

Valeria Sampedro and Hernán Firpo

SECRET BUENOS AIRES



JonGlez

CHALET ON AVENIDA 9 DE JULIO

9

1113 Calle Sarmiento, Microcentro district

• Metro: line B, Carlos Pellegrini station; line D, Avenida 9 de Julio station; line C, Diagonal Norte station



***A chalet
perched high
on top
of a building***

Look up beyond the Obelisk of Buenos Aires and you will see a strange chalet perched high on the top of a building. The man who put it up there in 1927 was a well-known Spanish furniture maker called Rafael Diaz.

Apparently, he wanted it built in the same style as his house in Mar del Plata.

When Diaz bought the building and moved in to set up his shop, he had this little house built so that he could sneak away there for his daily afternoon nap from 2 to 4pm.

In the 1930s, Diaz boasted that he could see the Uruguayan coast and the town of Colonia from there.

He also had a great view of the construction of the Obelisk in 1936. He installed an antenna on the roof of the building – with his name written on it in enormous letters – when he set up his very own radio station to play music and advertise his company.

However, when radio broadcasting began to be regulated, he refused to pay his licence and sold his broadcasting frequency.

Sadly, today we can no longer see the Uruguayan coast from the chalet as billboards have long since obscured the view.

The little house is now home to the building's administrative offices. Nevertheless, its originality lies in the tiled roof, the bow windows so characteristic of English films, and the magnificent arabesques decorating the floor.

After Diaz died, the chalet was handed down to his children and then to his grandchildren.



EVA PERON'S RECEPTION ROOM

21

Palacio de la Legislatura

160 Calle Perú

- Metro: line A, Perú station; line E, Bolívar station
- Telephone bookings for guided tours: +54 11 4338-3000, ext. 1040/1041



Inside Evita's private world

It is now possible to enter Evita's private world by visiting the Salón Eva Perón in the Legislative Palace: here you will be able to see her dressing table, her wardrobe and her three bathrooms in a suite that was very nearly forgotten. Her reception room, which is on the ground floor of the palace, behind the Salón Dorado (Golden Reception Room), is covered in hand-polished white marble and measures 60 m². In 2012 it was fully restored, with all its woodwork, wrought-iron features and drapes, and with the greatest attention to detail. The room also had a huge mirror that entirely covered one of its walls.

It is a little-known fact that the Eva Perón Foundation set up its headquarters here between 1946 and 1952. Consequently, Evita spent several hours a day here, using the same office that her husband had occupied from 1943 to 1945 when he was still the Secretary of Labour and Welfare and the ministry headquarters were there. We know for a fact that she received everyone who came to the foundation regardless of their needs and the nature of their requests for welfare benefits. On these occasions, Evita always made sure that she was immaculately dressed by using this small annex where she could change her clothes and renew her make-up as often as she liked.

The restoration project required a great deal of work as, during the 1955 Revolución Libertadora (Liberating Revolution) that overthrew Perón, the slightest evidence of his supporters was removed and only the small bronze plaque, indicating the whereabouts of the former office, was spared.

In addition to the main rooms, the restoration team worked on more neglected parts of the building, such as the toilets and some of the original furniture that had been left to rot. Using old photos, they managed to research and recreate the original layout.

JUAN DOMINGO AND EVA PERÓN'S WALKS TOGETHER UNDER THE PERGOLA

The Legislative Palace was used as the headquarters of the Eva Perón Foundation for several years between 1946 and 1952. At this time, Juan Perón was in his first term as president, and it is said that the general liked to take a break under the pergola on the terrace of the palace. This area, together with the gardens and the interior patio, has been fully restored and is now open to the public.

LA BOTICA DEL ÁNGEL

1

543 Avenida Luis Sáenz Peña, Congreso district

• Metro: line A, Sáenz Peña station; line C, Moreno station; line E, Lima station

• Guided tours: Wed and Fri 7pm

• Information and bookings on 0800 333 8725



**A
psychedelic
museum with one
of the city's most
iconoclastic artistic
heritage collections**

The Angel's Pharmacy is a wonderful cultural hotchpotch. The visitor will find works by Juan Carlos Castagnino rubbing shoulders with works by Raul Soldi, Guillermo Roux, Marta Minujin (among others), texts written by Manuel Mujica Láinez, Jorge Luis Borges, Alejandra Pizarnik and Ernesto Sabato, in addition to souvenirs of Carlos Gardel and various film posters. The museum's café is decorated in the same spirit, with objects from some of the famous old bars that make up Buenos Aires' past.

This museum-theatre was set up by Eduardo Bergara Leumann, an actor and emblematic figure of the 1960s and '70s in Argentina, and it has the city's most iconoclastic and impressive artistic heritage collection.

On 8 December 1966, during the "democratisation of culture" period, Leumann opened La Botica del Ángel where he lived at No. 670 on Calle Lima. The eccentric artist's home soon became a place where all sorts of events were organised, from shows to weird and wonderful exhibitions and heated cultural debates. All manner of artists, whether emerging, classical or modern, used La Botica before Avenida 9 de Julio was widened and the venue had to move to another site. It finally closed in 1973.

Four years later, Leumann decided to create a museum called La Botica del Ángel in an old building situated at No. 541 on Calle Luis Sáenz Peña in the Congreso district. The place was lovingly decorated and at the entrance visitors can read the following inscription: "Here you will find everything that you thought was lost."

Leumann, the creator of this "museum-house of art" died on 5 September 2008 at the age of 76.



A MONUMENT TO BRIBES

Building of the former Ministry of Public Works
1925 Avenida 9 de Julio

• Metro: line C, Moreno station; line E, Belgrano station

“ *She holds
out her hand
while looking away*

At the corners of the front of the former Ministry of Public Works building, which is now home to the Ministries of Health and Social Development and which looks out on to Avenida 9 de Julio and Calle Moreno, there are two statues which are almost swallowed up by the huge Art Deco structure.

It is hard to make them out: located at either end of the second floor, they have complementary features. One of them carries a small box whereas the other puts a hand behind her back with her arm close to her side and gazes away, as if to accept the box. This is why the two statues are considered to be a monument to corruption.

The unofficial story goes that they were designed by the building's architect, José Hortal. He also drew up the project for the “first skyscraper funded by the State” in the 1930s and which was finally erected on the city's most important avenue (this is why it is a building with only one street number). It is said that Hortal – who was, at the time, the director of National Architecture – was so fed up with being offered bribes to finish the building more quickly that he put the statues up at the very last minute to denounce the fact that he had been subjected to so much corruption.

Although this was never publicly denied, it is nevertheless surprising that such a monument – denouncing corruption as it does from a public building – has managed to remain intact over the years.

PORTRAITS OF EVITA: THE SAME TECHNIQUE AS USED FOR CHE GUEVARA IN HAVANA

The two portraits of Eva Peron, which cover a large part of the north- and south-facing sides of the former Ministry of Public Works building, represent the public and political faces of Evita. They are 31 metres high and 24 metres wide and each one is made up of 42 steel parts, weighing a total of 14 tonnes. The work was executed by the Argentinian artist Alejandro Marmo and was inaugurated on 26 July 2011 for the 59th anniversary of the death of Evita (who had been nominated “Woman of the Bicentenary” a year earlier). Marmo used a similar technique to that adopted for the famous Che Guevara relief which stands outside the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, opposite Plaza de la Revolución.

TOILETS IN LA PERLA DE ONCE BAR

5

Avenida Rivadavia y Jujuy

• Metro: line A, Plaza Miserere station; line H, Plaza Once station



**The
acoustics
in the toilets were
second to none**

You're in for a surprise if you use the men's toilets in the Perla de Once bar. There's a commemorative plaque to "La Balsa" in there as it's where the Argentinian rock-music hit from the 1960s was written.

"I'm all alone and sad in this shit world" were the first words of "La Balsa", written by

Tanguito, one of the pioneers of the Argentinian rock scene. This line was later changed by Litto Nebbia, another legendary figure of the sixties and seventies, to "I'm all alone and sad in this lost world." His group, Los Gatos, went on to sell 250,000 copies of the record.

Nebbia saw La Perla as a creative home for his work and often said that it was as quiet as a public library. At the end of the sixties, many students used the bar as a place to meet and study as it stayed open all night.



It was at one of these late-night sessions that Tanguito asked Nebbia to help him write a song. They locked themselves away in the toilets as it was forbidden to play guitar in the main bar area and, as Javier Martinez (leader of the group Manal) said, "The acoustics were second to none in there."

The Perla de Once bar, which is referred to in Leon Gieco's song "Los Salieris de Charly", was declared a Site of Cultural Interest in 1994.

In 2007, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of "La Balsa", Nebbia and Ciro Fogliatta (former members of Los Gatos) put up a new plaque at the corner of the legendary bar, opposite Plaza Once. The fully restored La Perla bar is now indisputably a part of Argentina's cultural heritage and has undergone a new lease of life, with shows performed by those who helped to create the legend.

In the 1920s, the young Jorge Luis Borges was a regular at the bar, attending Macedonio Fernandez's conferences on philosophic metaphysics. Borges often said that attending these debates on Saturday nights was equivalent to a whole week's work.



POPE FRANCIS' PRIVATE COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS

1890 Calle Yerbal, Flores district

• Metro: line A, Carabobo station

• Advance bookings essential on + 54 11 4631-4378

8



**The works
of the Habemus
Papam collection**

Eight blocks down from the place where Jorge Bergoglio (the current Pope Francis) spent his childhood and some of his teenage years, there is an art gallery exhibiting portraits of him by Mercedes Farina. The quality of the artist's work was praised by the Vatican and she received a personal invitation from the pope.

The oil paintings of Pope Francis on display here seem to shine with an almost surreal, energy-filled light. They are among the most strikingly lifelike portraits of the Argentinian pope ever painted by the artist, who has already produced over 300 essentially religious works.

Farina's technique of hyperrealism gives her work such a wonderful feeling of intimacy that she has become a reference in the world of spiritual artwork. The first painting in the series shows the pope standing in front of the San José de Flores Church. Farina, a discreet person by nature, said that the portrait had been meant to pay a discreet tribute and she had been flattered when her painting was chosen for the local church. Little did she imagine that it would one day be hanging in the Vatican.

In 2013, after the first portraits had been painted, Farina was contacted by Francesca Ambrogetti, co-author of the book *The Jesuit*, the only authorised biography of the Pope, and who was about to visit the pontiff in Rome. Ambrogetti thought that the paintings would please the pope, so she took photos of some of them with her. A week later, Farina received a letter signed by Bergoglio which read: "I thank you for these allegorical portraits and congratulate you on your artistic skills."

The pope went so far as to ask that one of the paintings be hung in the Vatican and Farina was invited to Rome, where she personally handed over the portrait during a General Audience. A few months later, she was also invited to display her works in the Cathedral of Buenos Aires.

The works in the *Habemus Papam* collection can be viewed by appointment only (see phone details above) at the art gallery at No. 1890 in Calle Yerbal. Visitors are provided with commentaries from the artist.



“BENEDICTION OF THE WOMBS” IN SAN RAMÓN NONATO CHURCH

Santuario San Ramón Nonato

1150 Calle Cervantes, Villa Luro district

• Buses: 25, 34, 47, 99, 107, 166, 172, 181

• Annual event: 31 August



***Mothers-to-be
are given
a pair of shoes
as a present***

Every year on 31 August, the day of St Raymond Nonnatus, patron saint of pregnant women, the Villa Luro neighbourhood gets ready for a very special celebration. Hundreds of people gather in the San Ramón Nonato Church to receive the saint's benediction.

The sanctuary opens very early in the day and the ceremony begins with a procession of pregnant women, couples who are trying to have a child, and mothers who come with their new-born babies in their arms. Mass is said every hour and a “benediction of wombs” is held every thirty-five minutes. The hands of midwives and obstetricians are also blessed on this day.

During the ceremony, the mothers-to-be are given a pair of shoes as a present. They vow to come back the year afterwards with their children and a pair of shoes that will be passed on to women who are trying to conceive.

The church also does benedictions during weekend mass and on the last day of the month, but most people attend the annual gathering in August. Those who do not live locally often camp on the outskirts of the city so that they can attend the celebration.

WHY IS ST RAYMOND NONNATUS THE PATRON SAINT OF PREGNANT WOMEN?

St Raymond Nonnatus was born on 2 February in a small village in Catalonia (Spain), just before his ailing mother died. The story goes that it was Raymond Floch, Count of Cardona and future godfather of the child, who, upon discovering the young woman lying inert on the ground, opened her up with his dagger and saved the baby. The child was christened Raymond and given the surname Nonnatus (from the Latin *non natus*, meaning “unborn”).

At a very young age, he decided to dedicate his life to God through preaching. The Church therefore chose to make him the patron saint of maternity to pay tribute to a man who had always preached a message for life.