



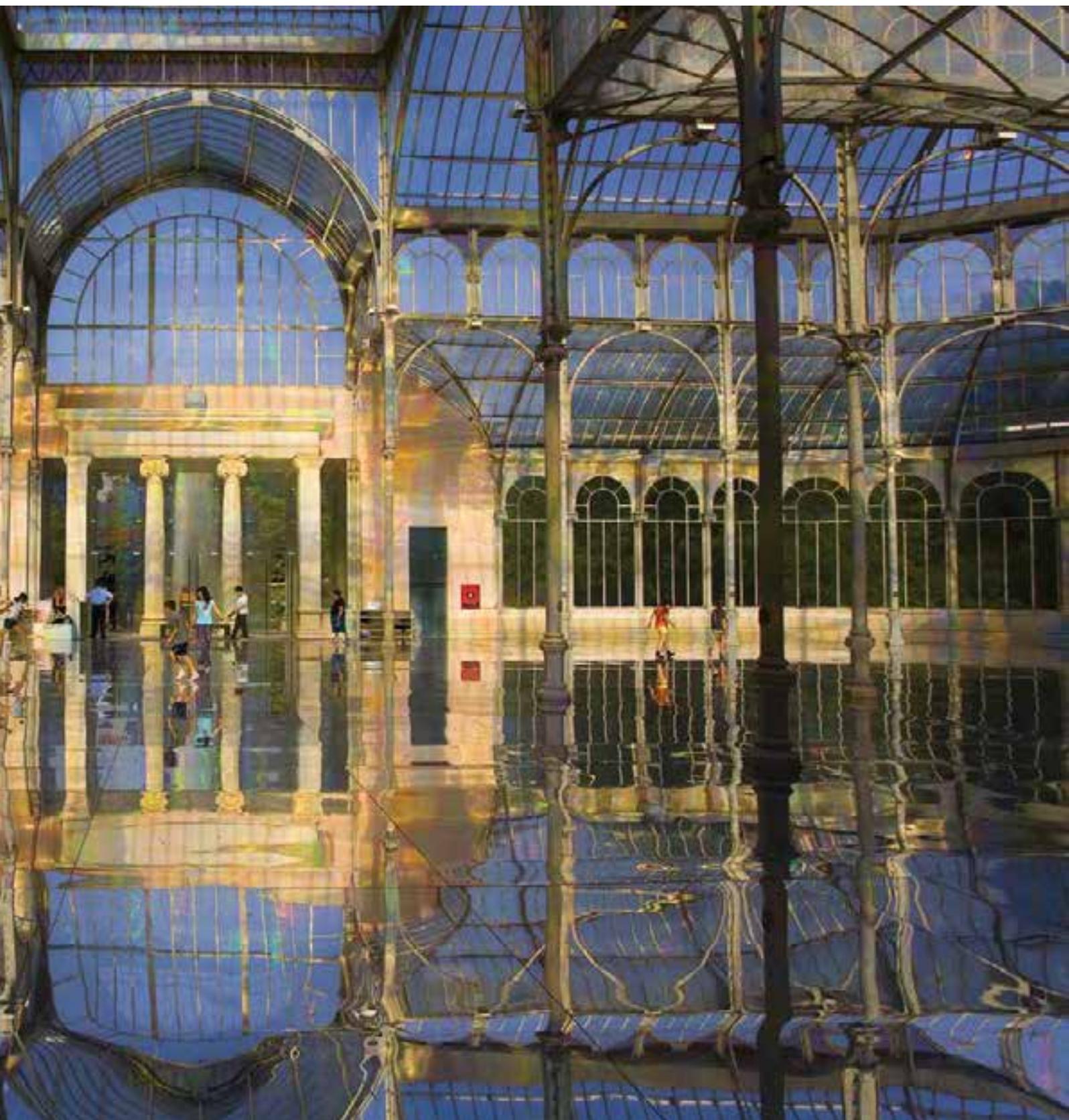
MADRID'S MEANDERING MOVIDA

Experience the Cultural & Architectural Wonders of Madrid

When in Madrid, take your cue from the locals - or Madrileños as they are known - and spend your days admiring the city's architecture and your nights enjoying its lively flamenco.

A trip to Spain's most central city, Madrid, must begin on Plaza de Cibeles.

In the middle of the square stands a goddess on a chariot pulled by two lions. Behind her, the spires of the Palacio de Comunicaciones de Madrid rise tall and proud. Originally the postal service headquarters, this beautiful building was home to the Postal and Telegraphic Museum until 2007, when it became the Madrid City Hall. In 1993 it was declared *Bien de Interés Cultural*, a category of the Spanish heritage register.





On the opposite corner, milky white against a dark background, stands the Palacio de Linares, declared *Bien de Interés Cultural* in 1976. Across from it, dominated by a golden globe, is the Banca de España (Bank of Spain), dating back to 1891. It is the most extensive building in Spain in cadastral terms, measuring more than 100,000 square metres. This is the heart of the capital, the exact point where the east-

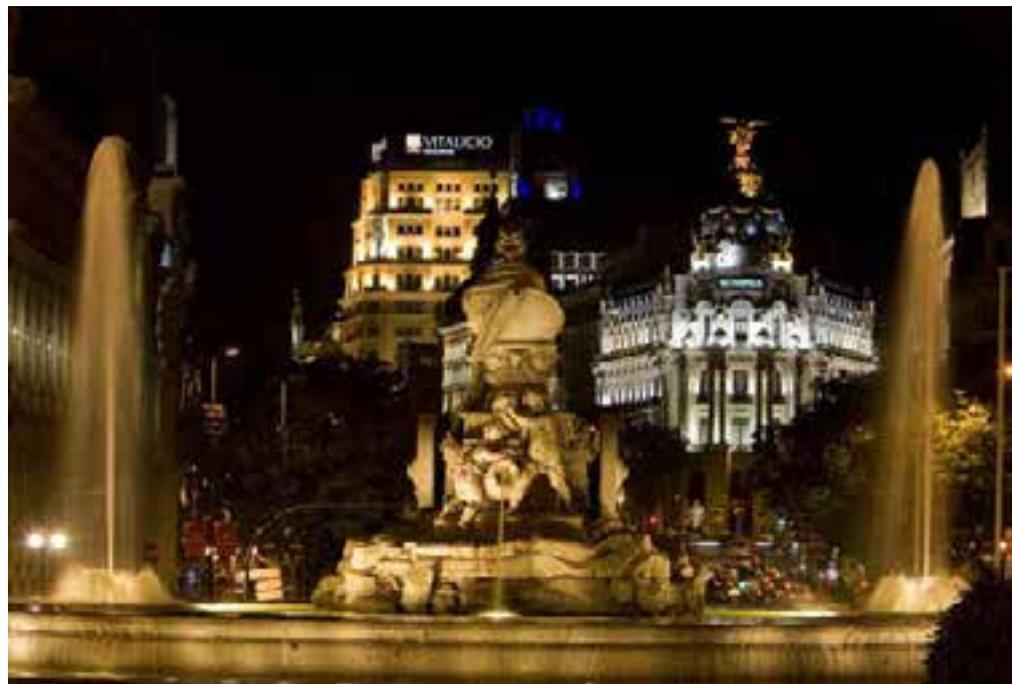
west avenue, the Calle de Alcalá, meets the north-south boulevard, the Paseo del Prado. Behind the Post Office stands the Puerta de Alcalá - the triple vaulted triumphal arch and a Madrilenian icon.

Your next stop - Gran Vía - is known as the "Madrilenian Broadway" and is a spectacular collection of 20th-century architecture. At number 12, opposite the Museo Chicote, is the Hotel de las Letras.

At number 28, the Edificio Telefonica - Madrid's first skyscraper. Inspired by the Chicago School, the Edificio Telefonica's surfaces are smooth and flat, with innumerable windows and the highest storeys set back. At 13, the Real Academia de Bellas Artes exhibits Goya's six small paintings of children playing. There is also a work called *Burial of the Sardine* and a self-portrait, painted in 1815, of the great



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ABOVE LEFT: *Flamenco*
ABOVE RIGHT: *Promenade Calle de las Huertas*
RIGHT: *Plaza de Cibeles*

master at his easel, the candles on his hat allowing him to continue painting once darkness falls.

Visit the royal palace next by crossing the Sabatini gardens, cool under the magnolias, via the Plaza de España. Once you are in front of the palace, contemplate its north façade and the classical balance and baroque elegance of the statues towering from the corners. Madrid was born on this hill. In 853, the Moors built a fortress here (the Royal Alcázar of Madrid), which the Christians seized in 1083 and which Philip II extended when he transferred the capital from Toledo to Madrid in 1561. The fortress burnt down in 1734, and Philip V, the first Bourbon, decided to have a new palace built. Bordering this palace is the Plaza de Oriente, a square lying to the east. In the centre of which stands the equestrian statue of Philip IV – a piece also known as the four geniuses, as Galileo did the calculations, Velasquez designed it, Pietro Tacca cast the bronze, while Martinez

Montanes made the king's head.

Crowded into the next remarkable spot - a small area within the Habsburgs Old Quarter - are a 17th-century palace and several baroque churches and stringed-instrument makers' shops. The literary quarter, bordered by the Calle Atocha, the Carrera de San Jeronimo and the Paseo del Prado, is not far from here. Plaza de Santa Ana is the vibrant heart of this part of Madrid, and is where theatre was born during the 16th century. Whilst there, appreciate the Neo-classical façade of the Teatro Español and look for the names Lope de Vega, Calderon de la Barca, and Tirso de Molina inscribed under its pediment.

As night falls, it is time to enjoy the theatrical tradition so well associated with Spain: flamenco. In a dimly lit cafe, a singer's voice modulates and quivers when, suddenly, a woman rises. Her lips tremble, her eyebrows knitted together, her chin jutting out defiantly. Her arms twist, then grasp and swirl the skirts that

fly. The small of her back arches, and her body twirls before lunging forward, arms raised. She stamps her heels and snaps her fingers, castanets clicking. Together with her back-up dancers, the singers encourage her movements, shouting "bravo, bravo" and "olé!" in time with the binary rhythm of hands and heels. Everyone's eyes are fixed on the dancer's feet, which pound the stage with quickening speed before thumping out a concluding crescendo.

If you're lucky enough, you may catch a glimpse of the relief experienced a few moments later in the wings. Once the show's tension has subsided, the dancers prepare themselves for their next performance, talking and teasing each other all the while. You may even be fortunate enough to meet a woman like Raquel, who decided to study flamenco at 16. At 21, she began touring the world. "The most important thing in the flamenco is improvisation," she says. "To express their feelings, the man tugs his jacket, the girl, her skirt," she continues. Some flamenco songs express intense suffering, most poignantly conveyed by the skilful body language of great dancers such as Blanca del Rey. If the mesmerising colours and sounds of flamenco are not enough to inspire you to immerse yourself in its splendour at the end of a long day in Madrid, you may be drawn to it in your lonelier moments as a traveller to the city. "Flamenco is the vital way to sympathise, to be human," concludes Raquel. 🇪🇸



ABOVE: Atocha Station, inaugurated in 1891

by *danielle tramard* / photography by *frédéric réglain*
(*lightmediation*)