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WINTER 2016

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Cover: A Cuban dancer with the Tumba Francesa La Caridad de Oriente, a performance group founded in 1862. Photograph by Nicola Lo Calzo. L'AGENCE A PARIS/LUZ

MAP: NICK SPRINGER, SPRINGER CARTOGRAPHICS

Non-Stop Delight @My Transit in Taiwan

I never thought my transit in Taiwan would be so utterly amazing and unforgettable.
Delicate dumplings, beef noodles and bubble tea restored my appetite after a long flight.
The National Palace Museum, Longshan Temple and Peking opera opened my eyes.
Stunning views from Taipei 101, bustling night markets and chic bars thrilled me.
My transit in Taiwan: A brief yet incredible whirlwind of non-stop delight!

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Taiwan
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Rich, Diverse, Alive Experience It Cultural TAIWAN

Taiwan's fascinating culture is everywhere, from back alley public art projects to street puppet shows, grand downtown performance halls, and up through the jewel that is the **National Palace Museum** and its over 700,000 treasures.

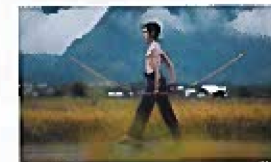


Photo by Liu Chen-hsiang

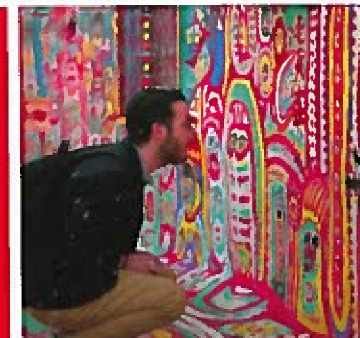
Culture is alive here well beyond the confines of curated museums. Performing arts blending traditional cultural themes with modern elements, and diverse religious and cultural festivals like **Dragon Boat Day, the Mid-Autumn Festival**, and the **goddess Mazu's birthday** fill the calendar with fascination year-round for truly authentic local experiences.

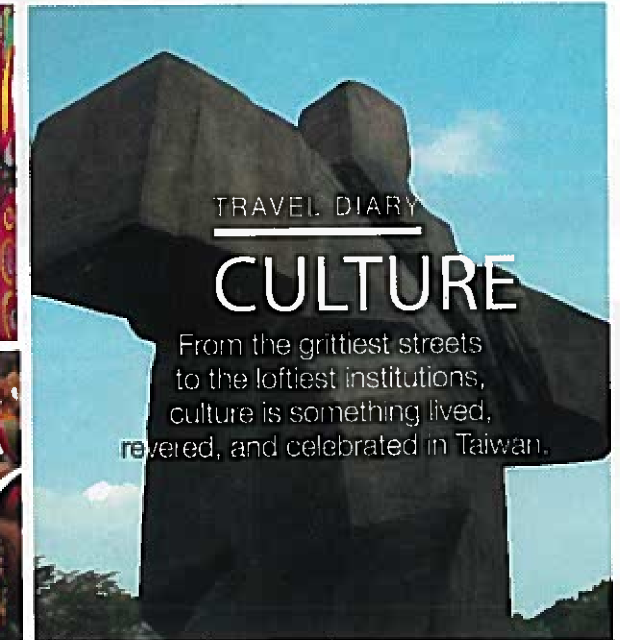
Wander the alleyways of Taipei and you could come across a hand puppet performance. Authentic, elaborately attired characters make charming keepsakes or gifts.

Don't underestimate the power and influence of these two crescent moon blocks, a ubiquitous sight at Taiwan's temples used in divination to answer a "yes" or "no" question.

This personable, quirky Bodhisattva is hand crafted and dressed in a pure gold robe.

No matter what your taste or appetite, on the ground with aboriginal elders or in the rarefied museum air, whether brilliant Hakka handicrafts or intricate temple architecture, culture lives and thrives here with vigor and variety.





Photos courtesy of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, Li Tien-lu Hand Puppet Historical Museum, and Taiwan Tourism Bureau

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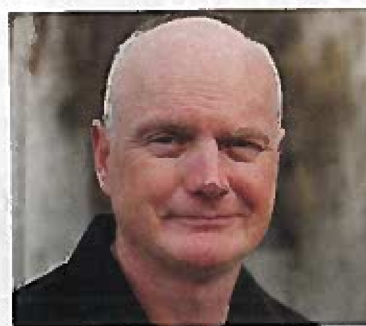
SILVIA CORBELLE BATISTA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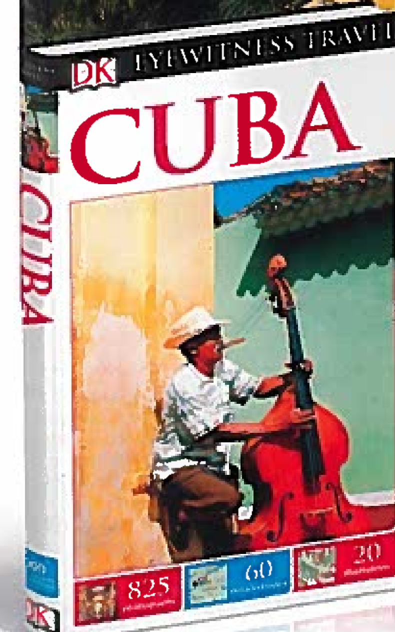

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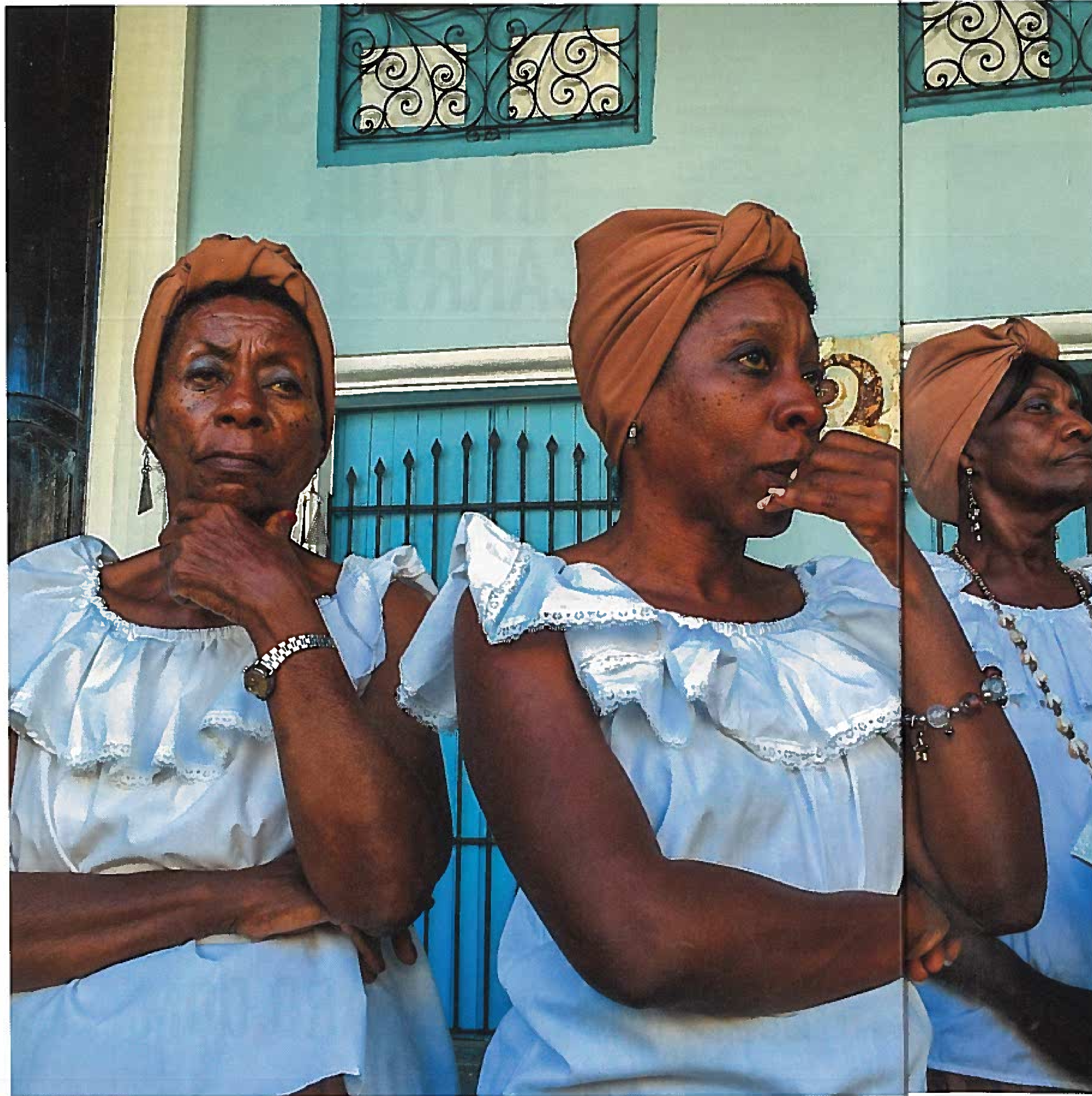


DEEP CUBA

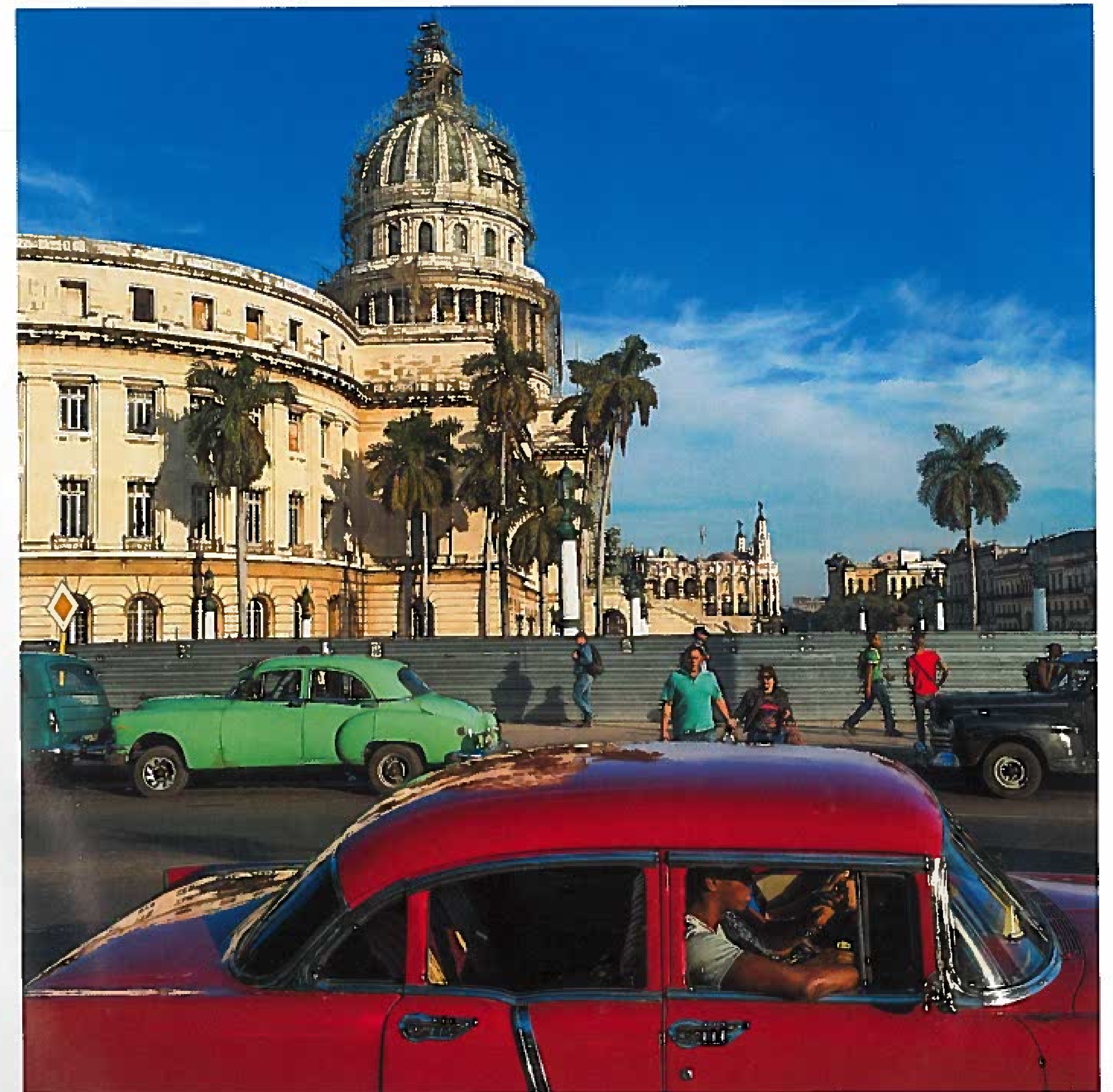
BEYOND CIGARS AND VINTAGE CARS

These women in traditional dress are preparing for a street performance in Havana. Despite laws guaranteeing racial equality, black Cubans are generally poorer than whites. And with fewer relatives abroad, they typically receive less in remittances.

The country's most celebrated blogger discovered her homeland anew while working as a tour guide

By Yoani Sánchez
Translated by Mary Jo Porter
Photographs by Michael Christopher Brown

ON TURNING 20, I DECIDED TO EARN my living as a hybrid Spanish teacher and tour guide. I had in my favor a certain knowledge of grammar and a history of long walks through Havana that had brought me to places and stories the travel books don't mention. I looked forward to teaching foreigners about Cuba while also providing them the language skills to explore on their own. From my very first student, however—as I taught verb conjugations and introduced unknown and unusual sights—I knew this work would also enable me to rediscover my own country. ¶ The gaze of the stranger, who comes from afar and peers into a new reality, sees details that are imperceptible to those of us who grew up in the midst of it. My country was so familiar to me that I no longer saw it. I had become blind to its decadent beauty and to the singularity of a capital city looking much as it did in the mid-20th century. ¶ It was only when my students, most of them German, asked questions that I began to wonder why a lovely art deco building was in such a state of decay—a blend of ruin and splendor, architectural perfection and seemingly inevitable decline. Or why such a big city had so little commercial activity. The 1968 Revolutionary Offensive had done away with most remaining private enterprise—down to the last shoeshine kit—but that had happened before I was born. When my students asked where we could stop for coffee or a snack, or where they might buy something small they had forgotten to pack, I had little to recommend, and my perception changed.



A long restoration project on the Capitol building, originally opened in 1929, is nearly complete. The structure is expected to become the new home of the National Assembly, which has never seated a member opposed to the government since its current incarnation began in 1976.

PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL CHRISTOPHER BROWN IS REPRESENTED BY MAGNUM

(Clockwise from left) *La Bodeguita del Medio* has served many celebrity customers, including Ernest Hemingway and Gabriel García Márquez; young Cubans like these, heading toward a club, are generally less ideological than their parents; tourists gather to take pictures at the Plaza of the Revolution.

Private barbershops proliferate throughout the island, operating in someone's house, an abandoned building, or a doorway. Cubans like to get their hair cut, in part because it's a relatively affordable service that can be paid for in local pesos.

For a dozen years I answered the same questions. I explained that the ceiba tree near Havana Bay was planted to mark the site where the current Cuban capital was founded in 1519. Even today, at the age of 41, I cannot pass this symbolic place without remembering the lines I repeated daily—that it was only after previous attempts to settle the island had failed, on both the southern and northern coasts, that seafaring Spaniards founded the Cuban village that would grow into today's capital, naming it San Cristóbal de la Habana.

My students hungered for historical details—the colorful personalities, the stories of frequent pirate attacks, the landmarks of a city whose historic center was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1982. But they were just as interested in the present: the daily struggles that took place behind the crumbling city walls. I didn't want to show them a sepia postcard—the Cuba of famous cigars and vintage cars—but rather a contradictory and complex country populated by people with real dreams and challenges.

"To resolve" is to coil a hose under your shirt to sneak alcohol out of the distillery. Taxi drivers "resolve" by fiddling with the meter.

My specialty as an informal guide (whose second language was German) was to show them that other side, the deep Cuba that is not addressed in guidebooks. So I took my restless students to one of the city's ubiquitous ration stores, part of a "temporary system" created in 1962 and still operating today (though less pervasively). I explained Cuba's long experience with shortages, the black market, and the "booklet" we've carried for more than 54 years, which regulates the government's distribution of subsidized food. I explained the nature of my own work, technically not legal but part of a huge informal economy that puts food on our tables.

We have a verb for it: to resolve. "To resolve" is to coil a hose under your shirt to sneak alcohol out of the distillery. Or to add extra yeast at the bakery so bread dough rises disproportionately high, and spared flour can be sold on the black market. Taxi drivers "resolve" by fiddling with the meter; farmers add a few small stones to each bag of beans; teachers, in a profession with little or nothing to take home, sell answers to their tests.

"My mother grew up with the ration book; I was born with the ration book; and my son, Teo, was born with it as well," I told my German students, who were bewildered by the little chalkboards listing what was available: rice, beans, sugar, a little oil, and other monthly rations too meager to survive on for even a week.

"So then how do Cubans eat?" one of the visitors invariably asked.

"We are specialists in finding everything that is censored, prohibited, and rationed," I explained, with the impish smile of one who has dipped into the black market to buy everything from eggs to forbidden beef. (If someone is caught selling the longed-for hamburger or stew meat, he or she can spend time in prison.)

As a guide to Cuba's depths, I never missed taking my students to Playita 16, a little beach west of the capital—a place the Cuban hippie movement made its own in the '70s, and whose rocks have witnessed the tightest jeans and longest manes in the country. This place of salt air and intense blue sky was a favored location for the hundreds of disillusioned people who climbed aboard ramshackle rafts in the summer of 1994, hoping to escape the country during the Cuban Rafter Crisis.

A short distance from that beach rises the Russian Embassy, previously the embassy of the Soviet Union, a mass of concrete with the strange shape of a sword stuck in the heart of Havana. Cubans sardonically refer to it as "the control tower," not only because its structure resembles those found next to airport runways, but because of the long years the Kremlin maintained its grip over our country.

Not much is left in Cuba of those days of Soviet "comrades" and the hammer-and-sickle flag. Some Cubans, mostly those over 40, carry names like Vladimir, Boris, or Nadezhda, but no one makes borscht soup for their families, and Mickey Mouse has long since won the battle over Misha the Bear. The area around the Russian Embassy sees hardly any pedestrian traffic, though the grim gaze of the guards remains fixed.

A very different scene plays out a few miles away, in a small park across from a seaside building surrounded by tall fences. On December 17, 2014, after more than a half century of ruptured relations, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro ventured toward a thaw when they announced the reestablishment of diplomatic ties. Six months later the heavily secured building ceased to be the United States Interests Section and again became the U.S. Embassy. Now the area outside fills with people who dream of obtaining a visa to visit or emigrate to the country that official propaganda has long deemed "the enemy."

Clothes bearing the stars and stripes are quite the fashion. In the informal market for

Some Cubans, mostly those over 40, still carry names like Vladimir, Boris, or Nadezhda, but Mickey Mouse has long since won the battle over Misha the Bear.

entertainment—previously fed by illegal satellite dishes, the discovery of which could bring confiscation, large fines, even prison time—the highest demand is for Hollywood and Netflix productions. These now arrive by way of the "weekly packet," as it's known in popular parlance—a compendium of movies, TV shows, and digital downloads that passes hand to hand on flash drives and other devices, stealing viewers from the lackluster programming on state TV. Like so many other things in Cuba, the packet is illegal yet tolerated.

The new devices make the flow of information easier, but it's always been hard to impede: In the '90s, my students would ask me how we managed to learn so much about the world, even when the national press—entirely in the hands of the Communist Party—was so stifling. I described to them "Radio Bemba"—literally "big lips radio"—the oral transmission of forbidden news, from the ousting of senior political figures in our own country to the fall of the Berlin Wall on the other side of the world. "We are specialists in finding everything that is censored, prohibited, or rationed," I repeated.

As time and interest allowed, I also escorted my students to another Cuba, one that exists beyond the confines of the capital city.

My father was a locomotive engineer, so my earliest years were marked by the rhythm of clattering train cars, the whistle blowing in every village we passed through. From the train windows during those childhood trips, I looked out over the Cuban countryside, tranquil and uncluttered, as if time itself had passed it by.

Not much had changed two or three decades later. Occasionally, at a crossroads, a farmer would be driving a rickety horse-drawn cart the locals call "spiders," perhaps because they travel a fragile web of roads, trails, and narrow paths that run between fields and connect the towns, villages, and *bateyes*—as the settlements of sugar workers are called. Furrows of tobacco, beans, and garlic reminded me of fields I harvested as a teenager, when I attended now abandoned "schools in the countryside"—intended to complete our transformation into socialism's "New Man."

In the middle of nowhere, there was often a sugar mill. Some still worked, but others had been abandoned, their rusted bits and pieces orange in the sun. In 2002 the Cuban government launched a plan to reuse the sugar mill engines. Of 156 of these important installations across the country, almost a third were inactive. The government converted some into noodle factories and others into workshops for the repair of home appliances.

Cuba, the so-called sugar capital of the world, has seen production collapse in recent years. The harvest that ended in May this year barely reached 1.6 million metric tons of raw sugar, less than the previous year's 1.9 million and a far cry from the 8.5 million officially achieved in 1970. (The long decline since the failure of that year's highly touted "Ten Million Ton Harvest" is a complex story, combining the vagaries of the world market and a planned economy beset by incompetence and corruption.)

Traveling along the rural roads—a journey made by horse-drawn carts—was a highlight for my students, who were eager to immerse themselves in a less touristy Cuba. So we traveled together to the Escambray Mountains, which rise from the southern coast over the city of Trinidad. In normal years, heavy rains nourish this area, which becomes a lush, high-altitude jungle filled with ferns and bromeliads. In the Topes de Collantes nature reserve, Cuba's national flower, the *mariposa* (butterfly), blooms on all sides, and the Caburní waterfall drops 200 feet into a series of linked pools. It's a magical place. In the evenings, we saw the stars in all their intense luminosity; at dawn, we woke to the crowing of roosters.

Since Raúl Castro permanently assumed the presidency in 2008, the private sector has grown to more than a half million workers, many of them food sellers. State-operated services, like the one shown above, face tough competition.

In deepest Cuba, such places remain almost virgin. People live in *bohíos*—thatched-roof huts made of palm boards. Cuban *guajiros* (farmers) still make coffee in a cloth sieve and go to bed with their chickens. Reality here contrasts sharply with the unrestrained cacophony presented by the island's tourist advertising, which conveys the false idea that we are a people immersed in endless revelry, laughter, and carnivals.

Life in the countryside is hard. Power outages are frequent, modern conveniences are few, and transportation is often by foot, bicycle, or horse. Farm work, largely by hand or powered by animals, takes a physical toll. Many young people prefer to migrate to nearby cities or farther afield. Of the thousands of Cubans who crowd the border crossings of Central America, eager to reach the United States, many come from these beautiful, tiny towns devoid of opportunity.

In one of these small settlements—known as El Pedrero, near the town of Fomento—a young woman from Frankfurt and I joined a family of farmers

These farmers (left) are growing tobacco, which can be sold legally only in official stores. Other Cubans, like the young man holding strings of garlic (right), try to peddle their produce on roadsides. Some Cubans jokingly refer to the price of pork as "the Dow Jones" of the island's economy.

Family life—waking up to milk bubbling on the stove and the smell of woodsmoke from the cooking fire—was one of the highlights of each trip.

for lunch. With the menu enlarged by the farm's own produce, we enjoyed generous and varied offerings: black beans and rice, a freshly sacrificed pig, and a tomato-and-avocado salad dressed with oil, vinegar, and salt. Boiled yuca with garlic sauce sat in a glass dish atop a table made from unpolished tree trunks. This delicious root, often called cassava in English, is very common in the diet of Cuban farmers. When Christopher Columbus came to the island, the natives were already using it to make a crusty and very thin bread still enjoyed today, especially on the plains of Camagüey.

After lunch came the siesta, a Spanish custom still practiced by many elderly farmers. The head of the house rocked in his hammock on the porch, while the dogs collapsed near the door to ensure that no strangers passed unnoticed. Modern farm implements and supplies were nowhere in sight, and the invasive marabou weed—a common plague throughout the country—had overtaken untilled land around the house.

The scene helped me explain the effects of excessive state control and bureaucracy, particularly food shortages. Many products are rarely, if ever, available in the rationed markets, and when they can be found in the unrationed *agromercados*—where supply and demand prevail—their prices are often well beyond the reach of the average worker, whose earnings (beyond what he or she gets in subsidies) don't exceed the equivalent of $20 a month.

A farmer might slaughter his or her own pig, but a Cuban worker needs more than a day's wages to buy one pound of pork. And one of our most beloved fruits, the pineapple, has become a one-dollar status symbol that only the richest families can afford.

For tourists, however, the prices of a *mamey*, *guanábana* (soursop), or *cherimoya* (custard apple) are unimaginably low. Travelers from Berlin, Bonn, or Munich looking at the market stalls filled with the striking colors of mangoes or the provocative image of a *fruta bomba*—Cubans reserve the commonly used term "papaya" as slang for a woman's sexual organs—cannot believe that a pound of lemons costs less than a half-dollar, not understanding that this is nearly a half-day's wages for a Cuban engineer.

When we'd arrive in Santiago de Cuba, we'd experience the city as a blast of heat and color. My students loved this Caribbean port, where people are more hospitable than in populous Havana, and where life proceeds with less bustle. We would stay in private homes rather than hotels. Family life—waking up to milk bubbling on the stove and the smell of woodsmoke from the cooking fire—was one of the highlights of each trip.

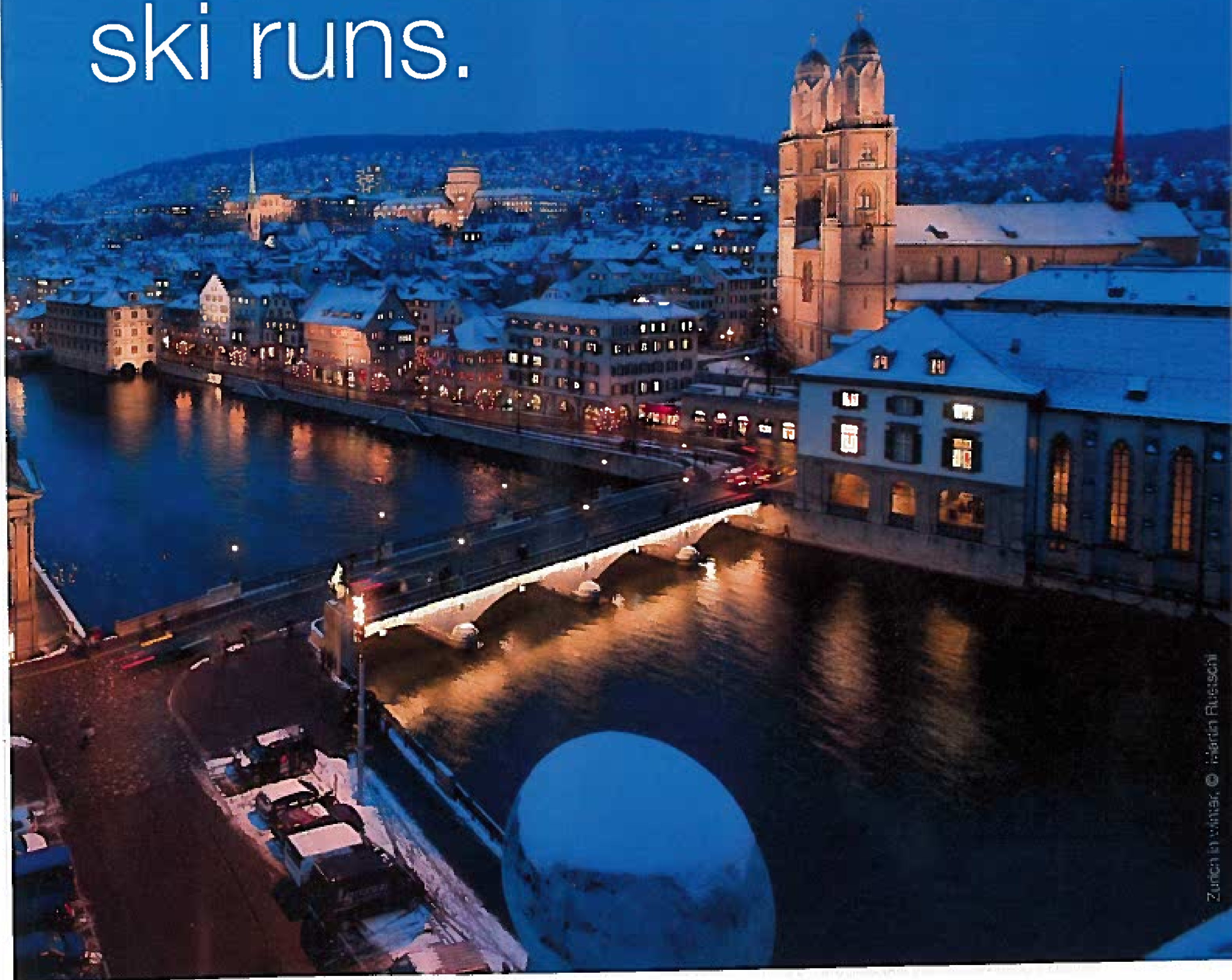
After sleeping a night in Santiago, we'd follow the obligatory path to the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, Cuba's patron saint, who is syncretized with the Orisha Oshún in Santería, a religion with African origins. Pilgrims from all over the country bring their prayers and their offerings to the shrine. Baby booties are offered to the saint by a family hoping for a child's health to improve; miniature wooden houses are given in thanks because Cachita—as she is popularly known—helped someone achieve home ownership; relatives bring tiny boats to fulfill the vows of those who have managed to leave the country.

Under an imposing dome, dozens of pilgrims gaze on the small wooden statue of the Virgin, which was mysteriously—or miraculously—found bobbing on the Bay of Nipe in 1612. Standing before her, Cubans are equal: We put aside ideologies, class differences, and the rigors and disputes of everyday life. In front of Cachita, deepest Cuba and the more visible Cuba come together. Even my amazed students would begin to understand that this complex and beautiful island needs more than a couple of visits to be truly comprehensible. ○

Havana's ocean esplanade and wall, the Malecón—free of charge and with a cooling ocean breeze—is still the most popular place in the city for Cubans to relax and enjoy themselves. They call it "the longest park bench in the world."

Switzerland.
get natural.

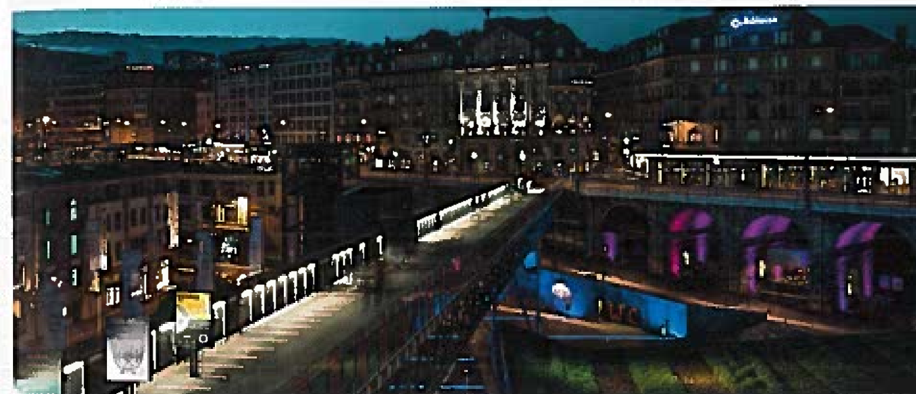
City stays meet ski runs.



Zurich in winter. © Martin Rueschi

Art and culture in the city or fun and games in the snowy mountains? In Switzerland you can combine them both. Enjoy a stay in the city and easily accessible winter adventures. **MySwitzerland.com/cities**

Feel the pulse of five evolving Swiss cities.

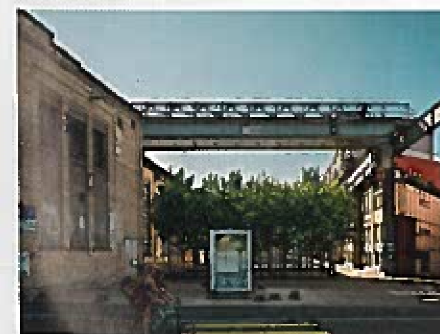


Lausanne and the metamorphosis of Quartier du Flon

The "Quartier du Flon" is in the heart of Lausanne and has in the past few years blossomed from a cluster of forgotten warehouses into a pulsating city district. Today, if you wanna see or be seen, this is the place to be. This former trading place now accentuates its historic industrial buildings with modern avant-garde architecture. It's myriad of shops, cinemas, art galleries, bars, clubs and restaurants attract shoppers by day and party-goers by night. Not to be missed: the Legends Sports Bar. The bar's rooftop garden offers impressive panoramic views over Lausanne! **www.flon.ch**
Winter resort: Verbier, with more than 60 miles of runs, can be reached in under one hour.

Urban spring in Winterthur

Winterthur is a forerunner of urban transformation. Case in point, the centrally located old iron and steel factory complex "Sulzer-Areal". Since the expulsion of heavy industry from the city center in 1980, an ambitious restructuring project returned life to the sector. Residential buildings and artists' studios have been constructed, as well as a cultural movie theater and a restaurant in three 100 year old carriages of the Zurich Uetliberg Railway. **winterthur-tourismus.ch/en**
Winter resort: The family friendly resort Stoos in Central Switzerland can easily be reached via Zurich.



Zurich cultivates gardens where plants used to be

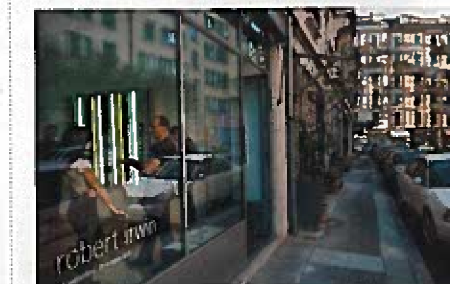
The industrial area Zurich-West has been re-inventing itself for the past ten years. Don't miss "Frau Gerold's Garten", located between the modern Prime Tower and the headquarters of accessories designer "Freitag" - a tower entirely built out of shipping containers. It boasts small shops, art galleries, cafés and restaurants serving veggies supplied by their own gardens.
www.zuerich.com/zurich-west
Winter resort: Flumserberg is the largest ski resort between Zurich and Chur and can be reached in a mere 1½ hours.

Art in Basel? What the HeK

The Dreispitz area of Basel was home to crop growing farmers. As the city grew, various industries got their foothold there. Most recently, however, the area has further cemented Basel's reputation as cultural capital of Switzerland. Take the House of Electronic Arts (HeK), dedicated to digital culture and the new art forms of the information age.
www.hek.ch
Winter resort: The top ski area Engelberg-Mt. Titlis is less than two hours away.

Geneva's "Quartier des Bains" is awash with art

Forget about bank transaction or shopping for luxury watches. Today one goes gallery hopping in the "Quartier des Bains". The New York Times described this former working class area in the southern part of town as "the little SoHo of Geneva", one of the most innovative art neighborhoods in Europe. **www.quartierdesbains.ch**
Winter resort: Leysin and many other resorts are just a snowball's throw away.



Switzerland.
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Exploring secret realms

Photographs by Nicola Lo Calzo

WHY IS A MAN DANCING BAREFOOT in the street, a cone-shaped hood covering his head? And what to make of strange yellow chalk markings or the blood sacrifice of roosters and doves? These are rituals of a mystical subculture in Cuba, formed during its years as a Spanish colony and plantation economy, when West African slaves melded their pantheistic worship of spirits with features of Catholicism. This blending of cultures and beliefs gave birth to the country's unique religious practices: Santería, as well as other mysterious associations and smaller groupings.

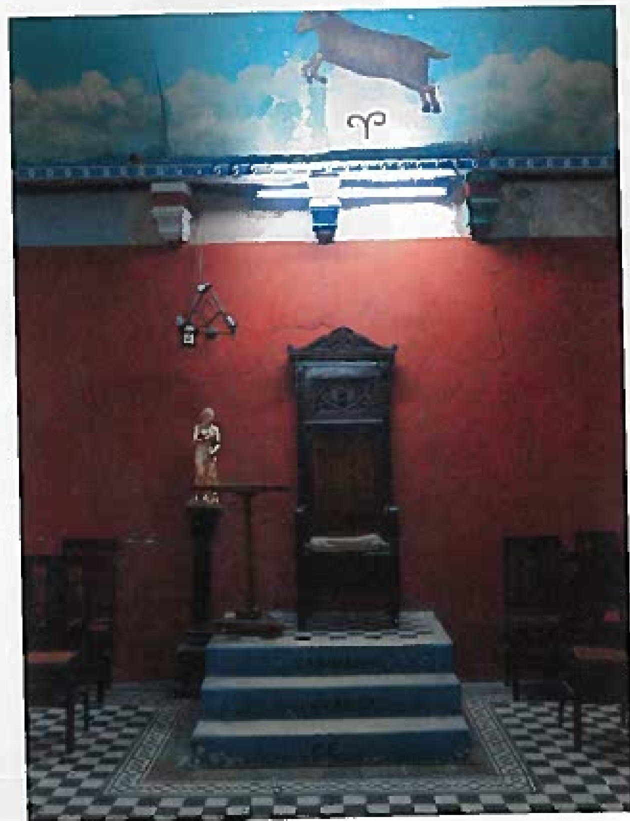
The island's appetite for secret societies can seem boundless. Among the early settlers were Freemasons, who established a robust membership among the island's white elite. After the 1959 revolution, the Masons faced pressure to become part of larger state-controlled associations; indeed, there were calls by some of their communist members to dissolve. But their lodges were never closed down, as they were in many communist countries. Today there are an estimated 30,000 members in 316 lodges.

During the last couple of years, Italian photographer Nicola Lo Calzo has photographed these mysterious byways, focusing his work in the cities of Santiago de Cuba, Trinidad, and Havana. His subjects include Santería priests, members of the Abakuá fraternal order, Masons, and rappers at odds with the authorities for refusing to join the state-run music industry. All this is part of a larger project, started by Lo Calzo in 2010, to chronicle the global history of the African diaspora. In Cuba, his thematic focus is Regla, a reference to *Regla de Ochá,* the formal name for Santería as well as the part of Havana where the first Abakuá lodge was formed in 1836. In its most fluid sense, Regla, which literally means "rule," also evokes a set of communal values that sustains a group. Certainly for Cuba's slaves, brought to the country to labor on sugar plantations, secret societies provided a sense of control and power that allowed them an escape from the misery of bondage. And up to the present day, Lo Calzo asserts, these subcultures are sanctuaries of self-expression. "They open an otherwise firmly closed door to individuality," he says. "Young Cubans live a unique kind of freedom that is both personal and shared, far from the prying eyes of the state." ○ —*Victoria Pope*

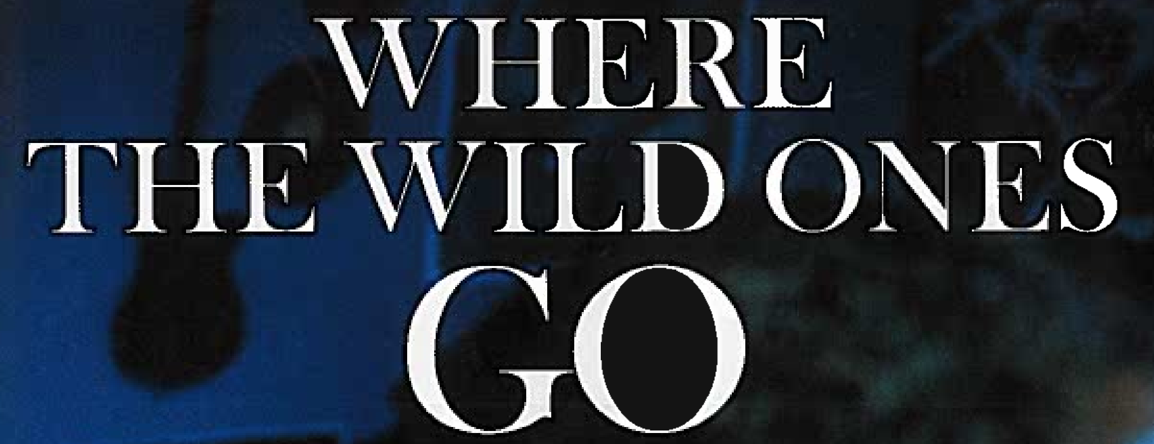
SACRED SYMBOLS Chalk hieroglyphics drawn on a trunk of an oak tree (top) convey mystical messages to members of the Afro-Cuban secret society called Abakuá. During an Abakuá initiation ceremony in the Havana district of Regla, a young aspirant (far right) depicts *Aberisún*, an *ireme*, or spirit messenger. A Masonic apron and necktie are worn by Nicolas Rojas, a Freemason from San Andres #3 Lodge, in Santiago de Cuba.

PHOTOGRAPHER NICOLA LO CALZO IS REPRESENTED BY L'AGENCE À PARIS/LUZ

SOLIDARITY
To join the Abakuá brotherhood, initiates are blindfolded (above) during an elaborate ritual that signifies rebirth. The Afro-Cuban religion known as Santería often punctuates its ceremonies with the rhythm of sacred Batá drums (right), here played at the home of the priest, Peter King. Eba Augustin and Sergio Ramo (left) prepare to join the carnival parade in Santiago de Cuba as the queen and king of the Carabalí Olugu, an offshoot of a fraternity created by freed African slaves at the end of the 18th century.



CONCEALED
Fugitive slaves throughout the Caribbean were called Maroons, from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, meaning wild. The Cuban government has staged reenactments of their plight (above) in a cave in Viñales. Enrique King Bell (right) is a priest of of the religion known as *Palo Monte*, first practiced in the colonial period by African slaves, particularly those speaking Bantu languages. The secret rituals of Freemasonry (left) have been viewed by the authorities with suspicion.



WHERE THE WILD ONES GO

Innovative nightspots are transforming the Havana social scene

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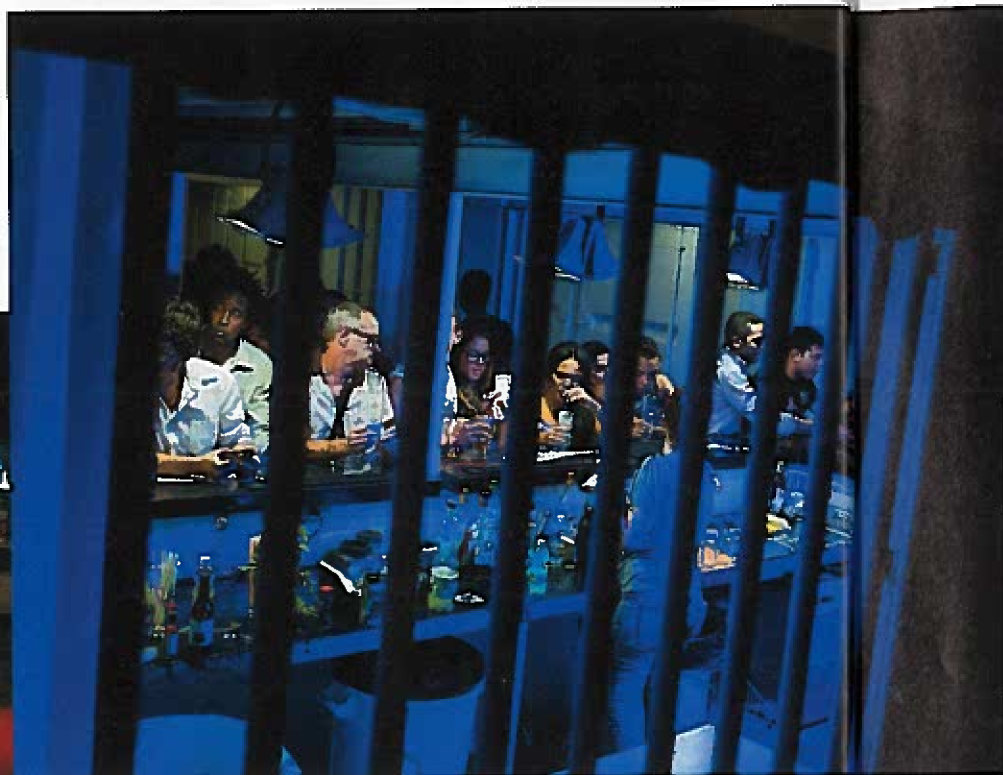


The Fábrica de Arte Cubano, popularly known as FAC, is more than just a dance club. The former cooking-oil factory is also a cultural and performance arts center featuring (from left to right): a street front through which more than a thousand visitors pass on a typical Saturday night, a colorfully lit bar, a stage for live music, and an arts exhibition space.

By Julia Cooke
Photographs by Edu Bayer

On a recent Thursday at 1:45 a.m., as I watched the last dinner guests spiral down the vertigo-steep stairs from El Cocinero's rooftop bar—to where gypsy cabs, old Chevys, and Soviet-era Ladas waited along the street—the Fábrica de Arte Cubano next door appeared to be winding down, too.

Appearances deceive: A low thrum of music pulsed from the broad entrance to the warehouse-size space, which was once a cooking-oil factory. Just inside, the arms of a half dozen patrons stretched and waved toward servers at a bar. I threaded past clusters of young Cubans arguing and laughing in hallways and gallery spaces, and caught a glimpse of Rihanna on video, in resplendent yellow on a three-story screen, singing for customers gathered on a smoking patio outside. In a cavernous hall at the back of the complex, a local DJ provided the soundtrack for body-to-body dancing. Hundreds of bobbing heads turned blue, pink, no color at all, and then blue all over again.

Everything tonight was new, including the pace of change. Fábrica de Arte Cubano, known by its acronym, FAC, usually closes for a month three times a year to switch out the 900-odd works of Cuban art it exhibits. FAC's founder, the musician X Alfonso, told me earlier in the afternoon that he and his colleagues had just accomplished in three days what normally takes 30. They had mounted a dizzying collection of photography, painting, sculpture, and displays of industrial design—not only by such gallery notables as Liudmila & Nelson and Roberto Diago, but also by hitherto unknown artists who proposed work via a submission box. As we spoke, Alfonso was still rubbing gray paint off his hands.

When I lived in Havana on and off between 2008 and 2011—to research a book on the last generation of Cubans raised under Fidel Castro—most of the people now at FAC would have been hanging out on the Malecón, the five-mile road and esplanade that runs along the coast, or on park benches along G Street, the city's stately central avenue. Havana's social life then typically took place either in public spaces, behind closed doors, or at concerts. Foreigners sipped mojitos at expensive state-run clubs or one of the two dozen in-home restaurants priced for tourists, most of which featured similar menus in similar settings. The meals were unappealing, even to the well-heeled Cuban artists, musicians, and government officials who could afford them. If there wasn't a cheap concert at the Karl Marx or the Bertolt Brecht theaters, the young or broke might visit Havana's massive ice-cream parlor, Coppelia. But by and large, social life was cheap, and it was spontaneous and far from the tourist orbit.

"On Calle G there were nodes of people, and one group stuck to another, and another and another," Alfonso recalled. "I lived on Calle G, Malecón. [We went] from Coppelia to Malecón, Malecón to Coppelia, Coppelia to Malecón."

In the past few years, this pattern has shifted. Restaurants, bars, and music venues have opened everywhere conceivable—on corners, rooftops, even in alleyways—since the loosening of restrictions on privately run eateries in 2011. In short order, these nightspots have become increasingly sophisticated and specialized. And tourism to Cuba has simultaneously boomed, funneling a reliable flow of dollars to local employees who can then afford to go out themselves.

The dynamism of public spaces hasn't disappeared—the vast majority of Cubans still don't make enough money to pay FAC's $2 cover charge with any regularity. And bars, technically, are not sanctioned by the government, which is why El Cocinero is a restaurant before it's a drinking hole. But at these nightspots, no matter what they're called, Cubans and foreigners converge in varying proportions—young and not so young, posh and not so posh—nursing drinks or building up a hefty bar tab, making new friends or catching up with old. The back pages of *OnCuba* magazine are thick with quarter-page advertisements for hybrid restaurant-bars, and a relatively new app, AlaMesa, helps direct patrons to the right spots.

A bar in Cuba is also a cultural statement, a reflection of entrepreneurial spirit, and an opportunity to project a personal vision.

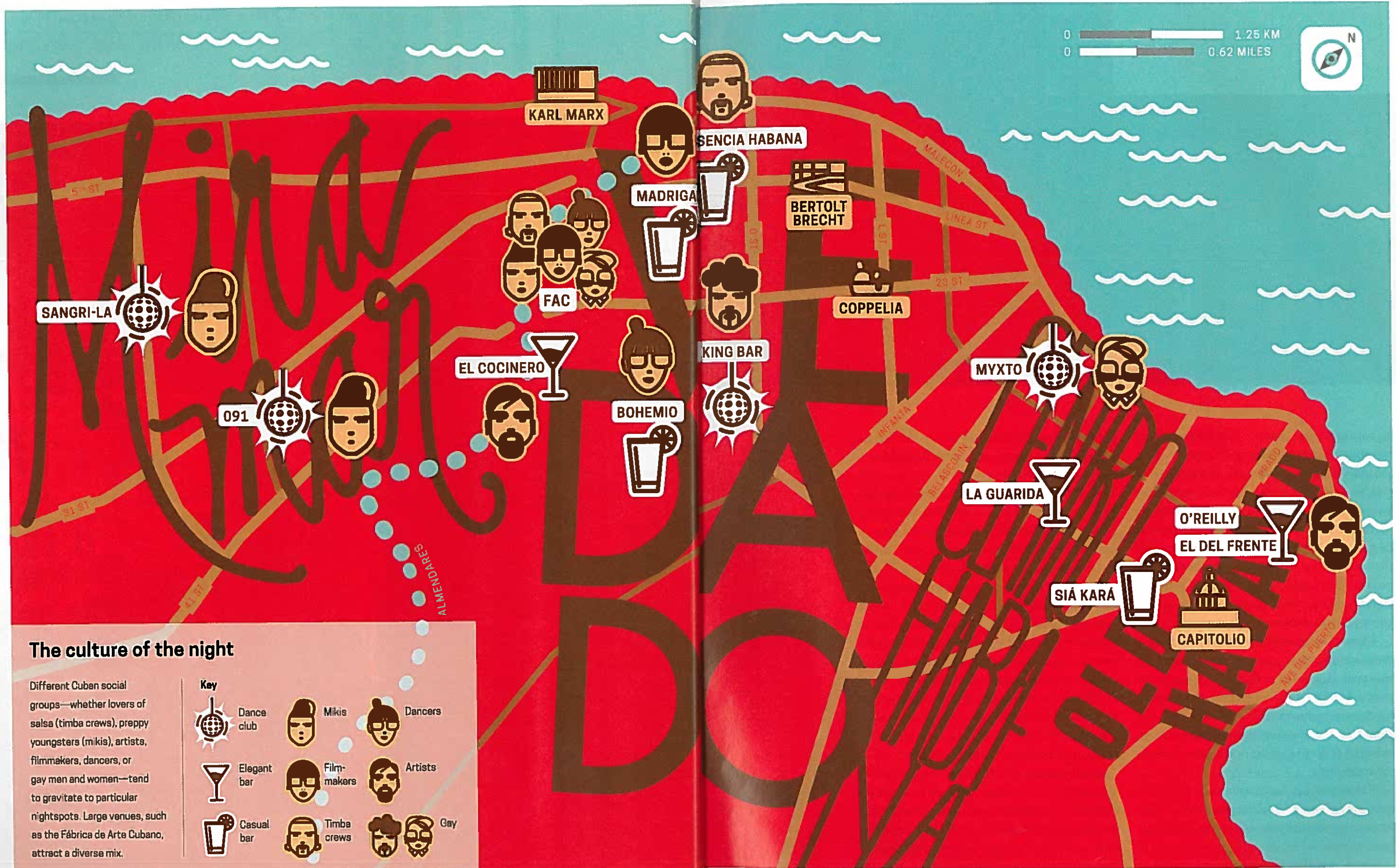
"You can come here and see four photographers and seven musicians, and they're in the same space as the general public," Alfonso noted. "They're waiting in the same line as you. This was what I wanted. Everything is different now."

A BAR IN CUBA IS—by necessity and design—not just a bar. Nor is it merely an indication of a shift in the country's economic policies or of a booming tourist industry. A bar is also a cultural statement, a reflection of entrepreneurial spirit, and an opportunity to project a personal vision. Building by building, brick by brick, Havana is being remade after decades of entropy. A number of proprietors see themselves as restorers of architectural patrimony; they peel away slapdash additions and renovations to highlight a building's old bones.

Two bar-restaurants in Old Havana, the O'Reilly 304 and El Del Frente, are just those sorts of places. Both were previously residential apartments, co-owner José Carlos Imperatori told me over a pineapple-lemonade frappe at El Del Frente, the restaurant he opened nine months ago across the street from his first venture on O'Reilly Street. "The [economic] opening has made us more creative," said Imperatori, who is also a painter and graffiti artist. "It's not like before, where everything was the same. We are more daring."

Imperatori and his business partner bought the apartment that would become O'Reilly 304 three years ago, and then smashed its facade and replaced it with enormous window panes. He opened half the sleeping loft—what's called a *barbacoa*, installed in Old Havana homes with high ceilings to create more room—to make a double-height dining space. Then he removed internal walls, installed a skinny concrete bar at the back, and hung vintage signs, his own artwork, and pieces made by his art school friends over every possible inch of wall space. O'Reilly, as

For decades tough economics have forced ever resourceful Cubans to take their social scene outdoors, most famously along Havana's Malecón, the five-mile esplanade that hosts such festivals as the Havana Biennial arts fair every November.



The culture of the night

Different Cuban social groups—whether lovers of salsa (timba crews), preppy youngsters (mikis), artists, filmmakers, dancers, or gay men and women—tend to gravitate to particular nightspots. Large venues, such as the Fábrica de Arte Cubano, attract a diverse mix.

Map by Clandestina

Chic has replaced gritty in many of Havana's newly imagined gathering spots. From left to right: eclectic decorations brighten La Vitrola in Old Havana's Plaza Vieja; Cuba's famed rum enlivens a cocktail at O'Reilly 304; crowds gather to see René Francisco's installation at Factoría gallery in Old Havana; and visitors take in a video exhibition by Alexandre Arrechea at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

it's popularly called, features Cuban-international fusion food, gorgeously presented gin drinks, guava and passion fruit daiquiris, and—seemingly impossible, the space is so small—impromptu jazz performances by trios of young musicians later at night.

Though Imperatori wanted to attract tourists, his bar is a local favorite, too. At 9 p.m. on any given evening, a mixed cluster waits in the street outside for tables. Cuban friends-of-friends squeeze into tiny non-spots at the bar for a drink before dinner elsewhere.

There's more gloss on El Del Frente, Imperatori's newer venture. In a gracious 1942 building, the restaurant is all high ceilings and white walls, colorful floor tiles, stenciled graffiti art, and sweeping flowers in enormous vases. Too glossy, it seemed, for the trio of young American men who walked up to the rooftop bar next to where I sat on a Saturday night.

"This is so gringo," one commented at the bar's Bertoia chairs, swooping plants, and Edison bulbs, the latter zigzagging between the apartment buildings overhead.

"*Yuma,*" one of his friends corrected him. "They say 'yuma' here." ("Yuma" is indeed the correct Cuban slang for American; it came from the 1957 Western *3:10 to Yuma.*)

A distinct faction of tourists seems annoyed by the perceived polish of this new Cuba, as if they've missed out on the real thing, or as if the obvious grit of the city hasn't been simply brushed outside the tourist corridor of Old Havana, Vedado, and Miramar. Still, the young Americans weren't wrong. If by "gringo," or "yuma," they meant that the bar no longer required patrons to thread under lines of wet laundry and past a living room where a lone woman would sway in a vinyl rocker while watching a Brazilian soap opera—the route to the famed La Guarida restaurant before its owners bought out the apartment building's residents and opened a rooftop bar—then yes, Havana's new nightspots are very much more yuma than in the past.

Smaller details still reflect the Cuban talent of making the best of things: The Copa Airlines flatware at one café, the too-large paper napkins stuffed into Sol holders at another, or the man wheeling ice into a sleek patio bar in a rusted shopping cart. And ordinary Havana is never far away: You can watch from a new waterfront lounge in Miramar as kids leap off the boulders on the rocky coastline, slamming into the ocean at the magic hour before nightfall, and you can listen to the gentle flutter of laundry one patio over.

As the Americans at El Del Frente sipped their expertly crafted cocktails, an impromptu dance party was forming just outside the bar. A half block down the street, a rusty Moskvitch, an '80s Soviet sedan, had parked alongside a state-run *centro de recreo*—a slim, empty storefront with overly bright fluorescent lighting and a few bottles of rum and TuKola (local cola) at a makeshift bar. As the car radio blared techno, a dozen Cubans danced raucously in the street.

A BAR IN HAVANA is also a social statement. Among the Cubans who can afford to go out, different groups have begun to frequent different venues. Artists go to O'Reilly 304 or El Cocinero. The film and dance crowd stays up late at Bohemio or Madrigal, owned by, respectively, a dancer and a producer. The *timba* crews, the city's salsa musicians and their fans, go to Esencia Habana. The preppy kids—*mikis,* in the local parlance, who get support from a wealthy exile or a relatively well-to-do artist, entrepreneur, or political parent in Cuba—haunt Sangri-La or 091, a new spot in a restored modernist house. There's an underground *friki,* or punk rock bar, and the gay scene materializes at mYXto or King Bar, as well as at FAC, where most of the above crews also can be found.

The list goes on and on. And all these spots host a mix of Cuban and foreign patrons. Earlier on Thursday evening, at Siá Kará, an Old Havana eatery, I sat at the bar between a pair of Frenchmen and a young Cuban woman. Her name, I learned, was Alejandra, and she was the bartender's girlfriend. She was 24 and a psychologist, but she'd quit teaching at the university six months earlier—her salary had been 500 Cuban pesos, about $20 a month—to tend bar at Sangri-La, where she nets up to a thousand dollars in tips during the same amount of time. The discrepancy between state and private pay scales explains why the bars and restaurants of Havana are tended by very educated Cubans—no legal framework permits privatized academic work yet. Alejandra wanted to practice

It's easy to forget how tenuous the standing of these new enterprises actually is, even in this brave new Cuba.

her English with me; as we spoke, she pulled out her iPhone and showed me pictures of her aunt, a bodybuilder in Canada.

"Her muscles, they are like, what is the word? Marble!" she crowed before ordering a screwdriver.

That rainy evening, Siá Kará—with its warm light, enormous open doors, fluttering gauze curtains, and the dome of the *capitolio* at the end of the otherwise residential street—possessed the air of a secret hideaway.

It's easy to forget how tenuous the standing of these new enterprises actually is, even in this brave new Cuba. Competing rumors dominate discussions of why a bar run by a German man, which remained open for a scant three months, was shut down by state inspectors. The wife of a Cuban spy imprisoned in the U.S.—a state hero—may or may not live in front of the bar and may or may not have bubbled a complaint upward; a neighborhood lobby consisting of other nearby clubs may or may not have disliked the competition and forced its closure. The bar today, with its custom ironwork and fresh paint, is still dark, and the local laws prohibiting or protecting new restaurants, bars, and clubs are murky. Rumors—of who owns a bar, how it was constructed, or why it was closed—ping around most new ventures.

Still, for better and for worse, Havana has entered a new era: more tourists, more social spaces, increasingly gentrified neighborhoods. The center of gravity of Havana's social life has become split between indoors and out. Just look at FAC: During the course of a typical Saturday night, X Alfonso told me, his club/bar/art and performance space hosts between 1,000 and 1,700 revelers.

"The miki and the friki and everyone, they're all here," he said proudly. "There's nothing like this in New York, in Paris, anywhere." I knew he was talking about FAC, but I couldn't help but think his words applied more generally to the overall energy—exuberant, uncertain—of Havana itself. ○

People wait in line to enter FAC. "You can come here and see four photographers and seven musicians, and they're in the same space as the general public," says founder X Alfonso. "They're waiting in the same line as you. This was what I wanted."

LIKE A LOCAL

Printing with ghosts

By Mimi Dwyer
Photographs by Arien Chang Castán

I am standing in the back of the Taller Experimental de Gráfica, Cuba's premier printmaking studio, showing artist Max Delgado Corteguera my cracked phone. He jokes with me: How do I get one like that? I tell him I'd be happy to barter a lesson in my specialty, the shattering of iPhones, for his, traditional Cuban lithography. He demurs.

I pull up the photo I'm looking for, a snapshot from a few months back of the logo for the bank my family once owned in Cuba, Banco Garrigo. It's in my archive as part of an ill-fated plan hatched with my cousin to get the logo's elements tattooed on our sides: A palm tree, two gears working together, and some kind of tool we couldn't identify, shaped vaguely like a check mark.

Max knows the tool immediately: an *arado*, he says. A plow. For *campesinos* (farmers) to dig lines in the soil. The bank must have been agricultural?

"I think so," I say. "I think it was small." The truth is, I don't really know the specifics, as with most of my family's past in Cuba. I have always liked it that way—a little mysterious and vague. My grandparents fled the island on an airplane shortly after the revolution. They landed in Miami and left it behind forever. I grew up in the shadow of that trauma, tiptoeing around it.

In 2015, to my grandmother's dismay, I flew to Havana to watch the U.S. Embassy reopen, and to look for remaining family. It was intense and difficult. The island was hot and I was alone. But it also seemed like the only thing I'd ever felt compelled to do without knowing why. That made it important somehow.

I came back to Havana this summer with an assignment to make a print at the Taller and write about the experience. Beyond that, I also wanted a reason to look up more addresses and dig through more records and cold-call more Cubans with my mother's strange last name, Argilagos. Then there was the matter of the family's bank crest: I often felt unsure of my claim to my family's Cuban past. Printing the image would help me make it my own.

Max gives me a quick primer before we get started: Lithography arrived in Cuba before anywhere else in the Americas, as a way to protect the sanctity and integrity of the country's industry. By the early 19th century, Cuban exports, especially tobacco, had a prestige that made them valuable throughout the world. Exporters wanted a way to protect Cuban industry from counterfeiters. Using lithography, they could make seals and rings that both decorated their products and distinguished them from those of competitors.

Ian Marcos Gutiérrez, a 23-year-old printer at the Taller Experimental de Gráfica, in Havana, helps the author prepare a block of lithographic limestone for printing.

The process depends more than anything on the repellent properties of oil and water, and their interaction with limestone. By using acids, powders, solvents, oils, and gum in specific combinations, lithographers manipulate the places a stone receives ink. In this way, they can use a stone to print precise and intricate images onto paper.

Cuba imported thousands of lithographic limestones from Germany in the 1800s, when the technology was first emerging. Cuban businessmen brought machines from France and Germany and lured experts to Havana who knew how to use them. Many of the original machines still work. The Taller's oldest is an intricate, red woodcutting machine from 1829, still used by artists every day.

In the 1950s, shortly before the revolution, aluminum replaced lithography as the best way to

LL

protect product identity, and the stones fell into disuse. Campesinos started to use them to make walking paths through muddy fields. Habaneros, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, laid them around the city along with whatever other stones they could find to serve as barricades.

Cuban lithography would have died then but for a few artists who recognized the value of the craft. They lobbied the government to protect the stones, and in 1962, as minister of industry, Che Guevara signed a mandate to provide materials, space, and machines to Cuban lithographers in the name of art. The Taller was born from that directive, and it remains the oldest and best known print studio in Cuba. It's been producing work consistently since then.

The Taller is on the Callejón del Chorro in Habana Vieja, the tourist mecca at the center of the city. In the cathedral plaza nearby, women dress in Santería whites and smoke cigars, waiting for tourists to take their photos. Doña Eutemia, one of Cuba's first *paladares* (private restaurants), is right next door. The studio itself is calm and airy. At the front there's a gallery where pieces made in the workshop go for 10 or 20 times the average monthly Cuban salary.

Tourists mill freely between the gallery and the workshop, which offers classes in woodcutting, lithography, and etching for between $100 and $500, depending on the length of the course, the techniques used, and the number of editions made. I paid $300 to make six two-color prints over two eight-hour days. A sign hangs from the rafters commemorating a March 2016 visit by Michelle, Malia, and Sasha Obama, with a signed note commending the Taller for preserving the beauty of Cuban artistry.

The artists working in the Taller are carefully selected and often have well-recognized portfolios or have earned major prizes. A committee overseeing the studio considers new members only every four or five years. The space itself is dynamic and convivial.

(Above) Cleaning the stone of *fantasmas*, or hidden images from previous printings. (Right, from top to bottom) Placing an inked leaf on the stone; drying prints before adding another layer of color; an artist works on a woodcut. (Far right) The author's finished piece, with a Cuban peso printed on the bottom right.

One woodcut artist lays out a book he's had made for his daughter's *quinceañera*—festivities celebrating a girl's 15th birthday. It's a cardboard holographic photo collection of her in various costumes: a police officer against a New York skyline, a Southern belle amid the vines, several permutations of prom queen. These books are all the rage among teens in Havana, he says, shaking his head. The guy who makes them charges hundreds of dollars. He prints them in Miami. Now the artist is using the book as the basis for a woodcut.

I wheel my enormous limestone to the huge sink in the workshop's corner with Ian Marcos Gutiérrez, a 23-year-old printer who's been assisting established artists in the studio for several years. We scrub the stone down to rid it of *fantasmas*—the ghosts of previous artwork. Sometimes they linger in the stone even though you don't see them, interfering with subsequent prints.

"I do this every day, but I don't get bored," Ian says as he mixes abrasive *carborundio* dust with water, sprinkles it on the stone, and shows me how to move one stone over another to smooth and flatten its surface. In Cuba you use what you have, and substitute if something's missing. The carborundio we're using to grind the stone down is hard to find. The Taller traded some *goma arábiga* (gum arabic) for this batch with a printer in Camagüey. If we didn't have it, we'd find a substitute, and the work would emerge slightly different.

"Lithography is always a fight," Ian says. "You want to do something, and the stone wants to do something different. It's a push and pull." I rinse the stone off and he smooths his hand over it. Feels fine. So far, so good. But when I read back from my notes the steps we've taken, Ian rolls his eyes. I've skipped things and mixed up carbon and carborundio.

We wheel the stone to the lithography machine, and Max brings over a laser-printed copy of the bank logo—the Taller is not opposed to mixing new techniques with old ones. Ian wipes the stone with powders and solvents, making sure it's wet so that its pores are open to receive ink. Max lays the logo facedown, covers it with a solvent, and runs the machine over it once. He lifts up the paper, and I see the logo has appeared backward on the limestone.

We bring the stone over to a table, and Max sets down a little cup of goma arábiga to make the print's borders. The gum repels ink, so anyplace I put it will stay blank when I use the stone to print colors. We'll print the logo in a reddish black and a light green.

LL

The black comes first. Ian rolls out a slick of oil paint for transferring images onto the stone with rollers, then hands me some greasy lithography pencils for drawing. "Now you get to add to the family history," Max says.

I take the pencil and stare at the stone, bewildered. I hadn't actually considered this part. What right did I have to alter the logo? Max nudges me along, brings over some laser-printed Cuban pesos to transfer onto the piece. He cuts one out, soaks it in solvent, places it onto the limestone facedown, and presses down with his hand. A mirror image of the face of José Martí emerges perfectly. I still hesitate.

"Got a dollar?" Max asks, nudging me along. I pull a crumpled one out of my backpack. Max says we can transfer a negative of the dollar—Washington's face in relief. He pushes the roller back and forth over the bill until it's covered with toner, then hands it to me. I place it on the stone, cover it with a paper soaked in solvent to transfer the ink to the stone. We press down with our palms and lift. It leaves only a black box. Everybody laughs. "Well," says Max, "it works with pesos." Dollars must be better fortified. More secure.

I print the stone with a few more *monedas*, some American quarters. Max adds two stamps—Soy Cuba—to either side. I'm cursing myself for not planning better. I don't want to cover the bank logo in money. It feels too literal. But I'm not a visual artist and feel at a loss for what to do.

I look up to the open-air garden on the second floor of the studio, where a Taller member is watering some plants. Can I take some leaves from there? Print the stone with something that comes from the place I made it? Max nods, and we walk up together to pick out leaves. I cover them in ink, roll and press them all over the stone. When I lift them, I see their spines and my own fingerprints. I keep pressing and other aspects of the design disappear into the brush.

We wheel the stone back to the lithography machine and start a process so intricate and so quick that I'm bound to get it wrong. I write down steps—talc, then pine resin, something to dissolve the goma arábiga—and Ian demands my notes. I'm not getting it wrong, I say, offended. But of course I am. The object is to set the stone so that some places will hold the red-black ink I've chosen and others will repel it. We'll do this with the first color, then repeat it tomorrow with a second, securing the paper in place over the stone and transferring each layer to each print precisely.

There are so many moments of erasure and coverage throughout the process—laying acids, dissolving them; placing color, rolling it away; opening the stone's pores and sealing them off—that it's hard to believe my impression stays intact, that we can alter the stone so much without losing the outline. Later the next day, when Max, Ian, and I are printing the green I've covered with another layer of leaves, Ian wipes down the stone completely and watches my face for a reaction.

"Everybody always thinks I'm erasing it at this point," he says. "But it's still there in the stone." The design isn't immediately visible. You don't know what will come out, what happens on the inside. You can't see it. Push and pull. The relationship between the work as you imagine it and the print that eventually emerges is complex, opaque—something like the one between the Cuba I created in my mind as a child and the reality where I now found myself.

Process is everything here, and everything is in flux. I look around the studio at the works made by the Taller artists—images of Che and Martí, but also giant prints of Barack Obama as Spider-Man, swinging his way across Havana. "The Cuban people love you," the inscription reads.

Tourists mill around the studio as Max, Ian, and I finish putting the final green layer on my print. A Dutch couple looks over my shoulder and I joke that maybe I'll sell a work.

"That happens," Max says. For whatever reason, the Taller has an aura that makes people come after unfinished pieces, as well as ones made by students. "Students have paid for their whole courses that way," says Max. "Beginner's luck."

To him, that's the essence of what separates Cuban lithography from other studios' approaches to the practice—it's a little freer, deeply committed to process but also ready to use whatever's at hand—quarters and leaves and, in my case, at Max's suggestion, some extra cigar labels we press over the top. A little kitsch. I feel OK with it.

Here, a print completes a full life cycle. Unlike other lithography studios, which keep artists' work on hand to make second and third editions, everything in the Taller gets destroyed after its run. The studio likes to keep each edition completely unique, made only by the artist, and only at the time she first makes it. It also clears the limestones for further use. Max calls me over to watch as he and Ian scrub a giant X into my print, "canceling" it. They wheel it back to the stone basin where it will be scoured to use again, traces of my work joining the ranks of fantasmas. O

The Taller offers classes in woodcutting, lithography, and etching for $100 to $500, depending on the length of the course, the techniques used, and the number of editions made.

TIME TRAVEL

A slave breaks free

Esteban Montejo was born a slave in 1860 and raised on a Cuban sugar plantation. He eventually escaped and lived as a fugitive until around 1886, when slavery was abolished in Cuba. In 1963, when Montejo was 103 years old, Cuban ethnographer and poet Miguel Barnet conducted a series of interviews with him that Barnet later crafted into a first-person account.

Excerpted from Biography of a Runaway Slave, *by Miguel Barnet, translated by W. Nick Hill, 1994.*

Runaways, there weren't many. People were afraid of the woods. They said that if some slaves escaped, they would be caught anyway. But for me that idea went around in my head more than any other. I always had the fantasy that I would enjoy being in the forest. And I knew that working in the fields was like living in hell. You couldn't do anything on your own. Everything depended on the master's orders.

One day I began to watch the overseer. I had already been studying him. That dog got stuck in my eyes, and I couldn't get him out. I think he was a Spaniard. I remember that he was tall and never took his hat off. All the blacks had respect for him because one of the whippings he gave could strip the skin off of just about anybody. The thing is, one day I was riled up, and I don't know what got into me, but I was mad, and just seeing him set me off.

I whistled at him from a distance, and he looked around and then turned his back. That's when I picked up a rock and threw it at his head. I know it hit him because he shouted for someone to grab me. But he never saw me again because that day I made it into the woods.

I traveled many days without any clear direction. I was sort of lost. I had never left the plantation. I walked uphill and downhill, all around. I know I got to a farm near Siguanea, where I had no choice but to camp. My feet were full of blisters and my hands were swollen. I camped under a tree. I stayed there no more than four or five days. All I had to do was hear the first human voice close by, and I would take off fast. It would have been real shitty if you got caught right after escaping.

I came to hide in a cave for a time. I lived there for a year and a half. I went in there thinking I would have to walk less and because the pigs from around the farms, the plots, and the small landholdings used to come to a kind of swamp just outside the mouth of the cave. They went to take a bath and wallow around. I caught them easy enough because big bunches of them came. Every week I had a pig. That cave was very big and dark like the mouth of the wolf. It was called Guajabán. It was near the town of Remedios. It was dangerous because it had no way out. You had to go in through the entrance and leave by the entrance. My curiosity really poked me to find a way out. But I preferred to remain in the mouth of the cave on account of the snakes. The majases [large Cuban boa constrictors] are very dangerous beasts. They are found in caves and in the woods. Their breath can't be felt, but they knock people down with it, and then they put people to sleep to suck out their blood. That's why I always stayed alert and lit a fire to scare them away. If you fall asleep in a cave, be ready for the wake. I didn't want to see a majá, not even from a distance. The Congos, and this is true, told me that those snakes lived more than a thousand years. And as they approached two thousand, they became serpents again, and they would return to the ocean to live like any other fish.

Inside, the cave was like a house. A little darker, naturally. Oh, and dung, yes, the smell of bat dung. I walked on it because it was as soft as a mattress. The bats led a life of freedom in the caves. They were and are the masters of them. All over the world it's like that. Since no one kills them, they live a long time. Not as long as the snakes, for sure. The dung they drop works afterward as fertilizer. It becomes dust, and it's thrown on the ground to make pasture for animals and to fertilize crops.

One time that place nearly burned up. I lit a fire, and it spread all through the cave. The bat shit was to blame. After slavery I told the story to a Congo. The story that I had lived with the bats, and that joker, they could sometimes be more jokers than you might imagine, he said: "Listen here, boy, you know nothin'. In my country

that thing what you call a bat is big like a pigeon." I knew that was a tall tale. They fooled nearly everyone with those stories. But I heard it, and smiled inside.

The cave was quiet. The only sound always there was the bats going: "Chwee, chwee, chwee." They didn't know how to sing. But they talked to each other and understood each other. I saw that one would say "Chewy, chewy, chewy," and the bunch would go wherever he went. They were very united about things. Bats have no wings. They're nothing but a cloth with a little black head, very dirty, and if you get up real close, you'll see they look like rats. In the cave I was summering, you might say. What I really liked was the woods, and after a year and a half I left that darkness behind. I took to the footpaths. I went into the woods in Siguanea again. I spent a long time there. I took care of myself like a spoiled child. I didn't want to be chained to slavery again. ○

Illustration by Edel Rodriguez

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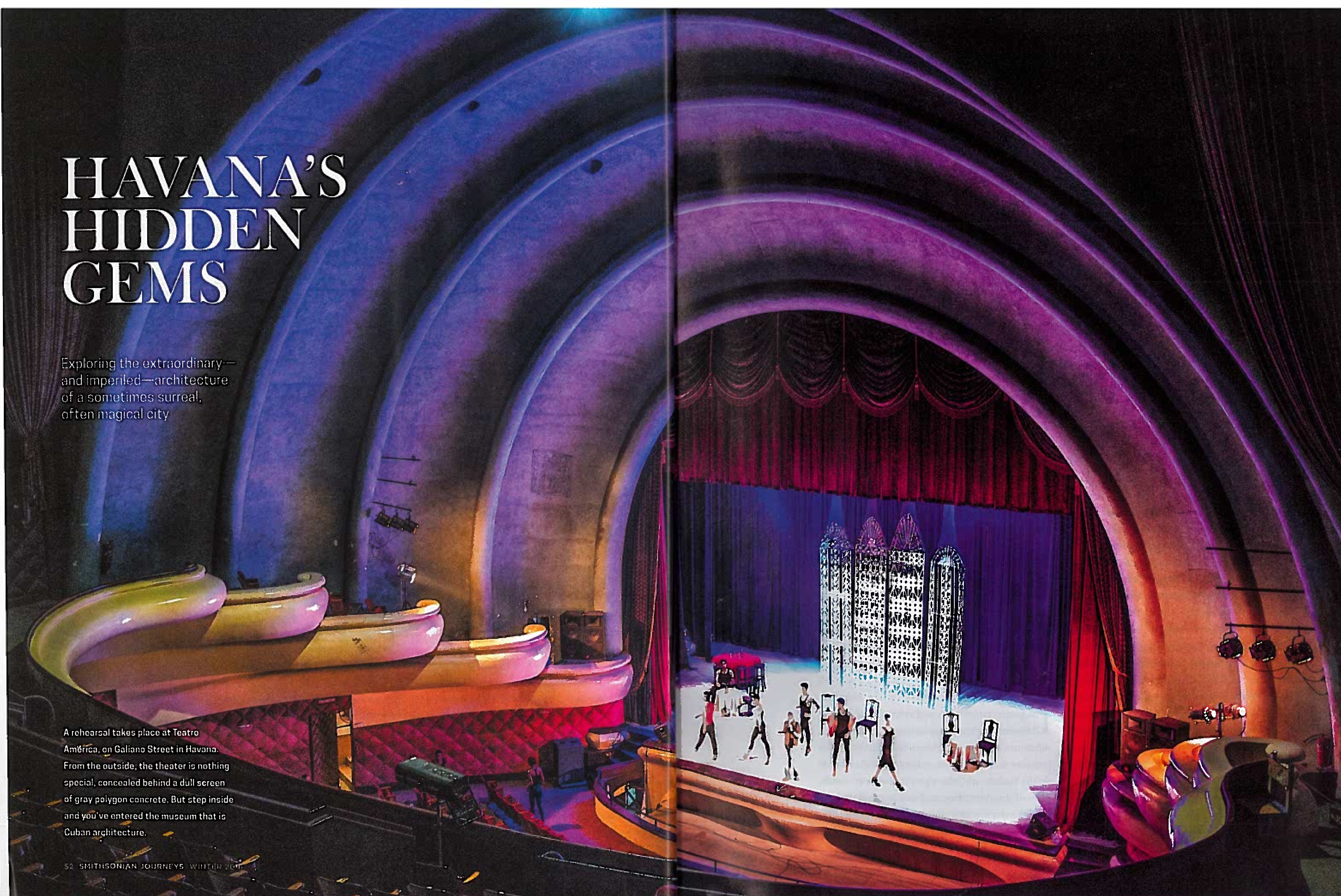
HAVANA'S HIDDEN GEMS

Exploring the extraordinary—and imperiled—architecture of a sometimes surreal, often magical city



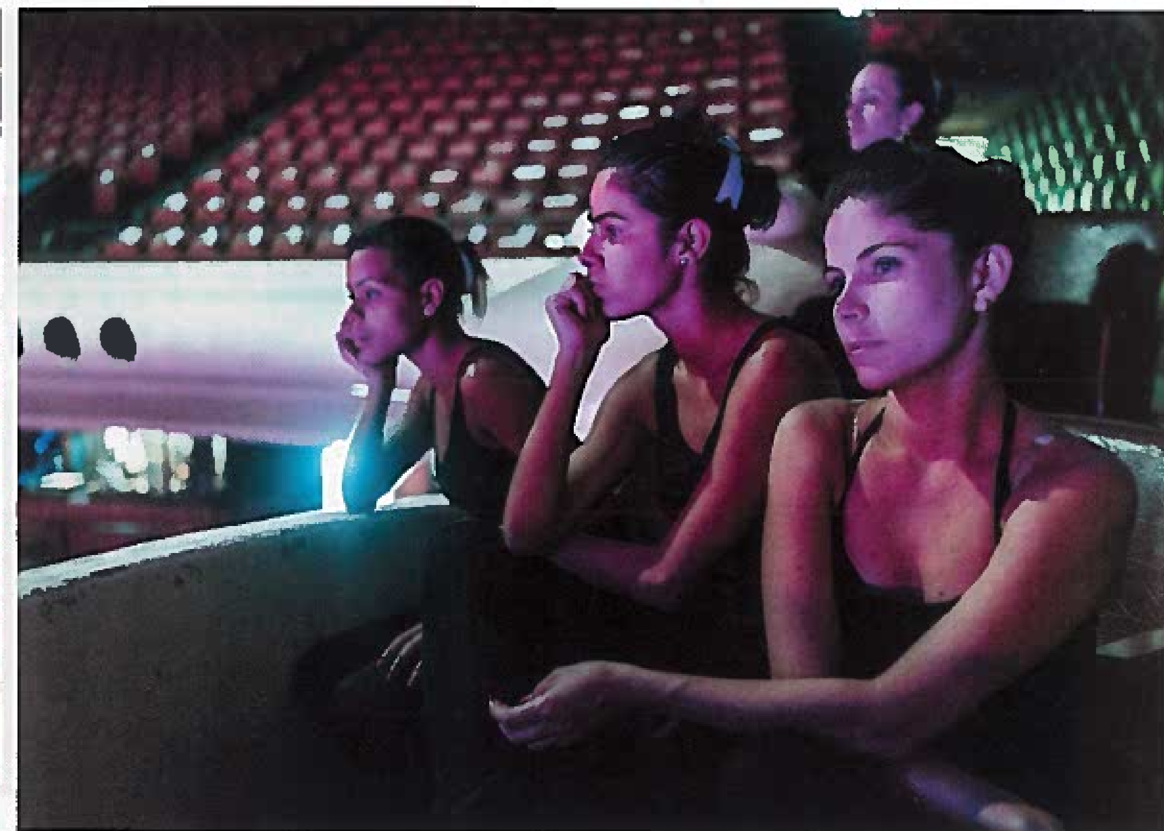
A rehearsal takes place at Teatro América, on Galiano Street in Havana. From the outside, the theater is nothing special, concealed behind a dull screen of gray polygon concrete. But step inside and you've entered the museum that is Cuban architecture.

By Patrick Symmes
Photography by João Pina

A HIGH PIECE OF WALL came down in the middle of dress rehearsal. The musical was *Victor/Victoria*, the gender-bending comedy, and young dancers in black leotards ran and scattered in all directions, screaming, as the patch of plaster broke free, plummeted down, and landed with a harmless thud off stage right. A puff of powder marked the strike zone, amid elaborate lighting fixtures that run up each side of Teatro América. The big lights were designed to frame rising rows of seating and to illuminate the audience, not the stage. In the Havana of the 1940s and '50s, the people themselves were the drama.

Jorge Alfaro Samá, the theater's artistic director, didn't move. Standing at center stage, he quickly dismissed the falling plaster as "nothing." The dancers returned, to nervous giggles, and then listened to him finish reviewing their call schedule. Entire buildings collapse all the time in Havana, so losing a patch of wall or ceiling is routine, even in one of the city's most cherished and popular venues. This is a dress rehearsal, Alfaro Samá reminded the actors—call it good luck and hit your marks.

Offstage, the director suggested that I follow him to a quieter location—presumably one with solid walls. We climbed up the long empty rows and crossed through the marble lobby, with its twin sweeping staircases and fat balustrades. Opened in 1941, the theater evokes an ocean liner, with its lack of straight lines and a floor mural of the Western Hemisphere wrapped in zodiac signs. It's all curves and soft corners; extravagant art deco styling is squeezed into ticket booths and tangential lobby bars. Alfaro Samá led me through a small office, into a smaller one, and finally into a tiny area behind it, filled by his desk and the two of us. Like the innermost chamber of a snail's shell, this is the impresario's safe space. Photos of Latin performers who have appeared at the theater, dating back decades, crowded the little area behind him.



Opened in 1941, Teatro América evokes an ocean liner, with its lack of straight lines and a floor mural of the Western Hemisphere. It's all curves and soft corners. But performers, like these dancers on break (right), sometimes need to be wary of falling plaster.

The problem of the plaster, Alfaro Samá said, was typical of Cuba. He was determined to restore the theater "to how it was in its golden age," but could do little more than repair a few details. The space was heavily used (acts from rappers to musical theater were booked four nights a week, and I'd once felt imprisoned here during an hours-long rumba performance), allowing no time for proper restoration. Maintenance of a public building is the responsibility of bureaucrats outside the theater anyway. "I've worked here 18 years, and in that time we learned to work around problems," Alfaro Samá said. They had patched walls and ceilings before, and they would do it again.

IN MORE THAN TWO DECADES of reporting in Havana, I've grown accustomed to the visual signatures of the city: grimy old buildings, rattletrap cars, little that is new or bright. But that is only on the surface; in Cuba, there is always an inside, a life of interior spaces, and this is especially true amid the city's hidden gems of architecture.

Teatro América is one such gem, concealed in plain sight behind a dull screen of gray polygon concrete on Galiano Street. When the theater opened, this part of Centro was the commercial artery of Havana, and the marble walkways held the names of now vanished department stores. Galiano is still chaotic—during my visit in March, I was nearly flattened by a man unloading smoked ham hocks from the trunk of a 1950s car, and had to push aside mattress vendors to reach the theater. But step inside and you are in the museum that is Cuban architecture.

There is no city in the world so layered with hidden beauty. Yet today, as Havana opens to the world, it is also poised at the edge of collapse. Love of the city, which I have visited regularly for a quarter century, brought me back looking for answers: Can a place long known for its decay become dedicated to preservation? What can be done to protect its architectural legacy? And how can that be accomplished while also meeting the growing demands of Cuba's hard-pressed and ambitious people?

Lesson one: Keep your eyes peeled for chunks of falling plaster.

HAVANA IS A CITY EASY to navigate, limited by the sea and divided from its suburbs by a river. Each neighborhood seems defined by historic landmarks. Old Havana, founded in 1519, still spreads out from the original Plaza de Armas, the civic space of medieval Spain. Next out from the harbor, in distance and time, is its modern equivalent, the Parque Central district, overseen by the National Capitol building, based on the Panthéon in Paris (not the U.S. Capitol, as sometimes claimed). Next are the elegant and faded apartment blocks of *fin-del-siglo* Centro, followed by the Vedado business district, still dominated by Welton Becket's 1958 Hilton hotel, a 25-floor modernist statement renamed the Hotel Habana Libre. Beyond, there is the 20th-century suburb of Playa, visually defined by the spacious and arrow-straight Avenida Quinta ("fifth avenue"), lined with the luxurious mansions of Cuba's old rich and miles of precise topiary.

Even symbols of communist power—the tower of what was once the Soviet Embassy in Miramar, or the barren asphalt plain of Revolutionary

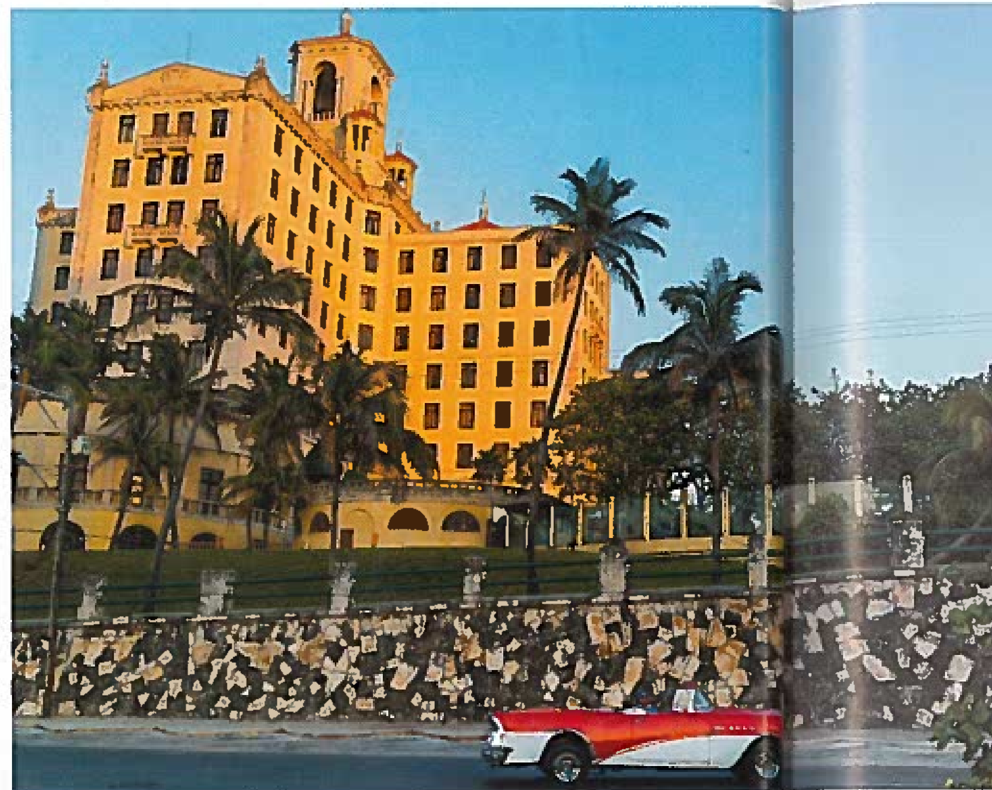
Square—have redeeming value in making orientation easy.

Then all you have to do is look up. "Havana is a library of architecture," says Raúl Rodríguez, a Cuban architect-in-exile with a deep passion for Cuban history and architecture. "Every style is well represented there, and the reason for its magic is the tripartite culture"—African, American, European.

From the very beginning, the city was a mixture: star-shaped forts from medieval Europe, shaded Moorish colonnades, Greco-Roman columns, French landscaping, and the iconic Malecón seawall built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Exiled Bauhaus stars like Walter Gropius visited Cuba during the 1940s, and with an influx of influential Cuban architects trained at Columbia University, the city became an eclectic crossroads.

Various structures and styles competed for attention. In 1930, the Bacardi family built a tower named for themselves that mixed art deco with eccentric combinations of etched amber and steel, and terra-cotta bas reliefs by Maxfield Parrish. (Ask to see the old private bar.) I'm particularly fond of another art deco excess, the Maternity Hospital erected in 1940 by José Pérez Benitoa. The gorgeous Cine-Teatro Sierra Maestra movie theater, located in the Rancho Boyeros suburb, is art deco but features a Maya-motif interior.

The layers continue through 1958, with only a few gestures since then, notably the National Art Schools in suburban Cubanacán. It was there that a collective of Cuban architects turned a private golf course into a winding campus of vaulted rehearsal halls, terra-cotta painting studios, and elaborate classrooms. It was a utopian dream of social progress, but by 1965 the project had collapsed and was abandoned to the jungle. Now partly reclaimed, it struggles along like the revolution itself, leaking badly but still active.



The Hotel Nacional (above) is a towering presence in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. The National Art Schools (left and below) began when Cuban architects turned a golf course into a winding campus of vaulted rehearsal halls, terra-cotta painting studios, and classrooms.

Rodríguez is proud of that extensive catalog of eras past. But most critical to Havana's architecture may be what has *not* happened since. "There's a crust that has developed," says Washington, D.C., architect Gary Martinez, "an age of time over the entire city."

Martinez has visited Havana for 15 years, studying the city's theaters, dance studios, and other public spaces. I asked him the question every visitor grapples with: What makes Havana—dirty, impoverished, dilapidated—so seductive? "We are overwhelmed by the visual complexity," Martinez said. "The decay. The texture. The colors. The seemingly random organization of buildings. There's nothing quite like it."

He described finding an old theater with a retracting roof. Judging from its appearance, he expected it to be abandoned. Instead, he and some companions discovered men repairing cars in what used to be the lobby. Pushing farther inside, they found a dance troupe training onstage. Thanks to decades of improvised and incomplete repairs, the roof still retracted—sometimes.

The past has not passed, not in Havana. It's very much present. And yet—this is the key—so are the Cuban people, persevering in the here and now, against the odds and after a span of many difficult decades. The result is a surreal overlap of eras, a time-travel experience on every block. That is the magic.

"They were fixing cars in the lobby," Martinez marveled.

I've had that moment—that strange, surreal feeling—often in Cuba. It occurred the next day when I walked the length of the Calzada del Cerro, a neighborhood that twisted toward Old Havana, each house fronted by a portico, loggia, or arched arcade that created one continuous shaded walkway for a mile or so. The richly ornamented 19th-century buildings had become dilapidated. One family invited me inside to drink strong coffee and watch baseball on a flat-screen TV. Rooms were separated only by towels, the stairs were jerry-built out of concrete blocks, the living room was now a garage, and tin roofing kept the rain out.

"The government said it would get the tiles we need" to maintain the historic character of the building, "but it never comes," said Elmis Sadivar, the matron of the household. As we watched the ball game, she was anxiously checking her cell phone for updates about her adult daughter, who had recently left for America illegally. The family couldn't afford to fix things themselves, she said: "A bag of cement costs half a month's salary."

Next door I found a man in his 70s trying to build a roof for his home, which in the meantime had blue-sky views. A house on the corner was similarly roofless, at least on the front side, and a careening garbage truck had recently taken out two of the four columns supporting the 19th-century arcade. People living in the back had refused to move out of the house, valuing the close-in location more than they feared the risk of collapse.

Yet the revolution has treated some of its treasures with great care. These include homes confiscated from wealthy exiles in 1959, many of them parceled out as embassies and cultural centers. The revolutionary government transferred the contents of those homes—a trove of ceramics, paintings, statues, and other objets d'art—to official buildings and Cuban embassies, as well as to small museums, including the Museum of Decorative Arts in Havana.

Located in the 1927 mansion of José Gómez Mena, whose sister María Luisa was a high-society Havana hostess and patron of the arts, the museum is an overstuffed repository of 33,000 knickknacks and other memorabilia. Sèvres porcelain and

What makes Havana—dirty, impoverished, dilapidated—so seductive? "We are overwhelmed by the visual complexity," says architect Gary Martinez. "The decay. The texture. The colors. The seemingly random organization of buildings. There's nothing quite like it."

Louis XV vitrines are crammed everywhere, mounted on pedestals or encased in flimsy display cases that look vulnerable to any tourist stepping back for a selfie.

I'd come here to ask deputy technical director Gustavo López about our shared passion for art deco architecture, but he immediately clarified a point as we sat down in his office. American-style art deco is strong in Cuba, López said, but it's not unique; it also exists in Florida and New Zealand. Colonial architecture is more often regarded as "the jewel here," he explained. And the gems of colonial architecture are in Old Havana, the protected part of the city.

Old Havana, with its narrow streets and centuries-old fortresses, has been largely saved from ruin for one reason: "It had the good luck to be inside the jurisdiction of the city historian," said López, speaking of Eusebio Leal, an unassuming but highly regarded official. Leal was given unprecedented authority in the early 1990s to rebuild the entire district, serving as its de facto mayor and renovation tsar.

The best example of Leal's power and methods may be the Plaza Vieja ("old square"), which is, as the name implies, the oldest of Havana's original five plazas. "I remember as a student climbing over mounds of rubble there," López said, describing the 1980s. "You had to be careful." Leal was allowed to create special tourism companies, which recycled income into new renovations that, in turn, created more tourism revenue. The process can be slow—in another neighborhood, I watched Cuban workers take more than a decade to renovate what is now the Parque Central, the district's flagship hotel—but the improvements have been undeniable.

When I first saw the Plaza Vieja, in 1991, it was a wreck of marshy sinkholes and collapsing buildings, the houses all around it *apuntadas*, or "on points," and braced against collapse. Today the Plaza Vieja is filled with restaurants and shops aimed at tourists, but it's also populated by ordinary Cubans—elementary school students on a class trip, young lovers taking selfies, teenagers chasing soccer balls. The surrounding blocks are dense with longtime residents. "Against wind and tide, he's done it," architect-in-exile Raúl Rodríguez said of Leal. "He is a hero even to Cubans who left Cuba. What he has done is going to outlast him and us."

But Leal's brief has mainly covered Old Havana, and a few of the oldest historic sites outside it. In much of the rest of the city, budgets for architectural restoration are much less robust and don't necessarily benefit from tourist revenue. Leal's team has "more resources; they have their own methods," López said with a sigh.

When the author first saw Plaza Vieja, in 1991, it was a wreck of marshy sinkholes and collapsing buildings. Today, the oldest of Havana's plazas is filled with restaurants and shops aimed at tourists, but it's also populated by locals.

Where no one has the resources or personal interest to help, however, gorgeous architecture crumbles to ruin. One elegant building at risk is the Club Náutico. This prestigious old beach club in Havana's suburbs is an airy, overlapping series of shells designed in 1953 by Max Borges Recio, who also designed the Tropicana Club. The facility has been corroded by sea spray, a huge problem on the waterfront.

Other grand buildings have been lost in this way, including a seaside amusement park in Miramar called, improbably, *El Coney Island*. Rusted carousels and a tiny Ferris wheel once fronted a sea-facing pavilion here, but in 2008 Chinese investors replaced it with a concrete theme park called Coconut Island.

In 2013, Camilo Valls, a Cuban arts journalist, told me about a beautiful old Moorish theater whose landmark bronze doors had simply disappeared one day—looted. By 2016 he was losing hope: The imperiled buildings of Havana would soon be "all gone," he said. Valls then described to me the new Cuban vernacular, which he called "kitsch style." This is the cringe-inducing tendency to rip out historic features and replace them with new-money displays. People toss away "old" light fixtures and install made-in-China chandeliers and flat-screen TVs. I heard of one man who tore the corner off his art deco house—with a bulldozer—to build a media room for his PlayStation.

"There will be a disaster if we don't have norms," López told me.

One building that epitomizes those risks is the López Serrano, an elegant tower in the modern downtown. In 1932, the 14-story apartment building was the tallest structure in Havana, an emblem of modernism that evoked Rockefeller Center. It still has great bones—the ziggurats and shafts of the building, by Ricardo Mira and Miguel Rosich, make it a kind of vertical art deco—but walking up to it, I saw how badly it had aged. The gray concrete is sweat-stained, with many of the wooden window frames cracked and the odd piece of glass punched out and replaced with cardboard. Air conditioners and improvised laundry lines clutter the narrow spaces overhead; rain cracks begin near the roof and run down the facade.

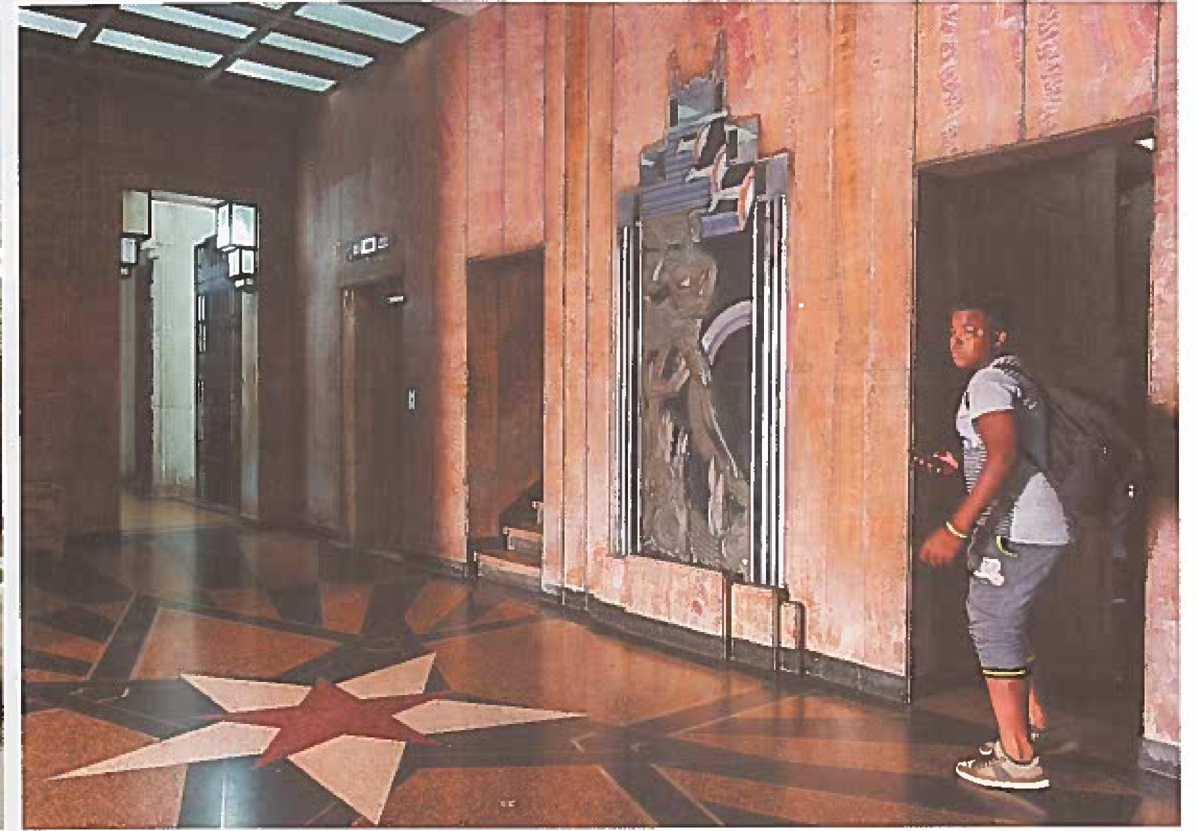
"Five hundred and forty-four windows of real wood and glass," explained Sarah Vega, a Cuban journalist who lives on the seventh floor. Vega has made a short film, *Deconstruction*, about the building's history, which was designed to represent Cuban aspirations for a modern society. The twin portals at the front door are bronzed bas reliefs, still gleaming, and visitors pass through a marble lobby to twin elevators divided by "Time,"

a bas relief by Enrique García Cabrera infused with aerial speed and futurism. An art deco clock used to sit over the sculpture but someone stole it. Even the light fixtures on the ceilings are wired shut to prevent anyone from swiping the fluorescent bulbs.

Vega gave me a tour of her apartment, which she shares with her mother and son. The López Serrano was aimed at Cuba's rich, but the rooms are relatively small—the ideal customer also had a big country house. The 1932 bylaws even banned children—which was possible because this building was the country's first co-operative apartment corporation, emblematic of Cuba's turn toward an urbanized society. The building wasn't progressive—the same 1932 bylaws banned black people from buying apartments—but the López Serrano was long associated with one of Cuba's greatest heroes, the crusading reformer Eddy Chibás, who kept his offices on the top two floors. In the 1940s, Chibás railed against corruption and dictators from an office with sweeping views of the Cuban Republic. He shot himself while hosting his radio program one day, a suicide-protest commemorated with a plaque by the building's front doors.

In '59, the rich fled and the needy moved in. Vega is proud that empty apartments and houses across Cuba were handed out to the poor. But it was a "culture change," she noted, with many new residents unconcerned with the López Serrano's history or its preservation. It's a pervasive problem: "People often don't know where they are living, when it was built, if it was a famous architect," said Gustavo López. "If you don't care for what exists, it disappears."

During the desperate economy of the 1990s, some of Vega's neighbors began selling off elegant fixtures and even the building's original toilets. That's when the art deco clock over the elevator disappeared. "It's not just money," she said of the building's problems. "It's lack of knowledge."



Visitors to the López Serrano building (above left) pass through a marble lobby (above right) to twin elevators divided by "Time," a bas relief by Enrique García Cabrera. An art deco clock used to sit over the sculpture but someone stole it.

As in many endeavors, when it came to preserving the López Serrano, Cuban officials had good intentions and poor execution. Distant bureaucrats with scarce resources oversaw the building, making sporadic and only partly effective repairs—the massive front doors were refurbished, but when new elevators were installed, workers trimmed away marble detailing to make them fit. For decades the government vowed to fix the original windows but recently gave up pretending. Residents would have to pay for the job themselves. "That costs a lot of money," Vega said. "We can't afford it."

Perhaps this is the greatest threat to the López Serrano: No one really owns it anymore. The revolutionary government nationalized all apartment buildings in 1959, but about a decade ago retreated from that policy, returning ownership of apartments to the residents. Yet the government retains responsibility for the shared public spaces and exteriors. That works in high-priority areas like Old Havana, but in the rest of the city, decay is the rule. Many buildings look substantially worse now than when I first arrived in 1991. An astounding portion of the city's buildings are roofless wrecks. No one is truly in charge.

Sarah Vega's mother suggested they would forge ahead, offering a Cuban truism: "We'll fix what we can, with what we can get, with what we have," she said.

The ziggurats of the López Serrano point to a difficult future. If the residents there—at least some of them more educated and historically conscious than the average Havana resident—are incapable of saving their building, what of the rest of the city, and of Cuba?

Paradoxically, there may be hope in Cuba's economic weakness: In a land with little money but plenty of skilled craftsmen, simple forms of preservation are often the best option. Wealthy foreign developers are not allowed to overwhelm whole neighborhoods, yet Cubans, as they gradually earn more money, can renovate bit by bit. Part of one building becomes a restaurant, a house becomes a hotel, and even without a master plan, the scale of a block and the character of a district are maintained. "Kitsch style" encroachment could be staved off by strengthening Cuba's historic preservation standards, particularly for exemplary buildings.

Architect Gary Martinez favors this approach. Huge areas of the city are fallow, with buildings either underutilized or simply abandoned, he said; let people fix them up, slowly, on their own. "There is so much building stock," noted Tom Johnson, his business partner, "that it can almost infinitely accommodate small changes."

There is also talk of big change—the Cuban government has asked for investment to rebuild the port of Havana, with new and much needed housing on the far side of the harbor. But Havana's social peace will depend on keeping Habaneros invested in the city themselves. Just as Eusebio Leal has been able to preserve the residential character of Old Havana as he rebuilt it, others should be empowered to extend that model to other parts of the city. The challenge is to accommodate the next Havana, even while preserving all of the previous ones. ○

TOUCH STONE

Fulfilling a sacred promise

By Emilio Cueto
as told to John F. Ross

A minor miracle occurred on a dark train platform in a provincial Cuban town in 1981. I had been a Cuban-American exile for two decades, and had managed to wrangle a visa to visit my sick mother. After seeing her, I had traveled to the train station with some unfinished business. The middle-aged woman in the black dress behind the counter inspected me. My stomach sank. How could she know that I needed a ticket so that I could fulfill a sacred promise my mother had made 22 years earlier? Traveling in communist Cuba was a bureaucratic nightmare, tickets taking weeks or months to obtain, if one could get them at all. What's more, I had no ID and was suspiciously dressed. I felt certain she had heard every sob story ever concocted.

It all came flooding out: How a childhood condition had required me to have leg surgery, and my worried mother had sworn that we would visit Cuba's patron saint—Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre—upon my recovery. But we never got to the shrine outside Santiago that houses the figurine. Shortly before my illness, the communist revolution had erupted, sending many of my high school friends to jail. My mother knew I would be next, so she arranged asylum for me in America, where I would attend Catholic University, go on to a career in international banking, and become a collector of Cuban memorabilia.

On this trip I had only a few precious days in Cuba. How could I explain how much this simple trip meant, how I had clung to the idea of seeing Our Lady of Charity for more than two decades?

I don't know how much the woman behind the counter heard, but she understood. "I have a son in Milwaukee," was all she murmured. She appreciated the pain of exile and dislocation, the importance of faith. She knew! In a moment a ticket miraculously appeared. I will never forget her smile and kindness.

When I finally arrived at the shrine, in the former copper mining town of El Cobre, I was not disappointed. Almost levitating above the altar, the small Virgin glowed. Unlike many other depictions of her, this one looked directly into my eyes, not at the child in her left arm, giving me her undivided attention. She wore a golden dress and cape, not the usual blue, and the crescent moon, often paired with the Virgin, pointed down, not up.

Everybody in Cuba knows her story: In 1612, in a bay to the north of Cuba, a 10-year-old black slave named Juan and two indigenous young men had found her while rowing out to an island to harvest salt. Despite bad weather throughout the previous day, the 15-inch-tall wooden Virgin figurine bobbed serenely upon a plank on the sea, her dress miraculously dry and unruffled. The story of her discovery spread quickly. The faithful carried the wooden figure to the economic hub of El Cobre, where they constructed a shrine to hold her.

The Christian iconography is hard to miss: She came to Cuba bearing the greatest of gifts—her own child—and appeared not to a priest or bishop, but to common men. She spoke not just to the aboriginal people, but also to the Spaniards, Creoles, and African slaves. The latter would assimilate her image into their Afro-Cuban Santería faith many years later. When Cubans fought the Spanish for independence in the late 19th century, she became a national symbol of the small island's struggle against a mighty European superpower.

Nicknamed "Cachita," Our Lady of Charity evolved into a staple of popular culture, appearing on everything from calendars and jewelry to key chains and fans, interpreted again and again by artists, writers, dancers, and poets. The old fisherman invoked Our Lady of Charity in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*; when the famous writer decided to give the medallion he received for the 1954 Nobel Prize in Literature to the Cuban people, he did not choose the national museum or presidential palace, but Cachita's shrine. The long period of communism may have driven her from view, but not out of favor and memory. This year, Cuba is celebrating the centennial of Pope Benedict XV's naming of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre as Cuba's patron saint, as requested by the veterans of the nation's war of independence.

I have traveled back to El Cobre many times since, becoming so interested in Cachita that I wrote a book about her influence in art, literature, music, film, and dance. Through war and revolution, among exiles and communists, among the rich and poor, Cachita has stood by all of us, no matter our differences. She unites us. She is Cuba.

Last year, I crisscrossed the nation, delivering copies of my book to libraries and churches. My proudest moment came when the bishop of Santiago accepted a copy of the book on behalf of the shrine. It now sits permanently on a lectern there, a token of my deep love for and abiding faith in this extraordinary figure, which took firm root nearly 60 years ago with a distressed mother's whispered promise, and which have grown stronger every day since. ○

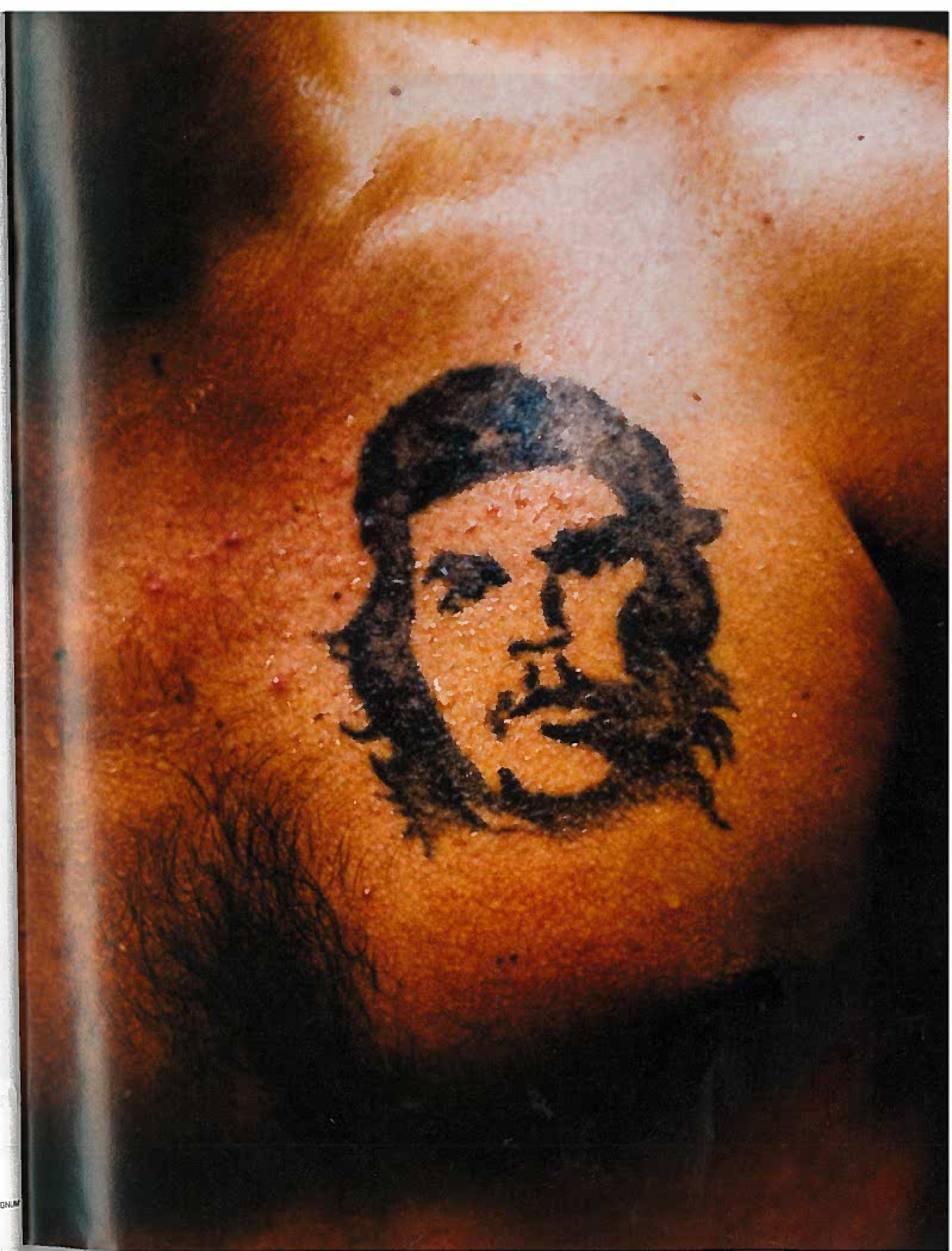
IMAGE: HOLY CARD FROM THE COLLECTION OF EMILIO CUETO

THE ICONIC CHE
FROM MAN TO MYTH TO CLICHÉ

By Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

My grandmother used to light a candle to worship him, even though her idol had been an atheist throughout his life. The memory still dances in quivering light: When I was a child in the late '70s in Havana, during the never-ending blackouts, I was terrified by the shadows on his face. ¶ That famous face, printed on a huge poster my grandmother had scavenged from the streets of Havana following a military parade: It was heroic, seemingly immortal, and yet a decade had passed since he'd been killed in the jungles of Bolivia, a country I couldn't have pointed to on a map. ¶ Grandma used to pray to him as "Saint Che." She wasn't fond of the revolution, but she did believe in strong spirits that refuse to leave this world. For years I thought that his family name was Sánchez (which Cubans pronounce SAHN-che), and that Che was a diminutive. Then in school I learned that he was Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, and that he'd been given pop culture immortality by a former fashion photographer named Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez, who'd later changed his name to Korda. Everything about the man and the myth was always a little off-kilter.

PHOTO: PAOLO PELLEGRIN, MAGNUM



KODAK PLUS X PAN FILM

KODAK SAFETY FILM

PHOTO: BANQUE D'IMAGES, ADAGP/ART RESOURCE, NY

The photo, so prominent in the shadowy world of my childhood, became one of the most reproduced images ever, rivaling those of the "Mona Lisa" and Marilyn Monroe with her skirts flying. It was Che as deity—and went viral long before the advent of YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook. From Bolivia to the Congo, from Vietnam to South Africa, from the U.S.S.R. to the U.S.A., Korda's Che became the apostle of anticapitalism and the ultimate icon for peaceful social activists everywhere—despite the fact that Che himself had preached hatred as a tool for the "New Man" to wipe exploitation from the Earth.

How his mug made the rounds! To the student barricades of Paris, 1968. To the album cover of Madonna's *American Life*. To Jim Fitzpatrick's psychedelic posters. To Jean-Paul Gaultier's sunglasses. From cigar boxes to condoms, from Che Christ to gay-pride Che, from dorm room to dorm room and refugee camp to refugee camp. To the facade of the frightening Ministry of the Interior in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution.

The iconic Che was nothing if not adaptable. Patrick Symmes, who tried to disentangle the man from the myth in his book *Chasing Che: A Motorcycle Journey in Search of the Guevara Legend*, told a *New York Times* reporter, "I think the more that time goes by, the chicer and chicer Che gets because the less he stands for anything."

CHE WAS NOT CUBAN. But in February 1959 he was granted Cuban nationality "by birth." Che was not an economist. But by November of that same year he was president of the Cuban National Bank, where he signed the currency with his three-letter nom de guerre. Che wasn't even very handsome, his features puffy after a lifelong battle with asthma. But he's remembered as the most photogenic idol of the Cuban Revolution and beyond.

For Cubans, and not only those of my generation, Korda's Che is less about guerrilla chic and more about a mix of superstition and socialism, ideology and ignorance, fidelity and fear. Many venerate his absence as a symbol of what the revolution was meant to be, maybe because the man himself would be too overwhelming for us today, when the shopping mall is far more central to our lives than Marxist manifestos.

We might still need heroes, yes, but not heroes so powerful as to lead us like sheep to some faraway paradise. Who were we following anyway?

In this era of anything-goes globalization, Che doesn't really stand for anything partly because he stands for so much. Once a symbol of a society struggling toward the ultimate abolishment of money—during the 1960s at least three communal experiments were launched in the Cuban countryside to achieve this goal—Korda's Che has now been converted into its own form of capitalist currency: a cool knickknack or keepsake, a pin or poster or touristy T-shirt. When the Rolling Stones performed in Havana's Sports City this year (provocatively, on Good Friday), Korda's Che welcomed "their satanic majesties" from the audience in his usual heroic form, except for the big, fat, redder-than-ever Rolling Stone tongue protruding from his mouth. And you can bet that tongue came thanks to a pirated copy of Adobe Photoshop.

Alberto Korda's March 5, 1960, contact sheet shows Jean-Paul Sartre, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara attending funerals a day after an explosion in Havana. The iconic photo of Che wasn't used then as a news image but eventually took on a life of its own. A tattooed version (previous page) is near the heart.

Cubans who can't make a decent living in their own professions—including doctors and engineers trying to survive on the low salaries paid by the state—have learned how to make and sell Che trinkets. They hawk them in tourist markets, in accordance with new government regulations that allow selling to occur *por cuenta propia* (literal translation: "by individual account")—but only after fees and taxes have been extracted.

Nowadays, when Cuban government functionaries mention Che at all, they tend to repetitively quote a couple of common phrases—"the highest level of the human species is being a revolutionary" or "the true revolutionary is guided by big feelings of love"—and they keep a large picture of him in their offices as an emblem of their ideological purity. But those types are increasingly rare, and they're mostly pretenders who know very little about Che's life and thoughts.

Even Frank Delgado, a Havana troubadour who sincerely admires Che's epoch, condemns what he sees as the revolutionary decadence of today:

Those who use your image as the topic of their sermons
While doing the opposite of what they teach
We won't allow them further speeches honoring you
Nor the use of your image if they preach what they are not.

Curiously enough, Korda's Che, at least as ubiquitous in Cuba as in the rest of the world, came to be published by chance. The photo started as a reject, a casually captured news image that a Cuban newspaper didn't publish. It was used initially to decorate Korda's studio.

ON FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 1960, a ship exploded in Havana Harbor, killing more than a hundred workers and injuring many more, including passersby who rushed to offer help. It was the vessel *La Coubre*, loaded with tons of weapons bought in Belgium by the Cuban government and secretly transported to the Caribbean.

The details are sketchy, but it seems the arms and ammunition may have been off-loaded by ordinary dockworkers to disguise the operation from the "enemies of the people"—local opposition groups, exiled "counterrevolutionaries," and CIA officers who kept a close eye on Fidel Castro.

EXTRAORDINARY ACCESS

Che was eventually captured and killed by soldiers in Bolivia, but his days in Cuba were well documented by Korda. The fashion photographer turned photojournalist took Che's picture hundreds of times in the 1960s—as he played golf and fished with Castro, joined work shifts, and met with Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Still, Che preferred revolution to governance. According to Korda, he also didn't like to be photographed.

PHOTOS: COURTESY THE ALBERTO KORDA ESTATE, LA HABANA-CUBA, AND SOUS LES ETOILES GALLERY, NEW YORK

PHOTOS: (LEFT TO RIGHT) DESMOND BOYLAN, AP PHOTO; GERALD HAENEL, LAIF/REDUX; JOERG MODROW, LAIF/REDUX; BRIDGEMAN, UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/DOSFOTOS/PYMCA/AKG IMAGES; ERNST VOLLAND, AKG IMAGES

(Left to right) Korda's image has morphed and taken on countless forms. Outside a Havana concert venue, it bears the tongue-and-lips logo of the Rolling Stones, who were once censored in Cuba. In an Indian market, shirts of the guerrilla are sold next to those of Mahatma Gandhi. Korda's Che can be seen smoking a joint in Amsterdam or wearing Mickey Mouse ears in the United Kingdom. In a Berlin art gallery, he's depicted posing in his own Che shirt. His image has also landed on Cuba's three-peso bill.

Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez, a staff photographer for the newspaper *Revolución*, was assigned to cover the funerals the next day at the Colón Cemetery. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, enchanted with a tropical utopia that might lend color to the gray Stalinism of Soviet-style communism, were among the honored guests. Close to them stood Che, who years earlier had signed letters to his family as "Stalin II," swearing to an aunt "before a stamp of the old and mourned comrade Stalin" that he wouldn't "rest until seeing these capitalist octopuses annihilated."

In Castro's funeral oration, as might be expected during the not-so-Cold War, he announced that the explosion had been sabotage. He went on to accuse the U.S. of the crime, the only evidence being his own monologue to the masses (typical of what he called "direct democracy"). It was on that Saturday that he first uttered his slogan "Homeland or Death," radically transforming Cuba's republican-era motto "Homeland and Liberty."

Díaz was by then better known simply as Korda, but it wasn't a nom de guerre. Before the revolution, which began in 1956, he and his friend Luis Antonio Pierce had named their studio Korda after two Hungarian film directors. They took on the name of their Hungarian idols and worked as fashion photographers who made the most of Cuba's natural light to commercialize clothes and promote TV stars.

But in 1959 Castro's revolution turned them into graphic reporters committed to a cause. Private businesses were being forcibly nationalized, and the two men grasped that the *rebeldes* were fast becoming the only lawful employer and trademark left.

Korda would later recall his magic Che shutter click: "At the foot of a podium decorated in mourning, I had my eye to the viewfinder of my old Leica camera. I was focusing on Fidel and the people around him. Suddenly, through the 90mm lens, Che emerged above me. I was surprised by his gaze. By sheer reflex I shot twice, horizontal and vertical. I didn't have time to take a third photo, as Che stepped back discreetly into the second row.... It all happened in half a minute."

Back home, Korda cropped the horizontal shot into a vertical portrait, because in the full frame another man was emerging near Che's right shoulder and some palm branches hung over him on the left. The *Revolución* editors declined the black-and-white print without further comment. They simply preferred to run one of Korda's pictures of the commander in chief, and another picture of Castro's philosopher guests Sartre and Beauvoir.

Korda hung the Che image in his apartment. He used to call it "Guerrillero Heroico," and he liked to describe the Che who appeared in it as a human being who was *encabronado y doliente* (pissed off and pained), with "impressive force in his expression, given the anger concentrated in his gaze after so many deaths."

Despite having taken hundreds of pictures of Che, Korda insisted that the Argentine Cuban didn't like to be photographed. For Che was obsessed with neither governance nor diplomacy but with exporting the revolution by any means—a mission too sacred for him to play a character who emerges for half a minute and then steps back discreetly behind the verbosity of Fidel Castro. He was a man of action and needed to get back to it.

In 1965 the Cuban people heard nothing of their supposed hero for six months, until Castro unexpectedly made public a farewell message from his old comrade. In the letter, Che renounced all of his civil and military positions—including his Cuban nationality—because, as he said, "other regions of the world claim the support of my modest efforts."

Though Korda and Che had been born just months apart in 1928, the photographer would outlive his subject by more than 33 years. Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was executed by U.S.-trained soldiers in Bolivia in 1967, after being captured with help from a Cuban exile working for the CIA.

A couple of months before Che's death, Italian businessman Giangiacomo Feltrinelli knocked on Korda's door in Havana. He'd arrived in Cuba directly from Bolivia and handed Korda a letter from Haydée Santamaría, then president of Casa de las Américas—a cultural think tank that was helping to export the ideology of the Cuban Revolution—requesting that he provide Feltrinelli a good picture of Che.

Korda pointed to his studio wall, where the picture passed over by *Revolución*—a newspaper which no longer existed—was still hanging. "This is my best picture of Che," he said.

Feltrinelli asked for two copies, and the next day Korda made two eight-by-ten prints. When asked about the price, Korda said the photos were a gift because Feltrinelli had been sent by someone he regarded highly. That may well be true, but accepting money in payment could also have been risky. The government was on its way to extinguishing all private business, and possession of foreign currency was a crime that carried a prison sentence. (That restriction continued until the "dollarization" decree of 1993, after decades of generous Soviet subsidies ended and Fidel Castro took to the airwaves to personally approve the use of American dollars in special Cuban stores, officially named hard-currency-collection stores.)

Heir to one of Italy's wealthiest families, Feltrinelli had turned his considerable energy to radical, left-wing causes. With Che's corpse barely cold in Bolivia, he began selling millions of posters that used Korda's photo but made no mention of the Cuban photographer. When Fidel Castro handed him a copy of Che's diary from the Bolivian jungle, Feltrinelli published that too, with Korda's unsigned picture on the cover.

According to his son, Carlo, Feltrinelli baptized Korda's masterpiece "Che in the Sky With Jacket," a riff on "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds." It's an irony within an irony that Beatles songs were censored in Cuba at the time and that rock-and-roll

Though Korda and Che had been born just months apart in 1928, the photographer would outlive his subject by more than 33 years.

lovers, considered "extravagant beings," were being rounded up, along with homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and nonconformist hippies. They were sent off to forced-labor camps under the infamous program UMAP—Military Units in Aid of Production. These were prisons in the countryside where inmates were to be "turned into men" by hard work—a kind of aversion therapy that could have inspired Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*—and held without charges until their behavior, at least to all appearances, was deemed proper for members of the "dictatorship of the proletarians and farmers."

The violence that runs through this story did not spare Feltrinelli. In 1972, the man who helped smuggle Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* out of the Soviet Union in the '50s was found dead near Milan, apparently killed by his own explosives, next to a high-voltage power line he was suspected of attempting to sabotage. Suspicions of suicide and assassination still surround his death. The Soviets never forgave him for helping Pasternak, just as they never forgave Che for being an admirer of Mao, whose global aspirations conflicted with their own.

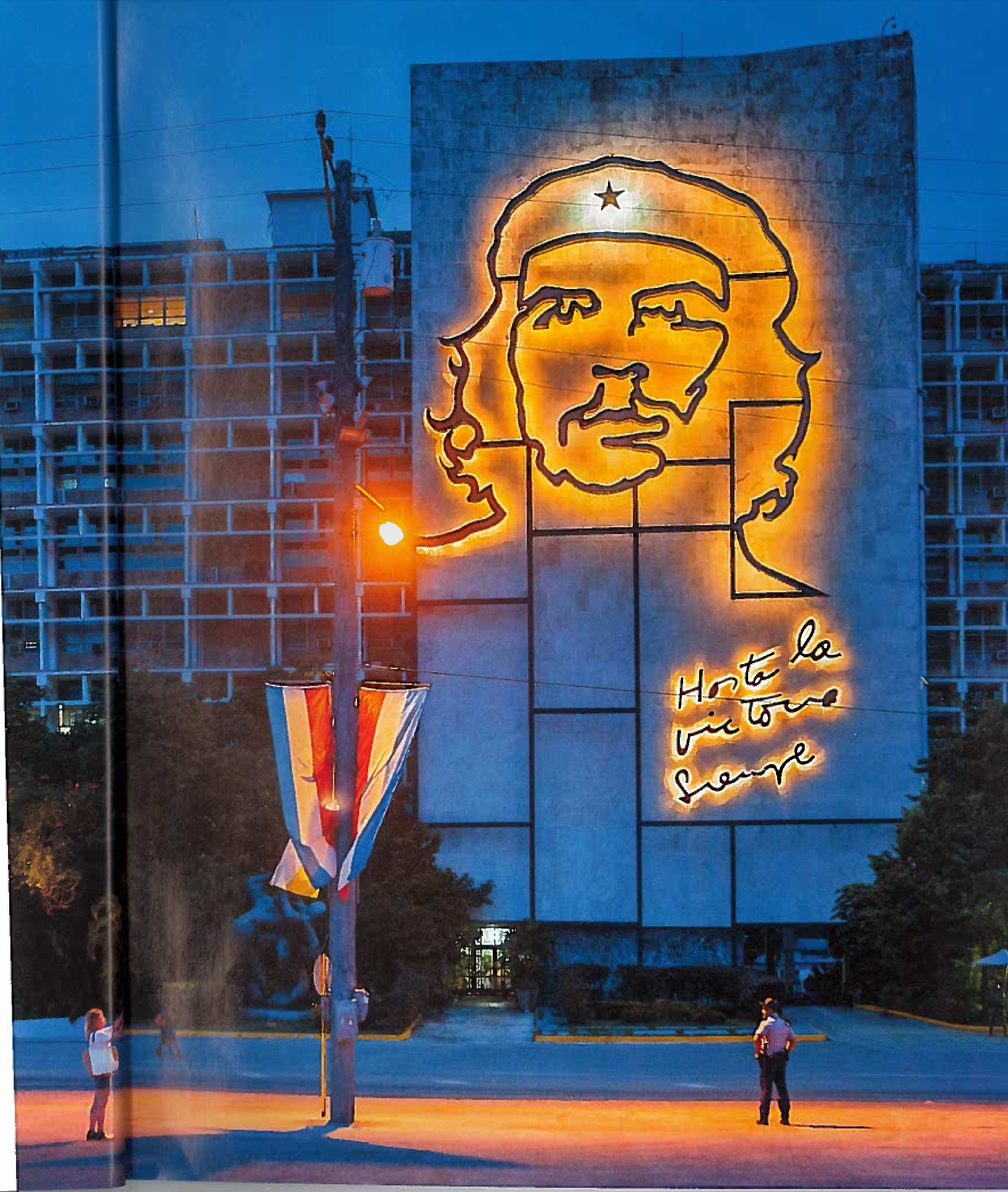
FOR DECADES KORDA NEVER earned a cent from the broad distribution of his iconic picture. Such profiting would have been unrevolutionary. "The strange thing is that air cannot be shut up in a bottle, but something as abstract as intellectual property can be shut up," declared Castro in 1967. Asking "Who pays Shakespeare? Who pays Cervantes?" he concluded that Cuba had "de facto adopted the decision to also abolish intellectual property." And so, de facto, Korda's Che had to be given away for free.

Just before his death, Korda did file and prevail in some legal claims and finally had his copyright confirmed by the London High Court. He was then able to stop the use of his Che image in Smirnoff vodka ads, arguing that he considered such commercial exploitation an insult to the legacy of the *guerrillero heroico*. (Korda insisted to the press that neither he nor his hero ever drank alcohol.) He received $50,000 from the settlement, which he donated to the Cuban state to buy children's medicine on the international market.

Yet capitalism is a force that's hard to resist. Korda's Che did end up on Cuba's three-peso bill, which is approximately equivalent to an American dime. And now Cuba is on its way to becoming a state-controlled market economy, engaging with "imperialism" even before what some call the "Castrozoic era" ends.

For the time being, Korda's Che still frowns from the facade of Cuba's mysterious Ministry of the Interior—where repression is ordered and reality staged. And his image continues to be framed into the last selfies of socialism by tourists passing through what was once called Civic Square and is now the Plaza of the Revolution. Even Barack Obama, during his visit in March 2016, paused with American and Cuban officials for a group photo with Korda's Che in the background. Maybe he saw the irony or some political utility in the shot. Still, it was more evidence—as if any were needed—that the magic somehow persists.

Meanwhile, the mortal remains of Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, their authenticity subject to ongoing debate, are kept as a communist totem in Santa Clara, in the geographical center of Cuba—a withering testament to one of the last attempts to create a utopia on Earth. *"Hasta la victoria siempre"*—toward victory always—used to be Che's war mantra, even if the price would be intolerable and the victory unattainable. In the end, it seems, Korda's Che remains the guerrillero heroico—eternally pissed off and pained. ○



Stretched across the facade of the Ministry of Interior in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution, Che's glowing face and mantra, "Toward victory always," attracts stares and selfies.

PHOTO: LUCAS VALLECILLOS, VWPICS/REDUX

9 THINGS

Cuban cool

Cuban craft, like Cuban music, thrives on improvisation. "Access to materials can be challenging," says Cynthia Vidaurri, a Smithsonian researcher who is the curator of the institution's Folklife Festival on Cuba. "This can mean certain crafts are not produced on a regular basis." Local markets are a good source, but great finds can be scored at bus stops when traveling outside of the capital.

CIGAR CASE

Now that visitors can bring back a hundred dollars worth of cigars, why not stash them in a leather case imprinted with the magic name Cohiba—once Fidel Castro's preferred brand? (It's also the most counterfeited. Best not to buy yours from a gray-market vendor.) Found at many booths in the Mercado San José, Avenida del Puerto, on the corner of Calle Cuba, Havana

DOMINOES

Walk around any neighborhood, especially in the evening, and you'll find a foursome playing that other national game (besides baseball)—dominoes. Listen to the clack of tiles (*fichas*) and the triumphant "*¡Me pegué!*" of the winning player, who slams his final piece on the table. This box of dominoes is wood, covered in marbleized paper. Alma, Calle 18 No. 314, between 3rd and 5th streets, Playa, Havana

TOY

Tin toys like this beer can helicopter can be found at Arriani Veloz Darias's booth in the Viñales Market. Her collection also includes a camera made from a Coke can and a car that began life as a Fanta container. Mercado Valle de Viñales, Pinar del Río Province

COFFEE

The ultimate wake-up call is a *café Cubano*, a thimbleful of black brew topped with a layer of caramel-colored foam. The industry, nationalized after the revolution, is on the rebound after years of neglect; Nespresso even plans to import Cuban coffee to the United States. El Elixir, Palacio de la Artesanía, Calle Cuba No. 63, Havana

NECKLACE

Necklaces made of seeds such as black watermelon, red coralillo, and black jaboncillo are easy to find and inexpensive, but for a more refined look, Lien Vela Almodovar marries local freshwater pearls with turquoise beads as blue as the Caribbean. Mercado San José, Avenida del Puerto, on the corner of Calle Cuba, Havana

RECORD

The great Benny Moré (who sometimes spelled his first name Beny) couldn't read a note of music, but the "wildman of rhythm" wrote and sang many Latin standards. Vendor Brian Torres has a record player so that customers can listen before purchasing. Plaza de Armas, between O'Reilly and Obispo, Cuba Tacón and Barillo streets, Havana

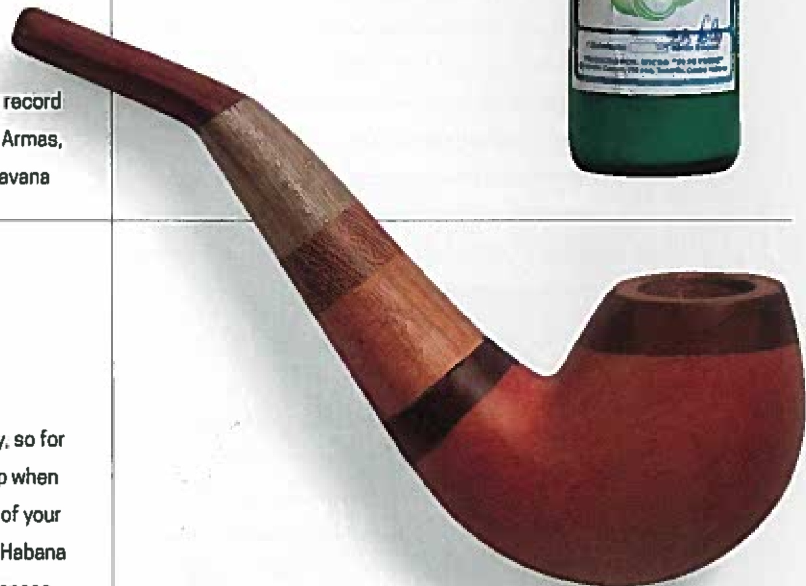
MARINADE

A repurposed beer bottle holds a marinade made from limes—just the thing to add zest to your *lechón asado con mojo* (roast pork) or braised beef, *vaca frita* (literally "fried cow"). La Esperanza, Calle Cuarteles No. 12, between Cuba and Aguiar streets, Havana

PERFUME

Scent summons memory, so for instant recall of your trip when back home, pop the top of your ceramic flagon from the Habana 1791 perfumery. Fragrances feature exotic and tropical scents such as jasmine, tobacco, orange blossom, vetiver, and mariposa, the national flower. Habana 1791, Calle Mercaderes No. 156, Havana

PIPE



Craftspeople throughout the island use sustainable woods, such as teak, guayabillo, and jiqui, to whittle small mementos like this pipe, purchased in a booth at the crocodile farm of the Boca de Guamá tourist complex. Kilometer 19 on the road south of Australia, Playa Girón, Matanzas Province

ADVICE

What you need to know before you visit Cuba

By Christopher Elliott

Despite a recent thaw in U.S. relations with Cuba, Americans, as "tourists," remain banned from traveling to the island nation. But they can now visit Cuba under one of 12 other categories of travel. These include family visits, journalism, professional research, educational or religious activities, public performances, and humanitarian projects.

Most trips fall into a general "people-to-people" category, which allows visitors to pursue educational activities in Cuba individually or with a group—usually with a tour operator. If you're using this general license, regulations require that you maintain a full-time schedule, "intended to enhance contact with the Cuban people," in order to ensure "meaningful" interaction. In other words, you can't spend a week just lying on the beach of Cayo Largo.

You must sign an affidavit that promises that you qualify for travel to Cuba, but the U.S. government will take your word for it—up to a point. Simply review the general licenses, which can be found on the U.S. Treasury Department website (*treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba_faqs_new.pdf*), to make sure you're covered. Remember to keep your affidavit and records of travel for five years, since you could be audited.

Your mobile phone may or may not work in Cuba. Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon currently offer roaming service there, and other carriers are working on it. But be prepared to pay: Sprint, for example, charges $2.49 per minute and $1.99 per megabyte. SMS text messages cost 50 cents to send (but nothing to receive). A less expensive option may be renting a SIM card for your GSM-capable phone.

The U.S. government doesn't limit the amount of money you can spend in Cuba, but you can't bring home more than $400 worth of manufactured goods, including up to $100 of alcohol or tobacco (which translates into one bottle of rum and a few cigars).

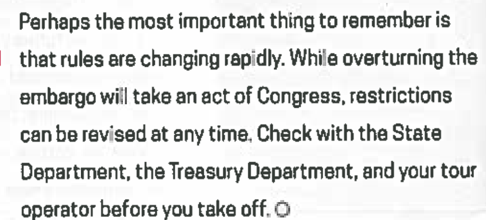
Don't assume you can find enough currency to buy those Montecristos. Virtually all ATM and credit cards issued by U.S. banks do not work in Cuba. One exception is a MasterCard issued by Florida-based Stonegate Bank, which has a reciprocal agreement with Cuba's Banco Internacional de Comercio. The card can be used at about 10,000 locations on the island and also offers ATM access.

Another complication: Cuba has two currencies. The Cuban convertible peso is worth one U.S. dollar, and the Cuban peso is worth about 1/25 of that. A common scam involves capitalizing on the confusion between the two. (Hint: The more valuable convertible peso notes show monuments, whereas the Cuban peso shows national heroes.)

You can't buy Cuban currency before your trip, and when you exchange dollars inside Cuba, the transactions are typically subject to a 10 percent fee plus a 3 percent finance charge. In effect, one dollar buys .87 convertible pesos. Big spenders can avoid that extra cost by traveling to Cuba with Canadian dollars or euros, which are not subject to the 10 percent fee.

No vaccines are required or recommended, but the State Department warns of standard tropical diseases and other ailments, including cholera, diarrhea, dengue fever, rabies, and the Zika virus. A reliable travel insurance policy with medical evacuation coverage is recommended.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that rules are changing rapidly. While overturning the embargo will take an act of Congress, restrictions can be revised at any time. Check with the State Department, the Treasury Department, and your tour operator before you take off. ○



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Digging for ancient roots

A newfound quest for identity leads some to reclaim their Taíno Indian heritage

Three Taíno Indian sisters (left) pose during a family pig roast in eastern Cuba, where there's a small but growing movement to explore the indigenous culture that Columbus encountered in 1492. A Taíno clay fertility figurine (above), dates to around the 15th century.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) MAGGIE STEBER; (ABOVE) JULIO LARRAMENDI, MUSEO ANTROPOLÓGICO MONTANÉ

By Hillary Gulley

ROBERTO ORDÚÑEZ FERNÁNDEZ first began unearthing artifacts in and around Cuba's eastern tip more than 40 years ago, at the age of 17. He hasn't stopped since. Ask anyone in the small city of Baracoa for *el arqueólogo* and you'll be directed to his narrow row house near the seafront. Most of what Ordúñez has found was left behind by the Taíno, an Arawak Indian people that Columbus encountered in Baracoa when he first landed there, in November of 1492.

Ordúñez is best known for establishing Baracoa's Cueva del Paraíso (Cave of Paradise) Archaeological Museum, which opened in 2004. Set in what had been an abandoned Taíno cave at the edge of town, it's the only Taíno museum on the eastern tip of Cuba. "It was a dream," says Ordúñez. "When I told people here what I wanted to do, they thought I was crazy."

Ordúñez himself would admit he's relentless—but in Cuba, where private initiatives are often hindered or blocked by government bureaucrats, he is also unusually effective. Before founding the museum, he fought to protect land containing archaeological sites just east of Baracoa, and won. He has battled for permission to excavate artifacts that are in imminent danger of being washed out to sea or destroyed by real estate development. And now he is building another Taíno museum on the second floor of his house.

Ordúñez is a solitary fighter, but he's not alone in his struggles. His quest is part of a small yet growing movement to reclaim Cuba's indigenous culture, and to persuade Cubans to explore their pre-Columbian Taíno roots.

THE TAÍNO WERE THE MOST populous of several groups who inhabited Cuba when Columbus sailed into Baracoa harbor. The explorer described them in his journal as a friendly and generous people who lived simply, noting pointedly, "They will make good servants." He wasted no time in erecting a wooden cross on the shore. Not long after that, he enslaved the Taíno in the name of Spain.

The Taíno began to die out quickly—from smallpox, violence, and overwork at the hands of the Spanish colonizers. But despite claims to the contrary, they didn't disappear completely. Some fled into the mountains. Others mixed with colonists or Africans fleeing slavery, sometimes maintaining Taíno customs and farming practices.

The colonial authorities refused to recognize the existence of the Taíno as a people, assigning their own last names to the remaining indigenous population. "[They wanted] to eliminate Indian identity so there would be no indigenous title to the land," says José Barreiro, a member of the Taíno Nation of the Antilles and director of the Office for Latin America at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. But this did not stop some Taíno from asserting their land rights in court, albeit without success. The last indigenous land claim in Cuba was denied in 1850.

The Taíno died in great numbers from disease, violence, and overwork after Columbus's arrival, depicted above by the Anglo-American artist Benjamin West in 1794. But the culture survived. Taíno descendant Regino Rodríguez (right) guides tourists through caves where Taíno petroglyphs adorn the walls.

ILLUSTRATION: SCALA/WHITE IMAGES/ART RESOURCE, NY. PHOTO: CHIP COOPER

"People still believe in mother earth and father sun. They go ask permission from Taíno gods like Osaín before they harvest something."

–Historian Alejandro Hartmann

A clay figure (left), circa 1300-1500, was broken from the rim of a bowl. Emotions run high at a Taíno prayer ceremony (right) in a *bohío*, or country home, near the city of Baracoa. *Curanderas*, or folk healers, still use traditional herbal remedies here.

Researchers who looked for a surviving Taíno culture during the 20th century failed to recognize what was right before their eyes. "They were looking for people with loincloths and didn't find any," Barreiro says. "They didn't see the nuances." Taíno in Cuba can't always be identified by physical traits, adds Barreiro's research partner, Baracoa historian Alejandro Hartmann—their customs are often the only evidence of Indian heritage. "People still believe in mother earth and father sun," he says. "They go ask for permission from Taíno gods like Osaín before they harvest something."

Genetic analysis has recently bolstered the case for the continuing Taíno presence in the Caribbean. A 2003 study in Puerto Rico showed that 61 percent of randomly selected subjects had mitochondrial DNA of indigenous origin. "You can be looking at a very Afro-Cuban or Iberian-looking person, but the DNA tells a different story," Barreiro says.

After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the new leadership tried to foster a stronger sense of "Cubanness," and frowned upon talk of separate racial identities. "The government was drastic about it for years and didn't want it to come up," says Barreiro. But the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union caused an identity crisis among Cubans, who suddenly found themselves short on food and basic supplies—and more likely to turn to traditional knowledge for making goods and medicines they needed. Only in recent years have the nuances of Cuban identity, including Taíno roots, become an acceptable topic for discussion in the eyes of the government.

WHEN I VISITED ORDÚÑEZ at his Baracoa house, he waved me through the open front door into a living room crammed with bags of cement stacked to the ceiling and a red 1950s Česká motorcycle. In the narrow corridor that remained, he had managed to find room for furniture. I squeezed through and joined him on the sofa, in front of a box fan.

Ordúñez launched into a tutorial on the Taíno, bolting upstairs to gather a basket of artifacts for me to inspect. For over a decade, Ordúñez and his partners have been excavating in the nearby village of Boma, where they found what could be the burial site of Guamá, a Taíno *cacique* (chief) who resisted the Spanish colonizers for a decade before he was killed.

Ordúñez told me that he learned his field from Antonio Núñez Jiménez, a Cuban revolutionary turned archaeologist who had hidden out with Fidel Castro in the mountains west of Baracoa. As I turned over clay idols in my hands, Ordúñez proposed an excursion to Boma later that week.

On the appointed day, despite heavy rains the night before, Ordúñez and I set off early on his Česká, heading toward the mountains to the east. We soon left the paved road for a rocky dirt path and finally came to a stop where a handful of young children appeared at the top of a hill, shouting the archaeologist's name. Their numbers grew as we walked up toward the cave where Ordúñez believes his team recovered Guamá's remains.

The bones have been relocated to the Cueva del Paraíso Museum, in Baracoa, and today there is only a replica grave in their place, with a single chain to discourage people from getting too close. "After we found Guamá here, the kids would come and dig when we were gone," said Ordúñez, shaking his head. He hopes to conduct more excavations in the area soon, funds permitting.

Enthusiasm has increased among the children in Boma since Ordúñez initiated a community project, including archaeology lessons in the local school. On weekends he teaches kids to perform *areítos*, a type of Taíno ceremony. Where possible, the performance is based on archaeological findings and early colonial accounts. But generally speaking, he acknowledges, the performance is more fantasy than fact. Ordúñez wants the kids to perform for tourists, to raise money for the new museum and educational programs.

The government used to crack down on such inauthentic displays, but with the increasing demand for indigenous culture from cash-wielding tourists, authorities have become more tolerant. Many Boma residents think the activity is harmless. "The kids would be out wasting their time if they weren't practicing," said a woman whose husband is of Taíno descent, and who was reluctant to be named.

Farther east along the coastal road, past the sleepy oceanside village of Bariguá, Ordúñez and I visited two more caves with petroglyphs and drawings in iron oxide. The Cuban military has partially walled off one of the cave openings, with a lookout slot and what appears to be a shelf for a gun.

The drawings inside are scant and simple: faint depictions of people, sea creatures, maybe a lizard. The caves themselves are small and accessible to anyone from the roadside. Some of the images have been irreparably scratched, as if someone has tried to erase them from history.

BACK IN BARACOA, my search for traces of Taíno culture turned up questionable leads. Fact and lore competed for attention. I heard unreliable information about which crops and foods were actually

PHOTOS: (LEFT) JULIO LARRAMENDI, MUSEO ARQUEOLOGICO CHORRO DE MAITA; (RIGHT) MAGGIE STEBER

indigenous. Various sources told me about connections between contemporary Cuban rhythms and Taíno music, although experts like Hartmann say there is no relation at all. Most conversations about ethnic identity showed a marked ambivalence: "I am part *Indio,*" went a typical comment, "and I learned about the Indios growing up. But I am Cuban."

I stopped in a tattoo parlor just off the new Taíno-themed pedestrian walkway, in the city center. Five inked-up men were crammed into a space the size of a closet. I asked one with a sleeve of patriotic tattoos if the shop offered any indigenous designs. "Sure," he said. "Aztec, Mayan—whatever you want."

Just when I was losing faith that I would find anyone in Baracoa besides Ordúñez and Hartmann who were truly engaged with Taíno heritage, I came across Mildo Matos's art studio. In his 50s, Matos remembers the Taíno aspects of his childhood in a tiny village on the arid southern coast of Guantánamo Province; his grandmother was Taína. As a boy, he ate *casabe,* a Taíno bread made from grated yuca (cassava root). His family built huts called *bohíos* on their land and grew indigenous crops. "I didn't realize how different we were from other Cuban families until I went away to art school," said Matos.

As a student, Matos took up oil painting. But for years before the Taíno appeared in his work, he painted other subjects. Now his studio walls are covered with dynamic depictions of Taíno gods, though his style stems more from 20th-century European traditions than from cave drawings or idols. "I use a lot of surrealism, because [like Taíno symbolism] it is also about reinterpreting nature and natural phenomena," he said.

For Matos, exploring his ethnic identity is an active process of retrieval, reconfiguration, and reinterpretation: "Identity is personal—everyone has to do the work for themselves." One problem, he added, is the lack of historical and archaeological resources for Cubans who do wish to understand their Taíno heritage. "All of the important artifacts are in Havana," said Matos—"or the U.S."

PHOTO: CHIP COOPER

Columbus sailed into Baracoa harbor (left), erected a cross on the shore, and soon enslaved the Taíno people. Today Baracoa is a center of the movement to reclaim Cuba's indigenous heritage, which mostly lives on through beliefs and cultural practices passed down through generations.

ONE SIGNIFICANT TAÍNO artifact that is no longer available to people on Cuba's eastern tip is the Gran Cemí of Patana, a stone idol that American archaeologist Mark Harrington removed from the Patana Caverns in 1915. Harrington was excavating there on behalf of George Gustav Heye, whose collection was transferred decades later to the Smithsonian Institution. The Gran Cemí now resides in storage at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Cultural Resources Center, in Maryland, awaiting the outcome of repatriation negotiations between the United States and Cuba. "The museum and all parties in Cuba are in conversation," said Eileen Maxwell, director of public affairs at the NMAI. "We anticipate receiving a formal repatriation request in due course."

My guide to the Patana Caverns was Alexis Morales Prado, a self-taught archaeologist whose hobby led to a full-time job. Before he founded the local office of the Empresa Nacional para la Protección de la Flora y Fauna—a government agency that oversees the preservation of land and cultural heritage—Morales spent decades as the state prosecutor of Maisí, Cuba's easternmost municipality. The crime he most prosecuted was the unauthorized slaughter of cows. Now he works to gain protected status for land in Maisí that contains Taíno sites.

I found Morales at his home near the village center. He is tall, with expressive blue eyes and graying hair. Cuban flag patches ornamented one of his shirtsleeves and his khaki vest. A small machete hung in a leather sheath at his waist. "I work in facts, not fantasy," he said. "Language. What I can see. Some people are nothing more than intellectual *jineteros* (hustlers)."

According to Morales, many people in Maisí have Taíno blood and follow Taíno customs by virtue of their inherited relationship with the land—but not all of them identify as indigenous. Morales is working on a new museum to house Taíno archaeological finds from the region, set to open at the end of 2016. He also teaches in the local schools, where his students learn how their current way of life is part of a living past. "They still use some of the same hunting and fishing methods. They'll bring in Taíno mortars they found in their backyards that their families use to prepare food," Morales marveled. "They use Taíno words."

Morales teaches children how to distinguish real artifacts they may find—like a mortar with subtle but intentional carvings for different grips—from unadorned rocks. He took me out to the future museum to show me examples, but guards turned us away: no visitors allowed, no explanations given. "They won't even let me in—and my stuff is in there," Morales said. But he had another solution: "Let's stop by my parents' place."

His parents weren't home, but there was a hungry cat waiting inside with her newborn litter of kittens. Morales rummaged through the fridge to find something to quiet them, then opened a glass display case in the living room. He turned and passed me a large earthen Taíno bowl. I cupped its rounded edges firmly, eyeing the concrete floor and imagining the worst. The bowl was about a thousand years old, Morales said. I was relieved to hand it back to him after he emerged from his parents' bedroom dragging two plastic storage bins of Taíno artifacts that had been underneath their bed. The bins contained rocks with coral fossils, mortars, graters—probably for yuca—picks, hatchet heads, ceramic fragments, miniature stone and clay idols, all of it in earthy browns and grays, except for a single contemporary artifact: a white plastic hair clip.

MORALES AND I LATER DROVE in a 1959 Land Rover to La Patana, situated at the end of a red-dirt road best traversed on a horse or in a four-wheel drive vehicle. The local school has only eight students. The village was all but deserted when we

"It was a dream. When I told people here what I wanted to do, they thought I was crazy."

–Archaelogist Roberto Ordúñez Fernández, founder of Baracoa's Taíno museum

arrived, so we continued our hike to the Patana Caverns down a precipitous trail of jagged rock.

To remove the Gran Cemí from its cave, Mark Harrington's team had to cut the idol into five pieces with a two-man lumber saw. The pieces were then packed in cedar boxes and hauled by mules to Maisí, where they were loaded onto a boat headed for Baracoa, and later transferred to a Norwegian freighter making a stop in New York City.

Before its removal, the idol must have been an imposing sight; it had been carved into a four-foot-high stalagmite with an even wider base. Still, Harrington nearly failed to see it. The cave's mouth opens wide to a high-ceilinged antechamber, tempting anyone who enters to look upward past the idol's former resting place, toward an enticing passageway that disappears into the darkness. This leads into a rotunda filled with bats, whose presence thwarted all three of Harrington's attempts to thoroughly explore the deeper space. He noticed the idol only while recovering from his third try.

I did not read Harrington's account of his Patana expedition until after I had visited the cave, and don't recall seeing the millions of roaches he witnessed on the floor of the corridor leading into the rotunda. But that's probably because I was too preoccupied with the thousands of bats that formed a funnel cloud when Morales and I entered their space in the two-tone glow of my smartphone and his flashlight.

In pursuit of the more mysterious chamber, I, like Harrington, had also failed to note the petroglyphs that still remain at the cave's entrance, and now I too was sweating through my clothes and suffocating in the rotunda's foul air. By the time I thought to ask Morales what marvels awaited us, I could hardly hear myself over the beating wings and piercing cries. "None," he shouted back over his shoulder. "I wanted to show you the heat trap!" Frenzied bats clipped my arms and legs. Warm guano clotted in my hair. Head down, I turned and sprinted back to the entrance as fast as I could manage on a soft floor of droppings.

Only when I was back at the cave entrance, alone and breathless, could I finally appreciate the space. Petroglyphs stared out from the walls. The spot where the Gran Cemí used to stand came into focus, a haunting stump of a rock remaining in place of a figure once infused with life. The Taíno may be destined to be defined, at least in part, by their absence.

I remember the first Taíno idol I held, as I sat in Roberto Ordúñez's living room: a three-sided clay figure called *La Muñequina* (the little doll). As I turned each of its sides to face me, it became a frog, a skull, and then an owl. For the Taíno, this idol was an indivisible symbol of life, death, and wandering souls—though not necessarily in that order.

It was a Taíno belief that the dead had their own spirits, and that these could pass back into the world as people, animals, even objects. Their presence wasn't regarded as a haunting, however. It was simply as if those who had died had taken a new shape in order to exist again alongside the living. ○

Taíno *cacique* Francisco Ramírez Rojas (right) beats a palm frond to drive away bad spirits at a seaside ceremony of thanksgiving. A three-sided idol (left) known as *La Muñequina* is thought to represent the Taíno belief that spirits of the dead are present among the living.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) ROBERTO ORDUÑEZ FERNÁNDEZ AND YURISBEL ORDUÑEZ CESAR, COLECCIÓN Y ARCHIVOS DE LA SOCIEDAD ARQUEOLOGICA DE BARACOA; (RIGHT) MAGGIE STEBER

LOCAL LENS

Dancing in the streets

By Simon Worrall

Gabriel Davalos (@davalos_photography), 36, grew up in Havana amid what he calls conditions of "immense spiritual wealth and the necessary material things." But as the Soviet Union began to implode in 1989 and Cuba was battered by a severe economic crisis, many Cubans emigrated. Davalos was determined to stay in the country he calls his "utopia." Later he became a photojournalist, using his images to question and explore the reality around him. Communicating by email, Davalos writes about how his pictures are, above all, about storytelling, and why he is drawn to dance for inspiration. The following excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.

Cuba must be a complicated place to be a photographer. How free are you to take the photos you want?
When I was young, I wanted to take pictures but I did not have a camera, nor the money to buy a camera. Then, an Italian photographer—a friend of my family—donated his old Nikon D200. I began my journey that day.

Do you now use an iPhone or a regular camera?
When you live in a poor country, you are forced to be creative and learn, no matter what kind of equipment you own. Becoming an excellent professional can help close the technological gap. Whether you begin or end your career with an iPhone, what really matters is how creative and knowledgeable you are.

Tell us the story behind the ballet-type shot of the man and woman in the street. Are they professional dancers? How many "takes" did you need to get the right image?
This shot features two professional dancers who are dating in real life. They belong to different companies and had been working in different countries for several months. That day was special: the reunion of two Cubans in love. This photo came together after 50 attempts.

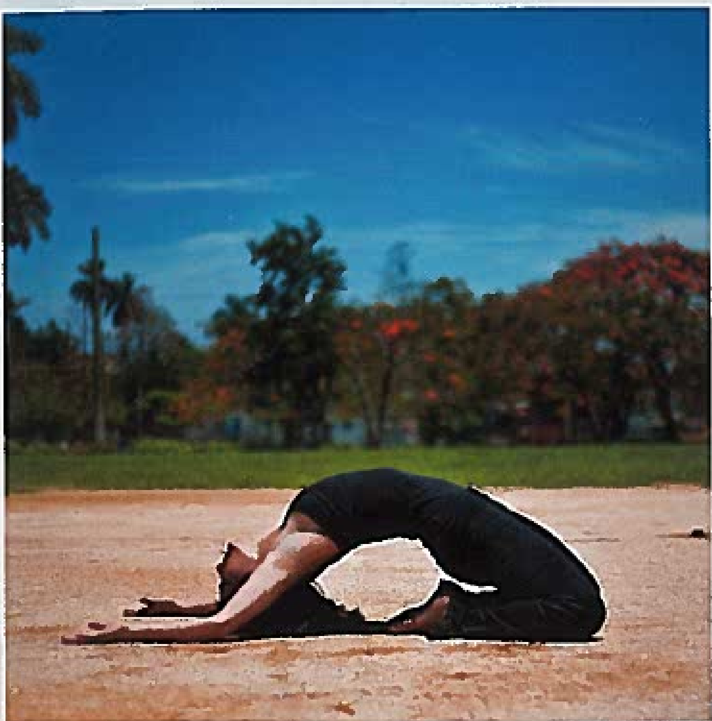
And the other couple lying on the ground in the rain?
This picture was taken at the famous Malecón of Havana. In some years, the sea floods the streets in lowland areas. When I heard the news on television, I picked up these two dancers, who were still rehearsing at the National Ballet of Cuba, and we went out together looking for photo opportunities. It was risky business taking the pictures under the rain, with the ocean coming in and the strong winds. At one point, three ferocious waves dragged the dancers all over the street, while I had to hang on to a utility pole! ○

EL CERRO NEIGHBORHOOD, HAVANA

June 14, 2016

159 likes

Glenda García, soloist with the National Ballet of Cuba, and Julio Blanes, soloist with the Revolution Ballet Company.



ON A BASEBALL FIELD IN THE MARIANAO NEIGHBORHOOD, HAVANA

October 11, 2014

61 likes

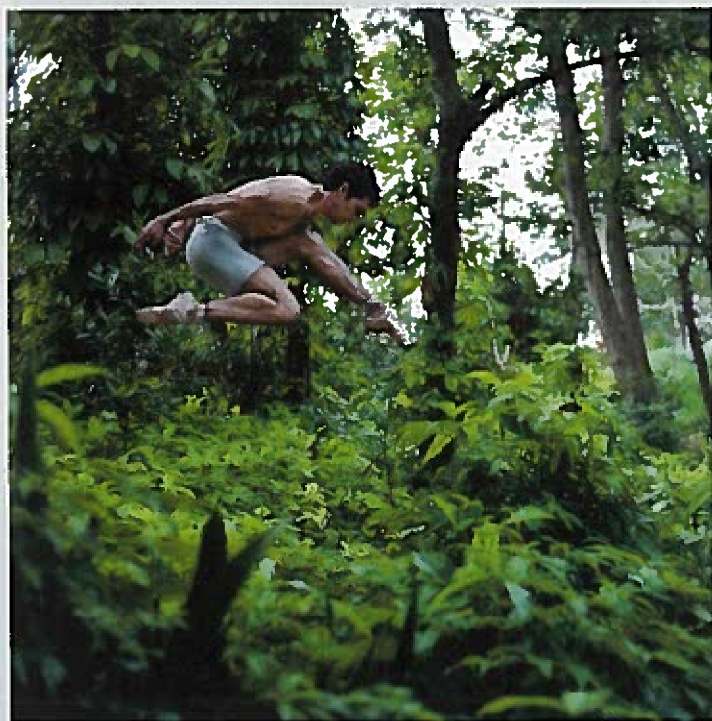
Glenda Preval, a soloist with the Havana Queens dance company when the photo was taken, now lives and dances in New York.

ON THE MALECÓN, HAVANA

February 11, 2016

133 likes

Grettel Morejón, principal dancer with the National Ballet of Cuba, and Rafael Quenedit, first soloist with the National Ballet of Cuba.



METROPOLITAN PARK, HAVANA

October 11, 2014

62 likes

Serafín Castro, principal dancer with the National Ballet of Cuba when the photo was taken, is now the principal dancer with the Monterrey Ballet Company, in Mexico.

By the beautiful sea

By Sasha Ingber

BRACKETED BY THE CARIBBEAN SEA to the south and the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean to the north, Cuba has more than 3,500 miles of coastline. The Caribbean's largest island is a shoestring of land, only 120 miles at its widest point. The sea is never far away. Its presence is felt even in the nooks and crannies of rural houses, where red land crabs hide in winter before they invade the roads in a march toward the shore to lay eggs in spring. ¶ "Here is this 750-mile-long island that divides and defines the Caribbean. It's like a great umbrella over the top of it," says underwater photographer David Doubilet. Anytime a hurricane tears across the sea, what lies beneath that umbrella—on Cuba's southern coast—is

often spared: Colonies of coral polyps continue to shelter and feed multitudes of creatures, and tangles of mangroves remain a vital nursery for young fish. Though pollution, rising water temperatures, and overfishing have turned vibrant coral reefs into graveyards off Mexico, Jamaica, and the Florida Keys, Cuba's reefs are thriving.

One might attribute the country's pristine flora and fauna to long-stifled economic development, including poor roads and difficulty of access. But its lushness is also partly the result of government conservation efforts that began after the communist revolution. "We do not need any more transferring to the Third World of lifestyles and consumption habits that ruin the environment," said Fidel Castro in 1992.

Today 25 percent of Cuba's marine waters are protected (compared with 1.29 percent in the continental United States, or 16.3 percent if U.S. offshore territories are included). Roughly 80 percent of the country's national parks area is reserved for conservation. The other 20 percent is considered "sacrificed places" where leisure activities like camping, fishing, and hiking are allowed. Even there, access is restricted and a guide is often mandatory.

In primary and secondary school, students receive mandatory environmental education. Residents of the island's westernmost province, Pinar del Río, participate in a migratory bird festival in the fall and a turtle festival in the spring. (Fines for killing a sea turtle run up to 4,000 Cuban pesos—almost a year's salary.)

Cuba's unspoiled shores have benefited from at least one other factor: the U.S. embargo, which halted commerce and kept tourists at bay. But now that relations between the two countries are thawing, environmentalists express concern about whether Cuba can balance its desire for economic growth with the demands of conservation.

"Cuba has very good environmental law. So did other Caribbean nations. The problem was those other nations didn't enforce their laws," says David Guggenheim, founder and president of Ocean Doctor, which collaborates with Cuban scientists on marine conservation and research. He says the government will have to decide if it wants to embrace mass tourism or attract fewer tourists who pay more for an authentic experience.

The island is home to some of the Caribbean's most important ecosystems and is almost completely encircled by coral reefs. More than 40 percent of the country's fauna, including the two-inch bee hummingbird and 13-foot Cuban crocodile, exist nowhere else. "What I found was missing from the Cuban public is that they didn't realize how much they have to be proud of," says Guggenheim. "I tell them, 'You guys have the healthiest coral reef ecosystems left in the Caribbean,' and they say, 'Really?'"

On the pages that follow, *Smithsonian Journeys* highlights the best of Cuba's coastal treasures.

In a channel of the Jardines de la Reina, with a barracuda looking on, "you can just drift over starfish after starfish with fish and corals beneath you," says photographer Ian Shive. (Previous page) Tourists kayak the waters of the Bay of Pigs off Playa Larga.

PHOTOS: (PREVIOUS PAGES) CHAD CASE, TANDEM, (RIGHT) IAN SHIVE, TANDEM

Jardines de la Reina

An archipelago 50 miles off Cuba's southern coast, Jardines de la Reina, or Gardens of the Queen, has been described by scientists as an underwater Eden and a living laboratory. Jutting branches of elkhorn and staghorn coral—both threatened species—offer hundreds of square miles of refuge for fish. "It represents the way these ecosystems are supposed to look, with all of the species present without the profound impacts of fishing and pollution," says Guggenheim of Ocean Doctor.

Fish once considered rare, like the 600-pound goliath grouper, glide by with ease. "They don't have fear of humans because humans aren't hunting them," says Guggenheim, who has had "staring contests" with grouper while lying on his belly on the seafloor. "They are about a foot from my face, staring at me. They always win because they don't have eyelids," he quips. Schools of tarpon, yellowtail snapper, jacks, grunts, and angelfish knife past the silky shark, lemon shark, and Caribbean reef shark. There are ten times more sharks here than in surrounding waters. Scientists monitor these species, collecting knowledge that could prove lifesaving to other reefs that are dying out.

Christopher Columbus named this labyrinth of mangroves and sandy spits after Queen Isabella of Spain. Restrictions imposed in the 1990s by the government have preserved it from degradation. Fishing for anything other than lobster is banned in the 367-square-mile marine preserve. The number of scuba diving permits is limited to fewer than 900 annually. A floating hotel, Tortuga, offers just seven cabins.

Silky sharks (above left) are just one species of the predator common in the Gardens of the Queen—far more common than in surrounding waters. Sea grass beds like those in the preserve (above right) cover half of the Cuban continental shelf. Hutias (right), a type of tree rodent, make for friendly ambassadors.

PHOTOS: (TOP LEFT) DAVID DOUBILET. (RIGHT, BOTH) TODD HEISLER, THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Guanahacabibes Peninsula

Between June and August, three species of sea turtle crawl onto southern beaches of the Guanahacabibes Peninsula at night to lay eggs. Just six of the 40 miles of coast are suitable for nesting, says Natalia Rossi, Cuba country manager at the Wildlife Conservation Society. "The majority of mothers return every two to three years to lay their eggs on the same beaches." Visitors, accompanied by a guide and a group of University of Havana students, can watch the 500-pound, endangered reptiles nest. The students volunteer to pace the shore for 15 nights, counting, measuring, photographing, and determining the gender of the turtles. The program began in 1998. Volunteers found a record 900 nests in 2013.

"Sea turtles play an important role in the coastal ecosystem," says Rossi. They graze the sea grass beds, trimming them so they aren't overgrown and diseased, which benefits thousands of other species that rely on the grass for food and protection. On the coastal reefs, typical marine life includes barracuda, grouper, parrotfish, and moray eels. María La Gorda's International Diving Center is the gateway to 30 sites for scuba diving and snorkeling.

From a road in La Bajada made of coral and sand that the government closed off to vehicles in the 1960s, bird-watchers, even in the low season of summer, can spot the world's smallest bird, the bee hummingbird, along with red-bellied tocororos and lime-green Cuban todys. The peninsula also has about 100 butterfly and 16 orchid species.

Land crabs on the Guanahacabibes Peninsula, like the one shown above, migrate in spring to salt water. The pristine sand and sea of María La Gorda are at the isolated tip of the peninsula, a paradise for sunbathers, snorkelers, and scuba divers.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) KIKE CALVO; (RIGHT) CHRISTIAN SVORONO, NORDIC/AURORA PHOTOS

La Ciénaga de Zapata

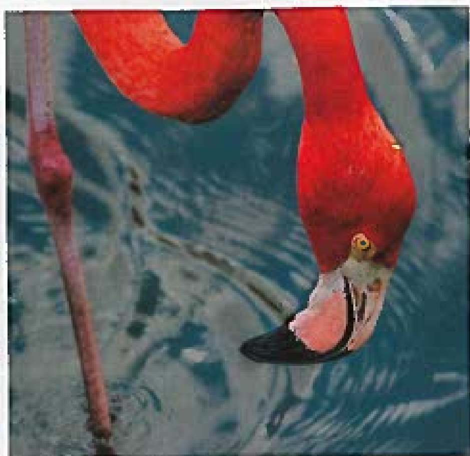
More than 14 different ecosystems, including mangrove swamps, flooded palm savannas, and coral reef barriers, are found in the Caribbean's largest and best preserved wetland, La Ciénaga de Zapata. It's also home to at least 3,000 critically endangered Cuban crocodiles. George Amato, director of the Sackler Institute for Comparative Genomics, describes them as "notably curious and notably aggressive." Genetically, Cuban crocodiles are more closely related to birds than to other reptiles and "are notorious for leaping out of the water," says Amato. They can jump most of their body length—up to 15 feet—by propelling their tails.

Even before the revolution, overharvesting of food and skins decimated their numbers. Today, habitat modification and illegal hunting take a further toll. As the freshwater habitat of Cuban crocodiles has become brackish, more prevalent American crocodiles have moved into their territory. The two species are mating and producing hybrid offspring. In a move to preserve the Cuban crocodile, the Criadero de Cocodrilos breeds them and releases some back into the wild. Visitors can touch hatchlings and feed 60-year-old adults.

A tour of the maze of mangroves may reward travelers with a manatee sighting or a glimpse of a Cuban gar, an archaic fish with origins in the Paleozoic era. Of Cuba's 20 endemic bird species, 17 have been found on the Zapata Peninsula, including Cuban pygmy owls and Cuban Amazon parrots. In 2015, the extraordinarily elusive Zapata rail was spotted after a 40-year lapse in sightings. About 400 still exist.

Researchers (above left) pole through mangroves in search of Cuban crocodiles (above right) to tag and measure in La Ciénaga de Zapata. Fewer than 5,000 crocodiles remain in those 140 square miles of freshwater swampland. A Cuban screech owl (right) peers out from a tree trunk.

PHOTOS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) STEVE WINTER, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE; MIRKO ZANNI; NEIL BOWMAN, FLPA/MINDEN PICTURES



Other waterside attractions

A flamboyance of flamingos
In spring, 70,000 Caribbean flamingos from Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula and surrounding islands flock to the Máximo River Fauna Refuge to feed and nest in the muddy flats of the northeast Humedal Río Máximo-Cagüey wetland. They were reportedly first spotted in the 1950s by pilots flying over the river. Researchers track the hatching and maturation of the chicks, and weed out and quarantine weaklings. In times of drought they even carry buckets of water from the river to a dry spring where some of the birds congregate.

The Bay of Pigs
Snorkelers and scuba divers have their pick of beaches along the Bay of Pigs, including the tranquil waters of Punta Perdiz and Cueva de los Peces, open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. The nearby Bay of Pigs museum pays homage to the revolution's defeat of the CIA-led invasion in 1961, and features photographs, weaponry, and a propaganda film condemning the "soldiers of Yankee imperialism."

Hemingway haunts
Ernest Hemingway liked fishing off the white-sand shores of the Jardines del Rey (Gardens of the King) archipelago, off Cuba's northern coast. One beach at the western end of Cayo Guillermo even changed its name to Playa Pilar after his beloved fishing boat, *Pilar*. The writer used scenic details from Cojímar, a fishing village 20 minutes outside Havana, for *The Old Man and the Sea*. In 1945, fishermen in this community caught a great white shark that reportedly measured 21 feet long and weighed 7,100 pounds.

Bats, dinos, and cars
Caves and indigenous bats—of the funnel-eared, bulldog, and pallid varieties—are only one draw of the Baconao Biosphere Reserve. It also features about 70 scuba diving sites, an outdoor car museum, a "prehistoric" park with big dinosaur sculptures, and an aquarium with a viewing tunnel that allows visitors to observe marine species as they swim by.

Shipwreck graveyard
Some 3,000 ships, many as yet undiscovered, are scattered along Cuba's coast. In Santiago de Cuba, the former capital of the Spanish colony, scuba divers can explore the *Cristóbal Colón*, a Spanish Navy armored cruiser, sunk by the U.S. on July 3, 1898, during the Spanish-American War. Off the coast of Santa Lucía lies the *Nuestra Señora Virgen de Altagracia*, a well-preserved 90-foot steel tugboat that sank in the early 20th century.

Limestone and revolution
In Playa Las Coloradas, you can see where the *Granma*, a 60-foot cabin cruiser carrying Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and 80 other rebels traveling from Mexico, capsized in 1956. The men waded to shore and started the revolution. (At the Coloradas museum, you can also see a replica of that vessel, from which the nearby Parque Nacional Desembarco del Granma takes its name.) The limestone terrace of Cabo Cruz—considered by UNESCO to be the world's largest and best preserved—originates 600 feet below sea level and rises to more than 1,100 feet above, with giant karst canyons, cliffs, sinkholes, and caves. Native Taíno culture is visible in petroglyphs, pictographs, and artifacts.

Deep-sea fishing
In search of the "big one" that (hopefully) won't get away? Fishing boats depart from Varadero's Marina Gaviota every day and often return with blue marlin, yellowtail, and red snapper in the summer; sailfish and dorado in the fall; and barracuda all year round. Boat captains can also be hired at the Marina Hemingway, nine miles west of Havana, and in Cayo Guillermo.

Sponge garden
Cayo Largo del Sur stretches for more than 16 miles; its clear waters have enticed tourists since the state opened hotels there in 1977. Divers and snorkelers can see nearly 600 types of coral. Photographer David Doubilet remembers vibrant vertical reef walls that start in water as shallow as 12 feet and give way to a sponge garden. "Sunlight touches the top of the reef, and then you slide over the wall, and you're sliding down a blue cliff, and as it tips under, that's where the sponges are. You have great big barrel sponges and long tube sponges and orange sponges."

Heavenly cloud forests, Hell's Stream
More than 900 species of flora and fauna are found only in the mountains, cloud forests, and reefs of Cuchillas del Toa Biosphere Reserve, including the Cuban land snail, with its striking spirals of orange, yellow, black, and white. The Caribbean's highest waterfall, the Salto Fino, cascades a thousand feet down into the Arroyo del Infierno (Hell's Stream) before flowing into the Toa river. Now a UNESCO site, the area was once a refuge for Africans fleeing slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Pirate hideout
A tear-shaped island 60 miles off the mainland, the Isle of Youth was renowned at the turn of the 20th century for its mineral springs, reputed to cure pulmonary, rheumatic, and throat afflictions. It was a hideout for pirates in the 1500s, an American settlement in the 1900s, and a prison complex where the Castro brothers were held in the 1950s. In the 1970s, Fidel Castro established dozens of boarding schools where children from poor countries could learn at no cost. In the 1990s, a weak economy shut down the schools, and a strong hurricane destroyed some of the buildings. Today, Bibijagua beach attracts locals and visitors to its black volcanic sand. ○

PHOTOS: (TOP LEFT TO RIGHT) JORGE V. DAVILONDO; KARL-HEINZ RAACH, LAIF/REDUX; FRANCO BANFI, NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY

A fly fisherman shows off his crevalle jack.

PETER MCBRIDE, AURORA PHOTOS

'About as pristine as it gets'

Canadians and Europeans have been saltwater fly-fishing in Cuba for years, but for the most part, Americans have had to take their pack rods elsewhere. Now, with barriers falling, specialty travel companies based in the United States are gearing up for a sportsmen's feeding frenzy.

The lure of Cuban fishing, explains Kirk Deeter, editor at large for *Field & Stream*, includes gin-clear waters and fish that haven't had a fly drift by their noses…ever. "It's like being back in the Columbus era and is about as pristine as it gets in the Caribbean. No billboards, no condos," he said after a fly-fishing trip this past spring.

The sporting-goods company Orvis sold out its first three fly-fishing trips to Cuba this year within a week. The itinerary features four days of fishing and a cultural component—visits to an artist's studio and Hemingway's farm, for example—to comply with the license issued under the people-to-people program. Likewise, Jim Klug, director of operations for Yellow Dog Flyfishing Adventures, based in Bozeman, Montana, reports sold-out trips for 2016 and 2017. "People want to get there before it changes," he says. "And the reality is, with the influx of money, Havana may change, but the fishing isn't going to change that quickly. There is only so much infrastructure, and the guys down there are doing it right." Saltwater fly-fishing for the trophy triumvirate of bonefish, permit, and tarpon is catch and release, and sportfishing rights are limited and controlled.

Thanks to minimal fishing pressure, the government's attentiveness to conservation, and the creation of marine reserves, there are plenty of fish. "Exceptional fishing," Klug avers. The big payout is the chance to nab a "grand slam." A grand slam in saltwater-fishing parlance is an all-in-one-day capture (and release) of a bonefish, a gray ghost of a fish with a mouth that looks like the business end of a Hoover; a permit, a notoriously skittish, silver-platter-shaped picky eater; and a tarpon, a ferocious fighter with a hard-to-hook mouth.

To catch them requires stealth—they're easily spooked—and a sure, soft touch. A writer for the *Atlantic* who went deep-sea fishing with Hemingway off Cuba said the great man (who was particularly focused on marlin) talked about the act of playing a fish as if it were an English sentence. "The way to do it, the style, is not just an idle concept," Hemingway told him. "It is simply the way to get done what is supposed to be done…. The fact that the right way looks pretty or beautiful when it's done is just incidental."

— *Cathy Newman*

When the mob ruled an empire

By Simon Worrall

T. J. ENGLISH, A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR of books about organized crime, caught the Cuba bug as a child watching Fidel Castro on newscasts. Later he fell under the spell of Cuban music. His book *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba...and Then Lost It to the Revolution* takes readers to the underbelly of Cuba in the 1950s, when mobsters like Charles "Lucky" Luciano and Meyer Lansky turned the island into a criminal empire and unwittingly launched a vibrant Afro-Cuban music scene that continues to this day.

When *Smithsonian Journeys* contacted English recently by phone, he explained how Frank Sinatra became a draw for mob casinos in Havana, how the Castro-led revolution in Cuba and its subsequent diaspora had a protracted, corrosive effect on American politics, and how the ghosts of the 1950s still haunt the streets of Havana.

In one of the most famous scenes in *The Godfather, Part II*, the mob meets on a rooftop in Havana under the aegis of Hyman Roth, played by Lee Strasberg, who is supposed to represent mobster Meyer Lansky. Separate fact from fiction for us.

The movie is fictionalized but uses a lot of accurate historical detail. The rooftop scene shows Roth's birthday party. They bring a cake out depicting the island of Cuba and cut it into pieces. It's a powerful symbolic image, but the actual gathering of mob bosses from around the United States at the Hotel Nacional in Havana in 1946 was even more grandiose. It had been called by Meyer Lansky, the leader of the mob's exploitation of Cuba in the 1950s, and it kicked off the era of entertainment and licentiousness Havana became known for. The mob funneled dirty money into Cuba to build casinos and hotels, which in turn generated the funds used to facilitate the corrupt political system led by President Fulgencio Batista.

You write, "It is impossible to tell the story of the Havana Mob without also chronicling the rise of Castro." How closely were the two linked?

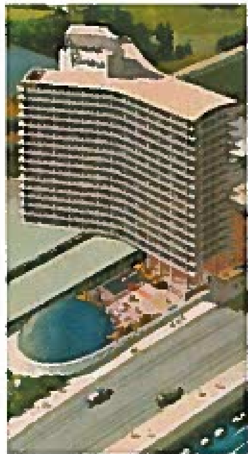
They weren't directly linked. Castro was produced by many social conditions that existed in Cuba. But I think the mob became a symbol for the revolution of exploitation by outside forces, particularly the United States. Part of the narrative of the revolution was that the island was not able to control its own destiny and that all of the most valuable commodities were owned by corporations from the United States. In the eyes of Castro, the mob, the U.S. government, and U.S. corporations were all partners in the exploitation of Cuba.

Did mob bosses like Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky have bigger dreams for Cuba than just the creation of an enclave for gaming and leisure?

The idea was to create a criminal empire outside the United States where they had influence over local politics but could not be affected by U.S. law enforcement. They were exploring doing the same thing in the Dominican Republic and countries in South America. It was a grandiose dream. But the gangsters of that era, like Lansky, Luciano, and Santo Trafficante, saw themselves as CEOs of corporations, operating at an international level.

Tourists and Cubans gamble at the casino in the Hotel Nacional in Havana, 1957. Meyer Lansky, who led the U.S. mob's exploitation of Cuba in the 1950s, set up a famous meeting of crime bosses at the hotel in 1946.

RALPH MORSE, LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



An artist's rendering of the Hotel Havana Riviera (above), built in the 1950s by mobster Lansky (bottom). He and other mob bosses, like Charles "Lucky" Luciano (below), aimed to make Havana the offshore base of a global criminal empire.

Several American icons come off pretty badly in your book—tell us about Frank Sinatra's and John F. Kennedy's involvement with the Havana mob.

Sinatra's involvement with the mob in Havana is a subnarrative of his involvement with the mob in general, which was rooted in his upbringing in Hoboken, New Jersey. The mob is even rumored to have been instrumental in launching his career by financing his early development as a singer. He was very close to Lucky Luciano, who came from the same town in Sicily as Sinatra's relatives and ancestors. Cuba was crucial because of the mob's plan to create a chain of important hotels and nightclubs. Sinatra was going to be used as a lure to make it all happen. He was like the mob's mascot in Havana.

Havana also became a destination for junkets, where politicians could do things they couldn't in the United States. Sex was a big part of that. [While still serving in the Senate and before he was elected president], John F. Kennedy went down there with another young senator, from Florida, named George Smathers. Santo Trafficante, one of the leaders of the mob in Havana, later told his lawyer about how he had set up a tryst with three young Cuban prostitutes in a hotel room. What Kennedy didn't know was that Santo Trafficante and an associate watched the orgy through a two-way mirror. Trafficante reportedly regretted not capturing it on film as a potential blackmail resource.

We can't talk about Cuba in the '50s without discussing the music scene, which you call "an international swirl of race, language, and class." Put us on the dance floor.

The main dance style that hit that island was the mambo, created in the '40s by a bandleader named Pérez Prado. It became a sensation in Cuba, Latin America, and the United States. It involved big orchestra music, and the dance moves were simple enough that the gringos could pick it up easily. Then there was rumba, which was a style of Cuban music rooted in the Santería religious culture. This exotic, sexy music drew celebrities like Marlon Brando and George Raft. Cuba also attracted great entertainers from the United States and Europe, like Nat King Cole, Eartha Kitt, and Dizzy Gillespie. I don't think the mobsters anticipated that what they were doing would generate this exciting Afro-Cuban cultural explosion. But that's what happened, and it became a major reason that Havana was such an exciting place in those years.

How did the revolution and the Cuban diaspora following the fall of Batista impact politics in the United States?

It was a hugely significant event, because it was the first time a country so close to the United States had achieved a successful socialist revolution. This set off a great deal of paranoia on the part of the U.S. government, which began to influence American politics. Cuba became a chess piece in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, inspiring the United States, particularly the CIA, to use the anti-Castro movement for all kinds of dirty politics and covert operations, like the Bay of Pigs invasion. Four of the five burglars in the Watergate break-in were also Cubans from Miami, who were talked into it by CIA agent E. Howard Hunt. Anti-Castro activists were manipulated by the right wing of the U.S. and the Republican Party for half a century.

You were recently in Cuba again. Does the mob era of the '50s still have resonance?

The casinos are long since gone, but the hotels like the Nacional or Meyer Lansky's Riviera are preserved in the exact same state they were in during the 1950s. The famous old American cars are still there too. You can go to Havana and walk the streets and still feel the ghosts of that history. It's still very much alive. ○

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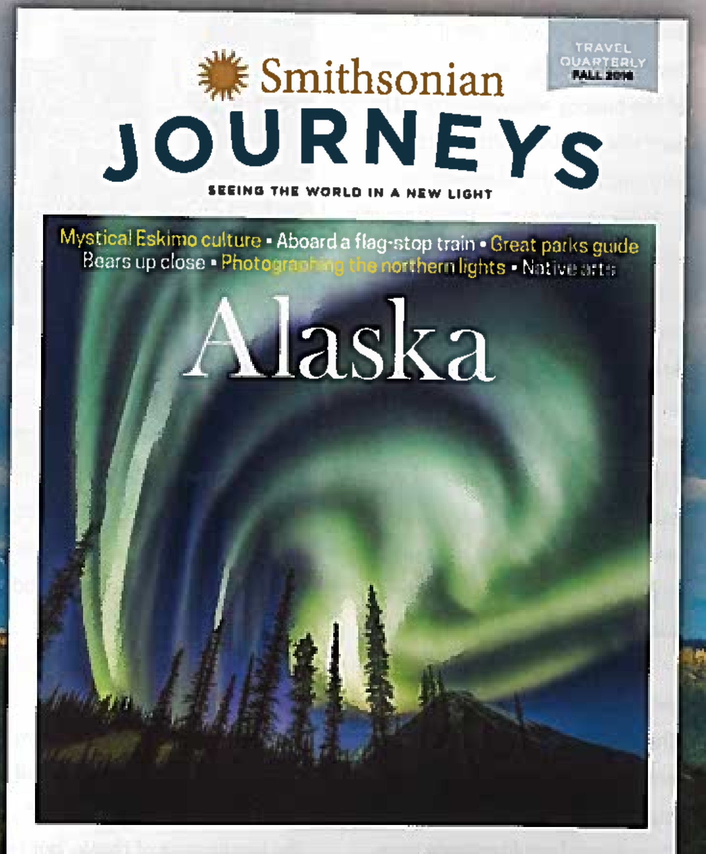

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ATLAS OF EATING

Culture in the cauldron

With origins in the island's oldest culture, *ajiaco* is a stew that adapts to the times

By Ana Sofía Peláez
Photographs by Ellen Silverman

"Is there *ajiaco* today?" That was the first question my grandfather Julián would ask when he entered any of the Cuban restaurants spread across Miami. In quick succession he would ask it of the host who was seating us; he'd ask it of the busboy who was passing by; he'd ask it of the waitress before she distributed the menus.

If ajiaco was on the menu, usually as a rotating weekly special, he'd be rewarded with a bowl brimming with smoky cuts of pork, chicken, flank steak, and a dry cured beef called *tasajo*, along with rounds of starchy corn, golden sweet squash called calabaza, and plantains at every stage of ripeness. The broth could be light, or dense with the tropical root vegetables and tubers that had dissolved into it.

For my grandfather, it was everything he could want, flavors that evoked large family dinners and weekends spent on his ranch outside Havana where the *guajiros* (farmhands) would prepare large rustic stews. If more people turned up, a few more vegetables would be added so there would be enough for everyone. The next night it would be simmered down for a light soup. Then those leftovers would be milled together to make a smooth purée the following day.

Chock-full of smoked meats and native vegetables like corn, plantains, and squash, *ajiaco* (right) is a mainstay of Cuban cooking, prepared in every manner of kitchen, including this one in a 1920's home in Havana.

I was never part of this life in Cuba. For me, ajiaco was an unfamiliar blend of rough brown vegetables and strange cuts of meat. My grandfather praised the tenderness of tasajo, but I saw little appeal in the dried beef covered in a thick layer of orange fat we'd find in the grocery store. It was a blind spot in my defiantly Cuban upbringing, like when a Spanish word eluded me but the English one was screaming in my ear. Though I can't say that I appreciated ajiaco growing up, I did sense that it was fundamentally Cuban, something I should enjoy eating but didn't. I never wanted to disappoint my grandfather by letting on that I didn't like it. I hoped to spare him another reminder that we weren't in Cuba after all.

Many years later, when I was writing a book of Cuban recipes, my research led me to the island, where I believed ajiaco could be the key to fully understanding Cuban cuisine. But what I found was that, like so many traditional dishes, it was more often talked about than tasted. Simpler versions could still be managed, especially in the countryside if there was immediate access to ingredients, but shortages persisted. Beef, in particular, was a rare commodity that was largely out of reach for most Cubans. Ajiaco had become a recipe of subtraction—but it didn't start out that way.

According to food historian Maricel Presilla, when the Spanish came across the island's indigenous Taíno population preparing the stew in clay pots

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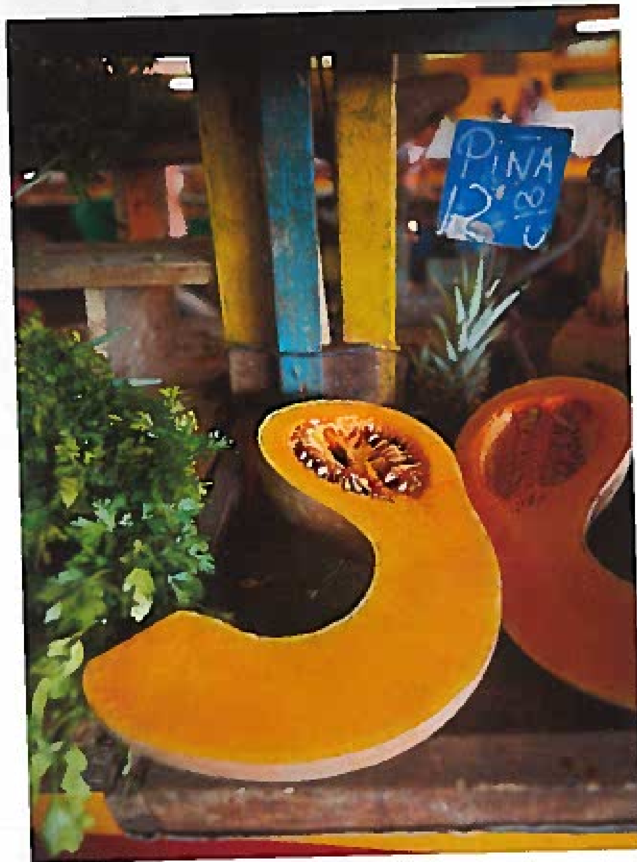
over a wood fire, they would have recognized their own *olla podrida*, albeit with very different ingredients: Small game, like hutias (a local rodent), iguanas, or turtles; simmering with native vegetables like yuca, malanga, boniato, corn and squash; and seasoned with the burnt orange seeds of the achiote plant, which grows wild on the island. Its name came from the caustic peppers, or *ajíes*, the Taíno used for added heat. Although the elements of the concoction have changed since those times, its primacy as one of the few recipes with roots stretching back to pre-Columbian times is unquestioned.

In a recovered journal from the mid-1600s, maintained by a servant named Hernando de la Parra, early descriptions of ajiaco show a pronounced Spanish influence. Small game was replaced with the fresh meats and salt-cured beef from the livestock the Spanish introduced to the island, including cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. But the indigenous roots and tubers, corn, and achiote were still present, as was *casabe*, a flatbread accompaniment made with shredded and dried yuca. Although de la Parra concedes the dish was largely consumed by the indigenous population, he notes that Europeans quickly became accustomed to this new way of eating, even to the point of forgetting their own traditions.

The push and pull between Old and New World ingredients would continue throughout the brutal years of colonization. Columbus's second voyage in 1493 brought the sour oranges and limes that would become the basis of creole marinades. Onion and garlic were combined with indigenous peppers to form the trinity at the heart of traditional Cuban cooking. Plantains and yams called *ñames* arrived from West Africa soon after and were closely associated with the large African population brought to the island as slaves to toil in mining and agriculture, and to supplement a Taíno labor force decimated by famine and disease. Though it's unclear exactly when these foods were added to the stew, all these ingredients were listed when ajiaco recipes were finally recorded in 19th-century cooking manuals.

Despite the intense social stratification that existed, ajiaco was one of the few dishes that seemed to cross all barriers—a peasant meal ennobled by its origin story. In *Viaje a La Habana*, a memoir published in 1844, the Condesa Merlin Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo chronicled her return to Cuba after several years in Europe.

Noting the dichotomy that existed among elite, native-born Creoles, she describes the show they made of serving hyper-refined European delicacies to guests, while taking comfort in familiar, tropical foods in private. She rejects an aunt's efforts to present her with an elaborately prepared French recipe, choosing a simple ajiaco instead, asserting, "I have only come to eat creole dishes."



What goes into a pot of ajiaco depends on what's available. Home cooks in Havana will typically buy ingredients at market stalls (top left) or from the ubiquitous bicycle carts (above). Calabaza squash is a key component of the stew.

For the emerging Cuban-born aristocracy, flush with capital but facing volatility both in sugar markets and politics (the revolution in Haiti at the turn of the 18th century sent shock waves), the European style of cooking projected wealth, stability, and cosmopolitan sophistication. There are 19th-century descriptions of parties where ajiaco was served, but only if no foreign guests were present. Tropical ingredients and ajiaco in particular became synonymous with Cuba's roots and a growing drive to embrace them.

As Cuba moved toward independence from Spain in 1898, the shaping of a national character grew in importance. In the decades that followed, poets, writers, and academics looked to better define the country's identity. Ajiaco, with its blended, or mestizo, culinary heritage, became a favorite metaphor in the *criollista* movement, which embraced Cuba's Indian and black heritage.

Most famously, the preeminent anthropologist Fernando Ortiz compared all of Cuba to an ajiaco: "This is Cuba, the island, the pot placed in the fire of the tropics.... An unusual pot, this land of ours, just like the pot of our ajiaco, which must be made of clay and quite open," wrote Ortiz in a lecture delivered at the University of Havana in 1939 and published in 1940. "And therein go substances of the most diverse types and origins...along with the flush of the tropics to heat it, the water of its skies to compose its broth, and the water of its seas for the sprinklings of the salt shaker. Out of all this our national ajiaco has been made."

Not only did he celebrate the confluence of Taíno, Spanish, and African cultures in the making of ajiaco, he also cited other surprising influences, including Eastern spices introduced by Chinese laborers and mild peppers brought by immigrants fleeing revolutionary Haiti. He even pointed to Anglo-American ingenuity, although with ambivalence, for simplifying domestic life and producing the metal cookware that replaced traditional clay pots used for making the stew.

It wasn't the final savory result that made Ortiz see Cuba in the cauldron but the process of cooking—varied cuts of meat disintegrating after a long simmer, and vegetables and fruits added at certain intervals to create new

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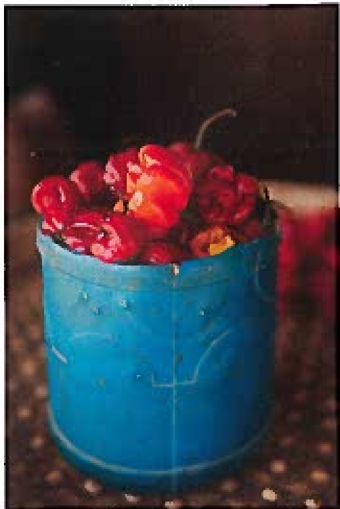

Cachucha peppers are in the stew's *sofrito* sauce mixture.

textures—a "constant cooking" that was always evolving, creating something new.

It's harder to know what Ortiz would have thought of this quintessentially Cuban dish establishing itself on the other side of the Florida Straits. But for many Cubans in the diaspora, the longing to connect to their country is fulfilled at the stove. The ritual of finding the right ingredients—the roots that are at the base of the stew, the special cuts of beef or pork, the plantains in various stages of ripening—are ways to experience the island from afar.

Ajiaco has a place in my life, too. My grandfather's yearning for the dish awakened my curiosity. I now take comfort in the flavors, learning something new with each attempt at the recipe, and never taking a single spoonful for granted. ○

Recipe: Ajiaco Criollo

This version of *ajiaco* comes from Miguel Massens, a young Cuban-American chef.

FOR THE MEATS

- ½ pound *tasajo* de res (smoked, dried beef)
- 2 pounds bone-in, skinless chicken thighs and drumsticks
- ½ pound flank steak or brisket, cut into 1-inch cubes
- ½ pound bone-in *aguja de cerdo* (pork collar bones), pork ribs, or ham hock
- ½ pound boneless pork loin, trimmed of any excess fat and cut into 1-inch cubes

FOR THE VEGETABLES

- 1 pound boniato, peeled and cut into 1-inch rounds
- 1 pound malanga, peeled and cut into 1-inch rounds
- 1 pound yuca, peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch rounds
- ½ pound ñame (or white yam), peeled and quartered
- 2 ears corn, shucked and cut into 2-inch rounds
- 2 large green plantains, peeled and cut into 1-inch rounds
- 2 large yellow plantains, peeled and cut into 1-inch rounds
- 1 pound calabaza (sold as West Indian pumpkin), peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 chayote, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

FOR THE SOFRITO

- 5 large garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ cup freshly squeezed sour orange juice or lime juice
- ¼ cup loosely packed fresh culantro (found in Latin markets), finely chopped
- ¼ cup achiote oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, minced
- 5 cachucha peppers (also known as *ajíes dulces*), stemmed, seeded, and diced
- 1 large cubanelle pepper (also known as Italian frying pepper), stemmed, seeded, and diced
- 1 small fresh hot pepper (habanero, Scotch bonnet, or tabasco), stemmed, seeded, and minced (optional)
- Lime juice to taste

Soak the tasajo to remove some of the salt, changing the water twice, at least eight hours at room temperature or overnight. The next day, drain the tasajo and rinse well under cold water.

Add the chicken, flank steak, pork collar bones, and pork loin to a heavy eight-quart stockpot with five quarts of water and simmer until tender, skimming off any impurities that rise to the top, about one additional hour.

Add the boniato, malanga, yuca, ñame, and corn to the pot and continue to cook covered until the root vegetables are just tender, about 20 minutes. Add the plantains, calabaza, and chayote and continue to simmer until tender, an additional 10 to 15 minutes. Replenish the water if needed. Allow the stew to cook at the stove's lowest setting until the meat falls from the bone and shreds easily, 30 to 45 minutes.

In the meantime, prepare the sofrito. Using a mortar and pestle, mash the garlic, salt, black pepper, and cumin to form a smooth paste. Stir in the sour orange juice and culantro and set aside.

Heat the achiote oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cachucha peppers and sauté until the onion is translucent, six to eight minutes. Add the garlic mixture and combine with one cup of broth and one cup of root vegetables taken from the stew. Mash the vegetables into the sofrito and simmer until well blended, about five minutes. If using, add the minced hot pepper to taste. Add the entire sofrito to the stew and simmer an additional 10 to 15 minutes.

Adjust the seasonings to taste. Remove the chicken bones and pork bones from the stew. Ladle the stew into individual bowls and sprinkle with lime juice. Serve with warmed *casabe* (yuca flatbread) and fresh lime wedges.

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EDU BAYER

Soccer buddies take a break from a game in the center of the city.

HOMAGE TO HAVANA

By Michael Atwood Mason

One afternoon in Havana, while I was walking along the Malecón, a young boy caught my attention. He was playing on top of the thick, cement gray seawall of the esplanade that runs along most of the northern coast of the city. I was only a few hours into my first research trip to Cuba. After unpacking my suitcase, I had bounded out to explore the city, heading first to the Malecón, where I knew Cubans congregated for all sorts of fun—swimming, dancing, hanging out. ¶ The boy was waifish and thin but not afraid to make eye contact. He approached me, speaking in the rapid, singsong accent of Havana's residents.

"Where are you from?"

"The U.S."

"Americano! Really?" He had reason to wonder. It was 1992, and there were very few Americans in Cuba at the time. The boy, who I learned was named Armando, asked why I was in the city. I explained that I was doing research on the country's African-inspired religions. He asked if I was a believer, and when I told him that I was, he invited me to his home, explaining that his father was an important priest and his mother had just been initiated as a priestess.

WE WALKED a couple of blocks to a spartan second-story walk-up, and his mother, Emilia, welcomed me warmly into their home, even though I was total stranger. It was the "special period," just after the Soviets had withdrawn their subsidies for the Cuban economy, and everything was in short supply. Still, she made me coffee, and we sat down to talk. When she asked why I was in Havana, I told more of the story: I was there to do research on the Afro-Cuban religion commonly called Santería but also to become a priest in the tradition. She asked if I knew anyone who could help me along this path. I told her I had spoken to friends and colleagues in the States, so I'd come prepared with a list of potential people.

She gently pressed me. She wanted names. I ran through the first few, and then I mentioned Norma Pedroso. She asked how I knew Norma.

"Her brother Santiago, in Philadelphia, is a friend of mine."

Emilia put down her coffee cup, and looked straight at me, her eyes gleaming. "I used to be married to Santiago Pedroso. He and I have a daughter, named for his sister Norma. Norma is a good woman, and you will not go wrong with her." Three weeks later Santiago's sister initiated me, and when I saw her this past April, this good woman had become an old friend.

One is always making connections of this kind in Cuba, as the years would teach me.

THINK OF ME as your man in Havana. I probably started out, 24 years ago, as naive as the character from the Graham Greene novel. I went with the idea that I could focus narrowly on religious culture and heritage, but I soon learned that the wide world of geopolitics impacted almost every aspect of daily life on the island. Strong personalities at many levels of society make for a good deal of arbitrary behavior, so Cuba is complicated, unpredictable, and sometimes maddening.

Some authors have ventured a theory or hypothesis for Cuba, but I am not that brave. The "island of marvels," as it is sometimes called, is actually an archipelago of more than a thousand islands and keys. It includes the dense urban jungle of downtown Havana, rain forests, swamps, and near deserts. And each location has a thicket of interlocking stories about its history and its inhabitants—people, plants, animals, and spirits.

These stories are told in the very distinct Spanish that Cubans speak, using vocabulary overflowing with African words and an intensely melodic intonation. Cubans delight in these stories, whether they chronicle romance or betrayal, history or heroism.

Many Cuba experts have tried to identify the singular element in the culture that makes it so distinctive. Most people sense it when they visit, and Cubans themselves sometimes allude to it as *chispa*, a certain kind of spark or moxie. Chispa exists in performance and rhythm, in the nation's colors, style, and intensity. In creativity that seems to come as effortlessly as snapping your fingers. There's a certain way that musicians tap out the

CARL DE KEYZER, MAGNUM

A bride-to-be poses in a wedding palace, a large public facility where marriage ceremonies and receptions take place.

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CARL DE KEYZER, MAGNUM

Many city buildings are on the verge of collapse, as this view from a rooftop near Calle Obispo shows.

rhythm of the clave, the syncopated beat of most Cuban music. There is a certain way that baseball fans gather to argue about their favorite teams and players. And there is a certain way that housewives and workers line up to wait for the bus. Not everything can be explained by chispa, to be sure, but you're likely to be struck immediately by the omnipresence of style—so much style.

Cuba is a powerful place. You cannot visit the island without noticing its exquisite geography. And Havana rarely disappoints. Even the street names conjure up small stories from the past and make you share in them as you enunciate with care.

Aranguren, named for Col. Néstor Aranguren, who died fending off Spanish forces in the war for independence.

Bayona, as in count of the house of Bayona. One José de Bayona y Chacón, Fernández de Córdoba y Castellón had been mayor of Havana a couple of times before 1721, when he bought a title from the Spanish crown for 20,000 ducats.

Crespo street is more difficult. It could be for Bartolomé Crespo, who quit his studies to dedicate himself to literature and produced popular satires in Afro-Cuban slang, but it's probably for Arcadio, another hero in the long struggle for independence.

Muralla traces the outline of the fortifications that enclosed the city for centuries.

San Lázaro begins where the old leprosarium was located, next to the seawall.

San Nicolás reflects a time when Catholicism had an official hold on the city.

Teniente Rey translates as "viceroy" and evokes Spain's empire.

Zanja, or ditch, follows the course of the canal that channeled water from a river to the east of the walled city.

CARL DE KEYZER, MAGNUM

A carousel operator naps at an amusement park north of the city near the sea.

This landscape becomes the stage for astonishing moments, glimpses into Havana's particular way of being.

You could cover the whole alphabet this way and not even make it across town.

Most confounding to newcomers, every postal address includes the street name and building number, plus the two cross streets. For example, I have an old friend who lives at Zanja No. 732, between Aramburu and Hospital. Another lives at Lacret No. 508, between Juan Delgado and Goicuria. Each address is like a sound collage with specific coordinates but a distinctive Cuban rhythm, like a poem from Nicolás Guillén's *Sóngoro Cosongo*, which turns the specific cadences and characteristic syllables of Afro-Cuban speech into unforgettable verses.

THIS LANDSCAPE becomes the stage for astonishing moments, glimpses into Havana's particular way of being. And the island of wonders is sometimes unbelievably dull, so you should never forget that all these exceptional moments truly stand out. Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano's *Book of Embraces* tells one such story about Havana. (The book is both fact and fiction and the story is either true or true to type.) A bus driver sees an attractive woman on the street, slows the bus, opens the door, and begins to flirt with her. After several blocks, the driver stops the bus, descends the steps, and follows his siren into the city. The passengers are left at loose ends until one of them takes the wheel and drives to his stop and disembarks. One after another, different passengers step up, drive to their stops, and get off. This continues until the bus comes to the end of its route.

LATE ONE AFTERNOON in the winter of 1995, after a long day of interviewing people, I rode my bike home along the city's esplanade—not far from where I met Armando. A rainstorm had just washed over the city, and everything was still wet. As my bike splashed through a huge puddle near the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital, I noticed an old man standing on the seawall, facing the bay. His white hair made a stark contrast with his dark skin and the deep gray-blue of the stormy sea. He was pounding on a guitar and pouring his heart into a song to the water.

I stopped to listen but did not disturb him. Was his song dedicated to Yemayá, the generous great mother of the sea? Did he just need to get out of his apartment after the storm? Or was this just the idiosyncratic habit of an unusual old man? No matter his motives, you could hear the skill in his playing and the passion in his voice.

A few years later, when the *Buena Vista Social Club* took the world by storm in the late 1990s, I was surprised to see the face of the old man in the album art. He was none other than Ibrahim Ferrer, the brilliant vocalist who played with bandleader Pacho Alonso and the legendary Benny Moré in the 1950s before becoming part of the *Buena Vista Social Club*. Anywhere else, this sort of surprising performance might have seemed strange, but in Havana a marvelous concert played for the sea is part of everyday reality.

MY FRIEND Erasmo Rey Palma never tires of telling a story about his father, who had worked as a seasonal sugarcane cutter before the revolution. Erasmo says his father remembers going hungry every year, when the family ran out of money a few months before the harvest. But after the 1959 revolution, when times were good, his father would prepare *lechón*, roast pork, on Christmas Eve. He always bought two pigs, one large and one small. He hung them outside over the patio and poured boiling water on their skin to

make their tiny hairs stand up. He shaved each one with great care. (Making lechón is tedious work.) He marinated the pork in bitter orange juice with cumin, garlic, and onions. Then he carefully roasted the two pigs side by side.

The large pig went to the family table for everyone to share. The small one was his private prize, and he would eat every last scrap of meat with his bare hands. When he had finished this celebration of excess, his hands would be covered in the juices and fat from the pork, and he would bring them together and cover his face. Then he would run them up over his face and head, anointing himself with the remains of the feast. This idiosyncratic delight in the pleasures of life is all the more poignant given the long history of scarcity that marks the personal story of this man and the island as a whole.

IT IS NO SURPRISE that these are the same people who are credited with inventing magical realism. Cuban author Alejo Carpentier wrote passionately about the "marvelous real" as a way to approach the improbable and effusive tropical environment as well as the surprising nature of history in this part of the world. Gabriel García Márquez is said to have encountered Carpentier after penning the first draft of *A Hundred Years of Solitude* and decided to rewrite the whole book to infuse it with magical or unreal elements.

"It is neither beautiful nor ugly; rather, it is amazing because it is strange. Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous," Carpentier wrote in his 1975 essay "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real." The baroque, he says, "is an art in motion, an art of propulsion, an art that goes from a center toward the outside and breaks its own margins."

This constant movement in multiple directions is endlessly interesting in architecture and politics, literature and religion. In fact, some Cubans even refer to themselves as having baroque personalities, filled with contradictions and paradoxes that they celebrate. Carpentier cited Afro-Cuban religious altars as evidence of spontaneous surrealism in Cuba, because they unite many disparate objects and images to evoke and honor the deities.

AT THE HEART of Santería sits a trickster god, an unreliable but helpful messenger who everyone ironically relies upon for communication between humans and the heavens. His name is Elegguá, and he appears in dreams to make claims on your reality. He is always the first and last deity honored in ceremonies. Cuban adepts commonly say that he closes the road to difficulties and opens the road to blessings. He appears both as a child and as an old man. He places people on your path, like that boy I met on the Malecón. Uniting all opposites, Elegguá controls life and death. Across the city, he is honored with ceremonies at the crossroads, signifying life's intersections, where differing paths meet, choices are made, and the meaning of those choices becomes real. Dynamic and vital, he propels Cuban believers toward a future built from their skills, their chispa, and their objective conditions. As Galeano says in "Celebration of Contradictions," a panegyric to both Elegguá and the marvelous real, "We are the sum of our efforts to change who we are...the endlessly astonishing synthesis of the contradictions of everyday life."

That ever changing and always surprising quotidian reality, the unexpected connections that I have come to expect, are what make Havana my favorite place on Earth. ⊙

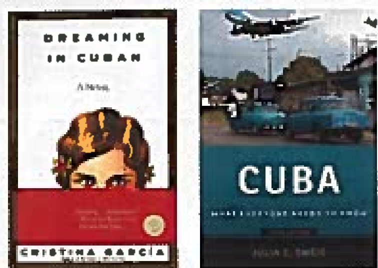
EDU BAYER

Vintage automobiles like this red convertible are often used as taxis to show tourists the sights.

It is no surprise that these are the same people who are credited with inventing magical realism.

Contributing writers and experts from the Smithsonian submitted their suggestions for Cuba-themed books, movies, and online resources to enjoy before traveling. Compiled by Eric Zurita.

BOOKS



Julia Sweig primes travelers heading to the island with ***Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know***, an evenhanded account of the country's complex political past.

Dreaming in Cuban is Cristina García's multigenerational novel about three Cuban women in a family divided by politics and geography.

In ***Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba*** Tom Gjelten weaves the history of the rum-making family into that of the island where the company originated.

Patrick Symmes's ***The Boys From Dolores*** follows pupils at a Jesuit school in the late 1930s and early '40s, adolescents who would later lead the country, Fidel and Raúl Castro among them.

Alfredo Estrada provides an intimate history, extending from Columbus to Castro, in ***Havana: Autobiography of a City.***

In ***Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*** Jon Lee Anderson recounts the tumultuous story of the famous guerrilla leader.

Carlos Eire recalls his experience as one of 14,000 children airlifted off the island in 1962 in ***Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy,*** winner of a National Book Award.

Leonardo Padura Fuentes's novel ***Adiós Hemingway***—part mystery, part biographical study of the Nobel Prize-winning American writer—is a thrilling investigation of a murder case that takes place during a fictional Hemingway's final days in Cuba.

Evoking a raw realism that has led critics to call him the Caribbean Bukowski, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez puts readers at the center of a hungry, post-Soviet-era city in ***Dirty Havana Trilogy.***

Rachel Weiss analyzes contemporary artwork on the island in ***To and From Utopia in the New Cuban Art***, exploring how the revolution led to a unique artistic movement.

In ***Pitching Around Fidel*** *Sports Illustrated*'s S. L. Price embarks on a quest to understand the passion Cubans have for sports, traveling through the country to meet some of its athletic heroes.

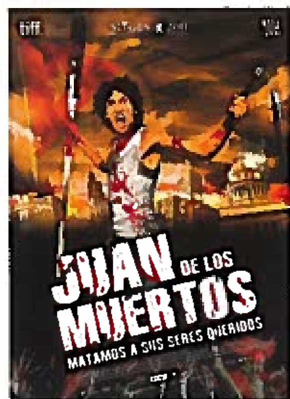
MOVIES

In ***Habanastation*** (2011) director Ian Padrón follows a day in the lives of two boys from different neighborhoods who exemplify growing inequalities under the island's socialist system. Written and directed by Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti, ***Viva Cuba*** (2005) explores the effect of emigration on a budding friendship.

Based on a short story by Cuban writer Senel Paz, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's Oscar-winning ***Fresa y Chocolate*** (1993) features a gay artist unhappy with the government's attitude toward the LGBT community. Gutiérrez Alea's romantic comedy ***Guantanamera*** (1995) depicts life in Cuba during the "special period" of the 1990s, as a woman from the province of Guantanamo brings the body of her deceased aunt back to Havana.

A fictional account of Benny Moré's life as a *son* and *bolero* singer, Jorge Luis Sánchez's ***El Benny*** (2006) includes new versions of the artist's songs by contemporary Cuban musicians such as Juan Formell and Orishas.

After leaving his homeland, a Cuban intellectual finds himself disenchanted with the bustle of Paris, Tokyo, London, and New York in Miguel Coyula's ***Memorias del Desarrollo*** (2010).



Alejandro Brugués's horror spoof ***Juan de los Muertos*** (2011) depicts a zombie-ridden capital, bringing satirical humor to Cuban hardships and reflecting Cuba's growing cinematic freedom.

BOOK COVERS: (TOP LEFT) BALLANTINE BOOKS; (TOP RIGHT) OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
MOVIE POSTER: EVERETT COLLECTION

MUSIC

In ***Al Final de Este Viaje*** (1978) Silvio Rodríguez writes songs that are both political and poetic. He inspired the music of singer-songwriter Carlos Varela, often referred to as Cuba's Bob Dylan; Varela's ***All His Greatest Hits*** (2013) features several of his best ballads.

Interactivo is an experimental music collective whose constantly changing sound draws on jazz, soul, rap, and funk while staying true to Afro-Cuban rhythms, as evidenced in its latest album, ***Cubanos por el Mundo*** (2011).

WEBSITES & BLOGS

OnCuba offers a fresh, young perspective on the island; its articles and columns help to bridge the gap between political extremes during this time of diplomatic change. *oncubamagazine.com*

Translating Cuba is a compilation of translated blogs written by Cubans who live on the island or in exile, including independent journalists and human rights activists. *translatingcuba.com*

Sponsored by Havana Club rum, **Havana Cultura** promotes the arts in the capital, giving artists a platform to share their work in music, dance, and literature. *havana-cultura.com*

The Farber Collection, founded in 2001, encompasses contemporary work by Cuban-born artists living around the world. *thefarbercollection.com*

A side project of the Farber Foundation, **Cuban Art News** gives visitors up-to-date information on Cuban art and culture, including interviews, videos, and exhibition details. *cubanartnews.org*

Cuba Junky provides useful information on car rentals, flights, sites, and accommodations. *cuba-junky.com*

INSTAGRAM

Artist Jauretsi Saizarbitoria shows the latest trends in culture and art on the island. **@thenewcuba**

The Ramiro A. Fernández collection displays classic images from 19th- and 20th-century Cuba. **@cuba_then**

APPS

AlaMesa provides a database of cafés and restaurants in 13 of the island's 15 provinces—more than 500 in Havana alone—listing menus, opening hours, and average dish prices for each establishment. **Cuba Casa Directory,** like AlaMesa, functions off-line, connecting travelers to owners of *casas particulares*—the Cuban version of B&Bs.

Cuba Offline Map + City Guide Navigator puts a detailed map of Cuban roads in users' hands; its split screen allows travelers to simultaneously follow directions and take photographs en route.

Listen to the latest hits Habaneros are enjoying on **CubanFlow,** an app featuring thousands of songs by Cuba natives.

CD: GRAFFITI MUSIC GROUP

LAST STOP

"LA RUMBA" BY ANTONIO SÁNCHEZ ARAUJO, OIL ON CANVAS, RAMOS MASTER COLLECTION

Ready to rumba

On Sunday afternoons in Havana and nearby Matanzas, it's not unusual to see Cubans make drums out of stools, domino tables, and glass bottles—and erupt into a spontaneous gathering of song and dance. After all, *rumba* means "party." The lively music and dance form emerged in the mid-19th century, when the drumming of enslaved Africans blended with the melodies of Spanish colonizers—"a Spanish legacy Africanized in the Cuban crucible," explains music historian Maya Roy.

It was a protest of sorts, a vital form of self-expression for people denied other freedoms. Slavery was abolished in Cuba by 1886, yet the rumba continued to evolve. Dancers developed different styles: the primarily male *columbia*, the sensual *yambú*, and the pelvis-thrusting *guaguancó*, Cuba's most popular form. The rumba's place in society also shifted. In 1925, President Gerardo Machado banned "bodily contortions" and drums "of African nature" in public. But the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro later embraced the rumba as an Afro-Latin creation of the working class. By then, the syncopated rhythms had already made their way into the jazz scenes of New Orleans and New York. Today's international, ballroom-style rumba bears little resemblance to its namesake, which some say is still best learned on the streets. ○

—*Sasha Ingber*