

## Newsletter

Issue : 17

Well, another summer is over on the Costa de la Luz. The weather was changeable to say the least and tourism stayed a bit flat again this year. I think it is a tail end effect from the recession. Nobody had money to go on holiday last year but with more people back in employment this year, they either do not have holidays to take or are afraid to ask in case their chair has been filled when they get back! I suspect next year will be different with forward bookings already looking good.

Good news though, the property buyers kept coming through the summer and we saw a lot of competition for some properties and that will help to start the prices rising. The banks are being a bit more user friendly regards mortgages and the desire to buy in Spain has certainly increased this year from all parts of the world. Likewise, long term rental has been excellent with a lot of try before you buyers coming to see what the Costa de la Luz is all about and quite a few new business owners setting up their stalls so that will generate work and income.

In this issue we have a great money market update from my old friend James Baxter at Foremost Currencies.. Also an interesting article about Bullfighting entitled, A Noble Art or Base Lust for Blood We have an article on the Spanish economy and also an update on the Ley Mordaza (the gagging law). Finally, it is my pleasure to have secured an interview with Pedro Ramirez of the Ceramica Ramirez. A truly fabulous artisan pottery on the old Conil de la Frontera road. Great to see family businesses doing well.

Hope you enjoy this edition and our Christmas edition will be out on 1 December 2015.

*Lesley McEwan, MD, Cadizcasa*

### STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS

The “driving in flip flops” dilemma has finally been sorted out by the traffic authorities. There has been much rumour and press coverage that driving in flip flops is illegal. Safety experts have advised not to wear flip flops as they can become trapped in the pedals or slip off leading to momentary lack of control and a possible accident. Likewise, driving in your baries is not recommended.

Although not technically illegal, if a policeman considers your foot attire not to be suitable for driving, he can fine you up to 200 euros. The responsibility would then fall to the driver to prove that the officer was incorrect and their footwear did not pose a risk.

### THE PATIENT IS AWAKE AND WE FEEL CONFIDENT THERE WILL BE A FULL RECOVERY

For many years the patient was in intensive care. We were all warned that the condition may be terminal and we should not expect too much. If there was a recovery, it would be slow and painful and what we would be left with at the end, nobody could predict. That has been Spain for the past 8 years. A critically ill patient with an indeterminable future. Now, the patient is sitting up in bed and we feel confident there will be a full recovery. How can we be so sure, well, you always judge the recovery of any country from recession by the confidence shown by those outside the country to start to invest in it. After a long period of recession, recovery can only come from within to a certain degree. Getting things up and moving more quickly requires an injection of foreign confidence and foreign cash.

What we know for sure is that foreign investors are snapping up shares in Spanish companies. In fact the pundits tell us that 43% of Spanish shares are now under overseas control. That shows a massive commitment to Spain for the future and it is the highest level of foreign investment since our crisis began in 2007. The current share holding is double what it was 20 years ago. Sadly, all this bright news does not stop Sanlucar de Barrameda having the dubious title of the town with the highest unemployment in Spain, the current figure standing at 49%.

Investment in Spain's tourism is racing ahead especially in the hotel sector with high levels of interest from buyers in the Middle East, Asia and US. These countries investment has reached a record level. In 2006 1.6 billion was invested in to Spain's hotels but this year's figures are set to smash that..

Adam Tan an executive director of the Chinese business group HNA, told The Financial Times "I am focused on deals outside of China because after the financial crisis some companies were hurt and where there is distress you can get something cheap". Perhaps not a view to be applauded but they have acquired shares in the NH chain of hotels and the Chinese market has forged alliances with chains such as Melia and Barcelo. HNA first showed interest in the NH group in 2011. In the past couple of years, China alone has invested in excess of 870 million euros in Spanish hotel chains. With HNA investing 420 million euros to become the major share holder in the NH chain. Originally their investment was 234 million representing a 20% stake but they then picked up the shares owned by Amancio Ortega, the owner of the textile group Inditex who's umbrella covers the retail outlets Zara and Massimo Dutti.

Dalian Wanda, based in Hong Kong is China's largest property developer and the world's largest cinema chain owner have purchased the Edificio España in Madrid where they intend to create a residential, retail and luxury hotel complex. Likewise, Platinum Estates owned by Harry Mohinani has invested in the old Telefonica headquarters in Barcelona for 56 million and the Hotel Asturias in the gran Via, Madrid, for 35 million both with the intention of developing them in to luxury

apartments. You may be saying about now, "why all the sudden interest" well, don't forget we have this little gift from the Spanish government called a golden visa. Buy a property for 500,000 euros and get a residents visa. That teamed with the revaluation of the Yuan against the euro and the blessing of the Chinese government to go forth and invest in overseas countries.

Perhaps the Chinese business view that you go for long term survival over short term profit fits well with surviving an economic crisis. Many Chinese companies have done well over the past 8 years in Spain. It is estimated that Chinese convenience stores alone bring in over 785 million not to mention the Chinese owned fashion chains, import export businesses, law firms and media groups all now operating in here.

One of the most respected Chinese business men, Mr Meodong Chen who owns the Don Pin group said "the Spaniards looked at us like they looked at the other migrants, like people who do the dirty work. Now when you go to a department store, they have signs in Chinese and staff who speak Chinese. They know, here are people who have money".

While foreign investment in Spain will help us back on our feet, a fair bit of work has been done at home to help ease the pain everyone who has worked through this crisis has felt. This year demand and consumption is rising, the property market has turned the corner, both foreign and domestic investment is up and even the beleaguered construction industry is showing signs of recovery. The government intend to create 3 million new jobs over the coming 5 years and our annual growth should be up 2.5 – 3% on previous years.

What else is contributing to the patients recovery? Well, oil prices have fallen which for a country who imports large amounts of energy, is a definite help and is predicted to add .5% to the Spanish GDP this year which will encourage household spending

I think we can say not only is the patient sitting up in bed but he is sending out for takeaways and DVD's. Long may it continue!

## **STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS**

Spain and the USA have made a deal for 2,200 American soldiers and 500 civilian employees to work permanently from the airbase in Moron de la Frontera, Seville. This will allow the USA to prepare missions to Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It will also bring their forces closer to sites of major conflict and position them better to assist with humanitarian crisis and offer protection for US embassies and citizens abroad.

Military aircraft would increase at Moron to 26 planes and the 850 soldiers currently stationed there would nearly treble in strength.

Spain and USA have long been defence partners thanks to a treaty signed 27 years ago which will be amended during the meeting with the southern European nations defence minister Mr Pedro Morenes. The original agreement was not signed until 1988 but USA forces have been present at the Moron base for close to 62 years.

## **THE PEASANTS ARE REVOLTING**

Perhaps it was the 45,000 demonstrations Amnesty International have reported took place during 2012 in Spain which has caused the government to feel that the time has come to deal with the revolting peasants. When people are out of work, under pressure to keep a roof over their head and feed their children, yet are faced daily, with the very public dalliances and corruption of the rich and powerful, who seem incapable of keeping their behaviour private, silence tends to give way to revolt. Not an unreasonable response you may say but sadly the Spanish government does not agree. In fact, they have brought in draconian measures to keep the

Spanish public silent. The new law called the Public Security Law, commonly dubbed the Ley Mordaza (the gagging law) has been compared to the lack of public freedoms under the dictatorship of General Franco and some elements, quite frankly, are a bit ridiculous.

Only a few years ago, on a weekend, literally hundreds of young Spaniards would gather in my town on the main beach road for a Botellon. To other Europeans this conjures up fears of mass vandalism, damage to property and of course a fair few punch ups. Not at all, this was a very polite affair where the hatches of your Ford Fiestas, VW Golf etc were opened to reveal a full bar facility including ice bucket and glasses. The youngsters would gather on mass, play some music, nothing rowdy just enough to let the girls have a dance round their handbags on the pavement, and open up their boot bar. On several occasions while out for a walk or at a nearby bar I have been offered a drink by a friendly, very sober young Spaniard just keen to share his night out. My friend a local tapas bar owner would happily sell them cigarettes and when asked, which was infrequent, let the ladies use his loo to touch up their make and make themselves more comfortable, but thanks to the new laws the Botellon no longer exists. Anyone caught trying to bring back those happy nights will be fined 600€ and if the kids don't pay, the parents will be held responsible. Party poopers I hear you say.

Likewise, you cannot get up at a public meeting, whether it be a speech, sports event or religious ceremony and prevaricate. What would a town council planning meeting be without the obligatory agitator? During how many speeches is there no verbal response at all from the public, and how many cricket matches have been cheered up by a bare backside running across the pitch only to be rugby tackled by a police officer, who then uses his helmet to cover up the naughty bits. Well all that witty banter has been resigned to the dungeon in Spain, as you now stand to be fined between 600€ and 30,000€ for disrupting a public event.

As for making your unhappiness with the new law known, forget it, the fine for organising or taking part in an unauthorised protest can result in a fine of 30,000€ - 600,000€. Likewise, using Twitter, Facebook or any

other form of social media to incite people to protest will also be punishable by a fine.

Where these new laws become worrying is how they relate to the police. You can now be fined for taking an unauthorised photograph of a police officer and more worryingly “showing a lack of respect” to those in uniform or failing to assist security forces in the prevention of a public disturbance. These misdemeanours, could result in a fine of 500€ to 30,000€.

Quite how you quantify disrespecting a person in uniform I am not sure. For instance, will the Chipendales still be allowed to wear police and firemen uniforms on stage when touring Spain? Sorry ladies, I don't know, but I was always taught that you have to earn respect, it is not a god given right but perhaps my parents were wrong on that. While I joke about this point, it is the fundamental flaw in these new laws. It is what the legal eagles call “undefined legal concepts”. These are concepts which require a subjective assessment or non objective measurement. This affects crimes where a decision has to be taken on whether “reasonable” force was applied or whether an act or spoken words constituted “an affront to national dignity”. What affronts you, may not affront me. Likewise, what I consider to be reasonable force may not be what you consider reasonable. These concepts need to exist in law because it is not always possible to quantify or specify everything in a detailed way but they are intended to be used with considerable caution when applied to the rights and liberties of the general public.

More worryingly, these concepts often have to be assessed in difficult situations, on the spur of the moment, when faced with a particular event. Is the layman qualified to make judgement as to whether something said by a protester, is an affront to national dignity, or a legitimate expression of his freedom of speech? The fear is that these laws facilitate abuses of power and open up legal loopholes.

Another problem with this law relates to the creation of new administrative infractions which often carry

disproportionate fines. A fine of up to 30,000€ for an individual, may be seen as disproportionate when levied against a person spontaneously protesting about their eviction from their home for instance. A bit of angst would be expected by most reasonable people at a time like this, when someone is losing everything, possibly through no fault of their own.

The government brought in these reforms despite the disapproval of all 14 opposition parties. They brought them in by using their majority and claim to be doing this based on the criteria established by criminal law experts who advise that their discipline be used as a final answer to social problems often called the “principle of last resort” but we all know that when you have reasoned with the child, talked to the child, shouted at the child and finally smacked the child, you have in fact lost the battle. Many people feel that the Spanish government has twisted this principle and is following it in a slightly warped way. The most fundamental flaw is, that these administrative fractions are meant to be imposed by a judge in a court. A person who has years of legal experience and has built up a sense of judgement from that experience. To use the same system where they will be applied by lay people, by administrators or police officers, leaves the accused with few means to defend himself. The individual is therefore left with the choice of paying the fine more or less “on the spot” or having to go to court and risk the cost of the whole process.

Furthermore, a registry is to be set up where your sins will be kept in a personal file. The excuse being that they can follow recidivist acts and that will help them to work out if there is a pattern emerging which might affect the public's safety. What a load of wallop, all it will do is give the government the ability to pinpoint members of the public who are not prepared to knuckle down and keep quiet. In my view, when you start to keep files of this kind in a democracy, you are only one step away, from failing to be a democracy.

## STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS

The ratings agency, Standard and Poor has predicted a 2.5% increase in Spanish house prices in 2015&2016 and a further 4% increase in 2017. They say this rise has been driven by the country's economic recover which is gaining in momentum and also the lower interest rates making borrowing more affordable. Standard and Poor say that the downturn in property prices ended in 2014 when prices stabilised.

They believe that the improvement in economic conditions and low rate mortgages will also drive up prices in other countries. Ireland showed the greatest recovery in house prices with a rise of 9% followed by Germany at 5%, Portugal at 4% and the Netherlands at 3%. The markets in Ireland the Netherlands were amongst the worst affected by the worldwide recession but they are forecasting that both markets will maintain the increases in to 2016 at 5% and 3.5% respectively.

As in Spain, the Italian property market is expected to end their downwards trend this year and remain stable. Only France and Belgium will see further price drops this year at -3% and -2%. In the case of Belgium, this trend will go on in to 2016.

Outside the Eurozone, prices should increase strongly as in the UK where a rise of 7% is expected which is slightly less than in 2014 when it stood at 10%. However, there is a possibility of the Bank of England raising interest rates and limiting subsidies.

## EXCHANGE RATE OUTLOOK



As economic uncertainty continues to dominate the headlines, it's been a fairly eventful summer. The Greek saga, stock market collapse in China and

tumbling commodities prices have all contributed to a number of the major currencies hitting multi-year lows. The most notable of these, and perhaps the most pertinent, was the high hit for GBP/EUR, rising to 1.44, a level not seen since 2007.

Greece was the main driving force behind the collapse in the euro. For those of us with an eye on the financial news, the Greek situation grew tiresome as neither they, nor their creditors, could agree on a resolution and we were consequently subjected to daily updates on the stalemate; it seemed as though the saga would never end and any other news had become irrelevant. It was great news for euro buyers, however, as the single currency dropped to multi-year lows against its two main counterparts, the US dollar and the pound sterling. The beleaguered currency dropped to a ten-year low against the US dollar and an eight-year low against the pound. Expats in Spain had therefore seen the euro return on their sterling-denominated incomes increase by around 15% since the turn of the year. Ultimately, the Greeks managed to secure a third bailout from the IMF and ECB, releasing another €86bn, which should tide them over in the short term; the debt crisis inevitably rearing its ugly head again at some point over the next few years.

As the Greeks agreed the terms of the third deal, the euro began to regain some of the ground it had previously lost. At the time of writing, GBP/EUR had dropped back to 1.37 and EUR/USD was up at 1.13. Although the euro has recovered somewhat, it is still significantly weaker than it was at the turn of the year. Those San Miguels are still around 10% cheaper than they were at Christmas time.

Of course, if you're considering selling property in Spain and returning to the UK, the weakening euro is not good news. However, there are ways to take advantage of the recent strengthening of the currency, even though you may not be looking to

convert your funds in the very near-term. Currency brokers offer forward contracts, whereby you are able to fix an exchange rate, even though you may not actually need to convert your funds for up to two years. Considering the forecasts for GBP/EUR, this is proving a particularly popular option for those looking to convert euros back into sterling.

Elsewhere on the currency markets, the commodities currencies, particularly the Canadian, Kiwi and Australian dollars, have taken a hammering over the past three months, all now trading well above \$2 to the pound. The price of oil, copper and iron-ore have all dropped to 6 year lows and the stock market collapse in China has compounded the situation. Considering the size of the Chinese economy, the ripple effects of any problems in China may be far-reaching. The last quarter of this year could prove to be interesting if the situation deteriorates further.

The Spanish economy, on the other hand, has been performing fairly robustly. Unemployment continues to fall and Spanish GDP figures are actually outperforming those of the UK. If you're considering a property purchase in Spain there may be no better time than the present. Property prices remain low, but are likely to start rising, the pound is strong and the Spanish economy appears to be firmly on the path to sustained recovery.

**Contact James Baxter at the Foremost Currency Group for a free, no obligation consultation on +44 1442 892 062. Alternatively, drop him an email at [jsb@fcgworld.co.uk](mailto:jsb@fcgworld.co.uk).**

### **STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS**

The son of the legendary Audrey Hepburn has commenced a legal action against the former Chairwoman of the Alhambra Place complex.

Sean Hepburn Ferrer alleges, that Maria del Mar Villafranca made statements that he had married illegally at the Alhambra and that those statements are slanderous and likely to damage his "good name". Sean further states that his mother "had a flawless reputation" and that the rest of her family, including himself, have "followed in her footsteps".

Ms Villafranca is alleged to have published photographs of Sean and his bride apparently getting married inside the Place of King Carlos V at the Alhambra and stating that it was an illegal act as they did not have a permit.

Sean, a UNICEF ambassador, states that he was awarded the Granada Tourism Prestige Prize for his work with the Classic Cinema Festival in the city, and had told Ms Villafranca of his intentions to marry in the Alhambra, because of the excellent relationship he had always had with Spain and Granada in particular. He says that the Chairwoman clearly responded that a wedding could not be held in the Alhambra complex so Sean and his wife went to Gibraltar where they were married.

Later on the 8 August, they held a blessing at the Alhambra in full bridal dress and the City's mayor, Jose Torres Hurtado attended being photographed with the bride and groom. Sean states that he paid the required fee of 3,500€ to "rent" the area in the same way as any company or society can do.

Sean is seeking 100,000 euros in compensation and his solicitor, Pablo Luna says that if he is successful and wins his case, the money will be donated to charity as all Sean wishes to do is restore his "good name".

## NOBLE ART OR BASE LUST FOR BLOOD

Bullfighting certainly is a subject to raise people's blood pressure. Is it a noble art form or merely a way to fulfill the baseist lust for blood. At one time, it was a standard for weekends and holidays for all the family, but in this more animal welfare aware age, it has taken some knocks. In fact, it is quite the de rigueur subject for any political party looking to grab a few extra votes.

How did this rather odd spectator sport come about? Bullfighting has existed in one format or another for thousands of years. In Knossos, Crete, there are wall paintings showing male and female acrobats confronting a bull, grabbing its horns and vaulting over its back as it charges. Then there is the story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu who fought and killed the Bull of Heaven. For hours they fought this apparently indestructible bull until Gilgamesh danced in front of the bull luring it with his tunic and bright weapons. As the bull advanced, Enkidu thrust his sword deep in to the bull's neck, killing it and thereby drawing great similarities to the bull fighting we see today in Spain. It is thought that Claudius the Roman emperor may have introduced the sport in to Spain as a substitute for gladiators, when he brought in a short lived ban on gladiatorial combat. This view is supported by Robert Graves, the writer and well known translator of Classical Latin and Ancient Greek. Graves wrote that picadors are a representation of warriors wielding javelins. Certainly the oldest paintings of a man actually fighting a bull can be seen on a tombstone in Clunia, Burgos and in further cave paintings entitled El Toro de Hachos also found in Spain.

In medieval Spain, bull fighting was considered a sport for the rich. Nobles would rear and train their animals specifically for the bullfight. The spectacle was apparently enjoyed by Charlemagne, Alfonso X the Wise and the Almohad Caliphs. It is claimed

that El Cid was one of the greatest Spanish performers of the bullfighting art.

Up until 1726 horses were used rather than the matador fighting the bull on foot. Francisco Romero from Ronda, is widely thought to have been the first to fight on foot. This "new style" of bullfighting certainly drew more attention from the crowds and the modern corrida, or fight, began. The noblemen of the past were replaced by commoners on foot, and the new format required the construction of dedicated bullrings, which were initially square as per the Plaza de Armas. Later, after a few tricky moments in the corners with a raging bull bearing down on them, the decision was taken to make the rings circular.

The spectacle we see now in the bullring is generally accredited to Juan Belmonte, the man often referred to as the greatest matador of all time. Juan was born and raised in Triana near Seville. His career started in a childrens bullfighting troupe entitled Los Niños Sevillanos which toured around Spain in the early 1900's. In 1919, he fought 109 bullfights and that total was not beaten until 1965 when the world famous El Cordobes fought 111. His style was different to those who had gone before. It was revolutionary, he stayed only centimetres away from the bull throughout the fight but this "close contact" style had its price. He was gored on several occasions, one of the most serious being in 1927 when he was gored through the chest and pinned to a wall. Belmonte was a great friend of Ernest Hemmingway and sadly, like the writer, took his own life in 1962, less than a year after the writer. He was sixty-nine year of age. Many say that Belmonte decided that life was over when he was diagnosed with a grave heart condition and contracted lung cancer. His doctors told him to cut down on wine, stop eating his favourite calorie and fat laden foods, have nothing further to do with women, cut out cigars and stop riding his beloved horses. Given this somewhat bleak outlook, it is said he went out on his favourite horse Maravillas

one las time, ate his favourite meal then went to his room and killed himself. The less noble, but probably more accurate version of his last hours, tells that he went out on his horse, ate his favourite meal, took two bottles of wine and two ladies of the night from Seville to his room and when they left some hours later, he shot himself, preferring to die like a man if he could no longer live like one. Belmont is gone, but the style of bullfighting he brought to the arena lives on and is seen by many to be the ideal to emulate.

Many traditions, established in bullfighting in 1726 are still present today. Like using the muleta (a small easily wielded worsted cape used in the last part of the bullfight) and an estoque (sword) to kill the bull.

Likewise, the format of the bullfight is still the same with six bulls being selected to be killed by three matadors. Each encounter lasts around 15 minutes. The corrida starts normally around 5pm, the three matadors, their assistants, the banderilleros and the picadores march in to the traditional paso doble music. The matadors are the stars of the show and wear the "traje de luces" or suit of lights. The jacket is silk and heavily embroidered in gold, the trousers are skin tight and a montera or bicorne hat tops off the whole ensemble. The suits themselves cost several thousand euros and a matador must have at least six of them to see him through a season.

The bullfight contains several set pieces called tercios or thirds. Each third is introduced by the sound of a bugle. The matador wearing his traje de luces and the banderilleros, also known as toreros de plata or bullfighters of silver enter the arena to salute the presiding dignitary accompanied by music, this is called the paseíllo.

Now the three stages begin with the bull being released in to the ring via the toril or bull pen gate, and it is tested for its ferocity by the matador and the banderilleros using the magenta and gold capote or cape. This first stage is called the tercio de varas (the lancing third). The matador performs a series of passes in order to observe the response of the bull. These passes are normally veronicas, the basic cape manoeuvre. The pass is named after the woman who held out her handkerchief to Christ as he made his way to his crucifixion. How much applause the matador gets for his initial display depends on his proximity to the bulls horns, how calm he remains in the face of danger and his grace in manoeuvring the cape.

The bull's instinct causes it to go for the cloth, not because of the colour as is often thought, but merely because it is a large moving object. In fact, bulls are colour blind and will happily attack the inside of the cape which is yellow just as readily as it will attack the red outer layer. The bulls used for bullfights do not have to be trained to go for moving objects, it is a natural instinct.

A picador then enters the bullring with a lance. He is mounted on horseback and the horse is protected from the bull by a padded covering called a peto. This protection is as a result of a ruling passed in 1930 prior to that date, the horses did not wear protection and many were disembowled by the bulls. Generally speaking, it was common for more horses to die in this manner during a fiesta than the number of bulls which were killed.

The picador's job is to stab just behind the morrillo, a mound of muscle on the bull's neck, this weakens the neck muscles and causes a loss of blood. This stage is also important to show the bull's behaviour. How it charges the horse can give important clues to the matador about which side the bull favours. Providing the picador is successful, the bull should

hold its head and horns lower during the following stages. All this is aimed at making it possible for the matador to perform the killing thrust later in the performance.

Now the *tercio de banderillas* (the third of *banderillas*) is performed. Three *banderilleros* attempt to inset two *banderillas*, a sharp barbed stick, in to the bull's shoulders.. These barbs anger and agitate the bull but also weaken him. On occasion a matador will plant his own *banderillas*. If he chooses to do this, then he will conduct more varied manoeuvres than the usual *al cuarteo* commonly used by the *banderilleros*.

Finally, the *tercio de muerte* (the third of death). The matador performs this third alone in the arena with a small red cape or *muleta*. The bull is now slowed and weakened but it is more wary and the bull may sense that behind the cape lies its real enemy, the bullfighter. As a result, most injuries and goings occur in this phase of the bullfight. A serge cloth is draped over the *estoque* and the matador begins the *faena*, a word referring to the entire performance with the cape. This stage is often broken down in to *tandas* or "series" of passes. The basic *muleta* passes are the *trincherazo* generally executed with one knee on the ground and at the start of the *faena*, the *pase de la firma*, simply moving the cloth in front of the bull's nose while the fighter remains motionless, the *manoletina*, a pass invented by the great Spanish matador *Manolete* (Manuel Laureano Rodriguez Sanchez, shows the *muleta* held behind the body, and the pass in which the sword is removed from the *muleta* reducing its area and making the bullfighter the largest target for the bull to attack.

After time is taken to make these passes, as the matador endeavours to impress his audience by moving closer and closer to the bull's horns, the matador gets in position for the kill. The sword

must go between the shoulder blades. The target area is very small and it is imperative that the front feet of the bull are together as the matador delivers the sword. Hurling over the bull's horns and plunging the sword in to the bull's withers is known as the "moment of truth. Sadly, not infrequently he is unsuccessful on his first attempt and has to have several goes before he finally kills the bull.

Tradition dictates that the crowd may petition the president by waving white handkerchiefs to award the matador an ear of the bull and if his performance was exceptional, he may be given two ears. There is also a process of pardon for the bull which is very rarely used but if the bull has fought very bravely, the president may be asked to grant the bull a pardon. It is removed alive from the ring and returned to its home ranch where it becomes a stud for future bullfighting bulls.

There is little doubt that this is a very old, blood thirsty spectacle, not dissimilar to those seen in Rome almost 2000 years ago. Does it still have a place in modern society? Well, many would say no, but a hard core of bullfighting supporters do still exist. However, it is accepted that apart from *aficionados* and the elderly, bullfighting does not draw the audiences it did 50 years ago. In fact, the trend is away from bullfighting which is seen by many to be outdated and not in keeping with modern day Spain. Hence, it has become something of a hot potato for politicians.

The newly voted in local councils and regional governments are systematically doing away with bullfights and bull running. Some are putting the decision out to referendum first, while others are just putting the red pen through the calendar and outright banning the events. For instance Xulio Ferreiro, the mayor of La Coruña has stated that his party will not finance bullfights, bull runs or any other shows involving animal cruelty. This is quite

a late addition to the bans, as Gandia had been a bullfighting free area for 25 years up to 2012. In that year the PP took power and reversed the decision, only for the new socialist independent coalition to stop it all again when the recently took power. They state that they are against the ill treatment of animals and not a single euro of public funding will be spent on bullfights. Some areas say it is too late to call off the festivities but that they will hold a referendum before next year's calendar is prepared, while three other towns in Alicante have withdrawn council funding for any bull related events and have pledged to stop them altogether by 2017.

All this has been met with joy by PACMA the pro-animal political party who say "if Spain is trying to build a society based upon ethics and justice, bull related events should not only cease to be financed by local government but should be banned altogether". They also want to see far harsher penalties for abandoning, neglecting or ill treating animals in general and an end to shooting or hunting on foot with hounds. Although, the latter could be problematical as many do hunt in this manner to provide food for their table and while the economical crisis is coming around and brighter times are ahead, there are still many in country areas who rely on what they can harvest by way of birds and rabbits to feed their families.

Some towns have taken this new found desire to protect animals to a whole new level, Trigueros del Valle has become the first municipality to enshrine the rights of pets alongside those of humans. The socialist mayor, Pedro J Perez Espinosa introduced the Renedo Declaration to guarantee the rights of dogs and cats as citizens of the town. He said "dogs and cats have been living among us for over a thousand years, and the mayor must represent not just the human residents but must also be here for the others." The animal bill of rights comprises 13 articles including the statement "all residents are born equal and have the same right to existence". It

goes on "a resident, whether human or non-human, is entitled to respect". The new bill of rights also outlines basic tenets against cruelty to animals such as article 9<sup>a</sup> "No non-human resident should be exploited for the pleasure or recreation of man" while article 6b states "the abandonment of a non-human resident is a cruel and degrading act". The bill obviously prohibits any form of bullfighting and expressly forbids "any action that causes the mutilation or death of a non-human resident". One of the leading animal rights charities said "Today we are closer as a species and we are now more human thanks to the sensitivity and intelligence shown by the people of Trigueros del Valle".

### **STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOPP PRESS**

Three farmers who "accidentally" ploughed a field known to contain a massive archaeological hoard could face steep fines. The threesome failed to seek permission to plough from the government and the site at Ategua in the Cordoba province was known to hold remains dating from the year 200AD, the height of the Roman period in Spain.

Sadly, a large amount of column remains, shards of pottery and exterior walls plus foundation stones and other Roman artefacts have been broken by the illegal ploughing. The land is privately owned but due to the fact it was declared an official Historical and Artistic Monument in 1982, the site was protected and therefore permission was required in order to do any work in that area.

The three farmers were reported anonymously by residents from the village of Santa Cruz to the Friends of Ategua Cultural Association when they saw what was taking place and the Association in turn reported it to the authorities.

## THE ART OF THE POTTER LIVES ON

We don't think much about how we eat our food, pot our plants or decorate our houses. Pottery is a very invisible thing, it is just there. You buy plants for the window and you buy a pot to put them in, you are having guests and you buy more plates but did you ever think, where did it all begin? At what point did we all stop using bread as a trencher to put our food on and progress to wood, metal and finally pottery plates?

The oldest identifiable pottery dates back nearly 10,000 years to where middle Eastern and African nomadic hunters and gatherers were transitioning to becoming farmers with a more static lifestyle. They planted crops and baskets were useful for gathering the harvest but they could not hold liquids. The farmers needed to keep the crops watered so they looked for a natural material which was non porous, easy to mould and light to move around in order to carry the water they needed, to their crops. Clay was an obvious choice and was readily available and abundant in the area.

Pottery production was more basic than now, with pots being formed by laying rings of clay on top of each other then smoothing them to form a pot. The clay would be fired in a hole under a bonfire and were undecorated and utilitarian items but they were the beginnings of what we now know as pottery.

From these early roots, the Greeks developed the craft and used pots for storing and transporting wine and olive oil, they decorated their workmanship with characters from Greek mythology and were the first to invent coloured pottery by combining the clay with potash and ochre.



The production of pottery changed around 3000BC during the Bronze Age when the potter's wheel was invented. This was known as a slow wheel and was a stationary platform which the potter had to turn in order to complete his work. It was not until the next century that the fast wheel was developed which was not dissimilar to the slow wheel but could spin. The wheel was driven by the potter who would spin or kick it to get up the desired speed. For many centuries little changed, until the invention of electricity - then things really took off and the wheel became motorised.

From those early days, pottery became a thing of beauty, not only was it functional, it could be decorated to add color and beauty, it could be made in to any shape from a three dimensional wine flask to a flat tile. Its adaptability was endless and it remained relatively cheap medium. It was used by everyone from the King down to a peasant and, its flexibility has carried it through the ages right up to the modern day.

Due to my love of this ancient craft, I was delighted to have the opportunity to chat with Pedro Ramirez of Ceramica Ramirez.



Their workshops and retail outlet are situated close to the well known seaside town of Conil de la Frontera on the N340 road opposite Venta El Canario.



Pedro tells me that he comes from a long line of potters and after many years of experiment, improvement and perfection, he opened the cerámica you now see, in the 80's. The current Ceramica Ramirez consists of a large workshop with kilns and potters wheels and a large, very pretty, well stocked shop which is run by Ines Brenes, Pedro's wife. Ines is the member of the family responsible for the shop and she is a charming, quietly spoken lady, who is only too keen to show you round and help with any enquiries. Not only

does the cerámica offer "off the shelf" pottery, they can undertake any commission to order, large or small. Everything from a house name plaque for your wall, to a full scale municipal fountain. So if you don't see what you want in the shop, just ask, nothing is impossible at Ceramica Ramirez.

From the early days, the family have used red clay to shape the every day objects which form their bread and butter trade. Objects such as hanging pots, bowls and jugs with traditional shapes from the Conil área. They also produce flower pots and large glazed jars in the traditional local blues and greens.

They were amongst the first potters in the área to work with white glazed earthen ware and nowadays, these products are decorated by their grown up children who also work in the family business. Not only is their product used for kitchenware but also for restoration works, to replace damaged antique pieces and for tile murals. All the pieces are painted by hand in the workshop and the family work free hand to their own designs and ideas but also to the designs of customers. Every season, a new range of pieces and designs is offered to the public.



I was interested to know about the production methods used at Ceramica Ramirez. Pedro said, "the process starts with choosing the base materials. We use clays of various shades and strengths. It

must be free from impurities. We also only use the highest quality enamels and paints made in Spain. Once the clay has been kneaded to the required consistency, we cut it in a cylindrical form and mount it in the centre of the fast wheel. It must be moistened continually during the production process. The potter is totally responsible for moulding the clay to the desired shape, he has full control over the process and it is a heavy responsibility. Once finished, the piece is cut away from the base of clay with a fishing line and allowed to dry for a few days. During this period, it is refined with a damp sponge to remove irregularities and marks from the potting process. The items are then fired at 1000 degrees celcius in the kilns, a process which takes up to two days. When removed from the kiln, the pottery is hard, water proof and usable. Many items end the process here, such as planters, vases and pitchers but other go on to be hand painted or glazed.

Those which are hand painted, with our custom designs, are painted using brushes of various sizes, some used for bold sweeps of colour and others to do fine detailed designs.. Much of our work uses beautiful, traditional Andalusian designs, in intense blues and oranges depicting flowers and fruit. Also popular are sea related designs such as fishermen and sailors plus geometric designs. We also produce a lot of mural tiles with the names of restaurants, depictions of local landscapes etc. After painting, the items are submerged in a clear varnish to finish the piece and they go back in to the kiln for a second firing at 1000 degrees celcius to set the finish. We use only lead free paints and glazes for all our kitchenware and clients must be careful when purchasing pottery, for use with food, that it is a lead free finish”.

Some of the most popular pieces sold at Ceramica Ramirez are gazpacho jugs and a large bowl/ plate combos, accompanied by 6 smaller matching bowls/plates.



These are ideal for soups, salads, fruits, breakfast cereal and desserts. Also cassrole dishes and large pots, ashetes and large wall plates used for decoration. All of these items you may well expect to find in a pottery, but would you expect to find lamp shades and bathroom basins? Well, Ines and Pedro have an ample supply of these too, not to mention plant pots, planters, letters and numbers for your front door, small to absolutely massive Greek style urns, ideal for garden decorations or using as a water butt, mailboxes, the list goes on and on.

Some of the most memorable works the cerámica has produced include a mural installed on the facade of the Museo de Raices Conileñas de Conil which is a reproduction of a scene of the town in the 17th century. Also a beautiful mural of Jesus of Nazareth for the entrance to the Parish Church of the Devine Saviour in Vejer de la Frontera. Due to their expertise, they were also chosen to reproduce amfora from the Punic period for the archeological site in the Plaza de los Hornos Punicos y Fenicios in San Fernando and another of their works was produced for a contemporary artist. The piece is called “Le Pont” and sits in the museum of contemporary art at the open air NMAC located at Montenmedio just outside of Vejer.



What does the future hold for Ceramica Ramirez? Well, Pedro says “basically, our aim is to follow the traditions of artisan pottery and refine our techniques and not to allow the traditional forms and decorations to be lost. By developing and adapting our traditional basics to modern tastes, we can keep them alive and of course, most importantly, we will continue to welcome customers to our premises and fulfill their requirements”.

Many of the old arts have died out due to modern production system, but Ceramica Ramirez are keeping alive an old and valuable skill. Drop in to their shop and see for yourself, the wonderful artisan pieces they have on offer. They are lovely people, so please help them to ensure the art of the potter lives on.

## **STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS**

An aircraft capable of travelling at 5,500 kilometers per hour or 4.5 times the speed of sound has been patented by the Airbus aeronautical company who's head office is in Toulouse, south/west France but who's main production factory is in Seville.

So far, it is only a design which has been put forward and accepted for copyright to prevent any other manufacturers from jumping in there first. The plane has not yet been built but it would be a triangular shuttle similar to those we have seen from NASA rather than a normal design aircraft.

There would only be two rows of seats with a central aisle and 5 engines would be installed below the wings. Two of these will be strato reactors - a compression engine, without turbines which uses the speed of the craft to power themselves. A further two engines would be turbo reactors and the final engine would be similar to those used on space rockets.

The turbo reactors would be engaged for take off and ground manouvers, while the rocket engine would lift the craft to 35,0000 metres, about 105,000 feet, and the strato reactors would operate the craft in flight.

Airbus have patented other designs in the past which to date have not been built but this latest design would mean a flight from Madrid to Mexico could be completed in under 3 hours so its commercial viability is self explanatory.

In addition, they have created a similar design for a military aircraft which could cover distances in around one third of the normal time taken.

**Thank you for reading our Newsletter, the next edition will be out on 1 December 2015.**

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