



Barcelona revisited

• By BARRY DAVIS

What could be better for a micro-economy than hordes of foreign tourists jetting in, and shelling out some of their hard-earned cash on hotel accommodation, restaurants and various must-see local interest spots?

That said, if they just happen to pass by a shopping mall, they would be more than welcome to pop into a store or two, and leave with handfuls of gaily wrapped garments or electrical appliances.

While Barcelona is hardly a tourism backwater, there are a few locals who'd like to see some homegrown, long-lasting, spice added to the fiscal and cultural goings on in their neck of the woods.

Albert Montagut is one of staunchest supporters of that line of thinking and, along with quite a few of his fellow Catalonians – and some well-heeled nature – he is spearheading an urban renewal drive in the city which places the emphasis very much on grass roots creativity of an enduring nature.

Montagut is a member of Barcelona Global, a private, independent and non-profit association that incorporates over 130 of the Barcelona's leading companies, research centers, entrepreneurs, business schools, universities and cultural institutions, "and more than 770 professionals aiming to make Barcelona one of the world's best cities for talent and economic activity," as the group's brochure blurb puts it.

Barcelona Global is looking to bring its combined financial, entrepreneurial and altruistic clout to bear on the city, which is being facilitated through a number of projects. While recently in the northeastern Spanish city, of around five million, I got several eyefuls of what it is that Barcelona Global is trying to achieve, and how it is going about it.

The press jaunt was neatly timed to coincide with Barcelona Design Week and we were taken to several arts and creativity facilities around the city, including the Barcelona Design Center (Barcelona Centre de Disseny – BCD). If the idea was to impart some of the creative juices that evidently flow freely through Spanish veins, the organizers got that one right. The BCD was chock full of delightful and thought-provoking works, ranging from third century CE Coptic textiles to a sinuous-looking bicycle created in 2011, a 1970s computer monitor and a car, and, of course, an abundance betwixt.

The center says its Decorative and Author-Centered Art Collections highlight "the global sense of objects as art... and stressing the value of each individually."

If there is a "problem" with the BCD it's that there is simply so much to see, and enjoy and mull over, that you probably need more than one visit to ingest and digest it all. Even so, catching glimpses of such aesthetic finery like the early 16th century The Nativity and the Epiphany

chest of drawers, Ramon Sarsanedas and Francesc d'A Gali's Japanese-informed 1929 The Creation folding screen, amply conveys some of Barcelona's artistic heritage. To be fair, there are also artifacts from the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, France and other climes in the museum, but the vast majority is locally produced.

Then you have around half a millennium of fashion exhibits, taking in centuries old court gowns, corsets and other lingerie items, through to a fetching 1920s dress by local designer Anita Monros and a full-length number courtesy of Madrid-bred and –based, New York-born Sybilla Sorondo, known in the industry by her given name alone.

In the late 1970s, graphic design in Spain, along with others walks of life and professional pursuits, was freed from the shackles of the Franco dictatorship. Some of the results of that born-again liberalism can be seen in the BCD's eclectic exhibition of posters. The accompanying literature to the center's permanent exhibitions talks of designers being given "the opportunity to participate in a process of creating and transforming the image of public institutions, private organizations and companies."

THE FRUITS of free thinking, both indoors and al fresco, can be seen all around the city. The Barcelona art-social change generating synergy is probably most clearly demonstrated in the Poblenou district. During the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, Poblenou was the epicenter of Catalan and Iberian industry, and was known as the Catalan Manchester. But, like its illustrious British counterpart, the golden age of the western European textile industry petered out, leaving the neighborhood economically and socially depressed and with great hulking mill buildings that fell into disuse, and pockmarked the area with ugly reminders of a prosperous past.

The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games provided the catalyst for neighborhood renewal, and prompted the establishment of such arts venues as Fundacio Vila Casas which, today, serves as an impressive repository of contemporary art, and sits comfortably in a former textile mill. Currently the museum has a wonderful exhibition of contemporary Catalan art, as well as pieces associated with the region, with works by the likes of now 90-year-old Jewish photographer Frank Horvat, 67-year-old Barcelona-born photographer Jordi Belver, local 65-year-old multidisciplinary artist Mario Pasqualotto and celebrated 20th-century Barcelona painter Joan Hernandez Pijuan. Echoes of the district's industrial lineage resonated through the chimneys dotted around the area, which have all been well spruced up.

Part of the thinking behind the renewal of Poblenou is to make the neighborhood as family- and people-friendly as possible. Bicycle lanes abound, as do kiddies' playgrounds and there is clearly an empha-



THE INTERIOR of Sagrada Familia – Antoni Gaudi's yet unfinished weird and wonderful masterpiece (Barry Davis)

sis on environmental compatibility. The Media-Tic building, for example, is as energy self-sufficient as possible. There are also plenty of vegan-friendly and vegetarian eateries around town.

The district, also known as 22@, is an attractive mix of new and old. The more historic buildings sport elegant balconies and, it must be said, some Catalan flags – rumblings of the political strife between Madrid and Barcelona occasionally made their presence felt during our stay – and there is an appealing edginess about the place.

Community centers, housing street-level creative pursuits, abound, including the cozy Galeria La Plataforma, and the expansive Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC). The latter offers artists from all over the world a slew of state-of-the-art technological facilities, including robots and 3D printing, and both clearly convey the Barcelona Global concept of promoting local creativity, and sustainable urban renewal. There is more creative endeavor to be offered at the refreshingly verdant Palo Alto artists' collective complex.

There is more in the way of architectural revival to be enjoyed at the newly refurbished Mercat de Sant Antoni, a public food market built in 1882 by Catalan architect and urban planner Antoni Rovira i Trias. It is considered one of the most emblematic buildings of the iron architecture in Barcelona. On our visit there the place was buzzing with bargain seekers across a wide range of products, and artifacts, while soccer card aficionados were doing roaring trade across the street in the run-up to the World Cup.

Of course, you simply cannot go to Barcelona without seeing your fair share of

weird, wacky and wonderful architecture by the incomparable Antoni Gaudi. Whether it is the wondrous oriental-style Art Nouveau Casa Vicens, or his creations at Park Guell – the hilltop site also offers a great view of the whole city, and beyond – or the dramatically crafted Casa Calvet, there is so much of the peerless architect's to marvel at.

And that's even without mentioning his best known work, the yet unfinished Sagrada Familia towers, esthetically and/or physically, above all it surveys. As much as you may have heard about it, and as many pictures of the cathedral you may have seen, nothing can possibly convey the majesty, the beauty and uniqueness of the edifice. Started in 1882, construction work is expected to be finally completed in 2026. Should be quite an event eight years hence.

We got a glimpse of urban life beyond the official city limits of Barcelona, when we visited the Centre d'Art Tecla Sala in L'Hospitalet. The wide avenues of the parent city were nowhere to be seen, there was a lot more in the way of biting graffiti to be spotted, and this was clearly a less desirable, and less expensive, residential area. But there was an engaging funkiness in the air. We caught the No Flyers No Posters retrospective at Tecla Sala, celebrating 25 years of the Sonar Art Festival.

We also paid an all too fleeting visit to the Picasso Museum, where the fascinating gastronomically-themed Picasso's Kitchen, is now on show, and there was just time to catch a morsel more in the way of fascinating here-and-now art at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and, particularly, longtime Mexico-resident British artist Melanie Smith's portrayal of her adopted hometown.



BRISK BUSINESS takes place at the newly refurbished 19th century Mercat de Sant Antoni public market. (Barry Davis)

Add to that an early morning visit to a peaceful beach, just to the east of Poblenou, including a dip in the Mediterranean in the rain, and excursions to several record stores in the colorful alleyways of the La Rambla tourist district, and an entertaining, moving, fun and inspiring time was had by one and all.

The Barcelona Global web site declares that organization wants "to make Barcelona one of the world's best cities for talent and economic activity."

After five mostly intense days there, it looks like they are going about it the right way.

For more information about Barcelona Global: <https://www.barcelonaglobal.org/>

A Sephardic link to Seattle's Pike Place Market

• By GEORGE MEDOVOY

SEATTLE – Sol "Solly" Amon, the proprietor of Pure Food Fish Market at Pike Place, has a simple, proven recipe for success: "Give people their money's worth."

The 89-year-old Amon has been selling fish here since he was 15, working with his late father, Jack Amon, one of the many Jewish immigrants from Turkey and Rhodes who settled in Seattle and established businesses at the bustling Pike Place Market on the city's waterfront. Jack Amon arrived here from Turkey in 1911 and set up a fish stand at the market.

Pure Food Fish Market spans four generations, now including Sol Amon's adult grandchildren, Isaac and Carlee. On the shop's website, www.freshseafood.com, Amon's role is described somewhat tongue-in-cheek after the title of a famous movie: "The Cod Father."

Amon remembers that in the early years, selling fish "was kind of a tough business."

"There was plenty of fish around," he says, "but the thing that really changed the whole dynamic... is that the doctors got on our side and told us that fish is really good for your heart. That's when it really started picking up a little bit more, you know. That was in the mid-sixties."

Meanwhile, the early members of the Sephardic Jewish community all knew each other. "It wasn't a big Jewish community," Amon recalls. "We all lived in the same area and all went to the same public schools... and Hebrew schools."

Pike Place Market welcomes at least 10 million visitors a year, and Amon describes it as "a conglomerate of different cultures and different people from all over the world." They can start a small busi-



SCENES FROM the Pike Place market. (George Medovoy)

ness and "little by little" watch it grow, just like Starbucks, which began at Pike Place – and whose original store is still open and attracts many curious visitors.

I interviewed Amon over the phone because I had unfortunately missed him on my trip to Seattle. But I did meet his 27-year-old grandson, Isaac, when I walked into the bustling shop. Isaac told me that he started working in the business when he was 12, and although he graduated from college with a culinary certificate, he decided to return to the shop and has been there ever since.

"It's noisy, busy and vibrant and very full of energy," says Isaac, who also speaks some Ladino, the language of Sephardic Jews.

Wearing a white apron, he describes a large inventory of fish: "I've got salmon, halibut, king crab's a big seller. Smoked salmon, we've been famous for it for many, many years, Copper River's in season right now..."

"We get swordfish out of Hawaii. Every once in a while we get opa,

which is a big moonfish out of Hawaii as well. We carry Chilean sea bass, which is out of Chile. It's actually known as Patagonian toothfish nowadays. It's the same thing as Chilean sea bass – very fatty and rich in omega 3 oils." About 30% of the fish is locally caught, with 60% out of Alaska and the other 10% from around the world.

The shop's website also features an interesting fish blog with cooking advice, of course, like "3 Tips to Grill Fish."

One of the Sephardic community's own sons has also created a documentary film about Seattle's Sephardic Jews called "The Sephardic Jews of the Pike Place Market," available at www.sadisfilmworks.com.

"My goal," says Seattle filmmaker Stephen Sadis, "was to take a look at how Sephardic Jews came to Seattle, why they came, and how they thrived. Pike Place Market was central to that..."

The beginnings of the Jewish community here, he notes, was



based on a Greek shipping person returning to Rhodes and spreading the word about Seattle.

Sadis's own family goes back many generations in the city. His grandmother was from Turkey, and the rest of his family came from Rhodes. His great-grandfather, Haim DeLeon, was the first cantor of Seattle's Ezra Bessaroth synagogue, and his other great-grandfather, Solomon Alhadeff, was the first president of Bikur Cholim synagogue.

The four-block Pike Place Market, which overlooks the waterfront between 1st and Western Avenues, is the real thing – a place where Seattle shoppers can feel right at home, like LePanier, for example, where you can sit down and enjoy a croissant and a cup of coffee. This traditional French bakery is run by Kristi Drake and her French business partner, Thierry Mougin, who is originally from Normandy and trained as a baker before coming to the US in his early twenties.

On my recent visit, there was a line out the door, so popular is the

bakery, but it was well worth the wait because I purchased a deliciously-rich almond croissant so good that it reminded me of the pastries I've enjoyed in Paris.

ON MY recent visit, Pike Place was brimming with people. As I slowly made my way through the crowds, I saw vegetable vendors, fresh flowers sold by Hmong immigrants, hand-crafted beers, breads of every variety, arts and crafts, international restaurants, cafes and food bars, wind-up toys, and vintage clothing stalls.

The original objective of Pike Place Market is still proclaimed in big letters above the entrance: MEET THE PRODUCER, recalling the beginnings of the market in 1907, when shoppers could personally interact with farmers and merchants.

Over the years, Pike Place Market has developed into what Sol Amon calls "a happening..."

"It's like going to the circus," he says, "there's a lot of action."

As an out-of-town visitor to

Seattle, I also discovered the chic Kimpton Hotel Monaco at 1101 Fourth Avenue in the heart of the city and across the street from the architecturally-magnificent Seattle Public Library.

The walk from the hotel to Pike Place covered about half a mile. I made my way down 4th Avenue, and when I got to Union Street, I turned down towards the harbor and the market.

The Monaco's contemporary, jazzy design is clearly evident everywhere you look, and in the first-floor lobby near the fireplace, the hotel offers afternoon wine tasting with comfortable couches where you can meet other guests and compare travel notes.

Near the front desk were bikes available for a street-level view of downtown Seattle with this invitation: 'TAKE ME, I'M YOURS.' And as if this isn't enough, the Monaco also offers a yoga mat in every room free of charge!

Meanwhile, the hotel's Outlier restaurant is where executive chef Shawn Applin cooks tasty, rustic fare. Some examples are beet-cured wild salmon, whole rockfish bo ssam, potato pierogis with braised pork sugo, brick oven pizzas, and more. Before heading out the door to explore Pike Place Market and more of Seattle, you can also start your day here with a nice big breakfast.

The restaurant's bar area contains design elements through beer cans and beer caps. A mural of Jimi Hendrix made out of beer caps complements the bar counter surface, inspired and designed by Julie Coyle Art Associates using recycled bottle caps from Washington state breweries. A custom wall is also designed from local beer cans and becomes an image of the 12th man – a reference to the Seattle Seahawks. At the end of the day, it's all very Seattle.