

FOOTSTEPS

Blood, Sand, Sherry: Hemingway's Madrid

By DAVID FARLEY

IN Madrid's Legazpi neighborhood, a vast complex of early-20th-century buildings of ornate stone and brick sits near the banks of the Manzanares River. For most of the 20th century, the Matadero Madrid, as the compound is known, was the city's main slaughterhouse; its robust stench lingered far beyond the high stone walls surrounding it and deep into the working-class neighborhood nearby.

In the late 1930s, though, that odor didn't deter a young bullfighting-obsessed American writer living in the city from frequenting the slaughterhouse.

"This is where the old women come early in the morning to drink the supposedly nutritious blood of the freshly killed cattle," he later told A. E. Hotchner, his biographer. "Many a morning I'd get up at dawn and come down here to watch the novilleros, and sometimes even the matadors themselves, coming in to practice killing, and there would be the old women standing in line for the blood."

These days, you won't find the matadors or the old women: the Matadero has been converted into a dynamic new art center. I had just taken in an exhibition of Latin American designers — but I wasn't really there for the art.

I was instead following the tracks of that American writer, Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway is associated with a handful of places around the planet — most notably Paris, Pamplona, Havana, Key West and Ketchum, Idaho, where he took his own life in July 1961. But none may have held a warmer spot in his heart than Madrid, which he called "the most Spanish of all cities," referring to its diverse population from every region of the country. He also titled a short story based in Madrid "The Capital of the World."

"Don Ernesto," as he was known to the Spanish, spent enough time in Madrid — he was there for chunks of the late 1920s, late 1930s, and parts of the 1950s, with his last visit in 1960 — that he left a distinct, mostly booze-stained trail. With the exception of the revamped Matadero, the modern version of Hemingway's Madrid is an old-school itinerary of bars, bullfighting arenas and restaurants. So in advance of the 50th anniversary of his death, I set out to experience all that drew Hemingway

In the 'Capital of the World': roasted pig, bullfights and bars.

back again and again to the city.

After starting my tour at the Matadero, I met up with my wife, Jessie Sholl, in front of our hotel, the Tryp Gran Via, one of the spots Hemingway stayed (the second-floor breakfast room, named for the writer, displays photos of him in various acts of masculinity like firing a gun or pulling in a huge fish from a boat.).

From there we headed down the Gran Via, a wide boulevard Hemingway described as Madrid's answer to Broadway and Fifth Avenue combined, passing by Museo Chicote, a cocktail bar he frequented in the 1930s, when it was popular with international journalists. We then zigzagged through the streets around Puerta del Sol, many recently made pedestrians-only, crossing narrow Calle Victoria, where Hemingway often purchased scalped bullfighting tickets. We walked through leafy Plaza Santa Ana, home to Cerveceria Alemana, a 1904 beer hall that was such a favorite of Hemingway's that he had his own table (just to the right of the entrance, the only marble-topped table overlooking a window).

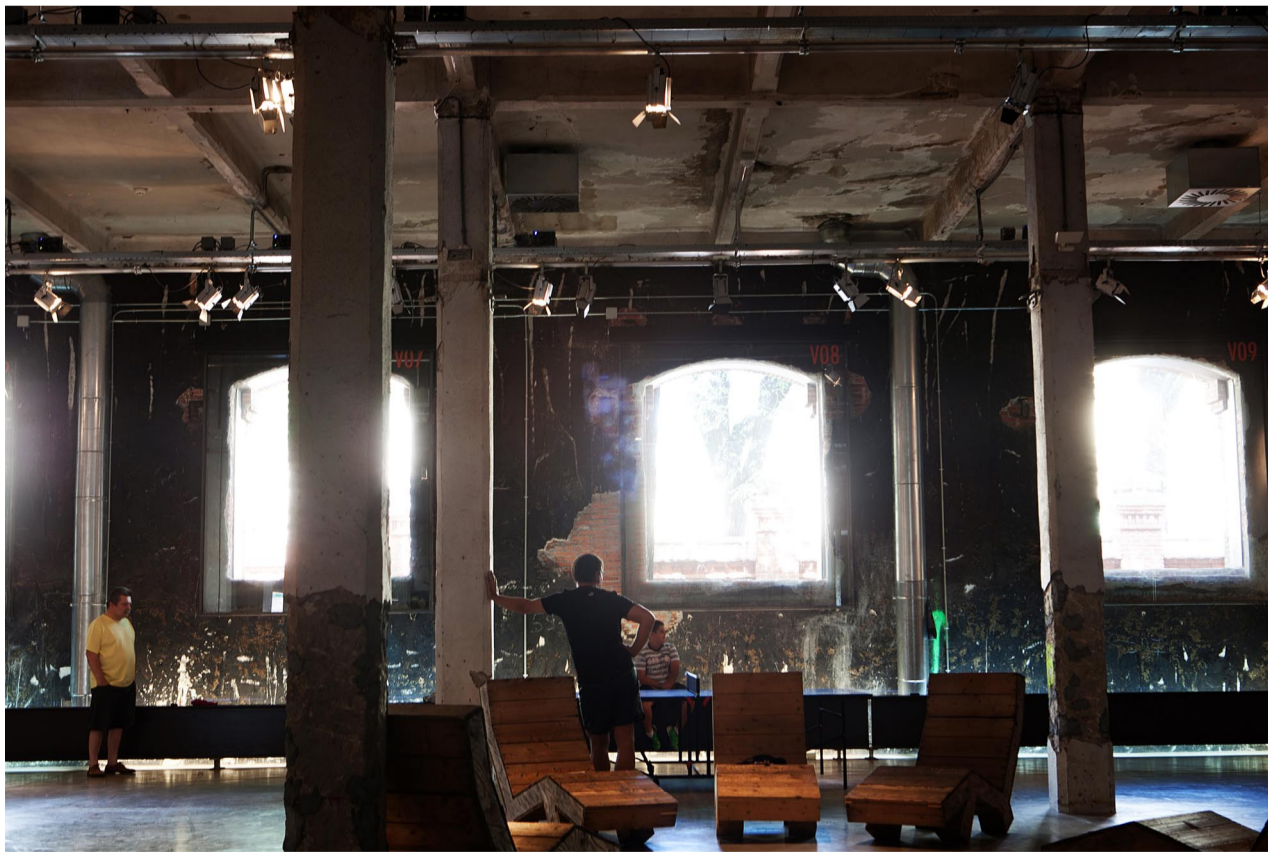
A couple of twists and turns later, we reached Calle de Echegaray, its cobblestones shining from a morning rain, and entered La Venencia, an old bar where men in flat caps and tweed jackets sipped sherry from tall, narrow glasses and barkeeps wrote their tabs in chalk on the bar.

We sat down at a table toward the back of the room with Stephen Drake-Jones, who has lived in Madrid for 35 years. "Welcome to the civil war," said the 61-year-old former University of Madrid history professor, referring to the three-year period, 1936 to 1939, that pitted left-leaning Republicans against the Fascists. Mr. Drake-Jones runs a tour company called The Wellington Society of Madrid. A native of Leeds, England, Mr. Drake-Jones gives a popular Hemingway-themed tour and has an encyclopedic knowledge of the writer's time in Madrid.

As he pushed glasses of crisp manzanilla sherry toward us, Mr. Drake-Jones explained that La Venencia was — and, in some ways, still is — a haunt for Republican sympathizers. "During the civil war," he said, "this bar was frequented by Republican soldiers. Hemingway would come here a lot to get news from the front" — in the late 1930s, he was reporting on the war for the North American Newspaper Alliance — which would later inform "For Whom the Bell Tolls," his novel about the war.

"This place hasn't changed in 70 years," he added. "It's like walking right into Hemingway."

He pointed to an old sign on the wall and translated: "In the interest of hygiene, don't spit on the floor." This was, he said, only the first rule of La Venencia. The second rule — no taking of photos — prevented Republican visitors from being incriminated by possible Fascist spies during the war. The third



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES RAJOTTE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

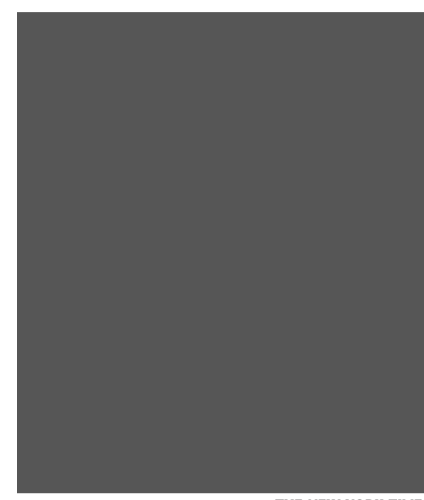
FROM TOP Hemingway liked Section 9 at Las Ventas bullring; taking refreshments at Las Ventas before the bullfights; Jose Gonzales, a proprietor of the restaurant El Sobrino de Botín; the Matadero Madrid, a slaughterhouse in Hemingway's day, is now an art center.

rule: Absolutely no tipping. "The Republican loyalists considered themselves all workers — they were all the same — so there was no point in tipping," Mr. Drake-Jones said.

Just then his eyes squinted and nar-

rowed in on Jessie, who was taking a sip of sherry. "Stop!" he cried. There was a fourth rule he hadn't gotten to yet. "If this were during the civil war, you'd be arrested right now," he said, his eyes surveying the room to see if anyone was

watching. Jessie put her glass down. "You just gave yourself away as someone who wouldn't have belonged here. But if you would have held your glass like this" — he picked up his glass by the stem — "the regulars wouldn't take



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alarm. Otherwise, they would have thought you were a foreign spy."

Schooled in correct sipping technique and fortified by the sherry, I bid adios to Mr. Drake-Jones (and Jessie, who went to nap back at the hotel) and headed to Las Ventas arena, one of the most prestigious bullfighting rings in the world. I joined a guided group tour. The tours, given daily from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., in both English and Spanish, take guests both into the seats (Hemingway liked sitting in Section 9, Mr. Drake-Jones had told me earlier) and onto the sand in the middle of the stadium, where brave matadors stare down 500-pound horned beasts in front of 24,000 fans. When the tour finished, I asked the guide, Sean Marcos, 24, if he was a bullfighting aficionado.

"No, not really," he said. "The people of my generation don't like bullfighting. It's mostly for older people."

When I asked if he thought that didn't bode well for the future of bullfighting in Spain, he shrugged and said, "Who knows? Maybe when we're older we'll become interested."

Don Ernesto would most likely have been crushed that his beloved bullfighting was losing interest with successive generations. But he'd be happy to know that interest in his other Madrid love is far from waning: He was also a lover of the Prado, home to one of the world's great art collections.

The analogy he drew to viewing art at the museum was pure Hemingway: "The tourist should be introduced to an attractive woman quite unclothed with no draperies, no concealments and no conversation and only the plainest of beds."

The Prado was one of the main reasons he sometimes chose to stay at the Palace Hotel (now the Westin Palace Hotel), located across the street from the museum. Hemingway would often begin his evenings with a martini or two at the stuffy bar inside the hotel, which also appears toward the end of his 1926 novel, "The Sun Also Rises."

Like Jake and Brett, the novel's protagonists, my wife and I cozied up to the bar and ordered our own round of martinis (at 17.20 euros, about \$, each, it wasn't easy pretending we were in the 1920s). When asked for a dining suggestion, the bartender pointed up toward Plaza Santa Ana and said the streets were crammed with restaurants. I had a different spot in mind, though: El Sobrino de Botín, Jake and Brett's next stop in the final scenes of the novel.

Botín, open since 1725 on a tiny street behind Plaza Mayor, claims to be the oldest restaurant in the world. Jake and Brett turned up here — like Hemingway himself often did — to dine on the house specialty, roasted suckling pig, and drink several bottles of Rioja Alta. Botín isn't above playing up the association: the front window displays an image of the writer and a quote from the "Sun Also Rises" that mentions the restaurant. (Until recently, the owners of a nearby restaurant, presumably trying to differentiate themselves from Botín, hung a large sign above its door reading: "HEMINGWAY NEVER ATE HERE.")

Jessie and I asked for a table upstairs, the place where Hemingway put Jake and Brett and where he preferred sitting as well. And like our fictional counterparts, we dined on juicy roast suckling pig, though we stopped at just one bottle of Rioja. Afterward, I introduced myself to Antonio and Carlos Gonzales, the third generation of their family to own Botín. The brothers hadn't been born when Hemingway was a regular guest at their restaurant, but they've heard plenty of stories.

"Don Ernesto once wanted to make paella," Carlos said. "And so our grandfather allowed him to go into the kitchen to make it."

Was it any good?
"Apparently not," he said, laughing. "It was the last time they let him cook anything."

Gonzales's grandfather, however, did give Hemingway the privilege of making his own martinis. "He would get here early in the day and write upstairs until his friends showed up for lunch," Antonio said.

We bade the brothers Gonzales farewell and, like Jake and Brett in the last scene of "The Sun Also Rises" — and most certainly the man whose trail I'd been following the last four days — we hailed a cab and drove into the warm Madrid night. ■