

Discover the Heart & Hospitality of Spanish Shooting Tradition

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Speaking from experience

I've shot in Spain for 35 odd years – on more than 25 different shoots; both partridge (Perdiz Roja) and Monteria (driven big game and quite extraordinary).

In that time, I've seen many a new shoot start, often with the idea of copying the Moda Ingles (uber high partridges over ravines). Exciting they may be, but for me they are not the essence of Spanish shooting that I so love.

The real McCoy is where the birds are driven, over their natural territory, from scrub (dehesa), olive groves and grassy, rocky bluffs. El Despenadero is such a place, and it's approaching a proud half century of shooting on the family's 7000 acres.



Tradition

It is so typical to swing from a bird low enough to be a grouse onto one so high that you'll remember it for a long time, all to shouts of "Mira, mira" (look, look) from your secretario (bird boy), hopefully followed by an Ole, Bravo or, if you are especially honoured, Hombre.

Your cargador (loader) will be keeping quiet as he is sitting at your feet, passing the gun up to you. Although not the style of loading you may be intuitively used to, it is in fact much faster.

This style is for me the essence of shooting in Spain, with La Mancha (the area south of Madrid) its natural heartland. If you only want to shoot birds of 50+ metres, then the Caza Natural of El Despenadero is not for you. That is not to say they cannot offer some really high birds; it's just that, on what I consider to be the better Iberian shoots, height of bird sometimes plays second fiddle to speed and variety.



Hospitality

This essence is also mirrored by the natural warmth and generosity of your hosts, for whom your relaxed comfort is of utmost importance.

Every time you stop between drives (probably not more than four) you'll be presented with tables groaning with chilled sherry, beers on ice, water (lots) and endless 'raciones' of jamon, (the world's best), cheeses, olives, dried figs. Lunch is usually outdoors – in 70 degrees, with olive and oak trees for shade and a wonderful lunch cooked on an open fire – probably featuring 'chuletillas' (the world's best lamb chops), tortillas and paellas.

90 minutes of this is hard to refuse.



The Spanish charm

Another typical feature of Spanish shooting is that most shoot lodges are a homage to trophies – not just monster stags and wild boar, but the owners' world-wide quest for different shooting experiences. I call them Palazzos de la Muerte. El Despenadero is no exception!

It is purpose built and hugely comfortable. You'll have a ball.



Above all, Spain is truly 'brownie point shooting'. You'll get away with leaving your partners at home if you take them to Spain on an annual pilgrimage.

A word of warning though – each time I have taken my beloved, she has expected the same charm and manners as 'Jacobo' or 'Fernando' on our return – a high bar as you will find out!



A few tips and wrinkles

- Although it's possible to take your own guns, the paranoid attitude of British airports coupled with Brexit can make this a painful exercise. So, why not hire guns on site – they'll be excellent.
- Local cartridges are fine – indeed many UK shots use them over here.
- They shoot into March, so postseason frolics are sorted.
- If offered a chance to shoot wild boar for an extra day, don't pass it up.

Firthy says:

If you want to experience traditional Spanish shooting as it used to be, and in many ways still should be, then pay El Despenadero a visit.