



Above: In between giving passionate performances of flamenco, Carmen likes to indulge in her other passion: cooking! She was incredibly impressed by the plate of tapas presented to her personally by the Al Hambra chef, Alfonso.

VIVA ESPAÑA!

## CARMEN CANTERO

FOR THE FLAMENCO DANCER WHO LOVES SPANISH FOOD AL HAMBRA WAS THE PERFECT SPOT FOR LUNCH



**T**he setting on the terrace at Al Hambra couldn't have been more perfect for our encounter with flamenco dancer Carmen Cantero who was in Dubai last week to perform at the Madinat Theatre.

Spanish music played in the background and a plate of tasty looking tapas awaited us in the centre of the table. The sound of Carmen chatting to Chef Alfonso in their native tongue almost made us feel like we'd been transported to a bodega in downtown Seville – although the Burj Al Arab in the background was a bit of a give away to our real location.

It turns out that the dancer and chef have a lot in common: they are both from Madrid and they share a passion for food and cooking. Before Carmen dived in to her plate of paella, we asked her a few questions about dancing, dining and Dubai.

### How old were you when you started dancing flamenco?

I started dancing for fun when I was very young, but it was just a hobby, I didn't turn professional until 10 years ago when I created the Carmen Cantero Dance Company.

### Where is the company based?

In Madrid.

### How often do you travel with the company?

It depends what our commitments are. At the moment, part of the company is in India and part of the company is here in Dubai.

### How many dancers do you have in the company now?

The core company is made up of 20 dancers but we can add to that or reduce that number

whenever we want because most professional dancers work for more than one company.

### When you are away from Madrid what do you miss the most?

I love travelling so much that when I'm away, I don't really miss anything. It just highlights one thing – I love living in Madrid and would never want to live anywhere else.

### When you travel is there one thing you never leave home without?

My toothbrush (laughs).

### Which is your favourite city to visit in the world?

Paris is the capital of the world as far as I'm concerned. Singapore, Tokyo and New York are great, but Paris is the best, London is fantastic too, but it is too cold for me.

## ALFONSO TAPAS

**Cod Brandada:** Mix cod with milk and corn oil and bake.

**Ham Croquettes:** Roll ham in bechamel sauce and cornflakes and deep fry.

**Garlic Prawns:** Sauté prawns with olive oil and green chili.

**Grilled Melon:** Grill slices of melon for a few minutes then serve with crispy chorizo.

**Piquillo peppers:** Coat peppers in olive oil and then deep fry.

**Seafood kebabs:** Alternate pieces of salmon, prawn and pepper, coat in olive oil and grill.

**Strawberry Gazpacho:** Blend together tomatoes, strawberries, red peppers, onions and cucumber with 1 cup canned tomato juice and 1/2 cup olive oil. Add 3 lightly beaten eggs, pepper to taste and fresh dill.



Above: The interior of Al Hambra is as Moorish as the food. Right: Chef Alfonso previously worked at Spain's most famous restaurant.

### What do you enjoy most about travelling?

I love meeting new people and experiencing new cultures, but most of all I love going to traditional markets and seeing all the local produce: fish, meat, fruit and vegetables. I love cooking so the food markets really excite me.

### So you are a bit of a chef in your spare time?

Yes, I love cooking for my friends, it makes me happy to know that they are going to enjoy the food.

### Typically, what kind of food do you prepare?

I usually cook Spanish dishes. Spanish food has its traditions, but it's always evolving and growing, that keeps it interesting. Cooking is really fashionable in Spain at the moment.

### What's the toughest thing to get the hang of when you are learning flamenco?

Gas-ordinating your whole body



## ONION SOUP



### Ingredients:

Onion  
Chicken stock  
Olive oil  
Sugar  
Cream  
Bread  
Parmesan Cheese

### Method:

Sauté onion in olive oil. Add Chicken stock, bring to boil, leave to simmer for 20 minutes. Make caramel with sugar and add cream. Toast bread. Put onion and cheese on top of the bread. Melt under grill.



to the rhythms, getting your arms and legs moving together is really difficult. But the hardest thing is learning to dance on your toes in elevated shoes.

### Is this visit to Dubai part of a tour?

I'd love to do a tour of the whole of the Middle East, but for now we're just here in Dubai. I'd like to bring Antonio Marqués here too. I manage his company and he's one of the best performers in the whole of Spain.

### Do you have any unusual superstitions about performing?

No, nothing. There is a superstition that it's bad luck to have yellow on stage on your opening night, but I don't believe in anything like that.

### You sound very confident, but do you ever get any nerves before you go on stage?

Sometimes if rehearsals or something else hasn't been going smoothly, I get nervous, but normally, no.

### Is this your first time to Dubai?

I have been twice before. I really love it.

### Do you have to eat any special diet to stay in shape?

I eat anything, but I try to avoid junk food.

### Have you ever had any celebrities in the audience when you've performed?

Many times. I have danced for all the kings and queens in Europe as well as Imelda Marcos and Franco, obviously. I don't say it very often, but



Above: Carmen - who is friends with flamenco hunk Joaquín Cortés - says

### Joaquín Cortés is very famous now, what do you think of him as a dancer?

He's a friend of mine. Lots of my dancers have also danced with him. He's so famous now he doesn't need his own company, he just travels with a musician and when he needs someone to dance with, he just gives one of the girls a call. I think it's a shame that he doesn't perform more traditional flamenco. He dances a very modern style now, but he was classically trained. This type of traditional flamenco is dying and it would be great if, with his international reputation, he could help keep it alive.

### What style of flamenco do you dance?

A little of everything.

### Does this show have a specific theme?

Usually my shows have a theme or a story. For example, last year for the centenary of Don Quixote, we danced his story. But I didn't think that would work in Dubai, so we did smatches of many different shows and stories instead.

### How long does it take to put together a show like this?

It depends, if the dancers already know the moves it takes a few months, but if they have to learn the choreography from scratch it takes much longer.

### What are your ambitions for the future?

My only ambition is to see flamenco danced in every corner of the world.

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