

Titan Properties

A fishing village – some stories from El Rompido

On the Costa de la Luz, about 50 kilometres from the Spanish/Portuguese border, is a fishing village called El Rompido. It is a special spot, a sheltered harbour. At this point the Rio Piedras runs headlong, eastwards, out of the Atlantic Ocean towards the coast, then it turns north and flows parallel to the land, forming a long estuarine waterway, south-west facing, protected by a sand-spit called La Flecha, 'The Arrow'. The Rio Piedras estuary is home to sea and land birds, is rich with marine life and a vital source of living and working for people from pre-historic

received encouragement from El Rompido's inhabitants, who have been reassured by Titan Properties that local people and newcomers will receive a fair business deal, together with Titan's total commitment to respecting and preserving the charm of the area and the lifestyle of its people.

During the next few months, we would like you to meet some of the people of El Rompido and neighbouring towns in these pages. We will be meeting local people and also internationals from Germany, Holland, France and Britain, who all enjoy life here, some of them working in

and air-dried as a staple diet to feed millions, but it is now also master-minded and high-financed by the Japanese and their fondness for sushi.

Huge fishing fleets with the capacity to freeze and the worldwide monitoring of coastal and international waters during the seventies caused the collapse of many traditional fishing communities, with more livelihoods lost over subsequent years as a result of over-fishing and globalisation. In the face of continuous change, the mariners of El Rompido have adapted. They have continued to work, to trade and to live in the place that they love.

Apart from fishing, the people of these local provinces are famous throughout the world for another marine tradition – sailing. For it is from the Costa de la Luz that Columbus selected his fearless and experienced sailors.

Cándido Burgos Flores

'I love this precious village, with its romantic air, its scenery, the river, the sandbar La Flecha and its natural open spaces'.

Sailor, fisherman and author of the book *Memorias de El Rompido*, Cándido Burgos Flores is a versatile, talented man with considerable personal knowledge of the history and traditional life of his home town. Like most citizens of El Rompido, especially those who have anything at all to do with fishing, he is qualified to comment because his family have lived in this place for several generations, and he has taken part in every marine activity all his life.

As a child, Cándido was privileged to know life as it was lived through timeless ages, and as it will never be lived again, on the sand-bar of La Flecha. Every day was long and the work was tough, often dangerous, especially when the tuna were running and the almadraba was set up. Apart from the almadraba, fish were caught sometimes only one at a time, hand lines were used from rowing or sailing boats which had to be hand-built. Nets were costly and took many hours of maintenance. There were no motor boats, no trawlers, no nets the size of football pitches, no weather reports on the radio, electronic navigational aids, or boat-to-

boat communications.

Men and boys used every ounce of their physical strength and every cell of their ingenuity to catch fish for nourishment and enjoyment. Women and girls drew water from wells, cabins were lit by candles and oil lamps, food was cooked over open fires. However, life was full of seasonal joys, in a place of rare beauty, isolated from the rest of Andalucía for most of each day by the fast flowing tidal waters of the Rio Piedras.

With very little money, but a plentiful supply of fish, the sailors of La Flecha used to row or sail across to the mainland side of the estuary, where El Rompido stands today (or they walked many miles across the tidal marshes at the far end, to El Terron and Isla Cristina) to exchange their surplus supplies of marine produce with the country people. This barter system was called 'cambalache' and the sailors

speed of motor boats and jet skis that shoot up the lagoon and back, disrespecting the 6-knot speed rule which has for years guaranteed the safety and tranquillity of the river that is still, after all, a working waterway.

For the future of El Rompido and for his children's children, Cándido hopes most urgently that the marine traditions are conserved and also the fragile, lovely landscape.

Three generations of feisty ladies

Ana Maria Cristóbal is the pretty young woman who runs the La Singladura bar in El Rompido. Her mother, Manoli Carro, helps her and they are often assisted by Ana's grandmother, Ana Camacho. The three women were all born and brought up in El Rompido, in a family whose marine traditions go back to the days when the fishermen



Cándido Burgos Flores

times until the present day. The estuary and the surrounding land is designated protected natural parkland.

As the world changes and becomes more hectic, over-priced and over-populated, places like El Rompido are a rare and desirable treat. Some people living and working in El Rompido, after many years of frantic business in the City of London, are Andrew Benitz from London and his girlfriend Kelly Gatchell (from Africa, who also speaks Spanish) together with Gustav Rehnqvist from Sweden, who speaks English and rapid-fire fluent Spanish, with his wife Teresa (who is from Seville). When they first came across the village it was love at first sight and the decision was made to set up home there. Titan Properties was initially set up in Seville three years ago, but two years later the company moved to El Rompido, opening its first office in March 2006 and a second in November. The business has

tourism, golf, sailing and so on.

The first part of the story, naturally, concerns fishermen, their families and the sea.

Because of its location on the estuary and the quality of the water, the 'almadraba' method of fishing assured the livelihood of El Rompido and its neighbours for centuries. The 'almadraba' is a complex and ancient fishing technique, said to have been used by the Romans and passed on to the Spanish by the Arabs. It is used to catch tuna on their seasonal migration to and from the Mediterranean spawning grounds. The method consists of layers of netting anchored to the sea floor, forming a maze, leading to various pools of clean, clear water, flowing into each other from deep to shallower water. This method is still respected today. If the quota system is applied, the technique is selective and sustainable. It continues to be used in a few locations. Traditionally tuna has always been salted, canned



Ana, Manoli & Ana

were able to feed their families on fresh vegetables, fruit, oil, cheese, milk and meat, while the country folk could rely on a year-round supply of fish and seafood, especially valuable during the winter months.

Cándido remembers that on the mainland, when the water was extracted from the well, it was distributed through the town, carried on the back of a donkey. The water was kept in terracotta vessels called 'búcaros' with two spouts, one on each side, to keep the water fresh and sweet, and either drunk straight from the spout or ladled into clay mugs.

These days Cándido enjoys the summer months, but admits that he hates the roar and the

all lived in cabins on La Flecha. Although immensely proud of their heritage, these women don't look backwards. They work as hard as their ancestors did, running a popular meeting place in the main square, often packed with people inside, on three floors of tables and a further twenty tables outside. Manoli's nephew, Enrique, owns and manages the business.

La Singladura means 'a day's run' in nautical terms. In the old days this 'singladura' was how long it took to bring the catch to the mainland, barter or sell it, and return to La Flecha. Ana Camacho's mother used to do a day's 'singladura' walking across the tidal marshes between La Flecha and El

Terron, and all the way to the prosperous coastal 'island' of Isla Cristina to sell fish, before returning home. This was her work, and her salary was seven pesetas per day, four cents of a Euro in today's terms. As a young woman Ana herself used to travel from El Rompido by donkey to sell fish in Lepe and Cartaya, while her sister helped care for her seven children, two girls and five boys. Today Ana is 73 years old, full of vitality and eager to share her stories with people who cannot believe how quickly life has changed in just a few generations. She sets a good example for today's retirees. She is jubilosa (full of joy) but not jubilada (retired). In the afternoons, when she has finished helping in the kitchen at La Singladura, she and her sister-in-law take a walk around the village, chatting to friends, visiting family, taking the sun. She is never bored. She knows her worth; she knows that she is helping her family to pay their way in life. She remembers that her house was one of twenty-four built for the sailors of El Rompido, it cost 200 pesetas forty years ago (€1.20 today). At that time she, her husband and children could go out to the estuary and in one day's work they would net up to 40kg of coquinas (clams), such was the richness of the sea's harvest.

What do these three women want for their village? What they don't want is to see its marine



Joaquín Ceada Flores

tradition lost nor do they want 'another Marbella' with high buildings, however luxurious they may be. They don't want La Flecha to be another La Manga. They are pleased that El Rompido continues to grow and they are proud that it attracts the interest of Spanish and international tourists alike. They want the village and their lives to remain unspoilt – they have high hopes for the future.

Joaquín Ceada Flores

Meet a successful, contented man. Joaquín, whose proud heritage includes ancestors who lived on La Flecha, has been working with his family in El Rompido all his life. Like Cándido he has served his full apprenticeship fishing these waters since his teenage years. With an unerring eye for a tasty fish to eat, he built his restaurant, Paseo Marítimo, thirteen years ago. This is one of the finest places to enjoy the fresh produce of the region and



"El Pitu"

the shining view of the estuary.

Joaquín's grand passion is now golf and he has applauded the arrival of the golf courses. Joaquín has two daughters, both of whom are studying in Huelva, preparing to make their future in the health and beauty sector by opening a hairdressing and beautician business in their home town, El Rompido. They are continuing the long line of the family on the Costa de la Luz - a decision which brings deep satisfaction to their parents.

Francisco Jesús Rodríguez ('El Pitu')

Francisco adores his work. Early every morning he goes to the fish market in Isla Cristina or Punta Umbria, where the Huelva fleet delivers its daily catch from the Atlantic 'Coast of Light'. Francisco talks about his family with affection – they are dedicated to helping him succeed. His enthusiasm is demonstrated when he fillets a fish for a customer in his gleaming clean pescadería on the corner of the Cartaya Road and Calle Rio Odiel in El Rompido.

He recognises that his children may not want to follow him in the marine tradition once they have finished their education, but if they do, Francisco will be enchanted.

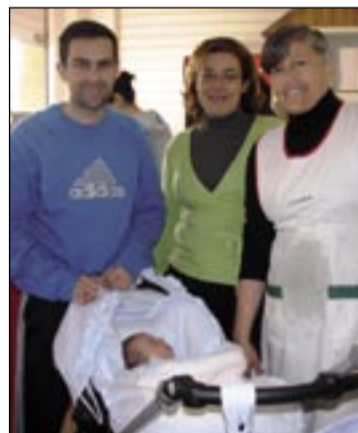
He wants his children to have a childhood like his own – he played in the sandy streets

of El Rompido and after school he and his companions climbed trees to pick and eat the fruit. Francisco says that no matter how happy he is now, he will always be nostalgic for his childhood days.

Francisco serves a customer, Carmen Jiménez, who was born in Badajoz and lived in Germany for 30 years. When she returned to Spain she and her husband searched the coast for a special place to live and retire. Once she discovered Urverosa at El Rompido, she looked no further. She is welcomed into the life of the town and she finds its people friendly, pleasant and likeable – all she wants is good health so that she can continue to live here for a long, long time to come.

Ana Carro de La Pescadería Miramar

Necessity dictates that El Rompido divides their loyalties when it comes to buying their fish. The first fishmonger in El Rompido was the one at the Miramar supermarket. A lot of people buy one kilo of fish at Miramar and one kilo from



Ana Carro with family

Francisco at 'El Pitu'. In a relatively small community it's share and share alike.

At Miramar fishmongers you will find Ana Carro. Ana is helped by her brother, Pepe, who runs the carnicería at Miramar. She has an amazing array of fish at her counter; cod, sole, whiting, sea-bream, turbot, live lobsters, clams and sea-snails. Ana handles fish not only with art and skill, but also with enthusiasm. She advises clients on how to prepare and cook the fish for the best taste. She knows the value of a good catch – the sea is in Ana's blood. She is the elder sister of Manoli Carro and one of the two daughters and five sons belonging to Ana Camacho, and mother of Enrique (some of whom you met earlier in our story at La Singladura, and

some of whom you will meet in later missives). Ana is totally enchanted with El Rompido, whenever she goes away she looks forward to returning home. She loves her life, the climate, the people, the newcomers, the hotels, the new houses – she is ready, bring them all on!

Restaurante La Ola

This is one of the friendliest places to savour the wealth of the sea. You may meet the owners, Lázaro Pérez and Francisca Hurtado, who have had the business in El Rompido for over thirty-five years and they are dedicated to serving customers with professionalism and friendliness into the future.



Lighthouse from La Ola

Paco García is Francisco's nephew and the affection between them is obvious. He has worked at La Ola for thirty years. His grandparents lived on La Flecha and when he looks over at the crumbling, romantic ruins of the abandoned canning factory there, he sees it as a symbol of the life of the town. He is optimistic and positive about regional development, but he insists that El Rompido should be left just as it is, a paradise. He has three children, they are

studying tourism and sports coaching and one of them is a champion dinghy sailor.

Ioan Solomon (called Juan) came here from Romania with his wife and daughter four years ago. Juan is delighted with life in El Rompido and his work at La Ola. He loves the place, his daughter attends the local school and the family now speaks Spanish. He has been warmly welcomed into the life of the fishing village, and is described by the owners as 'part of the family'.

Paco Bernal - Restaurante Caribe II

The entrance to Paco's restaurant is a long, narrow courtyard, like a Córdoba

patio, hung with flowers. It has an advantage over Córdoba - it overlooks the sea. From every window there is a Caribbean view to be savoured along with the tantalizing smell of freshly-cooked fish, while you scoop up your starter helping of coquinas in garlicky olive oil, or relish a fine slice of jamón ibérico, taken with a glass of Caribe's own vintage wine. Paco's forefathers lived on La Flecha and worked with the tuna almadraba. They suffered



Paco Bernal & Calin Zoicas

a setback in 1965 when the almadraba was moved from El Rompido and the packing was done in a more powerful and modernised processing plant in Isla Cristina. In spite of this, Paco had a happy childhood

and still operational. After his education, Paco went straight to work in the restaurant business and has been owner/manager of Caribe II for more than thirty years. He has a staff of stylish and efficient waiters.

house joke is that Paco is going to re-name him Calín Zoicas-Bernal.

Paco enjoys his life, even though in July and August he is totally occupied with running the restaurant most hours of



View from La Ola to La Flecha

in El Rompido because his father was appointed keeper of the lighthouse. This was the old lighthouse of 1861 and in

Calín Zoicas came from Romania three years ago in search of a good future and he found it with Paco Bernal. He



Francisco Hurtada & customer of 30 years

1975 a new, taller one was built – 95 metres high, visible at sea for twenty-four nautical miles

likes the peace of the place and the warmth and affection of the people, so much so that the in-

the day. Paco would like his children to continue living here and he urges them to focus their future on the future of the town. He encourages development projects in El Rompido and he is happy for it to take its place as an international tourist destination, but he trusts that the political leaders will take the wishes of the locals into account as they plan the progress of El Rompido.

The people of El Rompido are not yearning for the past, but the tranquillity of their childhood has informed their opinions of the future. They know that they will need to struggle to retain their traditions, but they are no strangers to adversity. Their past has given them confidence, political astuteness, openness and impatience with insincerity. They are not parochial and inward-looking, as some fishing communities tend to be. Yes, they love a simple, straightforward life, but they also know that their lifestyle in the place they call 'home' has become very desirable to others. This community has seen fundamental changes to their lives and work as a result of European and international fishing policies and intense over-fishing. They have faced challenges before and they embrace change, but understandably, they intend to set the new agenda on their own terms.

Jennifer Day and Teresa Cordero will be bringing you more stories about local people in the months to come.

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