



40.4167° N, 3.7037° W

Made...in Madrid

Meet the craftspeople making the Spanish capital one of the most diverse shopping cities in Europe

Words by Nick Funnell
Profiles by Delle Chan
Photography by Joseph Fox



“Every handmade object has a bit of the soul of the artisan in it”

Maria Conde, luthier, Felipe Conde, Madrid

A bull’s head woven from esparto grass; a guitar, hand-made from 30-year-old cedar; a bold, bright beret stitched to perch perfectly on your crown: in Madrid, unique, handmade things hang behind quaint, unassuming shopfronts at every turn, just as they have for centuries. From the side streets of lively Malasaña to quiet, out-of-the-way suburbs like Aravaca, you don’t have to look hard to see that Madrid has done a much better job than almost any other city in Europe at preserving its traditional businesses. Despite civil war, dictatorships, the rise of e-commerce and the savage recession of 2008, around its historic centre, you’ll find a remarkable number of independent potters, weavers, leathersmiths and luthiers with more than a century of heritage. With fans from Eric Clapton to Leonard Cohen, José Ramirez has been making classic and flamenco guitars on Calle de la Paz since 1882. On Calle Imperial, close to Plaza de la Provincia, Sombrerería Medrano first started selling its hats, caps and berets in 1832, while, on the other side of town, Casa de Diego began flogging its fans in 1823. Looking to make an impression? Stop by Capas Seseña for one of the capes it’s been tailoring since 1901 for everyone from Pablo Picasso to Hillary Clinton.

But to wander further afield is to realise it’s not just old-timers: in the past decade or so, a fresh wave of artisans has given “Made in Madrid” a >



From left A work in progress at the Felipe Conde workshop close to Madrid’s Theatre Royal; fourth-generation luthier Maria Conde continues the family tradition; a guitar can take up to three months to make



The luthier Felipe Conde

The Conde family has been handcrafting guitars since 1915, but 30-year-old Maria Conde never dreamt of becoming a luthier. Instead, she wanted to pursue something quite different: clinical psychology.

It was only six years ago, in her final year of college, that her father offered her an apprenticeship at the family workshop. “Immediately, I knew that my place was there, and that everything I was looking for had been in front of me my entire life,” she says.

Today, Conde runs the business with her father and brother, carving classical and flamenco guitars from wood – cypress, rosewood, spruce and cedar – that has been dried for at least 30 years. Each guitar can take up to three months to make, but for her, the end result is well worth the effort. “Every object that has been handmade has extra value... it has a little bit of the soul of the artisan in it,” she reflects. “Isn’t that idea beautiful?” condehermanos.com



“Our work is all about embracing the beauty of wood”

new allure. Recent arrivals Siete Formas, a wood-work start-up that opened in 2004, South Korean native Baek Joohyun’s five-year-old pottery studio Laon and Javier S Medina’s downtown weavers have all brought modern marketing smarts to Madrid’s craft scene and been much less shy about showing their work to the world. The founder of Taller Puntera, a small open workshop in Plaza del Conde de Barajas, Luis Alonso is another young artisan injecting new dynamism into the sector and has seen a change in profile in the city’s craftscape. “I think the new generation of makers in Madrid have realised that, with the right product and clever marketing, even small-scale production can lead to big things,” he says. Abandoning a more conventional career path, basket weaver Javier S Medina is a case in point: thanks to some inspired Instagramming, the unusual, woven animal heads he produces in his downtown workshop have become sought after by Hollywood ▶



The woodturner Siete Formas

Siete Formas (“Seven Ways”) started four years ago as the passion project of Martín Ruiz de la Prada (pictured, right). A commercial pilot by day, he worked on the lathe in his free time, creating small objects for friends and family. While the brand – which Ruiz de la Prada now runs together with long-time friend Miguel Cerezales (left) – has since grown into a full-fledged business, everything continues to be entirely handmade using certified woods like linden and pine, and finished with natural oils and waxes.

“Siete Formas is all about embracing the intrinsic beauty of each wood,” says Ruiz de la Prada. “People are willing to pay a little more for an object that will last forever.” sieteformas.com



Clockwise from above Siete Formas founder Martín Ruiz de la Prada (right) with creative partner, woodturner Miguel Cerezales; wood and alabaster lamps; in their Aravaca workshop

Far right Weaver Javier S Medina holds his signature bull’s head; in his workshop in downtown Madrid



The weaver Javier S Medina

Not many independent artisans can count big names like Sarah Jessica Parker and Nate Berkus among their fans, but Javier Sanchez Medina can. The Extremadura native has been weaving his distinct brand of magic since 2014, using *esparto*, bamboo and bulrush grasses to weave magnificent mirror frames and animal heads in his workshop in downtown Madrid.

His striking creations – which he dubs “ecological trophies” – are usually made to order, taking days and sometimes weeks to complete, depending on their size and complexity. Despite their avant-garde aesthetic, they’re deeply rooted in the age-old craft of basket weaving. “When I was younger, I remember seeing my granddad weaving the seats of bulrush chairs and shutters with wicker,” says self-taught Medina. “That’s where my inspiration comes from – those childhood memories. I want to create a product that tells my story, who I am, where I come from.” javiermedina.com

The potter Laon Pottery

When South Korean native Baek Joohyun first visited Madrid in 2010 on a student exchange programme, she immediately fell in love with the city, vowing to return some day. She made good on that promise in 2014 when she relocated to the Spanish capital, with the goal of setting up her own pottery studio. Today, Baek runs Laon Pottery in the town of Campo Real, east of Madrid, where she taps her knowledge of traditional Korean celadon to sculpt vases, mugs and plates. With their neutral hues and timeless aesthetic, her ceramics have a raw, austere beauty – which perhaps says something about Baek’s own personality. As the 31-year-old muses, “In pottery, the works are always a reflection of the artisan. And each piece is unique, even though they may all look the same at first.” laonpottery.com



stars and royalty worldwide. Still, it’s not all down to social-media savvy: the 30-year-old co-founder of Siete Formas, Martín Ruiz de la Prada, says his modern carpentry got a serious lift in profile after a big order from LVMH-owned fashion brand Loewe. “That changed everything for us,” he says. Now, they serve an international client base and work with interior designers countrywide.

Business is brisk at most start-ups we spoke to. So why the renewed interest in small-scale crafts? With the high-street increasingly dominated by chain stores, and the convenient if soulless experience of shopping online, there’s a growing desire for longer-lasting pieces, each with the face and story of an individual artisan behind them. “People are now starting to care more for the products they buy,” says Ruiz de la Prada. Others believe it’s simply because craft and a strong sense of tradition run deep in the city’s blood. “This is our history,” says Medina from the edge of his worktop. “It tells us who we are and where we come from.” ■

Opposite South Korean native Baek Joohyun in her studio

Above Leathersmith Luis Alonso, founder of Taller Puntera, at his open-to-all workshop on Plaza del Conde de Barajas, Madrid

The leathersmith Taller Puntera

“I wanted to open a workshop where you can actually see how the products are made,” explains Luis Alonso, who started Taller Puntera in 2009. Set in a quiet square in downtown Madrid, the large, bright space is currently home to a community of nine artisans, who hand-craft a wide array of leather goods – from purses to belts – often while curious customers look on.

In this spirit, the artisans occasionally conduct introductory leatherworking courses for the public. This exchange of knowledge goes both ways; while customers come in looking to learn more about the craft, they also often end up inspiring the design process. “That’s a very good thing about having an open workshop,” says Alonso. “People are always bringing in ideas.” puntera.com

Discover Madrid’s colourful neighbourhoods at atlas.etihad.com/madrid

Etihad offers one daily direct flight from Abu Dhabi to Madrid. etihad.com