



Baños Árabes Cultural Centre, Villardompardo Palace

Tradition and future in the heart of Andalucía



For centuries, the largest and best-preserved Arab baths in Europe and Northern Africa lay hidden under the Villardompardo Palace. A jewel of the architecture of Al-Andalus, rediscovered in 1913 and painstakingly restored in a process which was awarded the 1984 Europa Nostra's Medal of Honour. Three decades have passed since this award. The Provincial Government of Jaén is marking this anniversary with a major intervention in the building to create the Baños Árabes Cultural Centre, an open centre for the new millennium.

As well as the archaeological site itself, the seven floors house the Manuel Moral International Museum of Naïve Art and the Museum of Folk Art and Customs, spaces where museum areas and functional areas intermingle, and where the conservation and dissemination of heritage combine with a wide range of cultural events for the public to enjoy throughout the year. From its lookout point, the renewed Baños Árabes Cultural Centre calls to the city and its visitors, and opens its doors to all.

VILLARDOMPARDO PALACE

One of the great Renaissance palaces of 16th-century Jaén. Its stone façade dominates the Plaza Santa Luisa de Marillac, with two entrances: the main door to the left leads into



the palace, and the door to the right to the former church of La Visitación, which is now a gallery for temporary exhibitions. In the 17th and 18th centuries the palace was used as a bank. In the late 18th century, it was converted to a women's hospice. Over the main entrance to palace there is a white marble tablet bearing a Latin inscription which reads: "The first-born sons of the poor can feed, and the poor can rest in trust".

The central courtyard of the palace is lined with a gallery on two levels, the lower with Tuscan columns. The upper gallery has shorter columns

and lower arches, with the spaces between columns closed by a wooden balustrade.

The palace lobby invites us to enter to the left, to the reception area of the cultural centre, before visiting the Hall of the Province, covering the history and the most important events of its 97 municipalities. The next room is a hall with stairs down to the Arab baths and entrances to the two museums. Thanks to the restoration work, we can now visit the laundry of the former children's hospital, in the palace basement.



ARAB BATHS

The Arab Baths, alongside the Cathedral and the Castillo de Santa Catalina, are the most iconic sites in Jaén. Located in the basement of the Villardompardo Palace, the Arab baths were built in the 11th century, after the collapse of the Caliphate of Córdoba and the rise of the Taifa kingdoms. Several centuries later, they were discovered in 1913 during an inspection of the palace structure, and restored in 1970 by the architect Luis Berges Roldán.

In the basement of the Villardompardo Palace, they occupy an area of 450 square metres. Built in the 11th, they were restored a century later under Almohad rule. After Jaén was conquered by Fernando III in 1246, the baths continued to be used until the late 14th-early 15th centuries, when the Christian population installed a tannery in them. In the late 16th century Fernando de Torres y Portugal, the Count of Villardompardo and Viceroy of Peru, built his palace on the site. The baths would remain hidden until the early 20th century.

At that time the palace became the property of the Provincial Government of Jaén. From 1901 to 1903 the Provincial Government had several houses adjoining the palace demolished, with the idea of building a chapel for the women's hospice.

In 1913 an inspection of the palace structure was commissioned, in ordered to add the building to the catalogue of Jaén's important buildings. The inspection was led by the historian and artist Enrique Romero de Torres, who discovered a small part of the baths. Four years later, the archaeology professor Manuel Gómez Moreno certified the importance of the find, and proposed the building be declared a National Monument. The State approved this recognition in 1931.

The first important restoration work began in 1936 under the direction of Leopoldo Torres Balbás, then the conservator of the Alhambra and Granada, and the Jaén architect Luis Berges Martínez. However, work was interrupted by the Civil War.

Finally, in 1970 the Directorate General of Fine Arts commissioned Luis Berges Roldán, the son of Berges Martínez, to carry out the first complete restoration project for the Arab baths. The work continued until 1982 under the supervision of the Provincial Government of Jaén. The work restored the hammam to its former glory, and was awarded the 1984 Europa Nostra's Medal of Honour.





THE HALLS OF THE BATHS

The vestibule of the Arab Baths is 14 metres long by 3.80 metres wide. The alcoves at both ends are separated by horseshoe arches on half-columns. The barrel vault is pieced by 18 skylights in the shape of stars. The floor was originally white marble and the walls were plastered and decorated with red arches on a white background, of which some traces remain.

The smaller Cold Room (al-bayt al-barid) adjoins the vestibule. Its barrel vault has 12 skylights. On the right side is a domed alcove with five skylights.

The Warm Room (al-bayt al-wastani) is the main area of the baths, a large square room, 11.30 metres each side, with another square in the centre, which was the pool or fountain. The dome is supported by horseshoe arches on eight columns. One of the ends leads through two horseshoe arches to another hall, with a barrel vault roof whose skylights of toughened glass open to the square on which the Villardompardo Palace stands.



The Hot Room (al-bayt al-sajum) is next to the boilers where the water used to be heated. It has a barrel vault and an alcove at each end. Its walls concealed the chimneys where hot air circulated. In the centre of the hall there are two areas, one with a square seated bath and the other with two storage jars. There is a hollow space under the stone floor of the entire room. It is supported by brick piers which allowed the hot air to circulate underneath.

MANUEL MORAL INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF NAÏVE ART

The Manuel Moral International Museum of Naïve Art is the first and most important gallery in Spain dedicated to this unique style. It originated in 1988 when the Provincial Government of Jaén began a small collection of artworks donated to it, which would be expanded two years later by the bequest of the artist Manuel Moral Mozas, a resident of Torredelcampo. Moral donated most of his paintings and woodcarvings to the Provincial Government. This collection encouraged it to open the first museum in Spain entirely devoted to naïve art.

The museum now holds more than 600 works by 250 Spanish and 150 foreign artists. The core of the Spanish section is the galleries dedicated to the work of Manuel Moral and the Murcia artist Miguel García, "Vivancos". There is also the notable collection donated by the Madrid artist Lorenzo Aparicio, "El Boliche". The international section features works by artists from Haiti, Tibet, Portugal, Italy, France, England, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Hungary, Angola, Canada and other countries. The museum also has galleries of bullfighting subjects, landscapes and textile art.

MUSEUM OF FOLK ART AND CUSTOMS

The Museum of Folk Art and Customs, opened on 20 December 1990, is the collection that best represents the economy, society, culture and history of the villages and towns of the province of Jaén. The museum captures the pre-industrial way of life and summarises the traditions and customs of the men and women of the time. Its collection is distributed over six of the seven floors of the Villardompardo Palace. Basement floor -2 houses the collection of winemaking, cereal farming and bread making equipment. On basement floor -1 is the Olive Gallery, one of the most important, given the significance of olive-growing in the province. Floor 0 has display cases of weights and measures, and historic carts and carriages from the era of animal traction. The first floor is dedicated to childhood and religious folk art, and the second floor to ceramics, building techniques, textiles, and a recreated middle-class home. Finally, the third floor is occupied by leatherwork, occupations and artisans' workshops, photography, traditional pig-slaughtering, and a recreated rural house.

