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NADIA WITH JOSE LUIS MENDOZA AND OSCAR MARTINEZ HEREDIA, HER JARANA GROUP. PHOTO BY ALEJANDRA CONTRERAS

Creative Couples: Nadia and Mario

By Judith Jenya

Mario Moya and Nadia Merkel are engaged in a musical life together.

They are young musicians who grew up in San Miguel. They are a tribute to the caring creative and educational community here that supports young people in their quest to become artists and performers. They

first met in an acting class at the Biblioteca Publica when they were early teenagers and reunited 6 years ago when Mario began teaching Nadia composition. They moved rapidly into a relationship, marriage and being parents to Shira, whose name means song in Hebrew. All the time, each continues working on their own musical forms, performing and being supportive of the other.

Mario, 34, was born in San Miguel. He began in acting, storytelling and sewing

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FACES OF San Miguel

Working For The Long Haul: Carmen Rioja

By Natalie Taylor.

Carmen Rioja has been a part of San Miguel de Allende for many years, and she has served the community in various roles, yet always connected to the arts in some way. Born in Monterrey, Mexico, she acquired a taste for the arts because of her mother, who she says was “a builder and an artist,” as well as a photographer, and painter.

Carmen began her university studies in the school of architecture, and also learned art restoration during that time. Then in 1993 she happened to come to San Miguel and was immediately captivated by the city itself, and especially the artistic offerings at Instituto Allende, and began taking sculpture classes with Lothar Kastenbaum.

The 1990s were amazing times here, with excellent artists teaching and interacting with students, art flourished everywhere. Carmen decided to remain in San Miguel, and her

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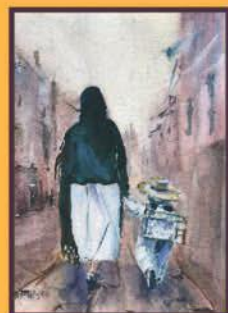
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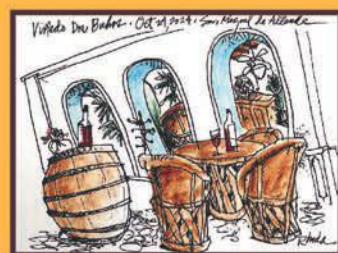
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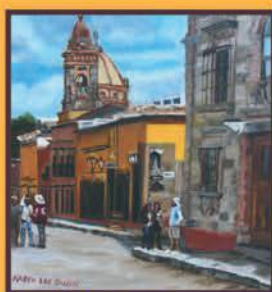
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News From The Insiders' Team

A Word From The Deputy Editor

By Bill "Memo" Wilson

In this digital age, newspaper people of all stripes, especially journalists, like to think of themselves as "print dinosaurs." The German-language *Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien*, printed by Johann Carolus in Strasbourg in 1605, is widely considered the first printed newspaper. Since 2005, over 3,300 print newspapers have closed just in the United States. This means that one-third of the newspapers that existed in 2005, are now gone.

Nevertheless, print still survives. People like to read a newspaper, magazine or hold a book in their hands. Besides being in print,

Insiders' News has an approach that also includes a website, email newsletter and Facebook page. This monthly newspaper-magazine has a dedicated editorial staff of dinosaurs working to produce our town's **only print publication in English.**

Writers include authors, a weekly newspaper publisher, a Mexican radio journalist, a Canadian magazine journalist, a daily newspaper editor and several freelance writers. While we heavily cover arts and entertainment, **Insiders' News** writers and editors are always looking for interesting stories. However, it's not our mission to cover every aspect of San Miguel news. We don't 'do' crime news and polit-

ical pieces. While we run an occasional advertorial, we eschew personal promotions pieces.

Our coverage is local, San Miguel and environs, and geared to the expat community. From the writers and editors, to the advertising staff, our design expert and distribution team - producing a newspaper is a labor of love and technology. There is still magic in watching the paper roll off the presses. And this effort is for you the reader and thanks go to our advertisers and everyone who makes this newspaper possible. Novelist Arthur Miller said "A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself."

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NADIA IS AN ACCOMPLISHED PERFORMER



MARIO HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH MUSIC SINCE AN EARLY AGE

CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

clothes for toys following in his father's footsteps as a fabric craftsman before his early death. Mario began studying music at age 15 with Elsemarie Norby as his first piano teacher. Soon he paid half his music fees by teaching music in her program in San Miguel Viejo and being an accompanist in her programs. He was fortunate to have had a series of mentors and sponsors the earliest being Gene Randall. Gene took him into his home, tutored him, paid the other half of his piano lesson fees. Gene became like a godfather to Mario while recognizing his musical gift. Mario continued with piano and attended the University of Guanajuato where he received a BA in composition. He learned the craft of music there.

Jose Suárez, his main professor, introduced him to early music,

especially Baroque music and taught him to play the harpsichord and organ, still his favorite instruments. He has played in Baroque music festivals in México, Spain and Germany and teaches students on these instruments.

At present Mario's work is recording, arranging music, arranging and producing concerts, teaching and working on various combinations of instruments and musical genres. Nadia has introduced him to Mexican folk music, and with Doug Robinson, and Alicia Rappaport he has engaged with jazz, pop and tango music. He helped produce Alicia's show and album.

He says that you fall in love with music and early music is what he loves the most. He currently plays solo, with a group, and with Nadia.

He credits Nadia with bringing

life, joy and love into his life. She brings out another side of him besides the serious early music side. Another aspect of his life both musically and personally, is finding his Jewish roots. He formally converted to Judaism and says having a Jewish family, preparing, playing Judeo-Arabic music and being part of the Jewish community of San Miguel deepens his Jewish roots both spiritually and musically.

Nadia, 33, was born in Veracruz to an Austrian Jewish father who was a glass blower and a Mexican mother. After her father's death when she was 3, her mother, a homeopath, moved with Nadia to San Miguel where she was involved with acting and dancing as a teen and started playing guitar at age 18.

She studied environmental science at the University of Morelia. There she became entranced with the music called

Son Jarocho the ancient music of Veracruz. *Son Jarocho* is a folk musical style that blends Mexican, Spanish, and African music elements. Its lively rhythms and energetic, intricate melodies that captivated Nadia. She changed from guitar to jarana an instrument that can have a variety of sizes used in San Jarocho. She took singing lessons, studied musical theory and played *jarana* for her enjoyment.

Since studying with Mario she takes her music seriously and has become an accomplished performer. She now likes to perform in large venues and is part of a trio, **Group Colonial 432** which includes José Luis Mendoza and Oscar Martínez Heredia.

They perform using *jarana* among other instruments. Nadia plays, sings, and dances in their performances. At times they play together with larger groups. Mario makes many of the arrangements for her group. A huge part of her life is being a mother to 4-year-old Shira, who can often be seen on stage with Nadia, together with Nadia and Mario. Like Mario, Nadia is exploring her Jewish roots and living a Jewish life in San Miguel. Their work together is evolving as a lifestyle, and as professional musicians. They work independently and come together without competition to learn, create new music, and perform. We can anticipate many years of lively music from this young creative couple.

If you want to suggest a couple that both are involved in their own creative process, for a future column please send an email at judith58sma@gmail.com



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Fearless Women, Champions Of Change

Françoise Vergnac Yohalem: At 86, I Still Want To Learn More Dancing Steps...

By Carolina de la Cajiga

"Being a volunteer has allowed me to travel to many countries around the world, learn about diverse cultures, and, most of all, appreciate and value our differences and similitudes," says Françoise Vergnac Yohalem with a grin.

During her twenty years as a Volunteer Team Leader for Global Volunteers, Françoise led groups to 17 locations in Vietnam, South Africa, Costa Rica, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, and various Indigenous reservations in the U.S. *"I worked in orphanages, children's hospitals, and homes for the elderly; we built trails, painted houses... whatever the communities required."*

Françoise recalls her first time in Mexico fifteen years ago, *"I was volunteering as an English teacher at a university in Queretaro, and I came to visit San Miguel Allende. Seeing its central square, the Jardin, surrounded by arcades and tall church spires, took me back to Monflinquin, one of the plus beaux villas de France, where I was born during WWII, in the Languedoc region of France. I immediately felt connected to San Miguel!"*

This visit brought back memories from the war years, *"My grandfather was involved in the resistance, while my grandmother gave shelter to a Jewish family. These difficult times made me a strong person. At 20, I left to study English as an au pair in London—a bold move back then... Then, at 23, I went to the U.S., where I lived for 50 years, settling in Washington DC. I returned to school and got my M.A. in Studio Art. Eventually, I mar-*

ried and had two daughters; this led me to manage art galleries rather than pursue a career as a visual artist."

"I also established an art consultancy specializing in Public Art projects. I worked with cities, states, and the Federal government, facilitating the incorporation of art in building projects. I organized workshops and wrote educational materials for artists to succeed in the complicated process," Françoise proudly explained.

Raising an eyebrow, Françoise says, *"I now see how all this prepared me for my future life in San Miguel!"*

Between these endeavors, Françoise trekked and camped on the Himalayas and the Andes, *"I celebrated my sixtieth anniversary at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, in Africa. These were marvelous adventures!"* She has now lived in San Miguel for more than ten years. *"It was easy for me to settle here—probably because my grandfather was from Spain, and I used to visit there when I was young, so I'm familiar with the language. Also, in school in France we had to take Spanish."*

Françoise continues to reminisce, *"When I moved here, I looked for a place to practice yoga. I joined a 7:00 am class at El Sindicato taught by Maestra Gloria Navarrete, where I was the only 'gringa.' Gloria founded the Ballet Folklórico SMA and became my best friend and my 'Mexican sister.'"*

"Half of my friends are Mexican, and they make me feel welcome in their lives. This is wonderful! My current activities in-

clude being part of the Board of Advisors of Casa Europa, active with UUFSMA, and volunteering with Opera San Miguel, and FASMA."

One of Françoise's passions is dancing, particularly folkloric. This led to her involvement with Gloria's ballet group. *"I helped them organize after three years of shutdown by creating 'Amigos del Ballet Folklórico de SMA' to collect funds. As they don't get any governmental support, this has allowed 50 families with more than 50 dancers to return to dancing—all volunteers."*

This year, the ballet is celebrating its 50th Anniversary, and Françoise and the directors of the Ballet Folklórico are planning conferences, costume exhibitions, and traditional dance presentations in the spring and summer. *"I'm extremely proud to*

be the only non-Mexican member of the 'Asociación de Costumbres y Tradiciones,' and have received an award from Casa de la Cultura for my work promoting local traditions with the international community."

"I would not want to live anywhere else. My children have visited several times and understand my love for Mexico, particularly San Miguel. I've never felt so 'at home' anywhere else, though; deep inside, I'm still French," says Françoise with a radiant smile.

"Dancing is my love, and I've been taking classes here all these years. I would like to travel more around this fascinating country, learn new dancing steps, make new friends, and even take on new challenges."

"Where else could I do this?" With a twinkle in her eyes, Françoise exclaims, *"Only in San Miguel."*



FRANÇOISE VERGNAC YOHALEM:
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CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

first job was at the Pégola Art Gallery with legendary Dottie Vidargas.

In the late 1990s Atotonilco was named one of the 100 artistic legacies in danger of being lost. The magnificent murals painted by Martinez de Pocasangre in the 1700s were deteriorating and restoration was badly needed.

Carmen Rioja became part of a team—which included Dottie Vidargas and several others—that began the meticulous work of bringing the murals back to their original splendor. Eventually those murals were an integral part of the decision of UNESCO to make both San Miguel de Allende and Atotonilco a World Heritage site.

The restoration work, begun in 1996 is now over 20 years in progress. It continues to this day, with Carmen still part of the team working on preserving the murals inside the church of Atotonilco, the very murals that

gave rise to the moniker “*the Sistine Chapel of Mexico*.”

History has always fascinated Carmen, which she traces back to her childhood when she heard stories about her family origins. Her father had supposedly originated “...from *Portuguese seafarers*,” and her maternal family, her mother claimed, had come from “*wandering Jews*.” These tales awakened a sharp desire to know and ask yourself who you are, which, of course means learning about the past.

In addition to the preservation of the murals in Atotonilco, Carmen has also worked on restoring the ancient wall art within a small alcove on top of the pyramid in Cañada de la Virgen. Those date back to pre-Hispanic, meso-American art done by indigenous people more than 1000 years ago.

Carmen’s artistic connection is not only with the visual arts, she has also studied literature and enjoys writing. She wrote articles for a magazine that

existed for a while in San Miguel de Allende, and also for other Mexican magazines.

For a period of time, she was the editor in chief of *Atencion*, the weekly bilingual newspaper that was a staple of San Miguel for almost fifty years. She has also written for *Mexico News Daily*. Currently she writes for an online Spanish language publication “*Fusilierías*,” which is published every fifteen days. Her latest entry was a book review of the renowned author-photographer, San Miguel based Janet Sternburg’s “*Looking at Mexico, Mexico Looks Back*.”

Carmen Rioja’s art restoration at Atotonilco is ongoing; it requires not only the skill involved in bringing back the former beauty of art, damaged by time and the elements, but it also involves a continuous search for funding. One would imagine perhaps that it is possible to begin such a work and do it in increments as the funds become available. But that is not so. The funds

collected must be sufficient to complete the entire task. That is because it is impossible to halt due to lack of paint or other material—a stop mid-task can make the entire project null and void.

One of the major contributors to art restoration, including the work at Atotonilco, is a US based organization based in New York: World Monuments Watch, which has provided most of the funding. Carmen continues to work tirelessly at her two-decade commitment to restoring Pocasangre’s work in Atotonilco. However, there is more to Carmen’s community involvement than the Atotonilco restoration project, her past as editor-in-chief at *Atencion*, and her writing. She has been on the board of the Biblioteca Publica for a number of years, and just last month she was voted as the incoming president, following in the footsteps of Debra Broussard from that position after many years of dedicated service.

www.natalietaylor.org



CARMEN IS AN ACCOMPLISHED WRITER AND EDITOR



WITH THE RESTORATION TEAM AT ATOTONILCO IN THE LATE 1990'S



CARMEN AT THE SCAFFOLDING, RESTORING THE MURALS AT ATOTONILCO



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Insiders' Music Spotlight:

Gabriel Hernández

By Felecia Ford

At the age of 7, Cuban-born pianist Gabriel Hernández began studying classical piano and music theory at the Luis Casa Romero Conservatory in Camagüey, displaying a natural inclination toward jazz at an early age. His 53-year love affair with jazz has taken him on tours across the world and, note to note, with the likes of Chick Corea, Ray Charles, Dizzy Gillespie, Herbie Hancock and a plethora of other jazz greats.

FF: The list of jazz legends that you have shared the stage with is quite impressive. It must have been thrilling for you. Did you ever get a chance to talk with them?

GH: In the 80's I participated in a festival in Hungary where I was rehearsing when someone came up and said *"Herbie Hancock, came to listen to you!"* People got nervous, others of us got magnified. In those days, the group I was in was called *"Fervet Opus"*. We played a melody for Herbie Hancock, and he stood up and said, *"I want to tell you that you are a great group. You are the best unknown musicians I've ever seen."* He didn't know us, and those were the words of the great Herbie. In the case of Chick Corea, I was on my tour at the Montreal Jazz Festival, when I met him on the street and I wanted him to listen to my music, so I gave him a CD with my music on it. Afterward, we went to the theater where he was going to rehearse, so he listened to the CD, and he said these words to me, *"Gabriel, there are a few good pianists, and you are one of them, but I*

also want to tell you that music is made to be listened to. I realized that it was your first album." He was right because that was my first production in Havana where I recorded with good musicians of that time and all the music I made was difficult. Making the album was impressive. He said, *"Of course, the album is amazing, but remember music is also made to be listened to."* Then I understood that there are other ways to make amazing music without being so novel; it's advice I still follow to this day. I would like to share that, other than daily practice, we not only listen to what you like, we have to be open to hearing different music. Only in this way can we absorb the language of great musicians. The secret is in the recordings, listening to the great musicians and also to their stories and thus entering into the language of the instrument.

FF: That is great advice. Speaking of recordings, where do we find your music?
GH: Well, all my music is on Spotify and another option is my physical albums that you can purchase at my shows and also from my manager, Alex Onofre.

FF: Do you have plans to go back to the studio anytime soon?

GH: Usually a jazz musician is a musician who always tries to do different things and there is something that keeps going around in my head that I want to achieve soon. I'd like to record with a symphony orchestra; this is one of my next plans.

FF: That sounds epic! I hope the stars align for you to do so. You are so deserving to dream



GABRIEL HERNÁNDEZ, AN EXTRAORDINARY JAZZ PIANO PLAYER YOU CANNOT MISS

big and make it happen. You have had quite an exciting 2025 already. In January, playing at the Jazz Plaza International Festival in Cuba, and in March, at Teatro Angela Peralta with your Trío, alongside international recording artist, trumpeter Luis Gasca and his orchestra, with special guests including fellow pianist Doug Robinson, Grammy award-winning saxophonist Alfred Thompson and his gifted son Freddy.

This town is bursting at the seams with talent, no doubt.

I think it's safe to say that, through your shows and your example as a pianist that you mentor and inspire the up-and-

coming jazz musicians here in Mexico more than you'll ever know. You have helped the music scene here, making it a destination for music lovers all over the world.

"Gabriel is a milestone in Cuban music, there is a before and after Gabriel." Aletz Onofre - Aletz Productions

Hear Gabriel in San Miguel de Allende next month on May 23rd for the first Cha Cha Cha Festival Mexico-Cuba 2025 and again for the International Bolero Festival Mexico-Cuba-USA 2025 on July 4th and 5th.

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As Eye See It

Summertime Comes Early in San Miguel

By Bill Wilson

"¡Hace un sol de justicia!"
(The sun is incredibly strong)
-Mexican weather dicho

It's May, break out the shorts! May here in the mountains of Central Mexico is hot and dry and residents await the return of the rains (usually late May to mid-June). Dust, pollen, smoke, and ozone (traffic) are constant friends.

And it is also time to contemplate purchasing a mini split air conditioner, fan, or porch umbrella. As to shorts, not often seen on locals but more of tourist togs.

Thinking of the Mexican dicho on the sun, yes, it is incredibly strong here. It's because of our elevation (6,300 feet and more) and being south of The Tropic of Cancer add up to a hot sun.

Keeping cool is important. A hat is essential. Stay hydrated but stay away from a lot of booze.

Our elevation and the sun can cause dehydration, not fun for older folks. Try to do gardening and work early in the morning and in late afternoon. When in town, do what locals the world over do—walk on the shady side. When contemplating the air conditioned or fans think of what your CFE (Luz or electric bill) can be.

WEATHER DATA

Let's look at the weather records for May since 2020, from my two weather stations at La Lejona II:

May 2024
High 107° - Low 61°

May 2023
High 96° - Low 53°

May 2022
High 98° - Low 50°

May 2021
High 96° - Low 54°

May 2020
High 100° - Low 54°

The data was collected via my two weather stations and apps via Ambinet.Net (available iOS and Android) and WeatherUnderground (also available on the two popular platforms).

My station ID is ISANMI1 and streams to various internet sites. Another reliable station in San Miguel is Rodrigo Garibay's station just outside of town. Most apps have maps in their display and you can navigate to stations in our area or for that matter all over the world.

FUN FACTS

Mexicans drink more Coca-Cola than anyone else

If you're a dentist looking for work then this is definitely one of the most fun facts about México. Their consumption of the world-famous drink is off the charts, with some regions of the country chugging down 2.2 liters per day of the sugary treat.

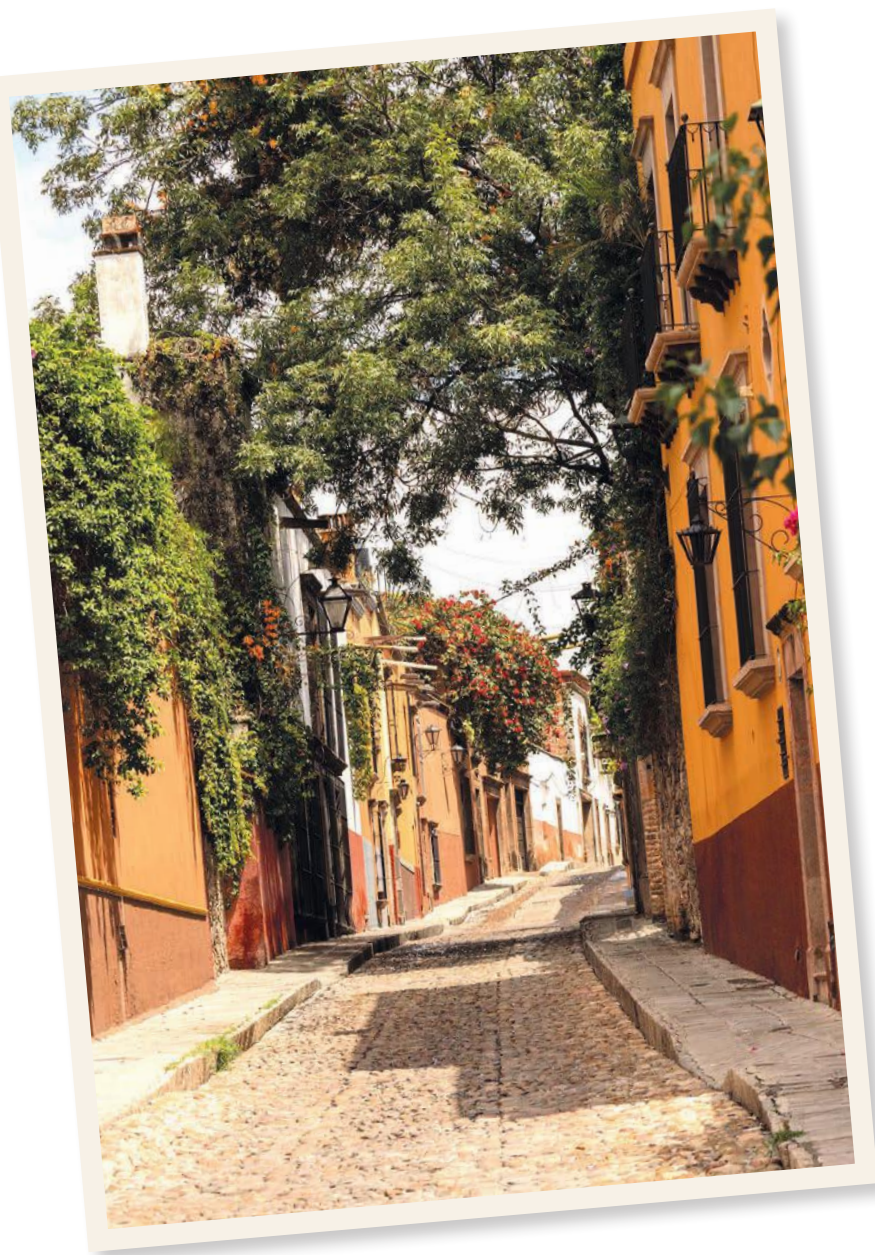
The Azteca is the largest football stadium in Latin America

If you're looking for a great crowd and plenty of entertainment, then a trip to the Azteca Stadium in México City is necessary.

This huge structure is the largest of its kind in all of Latin America, and getting a chance to watch a match on this hallowed turf is an experience well worth having.

You can check out vivid pink lakes in México

Las Coloradas is located in the



WHEN WALKING DOWN THE SAN MIGUEL STREETS, WALK ON THE SHADY SIDE, WEAR A HAT - THERE ARE MANY HAT VENDORS IN TOWN - AND KEEP HYDRATED

Yucatán Peninsula, and the region is home to some truly special scenery. The waters here are cotton candy pink, and often there's a soft blue sky to match the aesthetic, providing a wonderful place to sit back and relax.

As many readers know I generally post a weather report on my Facebook page as well as Insiders' News and Weather in San Miguel on Facebook.

TIP OF THE HAT

Raspberry to tourist traffic. Here in San Miguel we do *"uno y uno"* and many drivers don't

honor this system.

Kudos go to the many delivery service personnel who navigate (often iffy maneuvers) of highways and byways.

A mil gracias to the personnel at City Market who go out of the way to help befuddled expats.

Hasta el próximo mes!

Bill Wilson, 20-year San Miguel resident has a journalism career spanning 50 years covering everything the United Nations to Cub Scout news. He's also a weather buff and first responder.

Insiders' Vibrant Living

Fall For San Miguel, Not On It

By Carla Maria Pérez

San Miguel de Allende has a way of capturing hearts. Between its colonial architecture, warm community, and lively culture, it invites you to slow down and savor life. But while it's easy to fall in love here, you don't want to fall on the city—especially not on those charming-but-tricky cobblestone streets and sidewalks.

If you've walked more than a block in San Miguel, you know its beauty comes with a challenge. Uneven terrain, surprise curbs, and narrow sidewalks can turn a leisurely stroll into an obstacle course. It's especially tricky for those of us who didn't grow up navigating streets like these. I recently joined the ranks of the "fallen women (and men)" of San Miguel when I missed a shallow step and lost my footing. Luckily, I walked away with just a bruised knee and hand.

The good news? Falls are largely preventable—and one of the best ways to stay upright is by rebuilding something many of us lose with age or a sedentary life: strength and flexibility. Muscle mass naturally declines as we age—starting in our 30s. By our 60s or 70s, it's common to have significantly less than we used to. That loss, called sarcopenia, affects balance, stability, and reaction time. Add in stiff joints and limited range of motion, and it's easy to see how a misstep becomes a fall.

The solution? Keep moving and keep building. Strength training and stretching aren't just for athletes—they're essential for staying safe, steady, and independent. And you don't need to lift heavy weights or stretch like

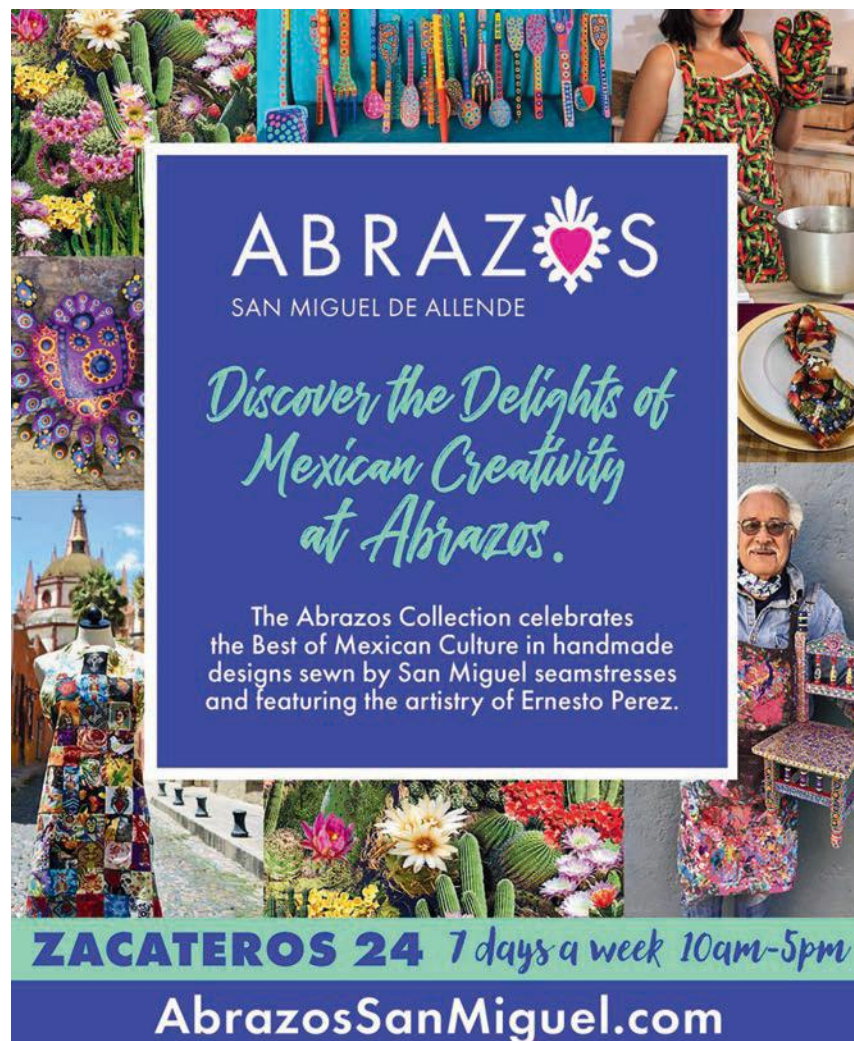
a gymnast. Small, consistent efforts can make a big difference.

Strength training doesn't mean bench-pressing your body weight. It means working key muscle groups—legs, core, back, and arms—so they can better support you in daily life. Simple moves like squats, leg lifts, wall push-ups, and resistance band exercises help maintain strength. Strong legs keep you steady on uneven ground, a strong core improves balance, and strong arms help you catch yourself or grab a railing when things get dicey.

Research shows that adults who strength train at least twice a week are significantly less likely to fall. Even better, it helps maintain bone density, reducing the risk of serious injury if a fall happens.

Flexibility keeps your joints limber and your movements smooth. Tight hips, stiff ankles, and reduced shoulder mobility can throw off balance, slow reactions, and make it harder to recover from a slip. Just a few minutes of daily stretching—especially after walking or exercise—can improve range of motion, posture, and coordination. Gentle yoga, Pilates, and tai chi are great options, blending balance, strength, and flexibility in one session. If needed, look for classes tailored for older adults, making it easy to start in a welcoming setting.

Shoes may not build muscle, but they support everything you've worked for. Good footwear is non-negotiable. Look for non-slip soles, arch support, and a snug fit around the heel. Avoid flip-flops, slick soles, or anything with a heel higher than your



common sense. In San Miguel, that might mean swapping style for function—but your ankles will thank you.

Your home should be as safe as your body is strong. A few smart changes go a long way: install grab bars in bathrooms, use non-slip mats in wet areas, improve lighting—especially near stairs—and keep walkways clear of clutter. Think of it as strength training for your space.

We're more motivated when we move with others. Group classes, walking meetups, and local dancing keep you social and strong. Staying connected helps you stay active—and activity supports balance, flexibility, and confidence. Ask around—San Miguel is full of active folks happy to share what works for them.

San Miguel de Allende is a place to savor life, explore new expe-

riences, and feel inspired. But it's harder to enjoy all of that if you're worried about falling. Staying strong and flexible isn't just about fitness—it's about freedom. It helps you move with confidence, navigate quirky streets, and keep doing what you love—whether it's exploring the mercado, attending a concert, or dancing under the stars.

As singer-songwriter Angela Kaset advises in her tribute song to San Miguel, "*When you want to look up, look down.*" And "*when you want to look down, look up*"—to duck a low doorway. So go ahead—fall for the magic of San Miguel. Just keep your feet firmly planted while you do.

Carla Maria Pérez, ISSA-certified trainer dedicated to helping men and women 55+ thrive with personalized fitness and nutrition plans, 415 566 0004 carlaperez.issacertifiedtrainer.com



Charity Works: Apoyo A Gente Emprendedora

Breaking The Cycle Of Poverty Through Entrepreneurship

By Danita Brisson

The Oxford Dictionary defines an entrepreneur as “a person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.” In the early 20th century, the characteristic of “a go-getter” was added.

Apoyo a Gente Emprendedora has been nurturing Sanmiguelense go-getters for two decades. The nonprofit’s website declares their commitment to, “helping Mexicans bootstrap themselves out of poverty to become financially independent for life.” They work with adults in our low-income neighborhoods and rural communities either to start or to expand their own businesses. Says **Ezequiel Mojica**, Founder and Executive Director, “Participants must have a strong desire to succeed and to break the cycle of poverty in their families by building a business themselves. That’s the first filter.” Their original mandate was to provide interest-free micro loans to those who lacked access to banks and financing. After five years, they recognized that entrepreneurs needed more than just startup capital to succeed. They need mentoring. Consequently, an educational division was added to provide free business management and human rights training.

Since **Apoyo’s** inception, more than 650 small businesses have received interest-free loans, and over 3,500 individuals have taken training programs. Last year, 92 folks participated in the two divisions, and over \$317,000 MXN was distributed among 51 small enterprises. Thousands of Sanmiguelenses pursuing finan-

cial security through entrepreneurship, that’s impressive.

Loans and training are available to all adults, however Ezequiel notes that 90% of applicants are women. Trades courses involve more hands-on learning than academic studies and are shorter in duration, making them attractive to women with family responsibilities. **The Mamás Program** improves family well-being in seven villages by educating women, empowering them and their children, and providing tools and strategies to confront societal inequality. The workshops for women and teens cover topics not offered in the community or schools, including health, nutrition, the environment, and income-producing activities. One tangible result of this grassroots initiative is the **Family Garden Project**. It enables women to grow healthy food in, and for, their communities. Such successes have fueled exponential growth. Currently three times as many participants are enrolled as were registered in all of 2024, necessitating the acquisition of a **Vocational Training and Community Resource Center** just off Stirling Dickenson. Here, technical and soft skills training, basic English, and work place-ment assistance are provided. Ezequiel admits that, while the progress is positive, it presents serious challenges. In one year, the annual budget ballooned from about \$2 million MXN to \$3 million MXN. “We have the opportunity to serve more entrepreneurs but we must manage our growth to be sustainable. We don’t want (the Center) to become a white elephant,” he explains.



In response, the five staff members have added new trades classes. Training in advanced home health care, graphic design for entrepreneurs, mechanics, plumbing and electrical will be augmented this fall with courses in salesmanship, customer service, and technology. **Apoyo** is pursuing additional bilingual teachers, Board Advisors and Directors with successful entrepreneurial experience. As well, they are introducing mentor and sponsorship programs to their fundraising portfolio. Until their 501(c)(3) status is finalized, donations are gratefully accepted through the **San Miguel Community Foundation**, on their website, through PayPal or by check (American or Canadian funds).

Now as in the past, **Apoyo** partners with other nonprofits such as CASA, EEESMA, Feed the Hungry, and groups including Midday Rotary Club, AMIS-TAD, the Community Church of San Miguel de Allende, Continnente Americano University, Instituto Sanmiguelense, and the State of Guanajuato. The synergy these reciprocal relationships

APOYO A GENTE EMPRENDEDORA
BRINGS SUPPORT AND MENTORSHIP
TO THE COMMUNITY BY
PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

generate profits each organization and its clients. More importantly, they reveal the powerful impact of communal action. What benefits your neighbourhood, benefits your family.

Ezequiel says locals initially, “thought I was crazy when I approached them to offer interest-free loans. It was difficult to break down the doors of that community.” Their 20-year track record has validated both their original concept and their expanded programming. With hundreds of business owners and graduates now earning and supporting their families thanks to **Apoyo**, and with an impressive facility attracting even more local entrepreneurs, Ezequiel says they are building a new community, created by Mexicans, for Mexicans. “We don’t give handouts,” he says. “The startup money is not the goal. It is a tool to help them make more money and grow the economy. So is the education. That’s how Mexicans will break the cycle of poverty.”

For more information contact Ezequiel Mojica at apoyoemprendedores@yahoo.com.mx - 415 120 1209

Patricia Schneider Plans

A Journey Into Mexico's Soul

ADVERTORIAL

By Patricia Schneider

It was in San Miguel de Allende—and I repeat this with joy—that I recently began organizing high-end cultural and gastro-nomic trips to Mexico City, this fascinating city that I know like the back of my hand. I arrived in this city at a very young age, and over time, explored its hidden corners, uncovered its secrets, and discovered its many facets, both joyful and enigmatic. Like Joséphine Baker, I could sing that I have two loves: Paris and Mexico.

But truly how does one become bicultural, deeply connected to another land, another culture? By fully immersing oneself, planting seeds, and probably only allowing time to cultivate deep roots. My new role as a meeting planner for all sorts of happy events and as a cultural and gastronomical curator for travelers is the natural continuation of a journey dedicated to art, aesthetics, and passionate attention to detail. For years, I have worked in the world of artists and interior design, guided by the great Robert Couturier, one of the greatest decorators of our time—a refined and vision-

ary mentor whom I have had the chance to adore.

Today, I invite you to join me in the vibrant heart of Mexico: in Mexico City, of course, but also along an exceptional itinerary from Puebla to Oaxaca, discovering a living heritage, astonishing culinary traditions, and atmospheres as subtle as they are intense. And very soon, a new destination will be added: an as-yet unspoiled beach on the coast of Oaxaca, where well-being, nature, and the sweetness of life will blend, in the spirit of the most beautiful retreats.

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San Miguel Jack

Insiders' Social Scene

Around Town: **Ristorante Casa Giovanni Marina** was presented with the highly prestigious Grand Prize “**Italian Hospitality of the World**” Award. **Giovanni & Marina** where thrilled to accept the plaque at the ceremony on April 8th at the Italian Institute of Culture in Mexico City. What an Honor! Featured on the April cover of Local SMA Guide, a hearty congratulations to **Susan Knight York**. Writer-Foodie-Photographer for her tireless work over the past thirteen years documenting the gastronomy of San Miguel de Allende. Well deserved! “*Retirement is tricky, right? Let’s create a place for the good old girls and boys who still have fire in their hearts.*” Check out **Barbara Cooney’s** monthly newsletter and blog **nursezel-daretires.com**. Local Artists **Tim Tyler** at Calderoni Gallery and **Judith Jenya** at Edina Sagnet Gallery both participated in the first Saturday ‘**Art Walk**’ last month at **Fábrica La Aurora**, much to the delight of art lovers in town. Tim is set to have a permanent exhibition soon, as in his other exhibitions at ‘Crystal Bridges’ in Bentonville, AR, and the ‘MEAN’ in Barcelona, Spain: www.tctyler.com

Christina Ruckel is in Asia for nearly three months with just one suitcase, one backpack, and her usual travel uniform: jeans, a black tee, and a Hermes scarf. Thankfully, she was safe when that devastating earthquake hit in Myanmar. She was in northern Thailand at the Elephant EcoValley. Quite the plucky, lucky gal!. More SMA travelers, Joseph Bennett and Eli Hans are off on their 25th Anniversary, galavanting around London, Paris, Prague,

Seville and Granada during May. And don't forget a visit out to San Miguel's one and only Olive Orchard Farm, **Finca Luna Serena** run by **Susan & Victor** - ask about ‘free pick up and delivery’ from Liverpool shopping Center.

Charities are always hard at work: **Heart to Heart** is beating strong with their Saturday Sale Bizarres raising money for **Patronato Pro Niños**. Since 1970 providing, medical, dental and psychological care for thousands of San Miguel de Allende children. Please save the date(s) for two upcoming Patronato Pro Niños fund raising events; July 12th and November 6th. Kudos to **Amy Gigi Alexander** of **Angelitos Sanctuario Support Group** for all she and her band of volunteers do to help our little four-legged creatures. And her selfless help to **Sandra Echeverria** who’s own animal shelter burned last month. Please give what you can to these tireless volunteers who devote time and money to help our animals. It’s a historic time in San Miguel de Allende with the inauguration of México’s first Hospice Center, the **Lee Carter Center**. A beautiful state-of-the-art facility. Thank you, **Lee Carter**, for championing this very important space for our community. *Muchas felicidades!*

Music & Medical: As the Hospital beds turn, lovable musician and realtor **Doug Robinson** is now out, less a pesky appendix. **Virginia Sloan** is back home too, much to the relief of her two labs, **Margot** and **Moka**. Even **San Miguel Jack** had surgery and a dance with the Doctors, Urologist **Dr. David Osorio & Dr's Ricardo Gordillo, Oscar López & Andrea Hernández**. *Muchas*

gracias to all **La Clinica** team - *Excelente!* Bandleader and guest vocalist with the **Count Basie Orchestra** on the Grammy Award Winning Album “*Basie Swings the Blues*”, **Lauren C. Mitchell** and hubby, **Jack Joshua** along with band members, **Michael Hensley, Vincent Sims, and Eleazar Davenport**, have been touring all over Florida laying down some swinging concerts and as she would say, “*doing my part to make this world a better place*”. Now back in San Miguel de Allende, she is in pre-production for her next album with San Miguel's very own producer, **Myles Wakeman**. Might the album be recorded at his **Trouble Clef Studios**... stay tuned. And the little dynamo that could, **Frad Mulier** is doing her musical thing around local restaurants and clubs, fitting in a mini-vaca in San Blas between gigs.

Last Word: If you are reading my diatribe, chances are you are reading quite a few other articles, and do I dare say, much more substantive than my social scene. I speak of this newspaper’s senior journalist, Editor-at-Large, weather geek, and one of the last true newspaper guys around, **Bill ‘Memo’ Wilson**. Thanks to him and our Publisher, **Madame Camie Fenton**, you have a monthly print newspaper to set your eyes upon. *Muchísimas gracias* Bill, Camie, and all the other hard working, dedicated (purely volunteer), writers and our loving paying advertisers that make it all possible.

If you have something or someone you'd like to see in bold or pictured here next month, do drop me a line: sanmigueljack@insidersnews.net

TOP TO BOTTOM: GIOVANNI AND MARINA, CHRISTINA RUCKEL, SAN MIGUEL JACK WITH TIM TYLER, AND LAUREN C. MITCHELL AND JACK JOSHUA



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Art Seen & Scene

The Latest Galleries To Check Out

by John Dodge Meyer
and Meryl Truett

On a small, quaint calle just off of Umarán, you can find the new space for **French Doors Art Events**. French Doors is the brainchild of Victoria Sidhoun. When I asked how she found and decided on this particular rental she answered, *“When I was looking for a new home for French Doors I found this space which was formerly a dentist office. My dad who passed away recently was a dentist, so I felt that finding this space was kismet.”*

Victoire studied History of Art and Business management for a cultural institution at the University of Leeds, England. She worked in various galleries and art institutions around the world for years before opening the Brussels Branch of Galerie La Forest Divonne. Victoire believes she was born a curator, to be a vector for the messages of the artists she loves. *“Through the art donors, art walks, workshops... I aim to elevate the quality of the artistic offerings in San Miguel de Allende through careful curation and have the public reconnecting with the artists in the intimacy of our*

creative space,” she explains.

Now showing at French Doors, San Miguel based artist **Jorge Caracheo**, presents *“Kraft-Works”* a grand ensemble of work on paper and wood. French Doors also introduced their first Kids' Art Course, specially curated by **Diego the Pirate**, a talented artist from Mexico City.

French Doors Art Speakeasy
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www.instagram.com/frenchdoors

Next on our gallery tour we find Nallely Moreno's, **Galería Amarillo 78**, located in a tranquil yet vibrant garden-like spot inside Umarán 34; where Zacateros and Umarán meet. The current exhibition is quite a coup for a gallery in our little city. *“Bestiary Spell”* features bronze sculptures by the legendary Leonora Carrington. This exhibit offers a unique opportunity to interact with Carrington's inner world, allowing visitors to explore the richness of her imagination and the complexity of her symbolism. Through her sculptures Leonora Carrington invites us to question our understanding of the world.

The exhibition will be on display at **Amarillo 78** until May 20, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Recently, the gallery has featured artists who have left an indelible mark. **Glen Rogers**, with her exploration of the Sacred Feminine, while **Alejandra Osollo** surprised us with the innovative use of virtual reality in her Sacred Land exhibition. But perhaps one of the most memorable moments was the opening of **MMO's Las Locas collection**; a tribute to women who have defined art and culture: Leonora Carrington, Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, and Chavela Vargas. With his monochromatic style, **MMO** has managed to capture the essence of these iconic figures.

For further info contact Nallely at:
[@galeriaamarillo78](https://www.instagram.com/galeriaamarillo78) 554 360 4357
[@mmoartwork](https://www.instagram.com/mmoartwork)

On a sunbaked road off the road to Dolores just past El Vergel Restaurant, is the impressive **L&P Gallery**. Founded by Chilean artists **Verónica Leiton** and **Mariela Paniagua**—both of whom have lived in México for nearly 30 years—this private gallery opens its doors by appointment only, offering personalized tours accompanied by a glass of Chilean wine, light snacks, and engaging conversations about art and the creative process.

This month, Verónica Leiton celebrates 41 years dedicated to painting—a lifetime of artistic exploration. Her work is known for its poetic representation of the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—in constant interaction within microscopic and macroscopic worlds, as well as in other dimensions. Through imaginary landscapes, her paintings invite viewers to contemplate the invisible connections between nature, spirit, and the cosmos.

L&P Gallery is not only home to her artistic vision but also a dynamic space that encourages collaboration across disciplines. Every two months, the gallery hosts special events. A new exhibition is currently in the works for the end of May. As part of this vision, Verónica also offers abstract art workshops for small groups. *“We want L&P Gallery to be a bridge between the public and the diverse artists living in this city. San Miguel has a unique creative energy, and our desire is to contribute by offering a space where art is lived, shared, and celebrated,”* says Verónica.

To schedule a visit, contact the gallery via WhatsApp at +52 656 199 7097.

Meryl Truett is an artist and workshop instructor in San Miguel de Allende. IG @madinsma www.meryltruett.com
John Dodge Meyer is an artist and writer living in San Miguel working on his memoir.



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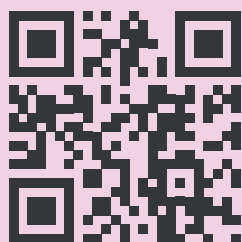
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Mezcal Spotlight:

The Room Mezcalería

By Jonathan Lockwood

Bleak. Desolate. Grim. That used to describe the hunt for exceptional artisanal mezcal in San Miguel de Allende. The good stuff—the kind made in small palenques, by families who’ve been doing it for generations—was mostly the stuff of legend, or maybe long weekends in Oaxaca. But those days are over.

Among the handful of mezcal-forward establishments in town, one shines especially bright. **The Room Mezcalería** isn’t just a place to learn about mezcal and discover bottles you’ll love—it’s one of the most attractive bars in San Miguel, period. A friend of mine, who’s not even a frequent drinker of mezcal, called it his favorite bar in town. That should tell you something.

The Room opened in November 2021, the vision of **Ana Sofia Tidball**, who was born in Colombia and adopted by an American diplomat. Her childhood took her across continents. In adulthood, she landed in Los Angeles, where she sold a business and eventually made her way to San Miguel. There, she met **Luciano Abaca**, originally from Mendoza, Argentina. Together, over many sips and stories, they discovered a shared passion for mezcal. And each other. A pilgrimage to the palenques of Oaxaca sealed the deal. **The Room** was born.

As someone who might be medically classified as a mezcal obsessive, I can tell you: the most dispiriting thing in a mezcalería is a bartender who knows next to nothing about what’s on the shelf—and couldn’t care less. You order something interesting, and they blink like you’ve asked for an oil change.

That is not **The Room**.

Ana Sofia and **Luciano** have traveled across Mexico, connecting with small-batch, artisanal and ancestral producers who still make mezcal the way it’s been made for centuries. These are family-run operations—no automation, no gimmicks, just agave, fire, and time. At **The Room**, they bring that world to your glass. New to mezcal? They’ll walk you through a curated tasting, explaining each pour’s origin, process, and why it’s worth your attention. Already on the agave train? You’ll find kindred spirits behind the bar and beside you.

And while purists like me might sip neat until the end of days, **The Room’s** cocktail program is nothing to overlook. You’ll find a Mezcalita, a Mezhattan, the Jamaica Me Happy (featuring an agave and cannabis distillation), and several other imaginative entries. My wife, Cecilia, simply loves their cocktails!

Now, if you’ve lived here any length of time, you know how brutal this town can be on bars and restaurants. Passion and talent are no guarantee. Many pour their hearts—and savings—into a place that never quite catches. So you might expect a spot like **The Room** to cut corners when it comes to design or ambiance.

They didn’t.

From the street, **The Room** draws you in with walls painted in bold geometric designs by local artist **Lucas Rise**. The patterns—including a compass and a north star—reflect Ana Sofia’s own search for direction, and the magnetic pull that led her to mezcal. Inside, palo santo gently smolders, infusing the space with a sweet, woodsy calm that feels both ceremonial and intimate.

Every detail was built without investors or family backing. Just



FIND ANA SOFÍA AND LUCIANO BEHIND THE BAR AT THE ROOM MEZCALERÍA AND ASK FOR THEIR SUGGESTIONS

grit, late nights, and a whole lot of love. One more thing you’ll notice right away: **The Room** is small. And while that’s part of its charm, it’s also clear they’ve outgrown the space—physically, perhaps, but conceptually even more so.

You see, Ana Sofia and Luciano didn’t really set out to open a bar. They wanted a kind of portal. And in its next iteration—a soon-to-come new space—they plan to lean even harder into mezcal education. The casual, social vibe will still be there, but layered over a more intentional experience: guided tastings, deeper storytelling, meaningful connections with agave culture.

A place where you don’t just drink—you learn. You feel. You remember.

In a previous piece, I wrote about

the best way to learn mezcal: find a bar with a great selection and staff who know their stuff. **The Room Mezcalería** checks those boxes—and redraws them with neon. As more spots in San Miguel step up their mezcal game, that’s good news for everyone. But **The Room** remains my top recommendation. And the fact that they’re evolving toward something even more focused and immersive? That just reinforces the point.

This is where mezcal belongs—in a room that respects it, celebrates it, and invites you to sit down, slow down, and drink it with care.

Jonathan Lockwood is an American Voice Talent living in San Miguel de Allende, México. He is also a Mezcal lover, explorer, and collector and writes the *Mezcal Maniac Substack*. Read and subscribe here: mezcalmaniac.substack.com



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Who Is Who On Our Streets: An Aromatic Bean

By Natalie Taylor

Every day of the week—including Sunday, **Paco** makes his rounds through the Centro, his backpack over his shoulders, and a couple of bottles of dark liquid in his hands. His route begins when he gets off the bus near Mesones, winds his way toward the Biblioteca, up Relox Street, zigzagging along the different streets, crisscrossing the Jardin, and then onwards. To anyone he meets, he hawks his trade: “*Vainilla?*” he asks, lifting one of the bottles, hoping they will buy it. And many do. The “*vanilla guy*” is a staple on our streets, and those who have tried his product like it so much they look for him to buy again when their supply goes down.

Paco's full name is **Francisco Bautista García**, and he came here some 40 years ago from the town of Papantla, in the state of Veracruz.

He is a descendant of Totonacs, the ancient people of the region who were there before the Aztecs. The Totonacs are the original cultivators of vanilla, which has been Paco's family's craft for many generations. What exactly is this fragrant liquid that is such a favorite of bakers and pastry makers around the world?

The vanilla plant is an endemic, American orchid with pods filled with aromatic seeds, and the climate of Papantla is ideal for its growth. Paco said he tried growing vanilla in San Miguel, but it did not thrive because the plant needs a tropical or semi-tropical environment, with lots of heat and humidity. The pods are collected while still green, then placed in the sun to dry. Once dry, the seeds are gathered and boiled down until the fragrance and flavor is extracted. A taste gives a hint of sweetness, but Paco says that's natural because no sweeteners, nor alcohol are added. This has been the work of his family, and the ancient tradition of the Totonacs.

Paco comes from a large family, with five sisters and one brother, and many family members still live in Papantla. Almost every month his mother makes the long trek to San



MEET PACO, THE “VANILLA GUY”

Miguel bringing large quantities of vanilla extract, which he then re-packages in small bottles. Sometimes, as this week, she brought toy replicas of the Papantla flyers for sale.

Paco has an 18 year old son who also lives in San Miguel, and works in construction as an apprentice albañil—a brick layer. That was Paco's age was when he, his parents, and an uncle came to San Miguel for the first time in 1982. He decided to stay.

Aside from the manufacture of vanilla, the town of Papantla is famous for a totally different skill—the **Danza de los Voladores**—the dance of the flyers of Papantla.

Part of an ancient Mesoamerican ceremony, it supposedly originated in central Mexico as a ritualistic request for a good crop. The Aztecs believed that the dance was a symbol of their culture. The performance has five male dancers—more acrobats than dancers—who climb a 30 meter pole, from which four of them launch themselves, tied with ropes, and descend to the ground. In the meantime, the fifth remains on top of the pole dancing (without the safety of a rope!), as he plays a flute and a drum. One of Paco's brothers is such a performer in Puerto Vallarta.

During all his decades of living in San Miguel, Paco has seen many changes, but he accepts them, and finds a positive angle.



THE VOLADORES DE PAPANTLA, CARRYING A CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION

He says that his daily route—which he never varies—has led him to meet and befriend many locals and expats. Many of them he considers good friends. He has a permit for his “street business,” and has to pay a monthly fee to the city for the privilege. This fee has, of course, increased over the years, but it is not a prohibitive sum even today.

When asked what he would like the people of San Miguel to know about him, he simply smiled, showing a silver tooth. He is friendly and loves to engage people in conversation, and genuinely proud of the work he does and the service he provides. And, as I pointed out to him, he has created a job which brings him outdoors every single day, it is commerce and exercise all in one swoop.

You can find Paco any day of the week in Centro, but if you need to get in touch, his phone number is 415 100 1157 natalietaylor.org

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Insiders' Fashion

Tale Of A Garment: The History Of The Kaftan

By Isabel Castrejón Pascacio

Flowing, regal and effortlessly chic, the kaftan has endured centuries, continents, and cultural shifts to remain one of fashion's most versatile garments. In 2025, it's not just a beach cover-up or a bohemian staple; the kaftan is a canvas for personal expression, global heritage, and timeless elegance.

The kaftan's origins date back over 2,000 years to Mesopotamia, where it was worn by both men and women. Originally a long tunic with sleeves, the garment was practical for hot climates and adaptable for different classes and professions. The word kaftan means robe and it comes from Persian, and its early iterations were favored by nobility and royalty, due to their long flowing cuts, intricate patterns, and luxurious fabrics. The kaftan served not only as clothing but also as a marker of rank and status.

One of the most richly documented historical uses of the kaftan comes from the Ottoman Empire (14th–20th century), where it became a formal garment worn by sultans and court officials. These kaftans were made from opulent silks, velvets, and brocades. They also were embroidered with gold thread and adorned with patterns indicating political and social rank and custom-made in the Imperial Palace workshops, often gifted as symbols of honor.

The kaftan spread widely across North Africa, where it took on local variations. In Morocco, it became a staple of women's formal wear, particularly during weddings and religious celebrations. Moroccan kaftans are often two-

piece ensembles (kaftan + belt), richly decorated with embroidery, beads, and lace and passed down through generations as heirlooms.

In Algeria, Tunisia, and the Levant, similar long garments (like the djellaba or abaya) carried their own cultural variations, further proving the garment's adaptability and widespread appeal. In West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Senegal, a similar style of flowing robe, often called a boubou, emerged. Though not always linguistically referred to as a kaftan, the aesthetic and function were similar: Made from vibrant, colorful fabrics, worn by both men and women for formal and everyday wear and they signified status, heritage, and celebration. The cross-cultural parallels are striking, showing that long, loose-fitting robes became the favored form across many regions because of both climate and symbolism.

In the mid-20th century, the kaftan broke into Western fashion consciousness. The 1960s and '70s were a defining moment: **Yves Saint Laurent**, inspired by his Algerian roots, famously included kaftans in his collections, turning them into haute couture. Elizabeth Taylor wore kaftans as glamorous loungewear and evening attire, helping to popularize the style in Hollywood. The counterculture and bohemian movements embraced the kaftan as a symbol of exoticism, freedom, and anti-conformity. The kaftan became synonymous with jet-set luxury, worn by the wealthy at seaside villas and by rebels on the streets.

Fast-forward to 2025, and the kaftan continues to be celebrat-

ed for its comfort, elegance, and cultural richness. With growing interest in modest fashion, sustainability, and slow style, it's being re-embraced not just for aesthetics, but for its practicality and inclusivity.

The kaftan stands at the intersection of tradition and reinvention. It's worn as cultural dress for weddings, religious ceremonies, and national holidays. Also, as resort wear, chic, light, and flowing for beach vacations and summer escapes. It can be a fashion statement from high-end runways to sustainable fashion brands. And lastly, it's wildly popular in inclusive clothing, celebrated for its comfort, modesty, and suitability across sizes and genders.

Designers like our beloved **Raul del Castillo** and **Christopher Fallon** are modernizing it with: asymmetrical cuts and gender-fluid styling. Local designer **Gay Estes** from the brand Orisha is making the kaftan a layering piece for streetwear and using recycled fabrics for sustainable appeal. Querétaro based designer **Bukola Biola** from the brand **Talking Body** is using bold digital prints that still appeal to her heritage. The kaftan is also re-emerging as a political and cultural statement. Many wear it today not only for style but to reclaim heritage, resist cultural erasure, and celebrate diasporic identities.



TOP: CROPPED BLACK KAFTAN BY ORISHA. BOTTOM: ORANGE KAFTAN BY TALKING BODY

From Persian palaces to TikTok closets, from Ottoman courts to Cannes carpets, the kaftan's journey is far from over. It represents history, artistry, and adaptability, and it still speaks volumes today. Whether you wear one to honor your roots, make a fashion statement, or just stay cool and comfortable, the kaftan invites us to dress boldly, beautifully, and with meaning.



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US Veterans Medical Services

Now Available In San Miguel de Allende

By Frank "Sugar" Hudson

U.S. Veterans medical services are now available in San Miguel de Allende through the Foreign Medical Program and US Veterans Medical Care in Mexico. US Veterans Medical Care in Mexico is a private medical provider not affiliated with the U.S. Veterans Affairs.

Veterans in the United States typically receive their healthcare through the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system while in the U.S. While the Veterans Affairs operates numerous medical facilities throughout the country, some veterans may need to travel back to the U.S. to access specialized care

or services. However, the Veterans Affairs does provide some options to help veterans access care in Mexico.

Here in San Miguel the services are provided by **SAMA Medical Hospital** through **U.S. Veterans Medical Care** in México.

The Foreign Medical Program is a vital component of the U.S. government's efforts to provide healthcare services.

The Foreign Medical Program serves as a valuable resource for veterans who may face challenges accessing healthcare services in México.

By providing coverage for a wide range of medical services, including doctor visits, hospital

stays, prescription medications, and medical equipment, the Foreign Medical Program ensures that veterans receive the necessary care.

The Foreign Medical Program is available to veterans enrolled in the Veterans Affairs health care system, as well as certain family members and survivors. To be eligible for benefits under the Foreign Medical Program, veterans must have a service-connected disability or be receiving Veterans Affairs disability compensation.

Furthermore, the Foreign Medical Program works in conjunction with the Veterans Affairs to coordinate care for veterans with complex medical needs, ensuring that they receive the appropriate treatment and support. This collaboration helps to streamline the delivery of

healthcare services and improve the overall quality of care for veterans living overseas.

In conclusion, the Foreign Medical Program plays a critical role in supporting American veterans who reside outside the United States. By providing comprehensive medical benefits and access to a network of qualified providers, the Foreign Medical Program helps to ensure that veterans receive the healthcare services they need to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

You may access these services by registering with the U.S. Veterans Care in Mexico which is a private company who bills the Foreign Medical Program for medical services provided at no cost to the veteran or their families.

For more information contact Frank "Sugar" Hudson at 415 167 2029



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San Miguel de Allende Geography

What Makes Our Location So Singular?

By Dr. David Stea

Do you know the geography of San Miguel de Allende? Do you know there exists an upper and lower San Miguel, the upper beginning at the commercial plaza called *La Luciérnaga* (the fire-fly), and the lower flowing down to the *Presa* (the lake)?

From the lower, one highway leads north to San Miguel coming through several small towns and spectacular wineries, entering San Miguel proper, onto one of the two routes connecting lower San Miguel to the upper. Through a road called *el Caracol* (The snail), which is well-named, and about as curvaceous as anything you'd normally want

to negotiate. The two routes from lower to upper San Miguel join at *La Luciérnaga*.

A truly unique and spectacular feature of upper San Miguel is *El Charco del Ingenio*, a lake that is a temporary home to the many birds that migrate in summer and winter. The small lake cascades in to a lagoon in lower San Miguel, at *La Aurora*, a restored old textile mill that houses many wonderful art galleries. San Miguel is north of Mexico's earthquake belt, where the last even slightly serious earthquake occurred a hundred years ago. However, big quakes in Mexico, are often felt in San Miguel with little or no damage. The last really disturbing eruption in our



SAN MIGUEL'S PARTICULAR GEOGRAPHY ALLOWS US TO ENJOY NATURAL MARVELS LIKE LAKES, LAGOONS AND HOT SPRINGS

area was about one hundred years ago and somewhere around 4.8 on the Richter scale. A hundred years ago is a long time, and longer than we need to be worried about right now.

San Miguel has several small volcanoes, of which the largest one, the *Palo Huérfano* is some 2,000 years old, and has been dormant, perhaps even extinct, for thousands of years. Prehistoric source-

es of heat affect the waters, and thus have been created the hot springs of our area, far from the volcanic belt of northern Mexico, which centers, more or less, on Mexico City.

Of the dozens geothermal springs just outside our area, a half-dozen are commercialized. The positive aspects are the geothermal springs are here for us to enjoy.



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Leonard Brooks: Collage

Do Not Miss This Extraordinary Exhibit

By Staff Writer

"The art of Leonard Brooks is undoubtedly one of the pillars of Canadian art inspired by Mexico that has most influenced the latest generations of artists whose lines of creation are based on this bridge which unites our peoples by turns so distinct and so similar... His contribution to the arts in Canada and Mexico is a lesson for all of us who wish to broaden all possible levels of exchange and mutual understanding" - Canadian Ambassador David J.S. Winfield, 1992.

Leonard Brooks was a Canadian artist who lived in San Miguel de Allende from 1947 until shortly after his 100th birthday in 2011. He has been highly acclaimed for his work as an official Canadian

War Artist during the Second World War.

Brooks is well known worldwide as a painter of top caliber who has had numerous solo exhibitions in Palacio Bellas Artes in Mexico City as well as in galleries and museums in Canada and the United States. He is the author of eight books about the art of painting. Over the course of his decades-long career, Brooks's art transitioned from figurative and landscape paintings to abstract works and mixed media collages. This exhibit is a unique opportunity to see his work up close.

The exhibition "Collage" by artist **Leonard Brooks** will be on view from June 11 through October 12, 2025. Free admission.

Centro Cultural El Nigromante
Dr. Hernández Macías 75, Centro,
San Miguel de Allende

Artful Gardens

May In The Garden: Holding Steady In The Heat

By Rob Johnson

As the days grow longer and the heat settles over San Miguel de Allende, May becomes a time of pause and protection in the garden. At **Artful Gardens**, we think of this month as a moment to hold steady—watering wisely, shielding what we've planted, and preparing for the summer's challenges.

This is not the time to plant

It can be tempting to keep adding beauty to your garden, but May is not a safe time to introduce new plants. The soil is already heating up, and without the protection of regular rain or cool nights, transplants often struggle. The golden window for planting ends in April—May is all about maintenance and patience. That said, if you must plant—maybe for a party or a last-minute garden refresh—stick to heat-hardy succulents, agaves, or potted plants you can move into shade during peak sun hours. But better yet, wait. Your future garden will thank you.

Watering is everything

As rainfall becomes more erratic, watering correctly is critical. A deep soak a few times a week is better than a little every day. Early morning or late evening watering helps reduce evaporation and gives roots time to absorb moisture. Consider using mulch—organic mulch like leaf litter, wood chips, or straw—to help retain soil moisture and regulate soil temperature. If your plants are showing signs of stress—wilting, yellowing, or sunburned leaves—it may not just be water. May's intense UV can scorch sensitive species. Provide shade with lightweight

mesh, garden fabric, or even strategically placed clay pots for temporary protection.

Lawn Love: Grubs, Reseeding & Top Treatments

By May, lawns can start to show signs of wear. If you see yellow patches or areas that feel spongy underfoot, you might be dealing with grubs—beetle larvae that feed on roots. Now is the right time to apply an eco-friendly grub treatment before they spread. This is also your window to top-dress sparse lawn areas with a fine compost or soil mix and gently reseed before the summer heat becomes too intense. We recommend early morning watering and keeping foot traffic off treated areas. If you're not sure where to begin, we're happy to assess your lawn and recommend a targeted approach.

Caution in the pots!

May is also a great time to refresh container gardens—replacing spent soil, trimming back roots, or giving your pots a visual update. But a word of caution: our longtime crew member José was just refreshing some large pots in an older courtyard when he got stung by a scorpion tucked into the cool rim of a ceramic planter. He's fine—but it's a good reminder that our local wildlife is very much alive and well in these shady corners. If you're turning over heavy pots, moving rocks, or working around stacked materials, wear gloves and long sleeves. Or better yet—call in the pros.

A look back: May in the old San Miguel

Historically, May was the waiting month—campesinos and home gardeners alike would

tend what they had and wait for the rains to arrive in June. It was a time of faith and patience, when the fields sat still and hopes turned skyward. In the past, families around San Miguel used simple, resourceful practices: ash from the cooking fire would be swept around citrus trees to keep bugs away. Prayers and offerings to San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers, were made in the fields on May 15—asking for rains, abundance, and protection. It's said that elders would also listen to the behavior of ants and birds to predict the timing of the rains. A sudden burst of ant activity or the early arrival of cer-

tain birds was read as nature's quiet forecast. These traditions remind us that gardening isn't just technique—it's also intuition, observation, and rhythm. At Artful Gardens, we always aim to blend this timeless wisdom with modern design.

Whether you need help setting up irrigation, identifying pests, refreshing pots, or just want a seasonal garden update, **Artful Gardens** is here to bring beauty and balance to your outdoor (and indoor!) spaces. We specialize in thoughtful, low-water landscapes that thrive in San Miguel's unique climate—and we always respect the land's history while creating something new.

artfulgardens.mx

ROB JOHNSON AND JHONNY GUTIÉRREZ
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THIS MONTH YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON
MAINTENANCE AND PATIENCE IN THE GARDEN



Insiders' Emerging Artists

Galería Potranca: Art For Today

By Iven Kelley-Dobson

Galería Potranca focuses on emerging artists along with additional artists who have had limited exposure. A wine & cheese reception on Friday of the second and final weekends each month kicks off the weekend featuring new work. In May, on the 9th and 30th, we will be introducing four new artists and their work, with ten artists returning, introducing new work. Among our artists in May you will meet:

Christina Ross: Christina is from the Bay Area of California. Her heart's desire was to be an artist but that was sidelined for a career in business, advertising, tech, and financial services. After career changes and with San Miguel calling, she started her adventures in our wonderful town in 2020 with her trusty dog, Jack, at her side. Initially returning to painting upon landing in San Miguel, the magic of

our town brought Christina an opportunity to pursue another passion: photography. Photography allows her to satisfy her love of simply wandering, observing, and documenting. Christina loves to travel, write, and attend various festivals and celebrations; all which contribute to a broad range of subjects in sharing her experiences.

Rosario: Born in Mexico City and with her father's family from San Miguel de Allende she has known our town all her life. In her years of travel throughout Mexico, she became inspired by the colors, people, and culture and learned to make jewelry along the way, being mostly self-taught. She experiments with various materials and techniques currently focusing on leather, feathers, crystals, and various symbols; all coming together to create more than an accessory but to become an object of power and protection. She also creates shadow boxes - "miracles" of mixed media and found objects. All of her work is a delight to study, seeing the interpretation and expression of her inspiration from her

life's experiences.

Ficus: Ficus came to San Miguel de Allende in 2016 and is originally from Quintana Roo. She expresses her passion for color and mandalas using 100% cotton yarn in vibrant Oaxacan colors in crochet. Ficus creates mandalas on a palm mat, a wooden board, or simply as dreamcatchers. Her work is truly a celebration of color.

Johnnie Boswell: Originally from Houston, she grew up as the child of a professional artist. Being immersed in art since the age of seven, she initially worked in oil and has expanded to include acrylic, ink, pigment powder, fabric, and encaustics. Johnnie has studied with artists in Texas, North Carolina, Florida, Colorado, and Mexico. The fluidity of her work evokes the beauty of nature and landscapes, especially in her new home of Mexico. Johnnie's complex work in mixed media on wood, paper, and plexiglass reveals her perceptions of our world.

Approximately 50% of the artists at Galería Potranca are Mexican, and many could be considered "outsider artists" in that they have not had formal art training but their talent and creativity are natural and read-



FICUS

ily apparent. Other artists have had studied art and techniques (some having art degrees). Our goal at **Galería Potranca** is to give artists a platform to show their work and meet the public, giving them the opportunity to receive feedback and encouragement. You have two opportunities to view new art, meet the artists and enjoy wine & cheese at both events every second and final Friday from 5:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M., and the following Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Galería Potranca is open by appointment, guided by Iven Kelley-Dobson who brings a lifelong career as an entrepreneur in the creative fields of floral, art, and interior design. His work in Galería Potranca is called **FACES**, mixed media sculptures created from found objects.

Galería Potranca Potranca 4, Guadiana 415 117 2923



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Volunteer Works: Choosing Your Cause

How To Find That Perfect Fit

By Danita Brisson

In an ideal world, volunteering entails teaming with like-minded friends who are passionate about a cause that matters to you. The experience is invigorating. Your contribution feels valuable and valued. Given the infinite number of worthy initiatives in humanitarian aid, animal welfare, and the arts, how do you choose where to invest your time?

This month's virtual panel includes **Tina Bueche** of **Fiesta de Vivos y Muertos**, **Michael Friedman** of **Amigos de Animales**, and **Víctor Guzman**, **perennial volunteer**. Their insights are drawn from decades of experiences. The first question they answer is, "Why do you

volunteer?"

Tina: I want to give back to the community. My parents volunteered. I tried many events, like a buffet, and if I liked them, I looked up the organizers and offered to help. You might follow your passion, or you might volunteer to support friends. Before you apply, decide what you want to get from the experience. There are no wrong answers so be self-ish. Organizations have value sets and cultures that may not match yours and some morph over time. A program I volunteered with diverged and no longer met the community's needs. Another volunteer and I founded a new event that did. This year marks its 10th anniversary. If a commitment stops being fun, be honest and step away. Otherwise, it will

show in your efforts.

Words of advice: *Before you give the gift of your time, insist on an interview and ask questions about the organization and the roles available. Be open and honest about your expectations. If they don't know you, they can't help you find the right fit.*

Michael: I like a full life with no downtime. My wife Susan and I shared a pre-existing interest in animal welfare. We were prepared to consider other causes when we moved here but quickly found an organization with a clear mandate that we supported. Start from your background (profession) and try every role until you find one that fits. In our six years with Amigos de Animales, involved in almost everything! Amigos makes cross-connections with many other animal welfare charities and arranges sterilization for their rescues as well. When it's a personal passion, you don't care who gets the credit, as long as the job gets done.

Words of advice: *If you find that an organization isn't a good fit, walk away. Analyze what didn't work then keep looking until you find the right one. It's like with your career; you should love what you're doing and feel as though you're making a difference.*

Víctor: I don't like spare time. I can't just sit at home and do nothing! If you want to volunteer, talk to people in the community to

TINA BUECHE,
MICHAEL FRIEDMAN
AND VÍCTOR GUZMAN



see where there's a need. Find out if there's already an organized charity,

what they do, who they serve and what their mindset is, and if you think you can help out, try it. Otherwise, start a new group. Trust your abilities. You'll know where you should invest your time once you know what drives you. If you are results oriented, don't join an organization with lots of bodies where they meet every week just to talk about what should be done.

Words of advice: *Lots of people are willing to volunteer if someone tells them what to do. Charities need strong leaders and good organizers who can solve problems and work with other groups. Some skills may only be needed briefly to create solutions or set a path. Volunteering your time doesn't take anything away from you. You always get back more than you give.*

In summary, our panelists agree that to find your cause you must first find yourself. Be open to trying something new but honor your core values. Trust in your skills and talents but if they don't fit with a particular organization, move on. It's not a reflection of your value. If you still can't find that perfect nonprofit fit, consider starting one!

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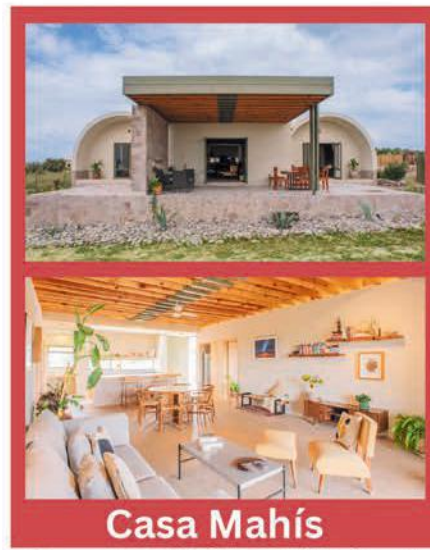
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Book Ends

Art And Crime, A Perfect Mix

By Bill Wilson

"Good writers are good readers."—James Scott Bell, *How to Make a Living as a Writer*

San Miguel de Allende is a town full of creative people. Photographers, writers, artists, sculptors, authors, playwrights, and poets just to name a few. Rarely, though, do you find an accomplished artist and renown author in one person.

Author **Jonathan Santlofer** of New York and frequent San Miguel visitor has a unique palette. It's full of a little oil paint, some pastels, printers ink and a splatter of blood. Art and crime novels are the result of this unique award winning artist-author.

During a recent visit to our city, **Insiders' News** sat down with Santlofer at the home of David Cross in Centro. Cross' wife, the late Caren Cross, produced the award-winning documentary *"Lost and Found in Mexico"*. Santlofer was also a presenter years ago at the annual **San Miguel Writers' Conference**.

He also went to art school with Caren. His first book, *"The Death Artist"* came about after a fire destroyed his art exhibit in Chicago. He has written over 10 published works including anthologies. Currently, on the shelves are *"The Last Mona Lisa"* and *"The Lost Van Gogh."*

Santlofer lives in a loft in Manhattan's Chelsea flower market, in what was formerly a fur vault. *"The neighborhood used to be all flowers and furs. Now it's flowers and hotels! It's a very hectic neighborhood, but the streets are always lined with plants and*

flowers so it's beautiful," he says. While in San Miguel he continued final touches on his latest novel.

"The working title of my current book is "Paradise Lost." I'm not sure if that will stay or the pub date (as I have yet to hand it in, but soon). It's going to have some illustrations, which I am just starting now. I'm also working on the third Luke and Alex book (recurring characters), tentatively titled "Blue Marilyn" (another art mystery) but that title will probably change," he notes.

What books does he read? *"I read a lot of books for research when I'm writing. For my last book, "The Lost Van Gogh" I read "Van Gogh: The Life," an almost 1,000 page biography of Van Gogh by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, which is everything you ever wanted to know about the artist and it's spectacular."*

What draws Santlofer to our city? *"There is so much I like about San Miguel, its beauty, the soft light, the pace of living, all so different from NYC."*

Bookstore News

Aurora Books Has a New Director! **The San Miguel Literary Sala** has announced that **Mary Molinaro** is the new director of Aurora Books. She has a master's degree in library science and served for many years on the University of Kentucky library faculty. She also brings her experience as a member of the **San Miguel Writers' Conference** executive committee and director of the bookstore at the recent Writers' Conference. Find



JONATHAN SANTLOFER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
CLARKE TOLTON

them at Calzada de la Aurora 48-A.

Reading Tips

Did you know that in addition to Amazon's Kindle reader you can read your Amazon e-books on an iPad via the iOS app of Kindle? Apple Books is another source of reading material.

Book Notes

There are quite a few online resources for readers to check out new releases, free eBooks, or a particular genre.

Here are some that have email newsletters or websites: BookBub, The Fussy Librarian, New York Review of Books, Literary Hub, New York Times Book Review and various publishers and booksellers.

Local Authors

Read Canadian-American author **Ellen Ackerman's** *"Shirley's Story. A Life of Finesse."* A memoir of her WWII WAVE mother.



MARY MOLINARO, THE NEW
DIRECTOR OF AURORA BOOKS

Jesús Ibarra, noted San Miguel journalist and author, has an English translation of his tome of our town's history expected out this summer.

And frequent visitor to San Miguel, **Robert Reich** has an upcoming book (this summer) *"Coming Up Short. A Memoir of My America."*

Bill Wilson, 20-year San Miguel resident has a journalism career spanning 50 years covering everything the UN to Cub Scout news. He's also a weather buff and been a first responder.

A Hint of Anxiety?

Hit The Spa

By Staff Writer

Be it biological issues, medical conditions, psychological, social or lifestyle factors – the fact is, sometimes we ‘feel’ anxiety in our body, oftentimes centered in and around our chest. If you are feeling a hint of anxiety, a spa visit can have beneficial effects.

Consider that various types of massages, such as Swedish, deep tissue, or aromatherapy massage, can help relieve muscle tension, improve circulation, and promote relaxation, relieving stress and muscle discomfort, often putting you into a state of deep calm, so necessary to release necessary dopamine and serotonin back into your

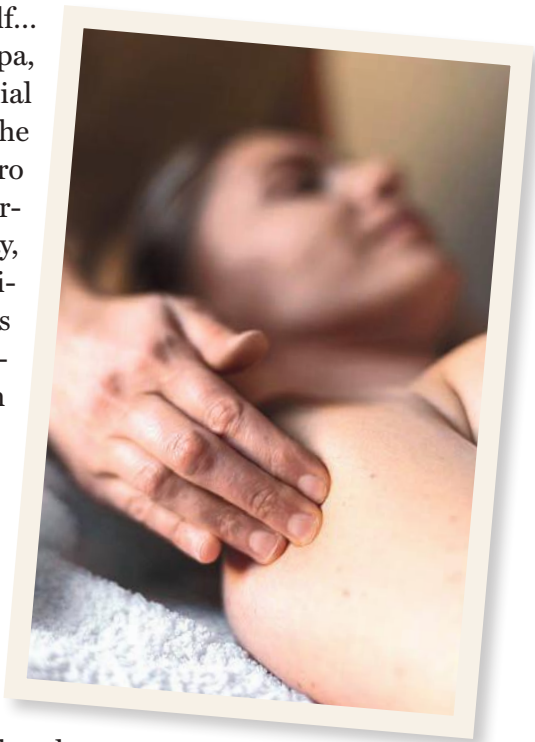
system – which stress virtually obliterates.

Also, Aromatherapy reduces stress caused by anxiety by using essential oils from plants to enhance physical and emotional health. Aromatherapy can be incorporated into massages or used in diffusers for a calming environment. Especially popular at The Spa is the Antioxidant Chocolate Treatment – just the word ‘chocolate’ stars relieving stress and associated anxiety.

When experiencing anxiety, it can be hard to consider that an hour to two hours away from your home or work routines and responsibilities could be the necessary action of caring for yourself front and center, which alone causes some people

anxiety – putting yourself... front and center. The Spa, situated in an old colonial building just outside of the hustle and bustle of Centro could be calling you during the hot month of May, with the heat alone possibly raising anxiety levels as how to go about staying cool and centered in San Miguel.

When you choose your treatments at **The Spa**, know that a portion of your payment goes to support **So Others May Eat, SOME**, feeding some of the most elderly and needy people who we often see sitting on the street curbs with hands out - they need a break too with **SOME**. In a real way, your treatment for hot weather skin and body care helps provide that nourishment for others.



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Real Estate Curious?

The Real Estate Purchase Process

By Erwit Reichert

How, When, Who, and What's Next?

Once you've found your dream home...

Your agent will draft an **Offer to Buy**. This document includes the proposed purchase price, payment structure (including the down payment—typically 10% of the total price), the terms of the agreement, and any contingencies. It also sets a proposed closing date.

In México, an **Offer to Buy** is a legally binding agreement, enforceable by either party.

From Offer to Contract

Once negotiations are complete and both parties have signed the Offer to Buy, your agent or broker will prepare the **Buy-Sell Contract**.

If you're a foreigner purchasing property in Mexico, you'll need a special permit from the Mexican Ministry of Interior (SEGOB), processed via the Ministry of Foreign Relations (SRE). This permit costs approximately \$400 USD per person and is required to appear as "The Buyer" on the Title Deed.

At this stage, the buyer must make a deposit—typically 10% of the purchase price—using one of the following methods:

- a. Cashier's check made payable to the seller and held in trust by the seller's agent until closing,
- b. Direct wire transfer,
- c. Escrow account.

An inventory list outlining all items included in the sale

should be attached as Exhibit A or Addendum A to the contract.

Property Inspection (Recommended)

While not standard practice in Mexico, we strongly recommend a property inspection to evaluate the structure, electrical systems, and plumbing—this can help avoid unexpected issues.

Closing the Deal

The closing must be conducted in the presence of a **Notario Público**, where the buyer, seller, or their legal representatives (POAs) sign the **Escritura** (Title Deed). The buyer is responsible for all closing costs—excluding any Capital Gains Tax—which typically range from 4% to 6% of the purchase price, not including the cost of the SRE permits.

The **Notario** will handle the following:

- Professional appraisal of the property
- Title search (up to 10 years back) to confirm the absence of liens
- Get your SREs.
- Issuance of preventive and definitive notices to the Public Property Registry
- Drafting and signing of the deed
- Retention and payment of taxes to the government on behalf of both parties

Once the deed is signed and payment is confirmed (or the Escrow Account is activated), the Notario will proceed with official registration at the Public Registry.



FROM COLONIAL TO CONTEMPORARY AVAILABLE THROUGH FENTON & FAY, SAN MIGUEL REALTY

The new owner can expect the first testimony of the registered deed within approximately six weeks. The original deed always remains on file with the Notario.

A Word of Caution on Ejido Land

Please do not attempt to buy rural (ejido) land without the guidance of a qualified real estate professional. While it is possible and legal, this process is more complex and carries unique risks.

Final Tip

Always work with a licensed Realtor when buying or selling property in Mexico.

Enjoy the journey—and welcome home!

Erwit Reichert, Broker, San Miguel Properties and current Vice President of AMPI (Professional Association Of Realtors)
San Miguel de Allende
415 153 5255

www.sanmiguelproperties.mx



San Miguel Taste

Paellas & Pitas At Zaki's Refreshed Menu

By Amy G. Rothlin

Find **Zaki's** just half a block from the Jardín at Jesús 5. While you may recall this place as the Spanish eatery Aquí Castilla, the same ownership has thoughtfully evolved the concept. **Zaki's** retains Spanish classics but now invites diners to try an expanded menu offering to explore a broader spectrum of Mediterranean plates.

The warm hospitality is immediately apparent. Upon arrival, guests are often welcomed by the attentive host, David, setting the stage for a pleasant dining experience. The service, exemplified by friendly staff like Ale, made us feel well-cared for throughout our meal. If the weather is nice, we recommend grabbing a terrace seat to enjoy beautiful Parroquia views! Guiding the kitchen is **Chef Miguel Quintanilla**, whose culinary background includes experience with prestigious names like Vidanta and Cirque du Soleil hotels in the Riviera Maya.

For those visiting **Zaki's**, sharing plates is an excellent way to savor the variety. We recommend starters like the savory *Chistorra Catalana al Jerez* complemented by *Padrón* peppers, fig mustard, and sheep cheese. For something cool the Arab platter delivers, we especially enjoyed the *Tzatziki* playfully named '*Tzatzakis*'. Yet, our favorite remains the Mixed *Paella*, with the perfect balance of tender rice and flavorful toppings, which was the perfect match for a chilled *Verdejo*. Leave space for the finale: a slice of Miguel's signature *Baklava Cheesecake*, offering layers of texture and sweet delight.

Experience **Zaki's** from Tuesday to Saturday from 1:00 pm to 10:00 pm and Sundays from 12:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

If you wish to invite the San Miguel Taste Insiders Team to visit your place, please contact Amy: amy.grothlin@gmail.com and follow on Instagram [@sanmiguel taste](https://www.instagram.com/sanmiguel taste)



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Through My Lens

Zen And Street Photography

By Bill Wilson

Photos by Jerry Rife

Jerry Rife, undoubtedly the dean of street photographers in San Miguel, has an interesting take on photography.

He calls it **"Zen and the Art of Street Photography."**

Jerry wanted to be a reporter. He worked on the university's daily newspaper and liked photography. A professor recommended him as a wirephoto operator at the San Diego Union-Tribune. Shortly, he was offered a job as a staff photographer. He thought he would stay for two years - which became 40.

Photographers are jacks-of all trades. They cover everything from crime to fashion to royalty.

"I have photographed the emperor of Japan, the queen of England and more presidents than you can shake a stick at. I've been tear-gassed by cops and threatened by criminals. It has been a helluva adventure," notes Rife who has been a frequent visitor here since 1985 and fulltime in 2006.

He continues, *"Although royalty, world leaders and celebrities passed before the camera, I prefer the common people and the life of the street."*

Rife says there are no better streets than our streets to practice his craft. *"The primordial cobblestones of San Miguel de Allende absorb my attention when I set out to take pictures. Spewed from the earth eons ago, they emit an energy that envelopes our town. I do a walking meditation as I pass over the stones. I try to let myself go, to release ego."*

His guidelines: Letting go of self, the street flows in to fill the vacuum. Life is a river. The river flows around and through me.

Don't look for pictures. They appear of their own volition.

Don't manipulate the subject. Just witness.

Don't engage. Allow reality to unfold without getting involved with it.

He concludes, *"There is a paradox here. It seems as if the photographer is distancing themselves from the subject. Yet in this moment one can feel a profound connection, a commonality with existence. The photographer is a connection between subject and viewer. All is one."*

"The language of photography is the language of the hunt, load the camera, we shoot the picture and capture the scene."

FROM TOP TO
BOTTOM:
"ENCOURAGEMENT"
"HAVE DRUM WILL
TRAVEL" "BAR SAN
MIGUEL", ALL BY
JERRY RIFE





Dry Composting Toilets: A Sustainable Sanitation Solution

By Aundria McMillan Humphrey

Access to clean water and proper sanitation remains a pressing challenge for many rural communities. **The Rotary Club of San Miguel de Allende – Midday, in partnership with CEDESA**, has been at the forefront of implementing sustainable sanitation solutions through the construction of dry composting toilets. These systems offer a practical, water-conserving, and eco-friendly alternative to traditional sewage and septic systems, bringing dignity, hygiene, and environmental benefits to families in need.

Carla Cadena is the Project Team Leader for the **Dry Composting Toilets**. She has been involved with this project since 2018.

How Dry Composting Toilets Work

Unlike conventional flush toilets, dry composting toilets function through separate chambers that independently process solid and liquid waste. Solid waste is covered with a drying mixture—comprising dry soil, leaves, sawdust, ash, and lime—which aids in decomposition and prevents odors. Meanwhile, liquid waste is diluted and can be used as a nutrient-rich liquid fertilizer. This system eliminates the need for water in waste disposal, conserving an estimated 13 to 20 liters per flush—a crucial advantage for communities where water is scarce, contaminated, or nonexistent.

Water scarcity is an ongoing issue in San Miguel, with 82% of the groundwater being allocated to agriculture. By providing dry composting toilets, families gain access to safe, private, and dignified sanitation, while also ad-

ressing the larger issue of dwindling water sources.

Additional Benefits Over Traditional Systems

- **Zero Water Consumption:** Eliminates the need for water in waste disposal, reducing strain on limited resources.
- **Prevents Water Contamination:** Processing waste separately eliminates the risk of contaminating groundwater.
- **Production of Organic Fertilizer:** The system creates nutrient-rich compost that supports agricultural activities and combats food scarcity.
- **Minimal Maintenance Costs:** Upkeep is inexpensive and manageable for families.
- **Odor-Free and Hygienic:** The separation of liquid and solid waste prevents anaerobic decomposition, eliminating foul odors.
- **Reduction of Disease-Carrying Pests:** Properly maintained dry toilets deter flies, mosquitoes, and other disease carriers.

Overall, the implementation of these toilets results in improved public health, enhanced agricultural productivity, and sustainable waste management.

Overcoming Cultural and Logistical Challenges

When first introduced, many individuals had doubts, primarily due to unfamiliarity with the system. However, once they understood the benefits and witnessed the success of others, acceptance increased. Rotary Club and CEDESA actively engaged in educational initiatives, demonstrating how the system works and showcasing families who have seamlessly integrated dry composting toilets

into their daily lives.

Enhancing Soil Health and Agricultural Sustainability

One of the most significant advantages of composting human waste is its positive impact on soil health. To ensure proper composting, key conditions must be maintained:

- **Temperature:** The compost chamber should remain above 68°F (20°C) for effective decomposition.
- **Humidity:** Optimal moisture levels (45%–70%) prevent odors and facilitate composting.
- **pH Balance:** Maintaining alkalinity (pH above 9) with carbon-rich materials ensures high-quality organic matter.
- **Proper Ventilation:** Adequate airflow is necessary to prevent excess moisture and accelerate decomposition.
- **Sufficient Time:** The composting process requires at least six months to produce safe, nutrient-rich compost.

When these conditions are met, the final compost product is non-toxic and highly beneficial for farming, promoting sustainable agriculture while reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers.

Maintenance and User Training

Ensuring proper maintenance is vital for the continued success of dry composting toilets. Families are trained by promoters and monitoring committees on:

- Using the drying mixture after each use.
- Keeping the toilet closed to prevent insect infestations.
- Rotating between composting chambers, allowing waste to decompose fully.

To reinforce these practices, monitoring committees conduct six periodic visits to each household, providing guidance, inspections, and reminders.



CUTTING THE RIBBON ON
A NEW COMPOSTING TOILET

Growing Adoption and Community Impact

Following the pilot project, demand for dry composting toilets surged, prompting the Rotary Club of San Miguel de Allende – Midday to apply for a global grant from The Rotary Foundation. As a result, more families have actively engaged with CEDESA to build their own sanitation systems with Rotary funding. Since 2018, over \$300,000 USD has been invested through global grants, supporting the construction, education, training, and monitoring of approximately 200 dry composting toilets.

Future Expansion and Sustainability

Given the program's success, the Rotary Club anticipates submitting additional grant applications to expand the initiative. The long-term goal is to ensure that more families in rural communities gain access to sustainable sanitation solutions, improving health, water conservation, and agricultural sustainability. Through education, community involvement, and continued investment, the Rotary Club is empowering rural families to embrace sustainable, dignified, and ecologically responsible sanitation practices.

Aundria McMillan Humphrey
www.slowdowngranny.com



Expat Lifestyle

The Art Of Third Chapter Living: Expats Crossing Cultures

By Doreen Cumberford

When we packed our belongings and bid farewell to familiar shores, many of us embarked on more than a geographical relocation—we began a profound re-invention of ourselves. For those of us who've chosen to spend our "third chapter" abroad, is it possible that this adventure represents perhaps our most meaningful work yet?

Far from the traditional concept of retirement as a withdrawal, we expats find ourselves engaged in a different sort of productivity. Our days are filled with the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural living, a vocation that doesn't appear on any CV but shapes us more profoundly than many careers ever could.

By accident, and rarely by design, we become, unofficial ambassadors. In the queue at the local market, we can innocently find ourselves fielding questions about our homeland's politics or explaining cultural quirks on the streets. Simultaneously, those video calls with family back home become gentle educational sessions about our adopted country's approach to healthcare, community, or the concept of time.

"Why do the British apologize for everything?" asks one of our new friends with genuine curiosity. Later that same day, we found ourselves explaining to friends back home why three-hour lunches are most definitely not a lazy habit, but rather are a celebration of life's proper priorities, and mental health cornerstones. These micro moments of translation—not just of language but of cultural perspec-

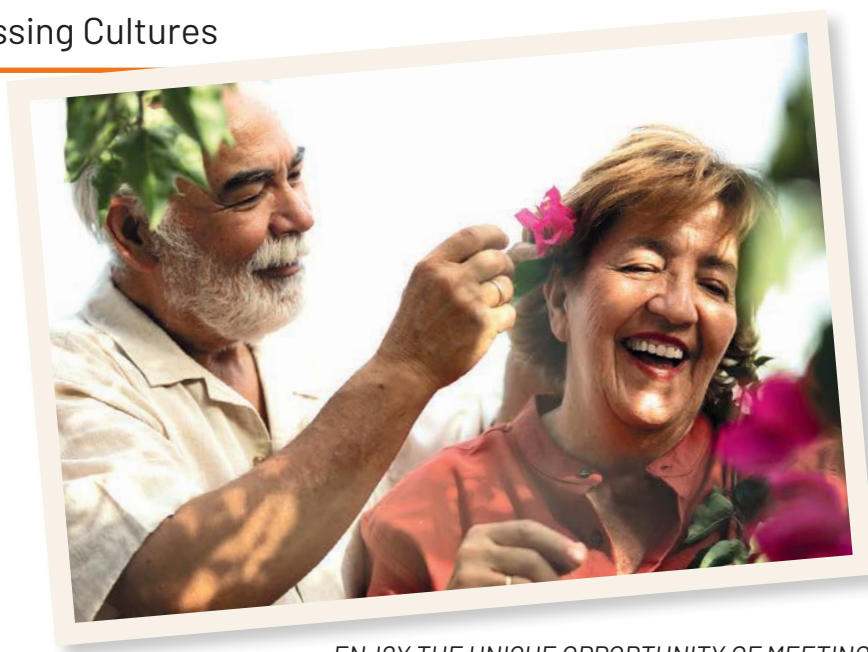
tive—create invisible bridges between worlds.

Nothing strips away one's pretensions quite like attempting to explain a medical condition in a language you've only partially mastered, or realizing you've been mispronouncing the name of your street for six months. Each blunder becomes a lesson in humility and a chance to demonstrate that most valuable of skills: laughing at oneself.

Many of us spent decades in professions where expertise was expected and competence assumed. Now we willingly place ourselves in situations as perpetual beginners where we are finding a new identity. Yes, there is a very curious liberation in this—a reminder that growth requires vulnerability. The dignity we once found in professional mastery, we now discover in the grace with which we handle our inevitable and constant mistakes.

It's no accident that sports like pickleball have become an unofficial pastime of expat communities worldwide. On these courts, we forge friendships that transcend language barriers. Between rallies, we exchange recommendations for plumbers, doctors, and the best local restaurants. Information becomes our currency, and those who can navigate both worlds become valued community resources.

And isn't there something wonderful about a game that's accessible to aging bodies yet offers endless scope for improvement? Like our expatriate journey itself, pickleball rewards patience, adaptability, and the willingness to learn new rules.



ENJOY THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF MEETING PEOPLE, LEARNING TRADITIONS AND CREATE GREAT MEMORIES

I like to call ourselves "rewired" rather than "retired" because it perfectly captures our experience and how can we retire when we are not "tired"? We haven't disconnected—we've simply rerouted our energies and attention. Many of us find deep purpose and satisfaction by volunteering, mentoring local students in English, or applying professional skills to community challenges. Others discover latent artistic talents that our busy careers never permitted.

This rewiring extends to our neural pathways as well. Research consistently demonstrates that learning new languages, navigating unfamiliar environments, and building fresh social networks provides tremendous cognitive benefits. Our brains, like our perspectives, remain wonderfully plastic. Perhaps most valuably, we become living examples that re-invention is possible at any age. By transplanting ourselves into new soil, we demonstrate that curiosity needn't diminish with time. We discover that comfort zones, while pleasant, are rarely where growth happens.

We become collectors of human stories and keepers of perspective. Having witnessed different approaches to life's universal challenges, we can offer gentle reminders that there's rarely just one "correct" way to live. Expanding our vision is perhaps our greatest contribution—both to our adopted communities and to friends and family observing our journey from afar.

So, while our business cards may no longer list impressive titles, make no mistake—we're still working. Building bridges, fostering understanding, and perhaps, in our small way, making our interconnected world slightly more compassionate and considerably more interesting.

The salary is rubbish, the benefits unparalleled, and the position open to all who dare to apply!

Doreen Cumberford, author of *"Life in the Camel Lane: Embrace the Adventure"* and *"Arriving Well,"* currently writing *"Unsettled: When Home Doesn't Feel Like Home,"* a guide to repatriation after living abroad and host of *"Nomadic Diaries Podcast."*

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Hi México: Let's Talk!

Mothers Day & Phrases About Mother!

By Francisco J. Báez

Every year around May, I don't have to think much before I'm able to bring back the memory of that sweet old woman passionately running to the door I just knocked on with opened arms to lift me up in her arms with a swirling hug and a tender smooch. Oh boy, do I remember her smile. She'd be all smiles because she knew I'd invite her to the "Día de las Madres" celebration.

Her resilience reminds me of "La Abuelita de México", an actress whose name was Doña Sara García, a tough-love lady, and a tender figure due to her many roles as a grandmother in most movies she appeared in.

But all that love and affection from my charming "abuelita" wouldn't come without sweat and pain. Why? Because for the most part, as a young elementary school pupil, you know schools have to plan for "the big day". For me and my peers that meant starting rehearsals sometime right after March 21st (Spring season and former president Benito Juárez's celebrations). So, we'd prepare for a typical Mother's day Mexican Folk Dance Show, and to top it off we'd prepare a nice wooden handcraft as a gift.

To go with this first part of the celebration, and since each of us had the best mom in the world "madrecita solo hay una" (there's only one mother), the Mexican-indecent-expressions that show surprise, admiration, satisfaction, promise and hope are: *iMadres!* (Whoa!), *iEn la madre!* *iPa'su madre!* (Holy smokes!), *iEstá a toda*

madre! *iA Todísima Madre!* *iEstá de poca madre!* (it's stunning, impressive, formidable!), *iNo tiene madre!* (It's second to none), *iTe lo juro por mi madre!*, *iPor mi madrecita santa!* (I promise by my—holy—mother), and *iHagámos esa madre!* (Let's just do that!)

And that's how you go from loving to hating a date which used to be "a very private acknowledgment of all our mothers do for the family and the matchless service they render to humanity". Mrs. Ann Reeves Jarvis and eventually her daughter Anna Maria never imagined how commercialized this would become. That's how all these hullabaloo became many people's worst nightmare.

Then, our colloquial—vulgar—expressions that show fatigue, caos, disappointment, unbelief, fear, and displeasure are: *iQué poca madre tienes!* (Shame on you!), *iNo tienes madre!* (I'll disown you!), *iVales pa'pura madre!* (You're not worth it!), *iYa valió madre(s)!* (This was not worth it!), *iQué desmadre!* (Shucks!), *iEstoy hasta la madre!* (I'm fed up), *iSigues molestando con esa madre!* (Why do you insist? Cut it out!), *iNo me tocó ni madres!* (I've got nothing!), *¿Qué madres se está creyendo?* (Who does he think he is?), *¿Qué pasa si jala esta madre?* (What if this works?), *iNo te creo ni madres!* (I don't believe you!), *¿Qué tendrá esta madre?* (Why is this not working?), *¿Qué es esa madre?* (now, What is that?), *¿Cómo funcio-*



THERE IS NOTHING LIKE THE AMOR OF A MADRE MEXICANA

na esta madre? (How does this work?), *iAy madrecita santa!* (Holy smokes!), *iNo veo ni madres!* (I can't see a thing!), *¿Dónde dejé esa madre?* (Where did I leave that?), *iLe da en la madre a todo lo que toca!* (He's a klutz!), *iEsto huele a madres!* (This stinks!), *iEsto sabe a madres!* (This is disgusting!), *iTrágate estas madres!* (eat your veggies!)

But... down in Mexico it didn't go too well either as the initiative to celebrate it was not exactly celebratory but a measure to counteract the feminist measures taken by a Yucatán politician, Felipe Carrillo Puerto.

The culprit this time was a journalist named Rafael Alducin Bedoya, owner and founder of Excelsior, one of the most important and traditional daily newspapers in Mexico City, who, on April 13th, 1922 published a front page invitation to celebrate Mother's Day, an initiative that was well received by the public and echoed by other newspapers, the Catholic

church, as well as by the former Secretary of Public Education; José Vasconcelos, who commissioned teachers nationwide to promote it.

This time around momma's had it, and she's ready to let it all out. The choices for rage, curse, and profane insult are: *iNi madres!* (No way!), *iMe vale madres!* (I couldn't care less!), *iMe lleva la madre!* (I'll be damned!), *iLa madre que te parió!* (I'm not your mother anymore!), *iTe voy a romper la madre!* (I'll break your every bone!), *iMe van a dar en la madre!* *iMe van a partir la madre!* (You're killing me!).

Please don't tell mom I taught you all these!

Francisco J. Báez is 'The Immersion Guy' from Hi-México! English & Spanish Programs by Voluntary-fee Accelerated English for your House's staff and Mastering Spanish Sounds for English Speakers: fastrack2english@gmail.com 0Whatsapp 415 111 7193

Insiders' Art Profiles:

A Diabolical Passion For Creating

By Pascual Hijuelos

Artists in general possess a diabolical passion for creating. It is ingrained in their psyche regardless of the discipline be it dance, writing, the visual arts or music. It is a compulsive need to create, and without it many would probably vaporize. San Miguel has many individuals who are not artists but have this quality.

Ernesto Pérez is a fascinating example of someone who, despite not identifying as an artist in the traditional sense, possesses that passion for creation. For years Ernesto has gotten up at 4:00 every morning and gone to his rooftop studio where he proceeds to methodically apply paint dots using toothpicks to everyday objects, transforming them into beautiful works of art using overall patterns and color.

This process is not unique. The Persians established the all over geometric design in the 7th and 8th centuries, making it a defining feature in Islamic art. More recently Larry Poons in the 1970s and 80s, explored dot paintings as part of his artistic evolution. In the early 21st century, Damien Hirst produced his own series of dot paintings and today, Yayoi Kusama dominates the art world with her iconic dot motifs.

In a recent interview with Ernesto I asked him several questions regarding his work.

PH: Why dots?

EP: Two reasons: I can't draw; and it's about the colors - I love the contrasts, the colliding, there's a point in combining colors where there is a "pop" - a

vibrant energy just happens that is so exciting.

PH: In what way are they like you?

EP: I don't know; I've never thought about that. As a Mexican born in "Occupied Mexico" (i.e., California) Facundo Cabral's song, "*No soy de aquí ni soy de allá*" resonates in me. So, my sense of being lost in a world of confusion, being from neither here nor there, are central to my sense of self. In that way, my dots on dots evoke that sense while at the same time sharing a universe that is infinite.

PH: In what way is the process like you?

EP: I've never thought about "process". Firstly, it begins with the material I'm painting - I do chairs, spoons, a couple of tables, bed head boards, clay hearts, a couple of pieces of clothing (shirts and vests), canes - almost all wood and all made in Mexico. I consider my work to be an homage to Mexico so it's not about me; it's about waiting for the shapes of wood to tell me what base colors to start with - I mostly like rich deep colors (black, dark blue, reds, dark greens) although I sometimes will start with yellows, oranges, lavender or lime green. Then, I start dotting; looking for contrasting colors that make the bases "pop." I do the dots with toothpicks and sawed-off paint brush handles. I just go until there's no available space. I love putting dots within dots - usually 4 to 6 different layers on any space. With this multi-layered effect and using more than 50 colors a physicist friend once told me that I have about 25 million combinations so I never

worry about redundancy or similarities.

PH: What rewards do you reap?

EP: I recently woke up at around 2:30 a.m. and said to Patrice, "*I must love painting. Why else would I get up at ungodly hours every day to paint?*" My first reward is Patrice's praise. Her praise assures me that I'm doing something worthwhile. My second reward is giving away baby chairs to Mexican families. I have given away 29 to date and my goal is 50. I have jokingly asked Patrice that if I die first and she has a memorial I would love for her to invite the 50 families and ask them to bring the chairs. The final reward is that my work feels like a good expression of my life - it celebrates the color and life of a country that I've chosen to return to, expressing my gratitude and admiration for Mexico in a nonverbal and appropriate manner without words because I have none.

PH: Is there an end in sight?

EP: No. One of the most powerful realizations I've had is that in my painting the concept of "finishing" is ridiculous.

Contact Ernesto through Abrazos on Zacateros 24, SanMiguelDesigns.com ErnestoOnTheRoad@yahoo.com

Cuban-American Pascual Hijuelos now divides his time between San Miguel de Allende, which has been his home for over twenty years, and New York City. pascualhijuelos.art



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CULTURAL EVENTS IN LA BIBLIOTECA MAYO

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TUES 9 | 6:00 pm

Entropy
R&B Jazz
\$330 pesos 10% cash discount

CHARLAS

SAB 3 | 1:00 pm

Seminario de Literatura
Escritor Antonio Ramos Revillas
Entrada libre

SAB 31 | 1:00 pm

Seminario de Literatura
Escritor Alberto Ruy Sánchez
Entrada libre

CINEMA

WED 7 | 1:00 pm

Political Series:
Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat
Dir. Johan Grimontprez
English Subs.
\$133 pesos 10% cash discount

THURS 8 | 5:00 pm

A Movie to Cool Down:
Nostalgia
Dir. Andrei Tarkovsky
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WED 14 | 1:00 pm

Political Series:
Three Days of the condor
Dir. Sydney Pollack
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THURS 15 | 5:00 pm

A Movie to Cool Down:
Esto no es una película
Dir. Jafar Panahi
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WED 21 | 1:00 pm

Political Series:
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Dir. Almuneda Carracedo
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THURS 28 | 1:00 pm

A Movie to Cool Down:
20,000 days on Earth
Dir. Iain Forsyth, Jane Pollard
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WED 28 | 1:00 pm

Political Series:
Lincoln
Dir. Steven Spielberg
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THURS 29 | 1:00 pm

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Under the Skin
Dir. Jonathan Glazer
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The Insiders' News Crossword

Test Your Abiities And Have Some Fun

ACROSS

- 1. Building additions
- 5. Tiny leaf pore
- 10. Beat but good, in Dixie
- 14. "Bye," in Bologna
- 15. Saturn's largest moon, or a mythical giant
- 16. Make less difficult
- 17. A modern convenience
- 20. Burger topper
- 21. Nikes and Reeboks
- 22. "Cut it out!"
- 25. 100%
- 26. Sports rep.
- 29. Breaking a mirror, some say
- 31. ____-Lorraine (area in northeast France)
- 36. "Fascism is ____ told by bul-lies": Hemingway
- 38. Modernists, for short
- 40. Lubricated
- 41. Red __, popular rock/rap/funk group
- 44. "Don't Cry for Me Argenti-na" musical
- 45. Mmes. in Mexico
- 46. Fill to the gills
- 47. Old Chrysler division named after a conquistador
- 49. Those, in San Miguel
- 51. Internet access inits.
- 52. Some two-door Audi models
- 54. Personal bearing
- 56. Liquidation sale
- 61. Bird on the Mexican flag
- 65. What you get if you pour boiling water down a rabbit hole
- 68. Official records
- 69. Expire, as a subscription
- 70. Med. sch. subject
- 71. Horn honk
- 72. Happen next
- 73. Out of danger

DOWN

- 1. Canyon sound effect
- 2. King of the jungle
- 3. Notes between sol and do
- 4. Philanthropist and billionaire George
- 5. RR stop
- 6. "Cat on a Hot ____ Roof"
- 7. "King of Soul" Redding
- 8. Food for the wandering Israelites
- 9. Actress Bassett
- 10. Feeble
- 11. Detest
- 12. Person with a log-in
- 13. Hiring dept.
- 18. "Once more ____ the breach"
- 19. Punch hard
- 23. Prefix meaning "all"
- 24. Prepares to eat an orange
- 26. Reacted to fireworks, maybe
- 27. Shortstop's catcher
- 28. South American monkeys
- 30. Bête ____
- 32. Tentative tastes
- 33. Go over like ____ balloon
- 34. Classic breath mint
- 35. Famous Ford flop
- 37. Prefix with -plasm
- 39. Muscle twitch
- 42. Carroll's mad tea drinker
- 43. Morales of "Ozark" Peter
- 48. "Lawrence of Arabia" star
- 50. Witnessed
- 53. Sarandon of "Dead Man Walking"
- 55. Grannies
- 56. Casual conversation
- 57. Bonkers
- 58. Eight, in Italian
- 59. "Shoo-be-doo," or just "Shoo!"
- 60. Small recipe amts.

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65								66	67					
68					69						70			
71					72						73			

62. '50s and '60s film star

San Miguel
- Lollobrigida

66. Sch. in Idaho's capital
63. Fall faller

67. Driver's one-eighty, slangily
64. Where the sun rises in

ABOUT OUR PUZZLER **Sheridan Sansegundo** was born in Eng-land, lived in Spain for many years, mainly on the island of Ibiza, and moved to eastern Long Island, N.Y. in 1980, where she was the arts editor, restaurant critic, and cruciverbalist (a person who creates or solves crossword puzzles) for The East Hampton Star for 20 years. She settled fulltime in San Miguel in 2007.

We are happy to share her crossword talent with **Insiders' News** players. **Find answers at insidersnews.net (after you are finished with your puzzle, please!).**

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