

→ Madrid: the ultimate Almodóvar muse

My life and my films are linked to Madrid like the two sides of a coin.

Pedro Almodóvar

Pedro Almodóvar is, together with Luis Buñuel, the most international Spanish filmmaker of all time. Born in Calzada de Calatrava (Ciudad Real) in 1949, he moved to Madrid in the late 1960s, determined to make movies. In 2018 he was made an honorary citizen, receiving the title of “adoptive son of Madrid”.

Madrid has always provided Almodóvar with “the perfect landscape and sassy fauna” for his work. There are actresses, known as ‘chicas Almodóvar’, who have starred in a number of his films, but if there’s one muse that he’s always been loyal to, it’s Madrid. The city appears, to varying degrees in all his movies, from *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980) to *Pain & Glory* (2019). We invite you to explore Madrid and Pedro Almodóvar’s career by visiting some of the main locations of his films. An utterly Alm-odovarian route, in a city straight out of a movie scene!

ALMODÓVAR’S EARLY DAYS IN

MADRID

01. TELEFÓNICA BUILDING AND GRAN VÍA AVENUE

Pedro Almodóvar arrived in Madrid in the late 1960s, planning to enrol in the Official Film School. His dream was frustrated, however, when he found that it had been temporarily shut down by Franco. After working a series of jobs, Pedro passed a public examination that enabled him to join Compañía Telefónica Nacional de España, the national telephone company, in an administrative role in 1971. He worked in various offices, including the Telefónica HQ on Gran Vía avenue. Construction on the skyscraper, one of the first to be built in Europe, began in 1929. In its day, it took pride in being the tallest on the continent. Today it hosts various temporary exhibitions as well as a permanent exhibition on the history of telecommunications. The Telefónica Building features prominently in Almodóvar’s films. It’s seen in Pepa’s view from her rooftop in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* as well as from El Palacio de la Prensa in *The Flower of My Secret* and from Chicote in *Broken Embraces*. Curiously, Gran Vía avenue -where it’s located- is only ever seen through a window: specifically, through those of the now defunct Manila café in *Law of Desire*.



02. THE MOVIDA MOVEMENT IN LA PALMA STREET AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

With the money he earned at Telefónica, Pedro bought his first Super-8 camera, focusing all his efforts on recording short films and soaking up the cultural atmosphere of the Movida, the counter-cultural movement that emerged in the capital during the years of the transition to democracy. His first feature-length film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, which he began to shoot in 1978, does a wonderful job capturing this fast-paced, experimental, fun and non-conformist Madrid. One of the hubs of the Movida movement which appears in the film was the flat where Costus (the pseudonym of painters Enrique Naya and Juan José Carrero) lived at number 14, Calle de la Palma. Although the flat is now a communications agency, it’s worth visiting the area, as several establishments nearby provide a deeper understanding of the spirit of the era. At La Vía Láctea (no. 18, Calle Velarde), you can see reproductions of paintings created by Costus to decorate this legendary 1970s bar. At El Penta (no. 4, Calle de la Palma), a corner bar where Alaska and Almodóvar met, the walls are covered in photos that pay tribute to Antonio Vega, who immortalised the bar in his song *La chica de ayer*. At the more recent bar-museum Madrid Me Mata (no. 31, Corredera Alta de San Pablo), there’s a wonderful 200 m² exhibition featuring hundreds of items and mementos donated by key figures from the Movida.

03. EL RASTRO FLEA MARKET AND LA BOBIA

San Millán, 3

After a night of partying at El Penta, La Vía Láctea or Rockola, it was common to head to the Rastro flea market to keep the fun going. *Labyrinth of Passion* shows us what the atmosphere was like in La Bobia, where the characters played by Imanol Arias and Fabio McNamara meet. Pedro and McNamara also teamed up to form one of the Movida’s most iconic musical duos: Almodóvar & McNamara. The Rastro was also immortalised in *Dark Habits*, as the place where the main characters, a group of nuns, sell food, the only thing you can no longer purchase in the city’s biggest street market since a law enacted in 2000 prohibited its sale.



04. PLAZA DE SANTA ANA

Plaza de Santa Ana was a favourite hang-out for the city’s hippies in the 1970s. Almodóvar frequented the square and has a great affection for it, which is why it’s probably one



of his most common filming locations: the Room Mate Alicia Hotel is the Decadance Academy in *Talk to Her*, bar Manolete, which is now the restaurant in the Reina Victoria Hotel, appears in *Talk to Her*, and the top-floor flat where Paco Raba’s character lived in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* can be found at number 6 in the square.

HISTORIC AND PICTURE-POSTCARD

MADRID

05. PLAZA MAYOR

Pedro Almodóvar steers clear of the sort of iconic Madrid sites commonly found on postcards, avoiding tourist hotspots like the Royal Palace and the Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofía museums. These aren’t the places where Madrid’s residents go about their daily lives, which is why his characters don’t either. Pedro does, however, occasionally devote some time to picture-postcard Madrid, especially in his two most Madrid-centric films: *The Flower of My Secret* and *Live Flesh*. Plaza Mayor is the setting for one of the most romantic scenes in all of Pedro’s films: Ángel’s confession of love to Leo in *The Flower of My Secret*. Pedro shot it in the 400-year-old square in the early hours of the morning, to make it look like an enormous stage.



06. PUERTA DE MOROS AND THE BASILICA OF SAN FRANCISCO EL GRANDE

In *The Flower of My Secret*, Leo puts on a pair of boots her husband gave her –the two are going through a rough patch– just to remember him. Suddenly, they start feeling tight and she can’t get them off. She lies down in the street, seeking help. It’s then that we see, in the background, the circular dome of the Basilica of San Francisco el Grande. The dome is the one of the largest in all of Christendom, third to Saint Peter’s in the Vatican and the Pantheon in Rome. The basilica’s interior, which features paintings by Zurbarán and Goya, is well worth a visit. Leo is ultimately aided by a junkie at the fountain in Plaza de Puerta de Moros, who takes off her boots in exchange for five thousand pesetas. Today a visit to the Basilica of San Francisco el Grande won’t cost you nearly as much, and you’re sure to enjoy it.

07. VIADUCTO DE SEGOVIA BRIDGE

It’s on this bridge that Paz Vega’s character attempts suicide in *I’m so Excited*. María Cardinal, a character obsessed with death in *Matador*, often visits it, having witnessed a death by suicide there soon after arriving in the city.

08. PLAZA DEL ALAMILLO

This charming square is where the character Becky del Páramo buys a basement flat in *High Heels*, because she wants to die in the bed where she was born. Almodóvar’s inspiration for the scene was his own father, who travelled from Extremadura to Castile-La Mancha when he was battling cancer in order to die in the bed where he was born.

09. FROM LA BOLSA STREET TO PUERTA DE ALCALÁ GATE

At the beginning of *Live Flesh*, set in 1960s Madrid under Franco’s regime, Pilar Bardem’s character helps a young Penélope Cruz give birth on a bus. Ironically, the two actresses are now mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Once again, Almodóvar drew inspiration for this scene from real life: a birth took place on a public bus in Madrid in 1963, with the mayor promising to provide a home and job for the baby once it was grown. The film begins in a rooming house in Calle de la Bolsa. The two women stop a bus in Plaza de la Provincia and travel down Calle Alcalá before coming to a halt next to the Hall of Realms, where the baby is born. The bus starts to move again, and it’s then that Bardem addresses the newborn, telling him: “Look Víctor, Madrid!” Immediately after this we see the magnificent Puerta de Alcalá, a gate which has, in effect and as the song by Ana Belén and Víctor Manuel goes, stood unmoved “watching time go by” for over two hundred years. It’s undoubtedly one of the city’s most iconic landmarks.

CULTURE, FILM AND THEATRE

10. CONDE DUQUE CULTURAL CENTRE

One of Almodóvar’s most memorable scenes takes place at the entrance to Conde Duque: Carmen Maura, in *Law of Desire*, yelling “Water me!” while a street cleaner sprays her with a hose on a hot summer evening in Madrid. In the 19th century, the same sorts of sprays had done little to stop a fire that devastated this former barrack, which was abandoned for a century. Restored in the 1980s (in the film you can actually see the scaffolding in front of the building), it’s now one of the city’s biggest cultural centres, featuring exhibitions, museums, libraries and theatre performances. At the entrance to Conde Duque, in Plaza de la Guardia de Corps, a bust of Clara Campoamor stands in memory of the women’s suffrage advocate who achieved the vote for Spanish women for the first time in elections held in 1933. In fact, the places where Almodóvar’s characters live hold echoes of the real-life women who fought for the independence of the strong, free women so typical of Pedro’s films.



11. CÍRCULO DE BELLAS ARTES

Alcalá, 32

If you’d like to enjoy the same view that Pepa had from her flat in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, just head to the rooftop of Círculo de Bellas Artes. Although Pepa’s flat was at no. 7, Calle de Montalbán, the views are those of the Círculo. Pedro wanted to shoot the film there, but the building couldn’t support the weight of the film crew, so he had the skyline recreated in a studio. That isn’t the only time the Círculo has played a prominent role in his films: its café, La Pecera, appears in *Kika*, and its traditional Carnival festival in *The Skin I Live In*.

It’s All About My Mother, however, that features one of the most iconic scenes from Almodóvar’s films: Teatro Bellas Artes is the theatre where Cecilia Roth’s character waits for her son, so they can watch *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The theatre opened in 1961 as the HQ of director José Tamayo’s company, and it was in fact Tamayo who introduced Spain to Tennessee Williams plays in the mid-20th century.

12. CINE DORÉ

Santa Isabel, 3

Cine Doré appears in two of Pedro’s films: in *Talk to Her* we see its façade, when Benigno goes there to watch the silent film *The Shrinking Lover*, and in *Pain & Glory* its beautiful modernist interior. Cine Doré screens films from the Filmoteca Española, the Spanish film archive, and offers a special experience in danger of extinction: watching classic films in their original languages, at a knock-down price, in a cinema built in 1923.

13. TEATRO LARA

Corredera Baja de San Pablo, 15

Theatre has always been a source of inspiration for Pedro, and several of the city’s theatres appear in his films: Teatro María Guerrero is where Becky del Páramo sings *Piensa en mí* in *High Heels*, and *Pain & Glory* features Sala Mirador. Coincidentally, the latter theatre is also where Penélope Cruz studied at Cristina Rota’s school. The theatre that appears most in Pedro’s films is Teatro Lara: its curtain can be seen at the end of *All About My Mother* and the beginning of *Talk to Her*, and its stage and foyer appear in *Law of Desire*. Its current programme resembles the one it offered when it was a repertory theatre: every week it hosts a large number of very diverse shows. It also offers a dramatised tour providing an overview of its 140 years of history.

IF YOU HAVE TIME

14. THE CORRALA AT NO. 11 IN CALLE TENERIFE AND THE PARK ON CALLE SAN RAIMUNDO

The *corrala* where Sole lives in *Volver* was built in 1921 thanks to Constructora Benéfica, a social project launched by Concepción Arenal that built homes for working families with donations from women from the upper classes. Nearby on a corner on Calle San Raimundo, is the park where Raimunda (naturally!) talks to and hugs her mother in *Volver*.



15. BARRIO DE LA CONCEPCIÓN

When Pedro commuted to his job at one of Telefónica’s offices in Fuencarral, he would see this neighbourhood, commonly known as “the hives”, from the M-30 motorway, and he’d wonder who lived there. This was the starting point for *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, whose main characters live here.

Built in the 1950s, it’s considered the most densely inhabited group of buildings in Spain, with over twenty thousand residents.

16. LA ALMUDEÑA CEMETERY

Together with the airport, this is the location that appears most often in Almodóvar’s films, because –at the end of the day– the thing we do the most is travel... and die. The cemetery appears in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Kika*, *Live Flesh* and *High Heels*. One of the oldest and largest in Western Europe, it’s the burial ground of figures as important as Vicente Aleixandre, Pío Baroja, Benito Pérez Galdós, Lola Flores, Tierno Galván and Ramón y Cajal.

17. ADOLFO SUÁREZ MADRID BARAJAS AIRPORT

When you arrive in or depart from the city, you’ll likely do so at its airport, which appears in *Labyrinth of Passion*, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *High Heels*, *Talk to Her*, *Volver* and *I’m so Excited*. If you have time before your flight, check out at the works of art found in the airport, such as the murals by Javier Calvo and Vaquero Turcios on the check-in level of Terminal 2, and the bamboo roof of the international award-winning Terminal 4, which Raimunda cleaned in *Volver*.



TAPAS AND SHOPPING

18. MUSEO CHICOTE

Gran Vía, 12

Founded in 1931, Museo Chicote was Spain’s first cocktail bar. Ava Gardner, Frank Sinatra, Rita Hayworth, Cary Grant and Hemingway, among other celebrities, couldn’t resist the artistry of Perico Chicote, the country’s most famous barman. It’s here where Blanca Portillo’s character makes an important confession in *Broken Embraces*.

19. VILLA ROSA

Plaza de Santa Ana, 5

One of Pedro Almodóvar’s favourite squares is home to the city’s oldest flamenco tablao still in operation. In *High Heels* Miguel Bosé sings *Un año de amor* on its stage.

20. TABERNA ÁNGEL SIERRA

Gravina, 11

This hundred-year-old pub in Plaza de Chueca is where Leo and Betty arrange to meet in *The Flower of My Secret*. Famous for its vermouth, it’s no surprise that it’s here where Leo reveals that she finds everything hard, except drinking. Plaza de Chueca, the heart of Madrid’s gay neighbourhood, now

bears little resemblance to the square that Pedro immortalised in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* in the 1990s, where Antonio Banderas’ character went to buy medicine on the black market.



21. TABERNA ALHAMBRA

Victoria, 9

In *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* Chus Lampreave’s character takes her grandchildren to this pub, opened in 1929, because in her hometown they say “if you haven’t seen Granada, you haven’t seen anything”. She still hasn’t seen Granada, but she settles for going to this old pub that recreates several of the Andalusian city’s typical motifs.

22. FARMACIA CARDONA

Luna, 6

This chemist’s, which opened in 1833, is one of the oldest in the city. It’s here that Pepa buys the sleeping pills she uses to cook up her lethal gazpacho in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*.

23. ALMIRANTE STREET

In *Law of Desire*, Antonio Banderas’ character notices a flamboyant shirt in the shop window at number 5, Calle del Almirante. In the 1980s it was a street for trendy clothing and avant-garde offerings, and even today, at number 10, you’ll find Berlin, which sells clothes by Roberto Torretta, and Ararat, which provided much of the wardrobe for *Pepi, Luci, Bom*.

24. CASA DE DIEGO

Puerta del Sol, 12

The colourful umbrella that Manuela holds as she waits for her son in *All About My Mother* is from this manufacturer of umbrellas, fans, walking sticks and shawls, which has been crafting top-quality products since 1823.

25. OCHO Y MEDIO-LIBROS DE CINE

Martín de los Heros, 11

This bookshop which specialises in film is a veritable shrine to Pedro Almodóvar: within its walls you can admire props from *I’m so Excited*, Vera’s mask and the fabric sculptures from *The Skin I Live In*, a dress worn by Carmen Maura’s character in *Volver* and posters from all of Pedro’s films, signed by him and his actors. In the shop you can also purchase books that study his films and even wines produced by Vinos Almodóvar, a winery launched by the filmmaker and his brother. The bottles’ labels feature photos taken by the director himself. In front of the bookshop you’ll find Madrid’s Walk of Stars, a tribute to important figures from Spanish film that’s inspired by Hollywood’s Walk of Fame. The stars are in alphabetical order, so the first one goes to Almodóvar. It was created by the same designer who made the poster for *All About My Mother* and the logo for the bookshop Ocho y Medio: Oscar Mariné. The same street is also home to the Golem and Renoir cinemas, which screen art house films in their original language. They are frequented by the main character in *Julietta*, as well as by Pedro Almodóvar himself.



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