

UNITED 

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Hemispheres

GET ENCHANTED WITH **BARCELONA**
IN THREE PERFECT DAYS

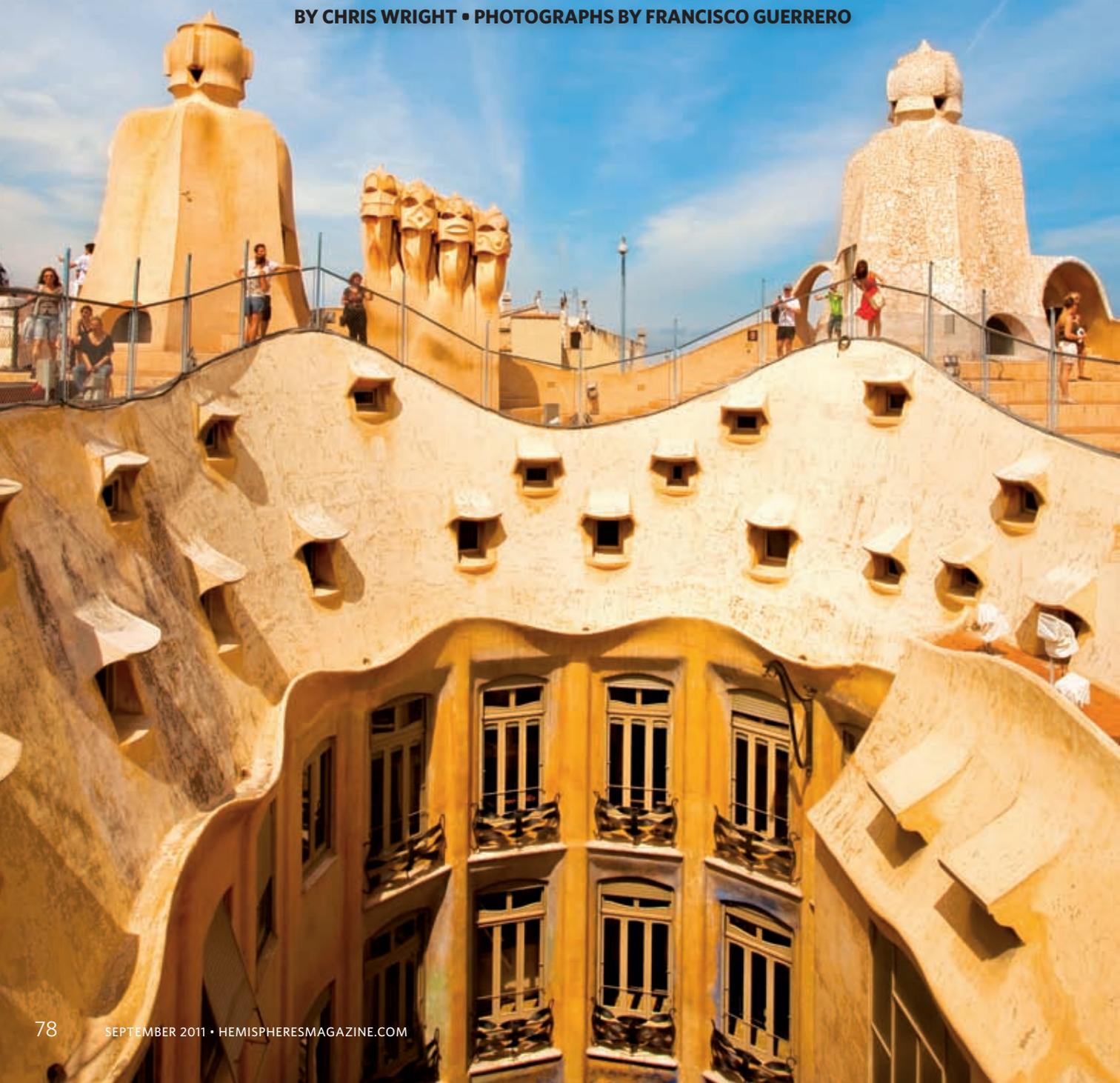
 **THE FALL FASHION ISSUE** HIGH STYLE IN BIG SKY COUNTRY, FERRARI'S LATEST CONVERTIBLE, REBUILDING THE BOLSHOI THEATRE, THE *HEMI* Q&A WITH TRAILBLAZING DESIGNER DONNA KARAN, TENNESSEE'S FINEST HAM AND THE BEST NEW GADGETS FOR GAMERS ON THE MOVE

THREE PERFECT DAYS

BARCELONA

The chic, meandering capital of proud Catalonia is best known for the hallucinatory architectural visions of Gaudí, but it's the great food and amiability of the locals that make it one of Europe's great cities

BY CHRIS WRIGHT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANCISCO GUERRERO



82
DAY ONE
Meeting Gaudí

85
DAY TWO
Behind the scenes
at Camp Nou

85
DAY THREE
Feeding frenzy
at La Boqueria



CATALAN COOL
Opposite, Gaudí's La
Pedrera; this page,
grilled scallops at Arola
in the Hotel Arts

GO FISH This page,
Frank Gehry's *Fish*
sculpture; opposite,
café life in El Born



THREE PERFECT DAYS

BARCELONA



BARCELONA IS NOT a place given to posturing. This former Roman outpost, now the capital of the northeastern Spanish province of Catalonia, isn't as self-consciously pretty as Paris, as studiously vibrant as London or as achingly stylish as Milan. It's secure enough to refrain from draping banners from lampposts advertising its status as "Europe's City of Culture." Most important, its leaders seem to understand the principle of benign neglect. There's little in the way of the compulsive scrubbing and sandblasting you encounter in other historical cities. This has a couple of benefits. First, you see buildings rather than scaffolding. Second, many of these buildings look and feel like they're supposed to: old.

The overwhelming sense is that this is a city comfortable in its own skin. Barcelonans are fiercely protective of their Catalan heritage, they simmer with emotional heat (fender benders can be theatrical affairs) and they are inordinately friendly. This is a town where you can walk into a shop, wildly mispronounce the name of the place you're looking for and then wait while the shopkeeper consults Google Maps. This is good not only for your faith in human nature, but for your feet. A lot of what Barcelona has to offer is unheralded, even hidden, and this allows for wonderful moments of discovery. Of course, it also means you're going to need some help from the locals to find this stuff. Luckily, you're in good hands.

 **WANT MORE?**
Download
our iPad app.

THREE PERFECT DAYS

BARCELONA

DAY ONE | By Barcelona standards, the interior of the exceptional **Hotel Arts** is fairly muted—there's none of the over-the-top design so often favored in this city. What this 44-story, oceanfront Ritz-Carlton does have is a view: a layer cake of sand, sea and sky on one side; the red-brown shambles of Barcelona on the other. You grab your camera and head out for a closer look, pausing only to contemplate the nearby Frank Gehry sculpture, a big, bronze-mesh fish tilting longingly toward the waters of the Mediterranean.

But you're in Barcelona, and when it comes to architecture, the star of the show is Antoni Gaudí. His maniacal confections dot the city, and the most eye-popping of the lot is **Casa Batlló**, an apartment block he renovated in the early 1900s. Batlló is located on the bustling Passeig de Gràcia, and there's a crowd gathered, staring up at it. You join them, transfixed by the orgy of detail: scattershot mosaics and wobbly window frames and skull-like balconies. Inside it's even weirder, a swirl of blue-tiled passages and undulating antechambers that leave you feeling woozy.

Shake it off and head up about four blocks to Hotel Omm, where you've booked a lunch at **Moo**. The Michelin-starred restaurant's chef, Felip Llufrú, specializes in *nuevo* twists on traditional Catalan fare, such as pigeon carpaccio served with ice cream and prawns with shaved pig trotters (trust your waiter, the dishes taste much better than they sound). Each of the six courses is paired with wine, and the presentation is so theatrical—poof! a cloud of smoke appears as the cover is lifted off the pigeon plate—that you have to resist the urge to applaud.

Totter out of the restaurant and head back down Passeig de Gràcia for a dozen blocks or so, until you find the **Gothic Quarter**. Finding your way in is easy; finding your way out is another matter. A knot of quirky cafés, oddball museums, medieval courtyards, Renaissance palaces and Roman ruins, the Gothic Quarter does not lend itself to a tight schedule. A foot-stomping Catalan folk trio, the musty shelves of a magic supply store, the Spanish Civil War-era bullet holes pocking Plaça Sant Felip Neri—all of these things demand your attention. When you do emerge, a hundred doglegs later, you fight the urge to turn around and start again.

Dinner promises to be more orderly. You've opted for the Hotel Arts' **Arola**, another Michelin-starred restaurant that



DAY ONE

- (1) **Hotel Arts** Marina 19-21; Tel: 93-221-1000
- (2) **Casa Batlló** Pg de Gràcia 43; Tel: 93-216-0306
- (3) **Moo** Rosselló 265; Tel: 93-445-4000
- (4) **Gothic Quarter** Carrer del Bisbe and Carrer Llibreteria
- (5) **Arola** Marina 19-21; Tel: 93-221-1000
- (6) **Casino Barcelona** Marina 19-21; Tel: 93-225-7878

toys with the Catalan tradition. Only here there's a twist: a six-course "Gastro-Sostenible" menu that you cannot resist trying. The succulent Rubio Fish Roasted with Morels and Potatoes, and the Ecological Goats Cheese Cream both transcend the menu's green premise.

Following a brief but emotionally fraught stint at the nearby **Casino Barcelona**, you return to your room and gaze for a while at the stubble of lights below, and then over at the oblivion of the sea. Oblivion sounds pretty good right now, so you head off to bed.

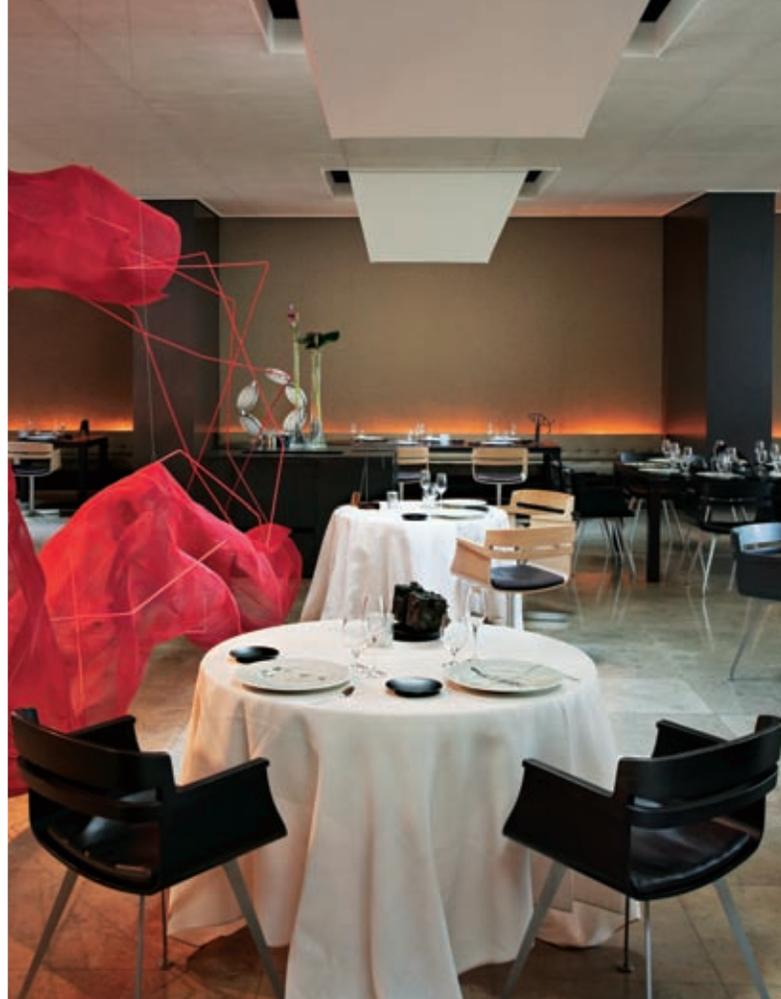


CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

In a town full of tours, World RT, run by Robert Thai (left), offers something different: bespoke. Just tell him your tastes and how long you'll be in town, and he'll map out your trip. If you want, he will even come with you. So how good is he? Asked to devise a quirky and surprising 10-minute tour of the Gothic District, he doesn't skip a beat. "Look," he says, pointing to a small carved skull overhead. You look at it. "They say if you stare into its face, you'll get one year of bad luck." You thank him for that. Next it's off to a dingy, nondescript courtyard. Here, standing alone in the half-light, is a cluster of Roman columns. It might just be the most beautiful sight in all of Barcelona. The last stop is a little stone turtle jutting from a wall. "Rub that," Thai says, helpfully, "and you break the curse of the skull."



MOOR, PLEASE The Arco de Triunfo



THREE PERFECT DAYS

BARCELONA



DAY TWO

- (1) **Marmalade** Riera Alta 4-6; Tel: 93-442-3966
- (2) **Arco de Triunfo** Carrer de Roger de Flor and Avinguda de Vilanova
- (3) **Basílica de la Sagrada Família** Carrer de Mallorca 401; Tel: 93-208-0414
- (4) **Picasso Museum** Carrer de Montcada 15-23; Tel: 93-256-3000
- (5) **4 Gats** Carrer de Montsió, 3 bis; Tel: 93-302-4140
- (6) **Camp Nou** Carrer d'Aristides Maillol 12
- (7) **Barcelona Taste** Gothic Quarter
- (8) **Bel-Luna** Rambla Catalunya 5; Tel: 93-302-2221

DAY TWO | You start the day at **Marmalade**, a loungey, low-lit nightspot in the artsy neighborhood of Raval whose Recovery Brunch has become an event in its own right. You have a Mexican omelet, with spicy chorizo sausage and crème fraîche, which makes you wonder how the people around you manage to stay so thin.

Burn off a few calories strolling between the extravagantly ornate lampposts of Passeig de Lluís Companys, at the end of which looms the **Arco de Triunfo**. If you want to get a sense of how neatly the Islamic and Christian traditions have dovetailed here, look at the angels and Moorish domes adorning this redbrick structure.

Interested in exploring another dovetail—the one between genius and lunacy—you head northwest on Passeig de Sant Joan and take Carrer de Mallorca to Gaudí's most famous creation: the **Basílica de la Sagrada Família**. Gaudí started work on this skyline-hogging cathedral in 1883 and never lived to see its completion. It is, in fact, still being built today. Like Casa Batlló, Sagrada has a surreal, almost sinister feel about it. Saints

GAUDÍ DISPLAY Clockwise from top left, balconies at Casa Batlló; Moo, at Hotel Omm; coffee break at 4 Gats; seating at Güell Park



VERMOUTH RISING

Until recently, vermouth was something your *yaya* drank after church, a libation to be sipped while discussing the price of sardines. The drink, which is basically inferior wine that has been fortified and flavored to make it palatable, has never been thought of as fashionable. Until now: Barcelona, it seems, is in the midst of a vermouth revival. Old, family-run bars like **Cala del Vermut** (shown) are seeing an influx of young people. And there are relatively new vermouth joints cropping up, such as **Bar Calders**, that are among the trendiest in town. During the so-called *hora del vermut*—the hour leading up to lunch—the terrace at **Bar Calders** is overflowing with enthusiasts, without a pair of false teeth in sight.

and supplicants ooze from its reliefs, and clumps of ceramic fruit teeter on its peaks. Inside, the conventions of Gothic architecture have been tortured without mercy. As you leave, you sense that you will never see anything quite like it again.

After an hour spent nose-to-canvas at the **Picasso Museum**, you wend your way through the Gothic Quarter to the **4 Gats** bistro, where Picasso used to hang out a hundred years or so ago. The place, the manager tells you, has hardly had a lick of paint since, and you believe him—from the Art Nouveau stenciling to the bow-tied waiters, 4 Gats has a film-set precision to it. Opt for vichyssoise with shaved leeks, sausages with white beans and a strawberry mousse—*delicioso*.

From here, take the Metro to the city's most fervently attended place of worship: **Camp Nou**, home of Barca, the greatest soccer team in the world and a source of heaving pride for locals. On non-game days, they offer tours of the stadium, so you join a mass of scarf-draped devotees traipsing through the looming stands, the bristling trophy room and, oddly, the official team bathroom.

Dinner tonight hauls you once more into the Gothic Quarter, the venue for **Barcelona Taste**—a three-hour, four-eatery tour that is fun, informative and filling. Highlights include a local sheep cheese, a pungent blood pudding and a Basque tapas bar whose signature drink is red wine mixed irreligiously with Coke.

You end the night at **Bel-Luna**, a gloomy, tunnel-shaped jazz club. The pianist is old school, looking back over his shoulder while he jams. Your appreciation causes you to slop your cocktail a bit. Looking to remedy the problem, you call for another and settle in.

DAY THREE | The **Mandarin Oriental**, the second hotel of your stay, also opts for elegance over exuberance. The color scheme comprises several dozen shades of brown, and the hotel's corridors are infused with a subtle floral aroma. After breakfast at the on-site brasserie **Blanc**—crushed duck egg over roasted

UNFINISHED, BUSINESS

This page, Gaudí's incomplete masterwork, the Basilica de la Sagrada Família; opposite, the bustling Mercado de la Boqueria



THREE PERFECT DAYS

BARCELONA



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

THE INSIDE SCOOP FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER JAMES FIELD



Diego Piero
ARTIST, DOLAR TATTOO

There's a little park I like to go to in Ciutat Vella. People go there to sit on the grass and play music—I play guitar. It's an artist's park, a place for young people, people who live here. I could walk there right now and find some friends.



Elena Vicente-Sevilla
STUDENT

What I enjoy most about Barcelona is the incredibly well-preserved Modernist buildings. I love their stained glass windows, which are like kaleidoscopes. Sometimes I dream about Casa Batlló coming to life as a dragon.



Tomas Molina
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST, TELEVISIÓ DE CATALUNYA

People forget we have musicals here, like Broadway. My favorite place is Teatre Musical, which used to be a sports pavilion. It is huge, so it puts on big productions. The last one I saw was *Mamma Mia!* I liked it very much.



SAND CASTLE Barceloneta Beach and the W Hotel

potato, a side of chistorra sausage—you take to the Metro once more for the final Gaudí extravaganza of your stay: **Güell Park**, which manages to take the weirdness up another notch.

Güell isn't so much a park as a mad fairy tale, a squiggle of pathways, grottos and toadstool-roofed pavilions, most of which is sheathed in riotous ceramic mosaics—heightening the sense that the place isn't quite real. At the heart of it all is a large plaza packed with vendors, musicians and out-of-towners. Güell sits atop a punishing hill—but the view of the city alone is worth the pain.

For lunch, head to La Rambla, the busy avenue that is home to **La Boqueria**, a produce market that makes the Rio

Carnival look dull. As you enter, you dodge an onrushing pedestrian and run face-first into a bushel of peppers, nearly careen into a hanging ham and only narrowly avoid a nearby nuthill. Aromas hang in the air: a spicy, citrusy, cheesy funk, and above it all the insistent tang of fish.

For serious shopping, cut back to Passeig de Gràcia, which offers everything from Bulgari to Zara. Things get more interesting in **Gràcia**, the kind of district where you'll find a funky gift shop abutting a store that sells beans by the scoop. You pick up a novelty T-shirt, pass a few coins to a man playing "Strangers in the Night" on a trumpet, and head to the hotel to prepare yourself for a more formal musical performance.

Classical concerts aren't the only reason to visit **Palau de la Música Catalana**. Its designer, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, subjected every square inch to some sort of flourish: heroic statuary, wreaths and roses, explosively patterned stained glass. Seated in the hall, violins washing over you, your eyes flitting over the faces popping from the burnt-orange backdrop, you feel dreamy and pleasantly detached. And then you fall asleep.

Roused by the bravos, you head outside and catch a cab to the El Raval district for a late supper at **Betty Ford's**, one of Barcelona's hottest eateries and, you've been told, the repository of the best burgers in town. The Texas Burger is very good: thick and juicy, slopping with BBQ sauce. The lighting is low. The crowd is chatty. Yet your bed beckons.

Back at the hotel, you step out onto the balcony of your room and watch the street below. A few taxis glide by. Young couples walk arm in arm. One woman is saying something to her lover in Spanish, almost singing the words. She seems happy to be here—with this person, in this place.

CHRIS WRIGHT lives on Spain's Costa Blanca. His friends are getting tired of hearing how great Barcelona is.



DAY THREE

- (1) **Mandarin Oriental** Passeig de Gràcia, 38-40; Tel: 93-151-8888
- (2) **Güell Park** Carrer de Marianao at Carrer d'Olot
- (3) **La Boqueria** Rambla, 91; Tel: 93-318-2584
- (4) **Gràcia** Carrer de les Tres Senyores
- (5) **Palau de la Música Catalana** Carrer de Sant Pere Més Alt; Tel: 902-442-882
- (6) **Betty Ford's** Carrer de Joaquín Costa, 56; Tel: 93-304-1368