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LITTLE SPAIN

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OUR HISTORY
1868 - TODAY
La Nacional is a 148 year-old cultural institution founded by Spaniards to serve the Spanish community in the New York area. At present, the Society is the oldest Spanish cultural institution in the United States. Since 1868, tens of thousands of immigrant Spaniards have found their way to La Nacional. In establishing their new life in America, La Nacional was their home away from home: where they found food, rooms, healthcare and new relationships. Surrounding the Society on West 14th Street, a neighborhood arose – it became known as Little Spain.

Written by Robert Sanfiz
Executive Director at La Nacional
Old memberships cards of “socios” of La Nacional. An entire life story on one page.

Little Spain on 14th street quickly became the largest Spanish colony in the United States.
Our building is located precisely where the historic Greenwich Village and Chelsea neighborhoods intersect with the cutting edge Meatpacking District.
Hall of the Spanish Benevolent Society

The third annual ball of the Spanish Benevolent Society, at the Teutonia Assembly Rooms, on Third Avenue, near Sixteenth Street, last evening, was as successful as the fondest wishes of the managers could have made it. It was marked by the excellent character of the company present, the bewitching appearance, both in dress and features, of the Spanish ladies, and the spirited and graceful dancing. The Society, which numbers about 130 members, has for its object the relief of destitute Spaniards in this City, and among the proprietors of this good work are F. Lladó, President of the organization; M. Vladero, J. A. Vega, S. Sanchez, Magi Jauer, Joseph Garcia, C. Faloni and others.
By the turn of the 19th century, 14th street between 7th and 8th avenues became known as “Little Spain”. A block teeming with Spanish restaurants and stores, it remained the cultural and spiritual heart of the Spanish community in NYC for nearly one hundred years.
Top: The children of Little Spain.

Top: José Vázquez, father of Maximino Vázquez. Today, Max is the vice-president of La Nacional and one of its beloved members.

Right page: Max in front of his father’s store “La Iberia.” Max recalls the busy days when the boats from Spain docked and immigrants would pack his father’s store.

Bottom: Marching up 5th Avenue, “La Carroza” of La Nacional—Spanish Benevolent Society at “El Desfile de la Hispanidad.”
Members of La Nacional at JFK Airport. The Society would charter 4 planes every August to take members to visit family in Spain.

Middle of page: Our Spanish cooks preparing a meal in the old restaurant circa 1950.

Bottom: Desfile de la Hispanidad.

Top of the page: Members of La Nacional at an annual gala in 1960.

Little Spain was starting to fade as the immigrant community moved out. The Society would soon be the only surviving reminder of that special time and place.
March 2016: In opening up old walls and floors during the restaurant renovation we found a vintage calendar from the year 1901.
RENEWAL, THE SOCIETY COMES BACK TO LIFE

2008 - 2016
In 2008, La Nacional - Spanish Benevolent Society was at a crossroads. After a 30-year exodus of the Spanish immigrant community to new areas of New York, the membership of La Nacional dwindled to only a handful. A team of young Spaniards and Spanish-Americans volunteers helped bring the Society back to life.

Today, La Nacional is one of New York’s most important cultural and social gathering places.
MEET OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2. Nancy Martin, Vice-President 2 at La Nacional, English Teacher at New York City Department of Education.
3. Antonio Morales, President at La Nacional, Board of Directors.
5. Max Vázquez, Vice-President 1 at La Nacional, Inventor, Entrepreneur and Fashion Designer.
6. Beatriz Merry, Vocal at la Nacional, Co-Founder & Director of Business Development at Merry + Valenzuela.
9. Ramon Abajo, Vocal at La Nacional, Ceo at Downhill Publishing-The Vellum Page.
"The first day I walked into La Nacional I could sense something very special - something I very much wanted to be a part of. When I'm inside, I can feel history come alive - and that we are preserving this little corner of Spain in the Big Apple. And yet, when I walk right outside our doors, I am in the middle of the most exciting and energetic part of this amazing city. Working here has changed my outlook for what I want to do, my expectations. Being able to assist my community and promote my culture is the most gratifying experience I've ever had. And to do it in a nurturing and positive environment makes it something that will stay with me for the rest of my career."

--Noelia Lecue
In the past 8 years the Society has undergone several major renovation projects. Working hand-in-hand with the renowned Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, La Nacional is recapturing several aspects of the original 200-year old historic brownstone in which we are housed. The latest effort was to revitalize the front of the building, removing the out-of-place granite and replacing with original brownstone. We also replaced the 1940’s small windows with the original style french balcony doors in place today. In addition, the Society completely renovated their event space “El Salon”, which today hosts hundreds of events each year.
The old facade of the Restaurant.

Restoring the antique brownstone doors. 18 layers of paint needed to be removed.

The process of replacing the windows.
The new appearance of La Nacional's facade and views of the windows from both interior and outside.
Our parlour floor event space in 2009.

Our parlour floor event space after 2015 renovations.
NEW BRAND LOOK FOR THE SOCIETY

M+V brought the The Spanish Benevolent Society branding up to date with a new look and feel across its online and brick-and-mortar properties.

Timeless fonts, simple graphics and a restrained color palette provide this New York institution with a fresh, modern image to tie in with the restaurant and attract a younger audience.

The branding extends to the organization’s website with a floating, dynamic layout inspired by old-school bulletin board posts. Asymmetry affords an interesting user experience across all devices and platforms thanks to responsive web design.

Designed by Merry+Valenzuela
Laura Valenzuela, Creative Director
Bea Merry, Director of Business Development

From left to right
1. Bea Merry
2. Laura Valenzuela
NEW IDENTITY FOR THE RESTAURANT

M+V said, “A legend in its own right, this classic haunt has been feeding Spaniards and Latin Americans in New York since the 19th century from a historical brownstone in the heart of what was once known as Little Spain. La Nacional, officially the cantina of the Spanish Benevolent Society, had never even had a logo, just its name scrawled in Sharpie, but with the building undergoing a facelift and the non-profit reaching out to a new generation of members, it was time for the restaurant to follow suit.

In developing a new brand identity, we knew it had to be something democratic that would appeal to the wide array of people who call La Nacional their second home. The menus and signage use an antique wood type that recalls the restaurant’s old-country vibe, while the synergy achieved through a mix of fonts is a reflection of its spirit.”
Collateral materials.

Website for the Restaurant.
Flamenco, Tango & Soccer & Parties

Inside a multi-functional brownstone at the crossroads of Greenwich Village, Chelsea, and the Meatpacking District, visitors discover a passion for Spain.

With live events, classes, authentic cuisine, art, music, and more, our not-for-profit organization supports the expression and promotion of a culturally diverse Spain.

The amazing Spanish actress Inma Heredia performing “Divas de España” in “El Salon”
La Nacional has been hosting open-dance milonga each Thursday for the past 15 years. In 2009 the Village Voice called it the "best place to watch really good dancers in the city."
Every October 11th we celebrate the Día de la Hispanidad Parade. Our society, as founders, lead the parade of 22 Spanish-speaking nations with their decorated floats, marchers, and traditional music up “La Quinta Avenida” for a day filled with revelry.

Members of La Nacional dressed with Flamenco outfits and the typical “mantilla”.

Members dancing up 5th Avenue on the Day of the Hispanidad.
España and its National Soccer Team won the World Cup in July 2010.
July 2010: Waiting a lifetime for this one: Spain finally wins the World Cup and 14th street erupts in jubilation.

La Nacional is the “go to” place for Spanish soccer.
THE HAMILCAR BOX

Another treasure found last week during renovations of the restaurant.
THE RESTAURANT AT LA NACIONAL: A HISTORIC ENDEAVOR

APRIL, 2016
In anticipation of our 150th anniversary, La Nacional - Spanish Benevolent Society will for the first time in decades, retake the space in an effort to create a community restaurant and gathering place open to everyone. Our non-profit will be teaming up with some of the top culinary institutes in Spain - sponsoring the visas of the country’s best young chefs to manage and create in our kitchen. The Society will provide each chef with a free apartment in our historic brownstone to draw inspiration from La Nacional's past and make it a culinary epicenter for Spanish food.

The Restaurant at La Nacional will be incorporated into the larger ecosystem of significant cultural and community elements that reflect the Society's mission. This includes free or low-cost apartments upstairs for artists-in-residence and opening our event space on the parlor floor to community events, cultural pursuits and charitable causes.
Photos of the old La Nacional Tapas Bar between 2002 and 2016.
The restaurant had an old cantina style feel that needed updating.
The renovation will transform the restaurant - providing for a stylish and contemporary makeover with a nod to the history and tradition of the Society. When we open in the summer of 2016, we will offer diners quality food, reasonable prices and a neighborhood atmosphere for all to enjoy.
Renovation at the Restaurant of La Nacional. Photo from March 2016.
Juan Suarez de Lezo, is a Spanish Executive Chef and Independent Culinary Consultant living in NYC. He has experience working for the best restaurants in the world - adding up to 13 Michelin stars - including Arzak, El Bulli, Per Se and Eleven Madison.

The Restaurant at La Nacional will have a rotation of young chef from the best culinary schools in Spain. Juan will be our valued consultant & Chef supervisor.

His tasks will be to settle the guidelines for culinary continuity and quality on the menu, and informing incoming chefs of La Nacional’s traditional practices and high standards.
A concept of our new kitchen.
All of us who know the old La Nacional remember thinking “it could be so much more”.

As architects, our goal from the start was to open up the space and bring more “life” to the front as well as make it visible from the street. With the new layout we created a sequence of spaces, from the most public to the very private as you walk through the restaurant. Starting with the bar area where people will first gather, followed by the “Cantina” and the tapas counter, this area will feature a display of Spanish specialties and offer a glimpse of the open kitchen further on. As one walks past the bar along the central isle, there is counter seating in front of the “lab-style” kitchen and a the semi-private seating area along the brick wall to the left. Continuing towards the “feature wall”, a focal point of the restaurant where projected soccer games or small performances can be held, a very private area opens up to the right - a familiar space with the beloved table for families or large group of friends to enjoy their special event.
La Nacional is the oldest Spanish institution in the United States, located in a brownstone building, and in the trendy neighborhood of Chelsea; its restaurant will be serving the best selection of food from outstanding Spanish chefs. The interior design should therefore reflect this interesting and unique blend.

The idea is to use natural materials like stone, leather and wood in combination of timeless and traditional materials like Spanish tiles, raw existing bricks and rusted iron. These materials would be handed with a modern approach, using basic and simple forms, with style.

We want to escape from the typical ‘taberna’ or ‘tasca’ approach, already obsolete. The restaurant will be a stylish, clean, open, modern but traditional space, very singular. The lighting plays a crucial role, since the restaurant is a semi-basement. We want to have a warm and inviting ambient, with a unique interesting design yet keeping a highly functional space.
OUR PROUD SPONSORS
PORCELANOSA
OUR PROUD SPONSOR

Few products define Spanish style and craftsmanship more than our tiles. And there isn’t a company who does it better than Porcelanosa. With operations in 143 countries and a gorgeous state-of-the-art showroom right here in New York City, Porcelanosa products are the definition of quality and elegance.

We want to thank Porcelanosa for their generous contribution of tiles and flooring for the entire restaurant space. The collaboration between Porcelanosa and La Nacional represents the best of what Spain has to offer in New York.
ROCA
OUR PROUD SPONSOR

When founded in 1917, the Roca brothers established a company that generations of Spaniards would come to look upon with pride - as we do with the tiles that will decorate our bar, kitchen and bathrooms. With sheer beauty of their product and their family-based business, we are truly honored to partner with Roca for this project.
For our surfaces, we knew that quality and value were features we could not do without. Cosentino Group provided this and more with their countertops and tabletops. Spanish innovators in high-value surfaces, Consentino has pioneered new products such as Silestone and Dekton - today produced in their factories around the world. Favored by chefs everywhere, we are lucky enough to have these surfaces for our kitchen prep area, our countertops and tabletops.
The transformative nature of lighting can convert a space into an oasis of color and warmth. We are extremely proud to announce our partnership with Spain’s most awarded lighting design company - Arturo Alvarez. This influential company has recently opened offices in New York and are excited about donating all the restaurant lights - making La Nacional an essential NYC showplace for their innovative products.
Artfully blending innovation with tradition, Estrella Galicia has produced the highest quality beer for over 100 years. Founded by José María Rivera Corral after his return from Mexico in 1906, the Estrella Galicia brewing company is a fourth generation family-owned business based in A Coruna. Galician roots run deep at the Spanish Benevolent Society and we are very proud to forge this partnership and serve Estrella Galicia at La Nacional.
Producing a traditional beer almost as old as the Society itself, Mahou-San Miguel Group is a family-based company based out of Madrid since the turn of the century. With an ample selection of quality beers that all Spaniards love to enjoy, the company embodies the rich variety of Spain, from Alhambra to the classic Madrileño Mahou Range brand. Tradition, family and variety all encompass the very same pillars of the Spanish Benevolent Society and we could not be more proud of this partnership.
Fagor’s cutting edge kitchen appliances are not only preferred by Spanish chefs, but by chefs and home cooks around the world. When renovating our restaurant, we knew that we also had to modernize our appliances in order to produce quality food for our patrons. We are satisfied and assured that a partnership with Fagor is one that will include lasting products that our chefs will be able to use for years to come.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

OUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN & YOUR REWARDS
An Historic Endeavor

Nearly 100 years ago, La Nacional – Spanish Benevolent Society made an appeal for help. The Society needed to raise funds to renovate a newly-purchased building on West 14th Street. Many of the boats carrying immigrants and goods from Spain were docked on the nearby ports and the Society recognized the need to provide services for this newly burgeoning neighborhood of Spaniards.

The President of the Society at that time was Jose Camprubí who founded La Prensa, (today the largest and oldest Spanish-language newspaper in the USA). In 1920, he used the newspaper to call for a “spirit of solidarity and cooperation” within the community to renovate our new home, promising that “open will be our doors to all.” Today, as the Society embarks on another truly historic endeavor, we again make an urgent appeal to the community.

Creating a Community Restaurant

After several decades of renting out our restaurant space on the ground floor, the Society is excited to announce that we are creating a community restaurant and gathering place. Our non-profit will be teaming up with some of the top culinary institutes in Spain – sponsoring the visas of the country’s best young chefs to create in our kitchen. The Society will provide each chef with an apartment in our brownstone to draw inspiration from La Nacional’s past and establish a culinary epicenter in New York City for Spanish food.

The renovation will transform the space – providing for a stylish and contemporary makeover with a nod to the history and tradition of the society. When we open in June, we will offer diners quality food, reasonable prices and a neighborhood atmosphere for all to enjoy. The Restaurant at La Nacional will be the catalyst for significant cultural and community programming that reflects the Society’s mission. This includes free or low-cost apartments upstairs for artists-in-residence and opening our event space on the parlor floor to community events, cultural pursuits and charitable causes.
We Need Your Support

But adhering to the benevolent mission of La Nacional is not always compatible with the bottom line. The renovation of the restaurant extends far beyond the Society’s savings. This is where you can help. This is YOUR Society. It is a non-profit run by the community, for the benefit of the community. Your donation is an investment in that community.

We want to reward our backers. For just $100 you will be invited to opening night – when the dream becomes reality. Enjoy the first dishes created by our young new chef as he/she embarks on their culinary career. The more you donate, the more we want to give back. Have your generosity memorialized forever on our 200-year old walls as we etch your family or company name on an individual brick. Enjoy a private tasting menu at the chefs table. You can also secure our spacious event space upstairs for a fully-catered and serviced party or event of your choice. La Nacional is run mostly by volunteers – people who deeply believe in the mission of the Society. Their tireless dedication drives this endeavor. Additionally, our architectural and design teams, construction crew, accountants and other professionals are all working at a fraction of their normal rate. All of us pledge to be good stewards of your donations.

More Than A Donation

Finally, we remind you that this Society exists at the service of our community. We have spent 150 years as the cultural, charitable and spiritual center for the Spanish-speaking community. It has never been clearer that we fail to preserve our heritage at our own peril. Now more than ever, we understand the importance of celebrating who we are and creating common spaces where the wine pours, bread is broken and conversation flows freely and easily.

And like Camprubi wrote in 1920 “Our society will always know how to express its gratitude, multiplied one hundredfold, for that which you bestow on us, for your generosity. We do not ask you for aims, rather we ask you for that which shall belong to you.”
We Need Your Support: REWARDS

$60
Lunch on us!
Please come enjoy a delicious lunch for you and a friend in our newly renovated space, including complimentary drinks from our innovative new cocktail menu!

$100
A Once-in-a-Lifetime Invite!
It will truly be an historic and magical night when the restaurant goes live for an exclusive opening night – to see our Chef create his first dishes in our new kitchen. We want our backers to be a part of this experience. Enjoy one pass to our opening night on us!

$300
The España Experience!
Enjoy exclusive opening night passes for two plus we’ll treat you to a choice of a special plate of Jamón Serrano – de Bellota, considered the best (and most expensive) jamón in the world. Yes, the good stuff! We want our backers to have the complete opening night experience!

$500
Opening Night & Private Tasting Menu
Enjoy exclusive opening night passes for two plus, we’d like to invite you back for a special five course tasting menu at the chef’s private table in the back of the restaurant.

$5,000
A Gift Memorialized!
"Mil gracias!" Experience our exclusive opening night party with two guest passes. We also want to invite you back for a five course tasting menu at our chef’s private table plus have your name or company etched onto a brick on the 200 year-old wall of our restaurant.
We Need Your Support: REWARDS

$10,000
Corporate:
Why not use your marketing budget for something worthwhile? Pledge this amount and we will give you an all-inclusive weekday corporate or holiday party for up to 80 guests in our beautiful event space on the parlor floor of our brownstone.

Personal:
For individuals, let us host your rehearsal dinner, graduation, fundraiser, bar/bat mitzvah or any other sort of celebration for up to 80 guests, fully catered and serviced by our restaurant.

$10,000+
The society would consider corporate sponsorships and exclusive corporate partnership and periodic use of our events space for marketing events, showcases or special exhibitions. We’d also like to honor your generous donation with a permanent plaque in the reception/waiting area of our restaurant that commemorates the invaluable contribution your company has made to this historic endeavor.

Gift Certificate
For those who prefer a gift certificate (for the amount donated) to our restaurant PLUS a complimentary bottle of wine instead of one of the above listed rewards, please enter the amount and select the “gift certificate” option in the following field labeled “name”.