Near the Plaza de Oriente & Teatro Real – Page 31
  - In Gentrifying Tribal – Page 31
  - Near Plaza de España & Parliament – Page 32
  - In the Chamberí District – Page 32
- Cheap Eats/Budget Dining – Page 35
- In Chueca, the Gay District – Page 36
- In the Gran Vía – Sol Axis – Page 38
- In Old Madrid near Plaza de Santa Ana – 40
- Near Parliament & Teatro de la Zarzuela – Page 41
- Near the Teatro Real – Opera House – Page 42
- In the Salamanca Shopping District – Page 42
- Cheap & Fun – Page 43
- Cheap with picky teens – Page 43
- Spanish Fast Food – Page 43
- Cheap for Vegetarians – Page 44
- Sunday Brunch– Page 46
- Afternoon Teas - Page 48
- Best Ice Cream in the city – Page 48
- Best Bets for Stylish Ethnic Dining – Page 49
- Hip “in” spots to see and be seen – Page 50
- Fashionable Summer Al Fresco Dining – Page 54
- My favorite Wine Bistros - Tapas Bars – Page 55
- Where Maribel Dines - My Secret Spots - Page 66

## MY MADRID DINING GUIDE

The customary Madrid lunch hours are from 1:30 until 4:00 (most madrileños lunch around 2:00 - 2:30) after which restaurants **shut down** until dinnertime. Only *cafeterias*, actually coffee shops (not the self-service places, which are called *autoservicios*), and fast-food joints, remain open between lunch and dinner, with very few exceptions.

Dinner is taken quite **late** by American standards. Locals don't even think about having dinner until 10:00 pm, and then some won't think about ordering their meal in a restaurant until after 11:00. Most restaurants don't open their doors until 9:00, some not before 9:30, but a few, in the heavily touristy areas (those mentioned in all the tourist guides) do start serving as early as 8:00 or 8:30.

Your best bet for Sunday dining is to make a late brunch your main meal of the day and plan on doing tapas in the evening, remembering that the tapas bars that do open on Sunday evening will not be open until 8:00 pm. **Very few top-rated restaurants will be open on Sunday (Piñera, being a notable exception).**

Please note that fine dining in the city can be **quite expensive**, as expensive even as dining in Paris, particularly given the poor dollar to euro exchange rate, and the fact that prices for supermarket staples, vegetables and quality meats, have skyrocketed. A nice dinner for two, with a bottle of wine in a Michelin rated (but not starred) restaurant, can easily cost €120+. The steep price of fish and shellfish (*mariscos*) make a dinner at one of the city's top seafood restaurants, "*marisquerías*" such as Combarro, El Telégrafo, Sanxenxo or O'Pazo, a real budget buster, quite the extravagance-so beware! Also, it is now common practice to charge for the bread and amuse-bouche/aperitivo (usually €2 - €4/person). Please don't be surprised when you see a "*pan y aperitivo*" or "*cubierto*" charge on your bill.

I've designated my recommended restaurants into the following categories with an estimated cost **per person**, including a glass of wine:

***Tipping is not expected, as service is always included in the bill. At the more elegant restaurants, diners sometimes leave an extra 5%, but never more.***

- Cheap: under €20
- Inexpensive: €20 - €30
- Moderate: €30 - €40
- Moderately expensive: €45 - €50
- Expensive: €60-75
- Very expensive-special occasion splurge: €90 - €120 +

## “EARLY” DINING IN THIS LATE NIGHT DINING TOWN

### Cheap to Inexpensive “Early” Dining

Near the Gran Vía

- **Finca de Susana** - *Crowd forms immediately, line up by 8:00 pm.*
- **La Gloria de Montera** - *Same owners as Finca de Susana.*

In Old Madrid

- **Terra Mundi** - *Inexpensive Galician fare, open Sundays. Offers a €10 weekday lunch menu.*
- **Casa Alberto** - *Small dining room in the back*
- **Dómine Cabra** - *€19 menu at night*
- **Maceiras** – *Rustic Galician tavern - opens at 8:30; go early to avoid the lines.*
- **Ginger** - *Same owners as Finca de Susana & Gloria de Montera*
- **El Estragón** - *Vegetarian fare*
- **La Camarilla** - *Gastro-pubs for sit down tapas to make a meal.*
- **Taberna de la Daniela** (2 locations) - *For tapas & raciones at the bar to make a meal.*



*Restaurant Ginger in the Plaza del Angel*

In Chueca, the gay district

- **Bazaar** - *Sister restaurant to Ginger*

In the Salamanca district

- **Estay** - *Sit down tapas on Hermosilla 4.*
- **La Colonial de Goya** - *Sit down canapés on Jorge Juan, 34. Offers a €20 fusion menu for lunch.*
- **El Lateral** - *Sit down tapas at Velázquez, 57*
- **Taberna de la Daniela** - *Canapés, salads, raciones at General Pardiñas, 21.*

Near the Manzanares River & Príncipe Pío shopping mall

- **Casa Mingo** – *Rustic Asturian cider house, open continuously and Sundays.*

Off the Gran Vía

- **Cubik** - *Fusion for €15, Monday-Thursday dinner. Opens at 8:30.*

### **Moderate to Upper Moderate Early Dining**

In Old Madrid

- **Botín** - *Oldest Madrid tavern, open daily.*
- **Posada de la Villa** - *Classic Madrid tavern.*
- **Taberna del Capitán Alatriste** - *Sister restaurant to Posada de la Villa*
- **Casa Paco** - *Steaks*
- **Casa Lucas** - *The best tapas and small plates dishes on the Cava Baja*
- **Matritum & Cava Blanca** - *Wine bistros*
- **Orixe** - *Galician fare*
- **Casa Patas** - *Tavern restaurant of the flamenco tablao. Opens at 8:00, 7:30 on Fridays and Saturdays.*

Near the Royal Palace - Teatro Real

- **La Bola** - *For cocido, open Sunday*
- **El Mollete** - *Former coal warehouse turned romantic tavern*

Near the Prado

- **Zerain** - *Basque cider house/grill restaurant - opens at 8:30*
- **Estado Puro** - *Trendy designer tapas bar, creation of Paco Roncero, open 11:00 am – 1:00 am.*

In Salamanca

- **Iroco** – *Open Sunday on Velázquez, with interior garden*
- **Pandelujo** – *On tony C/Jorge Juan*
- **Finos y Finas** – *on Don Ramón de la Cruz-opens at 8:30*
- **Pizzicheria** – *Tasty Sicilian specialties with great prices, opens at 8:30*

### **Moderately Expensive Early Dining**

Near Parliament

- **Europa Decó** – *Set dinner menus for €40, opens at 8:30*

### **Expensive Early Dining**

In the Salamanca district

- **La Trainera** - *Classic seafood emporium*
- **Sula** - *Serves Joselito Iberian ham*

### **Very Expensive Early Dining**

In the Salamanca district

- **Goizeko Wellington** – *One of the city's most elegant Basque restaurants*

## MY FAVORITE RESTAURANTS

### From Top Tables to Modest Eateries

*Note: the restaurants listed are those found either within walking distance of downtown hotels or within a short taxi ride. With one notable exception, **Piñera**, I have not listed any of my favorites in the northern business district that are not handy for the short-term visitor, nor have I listed any fusion restaurants, such as the exemplary (but extremely difficult to reserve), **DiverXO**, featured in the recent Madrid segment of Anthony Bourdain's "No Reservations".*

## HAUTE CUISINE TEMPLES

*For a splash out, or budget-be-damned, celebratory dinner – Count on an absolute minimum of €120 – €150 per person. All are closed on Saturday for lunch, on Sundays and during August. Tie & jacket, or at least a jacket expected for the gentleman.*

### La Terraza del Casino

This ultra elegant restaurant located at Alcalá, 15, is for a very special occasion or expensive account dinner. Housed in a building from 1910, it has gorgeous chandeliers, and the interior space was completely remodeled in '09; extremely professional service and beautiful out-door terrace overlooking the fin de siècle buildings of Alcalá and the Cibeles fountain. Featuring highly creative cuisine from chef Paco Roncero who trained with Ferrán Adriá of El Bulli and won the National Gastronomic Prize in '07. The restaurant is part of the El Bulli catering empire. Dress up! This is where I'd take my spouse for the ultimate splurge romantic dinner in summer.

Often closed for private functions, Tom Cruise threw a post-premier party here. It's the "in" place for luxury dining in Madrid and for special gastronomic society events. Has been anointed with 2 Michelin stars, 2 Repsol suns and is one of Madrid's very most expensive. Receives an 8.25/10 Gourmetour rating. The full tasting menu goes for €120, but you can have a short one for €95 as well as a set La Terraza menu for €60.

Tel: (+34) 915 321 275 ([www.casinodemadrid.com](http://www.casinodemadrid.com))

### Santceloni

While three Michelin starred Santi Santamaría's second outpost here in the 5-star Hotel Hesperia on Paseo de la Castellana 57, is not quite as atmospheric a setting as his original farmhouse, the Racó de Can Fabes in Sant Celoni, it is extremely elegant and widely considered one of the top dining venues in Madrid, if not the top. Both Santceloni and the Racó are similarly priced. Santi's two Michelin star rated spin off, with chef Oscar Velasco at the helm, is considered one of the most exclusive dining spots in the city with the best service and sumptuous décor by Pascua Ortega. Count on at least €160 per person to dine here. The grand degustation menu costs €165 while the gastronomic menu can be sampled for €132 but must be ordered by everyone at the table.

Along with La Terraza del Casino, it is Madrid's most highly regarded fine dining establishment. The restaurant cheese course is justly famous. It receives a 9.5/10 rating in the Gourmetour guide, an 8/10 in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy and has been

awarded one Repsol sun. It's also a member of Relais Gourmand. If you don't have the opportunity to sample Santi Santamaria's flagship restaurant outside of Barcelona, you won't be disappointed with his Madrid outpost.

Tel: (+34) 912 108 840 ([www.restaurantesantceloni.com](http://www.restaurantesantceloni.com))

*Tip: If your travel budget does not permit such as splurge, you can sample Oscar Velasco's talent at the Hesperia's more moderately priced dining venue, **La Manzana**, as he now supervises its kitchen. Or try his new moderately priced wine bistro, opened November 10, **La Cesta de Recoletos**, at Recoletos, 10, in the Salamanca quarter.*

## **Horcher**

Located at Alfonso XII, 6, across from Retiro Park, a Madrid legend. Grand, palatial and luxurious Old World elegance in beautiful Viennese type surroundings in the grand style of days gone by where they still do a tableside flambé. It's been a classic in Madrid for over 50 years. The Horcher family, from Berlin, founded it in 1904 and the founder's son and grandson are now at the helm. It has a Central European inspired menu, with game dishes being their specialty (roast duck, partridge, ragout of venison, wild boar), but impeccably fresh fish is also offered. There are crepes prepared tableside and strudel for dessert and a great wine cellar.

You'll be dining in splendid surroundings, with discreet, "white glove" service (and prices to match - count on €140/person) and be surrounded by a chic clientele (lots of famous faces-royalty, such as the now divorced Infanta Elena who celebrated her wedding anniversary here, movers and shakers of banking). Jacket and tie required.

*Gourmetour* gives it an 8/10 rating and Repsol awards it three suns. It's considered one of Madrid's top ten gourmet temples, in the traditional style. Cutting edge, molecular gastronomy it definitely is not. It opens for dinner at 8:00.

Tel: (+34) 915 220 731. Peruse the classic menu at: [restaurantehorcher.com](http://restaurantehorcher.com).

## **Goizeko Wellington**

Around the corner from Wellington Hotel, on Calle Velázquez, is the highly successful branch of the acclaimed Goizeko Kabi of Bilbao. Draws a very fashionable lunchtime, bespoke suited, business executive crowd who prefer the downstairs room. Goizeko is a local hangout for the city's movers and shakers-the mayor, other politicians, CEOs, aristocrats, and celebrities. Expect impeccable prime ingredients, especially fish and shellfish, and superb service. Imaginative desserts. 850 label wine list. Prices: main dishes run from €28-€36; all desserts, €10.80

Highly regarded as the best Basque formal restaurant in Madrid. It has garnered a rating of 7.75/10 in the *Gourmetour* guide. It opens for dinner at 8:30, closed Sundays and for lunch on Saturdays during July and August.

Tel: (+34) 915 770 138 ([www.goizekogaztelupe.com](http://www.goizekogaztelupe.com))

## Kabuki Wellington

When this high fashion, gastronomic temple of Japanese cuisine opened at the Wellington on Velázquez, 6, it was one of the most talked about restaurants in town and one of the hardest reservations to snag. It's the luxury outpost of chef Ricardo Sanz whose critically acclaimed sushi bar, Kabuki, in the northern business district is still going strong. As is the case of the Goizeko, the interior is elegant with well-spaced tables, and it attracts a discerning and well-heeled crowd of gastronomes. Sanz and his team produce highly creative Japanese cuisine with Spanish touches, and pastries are in the hands of the master of this genre, the famed Catalán pastry chef, Oriol Balaguer.

To best experience the chef's magic, most suggest that diners throw caution to the winds and order Kabuki tasting menu for € 85 or the classic menu for € 60 and Balaguer's *chocolate con churros* for dessert. There are beer, sake and tea menus plus a distinguished wine list heavy on champagnes and whites with high tariffs. It rates a 7.75/10 in Gourmetour and has been awarded one Michelin star and two suns in the Repsol guide. Closed Saturday lunch, Sunday and holidays.

Tel: (+34) 915 754 400 ([www.restaurantekabuki.com](http://www.restaurantekabuki.com))

## Arola Gastro

I have yet to try Michelin starred Catalan born chef Sergi Arola's dining venue at Zurbano, 31, since he left his Michelin starred **La Broche** in the Hotel Miguel Angel, now under the helm of his number two, Angel Palacios. In his new digs Arola offers no menu other than his three set tasting menus: the Gastro at €130 (3 tapas, 4 starters, 1 fish course, 1 meat, 3 desserts and petit fours), the Basic at €115 (3 tapas, 1 starter, ½ fish portion, ½ meat and a dessert) and the Vegetarian for €110. It's been well reviewed by the food critics of all the major newspapers although some have remarked on the tiny portions. Jacket required for the gentlemen. Arola's wife, Sarah Font, manages the dining room.

The restaurant includes a very Manhattan-like, Art Decó forties style cocktail lounge downstairs, the **Gastro Lounge**, with separate entrance, that opens Mon.-Sat. from 6:00 pm to 2:00 am and in addition to the exotic cocktail concoctions tapas from the restaurant are also on the menu. It's a spot for people watching, popular with celebrities (at the moment). The restaurant receives a 9/10 rating in *Gourmetour*.

Tel: (+34) 913 102 169 ([www.sergiarola.es](http://www.sergiarola.es))

## Viridiana

Another temple of innovative cuisine and "foodie favorite" I've yet to sample, on Juan de Mena, 14 (handy to the Ritz and AC Palacio del Retiro), which some American gourmards praise as their favorite high-end Madrid restaurant (but very high end with main courses priced at €27-37 and desserts at €12, although portions are quite generous). Chef-owner, writer, blogger and sommelier Abraham García, a true Renaissance man, turns out highly inventive cuisine borrowing flavors from around the globe. The restaurant this year celebrated its 30th anniversary. It's an intimate spot with 20 tables,

and the dining room walls are covered with prints from Luis Buñuel movies. García named his restaurant for his favorite 1961 Buñuel film starring Catherine Deneuve.

The restaurant's wine cellar holds over 23,000 bottles with 600 labels appearing on the wine list. It's a favorite of cookbook author Patricia Wells, and the International Herald Tribune named it one of Europe's 20 best bistros. It has earned two Repsol suns. Closed on Sundays and during Easter (Thursday-Sunday).

Tel: (+34) 915 234 478. See the menu at: [www.restauranteviridiana.com/](http://www.restauranteviridiana.com/)



*Angulas at Casa Rafa, €90 a plate*

## LESS CHÉR, LESS FORMAL HAUTE CUISINE DINING

*No jacket required - €70 to €90 per person.*

### **Club Allard\*\*\***

At Ferraz, 2, on the southwest corner of the Plaza de España, this is a distinguished private club, open to outsiders for dining since 2003, housed in a stunning 1911 Art Deco building, the Casa Gallardo. There is no sign at the entry, but the doorman will direct you upstairs, to the right, where you will find a very soothing and luxurious Baroque setting of gilt and chandeliers, making it one of Madrid's more elegant, refined and tranquil dining venues. Run by Cristina Goicolea and husband, Basque owners of the acclaimed El Refor in Amurrio, Alava, it has a highly creative menu that has won gastronomic prizes and one Michelin star/one Repsol sun for chef Diego Guerrero, who will take your order. Non-member guests are seated on the left side of the room, while club members (of a "certain age" and usually be suited) are seated at the window tables, which have a view of the Sabatini gardens. Choose among dishes such as a starter of eggs with bread and bacon over a light cream sauce and main course of confit of roast suckling pig with cinnamon, apple and cumin or a simple but perfect filet mignon with fried potatoes. Desserts here really shine whether it be an apple tart with fresh cheese, the shot glass of warm chocolate with churros, the tiramisu or the warm almond gratin with white chocolate ice cream. The wine list features some 170 labels.

I love this experience, and I highly recommend it for leisurely, romantic fine dining in an opulent setting. Although pricey, it serves as a much less expensive, less dressy but equally romantic alternative to the Terraza del Casino, especially during the winter months (no terrace dining here). A degustation menu is served for €68, market menu for €74 and vegetarian menu for €61. Service is impeccable for all. Should be reserved a few days in advance. It receives a 7.75/10 rating in Gourmetour and has been given one Michelin star. Closed Sundays, Saturday for lunch, Monday night, holidays and all of August.

Tel: (+34) 915 590 939. See the menu, wine list and its aristocratic dining rooms at: [www.elcluballard.com](http://www.elcluballard.com).

### **Ramon Freixa\***

The Madrid outpost of the celebrated chef, Ramón Freixa of Barcelona, opened in the spring of '09 in the boutique Hotel Selenza at Claudio Coello, 67, in the heart of the fashionable Salamanca quarter. This small but beautiful room with well-spaced tables, somewhat daringly decorated, is housed in a noble building from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The chef has left the family's flagship restaurant in his father's hands so as to be at the helm in his eponymous new space. Although just a bit more than a year old, Ramón Freixa has just received much critical acclaim from the gourmet critics as well as one Michelin star in the 2010 red guide. The restaurant critic of ABC newspaper recently rated it as one of his "top ten" in the city. Degustation menus are offered for € 70 (1+1=3), € 80 (the Botanic) and €90 (the FRX). Delicious breads.

Tel: (+34) 917 810 773 ([www.ramonfreixamadrid.com](http://www.ramonfreixamadrid.com))

## Balzac\*\*

Handily located at Moreto, 7, behind the Prado and across from Retiro Park, in front of the Jerónimos Church, with new chef, Gonzalo Omiste, who took over after the departure



of César Martín, is receiving much critical acclaim. The Gourmetour bestows a high rating of 8.50/10 to Balzac, this “magnificent” restaurant in an attractive Art Deco setting that serves a market driven menu with dishes “perfectly executed”.

The tasting menu goes for €62 but you can dine nicely here for less. Don't miss the dessert of fritters (*buñuelos*) filled with hot chocolate served with raspberry ice cream. The house red Rioja wine, a Luis Cañas '03, costs a reasonable € 16. Balzac's wine list offers more than 300 labels. Closed

Saturday for lunch, Sunday and two weeks in August. Opens for dinner at 9:30. It's very handy for those staying at the Hospes, AC Palacio del Retiro, Ritz and Westin Palace.

Tel: (+34) 914 200 177. Peruse the menu and wine list at: [www.restaurantebalzac.net](http://www.restaurantebalzac.net).

## Sanxenxo

Located at Ortega y Gasset, 40, this is an even more deluxe seafood emporium, *marisquería*, than **La Trainera** on Lagasca, 60, and considerably more expensive. This Galician seafood offshoot and its mother restaurant Combarro (in the northern business district) are considered to be Madrid's finest seafood temples, with a very comfortable and highly attractive decor, refined service and relaxed, elegant dining, brought to you by the Domínguez family. One can also sample small plates such as scallop filled turnovers (*empanadas de vieiras*), octopus (*pulpo a feira*) and little green peppers (*pimientos de Padrón*) at the bar. Count on at least €70/person or much, much more if you go heavy on the **extremely pricey** shellfish such as *nécoras* (small crabs), *centollo* (spider crab), *percebes* (goose barnacles), etc. Both Combarro and Sanxenxo earn high praise from Spain's restaurant critic, Rafael García Santos, in his *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía* (Best of Spanish Gastronomy) guide. Closed Sunday nights, Holy Week and August.

Tel: (+34) 915 778 272 ([www.combarro.com](http://www.combarro.com))

## El Paraguas\*

Jorge Juan, 16, the toniest address in this very up-market district. Distinguished with one sun from the reliable Repsol guide, this is considered one of the finest *haute* Asturian restaurants in the city, with chef Sandro Silva dishing up the classics - *fabada* (an Asturian white bean stew), *colmenillas* (wild mushrooms) filled with foie, *pixin* (monkfish), *rodaballo* (turbot) with clams, plus wonderful desserts such as rice pudding,

apple tart with white chocolate ice cream or *frixuelos* (crepes) - all presented in a very stylish setting. Décor consists of hanging copper pots, cider bottles and an abundance of greenery, elegant and very comfortable. The chef's wife, Marta Seco, mans the dining room. El Paraguas attracts Madrid's elite so expect prices in accordance. Average check: €70/person. Closed Sunday nights and 15 days in August.

Tel: (+34) 914 315 840 ([www.elparaguas.com](http://www.elparaguas.com))

### Alkalde

Jorge Juan, 10, is one of more popular casual Basque restaurants in Madrid along with the more critically acclaimed **Dantxari** (near the Plaza de España). Enjoy the well executed traditional Basque pintxos (tapas) at the bar or at one of the four wooden tables in the Basque tavern atmosphere of the upstairs bar, or a full meal in the Basque country house ambiance of the prettily decorated cozy downstairs dining room. It reminds me in feel of Paris's La Fontaine de Mars in the 7th arrondissement. And like Fontaine de Mars, I've seen Americans come in as early as 7:30 for dinner. At mid-day it will be packed with businessmen (power brokers) and high-end shoppers.

Offers authentic Basque cuisine, including a tasty spider crab bisque, *crema de centolla*, in copious portions. Excellent Rioja wines and the slight fizzy white Basque *txakolí*, which goes nicely with their fish dishes. Delicious omelets, croquettes and jamón ibérico plates served at the bar. But again, definitely not cheap! Open Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 159 310. View the menu at: [www.alkalderestaurante.com](http://www.alkalderestaurante.com).



Restaurante Alkalde

## FINE DINING IN CONTEMPORARY HIGH STYLE

### **Piñera\*\*\***

A bit hard to find, at Rosario Pino, 12, across from the Hotel Meliá Castilla, and a longish taxi drive from downtown, this new, elegant, highly acclaimed and very popular restaurant (especially among local gourmet critics) is most definitely worthy of the hike up to the northern business district. Among local food bloggers, it may be the most talked about restaurant today in its price range. Wild black sea bass with pea cream, charcoal grilled loin of oxen with potatoes and fried garlic, lasagne au foie and mushrooms. The director, Jorge Davila, will help you to choose a perfect wine to accompany your meal. And if you're a champagne lover, you'll have one hundred labels on the wine list from which to choose! It has been awarded one Repsol sun, and Piñera is one of the very few of Madrid's top tables to open on Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 914 251 425 ([www.restaurantepinera.com](http://www.restaurantepinera.com))

### **Nikkei 225** *opened Oct. 14*

Located in the Chamberí district on Fernando el Santo, at the corner of Castellana Boulevard, near Plaza de Colón at Paseo de Castellana, 15. Top restaurant and hotel designer, Ignacio García de Vinuesa, created the luxurious space in a color palette of white, cream and gold, with its exposed glass enclosed wine cellar, elegant dining room with picture windows facing the street and sushi bar. The sushi man is Peruvian Luis Arévalo, formerly of 99 Sushi Bar, considered by gourmet critics to be one of the best sushimen in the country. The other chef who created the hot dishes and desserts, Vicente de la Red, honed his skills at Michelin starred El Celler de Can Roca.

The restaurant is currently serving a "classic menu" for €50 and a "nikkei menu" for €65. The gourmet critic of El País gave the restaurant a rating of 7 in a recent review, after it had been open for just one week. Closed Saturdays for lunch and Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 913 190 390

### **Europa Decó**

On Carrera San Jerónimo, across from Parliament, Congreso de los Diputados, this is the splashy dining room of the Hotel Urban. Chef Joaquín Felipe offers imaginative Mediterranean fare in one of the "coolest" spaces in town. Thanks to *la crisis*, the prices of the set menus have been lowered; they now offer a €35 set lunch menu and a €40 menu for dinner. It opens for lunch from 1:30-4:30 and for dinner from 8:30-11:30. Closed Saturday lunch, Sunday and holidays. Many dishes can be ordered in half portions.

Tel: (+34) 917 877 770. Peruse the a la carte menu at: [www.derbyhotels.com](http://www.derbyhotels.com).

### **La Manduca de Azagra\***

At Sagasta, 14, near Plaza Alonso Martínez, just a short walk up from Plaza Colón. This is my favorite moderate splurge in central Madrid, along with Balzac. It serves simply wonderful Navarran dishes and has become extremely popular among the "in the know",

including Prince Felipe and Letizia. Must reserve several days in advance. The setting is stylish (designed by same architect as Pamplona's new Baluarte Performing Arts/Convention center), it won the National Prize for Design, the welcome by the Sola family couldn't be warmer, and the tables extremely well spaced, plus the portions are copious (the lady co-owner suggests that you share portions-heed her advice), the traditional Basque-Navarran *asador*, grill & roasting tavern, cuisine can't be beat.

There is always an excellent seasonal vegetable dish on the menu, plus the grilled tuna (just slightly but perfectly seared) is fantastic, but must be shared. Their vegetables are brought down daily from their vegetable garden in Azagra, Navarra. Nice warm chocolate soufflé with vanilla ice cream or cherry soup with lemon ice cream to finish. Highly recommended. Awarded one Repsol sun. Closed Sundays, holidays, Easter week and August. Average check: €50.

Tel: (+34) 915 910 112 ([www.lamanducadeazagra.com](http://www.lamanducadeazagra.com))

### Zorzal\*

Born as the less expensive "little brother" of one Michelin starred restaurant Zaranda, Zaranda has now closed its doors and number two Zorzal has taken its place at the Zaranda former home on Eduardo Dato, 5. Zorzal's original chef, Ivan Saez has moved on and has been replaced by Javier Lafuente. The sleek Tomás Alía décor remains unchanged as so the well-dressed and well-spaced tables while the Zorzal pricing has been maintained, thus making it one of Madrid's better high end dining spots that doesn't leave such a gaping hole in the wallet.

Tel: (+34) 914 464 548 ([www.restaurantezorzal.com](http://www.restaurantezorzal.com))

### Dassa Bassa

Can be found in the Salamanca district, on tony Villalar at number 7, with prices to match the neighborhood. There is a small storefront bar, but the dining is down a steep flight of stairs to the four subterranean dining rooms, decorated in an ultra hip, minimalist style, with white stucco walls, red and grey accents, located in what was once a coal warehouse. Owner Dario Barrios, who trained with Adriá at El Bulli, offers two highly inventive tasting menus, the Dassa for €60 and the Bassa for €75 along with a bargain weekday lunch "executive" menu for €25. These menus are the best way to experience this young chef's creative cooking, including his surprising dessert of beet ice cream. Fashionable but casually dressed clientele.



Praised by critic Anya Von Bremzen, in Travel and Leisure, author of *The New Spanish Table*. Also featured in the NY Times Choice Tables. Closed Sunday and Monday, Easter week and the first three weeks of August.

Tel: (+34) 915 767 397 ([www.dassabassa.com](http://www.dassabassa.com))

## Astrid & Gastón

Located right on the Paseo de la Castellana at number 13, this is the first Spain venture of Peruvian super-chef Gastón Acurio, who opened this contemporary spot in '07 to much fanfare. It quickly became one of the hottest reservations to secure as the word spread about this exciting new space. While the initial buzz has died down, the cooking remains sure-footed. The menu features Peruvian dishes with Japanese and Chinese nuances. Excellent quality fish dishes, ceviches and great pisco sours. The chef has opened other outposts in Santiago de Chile, Caracas, Quito and Bogotá. It opens for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30 but closes Saturday lunch and all day Sunday. Average check: €60.

Tel: (+34) 917 026 262 ([www.astridygastonmadrid.com](http://www.astridygastonmadrid.com))

## Pandelujo

Jorge Juan, 20, near the corner of Lagasca, is one of the several fashion dining spots to open on this ultra chic street, a total remake of a former bakery, hence the name. It is the creation of chef Alberto Chicote of the equally fashionable fusion restaurant 'No Do'. It is a soaring space with exposed brick, steel beams, shallow reflecting pools and plasma screen TVs. The dining room has an enormous glass wall separating diners from the reflecting pond of the interior garden. Restrooms have a glass wall open to brick and glass floors. At night figures of color and light are projected onto the wall, making this one of the area's most romantic dining spots.

Appetizers and desserts are served in portions that should be shared. Standouts include the delectable *ensaladilla rusa*, a Russian salad served in a giant glass ice cream bowl as a starter, *pisto*, the Spanish version of ratatouille, and a delicious rice pudding sandwich to finish. Each meal starts with their famous breadbasket accompanied by the finest olive oils. Pandelujo never closes. One should reserve at least a day or two in advance. The only downside: the slow and somewhat casual service. Average check: €45/person. Open Sunday.



Tel: (+34) 914 361 100. The restaurant's web page captures perfectly the hip ambiance: [www.pandelujo.es](http://www.pandelujo.es).

## Sula\*

Across and up the street a bit from Pandelujo at Jorge Juan, 33, Sula is another ultra chic dining spot, a collaboration of a noted threesome: the owner of Spain's best Iberian hams, the Joselito brand, a 2-star Michelin chef, Quique Dacosta of El Poblet and the owner of the canned goods emporium, La Catedral de Navarra. It has a black, brown and grey post industrialist (read cold) decor on two floors, downstairs is the long, narrow, lively and chic tapas bar where one can make a meal of croquettes, mini sandwiches, tortilla, cocas, etc. Along with one's (rather pricey) glass of wine comes a little appetizer of delicious Joselito sausage. Or move upstairs to the restaurant, surrounding the two-story glass enclosed wine cellar holding more than 4,000 bottles. We recently had a fantastic lunch of *carpaccio de solomillo* (filet mignon), *ventresca* (grilled tuna) starting with a shared order of the world's greatest asparagus (of course, from Navarra) and finishing with *torrijas* (the Spanish version of French toast).

The service by the Amaya Arzuaga clad wait staff has improved immensely since we first dined here. For the high quality of the ingredients, this is a great place for lunch, albeit a pricey one, in a very fashionable setting. Like Pandelujo, Sula never closes. The upstairs dining room opens for lunch at 1:30 pm and for dinner at 8:30 pm. Upstairs count on a check of €50/person.



While the prices in the upstairs dining room run on the high side, one can enjoy Sula for less by making a meal of the tapas and raciones served in the small dining space downstairs, beyond the bar. They no longer serve their bargain *menú del día* there, but sit-down tapas and small plates can be enjoyed, along with excellent wines by the glass.

Tel: (+34) 917 816 197. See the current menu at: [www.sula.es](http://www.sula.es).

## MODERATE TO MODERATELY EXPENSIVE DINING

### In the Elegant Salamanca Shopping/Residential District

*Nice places to stop while shopping - €40 to €50 per person.*

#### **El Almiraz \***

At the corner of Maldonado and Claudio Coello in the upper (northern) section of the Salamanca quarter not far from the American Embassy, this cute and cozy Basque-Navarran spot makes a nice place to stop for a pintxo (tapa) or a plate of fine Iberian ham at the bar in the tavern section or to dine stylishly but not terribly expensively in the restaurant next door. The service is attentive, the welcome warm and the classic décor cozy and inviting. Try the ratatouille (*pisto*) with eggs and green asparagus, the veal and mushroom croquettes or the ham and veal meatballs (*albóndigas*). Very good fish selections and excellent red meats.

Their typical Basque dessert of *pantxineta*, a puff pastry filled with cream is delicious. And their house red wine is reasonably priced. Closed Sunday night, Holy Week and 15 days in August.

Tel: (+34) 914 115 469

#### **Lago de Sanabria\***

Located at Ayala, 23, across from the Mercado La Paz, is a local dining spot in the Salamanca district that's virtually unknown to foreigners. Founded in 1913, it's a neighborhood favorite with very high quality dishes prepared with impeccably fresh ingredients. It's reminiscent of that perfect, simple and dependable, family run French bistro. It offers game in season and spectacular fresh spring asparagus from Aranjuez, and tasty rice pudding for dessert.

It won a gastronomic prize from the ABC restaurant critic for "best traditional fare". No tourists and no English menus (as yet...). It closes Monday - Thursday night plus Saturday night and all day Sunday, and from July 15 - August 20.

Tel: (+34) 914 311 506

#### **El Chiscón de Castelló\***

At Castelló, 3, open since 1979, this cozy, two-floor bistro has a friendly and comfortable tavern atmosphere and produces traditional cuisine with a few modern touches. The attentive service from owners María Pérez Ruiz and Carlos makes one feel right at home. And prices are quite reasonable for the neighborhood, particularly their €26 evening menus. Honest traditional food for decent prices.

Standouts here include their loin of venison, hake in saffron sauce, oxtail braised in red wine, black rice with baby octopus and rice pudding mousse with cinnamon ice cream. They offer lunch menus for €18. Closed Sunday, Monday night and August.

Tel: (+34) 915 755 662 ([www.elchiscon.com](http://www.elchiscon.com))

### **La Cesta de Recoletos**

At Recoletos, 10, in the former space of Leblón, this wine bistro opened November 10, and I haven't had the chance to try it...but, it may be one of the city's most exciting openings of the fall of 2010. It's a creation of Oscar Velasco, David Robledo and Abel Valverde, all of two Michelin starred Restaurante Santceloni-its chef, maitre and sommelier, so one can count on high quality. Prices should be in line with other wine bistros-gastro bars, such as Arzábal. Open 12:30 pm to 1:30 am. It's closed Sunday and Monday nights.

Tel: (+34) 911 400 696 ([www.lacesta.eu](http://www.lacesta.eu))

### **Zen Central\***

Off ultra fashionable Jorge Juan, at Puigcerdá, 6, between the Mesón 5 Jotas and El Amparo de Andrea (now Italian). This is one of the city's more reliable upscale and elegant Chinese dining spots with a minimalist décor and chic clientele. It is a product of Roger Chen, owner of the Asia Gallery restaurant of the Westin Palace and the brand new macro-eatery, Zen Market, near Bernabeu soccer stadium.



It does serve a €16 set menu for lunch, which places it in the affordable category. At night the Asian fusion menu is also moderately priced. Star dishes here are the Imperial rolls, Cantonese pork rib, chicken saté with green curry and Pato Laqueado (Peking duck).

Tel: (+34) 914 311 233

### **Asador Frontón**

Along with Iroco, this is one of the few reasonably priced dining establishments on posh Calle Velázquez (at number 54), the newest branch of the Asador Frontón group with other locations in Old Madrid at Plaza Tirso de Molina and Pedro Muguruza in the

northern business district. While feasting on Basque specialties such as veal steak in the formal dining room will put a small dent in the wallet, a couple can dine on a selection of 8 tapas at the tables in the front bar area for a reasonable €20. On Saturday nights, the rice dishes go for only €12,50/person. The bar is also open for breakfast, which provides an inexpensive option to the 5-star hotel buffet breakfasts (such as at the Wellington) that are priced at €20 and beyond.

Tel: (+34) 915 4775 165 ([www.asadorfronton.es](http://www.asadorfronton.es))

### **El Plató Restaurant & Lounge-Bar**

Castellana Boulevard, 36, next to the ABC shopping complex. This new, hip but casual eatery falls into the very moderate price category, one of the few recommendable, gently priced dining spots in this high rent district that serves memorable (if small) dishes. This one is not only good but also fun—a gastrobar attached to a TV studio, created by master Basque-Navarran chef Pedro Larumbe who still reigns at his eponymous restaurant next door. This 300 square meter space has floor to ceiling windows overlooking the Castellana, and the dining space to the right of the bar is separated from the Intereconomía TV sound stage by a full-length glass wall, so diners can watch television in the making. The décor is sleek and sophisticated, done in tones of black, red and white.

Diners have the option of ordering half portions so they can sample a full array of creative dishes from the market driven menu. Come for lunch starting at 1:00, dinner from 9:00 until midnight or an after dinner cocktail—the bar is open until 3:00 am!

Tel: (+34) 914 354 618. Peruse the menu (with prices) at: [www.elplato.es](http://www.elplato.es).

*Note: A recent meal here left me less excited about the concept and food because of indifferent service from our particular waitress, the presence of a “coffee to go” machine for office workers in our section, with workers going back and forth from coffee machine to pay at the bar, and the persistent smoking in the dining area facing the Castellana (to be eliminated as of January 2 with the new and much stricter non-smoking law).*

### **Pizzicheria\***

At Castelló, 83, this gently priced but high end pizzeria is a sophisticatedly playful yet informal, easy-on-the-wallet creation of Ignazio Deias, the chef-owner of one of the capital's best Italian restaurants, Boccondivino, which sits next door. It serves seventeen varieties of Sardinian style gourmet pizzas (such as goat cheese with black truffles), all baked in an artisan lava stone oven. Other menu items include pastas, tomato salads, bresaola, Caesar salad, Italian ratatouille-caaponata, vitello tonnato and fantastic parmigiana de melanzane or eggplant lasagna with tomato and Parmesan cheese, a hamburger, and tiramisu and semifreddo allo Zabaione for dessert. There is a small, all Italian label wine



list. Because of the very reasonable prices, it's extremely popular with families, especially on Sundays, so please reserve. Even in this high rent district, these well to do families love a bargain! Open daily. Metro: Núñez de Balboa

Tel: (+34) 914 357 533. Peruse the menu at: [www.grupopizziccheria.com](http://www.grupopizziccheria.com).

### **Iroco**

At Velázquez, 18, was opened 12 years ago by a New York chef, continues to be a dependable bet for casual Sunday dining when most top restaurants are closed. There is even a garden terrace in the back for summer dining *al fresco*. This restaurant with the dark orange awning and gray façade draws a celebrity/fashioners crowd in its Tribeca/Soho type setting. Quite chic, a place "to see and be seen" (and a favorite of Penélope Cruz) but won't break the bank. Great value lunch for €21. Stand out courses include the beef carpaccio from Harry's Bar in Venice. The VIPS chain has taken Iroco under its umbrella, but chef Pedro Molina still does a fine job with the Mediterranean fare adding a Japanese touch to the sauces. The mojitos and caipirinhas are very popular. Open for dinner until 12:30 am, even on Sundays. And an a la carte **brunch** is served on Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 – 4:00. Average check: €35.

Tel: (+34) 914 317 381 ([www.grupovips.com](http://www.grupovips.com))

### **Teatríz**

Hermosilla, 15, at the corner of Claudio Coello, is a "trendy", cutting edge refit of the old Beatriz Theater, renovated in 1990 by Phillipe Starck and Javier Mariscal. The entrance has a few tall postmodern tables where you can have a stylish set "tapas" lunch, or in the theater part itself a dinner of Italian cuisine in the round, where the audience used to sit, or just have drinks at the translucent bar on the stage. The downstairs library turns into a disco bar around midnight and remains open till very late, until 2:00 am weeknights and 3:00 am on Saturday. Attracts a fashionable local clientele from the neighborhood and a smattering of foreign visitors, as it's featured in some guides. Don't miss the bathrooms, which are worth the trip alone. Like Iroco, it now belongs to the VIPS restaurant group.

We've only had the mid-day fixed price tapas menu at the front and late Saturday night drinks. The Italian cuisine in the theater is mediocre by some accounts; others report that it's just fine. It's a place to see and be seen above all else, but fun. It's handy for those staying at the NH Lagasca, Petit Palace Embassy, Wellington, High Tech President and Hesperia Hermosilla hotels, and it serves a Saturday, Sunday and holiday brunch from 1:00 - 4:00; pancakes with bacon, fried eggs, bacon & cheese hamburgers and Eggs Benedict.

Tel: (+34) 915 775 379 ([www.grupovips.com](http://www.grupovips.com))

### **Near Plaza Mayor, in the heart of Old Madrid**

The restaurants in this area lie within walking distance of the following hotels, Westin Palace, Prado, Radisson Blu, NH Paseo del Prado and Palacio de Tepa, Room Mate Alicia, Plaza Mayor, Vincci Soho and Catalonia las Cortes. The Old Madrid taverns are

where you may (or may not!) want to try traditional Madrid cuisine, but beware that recipes are often organ meat based. In fact, next to Lyon, Madrid is the offal dining capital of Europe.

Some typical Madrid dishes you will find on the menus of many of the *castizo* (authentic) taverns in Old Madrid:

**Callos la madrileña** – *Tripe and shout in a tomato, onion and garlic sauce*

**Caracoles** - *Snails in a rich, hot sauce*

**Torreznos** - *Crisp grilled pancetta*

**Criadillas** - *Bulls or Lamb's testicles (most common)*

**Riñones** - *Kidneys*

**Sesos rebozados** – *Battered Lamb brains*

**Lechecillas de ternera** - *Sweetbreads*

**Mollejas** - *Lamb sweetbreads*

**Gallinejas** - *Lamb chitterlings*

**Lengua** – *Tongue*

**Manitas de cerdo** - *Pig's trotters*

**Oreja** - *Pig's ear*

**Albóndigas** - *Meatballs*

**Gallina en pepitoria** - *Casserole of stewed hen.*

**Cocido madrileño** - *A very heavy stew, served in 3 courses-similar to a pot-au-feu.*

### **Casa Lucio\***

At Cava Baja, 35, Lucio serves as one of my aces in the hole for Sunday night dining in La Latina. Fewer tourists venture here than to Restaurante Botín, but you may spot royalty or celebrities; it's one of the King's favorites, who took Clinton here, as well as visiting Hollywood types-Penelope Cruz, Tom Cruise-Melanie Griffith loves their rice pudding. Casually fashionable dress at night, filled with business folks at lunch. Impeccably fresh fish, irresistible broken fried eggs with fried potatoes (*huevos estrellados*), a signature dish and artery clogging, that most order as their first course. From Monday - Thursday for lunch Lucio serves a *plato de puchero*, or a stew (could be *cocido*, or perhaps a bowl of lentils). To enjoy the people watching, ask for a table in the low ceiling, main brick-vaulted downstairs dining room.

Old school service by the veteran waiters, most of whom who have been here since the restaurant was founded in 1974. Good Rioja red house wine, Marqués de Cáceres for only €12. Awarded one *sol* (sun) in the Repsol guide. You must reserve at least one week in advance. It closes on Saturday for lunch, August and Christmas to New Years.

Tel: (+34) 913 653 252

The establishment manages a sister restaurant, **Viejo Madrid**, across the street at Cava Baja 32, and Lucia's children run **Los Huevos de Lucio** at Cava Baja, 30. See them all at: [www.casalucio.es](http://www.casalucio.es).

### El Landó\*

El Landó is an equally atmospheric, old fashioned, classic Madrid tavern with a kind of British clubby decor whose owner Angel González is the brother-in-law of famed restaurateur Lucio Blázquez of Casa Lucio. This one, less of a celebrity circus, (although a Woody Allen, Gwyneth Paltrow and top model favorite), serves many of the same specialties, such as the artery clogging but delicious *huevos estrellados*. The house also serves impeccably fresh fish such as *rape* (monkfish) and *rodaballo* (turbot) and a terrific grilled steak, *churrasco*, along with a highly praised steak tartare. Top quality ingredients, prepared simply, are the name of the game here.

When you arrive, your table may already be set with the signature house appetizers-an irresistible tomato bread, a plate of fresh sliced tomatoes dressed in the world's best olive oil and a platter of silky Iberian ham. If you want, partake (but a warning, you'll be charged, these don't come on the house), but if you don't wish to partake, they will be removed. I order the perfect melon (that will feed an army) for dessert or their classic rice pudding. If you are an *offal lover*, this is the spot to try the Madrid signature dish of *callos a la madrileña* (tripe stew). Portions are copious.

The veteran waiters, as at Casa Lucio, are masters at their craft. The restaurant is located on Plaza de Gabriel Miró, near the Church of San Francisco el Grande and the pretty Parque de las Vistillas that has lovely, romantic views at night of the illuminated Almudena Cathedral and the Royal Palace below. Madrileños dine late here; they arrive around 10:30 and the last orders are taken at 11:15. If you arrive at 9:00 you'll be dining with the staff, but they'll pamper you. The restaurant closes Sunday, Holy Week and August.

Tel: (+34) 913 667 681 ([www.casalucio.es](http://www.casalucio.es))

### La Gastroteca de Santiago

The owners of **Taberneros** and **Matritum** have also opened this cozy bistro at the end of the street across from the church on the Plaza Santiago. It has only five tables for a maximum of 20 diners. Its chef, Juan Carlos Ramos, now has an a la carte chalkboard menu along with a daily seasonal, market driven fixed price set menu, consisting of five small plates and dessert for €60 (add €25 for wine pairings) plus a weekday lunch *menú del día* for €25. Every Sunday for lunch the chef prepares a different rice dish, based on what's fresh and wonderful in the market. It closes Sunday nights and Monday, Holy Week and the last two weeks of August.

Tel: (+34) 915 480 707 ([www.lagastrotecadesantiago.es](http://www.lagastrotecadesantiago.es))

### Posada de la Villa

Cava Baja, 9, my other preferred sit-down restaurant on this tavern-lined street where I take guests who don't insist on dining at Botín. A beautifully restored, highly atmospheric 17th century coaching inn with brick walls, copper pots, beamed ceilings. Nice tapas at the bar and delicious roasts (try the *cordero asado*-roast lamb) upstairs; you'll see the enormous roasting oven to the right as you enter. They not only offer delectable roast lamb, but also great fish dishes. Solicitous service. Order the house

Rioja (red). Posada de la Villa, featured in most guides, is understandably popular so, reserve. Closed Sunday nights and all of August.

Tel: (+34) 913 661 860 ([www.posadadelavilla.es](http://www.posadadelavilla.es))

*If you don't find a table available at this inn, try their sister restaurant next door...*

### **La Taberna del Capitán Alatraste**

At Calle San Bruno, 4, opened by the owners of **Posada de la Villa** behind their flagship restaurant, where house specialties include; *empanada de perdiz* (partridge turnovers), *jarrete de cordero* (lamb shanks), *chuletillas al sarmiento* (baby lamb chops grilled on vine shoots) and *lomo de buey* (an ox loin steak).

This sister tavern has a charming Old Madrid ambience with fireside dining in the upstairs dining room and several atmospheric cave-like dining rooms downstairs, which are perfect for a group or for romantic dining for two. Tapas and raciones are served at the bar, attentive and caring service. Closed Sunday.

Tel: (+34) 913 661 883 ([www.capitanalatristetaberna.com](http://www.capitanalatristetaberna.com))

### **Orixe**

Cava Baja 17, on the left side going south just beyond Restaurante El Schotis. This is a



sleek Galician tapas bar, small-plates restaurant that we hit on every visit to Madrid for their authentic Galician omelet and Galician wines by the glass. We come here just before 9:00, snag a table for two in the dining room or just feast on *raciones* (platters), or *tapas* of typical Galician specialties such as *pulpo a feira* (octopus), *empanadas de vieiras* (scallop turnovers), *pimientos de Padrón* (little fried green peppers), *chorizo* braised in Albariño wine, *tortilla de Betanzos* (a runny Galician style egg and potato omelet), *filloas* (crepes) for

dessert. At the bar, you can enjoy a Ribeiro or Rías Baixas wine by the glass. The tapas menu consists of some 16 choices in ½ or full portions.

The dining room seats only 50 in a post-industrialist chic setting of granite/brick/steel and offers the same tapas (for 20% more) and other creative small plates including fish and meat. Orixe offers an unbeatable €15 lunch from Monday to Friday with choice of 4 starters, 4 mains, 4 desserts and includes bread, wine/water, dessert or coffee. Opens for lunch at noon and dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday night, all day Monday and the 2nd half of July.

Tel: (+34) 913 540 411. Peruse the menu at: [www.orixerestaurante.com](http://www.orixerestaurante.com).

## **Olsen**

Calle del Prado, 15, just north of the Westin Palace, is Nordic designer restaurant/lounge, with Madrid's first vodka bar downstairs. The igloo looking Lounge Belvedere, serves 80 different vodkas and concoctions by Swiss barman Jerome Zufferey. His "Royal Palace" is made of vodka, Baileys, whisky and chestnut puree. Well recommended in Habitanía magazine who says its design falls somewhere between a Stockholm chill out bar, a Helsinki sauna and a Copenhagen country home. Open kitchen, soft lighting and hip music set the tone.

They also serve a 5-shot vodka platter accompanied by canapés and a popular weekend brunch costing €21, plus a lunch menu for €15, including two courses, drink, dessert and coffee.

The Belvedere Lounge is open on Friday and Saturday from 10:00 am - 2:00 am. The restaurant serves lunch on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 1:00 – 4:00 and dinner from 8:00 - midnight. Dinner on Friday and Saturday is served until 12:30 am. Closed Mondays.

Tel: (+34) 914 293 659 ([www.olsenmadrid.com](http://www.olsenmadrid.com))

**THE FOLLOWING RESTAURANTS RECEIVE HEAVY VISITOR TRAFFIC -  
Read "very touristy"**

### **1. Restaurante Sobrino de Botín**

Located at Calle de Cuchilleros, 17, dating from 1725, Botín is considered the world's oldest restaurant, according to the Guinness Book of Records. A Hemingway favorite, where Jake Barnes dines with Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*. Is also featured in Michener's *Iberia*. Hemingway once called it "the world's greatest restaurant". Goya supposedly worked there as a dishwasher. It's packed with tourists all the time, as it's the one Madrid top dining spot everyone wants to visit either for the nostalgia or for the authentic, classic roasting tavern ambience. One of the few Madrid restaurants you'll find open at 8:00 pm. It's best to reserve, because if you walk in at 8:00, you'll be seated in the less atmospheric front room.



Since there are five levels, ask for a table in the cozy, dimly lit caves, or on the prettily decorated and ceramic tiled third floor, where Madrileños business types entertain their foreign guests. But if you want to see any Spaniards, go after 10:30, preferably at 11:00, when strolling university student, or aging former students, troubadours ("tunas") come in to serenade.

The Queen took Nancy Reagan and Hillary Clinton to dine here, but Laura Bush was a taken by the wife of the Prime Minister to Casa Lucio. Specialties are roast-suckling pig and roast lamb cooked in centuries old wood-burning ovens fired by evergreen oak. The original stoves are still in use. Also serves a nice filet mignon with mushrooms (*solomillo Botín*) and very fresh fish as well. I like their *merluza al horno* an oven baked hake, and the *almejas Botín*, yummy clams served in clay cazuela. Very good gazpacho, and the house bottle of Valdepeñas is decent, while the Rioja is fine. Many order pitchers

of sangría, but never the natives, since *sangría* is considered primarily a tourist drink. Folding menus in English that you can take as souvenirs (practically every Spanish teacher in the US who's been to Botín has one in his/her classroom). Skip the flan and have the Botín cake (*Tarta de la casa*) instead, or the fresh strawberries from Aranjuez topped with whipped cream or freshly squeezed orange juice.

The place is still family run with great patience, given the constant barrage of hungry tourists, and with great aplomb. The staff has been around forever, including the maitre d' who has manned the house for 30 years. The chef is a 40-year veteran. The same family runs the restaurant of the Hostal del Cardenal in Toledo, and there's a branch of Botín in Coral Gables, FL.

You can go in practically any mode of dress (not so at Casa Paco where shorts are a no-no). I've seen diners bring in their backpacks- no problem. And flash away with your cameras-the waiters will oblige and take your souvenir photo. Reserve unless you want to take your chances at 8:00 with a throng of very hungry visitors eager to dine early. I've never had a bad meal here, and I've taken many a guest to Botín, as most of my guests are eager to experience this historic place. It simply has a fine satisfaction rating among foreign guests, particularly Madrid first-timers. And because of its mention by Hemingway and Michener it has the most name recognition of the old time Madrid restaurants. Yes, there are many, many more impressive dining spots in the city. And I wouldn't call it gourmet.

It has disappeared from the *Gourmetour* guide, while *Gourmetour* gives Julián de Tolosa a rating of 7,25. Casa Lucio a 6.75, Orixe a 6,50, all on the same street. But...since Botín represents a very good value, dishes up genuine, honest traditional Madrid cuisine with style and class, I enjoy Botín for what it is. Plus it offers oodles of Old Madrid atmosphere, and my guests leave happy, with their souvenir menu tucked away for their scrapbooks.

Tel: (+34) 913 664 217 ([www.botin.es](http://www.botin.es))

## 2. Casa Paco

At Puerta Cerrada, 11, is located at end of Calle Cuchilleros, before your cross over to the Cava Baja, to the right at the square. Look for the bright red, gold and green exterior. This is yet another old Madrid tavern and a tradition for dining on red meat amidst bullfighting memorabilia. Always crowded.

Go past the old-time zinc bar and up the stairs to the old fashioned tiled dining rooms where you'll find the walls covered with autographed pictures of the famous.

Steak (*cebón de buey*) is delivered to you still cooking on its clay plate. You finish the cooking at the table. Some prefer the filet (*solomillo*) to the T-bone. There are also grilled lamb chops, and their *pisto*, a Spanish ratatouille, is another signature dish. On Tuesday they serve *cocido*. Nice rice pudding for dessert, or try the *Tarta de Santiago* almond cake. Listed in all the tour guides so almost as packed with tourists as Botín. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 913 663 166 ([www.casapaco1933](http://www.casapaco1933))

### 3. El Schotis

At Cava Baja, 11, offers tasty red meats (*solomillo*- filet mignon) and roast lamb, as well in a simpler old-fashioned Madrid tavern ambience with old time waiters and pretty murals by Madrid painter, Eduardo Vicente, decorating the upstairs dining room. A fifty-year old classic for very reasonably priced, authentic and unpretentious Madrid cuisine. Not gourmet, just very dependable for its red meats. English menu. Opens for dinner early, at 8:15 pm. Closed Sunday nights.

Tel: (+34) 913 653 230

### Near the Teatro Real and Royal Palace

#### 4. La Taberna del Alabardero

At Felipe V, 6, on the pedestrian-only side street next to the Opera House. Offers yummy *patatas a lo pobre* at the bar, or you can have tapas seated at one of the marble tables with red velvet banquettes off to the side of the front bar, or inside, in front of the back bar. Pretty fin de siècle ambience in the two small dining rooms. Opens "early", at 8:30. Like its sister restaurant, Café de Oriente, I believe that the quality of the dining here has declined –and it's fallen off the radar screen of most food critics. We now just frequent it for mid-morning or pre-theatre tapas. Other branches are found in Marbella (Puerto Banús-La Meridiana del Alabardero recently hosted Michelle Obama), Seville, Seattle and D.C. (the best of the bunch).

This is the original restaurant of the dining empire created by the priest and king's confessor, Luis Lezama, with proceeds going to his foundation, which supports needy children. In summer there's great people watching from the outdoor terrace before the concerts/operas at the Royal Theater next door. English spoken

Tel: (+34) 915 472 577 ([www.grupolezama.com](http://www.grupolezama.com))

#### 5. Café de Oriente

On the Plaza de Oriente, facing the Royal Palace, this member of the Lezama group offers visitors a convenient variety of dining venues for all budgets, from tapas to breakfast at the bar, to drinks on the outdoor terrace facing the Royal Palace. This café is located on one of the prettiest squares of Old Madrid, especially beautiful at night. There is also a formal (expensive) dining room downstairs in El Aljibe, with exposed brick walls and curved arches giving the appearance of an old cellar, actually the basement of a former convent. The cuisine here is Basque, as it is in all the Lezama group restaurants including the Taberna del Alabardero next door.

Try the hake in garlic-parsley sauce, a traditional Basque dish- *merluza en salsa verde*. Drink prices both inside the café and on the outdoor terrace in front of the Royal Palace are quite steep-you do pay for the captivating view. Waiters speak English and offer English menus. Open daily.

Tel: (+34) 915 413 974 ([grupolezama.es/portal/cafe-de-oriente/home](http://grupolezama.es/portal/cafe-de-oriente/home))

## 6. La Bola

Located on the corner of Calle Guillermo Roland and Calle Bola up the street from Plaza Marina Española at #5. Look for the reddish orange façade. It opened in 1800 as a wine shop, has remained in the same family for six generations and is one of Madrid's most famous classic taverns. The street is named bola, so they say, because the Philip II's son rolled snowballs down the street.

Inside you'll find celebrity photos and heavy red velvet drapes. The veteran waiters may regale you with stories (if you ask) about the always-tipsy Ava Gardner and her matador companions who frequented the place in the fifties. Its specialty is Madrid's signature dish, *cocido*, an elaborate stew, a sort of French pot-au-feu, said to be a descendent of the Jewish *adafaina*, to which pork was added. Cooked over a wood fire for six hours, it's served in earthenware pots in three courses-first, the rich chicken broth with noodles, then the stewed vegetables and chickpeas, finally the juicy *pringá* course, which are the boiled meats (ham, sausage, bacon, hen and beef). Very heavy, very filling and not a summer dish!

Be sure to order the traditional apple fritters with whipped cream (*buñuelos de manzana*) for dessert. There are English menus available. It's been designated a "Bibi Gourmand" choice in the Michelin guide. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 476 930 ([www.labola.es](http://www.labola.es))

## SIX GOOD BETS FOR CARNIVORES

### Near the Plaza Mayor

#### 1. Julián de Tolosa

At Cava Baja, 18, is a classic with brick walls, tiled floors, floor to ceiling windows, one two levels and a kind of “neo rustic” atmosphere. Go for the *besugo*, a perfectly cooked sea bream, *merluza a la romana* (hake) or the *chuletón de buey*, a T-bone cooked their way, not to your specifications and priced by the kilo. Also the red beans, *alubias*, from Tolosa, wonderful asparagus, and great roasted red Piquillo peppers. It is run by the same family who also run Madrid's **Casa Matías** and the famed Asador-steakhouse **Casa Julián**, in Tolosa, Guipúzcoa in the Basque Country, one of the top spots in the country for grilled red meats.

Try the rice pudding, or custard (*natillas*) for dessert. Note-Prices here have crept up considerably, raising it into the expensive category-hake for €23, monkfish, €24,50, the steak for two, €46, and desserts from €7,50 – €9,50. Closed Sunday evening.

Tel: (+34) 913 658 210 ([www.casajuliandetolosa.com](http://www.casajuliandetolosa.com))

### Near the Plaza de España

#### 2. Asador Casa Matías

San Leonardo, 12, near the Plaza de España, the family of **Julián de Tolosa** opened this *asador*, named for owner Matías Gorrotxategui, the grill-meister of the original family restaurant, Casa Julián in Tolosa. It's been featured in design magazines and looks like an ultra modern Basque cider house, with a typical cider house menu. Offers great steaks (*chuletón*) and excellent grilled fish, such as *rape*, monkfish.

For a starter, try the scrambled eggs with mushrooms (*revuelto de hongos*) or the fried anchovies and finish with the typical and irresistible, classic Basque dessert, *pantxineta*.

Tel: (+34) 915 417 683 ([www.casajuliandetolosa.com](http://www.casajuliandetolosa.com))

#### 3. Dantxari\*\*\*

Ventura Rodríguez, 8, is one of Madrid's very best traditional Navarran Basque restaurants, disguised as a simple *mesón* (tavern), tables covered with checkered tablecloths, offering a classic Navarran menu that includes cod, “pil-pil” style, roasted red Piquillo peppers filled with spider crab, stuffed squid, oven baked hake, ox tail stew, filet mignon in puff pastry, *solomillo de buey al hojaldre con foie-gras*, Tolosa white beans with chorizo and for dessert, the Basque Navarran classics-*pantxineta* and *leche frita*. Generous portions and a fantastic wine list with reasonable prices. The house Rioja red, a fine Luis Cañas, goes for around €12. Awarded one *sol* (sun) in the Repsol guide and a 7.25/10 rating in Gourmetour. Opens for dinner at 8:30 pm. Closed Sunday and August. Count on a tab of about €45 per person.

Tel: (+34) 915 423 524 ([www.dantxari.com](http://www.dantxari.com))

## Near the Plaza Santa Bárbara

### 4. De María Hortaleza\*

Can be found at Hortaleza, 81, on the northern and ever-more-fashionable end of Chueca. While the De María group now has eight restaurants, I have only frequented this one, the newest and most stylish. Others are found in more tourist-filled sections of the city, and the more expensive “mother ship”, in the northern business district (Félix Boix, 5), attracts a steady stream of professional fútbol stars and other celebs.

This newest branch, which feels very much like an authentic and stylish Buenos Aires *parrilla*, has an all-Argentine staff and delivers a very authentic grill experience in a relaxed and very comfortable setting. With its well-spaced tables on two levels, high ceilings, soft, subdued lighting and professional attentive service, there's just lots to like here, especially the excellent RCP-quality to price ratio. There are high tables in the front bar with its open grill where one can dine inexpensively on tapas or order the €12,20 lunch short grill *menú* (grilled chorizo or morcilla, ½ asado de tira, French fries or roast potatoes or salad, 2 beers or soft drink or glass of wine, coffee or ice cream). Reserve a table ahead of time for lunch or dinner, and you'll be seated in one of the spacious leather booths.

A recent lunch for two started with an *aperitivo* shot glass of cream of artichokes and tiny *tartelette* of cream of Cabrales, followed by a simple house salad, a dish of delicious black ravioli and the *ojo de bife* steak, perfectly cooked, all accompanied by a light Azabache *crianza* from the Rioja, the house *tinto*. We eschewed dessert, since all diners receive a palate-cleansing mandarin sorbet on the house. Other standout menu items are their *provoletas*, *empanadas* and *mollejas* (sweetbreads). Although the Hortaleza branch brings in mostly a local, business clientele and few tourists, there is an English menu.

Tel: (+34) 913 101 439 ([demariaestaurante.es](http://demariaestaurante.es))

## In the Salamanca District

### 5. Asador Imanol

At General Díaz Porlier, 97, in the upper northeast corner of the district. Another of the city's finest classic Basque-Navarran grill restaurants/cider houses, directed with aplomb by Miguel Ansorena (creator of the Asador Frontón group), offering classic *asador* cuisine, efficient service and spectacular prime ingredients, both beef and fish brought straight from the pier of Ondarroa (hake, turbot, sea bream, cod), grilled to perfection over an open wood fired grill. Closed Sunday nights and August. Metro: Diego de León.

Tel: (+34) 913 090 859 ([www.asadorimanol.com](http://www.asadorimanol.com))

## Near Teatro Real - Royal Palace - Senate

### 6. El Buey

At the Plaza de la Marina Española, 1, near the Palacio Real and Teatro Real, across the street from the Senate. Dedicated carnivores flock to this moderately priced little spot noted for its fillets (*lomo de buey*), which are served on a sizzling platter so that you can

finish cooking them to your liking. Excellent house red Ribera del Duero wines. Everyone seems to order the same menu items, the onion soup to start, then *lomo de buey al carbón*, a house salad of tomatoes and onion, fries and homemade lemon sorbet for dessert. They also have a dish of nice seafood-stuffed red peppers. No space between tables! **They pack them in.** This is a favorite of the local politicians at lunchtime. And you'll find plenty of tourists as well, as it's featured in most guides, including the Michelin red.

Tel: (+34) 915 413 041 ([www.elbueyrestaurante.com](http://www.elbueyrestaurante.com))

I prefer the El Buey in the Salamanca quarter at General Diaz Porlier, 9, founded in 1982, also recommended in the red Michelin.

Tel: 915 758 066 ([diaz-porlier.restauranteelbuey.com](http://diaz-porlier.restauranteelbuey.com))

**MODERATE** (and not tourist-filled)

### **Near the Plaza de Oriente and Teatro Real**

#### **Genoveva de Barri\***

At Espejo, 10, a bit hard to find-From the square in front of the Teatro Real, look for Calle Independencia to the south and Calle Espejo is found at the end of Independencia. This diminutive spot, a very pretty and romantic neo-bistro has room for only eight tables and serves a market-driven seasonal menu with a creative flair. The mother runs the house and her son mans the stove. The bistro closes for lunch on Saturday and in July, all day Sunday and for three weeks in August.

Tel: (+34) 915 478 014

#### **El Mollete\***

At Calle Bola, 4, this newcomer, housed in a former charcoal warehouse and turned into a romantic bistro, has become a real crowd pleaser, especially since being featured in the NY Times article “36 Hours in Madrid” and now recommended by area hotel concierges. If you hope to dine here, you’ll need to reserve, since it has seating for only 26. Favorite dishes here include tortilla, the Madrid favorite of broken eggs, Galician octopus and Gorgonzola croquettes. Just put yourself in the hands of the owner, and you’ll dine very well for a fair price.

This diminutive spot lies within a short walk of the Hotel Preciados and Hotel Meninas.

Tel: (+34) 915 477 820

### **In Gentrifying TriBall, the new “SoHo”- off the Gran Vía**

#### **Casa Perico**

At Calle Ballesta, 18, this cute, memento-cluttered *tasca*, a local landmark, has been in business since the 1940s, bringing madrileños some tasty, unpretentious, classic *casa de comidas* dishes such as ham croquettes, breaded shrimp, veal roasts, *ensaladilla rusa*, breaded baby lamb chops, veal steaks with French fries, veal scaloppini and their signature dish, *arroz a lo cutre*, a poor man’s paella. Here the cuisine and the atmosphere is Old Madrid at its most authentic. Their dessert sampler, served in miniature cups, includes custard, fruit salad, almond ice cream and cheesecake. Each day Casa Perico serves a special *plato de cuchara*, a hearty soup or stew, such as a bowl of chickpeas or lentils. And on the menu every Monday you’ll find *cocido*.

The wine list is surprisingly sophisticated and varied for such an “everyman’s” eatery, and the wine prices, including champagnes, quite affordable. Go for lunch rather than dinner. Closed Saturday night, all day Sunday and August.

Tel: (+34) 915 328 176

## Near the Plaza Santa Ana and Parliament

### Le Petit Bistrot\*

On Plaza de Matute at number 5. Here you find a completely authentic Parisian bistro with an all French wait staff that offers a terrific value *menú del día* from Tuesday - Saturday for only €14,50, including vat, with your choice of three starters, three main courses, two desserts or coffee plus beverage. On Saturday the price increases to €19,50. This is unbeatable value for high quality French bistro fare. This one is handy for Old Madrid hotels.

At night it serves such classic dishes as chateaubriand with Béarnaise sauce, a steak tartar, magret of duck, escargots, brie-filled croquettes, plus tarte tatin and chocolate fondant for dessert. The mostly French wine list is strong on labels from Bordeaux, the Loire and Beaujolais. But you must reserve because it's extremely popular among the locals.

There is another location in the Chamberí district at Ponzano. They've recently opened a third bistro in the Salamanca quarter at Principe de Vergara, 210, where Saturday and Sunday brunch is served. Brunch is no longer served at this location.

Tel: (+34) 914 296 265 ([www.lepetitbistrot.net](http://www.lepetitbistrot.net))

## In the Chamberí District

### Las Tortillas de Gabino\*

At Rafael Calvo, 20, both an "in" place to be and reasonably priced, with a warm, stylish dining room, in the Chamberí district, just a few blocks from Castellana Boulevard near Ruben Darío square, handy for the Intercontinental, Hesperia, Santo Mauro and Orfila hotels. The Redruello brothers, Nino and Santi, whose family has spent years in the restaurant business at La Ancha, not only offer the traditional *tortilla de patatas* but also omelets in many other guises plus delicious Iberian ham croquettes, veal meatballs and creative deserts such as fig ice cream, warm carrot cake with coconut ice cream. Tablecloth dining.

With its moderate price, style and simple but great dishes, it has become a huge hit. It made Food and Wine's To Go List and won a gastronomic prize from ABC. One can dine well here for €35-40. Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday.

Tel: (+34) 913 197 505 ([www.lastortillasdegabino.com](http://www.lastortillasdegabino.com))

### La Gabinoteca\*

Located at Fernández de la Hoz, 53, one block north of José Abascal, this is the new sister to Las Tortillas de Gabino; not exactly a restaurant, maybe a gastrobar? Or is it a bistronomic? It's been called "the Zara of Madrid gastronomy". And it's open from 8:30 for breakfast until midnight. Anthony Bourdain featured it on No Reservations in his recent Madrid culinary tour.

The rustic looking, two-story space, with a black, white, red color scheme and Nordic woods, has a downstairs bar and dining area for smokers. The upstairs loft is reserved for

non-smokers (*A total smoking ban begins 02/01/11*). Décor could best be described as quirky and eclectic. There are high top tables, some tables are recycled traffic signs; some are even placed on the steps leading upstairs; one table uses ski lift seats as chairs, another has two sofas. It's playful, whimsical and quite original-far removed from your customary dining experience.



Like Las Tortillas, it serves creative dishes, but here they all come tapas-size. The menu is divided into four sections-appetizers, fish, meat and dessert, and each diner should order a dish from each section, or four dishes to make a full meal. The waiter leaves a Pulsa y Voy button on your table, so when you've made your selection, press the button and he comes running. He doesn't leave a formal wine list, but instead a survey. You answer the multiple-choice questions, designed to lead you to a wine that best matches your personality. (This personality test didn't work for me-didn't lead me to my perfect wine, so I just ordered the best wine for the best price).

You'll be surprised and amused by the imaginative presentations; baby clams come in a tin can, the poached egg, potato and truffle dish arrives in a baby food jar, the hamburger in a McDonald's style Styrofoam box, the baby prawn fritters in a paper cone.

And you can even play with your food. Try your hand at creativity and play the game with the do-it-yourself dessert, the Juan Palomo. The waiter brings you the ingredients-brownie, ice cream, chocolate sauce, whipped cream, a slice of watermelon-you put them together to create your own work of art. Take a picture of your creation before digging in, and upload it to their web page to enter a contest to win a free lunch. See the winning designs on the website ([www.lagabinoteca.es/juanpalomo](http://www.lagabinoteca.es/juanpalomo)).

La Gabinoteca is open from 1:30 - 4:00 and 8:30 - 11:30 (it closes an hour later on Saturday night). Closed Saturday for lunch and Sundays. Reservations are taken for

lunch only; for dinner go early or be prepared to have a mojito while you wait or an original Gin Tonic (rather than removing the tonic tab before pouring, the bartender just perforates it). Count on a check of €30/person. Metro: Gregorio Marañón

Tel: (+34) 913 991 500 ([www.lagabinoteca.es](http://www.lagabinoteca.es))

## **Gala**

At Espronceda, 4 (metro: Río Rosas), founded in 1989, is small (only 10 or so well-spaced tables), modern and attractive restaurant in Chamberí has been serving up very reliable market driven cuisine for over 20 years. It is not to be confused with Champagnería or Arrocería Gala in Old Madrid.

The restaurant offers several affordable menus, such as their special Sunday lunch menu, consisting of a glass of cava, starter, main, dessert, house wine, water and coffee for €40, an autumn evening menu paired with wines for € 35 and a special 5-course wild mushroom season menu for €50 (accompanied by wine, water, coffee). They participated in the third edition of Madrid Restaurant Week, held in October, with a bargain menu for €25. Closed Sunday nights and August 10-20. Menú Gala: €40

Tel: (+34) 914 422 244 ([www.restaurantegala.com](http://www.restaurantegala.com))

## MY BEST BETS FOR VERY LOW BUDGET DINING

### In this increasingly expensive dining capital

A sound way of saving Euros when dining in Madrid, or anywhere in Spain for that matter, is to have one's main meal at lunch, taking advantage of the many mid-price restaurants' daily *menú del día*, which is only offered at lunchtime and usually not on weekends. Just look for the *menú del día* signed posted at the window or on the chalkboard placed outside. You'll usually find a choice of 2-3 starters, 3 main dishes and a couple of desserts, plus bread, water or wine and sometimes after lunch coffee included in the price, which can run from €10-20, depending on the quality of the restaurant.

Please don't expect gourmet fare for these prices. In exchange for a low tab, you'll be served the least expensive ingredients and cuts of meat available at the market, such as veal cheeks, *carrilleras*, the Madrid favorite, tripe, *callos*, or meatballs, *albóndigas*. Desserts will most likely be the old Madrid standards of flan, rice pudding or custard, *natillas*. And don't plan on dining leisurely. These menus are geared for office workers who want to get in and out fairly quickly during their lunch break.

In Old Madrid, here are a few of the tried and true for dining inexpensively at lunchtime (but you'll need to provide your own translations of the menu items into English). Most of the budget dining spots listed below **open on Sundays**. *Note that prices may have increased slightly since this updated list was composed.*

- **Dómine Cabra** (€13,60 for lunch; €19 at night)
- **Terra Mundi** (€10)
- **Toma Jamón** (€10 at four Old Madrid locations)
- **Downstairs Txoko of the Basque Cultural Center** (€10, closed Sunday)
- **Le Petit Bistro** (€14,50 Tuesday - Friday and €19,50 on Saturday)
- **La Sede** (€12,50)
- **Ginger, Bazaar, Finca de Susana, Gloria de Montera-same chain** (€10)
- **Cafeteria of the Thyssen Museum** (€13)
- **El Café in the Prado** (€16)
- **Olsen** (€15)
- **El Schotis** (€22)
- **Cubik** (€10.50 Mon.-Fri. and €13.50 Saturday and Sunday)
- **Momo** (€11)
- **Divina la Cocina** (€11,60)
- **El Armario** (€16)
- **Orixe** (€15) - *see under tapas bars*
- **La Camarilla** (€11,50) - *see under tapas bars*
- **La Musa de la Latina** (€11) - *see under tapas bars*
- **Anema e Core** (€15) - *see under Dining with Picky Teens*
- **Casa Patas** (€11) - *see under Flamenco*
- **Medina Mayrit** (€12,90) - *see under Spas*
- **Café Central** (€14) - *see under Jazz*

Below I offer my list of “easy on the wallet” spots, particularly essential to Americans suffering from euro shock. The €50 - €60 per person check is becoming more and more prevalent, even standard, in upscale Madrid restaurants, with a €2 per person supplement for the *amuse bouche* and bread. And one can no longer get in and out of the top tier gourmet temples and Michelin stars for under €100/person, with most checks at Madrid's top 10 averaging €120 per person or even more if one orders a prestigious label of wine or champagne.

With the poor dollar to euro exchange rate, I find myself seeking out more often the dining venues offering a high quality to price ratio, and I try always to take advantage of this set menu of the day, particularly at lunch. I save the top establishments for special occasions.

### **In Chueca, the Gay District**

*Madrid's Chueca, the gay neighborhood, is somewhat similar in feel to New York's Lower East side-a gritty East Village or SoHo or Tribeca with a hip and vibrant alternative life style, filled with funky shops where young hipsters buy their club wear and trendy but gently priced eateries, frequented by gays and the straight alike. Also frequented by women who want designer shoes at bargain prices (the outlets selling samples around Calle Augusto Figeroa). If you have a **tight budget** yet want to **eat stylishly**, this is THE area to frequent at meal times.*

### **Gift**

At Plaza Vázquez de Mella, 12, is the dining venue of the avant-garde Room Mate Oscar hotel. It's done in white and stainless steel, a minimalist-trendy décor typical of this hip neighborhood, and it serves as a bar, restaurant and club, the latter open until 3:00 am on Friday and Saturday. You can have canapés and *pulgas* (mini sandwiches) at the bar or sit for more substantial fare, such as a timbale of ratatouille (*pisto*). Their dessert of natillas with cookie foam and crushed hazelnuts is said to be excellent.

Tel: (+34) 917 011 069 ([www.room-mategift.com](http://www.room-mategift.com))

### **El Original**

Julio Reoyo, chef of **El Mesón de Doña Filo**, has opened this pretty bistro, done all in white, (sadly, the façade has been covered with graffiti) at Infantas, 44, just a couple of blocks behind the Gran Vía. It offers the diner a menu with popular prices using high quality prime ingredients. Open Monday – Friday with a bargain price menú del día for €10. Open 10:00 am – 2:00 am. Closed Sundays. Metro: Banco de España.

Tel: (+34) 915 229 069

### **Bazaar**

Is a large open space with big wrap around windows located on Calle Libertad and decorated by the BCN designer Lázaro Rosa-Violán. The theme here is high style at low prices and was once frequented by former Real Madrid's David Beckham. It offers Mediterranean cuisine and a daily menu for around €10. This is a sister to the even less

inexpensive (but far less memorable) **Gloria de Montera**, at Caballero de Gracia, 10, just off the Gran Via, and **La Finca de Susana**, near Sevilla metro at Arlabán, 4. Cheap and very good eats for the young and for older hipsters too.

Tel: (+34) 915 233 905 ([www.restaurantbazaar.com](http://www.restaurantbazaar.com))

See all of these budget-priced, trendy style, casual dining spots in both Madrid and Barcelona at: [www.lesquinzenits.com](http://www.lesquinzenits.com). On the English page click on "We recommend".

### **La Bardemcilla\***

Augusto Figueroa, 47, is a funky combination restaurant/tapas bar and hangout for the intellectual and acting set. Well priced fixed menu lunch. Owned by the Bardem acting family and run by Mónica Bardem, the sister of Oscar winning actor **Javier Bardem**. Drinks served till 2:00 am. Closes Saturday lunch and Sunday. *Menú del día* for lunch. Opens for dinner at 8:00.

She has recently opened a La Bardemcilla branch near the Plaza Santa Ana on Núñez de Arce, 3, two blocks north of the Hotel Me Meliá.

Tel: 915 214 256 ([www.labardemcilla.com](http://www.labardemcilla.com))

### **Divina la Cocina**

At Calle de Colmenares, 13, corner of San Marcos, run by a group of gay men. It's become quite popular for its very well priced, market driven three-course set menus for both lunch (€11,90) and dinner (€17,90).

Tel: (+34) 915 313 765 ([www.divinalacocina.com](http://www.divinalacocina.com))

### **El 26 de Libertad**

At Libertad, 26, offers an unbeatable fixed price market driven lunch menu plus tapas at the bar. Closed Sunday nights and Monday.

Tel: (+34) 915 222 522

### **El Armario**

At San Bartolome 7, a hip, attractive dining spot, that offers an international menu with reasonable prices in a stylish setting. It also offers a weekday lunch menu consisting of a starter (6 choices), main (7 choices), dessert (4 choices) or coffee plus bread and vat for only €16. An English menu is available.

Tel: (+34) 915 328 377 ([www.elarmariorestaurante.com](http://www.elarmariorestaurante.com))

### **Momo**

At Libertad, 8, serves another unbeatably priced menú del día for lunch (€11) and also one for dinner for €16.

Tel: (+34) 915 327 348

### Comer Bien

San Marcos, 31, in a stark white minimalist setting, it prepares classic dishes with a contemporary touch. One can choose any two dishes from the menu for a fixed price. Its slogan: “*Traditional food for modern folks*”.

Tel: (+34) 911 263 751 ([www.comerrestaurant.com](http://www.comerrestaurant.com))

### El Cisne Azul

Gravina, 19, this is the low priced haunt of Madrid's mushroom lovers. A tiny, completely unpretentious space that looks like a very simple lunch counter, it grills up some twenty varieties of wild mushrooms: *boletus*, *perretxikos*, *trompetillas* and *colmenillas*. Opens for lunch at noon and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday. Average check €35.

Tel: (+34) 915 213 799

### El Pepinillo del Barquillo

Located east of Plaza Chueca, at Barquillo, 42. Serves salads, seafood and veggies at low prices. Have tapas at the bar or sit.

Tel: (+34) 913 102 546

### Home Burger Bar

Located at San Marcos, 26, a branch of the very successful mother ship in the bohemian Malasaña district. Supposedly they serve the “healthiest and most delicious” burgers in Madrid, along with salads. Closed Sundays.

### In the Gran Vía - Sol axis

#### La Finca de Susana and La Gloria de Montera

Sister restaurants, La Finca de Susana, Arlabán, 4, and Gloria de Montera, Caballero de Gracia, 10, offer an amazingly priced €10 lunch *menú del día* consisting of two courses (four choices in each course), and dessert (choice of natillas, flan, fruta, helado), including VAT, but these sister establishments don't take reservations. Be there for lunch by 1:30 pm. Opens for dinner at 8:30 pm, so go early, as the line will be long by 9:00 and probably all tables taken. Lots of vegetarian, rice and fish dishes. They all produce decent quality food at **bargain** prices (but don't expect gourmet cuisine and do expect rushed service).

There's an outpost of this group on the Plaza del Angel, **Ginger**, next to the Hostal Persal. All three belong to the super successful, Barcelona-based, low cost eateries group, Les Quinz Nits.

[www.lafinca-restaurant.com](http://www.lafinca-restaurant.com) [www.lagloriademontera.com](http://www.lagloriademontera.com)

## **Cornucopia**

At Navas de Tolosa, 9, just southwest of the Gran Vía offers fusion cuisine with vegetarian dishes, **7 days a week**, from **noon to midnight**, which makes it handy for Americans used to early dining (*American Kim Manning is a co-owner*).

Four additional reasons to seek out this creative, contemporary dining spot are its unbeatable, three-course, €11,50 (including bread, drink, VAT) lunch menu served from 1:00 - 4:30 on Monday - Saturday, its evening three-course, €15 menu, served Monday - Thursday, its special menu served for lunch or dinner for €19.50 and its Sunday and holiday brunch for €19,50, served from 12:30-5:30 pm. Cornucopia also serves a special Thanksgiving meal for under € 50 per person and a gala New Year's Eve dinner for around €90. Metro – Callao

Tel: (+34) 915 213 896 ([www.restaurantecornucopia.com](http://www.restaurantecornucopia.com))

## **Cubik**

Can found at Aduana, 12, two blocks south of the Red de San Luis, off the Gran Vía, or just one block north of Calle Alcalá, behind the Casino. It offers a bargain priced fusion cuisine *menú del día*, Monday-Friday, for € 10,60 with a choice of five starters, five mains, five desserts, including bread and a drink. Same lunch menu costs € 13,50 on Saturday and Sunday and is priced at only € 15 from Monday-Thursday for dinner. It serves lunch beginning at 1:00 pm and dinner starting at 8:30 pm.

Tel: (+34) 915 230 481 ([www.restaurantecubik.com](http://www.restaurantecubik.com))

## **In Old Madrid near Plaza de Santa Ana, El Barrio de las Letras**

### **La Bardemcilla de Santa Ana**

An Núñez de Arce, 3, two blocks north of the Me Meliá, recently opened by Mónica Bardem, sister of actor Javier Bardem-the new Santa Ana branch of her successful Bardemcilla of Chueca.

Tel: (+34) 915 214 256 ([www.labardemcilla.com](http://www.labardemcilla.com))

### **Terra Mundi**

At Lope de Vega, 32, this is an airy and cute Galician restaurant decorated with pale wood and checkered tablecloths, offering home cooking that offers an excellent value *menú del día* for €10.

### **Maceiras**

At Huertas, 66, you'll find another Galician outpost, a kind of a very casual hole in the wall, offering large portions of hearty fare and Celtic music on the stereo. No credit cards. No strollers. No reservations. No Coca-Cola. (No kidding!) It's always jam packed with locals and well as tourists staying in neighborhood hotels; thus, the menu displayed in the window is translated into several languages.

## Dómine Cabra

Also on Huertas at 54, it serves an equally good value *menú* at lunch for €13,60 and for €19 at night in an attractive 19th century setting. Its menu is posted in English.



*Lunch in the Plaza Santa Ana*

## Ginger

On Plaza del Angel, next to the Hostal Persal and across from the ME Meliá hotel, this member of the Quinz Nits group presents the same concept as its siblings, Bazaar, La Finca de Susana and La Gloria de Montera - no reservations, market driven menu, low prices, stylish contemporary setting, but rushed service with a lunch menu for €10.

Tel: (+34) 913 691 059 ([www.restauranteginger.com](http://www.restauranteginger.com))

## Come Prima

At Echegaray, 27, is an authentic Italian (Sicilian) trattoria with a lunch set-menu for around €15, but at night count on €25 and up. It's a favorite of international nuevo-flamenco star Joaquín Cortés, decorator to royalty Pascua Ortega, and Madrid's mayor dines here as well. The original owner has left to open another fashion Italian place near the Plaza de Chueca at Hortaleza, 100, the Più di Prima, but is considerably more expensive, for fashionistas who shop at this area's trendy boutiques.

## Le Petit Bistrot

At Plaza Matute, 5 (see above) is an authentic Parisian bistro serving € 14,90 menu Tuesday - Saturday with choice of three starters, three main courses, dessert of coffee, plus beverage and VAT. At dinner the menu is priced at €19,50.

Tel: (+34) 914 296 265 ([www.lepetitbistrot.net](http://www.lepetitbistrot.net))

### **Prada a Tope**

At Príncipe 11, between the Plaza Santa Ana and Plaza de Canalejas, this is a casual spot (*actually a small chain - this is their only Madrid outpost*) with tapas bar and small dining room in the back with bare wooden benches where one can sample El Bierzo wines and sample the cuisine of this area of the province of León-lamb, roasted peppers, chorizo, turnovers in tapas or raciones portions meant to be shared.

### **Near Parliament (Las Cortes) and the Teatro de la Zarzuela**

#### **Txoko - Basque Cultural Center (Hogar Vasco-Euskal Etxea)**

While most travel guides recommend the formal upstairs dining room, **Errota-Zar**, of this cultural center located on Jovellanos, I sometimes come at lunchtime for the bargain set menu offered in the tiny, "hidden" basement bar/café. Find it down the steps, open the door to your right. You must be able to read Spanish, as the daily menu is written on the chalkboard next to the kitchen, and you'll have no choice of starter or main course - just whatever the ladies working the stoves in the tiny open kitchen decide to fix that day. But since the honest home cooking is Basque, you'll be guaranteed a hearty and tasty meal for the rock bottom price of €10, including a bottle of house wine for two. And starting at 2:00 the place will fill with local office workers on their lunch break.

A recent lunch consisted of a serve yourself, huge bowl of white bean soup, followed by an enormous breaded veal cutlet with side of roasted red peppers. For dessert you'll have a choice of the classics - flan or natillas or a piece of fruit. No English spoken. No printed menu, only a half dozen tables.

### **Near the Teatro Real - Opera House**

#### **Anema e Core**

At Donados, 2, corner of Calle Arenal, two blocks east of the Opera metro station-a stylish, even gourmet Neapolitan pizzeria run by two cousins from Naples, offering 22 varieties from a wood oven plus salads (try the buffalo mozzarella), pastas, risottos and homemade desserts such as panacotta, tiramisu and chocolate mousse. Closed Sunday night. Open for lunch from 2:00 – 4:00 and for dinner from 9:00 - midnight. Their *menú del día* goes for €15, including drink, dessert or coffee. [www.anemaecore.net](http://www.anemaecore.net)

#### **Chic Madrid**

On Calle Campomanes, next to the Hotel Meninas and adjacent to the Teatro Real. Cosmopolitan-creative-stylish. It serves two fixed priced menus for €11,90 and €14,90.

Tel: (+34) 915 418 307 ([www.chicmadrid.net](http://www.chicmadrid.net))

## In High-Rent Salamanca Shopping District

### Wagaboo

Can be found at Ayala, 14, between Serrano and Castellana Blvd. One of four “chic and cheap” outposts in Madrid, this branch, I believe, has the best fusion-Italian and Oriental fare and the best service. Colorful, playful décor, “fun eating” as they call it, and gentle prices for this tony neighborhood. The former owners of the Wok chain founded this one. Classic dishes: the egg with truffle, Mahi Mahi rice and vegetable wok. There's another branch on Martínez Campos, 26, handy to the Intercontinental Hotel, Sorolla Museum and an outpost in the Chueca cheap eatery district, at Gravina, 18.

Tel: (+34) 902 885 363 *Central Reservations* ([www.wagaboo.com](http://www.wagaboo.com))

### Lateral

One of several highly successful branches around the city, Lateral serves designer tapas and small plates to the local business crowd-always busy during the week, especially for lunch. This Salamanca location is found on Velázquez, 57, handy to the Wellington, Hospes, Petit Palace Embassy, Hermosilla, Adler and AC Recoletos hotels. No reservations. Open continuously from noon until midnight.

Tel: (+34) 914 350 604 ([www.cadenalateral.es](http://www.cadenalateral.es))

### Vino Tinto (formerly The Grill Room)

This restaurant, on posh Jorge Juan, 9, has recently changed hands and now belongs to a mini-chain (two in Madrid, one in Palma and one in Oporto) but still offers a reasonably inexpensive lunch option, a complete three-course menu for €19. The rotating menus offer a starter with options such as broken eggs, a Caesar salad or *salmorejo*, a thick Córdoba style gazpacho, a main such as hamburger and fries, a sea bass tartare or a pasta of the day, plus, a glass of wine/soft drink/beer/water, dessert or coffee. It also offers a Happy Hour from 5:00 – 9:00, for madrileños in need of an after work cocktail.

Tel: (+34) 911 403 417 ([www.vinotinto.es](http://www.vinotinto.es))

## Cheap And Fun - Near Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida, Goya's pantheon

### Casa Mingo

At Paseo de la Florida, 2, Casa Mingo a bustling, noisy (think German beer hall) and very rustic 1888 Asturian cider house, built into a stonewall, which is a legend among Madrileños. Serves only spit roasted whole chicken, chorizo sausage braised in red wine, Cabrales (blue) cheese, pre-packaged house salad and bottles of cider. Extremely popular on Sundays among the working class families who live in the area, those who want a quick, inexpensive Sunday al fresco dinner and cash poor university students.

To find a seat, the unwritten etiquette is to approach a table of patrons about ready to leave and ask if you can have their table when they've finished, then keep hovering until

they do. Don't expect a maitre d' to seat you. It's first come, first served, survival of the fittest. Fun. Good for those with kids, or those on a tight budget. Metro: Príncipe Pío.

### **Cheap with Picky Teens - Alternatives for healthy, quick Mediterranean cuisine teenagers will like**

**Pizzicheria\*** - see above, in Salamanca district

**Wagaboo** - see above, in Salamanca district and a branch in Chueca

**Anema e Core** - see above, between Puerta del Sol and Opera

### **Pinocchio**

Teens always seem to like the trattoria Pinocchio, which is a chain from Montecarlo. It serves good homemade pastas, pizzas, risottos and salads in a pleasant but un-fancy setting. And the price is very right-very gentle on the pocketbook. Look for the yellow and blue façade. It's where I take pasta-eating teens for their first meal. The various Pinocchio branches offer a tremendous value lunch *menú*, Monday to Friday. Lunch from € 8,10 to € 9,80, includes a starter, main course, bread plus water, or glass of beer/wine. Salads go for €5,60, pizzas for €6 - €7. There's a handy branch at Paseo Sánchez Bustillo, 5, across from the Reina Sofia Art Museum, another near the Plaza Colón at Zurbano, 6, plus one near the Holiday Inn in the northern business district. If your teens like them, you can find more branches at: [www.pinocchio.es](http://www.pinocchio.es)

### **Spanish Fast Food**

Spanish mainstream **fast food** type places, actually decent for low budget-minded families and teens on the run are the **Pans & Co.** which makes cheap sandwiches made with their baked-on-site baguettes, **Rodilla** with American type sandwiches (some gourmet, some vegetarian and some low cal) plus salads, **Ginos** for basic pizza & pasta and **VIPS**, which is a combo lunch counter, coffee shop (think Denny's), 7/11 type drug store which is open from 9:00 am to 3:00 am for breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks and take out food. The Vips, Ginos and also The Wok, a chain of inexpensive, casual Asian eateries are all under the Vips group umbrella. There's a large **VIPS** upstairs on the Gran Vía, a very convenient one at Plaza Cibeles right under the Westin Palace Hotel next to Starbucks, plus many other branches. Again, think Denny's - no better - but handy in a pinch ([www.grupovips.es](http://www.grupovips.es)).

**Cheap for Vegetarians** (more options on [www.happycow.net](http://www.happycow.net))

### **La Isla del Tesoro**

At Manuela Malasaña, 3, it's located in the funky, slightly gritty, Malasaña district. Critics call this the best vegetarian in the city, serving dishes from around the globe including couscous every Friday. It offers a very affordable *menú del día* for around €11. Open daily.

Tel: (+34) 915 931 440 ([www.isladeltesoro.net](http://www.isladeltesoro.net))

### **Vegaviana**

At Pelayo, 35, in the Chueca district, this is a budget option for vegetarians in a simple and smoke-free environment. It offers fusion veggie dishes, such as wild mushroom ravioli with Parmesan cheese, tomato and rosemary, along with pizzas and salads. The weekday *menú del día* costs €9,70. English menus. Closed Sunday and Monday. On Friday and Saturday it remains open until 2:00 am for hungry night owls.

### **Yerbabuena**

At Calle Bordadores, 3, (metro: Opera) in Old Madrid. The cuisine has Mexican, Japanese, French, Italian and Chinese touches, yet there are some vegetarian versions of traditional Spanish cookery too, including vegetarian paella and a La Mancha style vegetable and “sausage” stew. Try the mousseline and poppy seed crêpe, filled with a quinoa-spinach mix or weekdays, opt for the filling *menú del día*—it includes two dishes, bread, a drink and a dessert—for € 13. English menus are available. Reservations are recommended, especially on the weekend.

Tel: (+34) 915 480 811 ([www.yerbabuena.ws](http://www.yerbabuena.ws))

### **El Estragón**

Located at Plaza de la Paja, 10, on a very pretty square in La Latina, in Old Madrid. Ceramic tiled floors, blue and white checked tablecloths, menus in English, and no smoking section. Nice vegetarian paella, almond soup, crepes, couscous, moussaka, salads, large portions, English spoken, on two levels, cozy and relaxed. Offer a very good value *menú del día* at lunch. Open 7 days a week from 1:00 to 5:00 for lunch, 8:00 to 12:30 am for dinner. Stays open on Friday and Saturday till 1:30 am.

### **El Restaurante Vegetariano**

At Marqués de Santa Ana, 34, this is a small (eight tables), rustic and cozy spot with kind and attentive service and low prices. Specialties include eggplant and spinach lasagna, quiche and ratatouille with couscous. Closed Sunday night and Monday. Metro: Tribunal.

Tel: (+34) 915 320 927

### **La Biótika**

At Amor de Dios, 3, in La Latina, Old Madrid-Madrid's first **macrobiotic**. Dining room is found in the back of a store selling organic, vegetarian products. They have an extremely cheap *menú del día* available at lunch, which includes a soup course, a combo platter, homemade dessert and tea. They also serve beer and wine. Open from 1:30 - 4:30 for lunch, 8:00 - 11:30 for dinner, 7 days a week. No credit cards. Non-smoking.

## BRUNCH

### Iroco

At Velázquez, 18, in the fashionable Salamanca district, this stylish Manhattan style spot was opened 12 years ago by a New York chef, and continues to be a dependable bet for Sunday dining when most top restaurants are closed. There's even an inviting garden terrace in the back for summer dining al fresco. This restaurant with the dark orange awning and gray façade draws a celebrity/fashioners crowd in its Tribeca/Soho type setting. Quite chic, a place "to see and be seen" (and a favorite of Penélope Cruz) but won't break the bank. Great value lunch for €21. Stand out courses include the beef carpaccio, the recipe from Harry's Bar in Venice.

It's now run by the VIPS chain, but chef Pedro Molina still does a fine job with the Mediterranean fare with a Japanese touch in the sauces. The mojitos and caipirinhas are very popular. Open for dinner until as late as 12:30 am. Their **a la carte brunch** is served on Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 – 4:00. Average check: €35.

Tel: (+34) 914 317 381 ([www.grupovips.com](http://www.grupovips.com))

### Toma\*

At Conde Duque, 14, facing the Centro Cultural Conde Duque, in a newly gentrified and quite hip area, which NY Times Madrid based writer, Andrew Ferren has dubbed "Madrid's Marais." It's a small, informal, homey place with bright red walls, red chairs and bare tables with bar to the side-a kind of American diner look, with 50s tunes on the sound system.

The American chef, Mack Kern, hails from New York's Gramercy Tavern. He offers his Sunday brunch for €18, served from 1:00 - 4:00. It consists of choice of drink (Bloody Mary, Mimosa or O.J.), a pastry/bread basket, choice of six mains, such as Eggs Benedict, Huevos Rancheros, a shrimp omelet, French toast, tomato frittata, all delicious. Or visit during the week for his bargain priced 3-course set menu for only €15. Metro: Ventura Rodríguez.

Tel: (+34) 915 474 996.

### Nina Madrid

In funky and slightly gritty Malasaña at Manuela Malasaña, 10, next to the Teatro Maravillas, is the neighborhood's most fashionable eatery. It's very popular for serving one of the most complete brunch offerings in the city, available on Saturdays and Sundays from 12:30 - 5:30 pm. With a sort of NYC SoHo décor, with high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, exposed brick and granite walls, it attracts a young and hip clientele who enjoy the Mediterranean style cuisine. Metro: Bilbao.

### Bristol Bar

At trendy-chic Almirante, 20, two blocks west of the Paseo de Recoletos. This very British craft cocktail bar (THE Madrid Gin Tonic experts) also serves an English breakfast and brunch on Saturdays and bank holidays from 11:30 - 3:00. The English

breakfast goes for €11, while brunch is priced at €16 (short) and €21 (full). Full brunch consists of coffee/tea, juice, croissant/muffin/cereal, yoghurt/fruit, and the typical English breakfast of sausage, eggs, mushrooms, bacon, baked beans and tomato.

Tel: (+34) 915 224 568 ([www.bristolbar.es](http://www.bristolbar.es))

### **Ramses Life & Food** *(note-currently closed for renovation)*

On Plaza de la Independencia, next to the Hotel Hospes, is (or was) one of Madrid's most "in" of all the fashion restaurants, a creation of Philippe Starck, avant-garde, but with heavy touches of Baroque. Downstairs is the Cocktail Bar Petit where you can enjoy a Bloody Mary or more inventive creations or move upstairs where on Saturday, Sunday and holidays a lavish brunch is served from noon until 6:00 pm.

Go early, no reservations. For your €32, you start with a glass of champagne (Moët) or a cocktail, then are served a basket of breads and pastries and help yourself to a buffet consisting of salads, yogurt, juices, smoked salmon, potatoes, sandwiches, Serrano ham, fruits, and you order a hot dish such as Eggs Benedict or a bacon and mozzarella hamburger. It's quite the place to be on weekends, so again, go early, before 1:00 pm.

### **Elaborate Hotel Brunches**

**The Glass Bar** of the **Hotel Urban** plus **El Jardín**, the garden restaurant in the **Hotel Castellana Intercontinental**, the **Rotonda** of the **Hotel Westin Palace** and the **Restaurante Goya** with outdoor terrace at the **Hotel Ritz** serve a predictably elegant and equally pricey weekend brunch.

- The least expensive, the Urban's brunch, consists of a buffet of cold plates (salads, pasta, sushi, salmon) and a hot plate to choose from plus drink for €35 and is served on Sundays and holidays from 11:00 - 3:00.
- The InterContinental brunch, consisting of elaborate salads, meat or fish dishes and a dessert accompanied by live jazz, is served on both Saturday and Sunday from 1:30 - 4:30 at a cost of €50.
- At the Westin Palace you can enjoy an Opera Brunch on Sundays in the Restaurante Rotonda served from 1:30 - 3:30, a groaning board buffet of fifty sweet and savory dishes accompanied by Opera and operetta (zarzuela) highlights performed by a soprano and tenor. Price: €65.
- At the Ritz it's served on Sundays from 1:30 - 3:00 and also costs €65, but with its elegantly presented and exquisitely prepared delights, accompanied by live music, you can dine in grand style in the memorable and highly inviting garden terrace, and you don't have to eat again for several days. The Ritz also serves a spectacular New Year's Day brunch. (But you can experience the lovely garden for far less simply by having a pot of tea in the afternoon).

## **AFTERNOON TEAS**

### **Living in London**

At Santa Engracia, 4, near Plaza Alonso Martínez, above Plaza Colón, this cozy British tea shop and tea salon offers breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea in a preppy lime green and pink, British country house, chintz setting. A part of the proceeds here goes to a hospital and school in Tanzania. Closed Sundays.

### **Embassy\***

At Paseo de la Castellana, 12, this is Madrid's most exclusive gourmet take-out shop with wonderful pastries, and upstairs (with separate entrance) a tearoom, cocktail bar and restaurant, frequented by the dowagers of the fashionable Salamanca district, complete with chandeliers, white-jacketed waiters, a beautiful, elegant bar, marble floors and Old World ambiance. Also serves breakfast. And you can just order a coffee or coffee and brioche or croissant and spend the entire morning reading the paper. Their full afternoon tea, with sandwiches and pastries, costs €19,50. Open daily, 9:30 am - 11:30 pm.

### **La Rotonda**

Located in the Westin Palace Hotel on Plaza de las Cortes is across from Parliament. It's an elegant setting under a gorgeous stained glass dome with attentive service and harp, guitar and piano music.

### **El Jardín**

Can be found in the Hotel Ritz on Plaza Cibeles, across the square from the Palace, is a wonderful place during warm weather, to have just a spot of tea (€9) with tiny plate of cookies, or a complete afternoon tea (€22), which starts at 4:30, or just enjoy a cup of coffee or a drink. You can stay as long as you want, even curl up and read a book all afternoon. Lunch is also served until late. Despite the aristocratic elegance of the hotel, any form of dress is acceptable in the garden. You CAN even wear jeans. You'll be serenaded by classical guitar music in the afternoon, around 5:00 daily. It's relaxing and tranquil, particularly during the warm, summer months and makes a welcomed respite from touring. I go there often after my visits to the Prado just for a pot of tea, served with little plate of cookies. Orient-Express now operates the Ritz and has restored its magnificent public rooms to their original splendor.

## **ICE CREAM**

### **Giangrossi\***

This is the high concept, glamorous Argentinean artesian ice cream bar/café with branches in Madrid-Mallorca-Barcelona ([www.giangrossi.es](http://www.giangrossi.es)). There's one in the fashionable Salamanca district on Velázquez, 44, at corner of Hermosilla and another on the Cava Baja 40 in the La Latina quarter of Old Madrid.

### **Acquolina**

At Gravina 9, in the late-night, gay district of Chueca, this gelati emporium serves delicious and original flavors. Before a night of clubbing, try their Gin Tonic or Red Bull sorbet or the Bailey's or Amaretto ice cream. You'll find another branch on the Plaza Dos de Mayo in hip Malasaña. Open until 11 or 11:30 weekdays and until midnight on weekends.

### **Bajo Cero**

In an area most tourists don't often frequent, on the Glorieta de Quevedo, 6, (Quevedo metro stop) in Chamberí ([www.bajocero.es](http://www.bajocero.es)). Opened by one of the best ice cream makers in all of Europe, Angelo Corvitto, with vanguard interior design by Tomás Alía. And the desserts are even low in fat. Try the mascarpone with figs. Open mid-week until midnight and Friday and Saturday until 2:00 am.

## **BEST BETS FOR STYLISH ETHNIC DINING**

“Best” is a highly relative term, and while I can't say they're absolutely the best, you won't go wrong with any of the following-

### **Best bet for moderately expensive pan Asian**

- **Sudestada\*\*** Ponzano, 25, gets heaps of praise from the professional foodies for its Southeast Asian cuisine. Take a taxi. Menu €38.
- **Asiana Next Door**, Travesía de San Mateo, 4, in Chueca-the lower cost tavern-sibling of Asiana, the Jaime Renedo restaurant in the antiques shop of his mother, menu €35. Pisco sours at the bar (€10). ([www.asianadeco.com](http://www.asianadeco.com))

### **Best for luxurious Asian**

- **Nikkei 225**, Castellana Boulevard, 15, on the corner of Bárbara de Braganza-it's the new glamour spot (€70-80/person).

### **Vietnamese**

- **Café Saigon**, María de Molina 4, in Salamanca ([www.cafesaigon.es](http://www.cafesaigon.es))
- **Le Dragon**, Gil de Sativañez, 6.

### **Japanese**

- **99 Sushi Bar\*\***, Hermosilla, 4, in Salamanca ([www.99sushibar.com](http://www.99sushibar.com))

### **Thai**

- **Thaidy**, Jorge Juan, 5 ([www.restaurantethaidy.com](http://www.restaurantethaidy.com))

### **Moroccan**

- **Mosaiq** on Caracas 21 in the Chamberí district ([www.mosaiqrestaurante.com](http://www.mosaiqrestaurante.com))

### **Chinese**

- **Soy\*\*** by Pedro Espina, Viriato, 58 ([www.pedroespina.es](http://www.pedroespina.es))
- **Zen Central** at Puigcerdá 7 (a mews off Jorge Juan) in Salamanca.

### **Best fusion**

- **DiverXo\*\*\***, Pensamiento, 28, in Chamberí, has one Michelin star, toughest reservation to snag in town. Call exactly 30 days in advance-reservations taken by phone only. Tasting menus only at €55, €61 and €67. Featured on Anthony Bourdain's 'No Reservations' recent Madrid food tour ([www.diverxo.com](http://www.diverxo.com)).

## FOR THOSE WHO WILL ONLY DINE IN THE TRENDIEST, MOST HIP “IN” SPOTS *and for those wishing to see and be seen*

### **Ramses Life & Food** (*currently closed for renovation*)

On the Plaza de la Independencia (Puerta de Alcalá), next to the 5-star Hospes Madrid Hotel. The latest Madrid creation of designer Philippe Starck, is three spaces in one, on three levels - at the entrance, the busy cocktail bar (said to serve the very best cocktails in the city), then El Petit, the more informal and modestly priced restaurant, where one can dine sans reservation at any hour, from 8:00 am until 3:00 am, upstairs is El Bistro, with greater gastronomic pretensions, which has a bar with champagne menu and elegant table cloth dining, under the supervision of chef Miguel Angel Jiménez. The dance club is found downstairs, frequented by Madrid's “beautiful people”, and as is the case with all Philippe Starck creations, a trip to the fanciful bathrooms is a must. It's also open for breakfast and weekend brunch served from noon until 6:00 pm ([www.ramseslife.com](http://www.ramseslife.com)).

The original chef at Ramses has moved on and opened his own wine bistro spot in Retiro district, the **Taberna Catapa** at Menorca, 17.

### **Bar Tomate**

At Fernando el Santo, 26, in the Chamberí district near Castellana Boulevard. It's its first entry into the Madrid dining scene of Barcelona's every so hip and trendy Tragaluz group. It offers a fashionista crowd, fairly moderate prices and a simple menu. Like other members of Tragaluz, it's open from early in the morning until late at night, serving breakfast, snacks and light meals, between meals snacks, late supper and post-priandal drinks. Menu items include wild mushroom croquettes, carpaccio of vegetables, pizzas, and hamburgers. Critics bemoan the fairly pedestrian fare, write it off as a “see and be seen” kind of place. Average check €30 - €35.

Tel: (+34) 917 023 870 ([www.grupotragaluz.com](http://www.grupotragaluz.com))

### **Le Garage**

Located midway between the Puerta de Alcalá and the Plaza Cibeles, at Valenzuela, 7, a block or so from Ramses Life & Food. It serves as a fashion nightclub with a trendy industrial look (yes, it really used to be a garage) and fusion cuisine restaurant. In the bar you can try out the house cocktail, a blend of Curacao, sake and juice of lime. In the open kitchen you can watch the two Japanese chefs prepare sushi, sashimi and nigiri. Gastro critics say go for the ambiance rather than the food. Along with Ramses, this is yet another fashionista hangout in the Salamanca district for the “see and be seen” crowd.

Tel: (+34) 915 226 197 ([www.legaragemadrid.com](http://www.legaragemadrid.com))

### **El Negro de Anglona**

In the heart of La Latina district of Old Madrid at Segovia, 13, it's housed in the lower floors of an aristocratic palace, with interiors done in black. The restaurant serves a Mediterranean based menu with Asian touches. Local aristocrats, celebrities and

international stars, such as Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush have patronized this hot spot. It's open on Friday and Saturday until 2:00 am.

Tel: (+34) 913 663 753 ([www.negrodeanglona.com](http://www.negrodeanglona.com))

### **Loft 39**

An architectural “wow”, this enormous and opulent space (1,500 square meters) at Calle Velázquez, 39, designed by decorator-to-the-stars, Pascua Ortega, can't fail to impress, particularly at night. Although we haven't dined in the pricey restaurant, we have had pre and post dinner drinks on the sofas in the comfortable lounge/bar area with fireplace—more of a living room than cocktail bar and the feel of a private club. This is one of those glamour spots “to see and be seen” in the Salamanca quarter, the “canteen of the local preppies”, and you'll be guaranteed a good look at the area's “beautiful people” and quite a fashion show included in the cost of your designer drink. In the summer they open their beautiful roof terrace.

Thanks to *la crisis*, Loft 39 now even offers a set menu for mere mortals; three courses, a glass of wine and coffee for €25, served for lunch Monday - Friday and even for dinner Monday - Thursday (except for holidays). Open Sunday.

Recommended in the Louis Vuitton guide and Town & Country magazine. Chef Roberto Limas has recently changed the menu to offer more traditional fare. One can keep the tab down by sticking to the rice or pasta dishes.

Tel: (+34) 914 324 386 ([www.restauranteloft39.com](http://www.restauranteloft39.com))

### **O'Live**

Located on posh Jorge Juan right below Sula, glamorous bar serving a menu featuring foie, caviar, risottos, carpaccios. Expect about €60/person.

### **Le Cabrera—see craft cocktails section**

### **No Do**

Located in the northern business district at Velázquez, 150, NoDo is a beautiful, highly popular dining spot as well as a royalty, celebrity and foodie mecca (Prince Felipe and Letizia have dined here), with an open kitchen, serving a very creative fusion of Spanish and Japanese cuisine created by Alberto Chicote, who also supervises the menu at **Pandelujo**. Specialties are tempura and sushi and offers a degustation menu for €42, and a Nodo box of small plates for €15,50. It has a lovely terrace garden open in the summer. Featured in the Louis Vuitton guide. Metro: República Argentina.

Tel: (+34) 915 644 4044 ([www.restaurantenodo.es](http://www.restaurantenodo.es))

## Midnight Rose and The Penthouse



*Hotel ME, Plaza Santa Ana*

Both are located in the **Meliá ME Hotel** (the former Hotel Reina Victoria) on the Plaza de Santa Ana in the heart of Old Madrid. The bar-restaurant downstairs and the rooftop terrace bar are a creation of the US based After Midnight Company. The Midnight Rose restaurant serves up fusion dishes at moderate prices in a hip atmosphere with DJ chill out house music during the evening dinner hour. The adjacent bar serves tapas and drinks, including creative cocktails (the mojitos are quite popular as are the lavender Margaritas) until the wee hours of the morning. Via a separate entrance, the Penthouse has several cozy seating areas indoors and outdoors (stellar views), which must be reserved in advance. Tel: (+34) 917 016 020.

The Penthouse has become one of the most popular watering holes in Old Madrid, thanks to the vibe and even better views, so if you don't reserve a table, you'll find yourself standing at the inside bar, particularly on weekends. And it's handy to all of the hotels of the Barrio de las Letras quarter.

## Fortuny

At Fortuny, 24, the upstairs dining venue of the *tres chic* Fortuny cocktail bar, housed in a beautiful turn-of-the-century mansion in the embassy quarter, Chamberí. It's owned by the TV personality Javier Meriño and is a favorite of Gwyneth Paltrow. Interiors are by the decorator-to-the-stars, royalty and just super rich, Pascua Ortega. Offering Italian

cuisine with an emphasis on salads, carpaccio, pastas, risottos and delectable desserts. But one doesn't need spend a small fortune to dine here, as it now offers two tempting menus—a lunch menu served Monday through Friday for €15, aimed at the local business and embassy folks, and on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, a set dinner degustation menu for €39, including wine pairings.

It has a lovely outdoor terrace for pre-lunch drinks or for pre-or post dinner drinks, open in the evening from 9:00 - 11:30 and on weekends until 12:30 am, and a dance club open on weekends until 5:00 am. Closed Saturday midday and all day Sunday.

Tel: (+34) 913 192 651 ([www.palacetefortuny.com](http://www.palacetefortuny.com))

### **Real Café Bernabeu - Puerta 57 - Asador de la Esquina**

Three dining venues, all located in the Santiago de Bernabéu soccer stadium in the northern business district. The first is casual, kid friendly and popularly priced, the second ultra plush, expensive, gourmet, and the third and latest dining venue serves charcoal grilled meats and fish and traditional Madrid fare such as potatoes with broken eggs, *huevos estrellados*, potato omelets, *tortilla española*, grilled cod, *bacalao a la brasa*, cod fritters, *soldaditos de Pavía*, and the famous never-ending boiled meal in a pot, *cocido*. Dishes here designed to be shared. Or order the *menú madrileño* for €28 consisting of two courses, dessert and half carafe of Madrid wine. Entrance to the new **Asador de la Esquina** is at Gate 46.

### **Real Café**

Offers a reasonable menu and great views of the inside of the stadium, making it extremely popular with families. Noteworthy café dishes are the vegetable tempura in curry sauce, timbale of fried eggs and fried potatoes, rice with squid, cheesecake, caramel ice cream. It offers a bargain *menú del día* along with a *menú Cuchara Exprés* for €9.90, which may include starters such as a potato omelet, *salmorejo* (thick gazpacho, Córdoba style), Iberian ham or sushi and mains such as lentils, red bean stew or tripe. Or one can order the *menú Madridista*, which consists of dishes from the regular menu for €18. The entrance is located at door 30. Outside of game season, the café serves breakfast.

### **Puerta 57**

Considered one of the most exclusive dining spots in this upscale neighborhood, with a lively tapas bar filled to the brim at the lunch hour with the area's business movers and shakers sampling oysters or perfectly grilled red shrimp from Denia, and an elegant dining room overlooking the field serving highly refined, traditional Spanish fare and the finest in pristine seafood and the best quality red meats at elevated prices. Their *arroz marinero de bogavante*, rice with lobster, is considered one of the city's best. It belongs to the Tejedor group of Madrid upscale dining establishments. The entrance is found at door 57 on Calle Padre Damián. The Café and Puerta 57 are closed during the games.

## **FASHIONABLE SUMMER - AL FRESCO DINING**

*And great people watching*

### **In the Museum triangle**

- **El Mirador del Museo** - In the attic of the Thyssen Museum, open July - September.
- **El Café del Prado** - Terrace set up on the Jerónimos side, only open in summer.

### **In the Salamanca quarter**

- **Harvest Company of Natural Goods** - Castellana, 40, casual café serving burgers, salads, with great outdoor terrace, above the Serrano branch of El Corte Inglés and Juan Bravo.
- **Iroco** - Velázquez, 18, has an indoor garden.
- **Loft 39** - Velázquez, 39
- **Zen Central** - Puigcerdá, 6, a tiny mews off ultra chic Jorge Juan.
- **Mesón 5 Jotas** - Also on Puigcerdá at the corner of Jorge Juan.
- **Alcalde** – On Jorge Juan, across the street from Mesón 5 Jotas.

### **In Chamberí**

- **El Jardín** - Intercontinental Hotel on Castellana Blvd.
- **Fortuny** - In a beautiful late 19th century palace.
- **Santo Mauro** – The garden terrace of the Hotel Santo Mauro.

## MY FAVORITE WINE BISTROS -TAPAS BARS - BEER HALLS

*Very lively & jam-packed on weekends, especially on Sunday, from 1:00 - 5:00*

### In Old Madrid

**Around the Cava Baja - Cava Alta - Plaza de San Miguel - Plaza Humilladero**

### Between the Puerta del Sol and Plaza Opera

#### Tabernerros\*

At Calle Santiago, 4, right off the Calle Mayor heading to the Royal Palace. This is my very favorite gourmet wine bistro in all of Madrid. It's a perfect, cozy spot on a chilly winter night for an evening of gourmet tapas tasting (either with pintxos or raciones-tapas size portions or large plates) and a great bottle of wine. The delicious cuisine is fusion (Japanese chef. Kenji Morita) and extremely well executed and presented. This is a heaven for wine lovers and gastronomes. The check can run up to €80 for two but with dishes of high quality plus an impressive and unusual wine list.

The house doesn't take reservations on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, so on weekend evenings, be there between 8:30-9:00 pm. You can also just have a glass of wine at the small front bar, but most folks come here to dine. We prefer to sit at one of the twelve tables in the wine cellar area, which holds only 48 diners. It has been recently recommended in Town & Country, and the owner of Planeta Vino proclaims it her favorite wine bistro as well. It closes on Monday, Tuesday lunch and August 16 - September 7.

Tel: (+34) 915 422 160 ([www.restaurantetabernerros.es/](http://www.restaurantetabernerros.es/))

#### La Cruzada

Calle Amnistía, 8, is one of the oldest taverns in Madrid. This atmospheric spot has morphed into a very special wine bar, where dedicated oenophiles have the opportunity to taste some of the Spanish greats by the glass from among 700 different labels, from a glass of Mauro (€6) to Alión (€9) to Flor de Pingus (€28) to the vaulted Vega Sicilio Unico Reserva (€40). Nearest metro: Opera.

Tel: (+34) 915 480 131 ([la-cruzada](http://la-cruzada))

### Located directly on the tapas bar lined Cava Baja of La Latina

#### Taberna Tempranillo

At Cava Baja, 38, across from Casa Lucio, is a hip spot with exposed brick walls and is usually jam packed by 9:30 pm. Open until 1:00 am, but usually thins out around 11:00. Attracts a 30ish clientele. El Tempranillo offers canapés on tasty peasant bread, called *tostas*, fabulous artisan cheeses, pates, salads and omelets. Most locals go with a big group and share.

There are half dozen tables for sit-down tapas sampling. Try the *tosta de trigueros* (fried egg with baby asparagus) or the *tosta de jamón de pato con berenjena* (duck ham, fried

eggplant and olive oil). They offer more than 200 wines by the bottle, with 15 to choose from by the glass ranging in price from €1.90 - €3.25. Fine, cured ham platters. You're bound to like it here; as it is one of Old Madrid's most popular wine bars. Open daily. Opens for evening tapas at 8:00. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 641 532 ([taberna-el-tempranillo](http://taberna-el-tempranillo))

### Taberna Los huevos de Lucio

At Cava Baja, 30, across from Casa Lucio, this rustic style bar-tavern is also owned by the Blázquez family and operated by the son & daughter as a tapas bar with informal restaurant in the back. It's always packed on weekends. You might see some famous faces here as well, since it's very "in" and takes the overflow from the mother ship. If you can't snag a table at Casa Lucio, this is your next best bet for Lucio style cuisine since the Taberna serves some of the same specialties as the original restaurant, including the famous, caloric *huevos estrellados*, although the menu here is much shorter. Opens for evening tapas at 8:30. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 662 984 ([www.casalucio.es](http://www.casalucio.es))

### Casa Lucas\*\*

Next door to Taberna Los Huevos de Lucio, with the blond wood façade, Casa Lucas has become, overtime, our **favorite** on this bar-filled thoroughfare because of the warmth of the welcome, the high quality and creativity of the blackboard menu of hot tapas and larger dishes. This is bite sized gourmet fare. One of my favorites is the superb creamy rice with wild mushrooms, *arroz cremoso con boletus*). The fair prices (tapas go for €5, the gourmet plates for around €20) and the well-selected wines by the glass list (around €3) add to the attraction.



If you arrive early enough, around 20:30, and you may be able to snag one of the four small tables beyond the bar for a sit down gastronomic tapas dinner. This is a great spot for an informal Sunday night dinner. Recently featured in Town & Country Travel magazine. Closed Wednesday lunch. Opens for evening tapas at 8:00. If you have only have the time or patience to visit one bar

on the Cava Baja, I urge you to choose this one. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 650 804 ([www.casalucas.es](http://www.casalucas.es))

### Taberna Txakoli (formerly Taberna Algorta)

At Cava Baja, 26, this *taverna* is a typical rustic Basque *pintxos* bar serving txakolí, the refreshing Basque, slightly effervescent white wine and two special *pintxos* (tapas are referred to as *pintxos* in the Basque country). Their special pintxo is the Bomba, a giant croquette filled with mashed potatoes. Another specialty-a large scallop shell filled with

a *gratiné* of hake and monkfish. Another favorite is their veal tenderloin, *solomillo*, with mushroom sauce.

It draws a younger crowd because the prices here run a bit lower than at the other bars on this busy street. The owners have opened another location at the southern end of the Cava Baja, same side of the street, which serves a wider variety of pintxos, both hot and cold. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 664 877

### La Camarilla

At Cava Baja, 21- another wine/tapas bar (again, more like a gastro pub or wine bistro) on this bar-packed street for a casual sit-down meal in a smoke-free environment. They serve several tempting menus: a €19.50 tapas menu for four or more that's hard to beat, a four plate, €37 degustation menu and an bargain priced €11.50 *menú del día* for lunch mid-week, along with a recession friendly offering of a glass of wine and two tapas for only €6. La Camarilla has aggressively kept prices down, even lowered them during *la crisis*, and because I haven't dined here recently, I can't comment on how this might have affected the cuisine or service. Open daily. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 540 207 ([lacamarillarestaurante.com](http://lacamarillarestaurante.com))

### Orixe

At Cava Baja, 17, on the left going down, beyond El Schotis. This is a sleek, Galician tapas bar, small plates restaurant that I try to hit on every visit because I'm a big fan of Galician bar food. I enjoy coming here just before 9:00 to snag a table for two in the dining room or just feast on *raciones* (platters that can be shared) or tapas of typical Galician specialties such as *pulpo a feira* (octopus), *empanadas de vieiras* (scallop turnovers), tenderloin *tostas*, chorizo braised in Albariño wine, *tortilla de Cacheiras* (a runny Galician style egg and potato omelet), *filloas* (crepes) for dessert. They serve my favorite Rías Baixas white wines by the glass. The tapas menu consists of 16 choices in ½ or full portions.

The dining room seats only fifty diners in a post-industrialist chic setting of granite/brick/steel and offers the same tapas (for 20% more) and other creative small plates including fish and meat. Orixe also offers an unbeatable, €15 lunch from Monday to Friday with choice of four starters, four mains, and four desserts, includes bread, wine/water, dessert or coffee. Opens for lunch at noon and for dinner at 8:00. **Closed** Sunday night, all day Monday and the 2nd half of July. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 540 411 ([www.orixerestaurante.com](http://www.orixerestaurante.com))

### On Cava Alta Parallel to and above Cava Baja

#### Matritum\*

At Cava Alta, 17, the street running above and parallel to Cava Baja. A very cozy spot, especially on a cold winter night, for casual but refined, serious "sit down" small plates

meals, taken on the main floor or in the cellar. Offers a fabulous wine list and currently the top wine bistro in La Latina. They've now incorporated desserts created by Oriol Balaguer. Matritum don't take reservations, so arrive early in the evening, before 9:00 pm, or come late. It opens for dinner at 8:30. If you leave the host or hostess your mobile number, they'll call you when a table is available.

The owners also own **Taberneros** listed above. Not for singles, as the concept here is not to stand at the miniscule bar to sip a wine by the glass, but to sit at one of the tables for a menu of small plates paired with wine. Romantic for couples, also great for groups of friends. You may see a celebrated chef or two dining here on a Sunday night, the Madrid chefs' night off. Matritum is only open for lunch on Saturdays and Sundays, from 1:00 - 4:30 pm. Nearest metro: La Latina.



Tel: (+34) 913 658 237 ([www.matritum.es](http://www.matritum.es))

### **Cava Blanca**

It sits at the corner where Cava Alta makes the turn at No. 7. This is a stylish, designer-done, trendy but very inviting small-plate restaurant rather than tapas bar, done in all white. At night votive candles illuminate the dining room, creating a romantic mood. The young chef, Alejandro Torre, has trained at Restaurante Jockey. I enjoy the black and white croquettes, the risotto, the sea urchins (*erizos*) gratiné in champagne and the chocolate in two textures. Moderately priced for the high quality. Opens for dinner at 9:00 pm. Closed Sunday night, all day Monday and Tuesday lunch. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 650 503

### **Inexpensive in Old Madrid**

**On Cava Alta** - *Also for sit-down tapas*

### **La Botillería de Maxi**

At Cava Alta, 4, this is a casual and very inexpensive sit-down tapas place, offering good wines by the glass, a variety of small plates or *cazuelas* (small clay dishes), jazz on the stereo. One can dine here for less, around €15. This represents a very good value for those on a tight budget, and a quiet sanctuary in this hyper crowded area for a tranquil Sunday lunch to avoid the huge "after the Rastro" crowds on the Cava Baja. And it's open for Sunday lunch until 6:00 pm. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 651 249 ([www.labotilleriademaxi.com](http://www.labotilleriademaxi.com))

**On El Almendro and Nuncio** - *Parallel streets below Cava Baja*

**Taberna El Almendro**

Is located at Almendro, 13, and is geared to the 20s and 30s crowd. House specialty is a tapa featuring fried eggs with Serrano ham and potatoes, the *huevos rotos*. You pick up your tapas at the counter and order your drinks at the adjacent bar. The waiters ring a little bell to announce to you that your tapas are ready. Opens for evening tapas at 8:00. Open till midnight. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 654 252

**Corazón Loco**

Calle Almendro, 22, is owned by a famous Spanish cinematic family, the Bardems, as in Oscar winner Javier Bardem of "Eat, Pray, Love". Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 665 783 ([www.corazonloco.com](http://www.corazonloco.com))

**On the adjacent squares at the southern end of Cava Baja**

**Juana la Loca**

Located at Plaza Puerta de Moros, 4, it's decorated with electric blue walls and stainless steel, another *new-wave* tapas bar serving Basque style pintxos around the Plaza Humilladero. Draws a 20s to 30s crowd and is packed after the Sunday morning El Rastro flea market. Closed Mondays. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 640 525

**El Viajero**

At Plaza de la Cebada, 11, a three-story affair, wildly popular on the weekends, is also for the 20 - 30 something crowd. Has a nice, upstairs rooftop dining in the summer (hidden away up a flight of narrow stairs), and filled with lush plants. Has great views and is always jammed with young yuppies. Also has an outdoor terrace on the plaza. The main bar has plush sofas and good music. Specializes in barbecued meats, along with pizzas and salads. Go for the mid-week excellent value lunch, or after the Sunday Rastro ends, around 2:00 pm.

Tel: (+34) 913 669 064

**Just south of the Plaza de la Cebada on Costanilla de San Andrés**

**La Musa Latina\***

This second Musa (with its "sister" in the Malasaña district) can be found at Costanilla de San Andrés, 12, next to the atmospheric Plaza de la Paja. This one has a vintage Paris look. On two levels, the upstairs houses the bar and tables for sit-down dining, and the basement cave-like, called the Junk Club, has a kind of "speak easy" feel, a separate menu and functions as a hidden restaurant within a restaurant. The kitchen serves quite imaginative cuisine that changes weekly.

Here's where we come for interesting, unusual wine offerings, their tasty wok specialties and better still, plentiful table seating and more moderate prices than can be found on the touristy Cava Baja and. Opens for evening tapas at 8:30. It serves a daily lunch menu for €11. Open daily. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 540 255 ([www.lamusalatina.com](http://www.lamusalatina.com))

## **Just beyond the Cava Baja on the Calle Humilladero One Basque/One Galician**

### **Txirimiri**

At Humilladero, 6, (right side coming from Cava Baja), this is the second outpost of the Basque pintxos bar whose original bar you'll find on General Díaz Porlier in the Salamanca quarter. This one attracts a lively young clientele, 30-somethings, who jam into the tiny space from 9:00 pm on to sample its excellent San Sebastián style pintxos along with a good offering of wines by the glass. But beware, you'll usually find it packed to the rafters, and you'll need to arrive early at 8:30 pm to snag a table in the tiny back dining room. And also beware of the heavy cigarette smoke-that is, until Jan. 2, 2011, when the stringent non-smoking law goes into effect nationwide, and all Madrid bars will become smoke free!

Tel: (+34) 913 641 196 ([www.txirimiri.es](http://www.txirimiri.es))

### **Xentes**

At Humilladero, 13, another casual Galician bar serving seafood, such as octopus with paprika, pulpo a la gallega and lobster paella, arroz con bogavante. Home made desserts. Wash all this hearty Galician seafood down with an Albariño white wine. Closed Monday. Nearest metro: La Latina.

Tel: (+34) 913 664 266

## **Tapas and drinks in the Barrio de las Letras Near Hotel Palace and Parliament - Handy to the Calle del Prado hotels**

### **Estado Puro Gastro Bar**

On Plaza Cánovas del Castillo 4 in the NH Paseo del Prado Hotel. Along with El Plató on the Castellana, Le Cabrera in Chamberí, Bar Aris in the Hotel Aristos, Arzábal in Retiro and the new La Cesta de Recoletos in Salamanca, here you have another of the city's high concept, designer done "gastro bars", or a tapas bar serving haute cuisine tapas and mini plates for more moderate prices, created by some of the city's top chefs. The idea is to democratize haute cuisine.

This gastro bar, Madrid's first, is a creation of Paco Roncero, the double Michelin starred chef of La Terraza del Casino. Its resident chef Alfonso Castellano creates each tapa fresh in the kitchen rather than have a groaning board of tapas from which to choose at a long bar.

Offerings include updated classics such as cod fritters, croquettes, *patatas bravas*, mini hamburgers, *bocadillos de chorizo* and fried eggs with squid. Along with cold and hot tapas, Estado Puro tempts with salads, canapés, rice dishes and sandwiches. Desserts are priced at €5.50. The reports have been mixed about this high concept tapas venture, the negatives having mostly to do with indifferent service. But the outdoor terrace is always packed, as it sits on the route from hotels to the Prado. Open continuously, from 11:00 am – 1:00 am, but closed Sunday nights and Monday. Average check: €25 - €30. There is a 15% surcharge for terrace dining.

Tel: (+34) 913 302 400 ([www.tapasenestadopuro.com](http://www.tapasenestadopuro.com))

*A second Estado Puro is to be launched by the end of the year in the new NH Palacio de Tepa Hotel on the Plaza Jacinto Benavente, across from the Hotel Me Reina Victoria, also in the Barrio de las Letras.*

### **Vinoteca Barbechera**

Located on southeast corner of Santa Ana and Calle Príncipe, is a chain offering a long wine list and tapas. Nearest metro: Sol.

Tel: (+34) 914 200 478 ([www.vinoteca-barbechera.com](http://www.vinoteca-barbechera.com))

### **La Platería\***

Below the Plaza Santa Ana, at the end of Calle Moratín, at number 49, where it meets Calle Huertas almost to the Paseo del Prado across from the police station. Cozy and lively exposed brick and wood wine bar/café offering tapas, *platos del día*, salads wines by the glass at moderate prices, good value cocktails and digestifs at night (whiskeys, patxarán, brandies, orujos) and is even open for breakfast. I usually skip the pricey hotel breakfast, walk right past Starbucks and grab a delicious *tostada* and coffee here, or even an egg dish before my assault on the big three museums. Has an outdoor terrace and menus in English.



This is my favorite very gently priced spot in the barrio for continental breakfast, snacks, drinks and desserts (such as their hazelnut chocolate tarte). Open until 1:30 am mid-week and 02:00 weekends. Well worth the walk. Nearest metros: Antón Martín & Atocha.

Tel: (+34) 914 291 722

### La Tapería del Prado

On the same Platería square, next to the Radisson Blu Prado hotel, at Paseo Prado, 22, same concept, similar outdoor terrace, menu and prices but more coffee shop type seating inside. This is also handy for a quick and cheap continental breakfast before an assault on the Prado. Opens daily from 8:00 am until 11:30 pm.

Tel: (+34) 914 294 094 ([www.lataperia.es](http://www.lataperia.es))

### La Taberna de la Daniela (Medinaceli)

Plaza de Jesús, 7, next to Cervecería Cervantes, is the two-year old 'Old Madrid' branch, of one of my favorite tapas bars of the Salamanca district, with the same menu and a dining room where one of the best *cocidos* in the city is served every day for lunch (complete cocido - €21,75). If you come for tapas such as their filling *ensaladilla rusa* or their long list of generously sized canapés, you'll need to sit at the bar or be lucky enough to snag one of only two high top tables located in the bar area. If seated in the dining room, it will be assumed you've come for their legendary *cocido*. Not partaking of this dish at La Daniela is considered a sin by the dining room wait staff and they'll work hard to twist your arm. When in New Haven, would you do to Louis' Lunch and not have their burger? La Daniel has opened yet another branch in Old Madrid, just below the Plaza Mayor on Cuchilleros with an identical menu and more table seating.

Tel: (+34) 913 896 238

### Cervecería Cervantes

On Duque de Medinaceli, behind the Westin Palace Hotel, in the block after the Madrid



Community Tourist Office and across from the church of Jesús de Medinaceli. It and **La Dolores** serve the best beer-on-tap in town, Mahou. There is also vermouth on tap and a dozen *tostadas*, including smoked salmon / anchovy canapés. Always crowded, usually with an older crowd, especially on Sunday mornings after mass-before lunch. Their *tostada de solomillo* (veal

tenderloin on toast) and Huelva shrimp are the most frequently ordered dishes. If you go at mealtime, the marble top tables are reserved for tapas dining, and you must wait to be seated by the wait staff. You can order just a *tostada* or salad or make a small plates meal. Recently featured in Travel & Leisure Magazine. This as authentic as they come in this tourist-filled area, with a genuine, old-fashioned Madrid atmosphere, much loved by the older folks of the neighborhood. Nearest metros: Antón Martín & Atocha.

Tel: (914 296 093

### Taberna Maceiras

There are two branches, *Maceiras Huetas*, at Huertas, 66, and the other, *Maceiras*, at C/Jesús, 7. This is a bona fide, hole-in-the-wall Galician tapas bar-restaurant with bare wood tables and benches, hand-written menus and Celtic music on the sound system. Have the *pulpo* (octopus), *pimientos de Padrón* (little green peppers, sautéed) or *empanadas* (tuna turnovers) and a glass of Albariño (white) served in the traditional little white cups. **Cheap!** But they don't take credit cards, don't allow strollers and don't serve Coca-Cola. Seriously! Nearest metro: Antón Martín.

Tel: (+34) 914 291 584

### Bodeguilla Los Rotos

At pedestrianized Calle Huertas, 74, this bargain spot is a Madrid replica of the popular Bodeguilla Los Rotos of the Rioja capital of Logroño. A *roto* here is a delicious mixture of broken eggs fried up in a skillet along with other ingredients (chistorra, ratatouille, mushrooms, gulas, veal) that the diner chooses from among the varied list and served in hollowed out bread. The rotos cost only €2,50 and fill you up quickly. The tavern opens for breakfast at 8:00 am with a coffee, juice and toast breakfast for under €4. Breakfast here with your budget minded traveling companion and get in and out for a 10-Euro note. Nearest metro: Antón Martín.

Tel: (+34) 914 293 352

### Taberna La Dolores

At Plaza de Jesús, 4, one block south of Cervecería Cervantes. Always packed, atmospheric Old Madrid bar with beautiful mosaic tiles, originally owned in the 1900's by the chauffeurs of the aristocrats, serving Roquefort and anchovy or smoked salmon/trout canapés (*tostas*) and Mahou draft beer plus the customary vermouth on tap. It doesn't close until 2:00 am. Nearest metro: Antón Martín.

Tel: (+34) 914 292 243

### Casa Alberto

At Huertas, 18, you'll find another classic *tasca* dating from 1827 housed on the ground floor of the house where Cervantes once lived and where he wrote the second half of *Don Quijote* in 1614. It's extremely popular with the locals on Sunday after mass for the *hora del vermut*, the ritual of ordering tapas and vermouth on tap at around 1:00 before heading home for Sunday lunch. Try their legendary *albóndigas* (meatballs) or croquettes. The recipe was recently published in *Saveur* magazine. Or enjoy a sit down meal of ox tail stew or other *castizo* specialties in the back room. Closed Sunday night, Monday and holidays. Nearest metro: Antón Martín.

Tel: (+34) 914 299 356 ([www.casaalberto.es](http://www.casaalberto.es))

### **Cervecería Alemana**

Located at Plaza Santa Ana, 6, the Alemana is an atmospheric, bustling, smoky, early 20th century (1904) style beer hall, of Hemingway fame, where Papa used to quaff German beer and eat grilled shrimp. The house classics, the *ensaladilla rusa* (potato/vegetable salad), *tortilla española* (potato omelet), *gambas* (shrimp) and *croquetas* are good bets, but tapas here are decidedly non-gourmet. Stick to the tried and true beer hall standards. A must for those who want to follow in Papa's footsteps, but honestly, I believe that tapas are better taken at other La Latina spots. It closes at 12:30 am. Closed Tuesday. Outdoors terrace on the square.

Tel:(+34) 914 297 033

### **Tapas Bars in the Salamanca district**

#### **Taberna de la Daniela**

At General Pardiñas, 21, between Herosilla and Ayala, the Daniela is my favorite tapas bar in this posh quarter for wonderful canapés (salmon, tuna, anchovy), unbeatable *ensaladilla rusa*, delicious Galician turnovers (*empanadas*) and refreshing salads, all served in a beautiful fin de siècle, Madrid tavern atmosphere with marble top tables, black & white tile floors, zinc bar, ceiling fans, pretty decorative blue tiles, all very charming.

A loyal local crowd keeps this atmospheric bar hopping and always full; people flock here for friendly service and great food at moderate prices. Most sit or stand at or around the bar, but there's a table area to the side which has waitress service (the one waitress on duty does get overwhelmed at peak hours, so one should either go early (8 pm) or just be prepared to wait. The back room-restaurant is also one of the best places in the city to try Madrid's signature dish, *cocido*, served only at lunch (bibs included!) and by prior reservation.

If you aren't a boiled meat lover, they also serve an oven-baked sea bream, *besugo al horno*. Featured in Travel & Leisure. Nearest metros: Goya & Principe de Bergara.

Tel: (+34) 915 752 329

#### **La Colonial de Goya\***

At Jorge Juan, 34, housed in what was once Madrid's first grocery shop, the interior décor is slightly reminiscent of a canned goods store. Young denizens of this quarter flock here at night to sample from the huge 60-variety canapé menu, all hot and made in the kitchen from scratch, along with a half dozen salads, potato omelet, croquettes and larger plates to share (*raciones*). And the desserts are home made.

We come around 9:00 pm (slightly before the rush) to grab a table for two in the all-white back room with its exposed white walls, white banquettes and simple white wood chairs, to enjoy the creative canapés and a glass of wine from the well-chosen list. A winner. Open until midnight and on Friday and Saturday until 1:00 am.

It has the same owners as **La Taberna del Rincón de Goya** at Lagasca, 46, at the Goya corner. By day, the Colonial serves fusion dishes and offers a three-course *menú del día* to the area office workers/shopkeepers for €20.

Tel: 915 756 306 ([www.restauranterincondegoya.es](http://www.restauranterincondegoya.es))

### **Txirimiri**

At General Díaz Porlier, 91, in the northern quarter of Salamanca (metro-Diego de León), this is the original Basque pintxos bar whose branch in touristy La Latina is even more popular. While not handy to many hotels, except for the Apartotel Madroño, you will find a quieter and far less tourist-soaked environment here in which to feast on pintxos San Sebastián style.

Tel: (+34) 914 014 345 ([www.txirimiri.es](http://www.txirimiri.es))

### **Marisquería El Cantábrico**

Padilla, 39, this is another locals-only haunt, a traditional, 60-year old Madrid *marisquería*, or seafood restaurant, that serves only the freshest of fish that arrives daily from Galicia. Come here to try a plate of grilled shrimp, a plate of prawns, clams, even goose barnacles (*percebes*) washed down with a draft beer. Very popular among the folks of the neighborhood who make it a daily stop before lunch. You'd be hard pressed to find a more traditional, un-fancy, unpretentious, genuine seafood bar in all of Madrid. Nearest metro: Diego de León

Tel: (+34) 914 024 087 ([www.marisqueriaelcantabrico.es](http://www.marisqueriaelcantabrico.es))

## WHERE MARIBEL DINES\*

### *Her own favorite spots, "hidden Gems", far away from the padding crowd*

Some readers of this guide have asked me to share my "secret dining spots", as they find the "usual suspects" of this guide in Old Madrid to have become too crowded, too tourist-packed, too filled with English accents. They've asked me where I choose to dine with family and friends, so I've decided to share my favorites, all of which can be found in the Retiro neighborhood. This section of town, just east of Retiro Park, is blessed with a number of stylish, fashionable yet still affordable gourmet jewels, where one can drop in for a casual tapas-based meal, accompanied by interesting wines from a well-chosen wines-by-the-glass chalkboard menu.

This area is (luckily) not handy to most hotels, so dedicated foreign foodies must make the trek up here from Old Madrid. From the hotels near the museum mile, count on a 25-30-minute walk (you can cut through Retiro Park for a more enjoyable stroll) or take the metro (a 25-minute ride) to the Ibiza stop (the purple line 9).

My favorite dining spots are concentrated on **Calles Narváez, Ibiza, Menorca** and **Doctor Castelo**, the final three running parallel to each other, and **Lope de Rueda**, which connects Ibiza to Menorca to Doctor Castelo. In this upper middle class neighborhood I do my ritual evening tapas crawls, as it provides me with great (and still affordable) regional dining options, from Basque to Asturian to Galician to Manchegan plus several fine wine bistros/gastro pubs; in fact, two of the best in the entire city are located here-Taberna Laredo and Arzábal. And unlike the tourist-filled bars of La Latina, Retiro area bars still serve their patrons a complimentary tapa or *aperitivo* with each drink.

So here's the rundown:

### **On Calle Narváez**

#### **Marisquería Casa Rafa**

At Narváez, 68, in addition to being considered one of Madrid's top tables for seafood, it is also a convivial spot to put on one's tapas crawl through this district, as one can try Rafa's justly famous *ensaladilla rusa* and a plate of crustaceans at the bar. Now well into its fiftieth year, this ultra classic place continues to pack diners in for its superb menu of impeccably fresh finfish and shellfish. Because it's one of the few fine tablecloth dining restaurants open on Sunday night, you might see a chef or two here on his/her night off.

Dining on crustaceans does not come cheap in Madrid, so expect the by-the-kilo prices for some items to be quite high. Rafa also serves meat dishes, such as their ribs in red wine, *costillas de buey al vino tinto*. The mark up for white wines, such as those from Ribeiro, is actually moderate. Open Sundays, closed Mondays. Nearest metro: Ibiza.

Tel: (+34) 915 731 087

*Yet another fine Galician marisquería, O'Grello, can be found in this neighborhood on Calle Menorca, at number 39, in case Rafa is fully booked.*

## On Calle Ibiza

### Ibiza 41 (currently closed)

At number 41, a soaring, diaphanous, contemporary space with cool, slick bar for enjoying after-work or after dinner craft cocktails (until 3:00 am) or a low priced lunch *menú del día* (€14 for three courses with bread and coffee) or a dinner based on French classics, such as steak tartare, chateaubriand, snails bourguignon, sole menuiere or Madrid staples such as broken eggs, croquetas or arroz caldoso. The dessert list features French bistro classics, crepes Suzette, tarte tatin and crème brûlée. Moderate prices. Closed Sundays. Nearest metro: Sáubz de Barabda.

Tel: (+34) 914 094 542 ([www.ibiza41.com](http://www.ibiza41.com))

## On Calle Menorca - from east to west

### Negur Etxea

At number 44, is an authentic Basque bar & *txoko* dining room, which serves a small chalkboard menu of well-priced, satisfying Vizcaya style pintxos along with a nice selection of wines by the glass. In winter, along with your drink order, you'll be given a free tapa and complimentary cup of homemade broth to warm you up. The owner, Manu, who cooked with Michelin-starred Martín Berasategui, will prepare a sit down dinner for you of spicy Basque sausage, *chistorra*, served with apple and onion, Iberian ham croquettes, perfectly fresh cod, hake or turbot, a hearty Basque stew such as *porrusalda* or *marmitako*, or a one kilo veal steak for two, *chuletón*. Closed Sundays for lunch. Nearest metro: Ibiza.

Tel: (+34) 915 745 668

### Taberna del Puerto

On same side of Menorca, at the corner of Fernán González, is an Andalusian tavern with a restaurant upstairs, and belonging to the Oter gastronomic group that owns 18 restaurants in the city. I come here for a tapa of pristinely fried fish, *pescaito frito*, such as *puntillitas* (baby squid) taken at one of the barrel tables at the bar, or in the attractively decorated upstairs dining room, a soupy rice dish, *caldereta de arroz*. In the evenings it opens at 8:00. Closed Sunday nights.

Tel: (+34) 915 044 507 ([www.tabernapuertofernán.com](http://www.tabernapuertofernán.com))

### Carlos Tartiere & Couzapín

At numbers 35 and 33, these are two very authentic and atmospheric Asturian cider houses belonging to the same family. In '10 the Rubio brothers opened the prettier, more sophisticated looking Couzapín space with even larger dining room along with its own traditional cider bar. Both have typical Asturian cider house décor and offer seating at wooden booths in the tavern areas or more formal, tablecloth dining in the restaurant section.

We come here for a casual dinner of small plates such as one of their excellent signature salads, chorizo braised in cider, wild mushrooms, *boletus*, from the Madrid sierra (magnificent in autumn), onion-breaded squid, *chipirones encebollados*, homemade turnovers, *empanadas*, or in winter, a hearty dish of *fabada*, the Asturian one pot stew. Their enormous plate of fresh shaved duck foie with duck ham is amazing! Portions are quite ample, but if you have magically saved room for dessert, order the rice pudding, Asturian crepes, *frixuelos*, or a platter of artisan Asturias cheeses. These brothers offer a decent wine list (including two Asturian wines), or you can try your hand at cider drinking Asturian style, with a bucket placed at your feet for you to discard your dulled cider that has lost its bounce.



Both cider house restaurants have become our staple for Sunday night dining or for dining during Holy Week, and are open continuously from noon to midnight and only closed on December 24, 25, 31 and January 1.

Tel: (+34) 915 745 761 ([www.sidreriacouzapin.com](http://www.sidreriacouzapin.com))

### Taberna La Catapa\*

Located at number 17, next to Peggy Sue's Diner, new and noteworthy, this small tapas bar/wine bistro combo on two levels should most definitely not be missed in your



exploration of Retiro area dining. The engaging and welcoming chef, Miguel Angel Jiménez, was formerly in charge of the kitchens of Ramses Life & Food, and he prepares delicious little creations from the best market fresh, prime ingredients. For a recent fall dinner here we enjoyed a fabulous plate of *níscolos*, wild mushrooms, the chef's signature potato and truffle croquettes, and little baby Lima beans with squid, *habitas con chipirones*. Other specialties include ox tail stew, *rabo de toro al vino tinto*, partridge salad, *ensalada de perdiz*, and Córdoba

thick gazpacho with tuna belly, *salmorejo con ventresca*.

While La Catapa does offer a short tapas menu at the bar, think of it more as a wine bistro, with dishes to be shared by two. The wine prices, especially priced by the bottle, are quite fair, and the list features the chef's newest discoveries. The small upstairs bar area has only four high tables, but there is a diminutive basement dining room with 10 tables for more comfortable sit down dining. On Mondays the chef serves marmitako. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 742 615.

## Barandales

We come here often at lunch to enjoy their very fair priced, daily rotating *menú del día* featuring updated classics from Zamora and León. Located at number 31, this unbeatable value, priced at €15,50, includes an *aperitivo*, maybe a chickpea purée, a starter (your choice of regular, read gargantuan, or low cal), a main course (ditto), a dessert, glass of wine or beer, bread basket and a mini decanter of *orujo* (similar to grappa) as a digestif. Because this set menu changes daily, we can come in several times a week to sample a full array of menu items. And Barandales has the largest selection of wines from the Bierzo and other Castilla y León appellations in the city. Area business folks like it because they can reserve online and because every day brings a different menu.

Barandales is a very contemporary design space with a small bar in the front along with a selection of gourmet products from Castilla y León for purchase (broad beans from La Bañeza, red peppers), and two dining rooms, one beyond the bar and one in the basement space. Closed Sunday nights and Mondays.

Tel: (+34) 915 572 152 ([www.barandales.es](http://www.barandales.es))

## Venta la Hidalguía

At C/Menorca, 15, is a tiny but cozy wine bistro that seats twenty and a specialty food and wine shop featuring the cuisine of Castilla-La Mancha, a gourmet shop/La Mancha tavern combo. We occasionally stop in for a glass of wine (served in Riedel stemware) and a plate of Manchego cheese, charcuterie, foie or a canapé (*tosta*). Closed Sunday nights.

Tel: (+34) 915 736 822

## Taberna Laredo\*

Among madrileño foodies and local gastronomic critics, Taberna Laredo, at C/Menorca, 14, is considered to be one of the city's finest *enotecas* or wine bistros with a wine list of more than 250 labels. You can drop in here just for a glass of wine (served in Riedel stemware) and a tapa, such as a fabulous plate of grilled shrimp or prawns, but if you hope to sit at one of the few high tables in the bar area or in the small dining room, you must reserve and a couple of days in advance. Outstanding dishes here include their Córdoba gazpacho, *salmorejo*, with Iberian ham, anchovies from Cantabria, *pisto*, a Spanish ratatouille, a wild mushroom risotto or scrambled eggs with sea urchin caviar and baby limas. It's been featured in Food & Wine. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 733 061 ([www.tabernalaredo.com](http://www.tabernalaredo.com))

## On Lope de Rueda

### La Montería

At Lope de Rueda, 35, with an Andalusian owner and a loyal local clientele, is always lively. Founded in 1963, this bar/tavern, with a nine-table restaurant upstairs, prides itself on its specialties, the *tigre*, a gratin mussel topped with béchamel, which one can enjoy as a tapa at the bar and its well-regarded game dishes (hence the Montería, “Hunting Party”, name) served in the tiny dining room. Come here for authentic Córdoba salmorejo, warm partridge salad, rice with partridge, venison ragout, venison loin with Port wine sauce.

A solid wine list includes wines from the Madrid D.O. Average check: €30/person. Opens for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 741 812 ([www.lamonteria.es](http://www.lamonteria.es))

## On Doctor Castelo

### La Castela

At number 22, this authentic “taberna ilustrada”, with its elegant zinc bar, marble, mirrors and stucco makes an ideal stopping place for a typical madrileño pre-lunch *aperitivo* of a tapa of tuna or anchovies or perhaps a plate of venison sausage accompanied by a beer or vermouth on tap. In the back you’ll find the tranquil and utterly traditional dining room serving a varied menu of ultra traditional dishes at honest prices. Featured in a Travel & Leisure article by Anya von Bremzen, “A Tapas Tour of Spain”.

Tel: (+34) 9173590 ([www.lacastela.com](http://www.lacastela.com))

### Arzábal\*\*\*

With two locations that almost connect-the original, rather cramped bar at Dr. Castelo, 2, and the new, more spacious addition, on the corner of Dr. Castelo and Menéndez y Pelayo, facing Retiro Park, is one of Madrid’s most talked about and universally lauded “gastro bars” or “neo-tascas”. My favorite stop on a Retiro tapas crawl, this casual but highly sophisticated wine bistro seems just seems to get everything right. Its owners, Alvaro Castellanos and Ivan Morales, have created a very friendly, relaxed, convivial spot and given it a stylish setting and ambiance, especially cozy and “buzzy” at night.

With a well-chosen chalkboard wine list (including champagnes), complimentary and delicious house *aperitivos* served with one’s drink at the bar, fine homemade olive breads accompanied by a little crock of salted butter to begin one’s meal, reasonable prices and great gourmet fare, what’s there not to like? And most all dishes on the menu can be ordered in half portions.

Favorites include the tuna salad with red peppers, carpaccio of wild mushrooms with truffle, *patatas a la importancia* with baby prawns, broken eggs with truffles, delicious Iberian ham and wild mushroom croquettes, even a duck hamburger. Because this is one of the “hottest” addresses in town, those who hope to snag a table here should reserve at

least 5 days in advance. It opens for lunch at 12:30 and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 915 572 691. ([www.arzabal.com](http://www.arzabal.com))

**My other favorite Madrid *gastro bars* include**

**La Gabinoteca** in the Chamberí district

**El Plató** on Castellana Boulevard

**Le Cabrera** near the Plaza de las Salesas

**La Cesta de Recoletos** in Salamanca