

The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico
San Miguel de Allende · Issue 8
October 2026
FREE



Memory

To Delay the Third Death
My Quest for Calm in San Miguel

Alebrijes: From a Fever Dream to a Oaxacan Art Form

Calling All Animal Angels!



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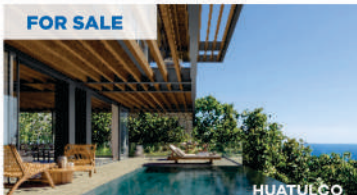
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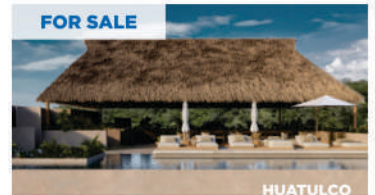
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Editor's Letter

You pile up associations the way you pile up bricks. Memory itself is a form of architecture.
-Louise Bourgeois

Who would you be without your memories? Without the ideas you have collected about yourself, about others and the world around you? I have thought a lot about this in the last couple of years as I cared for my mother who was shedding her memories the way a tree loses its leaves when winter is coming. At first there was a panic as to what would happen, what would be left and how would we cope if we got to the point where I was a stranger.

Of course there was a resistance, a desire to hold on to every moment and remembrance, but that resistance itself was a form of disease built by fear and the unknown. Eventually the path we chose was acceptance and the world around us loosened, tension slackened and we made space for new things. My mother never forgot who I was but sometimes she didn't know that I was her daughter, I was maybe a sister or a friend or even her mother. I, in turn, had to release my resistance to the idea of her as my mother. Whoever she thought I was, I wanted her to associate me with love and safety and I let that dictate my reaction to each situation we faced.

She saw the environment around us with new eyes each day and she took me along for the ride. Without the clutter of the past we would marvel at the new green shoots of leaves on a plant or the rising of the moon. How miraculous to see the rising of the moon as though for the first time!

Our memories can be tools. They can transport us to a moment in time in the past and we can feel the texture of an object we haven't held for years or conjure up the smell of our childhood bedroom. Our memories can also be weapons. Some people hold on to grudges like they are precious riches. Our memories can also be unreliable. Women who experience childbirth often say in the moment they will never do it again only to do it again once the pain has passed and they are holding a newborn in their arms.

And perhaps memory reaches beyond what we consciously remember. Like the complex networks beneath forests, where trees exchange resources and information through their roots and fungal partners, we too are connected to what came before us. Scientists are exploring whether some effects of our ancestors' experiences may be carried through epigenetic mechanisms – chemical changes that affect how genes are expressed without changing the DNA sequence itself. In animals, there is compelling evidence that some of these effects can cross generations; in humans, the science is still unfolding. What we inherit may be more complicated than the stories we have been told. None of us is an island.

This month our writers explore memory in many different forms. Thank you for reading.

See you next month,

Jane



The Eye Team

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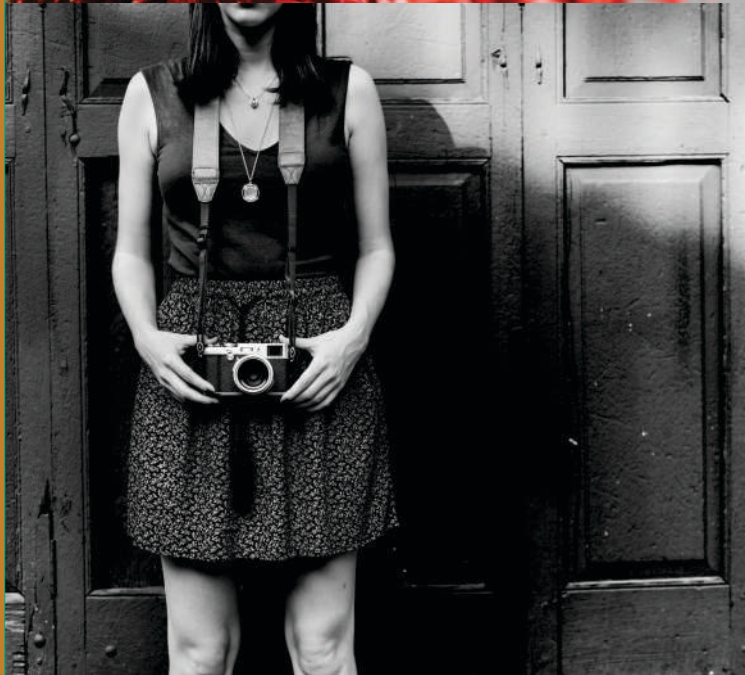
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Alebrijes: From a Fever Dream to a Oaxacan Art Form

By Shannon Jiménez

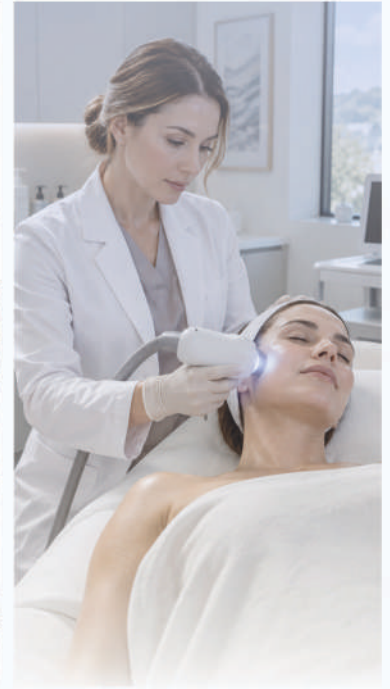
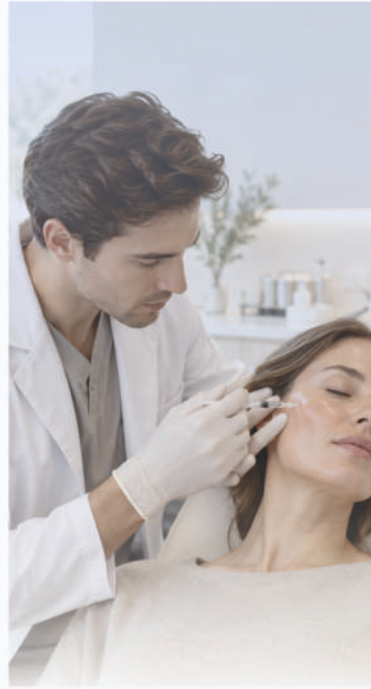
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Calling All Animal Angels!

By Joe Howell, Ashlee Lane
& Kiko Rodríguez



San Miguel de Allende has long been home to a deeply compassionate animal rescue community. Yet critical gaps remain in how dogs and cats—and the people who care for them—are supported.

Enter **Animal Angels SMA**, a new U.S.-registered 501(c)(3) organization founded by three longtime *animalistas* in San Miguel de Allende. Its mission focuses on three areas aimed at addressing some of the root causes of animal neglect and hardship: **Nourish, Transport, Educate**.

Nourish

No family should have to choose between feeding their household and feeding a beloved animal. Animal Angels SMA is developing a local animal food bank with three areas of focus. The first supports independent rescuers caring for dogs and cats taken off the streets.

The second works with established organizations in San Miguel to identify families experiencing hardship in the *campo*. The goal is to offer short-term assistance through regular *despensas* of dog and cat food, helping families keep their animals fed during difficult periods.

The third initiative will test a feeding station in San Miguel, providing food and water for street dogs at a designated location. Working with the surrounding community, Animal Angels SMA hopes to ensure the station is maintained and that animals have regular access to food and water.

Transport

Finding local homes for every rescued animal is an uphill battle. Animal Angels SMA helps transport rescued dogs north of the border, where they can be placed in permanent homes in the United States and Canada. Each successful placement also frees up valuable space and resources for rescuers here in San Miguel.

The Animal Angels SMA team has already been helping dogs make these journeys, either by flying them to major cities in the United States and Canada or through the **Rescue Express**, a bus capable of transporting as many as 70 dogs to new homes in the U.S.

Thousands of Mexican rescue dogs have been safely transported north through these efforts over the years. In July and August alone, dogs were sent to Toronto, New York, Portland and Iowa. Animal Angels SMA may be new in town, but the people behind it have been doing this work for a long time.

Educate

True, lasting change begins with prevention. Animal Angels SMA is developing community outreach and school programs designed to teach children about responsible pet care and the humane treatment of companion animals.

The education program is still in its early stages, and the team recognizes that reaching young people throughout the community will be a significant undertaking. But teaching empathy and responsible animal care to the next generation is an important part of creating long-term change.



It Takes a Village

When it comes to animal welfare, the old saying really does apply: it takes a village. No single rescue group or organization can solve the problem alone.

Animal Angels SMA was created around the belief that collaboration increases everyone's impact. Whether you're an independent foster, a local business owner, a frequent flyer or simply someone who would like to see fewer hungry animals on San Miguel's streets, there is a way to help.

A bag of dog food costs MXN \$305 and a bag of cat food MXN \$430, and food donations help support the Nourish program. Travelers can also become **flight angels**, escorting a rescued dog to its new home in the United States or Canada. Those flying Aeroméxico, Volaris or Viva may be able to accompany a dog at no cost to themselves.

Animal Angels SMA is also looking for volunteers to help package food and deliver it to communities in the *campo*, as well as people willing to host small **"Yappy Hour"** gatherings where friends and neighbors can learn about the organization's work.

Together, we can help make compassion for San Miguel's four-legged residents part of everyday life.

Want to become an Animal Angel?

Follow [@animalangelssma](#) on Facebook and Instagram for upcoming fundraising events, volunteer opportunities and updates on the organization's programs.

animalangelssma@gmail.com

Donations can be made via PayPal or Zelle to:
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To Delay the Third Death

By Tonya Harmon

I'm writing a memoir. It's an exploration of the generations of my father's Slovak family and what I inherited from them. I certainly don't speak Slovak, and I wasn't born in Slovakia. What, then, exactly did I inherit?

In conducting research for the book over the last 20 years, I became immersed in the past lives of relatives who were long gone and, in many cases, people I'd never even met. Their names appeared in a church registry for a birth or baptism, marriage or death, and little else. I wanted to know so much more about them: how they lived, what they ate, what they stood for, and what they believed in.

Where do you go to find these details, and can you even unearth them for a person who died nearly a century ago on another continent?

I decided to start with the living. I studied the picture of my family on the day they left Yugoslavia in 1938 and tracked down a woman who was a teenager at the time.

Julka was 14 when our families emigrated to Canada together and was in her late eighties when we met. She remembered my great-grandfather's bakery and how she would walk past the other bakeries to go to his, the best in town. Every day at the end of the school day, my great-uncle Andy would ride his bike to the schoolyard and ring his bell. His basket was filled with baguettes and zemle, plump round rolls, and kifle, the crescent-shaped rolls said to have inspired the croissant.

Julka remembered the taste of the kifle and how she had spent her whole life searching for one that tasted as good as she remembered but never found it. Julka died a few months after our interview.

She remembered the day the picture was taken, that it was raining, and that her boyfriend had arranged the send-off. My great-grandmother had stood behind the camera, taking one last picture of her son, daughter-in-law, and only granddaughter, Datka. "My eyes will never see you again," she said.



I traveled to Yugoslavia to meet relatives and learned about my great-uncle Stefan, the family jokester. Once at a wedding, he'd sprinkled hot paprika on the toilet paper and sat back laughing as people came out of the outhouse hopping and itching. He also hid ammunition in the water well for partisans fighting against fascists in WWII.

On the internet I found a website in Slovak written by an elderly man who had lived his whole life in the same village as my family. He had written about the history of the town and my family. I tracked Jan down and we began a decade-long conversation through Facebook, him in Slovak, me in English. We traded stories and genealogical facts and became friends. I was devastated when he

died suddenly two years ago.

As I traveled to meet people and collected historical facts about the places and times they lived in, the lives of my long-gone relatives slowly started to come alive for me. I found the family recipe for the kifle Julka remembered and made them, enjoying the taste as much as Julka did. I saw bundles of drying peppers hanging from the porches in the village where Stefan had lived. I wrote to the German government requesting details about family members who had been arrested and read bureaucratic records containing unanswered letters from relatives begging for information about their loved ones.

In 2011, Jaro Miklović took me from house to house in my family's hometown. At each stop, food appeared before we had finished asking questions: sausage, bread, cakes, glasses raised in welcome. Albums came out. I took pictures of photographs hanging on walls and held family samplers stitched more than a hundred years earlier.

Again and again, someone who had been a stranger, appearing only as a name in the family tree, stopped feeling like one.

Over the years, recipes crossed oceans. Photographs resurfaced. Distant relatives found one another. Objects and stories moved from one branch of the family to another.

Living in Mexico has made me think differently about what it means to remember the dead. Here people sometimes speak of *Las Tres Muertes*, the Three Deaths.



My family leaving Yugoslavia before WWII

The first death is when the body stops working and the heart stops beating. The second is when the body is buried. The third comes when the last living person who remembers you forgets your name. That is when you disappear completely.

The idea is often connected to *Día de Muertos*. Families build an *ofrenda* and place photographs on it, lighting candles, telling stories, and putting out the favorite foods of the people who have died, believing this may entice them to come home for the day.

It is one of the most beautiful things about living in Mexico. It is colorful and joyful, but underneath it is something very serious. Remembering is an act of love, and perhaps also an act of preservation.

I thought about this when I received an email from a woman looking for an old friend named Juan Carlos. She had known him in the early 1970s. He was the first cousin of my aunt's former husband, part of another Slovak immigrant family whose members had settled in both Canada and Argentina. She found me because of something I had written about the death of my aunt's twenty-three-year-old daughter, Karla, in 1993.

I vaguely remembered Juan Carlos. He had visited our family in Montreal once. He was tall and thin and very kind and was studying to become a pediatrician.

I had to tell her that he had died young, more than forty years earlier.

A few years later, she wrote again.

This time she wanted to speak to his sister.

I sat looking at the email.

After all those years, she still remembered him.

His body had died, he had been buried, but his name had not disappeared.

She still remembered.

Maybe Slovak families have been doing the same thing in their own way all along, not with marigolds and sugar skulls, but with recipes, family trees, photographs kept in drawers and hung on walls. And with names repeated at our kitchen tables. With a woman writing to me more than forty years later asking about a young man she had once known. Memory, it appears, traveled farther than the people themselves.

I came to Mexico believing I had followed my own route very far from home. Instead, I found myself living in a place that understood what I had been doing for years.

My great-grandmother's crystal bowls in my armoire are part of that *ofrenda*. So is the kifle, the family tree, the photographs I copied from albums, and the stories told at the kitchen table. So is this book.

For a long time, I thought I was collecting evidence.

I understand now that I was also collecting people.

Julka. Andy. Stefan. Jan. Jaro. Karla. Juan Carlos.

Each time I recover a name from a church register, identify someone in a photograph, translate a letter, or repeat a story, that person is back with us for a little while.

Perhaps that is what family history is for.

To delay the third death.

Tonya Harmon lives in SMA and is a wealth of knowledge about food and cheese:
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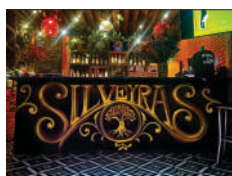
The Meals We Remember

By Michael Solof

This month, I delve into the theme of food-related memories. Over the past seven years, I've had the pleasure of hosting singles and couples, newcomers and locals, at various restaurants each week through my group, SMA Adventure Hound. I've forged deep friendships with many chefs, owners, and managers throughout San Miguel de Allende. I thought it fitting to let them share some of their favorite food-related memories.

Keli Silveyra, Silveyra's Restaurante

My husband, Ruben, and I never planned on owning a place here in SMA or even a restaurant at all. He is from Veracruz, Mexico, and I'm from the United States. In 2019, Ruben was deported from the U.S., and that became one of those moments where we had to see what we were made of. So, we came to Mexico and opened a Mexican-American family-style restaurant.



We started on January 22, 2020 and then the pandemic hit. Despite the challenges, we persevered. We cooked, served, learned, made mistakes, fixed those mistakes, and survived. Quitting wasn't an option. With the help of family, friends, and faith, we kept going. The SMA community always showed up for us during these tough times. They supported us financially, checked in on us, encouraged us, and helped us every single day to keep the business alive. That meant more to us than I can ever truly explain.

Donnie Masterton, The Restaurant

Thirty years ago, during my first visit to San Miguel, I stumbled into Picasso Restaurante, located in a small pueblo. I ordered the *flor de calabaza* (squash blossom) soup, which was so good that I still compare every other version to it to this day. It was perfectly seasoned with a touch of spice and served with warm tortillas. Nothing complicated—just incredibly delicious. It was my first meal in San Miguel, and even all these years later, I can still remember exactly how it tasted.



Aleysha Serrato Garfias, Kokumi

My favorite food memory in SMA began on December 12, 2019. That's the day I met Satoru and tasted his ramen for the first time. I was a vegetarian at the time, but I knew I had to try the dish exactly as he created it. I was considering inviting him to become my business partner, and I wanted to understand his cooking and the talent behind it. From the first taste, I knew he had to be a part of the project. Seven years later, he is not only my partner in Kokumi but also my husband. That bowl of ramen became much more than a meal – it was the beginning of our restaurant, our partnership and our life together.



Marie-Pascale Gérard, Wafflesence de Paul

Living and running my own Belgian restaurant in SMA brings a sense of wonder. My guests are always amazed to learn that our sugar doesn't come from sugarcane, but from sugar beets. The sugar we use is imported directly from my family in Belgium, who have been running a sugar factory for over six generations. It brings a piece of my own history here to SMA.



Lucía Ríos, Restaurante La Parada

I remember the excitement and uncertainty of my first day at La Parada; it felt like I was beginning a new chapter in my life. This role has given me my first opportunity to truly develop my talent as a chef, to grow, learn, and express my passion for Peruvian cuisine. One of my favorite dishes to prepare is the *filete a la Huancaína* because it encapsulates the flavors and traditions of Peruvian culture, which I love to share with our guests. Witnessing people enjoy and discover these flavors for the first time is something I'll never forget.



Eduardo Humberto García Hernández, Cocina Saludable

I arrived in SMA nearly ten years ago. This wasn't just a temporary stop for me; it became a place to build my life, both personally and professionally as a chef. My fondest culinary moments haven't been confined within the four walls of a traditional restaurant; they occur in the warmth of the homes I deliver to every day.



When I founded Cocina Saludable, my home delivery and catering service, my goal was to give back to San Miguel a piece of what it has given me by cooking with the honest, comforting nostalgia of a homemade meal. I visit local markets to select the freshest ingredients and craft a unique, single dish made from the heart. The real magic happens at the door during delivery, where I get to see the smiles on people's faces, knowing that the meal I prepared with care and love truly brightens their day.

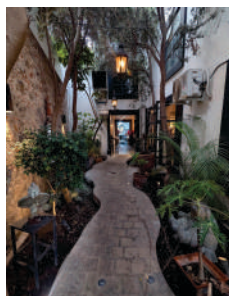
Lizette Angel, Lolita Cocina Mexicana + Bar

I was raised in Tijuana, where my father often took us for carne asada street tacos and tortas at night. There were rows of stands, each serving charcoal-grilled steak tacos topped with cilantro, onion, avocado, and salsa. Those memories are unforgettable. Long before reaching the stands, you could smell the charcoal smoke that filled the entire street. I recently added a charcoal grill and carne asada tacos to our menu at Lolita's, and I can't stop eating them!



Marco Massarotti, Casa Nostra Restaurante

My girlfriend's family was here visiting and challenged me to upscale the tamales they were having from a local street vendor. I accepted their challenge and reimagined it by taking a cake form, wrapping the masa around it, adding inside a braised beef, and topping it with a chile poblano sauce in a red wine reduction. Everybody loved it so much that we ended up putting it on our menu. This was a perfect case of making memories with my extended family, who unknowingly provided an exciting inspiration for a new item to feature at my restaurant.



Through these shared experiences, it's clear that food does more than nourish; it cultivates community, builds relationships, and creates lasting memories. As you continue to explore the culinary landscape of San Miguel, remember that every dish has a story, and every meal is an opportunity to make new memories.

Michael Solof leads SMA Adventure Hound, a group which takes locals and newcomers to brunches and dinners at different restaurants every week and he also offers classes in the art of smartphone photography. You can contact him at WhatsApp +1-443-310-9214 for more info and to reserve.

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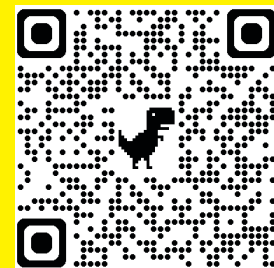
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The Hole in the Floorboard

By Kat Sparks

I learned to drive on a Volkswagen Thing in Mexico. Part jeep, part car, part truck, ugly as sin, with a hole in the floorboard the size of a dinner plate.

You could look down between your feet and watch Cozumel go by underneath. Gravel, dust, the occasional startled iguana. That hole was my speedometer. If the street was a blur, I was going too fast. If I could count the rocks, I could go faster. Reverse in a Thing is also not where you think it should be, a lesson I would learn again later, at higher stakes and in better shoes.

I was a free-range teenager on that island, back when that was just called being a kid. I had a car, a curfew that was more of a suggestion, and the entire Caribbean as a backyard. What I did not have was privacy. My father, Dean-o, knew I had broken a rule roughly four seconds after I broke it, which I remain convinced defies physics. I would come home rehearsing my story in the driveway, and he would look up from his glass, say my entire name, and the story would evaporate.

I resented it for ten minutes. Then I understood the lesson, which is that the world is small and people talk and you had better be someone you would not mind being reported on. Cozumel gave me independence and street smarts in the same package, which is the only honest way they come. And it gave me the water.

The first time I dropped into blue water, the real blue, where the reef shelf falls away into a color that has no name in English or Spanish, something in me went quiet and has been looking for that quiet ever since, across too many countries to list. Cenotes, cold quarries, questionable boats captained by men named Chuy. Every dive is an attempt to get back to that first one, and none of them quite do, which is why I keep going. Dean-o loved Mexico. Not the postcard version, the real one, with the bad roads and the good people and the church bells at hours that make no sense. He never gave me a speech about it. He just lived it in front of me until home stopped being a house and became a country. That is a hard inheritance to explain on a customs form.

Which is how a woman living perfectly happily in Austin ended up in the sierra of Guanajuato.



A friend told us about a hippie artist town in the mountains. Cobblestones, painters, a pink church that looks designed by someone in the middle of a very good dream. My husband, Agapito, and I looked at each other with that particular expression married people get right before they do something enormous. We came. We stayed.

Everything about San Miguel de Allende was overwhelming and beautiful and unknown, all at once. I could not find grape jelly. I could not find a hardware store, then found eleven on the same block, all named after saints. I cried at least twice a week, sometimes from frustration and sometimes because I turned a corner at seven in the evening and the light hit the stone and it was too much beauty to absorb standing up. Then it stopped being unknown and became mine. The smell of San Miguel in the morning, wood smoke

and wet cobblestone and the sugar cloud outside a panadería. The energy of it, which anyone who has spent a week here will tell you is not a metaphor. People arrive to visit, stay twenty years, and never quite explain it to their families back home.

Agapito and I had sweet years here. We drove out to the hot springs when the week got heavy and sat in the water until our fingers pruned and our arguments dissolved, because it is hard to stay mad at someone while floating. We spent Sundays in the Jardín, and here I must explain something to the younger readers. This was before WhatsApp. You did not text to make a plan. You sat on a bench and the plan came to you, wearing a hat, carrying a bag of oranges, asking if you had eaten. Whole friendships were forged on those benches, and the ones still standing are the load bearing walls of my life.

I started writing for *Atención* back then. Practical things, where to find the impossible item, how to keep a non-chemical home without importing half of it. I did not know I was becoming a person who explains San Miguel to newcomers. I thought I was answering questions about vinegar.

The bipolar got bad. That is the shortest sentence in this essay, and the heaviest. Anyone who has loved someone through mental illness knows the particular grief of watching someone you adore be slowly relocated somewhere you cannot follow. I will not spend your afternoon on it. I will only say that the sweet years were real, and stayed real, and nothing that came after took them from me.

Agapito died. Later, so did my mother. Different times, different kinds of quiet in the house afterward. Grief does not stack neatly. It moves in and rearranges your furniture. I found myself in Seattle with a whole life built around me. Furniture, systems, insurance cards, the correct hoodie. Everything I knew, and a growing certainty that I did not want it.

I want to be honest about what came next, because we lie about this part. Deciding to pack it up and return to San Miguel was not brave and it was not romantic. It was terrifying. There is a specific terror in dismantling a life you spent years assembling, with no guarantee the next will hold your weight. I made the decision, felt sick, made it again the next morning, and did that until I packed the Toyota, put the dogs in the back, and got behind the wheel. That settled the argument.

Here is what I found on the other side. When you rebuild from zero, you get to choose the blueprint.

So I chose community. Radically, deliberately, as the whole point rather than a side effect. That is where ExperienceSMA came from, and why so much of it happens around a table with food on it. Not networking. Not a mixer. A table long enough that you cannot possibly talk only to the person you came with, where strangers pass the salsa and by dessert they have somebody to call. I have watched it happen a hundred times and I am not tired of it.

I am building a life here on my own terms, a phrase I would have found insufferable at twenty-five and now understand costs everything and is worth it.

The hole in the floorboard turned out to be the whole education. You go forward, you watch the road move underneath you, and you accept that some of the dust is going to end up in the truck. And reverse is never where you think it should be. Sometimes you have to push down, and over, and trust that going back is actually the way ahead.

Kat Sparks is the founder and curator of University of Expats and ExperienceSMA.



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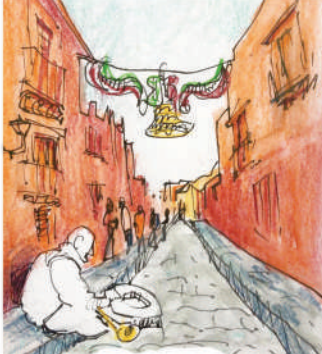
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PRIVADAS



CANTERA ROSA

BUGAMBILIA

ADOBE

AZAFRÁN

SANGRE DE TORO

NOPAL

CIELO DE SAN MIGUEL

CANTERA GRIS

SAN MIGUEL

COLOR PALETTE

A place told through color

CANTERA ROSA

The warm pink stone that gives San Miguel some of its most recognizable architecture. Quarried in the region, cantera shifts from dusty rose to glowing coral as the afternoon light changes.

BUGAMBILIA

Hot pink and magenta bougainvillea tumble over courtyard walls, balconies, and doorways, providing brilliant bursts of color against San Miguel's earthy façades.

ADOBE

Terracotta, rust, and burnt orange are everywhere in San Miguel. These warm earth tones recall the adobe and stucco walls that have defined the city's streets for centuries.

AZAFRÁN

Golden yellow and ochre façades seem to hold onto San Miguel's intense sunlight. Against blue skies and dark wooden doors, they are among the city's most characteristic colors.

SANGRE DE TORO

Deep, wine-red doors and walls punctuate San Miguel's streets. Rich and dramatic, the color becomes even deeper against weathered stone and brightly painted façades.

NOPAL

The muted green of prickly pear cactus is part of the semi-arid landscape surrounding San Miguel. Its dusty tone appears in gardens, countryside, and on the plate.

CIELO DE SAN MIGUEL

At more than 1,900 meters above sea level, San Miguel is known for expansive skies and intense high-altitude light. The blue provides a cool counterpoint to the warm colors below.

CANTERA GRIS

Grey cantera appears in fountains, columns, thresholds, and architectural details throughout the historic center. Weather and footsteps soften the stone, giving it a patina that only improves with age.



End-of-Year New Books

By Carole Reedy

Readers have had a banner year of new books from some of our favorite writers, and it's not over yet. Here are six titles arriving before the end of 2026 to add to your holiday list—either to give or, even better, to receive.

Partita by Barbara Kingsolver, October 6

Without a doubt one of the most anticipated reads of the season, Kingsolver's latest will appear in bookstores, libraries, and on your Kindle this fall. We mentioned this book, about music, memory, and a life-altering love affair, in our July 2026 column and include it here again as a reminder.



Stations by Louise Kennedy, November 3

Kennedy's much-lauded 2022 debut novel, *Trespasses*, put her on the radar of book lovers everywhere. The book was also adapted into a British TV series. Irish author Anne Enright poignantly said of the novel: "I loved it for the way it holds a national sorrow."

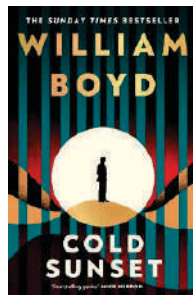


Kennedy's latest returns to the world of 1980s Ireland and Northern Ireland. It's the story of two teenagers, Red and Róisín. Red, often on the wrong side of the law, escapes to England, but they remain connected. In search of freedom, Róisín eventually travels to England but doesn't find what she anticipated.

Cold Sunset by William Boyd, November 3 in the US, September 3 in Britain

Even if you're not a lover of the spy genre, a William Boyd novel is guaranteed to entertain in a deeply intelligent way. Boyd's unusual talent for engaging readers, regardless of the subject matter, is evident in the 16 novels he's published to date.

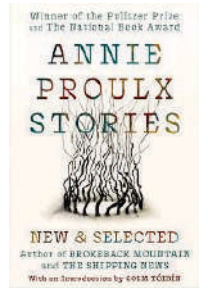
Cold Sunset is number three in his Gabriel Dax spy series, preceded by *Gabriel's Moon* and *The Predicament*, both compelling, delightfully fresh, entertaining reads.



Cold Sunset takes the reluctant spy and travel writer Gabriel Dax to Russia in 1964 with the task of delivering a drawing to a triple agent, who then wants Dax to sneak him over the Russian border to Finland.

Annie Proulx Stories: New and Selected, November 10

Annie Proulx is 91 years old. Her newest publication brings together celebrated stories from across her career, along with three new works. The collection spans decades of her writing about the American West, New England, and rural life.

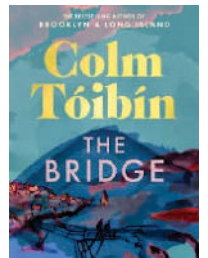


The book's introduction is written by Colm Tóibín (see his new book below), who has observed that some of the most powerful depictions of intimacy between men can be found in Proulx's work.

Proulx has had a distinguished career. Her 1993 novel *The Shipping News* won both the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award. Her short story *Brokeback Mountain* won an O. Henry Award in 1998 and was later adapted into an opera, with a libretto written by Proulx herself. The opera premiered at Madrid's Teatro Real in 2014.

The Bridge by Colm Tóibín, December 1

Tóibín has the remarkable talent, found in so many Irish writers, of weaving a simple story into a beautifully rendered tale. Each of his books is unique in subject, place, and style. *The Bridge* is a novella and a follow-up to *A Long Winter*. The setting is the Catalan Pyrenees, where a new bridge opens up a formerly isolated area. And so the story of Miquel and his father continues.



Tóibín has written 11 novels, including *Brooklyn*, *The Blackwater Lightship*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and *The Master*.

Primeval and Other Times by Olga Tokarczuk, December 1

Originally published in Poland in the 1990s, *Primeval and Other Times* arrives this December in a new US edition translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones.

Tokarczuk was awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature for what the Nobel committee described as "a narrative imagination that with encyclopedic passion represents the crossing of boundaries as a form of life."



One of Tokarczuk's most notable creations, *Flights*, was awarded the Man Booker International Prize in 2018 and is a reader favorite. The unusually titled *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* is another of her popular works, while the 900-page epic *The Books of Jacob* is considered by many to be her magnum opus.

Tokarczuk's background in clinical psychology is evident in her writing. *Primeval* is a mythical Polish village through which Tokarczuk takes us across three generations of life. Reading their stories may cause you to reflect on your own history and life. The tales are not only about the changes and hardships experienced by the people, but also about the natural world surrounding them.

We're already looking forward to another year of innovative storytelling in 2027.

***Carole Reedy has been writing for The Eye since 2011.
She is an avid reader who has made Mexico her home
for many years.***



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Memories of Champagne Wishes and Caviar Dreams

By Charles Woollett



Remember Robin Leach's iconic 1980s television series, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, with its signature farewell, “Champagne wishes and caviar dreams”? A recent Caribbean voyage aboard a SeaDream yacht brought those words back to me. It was a week of epicurean delights, casual perfection, and the rare pleasure of doing absolutely nothing. The anticipation of the unknown has always been my key motivation for traveling. What lured me to SeaDream was the promise of an intimate yacht carrying just 112 guests, attended by a crew of 98, with an emphasis on extraordinary French-inspired gastronomy.

Our itinerary included Virgin Gorda, Nevis, St. Kitts, Anguilla, St. Barts, and Jost Van Dyke. On St. Barts, the Caribbean's French Riviera, lunch at Le Toiny meant toes in the sand, a cold Chardonnay, and truffle French fries smothered in foie gras and Parmesan cheese. Ooh la la!

Then there was the decadent caviar and Champagne beach barbecue at White Bay on Jost Van Dyke, followed by the obligatory Painkiller at the Soggy Dollar Bar.

You sail by night and explore by day. I knew we would be surrounded by azure-blue water, ideal for unwinding the mind and dining in food heaven. What I hadn't anticipated was just how completely I would disconnect.

Several years ago, we discovered the pleasure of going unplugged at our favorite Villa Rolandi on Isla Mujeres. It has since become our preferred way to vacation. No cell phone, computer, television, or newspapers. Just your partner, a good book, and pampered service.

It brings a different kind of awareness to what we call “where nothingness begins.”

A Grand Beginning

We arrived in San Juan, Puerto Rico, a day before sailing and stayed at the majestic Condado Vanderbilt, where old-world elegance meets modern luxury.

Opened in 1919, the hotel has welcomed European nobility and Hollywood stars and remains one of San Juan's grand dames. Dinner at its restaurant, 1919, under the direction of Executive Chef Juan José Cuevas, was a fitting introduction to the culinary pleasures ahead.

Lifestyle and Cuisine

For all the five-star venues we've been privileged to enjoy around the world, this onboard experience exceeded our expectations.

Executive Chef Ali's approach was simple: cater to your every culinary wish. His creative offerings, which he describes as Confluence Cuisine, included Veal Wellington, sole meunière, perfectly steamed mussels with garlic toast, fork-tender osso buco, artichoke and sun-dried tomato salad, trout amandine, fresh lobster salad, tuna tartare, and, of course, a Grand Marnier soufflé.

Why not?

Pre-dinner cocktails and hors d'oeuvres were another pleasure. We could choose between dining in the main salon or al fresco, with excellent wines selected by our French sommelier, Eric.

But it wasn't only the food that made the experience memorable. The crew seemed to remember our names from the first day. Pool attendants appeared with cool water mist and offered to clean our sunglasses. These are small gestures, but they're precisely the details that distinguish a memorable holiday from an ordinary one.

Food, wine, spirits, gratuities, and an impressive selection of recreational equipment were included. Our stateroom, number 406, came with monogrammed pajamas, Bvlgari bath amenities, and nightly pillow gifts.

Do I dare say it? It felt rather like being a guest aboard a wealthy friend's yacht.

Yachting, Not Cruising

There is a difference.

We've given up the big cruise ships in favor of smaller, more intimate vessels. We've logged 49 days aboard Windstar's motor yachts and sailing ships, and SeaDream offered another compelling reason to continue traveling this way.

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The atmosphere is one of discreet sophistication without the formality that sometimes accompanies luxury travel. Everyone seems united by a common purpose: to relax, explore, and want for nothing.

All you need to do is give yourself permission.

And perhaps that's what I remember most. Not simply the Champagne, the caviar, or even the remarkable meals, although I certainly wouldn't turn down another Grand Marnier soufflé.

It's the sensation of sailing through the Caribbean with nowhere else I needed to be. No messages to answer. No news to catch up on. No schedule beyond deciding whether to go ashore or stay aboard.

Just the sea, the company, and that wonderful feeling of arriving at the place we call "where nothingness begins."

Charles Woollett has been writing about film, food, and travel for more than thirty years.

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The Curious Case of Mexican Nebbiolo

By Melissa Lyon

Spend an afternoon tasting wine in Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe and sooner rather than later, someone will pour you a Nebbiolo. That may not sound particularly unusual. After all, Nebbiolo is one of Italy's most celebrated red grapes, responsible for the legendary Barolo and Barbaresco wines of Piedmont. But there is something decidedly strange about encountering it in Baja California. Among other things, Valle de Guadalupe is thousands of kilometers from northern Italy, and its climate is considerably sunnier and drier. And yet Nebbiolo has become one of the valley's predominant varieties.



In contrast, Baja's "Nebbiolo" tends to be much darker and more deeply colored, with riper fruit, greater tannic weight and a more powerful profile.

Magoni, now 83 years old, recently remarked on his surprise encountering the vines upon arrival, "Of course," he said, "I had my ideas. But I shut my mouth and just observed and didn't talk." Acknowledging the difference, Magoni specifically calls the grape *Nebbiolo de Baja*. So, what do others think of the Mexican "Nebbiolo"? "It's not Italian. There's more color, more intensity," said Paolo Paoloni, an Italian winemaker

working with Baja's Villa Montefiori. Paoloni calls his version *Nebbiolo de Guadalupe*, emphasizing the wine's relationship with its regional identity.

There is just one problem. Some of the grapes being called Nebbiolo in Baja California may not actually be *Nebbiolo*.

The story begins more than eighty years ago, when Italian-born winemaker Esteban Ferro brought vine cuttings from northern Italy to Bodegas Santo Tomás in Baja California in the 1940s. But the journey from Italy to Mexico was not always an orderly one. Legend has it that in transit, vine labels were damaged or lost while moving through the port of Veracruz. Upon arrival in Baja, rather than discarding the unidentified vines, growers planted them. Robust harvests followed, with vines identified as Nebbiolo and others simply known as "Italian varieties" thriving in their new home.

Fast forward to 1965, when Italian viticulturist Camillo Magoni, who would go on to become one of the most influential figures in Mexican wine, arrived in Baja to work with L.A. Cetto. Having grown up surrounded by viticulture in northern Italy, and having studied winemaking in Piedmont, Magoni was uniquely qualified to recognize that something unusual was going on.

The grape being called Nebbiolo in Baja did not look or taste like the Nebbiolo he knew in Italy. Italian Nebbiolo wines, like the Barolo and Barbaresco wines of Piedmont, are famously pale in color but intensely aromatic, with high acidity, firm tannins and characteristic aromas of cherries, roses and violets.

So what exactly is growing in those vineyards? Modern DNA analysis has provided a clue. José Vouillamoz, one of the world's leading grape geneticists and co-author of *Wine Grapes*, has reported that at least one sample of the mysterious Baja vine tested as potentially being Lambrusca di Alessandria. If confirmed more broadly, this would mean that at least some of the vines long identified in Mexico as Nebbiolo may actually belong to another Italian variety.

However, the evidence is far from conclusive. The sample represented only a limited number of vines, and additional genetic testing would be required before the identity of the broader population of Baja vines could be established. Unquestionably, there are genuine Nebbiolo vines growing in Baja as well, sharing the beautiful valley with the older, mysterious population of vines historically labeled Nebbiolo.

This certainly isn't the only case of mistaken grape identity to happen in the New World. Consider the more recent case of Mourvèdre in Paso Robles, California. In 2018, the wine world learned that beginning in 2012, more than 200,000 vines sold by a California nursery as Monastrell, the Spanish name for Mourvèdre, were planted in vineyards throughout the region.

As they harvested and bottled their wines, winemakers increasingly noticed that something was not quite right. The vines grew differently from their established Mourvèdre, and the resulting grapes produced wines with unusually deep color and higher acidity.

Genetic testing eventually revealed the answer: the vines weren't Mourvèdre at all. They were Graciano, a relatively obscure Spanish variety associated particularly with Rioja. In other words, hundreds of thousands of vines, and years of wine production, had been given the wrong label. Even so, the Paso Robles Graciano was praised for its color, fruit and acidity, and its curious origin story has only enhanced its consumer appeal.

Similarly, the Nebbiolo of Baja has won over wine enthusiasts the world over. Of course, while the Paso Robles vines were ultimately confirmed as Graciano through genetic testing, the identity of the Mexican Nebbiolo remains unclear.

So, does the name really matter? For some winemakers and oenophiles, absolutely. For others, perhaps not so much. Kristin Magnussen of Vinos Lechuza takes a refreshingly pragmatic view. "Is it really Nebbiolo? Well, it's Mexican Nebbiolo."



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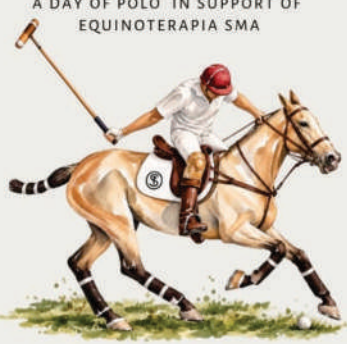


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SCAN TO RESERVE

1968: The Massacre Mexico Was Supposed to Forget

By Estefanía Camacho Jiménez

When you visit the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, on a quiet afternoon, when the old trees are almost the only sound amplified by the plaza's peculiar acoustics, you can feel something like a stifled scream. It has always astonished me that so many tragedies could have taken place there.



The plaza contains traces of three major tragedies. In 1521, a massacre followed Cuauhtémoc's defense of Tlatelolco against Hernán Cortés. "It was neither a triumph nor a defeat; it was the painful birth of the mestizo people that is Mexico today," reads a monumental plaque. In 1968, students were massacred only four years after the inauguration of Mario Pani's modernist housing complex.

Then, during the magnitude 8.1 earthquake of September 19, 1985, the Nuevo León building collapsed, killing many of its residents. Each tragedy has its own memorial in a plaza where beautiful apartments still stand, some seemingly frozen in the 1960s.

That Afternoon

That afternoon was confusing. According to the immediate accounts of journalists, residents and survivors, there was no way to determine how many people had been killed on October 2.

Tensions had been building throughout the summer of 1968. Mexico's authoritarian government, controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, used a clash between students from schools affiliated with UNAM and the National Polytechnic Institute as justification for intervening in educational institutions across the capital. The riot police known as the *granaderos* beat, tortured and detained students and, at times, teachers. As the students organized against the repression and demanded the release of political prisoners, every new protest brought further arrests. The government accused them of trying to sabotage the Olympic Games, and the conflict escalated when the Army entered UNAM preparatory schools with tanks, military trucks, artillery and a bazooka.

The Eye 24

In the United States, some press coverage repeated unsubstantiated allegations that Fidel Castro and communist agents had infiltrated the protests. These claims reflected the Cold War obsession with preventing the alleged spread of Cuban communism throughout the continent.

What the public did not know in 1968 was that President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was one of the CIA's

highest-level contacts in Mexico and had been assigned the cryptonym LITEMPO-2. His government shared information about the protests, student leaders and political opponents, while the agency closely monitored the movement. Documents declassified decades later also showed that Mexican officials misled the CIA about the origins of the violence and the government's responsibility for it.

By mid-September, approximately 10,000 soldiers had occupied University City, UNAM's main campus, while the arrests of high school and university students continued. UNAM Rector Javier Barros Sierra publicly sided with the students, infuriating Díaz Ordaz. Under intense government pressure, he submitted his resignation in late September, although the university's Governing Board refused to accept it.

Much of the mass media had been co-opted by those in power. Newspapers, television programs and magazines were expected to follow the government's version of events. Only a handful of journalists dared to criticize its actions, particularly after October 2, knowing that doing so could lead to censorship, persecution or even death.

International progressive movements, feminism, the counterculture, foreign music, the Cuban Revolution and protests against the Vietnam War were also influencing young Mexicans. This was a generation awakening to its dissatisfaction with an established order controlled by a repressive party that elected and reelected itself through processes bearing little resemblance to democracy. Those who questioned the system were branded as enemies and persecuted.

On September 30, the Army withdrew from UNAM's main campus, leaving destruction behind. Students then prepared for an October 2 rally at the Plaza of the Three Cultures, followed by a march toward the Polytechnic's Casco de Santo Tomás campus.

The Day

Despite the peaceful nature of the gathering, the Plaza of the Three Cultures had become a trap. The esplanade was enclosed by the Church of Santiago and the tall buildings of the housing complex. Government agents had infiltrated the crowd in civilian clothes, while troops, tanks and armored vehicles surrounded the area. The gathering included not only students but also families, children, teachers, workers and Mexican and international journalists. Estimates place the crowd at as many as 10,000 people.

Two movement leaders spoke briefly, but tense and cautious. The second announced that organizers feared a provocation and had therefore decided to cancel the march. The gathering would disperse as soon as the speakers had finished.

Above them, two menacing helicopters circled the plaza. Flares were fired into the sky.

The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, who was present that day, later recalled that her experience covering the war in Vietnam taught her to recognize the flares as an unmistakable signal that an attack was about to begin. She was alarmed, but it was already too late.

Troops moved into the plaza carrying machine guns and high-caliber weapons. Gunfire erupted from the surrounding buildings, and the soldiers opened fire. Armed men in civilian clothes, identified by a white glove or handkerchief, moved through the crowd and entered the Chihuahua building. Some belonged to the Batallón Olimpia, which had been assigned to capture the student leaders; later evidence indicated that a separate group of snipers linked to the Presidential General Staff fired on both the crowd and the Army. Amid the confusion, plainclothes agents shouted, "Batallón Olimpia! Don't shoot!" to keep soldiers from killing members of their own side.

People ran into the surrounding buildings and pounded desperately on apartment doors, begging residents to hide them. Some did. But hiding proved futile. Security forces forced their way into the apartments, violating the homes of residents and killing or detaining people who had simply been going about their daily lives. Photographs documenting some of these acts would not become widely known until decades later.



Grupo de estudiantes haciendo guardia en espera del diálogo público.
27 de agosto de 1968. Archivo.
Fotográfico de El Nacional, Fondo Temático, Sobre 337 - G. INEHRM.



Decades Later

It was not until 2000, when the PRI lost the presidency after more than seven decades in power, that Vicente Fox came to office promising to clarify what had happened. By then, writers, journalists, intellectuals and filmmakers had spent decades pursuing the same questions: How many people were killed? Where and under what circumstances did they die? How many disappeared? Was it possible to remove the bodies in a single night and then claim that only 20 or 30 people had died?

The Díaz Ordaz government never officially acknowledged the *Batallón Olimpia*'s role. For years, the evidence consisted mainly of survivor testimony and fragmentary footage, as government agents had confiscated film from some journalists. In 2002, journalist Sanjuana Martínez anonymously received an archive containing 35 previously unpublished photographs taken by Manuel Gutiérrez Paredes, who had worked for the government. The images showed detainees, torture, bodies, weapons and men wearing white gloves, further undermining the official account and its implausibly low death toll.



Puestos de periódicos tirados por los estudiantes.
Agosto de 1968. Archivo Fotográfico de El Nacional,
Fondo Temático, Sobre 337 - G. INEHRM. NT-337-G-053.

Fox knew the wound Mexico was carrying. By then, the slogan “October 2 will not be forgotten!” had echoed across the country for decades, particularly during the annual march commemorating the massacre. The demonstration traditionally begins in Tlatelolco and proceeds to Mexico City's Zócalo. High school students, university students, young people and workers gather every year, with some traveling from other states to participate.

A presidential decree issued in 2001 ordered federal agencies to transfer records concerning past political repression to the General Archive of the Nation. The following year, Mexico's intelligence service delivered more than 4,000 boxes containing approximately 58,000 files produced by the former Federal Security Directorate and the General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations. The Defense Ministry transferred a separate military collection.

International correspondents who had arrived to cover the Olympic Games inevitably noticed what was happening to students, teachers and workers. Despite government censorship, the information crossed Mexico's borders. Díaz Ordaz may have feared that the country would be portrayed as sliding toward communism; instead, he became internationally associated with authoritarianism and grave human rights violations.

We remember the date because public protest is a right.



Desfile Deportivo de la Revolución Mexicana, 20 de noviembre de 1968,
Archivo Gráfico de El Nacional, Fondo Deportes, sobre
Juegos Olímpicos, México, Inauguración P. INEHRM.



Archivo Fotográfico de El Nacional, Fondo Temático, Sobre 337 - G. INEHRM



Because the declassification and opening of government archives happened only recently.

Because photographic and documentary evidence can expose lies repeated for decades.

Because alarms go off whenever military convoys, soldiers or armed deployments appear on streets where they do not belong.

Because police forces are not supposed to enter university campuses, and when they do—as they still have—it must be regarded as reprehensible and unacceptable.

Because, in theory, no event as grand as the Olympic Games should ever be considered more important than human rights.

And because when students from other states organize and travel to the annual October 2 commemoration, their lives should not be placed in danger—as happened to the 43 students from Ayotzinapa who were forcibly disappeared on September 26, 2014. Mexico, you could say, has an extraordinary capacity to remember.

Estefanía Camacho Jiménez is a freelance Mexican journalist working across media and digital magazines. She is a specialist in gender, SMEs, economics, and business.

My Quest for Calm in San Miguel

By Audrey Jacobs

Everyone warned me when I moved to San Miguel de Allende, and I didn't listen. Centro is still a city. Church bells, trucks, street vendors hawking their wares, New York City with the flavor of a small Mexican colonial town. They said I'd eventually crave nature, quiet, a kind of peace only living outside of town can give you.



Life got crazy, and I finally understood the warnings. But I love my duplex in Colonia San Antonio. I didn't want to "vacation" to relax. So, I went looking for a staycation instead, a week immersed in nature, where someone else would take care of me and force me into self-care.

My life had quietly, then suddenly, turned upside down. At 55, nine months earlier, I'd moved here alone to fulfill a 30-year dream, with a safety net, a well-paid consulting client I'd had for years. I'd spent my whole life multitasking as a wife, mother, employee, with passion projects as my side hustle: curating TEDx talks, building community, designing events, and matchmaking. I never flew without a net.

Then the net disappeared. My consulting contract ended, my job was eaten by AI. It was time to depend on myself. Terrifying. My body went into fight, flight, or freeze and stayed there. I ate too much, drank too much, didn't sleep, snapped at my boyfriend, and turned into a whirling dervish.

Inspiration struck and in one insane month I built "Love in San Miguel", a new social club, from nothing to 400 members and a launch event. It was supposed to fulfill me and sustain me. It did, and it also took a toll.

I needed a reset, a therapeutic escape to restore my nervous system. I made a list of what I wanted: nature, peaceful elegant rooms, a home feel rather than a hotel, places to write, a bio pool, a sauna, hot tub and views.

Most of all, someone whose life's work was running that place, someone who'd decide exactly what I ate, drank, and did for one week. I wanted to be told how to reset. I'm from California, so I know the Golden Door style reset, where they control your every movement and you switch off. Never been my thing. I wanted a place where I could still think, and where the person running it could teach me a way of living so stress wouldn't swallow me again once I got home. And I didn't want it to break the bank.

Reasonable yet valuable. It was a demanding list. I'm so demanding about homes and men that I honestly doubted this place existed.

Was I wrong!

Meet Viktor Hackl, owner of Cuna del Cielo. I googled San Miguel de Allende detox retreat, and his place was, literally, the only one that matched my vision. Everything else was a pretty place with massages, yoga, donkeys or simply day spas.

His website's first line got me: "Cuna del Cielo is a lush four-bedroom oasis on a hilltop above San Miguel de Allende, inviting guests to rest and heal in a space of undisturbed peace and beauty."

I ached reading it. How soon could I check in?

The property sits a ten-to-fifteen-minute walk from the main town square, yet worlds away quietly tucked right against the botanical gardens of the Charco del Ingenio, canyons and waterfalls. Viktor built his sanctuary around that stunning landscape.

It was everything I'd dreamed of. I live in San Miguel and love it, but up here, above it all, something in me unclenched. I didn't realize how much I needed to see that much open sky.

Viktor's regimen, food, supplements, exercise, healing modalities, is thorough and deeply researched. Yet he's not rigid about whether or when you do it.

“Who are you?!?” I asked him. “Austrian”, he said. A more relaxed and casual hybrid of German/Italian/Slavic mentalities. He truly embodied his vision when I saw him grinning over the top of his hand-built wooden sauna box, tanned and peaceful.

Every surface here is made with love. My room, the World Loft, has a private library you reach by a wooden ladder and a round window that frames a single pirul (pink pepper) tree like a painting. I felt like I was in some sort of health time warp. I genuinely didn't want to leave.

Viktor lives on the property full time and tends to his guests with sincere patience. I'm dating the man who opened San Miguel's first organic grocery store, someone who takes a generous number of daily supplements, and even he was impressed by Viktor's knowledge and protocol.

What surprised me most wasn't any single treatment. It was how much of Viktor's world quietly rearranged mine, without ever feeling like a lecture.

The days follow an intermittent fasting window. Orthomolecular supplements are dosed with real precision. A therapeutic cycle runs once or twice daily: stretching, wet sauna, gym, cold plunge, infrared sauna again. It never once feels like a chore.

But it's the small things I know I'll actually keep. On day two, someone knocked and asked if Viktor's energy cleanser could come into my room for the weekly clearing. Sage, essential oils, incense, and it was done weekly. I've saged a new home before I moved in. I'd never once thought to do it weekly, as maintenance, the way you'd change sheets. I'm taking that home with me.

I also noticed that by day three, my cravings for junk had simply stopped, because the junk wasn't in the house. Stupid simple concept I'd never applied to my own kitchen. If it's not there, you don't eat it. And the eating window, done by six most nights, isn't a diet rule so much as a kindness to your own sleep. I'll still go out for dinner sometimes. I'm not becoming a monk. But the logic of it stuck.

The bedrooms are massive and still cozy, and I never felt crowded by the other three rooms. The communal kitchen, dining room, and rooftop hot tub give everyone room to mix or disappear. I loved the outdoor gym more than I've ever loved a gym, including an assisted morning headstand with my boyfriend spotting me.



My nervous system had been on overdrive, inhaling stress for three months straight, and I won't pretend one week erased that. I still snap back into old patterns when triggered. But for most of each day, I was genuinely, physically at peace, in a way my body had been begging for.

Cuna del Cielo also offers oxygen therapy, IV drips, acupuncture, and sound healing, a full menu I didn't even get on this trip. Reasons enough to go back.

I would have guessed San Miguel had a dozen places doing this. It has exactly one operating at this level, and I'm grateful it does. If you live here, you don't need a plane ticket for this kind of reset. Cuna del Cielo even offers day passes, a few hours with the saunas, the natural pool, and the jacuzzi, for anyone who just needs an afternoon of it. If you're visiting, block off the week. I live in San Miguel, and I'm already planning when I get to go back.

Audrey Jacobs is the founder and chief matchmaker of Love in San Miguel | Amor en San Miguel. She is a TEDx speaker whose talk has been viewed nearly 200,000 times. Audrey lives in San Miguel de Allende and believes the city is too magical to love alone.

Alebrijes: From a Fever Dream to a Oaxacan Art Form

By Shannon Jiménez

Few examples of Mexican folk art are as instantly recognizable as alebrijes. Brilliantly colored and covered in intricate patterns, these fantastical creatures might combine the body of a jaguar with wings, horns, scales, or other features drawn entirely from the artist's imagination.



Today, alebrijes are strongly associated with Oaxaca, where artisans carve figures from copal wood and decorate them with extraordinarily detailed designs. But the story of the alebrije actually begins hundreds of kilometers away, in Mexico City.

The Birth of the Alebrije

The original alebrijes were created in the 1930s by Mexico City artisan Pedro Linares López, a master of *cartonería*, the traditional craft of making figures from paper and cardboard.

According to Linares, while seriously ill he fell unconscious and dreamed of a strange forest inhabited by fantastic creatures. Some combined parts of different animals: a donkey with wings, for example, or a rooster with the horns of a bull. As the creatures appeared, they repeatedly shouted a mysterious word: “alebrije.”

When Linares recovered, he began recreating the creatures he had seen, using the paper and cardboard techniques he already knew. His brightly colored figures eventually attracted the attention of artists and collectors, including Diego Rivera, and his work became known in Mexico and abroad.

Contrary to a story sometimes repeated about the name, the word *alebrije* is not derived from the Spanish word *alegría*, meaning joy. Linares maintained that *alebrije* was simply the strange word he heard in his dream.

From Mexico City to Oaxaca

The wooden figures that most visitors now associate with alebrijes developed separately in Oaxaca. Woodcarving had existed in Oaxacan communities long before the alebrije appeared. Artisans traditionally carved animals, masks, toys, religious objects, and figures connected with local celebrations and everyday life.

One of the most influential Oaxacan carvers was Manuel Jiménez

Ramírez, from San Antonio Arrazola, near Oaxaca City. Jiménez helped transform traditional animal carving into a distinctive artistic form, producing imaginative creatures that appealed to collectors and visitors.

Over time, the name *alebrije*, originally associated with Linares' fantastical *cartonería* figures, began to be applied to these colorful Oaxacan woodcarvings as well. The tradition expanded particularly in communities such as San Antonio Arrazola and San Martín Tilcajete, which today are internationally known for their carved and painted figures.

How Oaxacan Alebrijes Are Made

Oaxacan alebrijes are traditionally carved from copal, a wood prized by artisans because it is relatively soft and workable when freshly cut.

The artist first studies the natural shape of a branch or piece of wood, sometimes allowing its curves and irregularities to suggest the animal that will emerge. The basic form is carved with tools such as machetes, knives, and chisels.

Separate elements—including ears, horns, wings, and tails—may be carved individually and attached later. Once carved, the wood must dry. It is then sanded and prepared for painting. Cracks that develop during drying can be filled before decoration begins.

The painting is often as impressive as the carving itself. Artists cover the figures with dots, lines, geometric forms, flowers, scales, and other elaborate patterns. Some artisans use extremely fine tools—even the thorn of a maguey—to create minute details.

Alebrije making is frequently a family enterprise, with carving and painting skills passed from one generation to another. However, the old generalization that “men carve and women paint” does not accurately describe every workshop today. Both men and women work as carvers, painters, designers, and master artisans.

Alebrijes, Tonas and Nahuales

Another popular misconception is that alebrijes are inherently ancient Zapotec spirit animals. The relationship is more complicated.

Ideas surrounding tonas and nahuales have deep roots in Indigenous cultures of Oaxaca, and contemporary artists sometimes draw upon these traditions when creating their work. Some artisans explicitly describe their figures in relation to *nahuales* or other spiritual concepts.

But alebrijes themselves are not an ancient pre-Hispanic art form. The term dates only to Pedro Linares and the twentieth century. The Oaxacan wooden tradition represents a fascinating meeting of older Indigenous carving practices, individual artistic innovation, tourism, the international folk-art market, and the influence of Linares' fantastical creatures.

A Living Oaxacan Art

What began as one artisan's fever dream in Mexico City evolved into something quite different in Oaxaca.

Oaxacan artists took an existing tradition of woodcarving and pushed it in remarkable new directions. Today, workshops continue to experiment with increasingly complex carving, painting, and design, while individual families develop styles recognizable as their own.

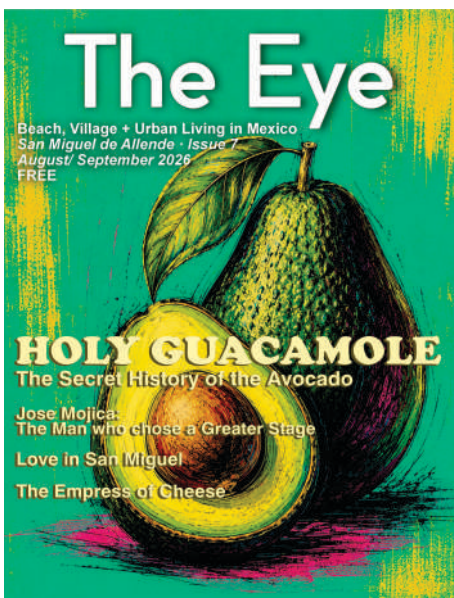
No two handmade pieces are exactly alike. Some resemble recognizable animals—rabbits, coyotes, jaguars, cats, armadillos—while others combine features from several creatures or spring entirely from the artist's imagination. That individuality is part of their appeal. An alebrije can be playful, elegant, strange, whimsical, or even slightly unsettling.

And although they have become one of the most recognizable forms of contemporary Mexican folk art, their history is surprisingly recent: a Mexico City dream transformed by generations of Oaxacan hands.

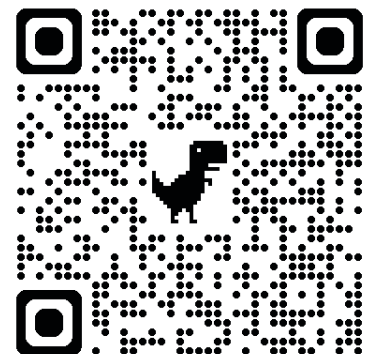
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www.lavivienda.com.mx



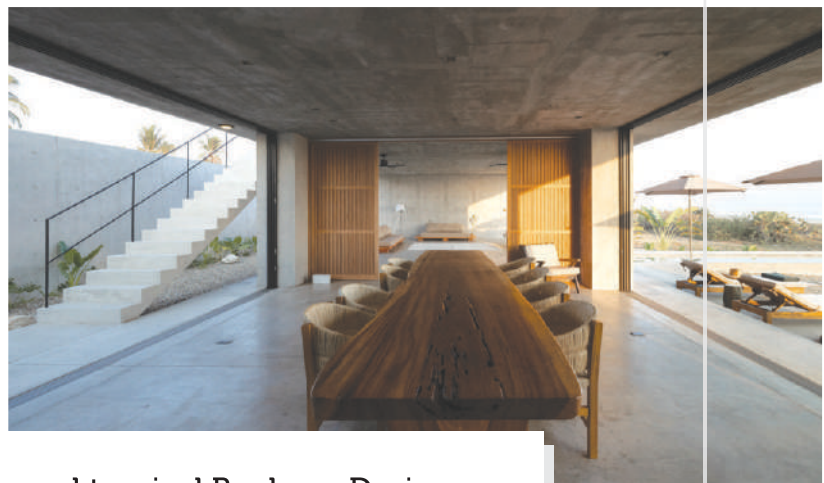


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