

## **IES PLAYA SAN JUAN. ALICANTE. SPAIN**

The Spanish historical and cultural heritage is immense and very rich in all its expressions. Fortunately, this heritage is still alive and has special relevance in everything related to their expressions in our crafts.

Each Spanish region has its own products and produces beautiful and particular handcrafted pieces throughout our territory. On this occasion, our work focuses on the research we have done in our immediate environment, from 5 important villages around Alicante in particular.

This is our selection among many other possibilities that we hope to be able to present throughout the project.

## **GATA DE GORGOS' CRAFTWORK**

Gata of Gorgos' most important characteristic is the handmade tradition of palm leaf, esparto and wicker manufacture which has been made for ages. Its elaboration is completely handmade with Spanish high-quality products. It is selected, treated and dried by natural processes, and they are totally respectful with the environment. The beauty and industry of this work is often confirmed at first sight. The handmade knowledge, inherited from generations, consists of making the best products keeping in mind today's tastes.

### **THE MATERIALS:**

**ESPARTO:** It is bast from the grasses family which have long-lasting leaves. It is valued because of its high resistance and durability and it naturally grows in the steppe climate. The Spanish esparto has the best quality in all Mediterranean countries because it has more cellulose percentage and a finer bast.

**PALM LEAF:** It is bast that is obtained from the fan palm. Its name means a little or modest scrub. It has a bushy and swollen aspect because it grows in extreme conditions. However, it can grow up to 3 metres and form some trunk groups. The growth, trunk thickness and leaf colours have a lot of variations. The fruits are called 'palmiches', they are used in popular medicine as an astringent and their leaves are cut and then dried until they lose their elasticity.

**WICKER:** It is a kind of bast that is obtained from the willow bush family, which naturally grows near a river. It grows fast, reproduces easily, adapts to the cold and it easily resists the droughts. In the first century of our era, Rome developed intense farming of this material because of his active trade. For centuries, wicker baskets were the only means of transport for the different products that were traded in villages. The flexible and resistant rods of the fresh willow are great materials for wicker basketmaking.



What these materials have in common is that they are warm, fresh and comfortable at the same time. They are also flexible, tough and beautiful materials that change with time. And they are biodegradable materials.



## **TAPESTRY IN CREVILLENTE**

**Where they came from and what they were used for:** The Crusades introduced Turkish rugs in Europe, where they were mainly hung on the walls as tapestries or used on tables.

**Crevillente and its highest quality:** In the town of Crevillente (Alicante), baptized as City of the Carpet, there has been a tradition in the manufacture of tapestry for centuries that became popular. In the sixteenth century, this textile industry began to develop, but it will be at the beginning of the 20th century, with the arrival of the first mechanical looms, when it finally took off, becoming a hallmark of the city.

**Important and recent fair:** Since 2016, the Carpet Fair has been held in the city, with the intention of strengthening an artisan and quality industry, known internationally, organized by the Crevillente Council, in collaboration with the UNIFAM association.

**Nowadays** there are more than 20 companies that still manufacture carpets, distributing their creations throughout Spain and several foreign countries, European countries, as well as American, Asian and African countries.



Current store on Paseo de Elche Avenue in Crevillente.

## POTTERY IN AGOST AND BIAR

The pottery of **Agost** has been an activity of great relevance for our municipality. It is the only pottery centre in the Valencian community that maintains this tradition, and is one of the few that preserves their traditional methods of production.

The existence of pottery in Agost, begins in 17th century. There is a hermitage close to the village, founded in 1821, and dedicated to the patron saints of potters: Saints Justa and Rufina.

The first workshops, which were inside the homes, were located near fountains, from where the water was taken.

It was at the end of the 19th century when Agost pottery had more success. As a sample for this circumstance we have the Pottery Museum.

The museum highlights our most representative product: the white botijo (pitcher). But this isn't the only product: more than forty models are produced here. With the purpose of keeping this extense variety of products, the Pottery Museum saves a different piece of the traditional pottery of Agost every year. It is what they call The Piece of the Year. Activities like exhibitions,talks, guided tours, etc, are dedicated to it. Samples of The Piece of the Year can be acquired in the museum itself.

The traditional pottery in Agost, is characterized by the quality of the material (light coloured clay), the preparation techniques, cooking and its variety of shapes are determined by the function of the piece.

The tool for modelling is the **lathe**. The pottery of Agost as we said before, is mainly known for the white botijos that preserve the water at a lower temperature than the environment. From the lathes of Agost have come botijos and pitchers that have been used in Spanish homes, but also in Southern France, Northern Africa and even Latin America for centuries.

Today, these pieces have stopped being useful or necessary items, as they used to be, to become handicraft or decorative objects that show one of the most important advances that the intelligence of the human race has achieved. In Agost today, as in old times, the same millennial formula is maintained: mud, hands and fire.

The **lathe** consists of a round and flat slide or surface attached to a shaft that rotates at an adjustable speed. On the slide, the potter models with wet hands, squeezing and stretching a clay's PELLA.

In the past, the potter's wheel was moved by the potter's foot, which activated a heavy wooden Wheel that gave the system enough inertia to turn constantly. The modern potter's wheel usually has an electric motor, and a mechanical device that allows to change the speed.



**In Biar** there is a company dedicated to traditional ceramics which is more than 150 years old, it has an old tradition in the clay trade, and since 1975 is the last and only inheritance of the activity. Cerámica Artística Maestre was founded in the last quarter of the 19th century by Juan Mora Carpintero, a native of Manises. It coexisted in those years with other 4 factories.

### HOW IS IT MADE?

In the production of ceramics, the raw material to be used is clay, obtained from clay mixed with water. After spending a few days in the settling ponds, and with the evaporated water, the mud is deposited in underground warehouses where it can be kept for a long time. Among the different procedures of shaping clay, one of them is the use of moulds of plaster. Kneading it previously to achieve its plastic homogeneity, and successfully complete the execution of the pieces with the help of the potter's wheel moved with foot kicks in its skirt.

Another way, where creativity has hardly any limits, is with the winch, a tool and the hands of the potter in a fundamental way, with the support of some elementary tools. When the pieces are completely dry, they are introduced in the oven for cooking, here they will go from fragile to strong, compact and insoluble in water. The oven called moruno (moorish), after about 24 hours of feeding it with firewoods, at intervals of progressively regular times will reach temperatures close to 980°C. After three days to cool it can be emptied. As regards varnish and decoration, basically two forms have been used varnished with white-opaque and its subsequent decoration on it, with dyes that are mineral oxides such as cobalt for blues, copper for greens, etc. Decoration directly on the piece baked with the same oxides and its subsequent varnishing, in this case transparent. A second firing, now in a gas oven, at temperatures similar to the previous one, the enamel will melt with the colours, giving it that bright white. Then we can consider the process is concluded. It is wonderful and creative work capable of transforming a mound of clay soil into some certainly beautiful pieces.



## **THE ELCHE PALMS**

The production of the white palm is a very laborious and totally artisanal process whose ancestral techniques have passed from parents to children for centuries.

The orchards are flanked by palm trees arranged along the ditches. Some palms are destined for the cultivation of dates while others are prepared for obtaining white palm. For this reason, a series of annual tasks are required that demand the spectacular ascent to the top of the plant.

The first step for the elaboration of white palm is the tying process, which starts in early December and consists of closing the eye of the palm with artisan ropes forming a cone, stopping the new palms from performing photosynthesis. When they receive little light, they remain a yellowish white color.

After a few months, from Palm Sunday festivity and until the month of August, the "Palmereros" experts go up to the palms again and cover them with leaves or with a special dark plastic. The palms are shielded, protected from the sun, but still receiving some light through an opening, to continue growing, up to 4 meters maximum.

The collection takes place from September until the eve of Palm Sunday. The palms that have grown inside the hood are cut off, and left the necessary to not cause damage to the palm tree or alter its growth.

Next comes a selection process for measurements and qualities, and another for cleaning. To finish giving them that clear tone, they are brushed one by one and introduced in special pools to whiten them; They are deposited in conditioned chambers to finish their whitening and maintain them in optimal conditions of conservation until their shipment as smooth white palm, or until the work of curling or braiding begins.

The braiding of the white palm is usually done by the women of the family, known popularly as curlers. It is a job that needs a lot of dedication, being very difficult to teach and considerably laborious.

The hands and ingenuity of the artisanal teachers will have to unite to give life to varied models, between 5 cm and 3.70 meters, which will be carried in the hand or on the flap. The worked palms are packaged in individual bags and stored in the cold chambers with sulphur until they are used.

The variety of ornamental designs is the result of creative inspiration of the artists, the leaves are braided, joined and sewn to form motifs like stars, chains, crosses, virgins, balls, flowers, etc., which are added to the central Palm and make a beautiful and striking result.

The families of "Palmereros", craftsmen and artisans have transmitted the knowledge of the trade for centuries. There are some families in Elche that have been producing white palm for more than 60 years.

In the Orchard called San Plácido, there is the Municipal workshop of handicrafts of the white Palm and the Palmeral Museum. In it, as well as being able to enjoy a traditional orchard of palm trees, you will be able to get to know the work of the artisans of the white palm and the Palmereros, including an exhibition of traditional ascent to the palm tree, collection of dates, hooded, pruning and Manual pollination, etc. Each and every one of the processes that follows the cultivation of the palm tree and that still today remain in the customs of ELX.



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