



auto guía

la orotava flower carpets

*3rd edition*

The autoGUÍAS collection of guides to La Orotava invites you to discover the town's rich historical heritage in an original and distinctive way. Through various themed routes, we take you on a journey through our historic heritage that transcends the architectural beauty of our streets and ancestral homes, to delve deeper into the hidden mysteries of masonic society, discover the devotional art of traditional carpets made using flowers and sand, recover the historic memory of times of great upheaval, or dive into the fascinating world of human finiteness, its expressions and symbols.

Collection:

auto guías



## **AutoGUÍA La Orotava Flower Carpets**

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© Zebensui López Trujillo

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# The Art of Carpets

The original idea behind the flower carpets so typical of La Orotava was to cover the cobbled streets of the old town with flowers for the Corpus Christi procession, which sets out every year from the Church of La Concepción. The idea was first developed by the Monteverde y del Castillo family in the mid-19th century, and they have since become one of the town's most prominent artistic manifestations and most cherished traditions.

This celebration, which dates back over one and a half centuries, was the initiative of two women, Leonor del Castillo y Bethencourt and Maria Teresa Monteverde y Bethencourt. They created the first ever carpet of flowers outside their home in Calle Colegio with a view to reviving the former splendour of the Corpus Christi celebration, which by the mid-19th century had become a fairly low-key affair.

The 1830s and 40s were years of economic decline in the Spanish Church, mainly due to land confiscation on the part of the Spanish government. In the case of La Orotava, this process had a negative impact on the celebration of Corpus Christi in the Church of Nuestra Señora de La Concepción, and the festivity gradually lost its prominence, declining in popularity.

The Monteverde family sought to rekindle greater devotion to Corpus celebrations since they had for many years had a very strong relationship with that Church.

After this pioneering initiative, which began sometime between 1844 and 1847, the Monteverde y del Castillo family were joined in their endeavours by some of their distinguished neighbours, who also lived along the processional route. So began a process that would culminate in the 1880s, when the entire processional route was finally carpeted with flowers.

The first families that followed suit were that of the widowed marchioness of La Florida, the count of El Valle Salazar, the Lugo-Viñas, the Machados, the Lercaros and the Diaz Flores family. And just like the Monteverdes, these families not only made their own carpets but also sourced their own flowers and heather, stripping the petals and burning the heather using their own means.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, carpets of flowers were tremendously popular in La Orotava, becoming a huge draw for tourists and an unmissable event on Tenerife's social calendar. Spurred on by the success of this initiative, other towns in Tenerife began to make their own flower carpets, with Tacoronte following suit in 1897, and La Laguna in 1907.





Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

Although, in the early 20th Century, many people were involved in the art of creating carpets of flowers, in terms of collecting flowers and removing the petals, cutting and burning heather, or laying out the carpets themselves, there were only five such carpets or tapestries created in total, joined together by long corridos, which were like flower carpet runners. These five carpets were made by the Machado family in the Plaza del Teatro; by the Monteverde family, outside their ancestral home; the Lercaro family, just a few feet further on; by the Díaz Flores family, outside Casa Brier, and by Peregrina Álvarez, in La Cuatro Esquinas.

Throughout the 20th century, these flower carpets became more and more popular, drawing tourists from throughout Spain and abroad. One example of this process of expansion was the fact that in the year 2000, coinciding with the celebration of the Jubilee in Rome, La Orotava was invited to contribute to La Infiorata del Mondo, along with other cities from several countries, including Tokyo and Moscow.

Several events that took place in the 20th Century that increased the popularity of these festivities. For example, during the first quarter of the century, the Plaza del Ayuntamiento was established as a new site to be adorned with a flower carpet. Furthermore, the people of La Orotava received an invitation from King Alfonso XIII to create a special flower carpet in Madrid on the occasion of his wedding.

And the coverage provided of this ephemeral art form by the Fox Films Corporation from New York and The National Geographic Magazine from Washington also made a major contribution to its rising popularity. These two American production firms did a great deal to raise the profile of La Orotava's unique carpets made from flowers and coloured earth, throughout the United States and the rest of the world. The National Geographic, through a photographic report published in 1930, and Fox Films through a documentary for its news programme.

All of this made the flower carpets of La Orotava famous throughout the world, generating interest in this beautiful tradition both within Spain and internationally. Cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valladolid, Caracas, London, Rotterdam, Oslo, Rome and San Antonio in Texas have been able to enjoy the artistry of La Orotava's flower carpets, thanks to the enthusiasm of the local alfombristas (carpet artists) to showcase this art form on the international stage.

Today, the flower carpets created in La Orotava, which are imitated all over Tenerife, are still made according to tradition using flower petals, unlike other towns that make them using a variety of materials.

But if there's something that truly sets the carpets made in this town apart from the rest, it's the monumental tapestry made from volcanic sands taken from Mount Teide, which is created in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento. Today, this is undoubtedly the most important component of a tradition dating back more than a century and a half. ■

# Tour La Orotava

## Flower Carpets

- 1** Stop
- R** Restaurant
- A** Local crafts
- i** Tourist information
- +** Church



- 1** Antigua Plaza del Teatro
- 2** Corrido de Los Monteverde
- 3** Casa Monteverde
- 4** Casa Lercaro
- 5** Casa Brier
- 6** Museo de las Alfombras
- 7** Casa Benítez de Lugo
- 8** Teide Volcanic Sand Carpets
- 9** Las Cuatro Esquinas
- 10** Corrido del Casino
- 11** Church of La Concepción



# Antigua Plaza del Teatro

## C/ Cologan, 2

Esplanade running alongside the Plaza de Patricio García and the monument honouring the flower carpet artists or alfombristas, by the ancestral home of the Machado family. This square is named after the town's old theatre nearby, located on the site of the former San Nicolás Convent.



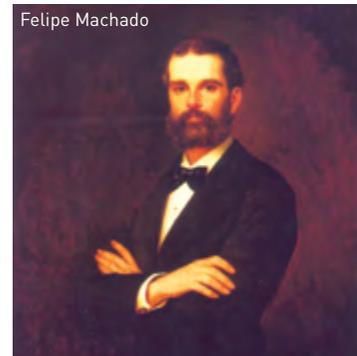
Photo: FEDAC

In this historic place, the most important figure in this tradition, along with members of the Monteverde family, made a name for himself: Felipe Machado y Benítez de Lugo. He created the Machado family carpet and was the first to create carpets for the Corpus Christi celebrations in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento. Thanks to him, by the late 19th Century, his family's carpet

rivalled even the Monteverde carpet in terms of popularity and quality, even though they were both made differently. Whereas the Monteverde family's carpets faithfully reproduced biblical scenes, he would create complex decorative medallions without using moulds or templates. In addition, he progressively introduced a series of natural products to replace flowers.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



## A carpet fit for a King's wedding

In June 1906, coinciding with the eighth day of Corpus Christi, the magnificent flower carpet created in Madrid's bullring to mark the marriage of King Alfonso XIII was recreated in this square.

At the behest of the King, alfombristas from La Orotava were invited to Madrid to create one of their famous flower tapestries for the royal wedding. The carpet, designed



by Felipe Machado, consisted of a giant medallion, featuring an extremely intricate design and clean lines. Two dragons, their tails entwined, form the foundation of carved columns, supporting a giant eagle, with its wings outstretched and neck arched, holding in its beak two chains from which two symbolic worlds are suspended.

Unfortunately, the carpet, which, according to the press was greatly admired by all, was destroyed by a strong gust of wind just moments before the King arrived.

# Corrido de los Monteverde

## C/ Colegio

Historically, the stretch of Calle Colegio that goes from the old Plaza del Teatro up to the section of the street that narrows by the Church of La Concepción, has been carpeted with a long corrido or runner created by the Monteverde family.



For years, this responsibility fell to Maria Monteverde y Lugo, who was married to the English philanthropist and naturalist George Graham Toler. Both La Orotava and the island of Tenerife owe him the building of Altavista Refuge on Mount Teide.

In the 1940s, responsibility for the creation of this long runner passed to Rafael Hernández García and Víctor Llanos Díaz, who continued to honour this family's name with their hard work. Víctor Llanos Díaz,



an eminent jeweller in La Orotava, is remembered today not only for his pioneering work creating flower carpets in the parish of San Juan, but also for his work alongside carpenter José Reyes Álvarez, creating a monumental carpet of flowers in Caracas to mark the 400th anniversary of the founding of this city.



## Saragatas

In La Orotava, flower carpets are divided into two categories: tapices or tapestries, and runners or saragatas. The tapices depict biblical scenes and the saragatas create geometric patterns repeated along a particular route. On this stretch of road,

María Monteverde created these saragatas.

According to some authors, this latter form of flower carpet was developed thanks to a former butler to the Monteverde family, who came up with the ingenious idea of using a barrel hoop as a template or mould that allowed him to create a series of flower circles.

# Casa Monteverde

## C/ Colegio

This house was built by Juan Monteverde Van Dalle and his wife Mariana de Ponte y Molina, in the first half of the 17th century. Upon completion, it became the home of this noble family, who created the tradition of making carpets of flowers.



The young members of the Monteverde family, eminent artists and painters, turned flower carpets into a true art form, and for many years their creations were unsurpassed. They introduced the use of burned heather to create shading and chopped heather for the background. They also created what is now known as the tapiz or tapestry.

Four generations of this family are still creating the magnificent carpet known as the alfombra

magna or the alfombra trono, as it was known formerly. Thanks to the artistry of the brothers Agustín and José Monteverde y Lugo, this family tradition became true floral craftsmanship. And Agustín Monteverde y Lugo, alongside Guzmán Codesido Varela (from Galicia), had the honour of creating the first ever flower carpet for the Plaza del Ayuntamiento.



## The first carpet

According to the press at the time, the first carpet created by the Monteverde family involved filling barrel hoops with flowers.

Subsequently, another slightly more complex carpet was designed by Maria Teresa Monteverde, a sketch of which still remains: it was just three yards



long by two and a half wide and was sketched out in plaster on the cobblestones of the street. The following year, it was larger and depicted a star in a combination of bright colours.

Some authors believe that this idea was not original to the Monteverde family, but rather was an imitation of other similar traditions in certain parts of Italy.

# Casa Lercaro Justiniani

## C/ Colegio, 5

This 17th century building showcases a plethora of architectural features characteristic of the Mudejar style. The front of the building has symmetrical apertures, framed by sgraffiti decorations with plant motifs.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



Photo: FEDAC

The Lercaro family began making carpets, following the example set by the Monteverdes, thanks to Antonio Lercaro y Ponte, who in the year 1860 began to carpet the stretch of road outside his ancestral home with flowers. Son of the head of the family, Lercaro Justiniano, and grandson of the Counts of El Palmar, the responsibility for creating the family carpet rested with him until his death in 1899. In the year 1900,

Doctor Osmundo Lercaro Machado took over the family tradition, together with his wife, Justine Muret, and his children, who carpeted the entire street right up to Casa Brier. For years they were helped by prominent alfombristas such as Diego Álvarez Casanova and Juan Hernández Bethencourt. The Lercaro family was involved in the making of this flower carpet until the year 1989, when they sold the house.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

## Corpus Christi

The feast of Corpus Christi was instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264 to commemorate the miracle of Consecration. The celebration reached the Canary Islands following their invasion by Castile. As in other towns, La Orotava marked Corpus Christi

by putting up altars. These were set up in the doorways to eminent houses, and Sacramental Bread was placed on them.

Since the year 1700, thanks to Bishop Bernardo Vicuña, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament sets out from the Church of La Concepción on the eighth day of the feast of Corpus.

# Casa Brier

## C/ Colegio, 5

Known as Casa Díaz Flores or Casa Brier, this elegant prism shaped building conforms to the canons of romantic architecture popular in the Canary Islands in the 19th century.



Like the Lercaros, the Díaz Flores family began making carpets of flowers outside their home a few years after the Montevertes pioneered this initiative. And, like them, they were also assisted by the most prominent alfombristas of the time, such as Guzmán Codesido, Nicolás Tolosa, Felipe Verdugo, and former mayor of the town, Tomás Pérez Acosta.

The Díaz Flores family made these carpets until the end of the 19th century. After the turn of the century, the Brier family continued the tradition, thanks to José Brier Casabuena and his children, particularly Conrado



Photo: FEDAC

Brier. But although the Brier family, like the Lercaro and Díaz Flores families, were assisted by prominent artists of the time in their creations, the Brier family carpet is remembered by many as the carpet of Don Ambrosio. Born in San Juan de la Rambla, he oversaw and created the Brier family flower tapestry for more than 20 years, leaving a permanent mark on the collective memory of La Orotava on account of his skill and expertise.

## Colegio Jesuita

The Jesuit College was built on the land occupied for most of the 18th Century by the Colegio San Luiz Gonzaga, directed by the Company of Jesus. Following the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain, the building was expropriated for Town Council premises, until a tragic fire destroyed it completely in the early hours of 2 June 1841. Antonio Díaz Flores built his home on this site. Finally, after a brief period in which this house served as the Hotel Hespérides, it was purchased by the Brier family, who built the splendid annex garden.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

# Museo de las Alfombras

 C/ San Francisco, 5

This building, which currently houses a museum dedicated to the art of Flower Carpets, was erected in the early 17th century. It is a truly spectacular edifice on the inside and outside, particularly the magnificent balconies at the front.

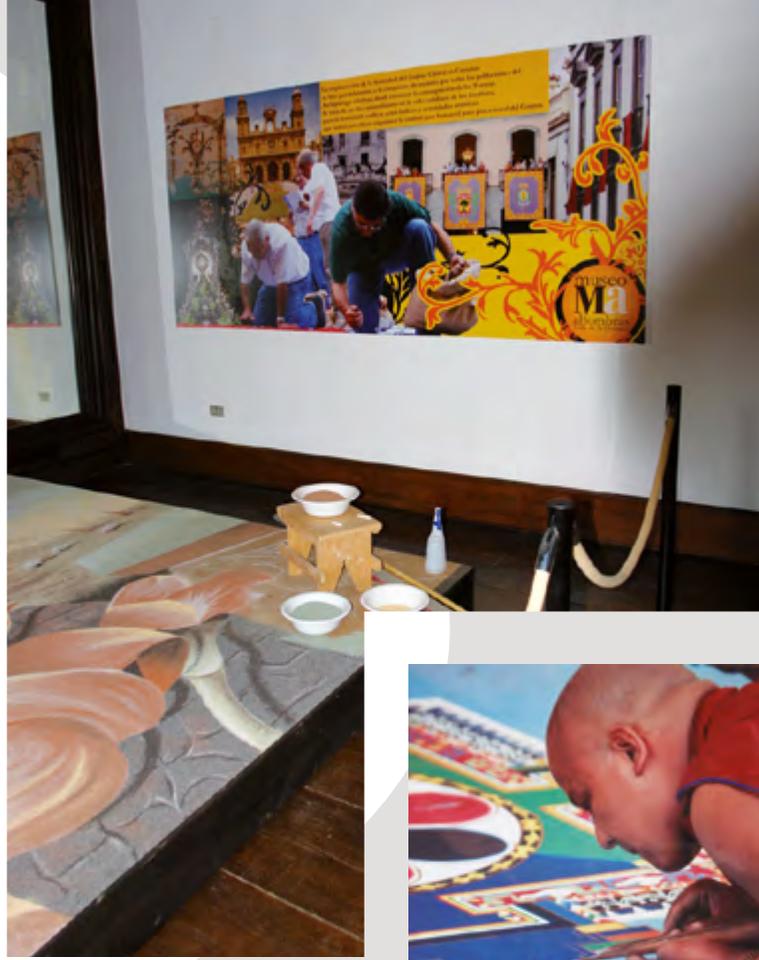


La Orotava opened its Museo de las Alfombras in June of 2006, coinciding with the 1st International Congress of Ephemeral Art of Earth and Flower Carpets of the World.

The main and indeed sole aim of this museum is to show locals and visitors alike the artistic and spiritual wealth contained within our Flower Carpets, which are created for the Thursday of Corpus Christi in the main streets around La Orotava's old town.



In the museum, you can see an old heather threshing machine, and even the old coats of arms they used to hang from the balconies of the Town Hall during Corpus Christi. But the most striking and spectacular thing you will notice as you enter the museum is the smell, as the fragrance of heather and flowers permeates every room, recreating the all-important 8th day of Corpus Christi.



## Asociación de Alfombristas

The Association of Alfombristas (carpet artists) was founded in 1991 in order to tackle issues of organisation, creation, promotion, conservation, improvement, and to defend and promote the interests and services that affect the creation of flower and earth carpets. In 2006, the I Congress of the Ephemeral Art of Earth and



Flower Carpets of the World was organised in La Orotava, inviting towns and cities that uphold this tradition from around the world to take part. There were representatives from: Huamantla (Mexico), Brussels (Belgium), Kobe (Japan), Rome (Italy), Toledo, Puentearreas and Sitges (Spain), Arrecife, Arucas and Mazo (Canary Islands) and even a delegation of monks from Tibet.

# Casa Benítez de Lugo

## C/ Carrera del Escultor Estévez, 17

The building was constructed in the early 17th century at the behest of Lorenzo Benítez Pereira de Lugo and has been linked to the Marquises of La Florida. It has been renovated on multiple occasions, most significantly in 1946, when the lower ground was turned into the offices of the Banco Exterior de España.

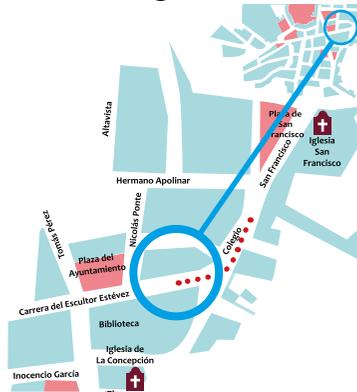


Photo: FEDAC

The historic carpet of the Marchioness of La Florida is one of the three longest-standing carpets made in the town, since the Marchioness herself, Elena Benítez Lugo y Saavedra, began making flower carpets shortly after the Monteverde family pioneered the tradition. She, along with the family of Antonio Lugo Viña y Sotomayor and the Machado family, was among the first to follow suit in the creation of flower carpets. The Marchioness and her daughters continued to

make carpets until the property was sold in the early 20th century.

As with the Lugo Viña family, who married into the Monteverde family, the Benítez de Lugo family created marriage ties with the Machados, a fact that may have been instrumental in the preparation of the family's first carpets. The daughter of the Marquises of La Florida married Felipe Machado y Benítez de Lugo in 1857, when he was in charge of creating carpets for the Machado family.

Ezequiel de León



## Pérez Bethencourt Family

Ever since then, the carpet has been created by the Pérez Bethencourt family, who bought the house through Pedro Pérez Perera. Like their neighbours, they have also worked with prominent artists from La Orotava to create their carpets. They worked with eminent alfombristas such as Norberto Perera, Pedro Hernández Méndez and the sculptor Ezequiel de León Domínguez, who for some years oversaw monumental tapestry created in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento.

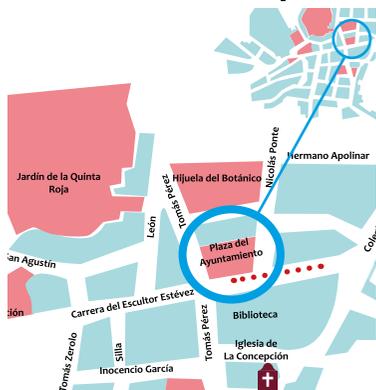


Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

# Teide Volcanic sand carpets

## Plaza del Ayuntamiento

This square is located by the former San José Convent. Initially designed by architect Antonio Pintor as a simple earth terrace, within a few years it was transformed into the current model proposed by Mariano Estanca. It was officially opened in 1912.



On 11 February 1905, Guzmán Codesido Varela and Agustín Monteverde y Lugo created the first ever flower carpet in this square, which at the time was called the Plaza de Viera y Clavijo. It was created to welcome sailors from the Spanish warships Pelayo and Carlos V. From this date onwards, a tradition began

that placed this square at the very heart of the celebrations. Starting in 1919, at the initiative of Felipe Machado y Benítez de Lugo, carpets were created every year to mark the arrival of Corpus Christi, even though the procession first took place in 1913, thanks to the initiative of Francisco Miranda Perdigón.



## Guinness Book of World Records

To date, 106 carpets have been created in the square, 94 to mark the arrival of the Holy Sacrament on the Thursday of Corpus Christi, and 12 special carpets to welcome important dignitaries or commemorate important events in the history of the town. Interestingly, in the year 2007, it made it into the Guinness Book



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

of Records as the largest carpet in the world made with volcanic sands.

## From Alfonso XIII to the Olympic Torch

During the 20th century, this square was always carpeted to receive important figures or to mark a global event in which the eyes of the world were upon the town. In 1906, a carpet was created to receive King Alfonso XIII, then again in 1910 for the Infanta Isabel, in 1928 for the then Head of Government Primo de Rivera, and in 1973 for the Prince and Princess of Asturias, Juan Carlos and Sofia. Carpets were also created in 1992 as the Olympic Torch passed through the town on its way to Barcelona, and to make a documentary for the Fox Films American newsreel made in 1933.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



## The Alfombrista who forgot the gods

In 1934, the most controversial central tapestry in the history of this celebration was created in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento. That year, Norberto Perera Hernández, referred to as the "Alfombrista who forgot the gods", created a carpet dedicated to the hydroelectric plant being built by the town.

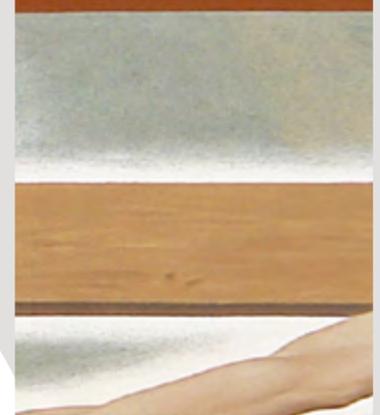


Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

## From cereals to the volcanic sands of Mount Teide

Although today the tapestry is made using coloured sands taken from the Teide National Park, the first carpets created here were

made from cereals and pulses. However, there were several drawbacks to this type of carpet. On the one hand, humidity, that would lead the grains to sprout over the time taken to create it, and on the other hand, the damage caused by pigeons and other birds.



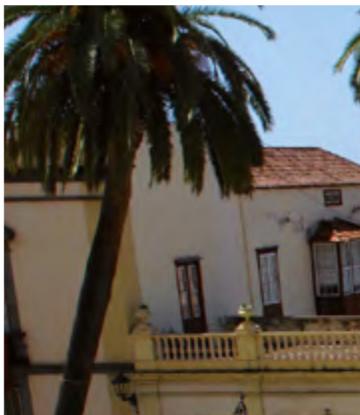
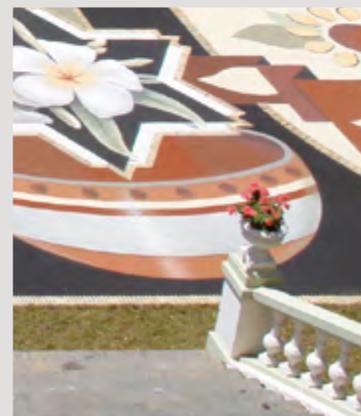
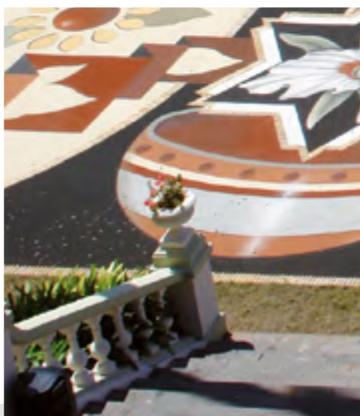
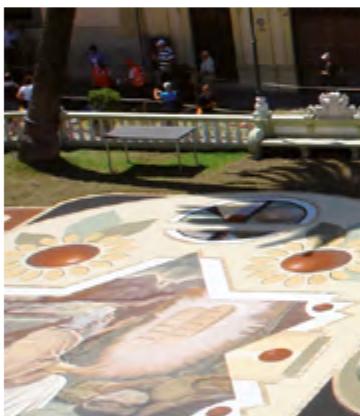


Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



# Las Cuatro Esquinas

## C/ Carrera del Escultor Estévez – C/ Tomás Pérez

In this strategic location at the intersection between Calle Carrera and Calle de Tomás Pérez, flower carpets have been created since the 1870s, one of the five historic carpets of this tradition.



Photo: Francisco Casanova Arzola

This carpet is also remembered as the carpet of the Infantry Battalion of La Orotava, since this company oversaw its creation for much of the latter 20th Century. It was precisely during this time that it was taken over by Francisco Casanova Cruz, who started out helping his brother-in-law Agustín Ruiz Domínguez and who is now in charge of this carpet. For many years, together with friends and collaborators, including

the emblematic Chucho Dorta, Benahuya, they worked with great care and affection to create this traditional carpet.

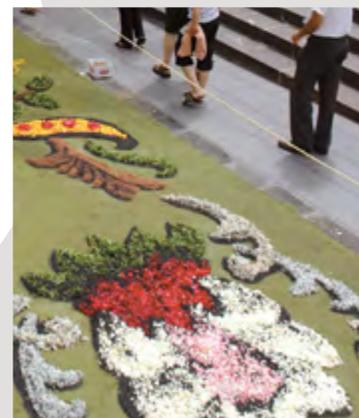
Both Francisco and Agustín took over the Cuatro Esquinas carpet from another prominent figure from the town, the naturalist, writer and editor Francisco Dorta y Jacinto del Castillo, known under the pseudonym of Alfredo Fuentes.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis

## La Alfombra de Peregrina

This historic carpet was also known as La Alfombra de Peregrina Álvarez, who created the carpet with the help of artist Francisco Álvarez González. Like Felipe Machado or the Monteverde family, Álvarez González did not use moulds to make his carpet, but simply sketched his work on the pavement and then filled the



lines with flowers. He was also considered an expert in the use of burned heather, which he used to create filigree work.

# Corrido del Casino

## C/ Tomás Pérez , 3

This historic runner occupies the entire length of Calle Tomás Pérez, from the Church of La Concepción up to the intersection with Calle la Carrera. It is named after Count del Valle Salazar y del Casino because it is situated outside Casa Bucaille, the family's ancestral home for much of the 19th and 20th centuries.



Photo: FEDAC



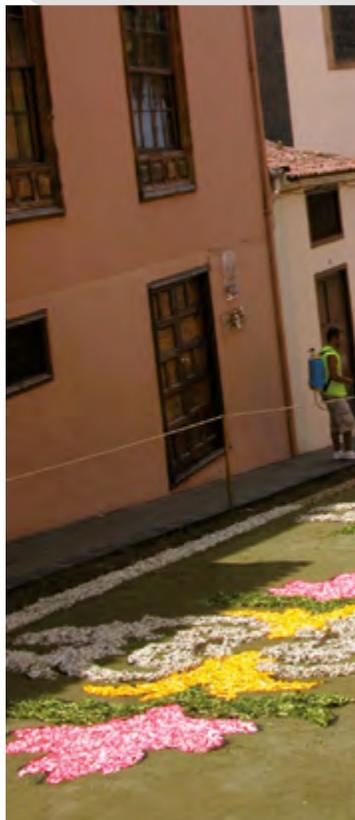
The Salazar family also began to make carpets in imitation of the Monteverdes in the year 1860, upholding this tradition until 1925, when they sold their house to the Orotava Casino. Esteban Salazar y Ponte, the Count del Valle Salazar and Domingo Salazar y Cologan, president of Tenerife's Island Council, are some of the most prominent members of this

Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



family, who have been responsible at some point for this long runner.

After the property was acquired by the Orotava Casino, the latter continued the tradition of making the flower carpet runner, working with two great alfombristas and alumni of La Orotava's School of Drawing, Isaac Quijada Lima and Victoriano Martín Raya.



## Luis Diego Cuscoy

Flower tapestries are consumed in their own beauty, in their ephemeral life. The truth is that their fate is beyond our control, with an air of beauty, elusive and fleeting, like the souls of children destined for heaven. No creator of carpets is allowed to revel in their creation. They create with a sense of offering, of devotion. The creation is not yet complete, the petals have not yet had time to wither, and now it has gone...

Luis Diego Cuscoy



This description of La Orotava's flower carpets dates from June 1947, attributed to the iconic archaeologist Luis Diego Cuscoy, who had links to this town since his childhood.

# Church of La Concepción

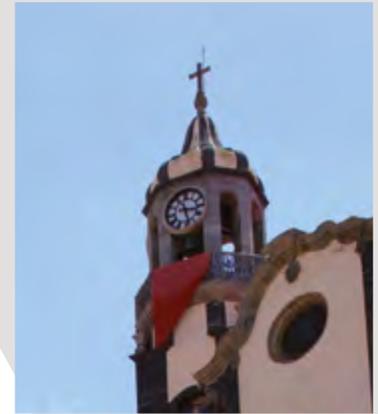
 C/ Plaza de la Iglesia, s/n

Officially declared an Artistic Historical Monument in 1948, this church has undergone several constructions and reforms from the primitive hermitage of the 15th century to its current form, on which construction began in 1768. It is notable for its size and composition, its baroque and neoclassical influences, and its Florentine style dome.



## Las Andas del Corpus

The litter or Andas used in Corpus Christi celebrations today is the result of several modifications made over the years. There are two main components to this litter: the upper covered section and the base section. Traditionally it is said that the upper section comes from the Dominican convent and might be related to the Guatemalan legacy of Fernández de Monroy. The three bottom sections on which the upper section rests were created by local silversmiths, José Domingo Acosta Dávila and his son Felipe Acosta Bencomo. For this creation the Santísimo brotherhood had to use some of the silver from the Virgen de la Caridad statue.



Flower carpets were first developed in La Orotava to give greater prominence to the procession of the Holy Sacrament, Corpus Christi, which sets out on the Thursday of the Corpus Christi celebrations from this church, Nuestra Señora de la Concepción. The Monteverde family always had close links to the Church and the sacramental brotherhood, and in their attempt to bring greater reverence and solemnity to the Corpus feast, they enriched the treasures of this church. Thus,

Antonio Monteverde y Rivas, father-in-law of Leonor del Castillo and father of María Teresa Monteverde, during his years as church warden for this Church and the Santísimo brotherhood, brought six silver lanterns with six spare bulbs from London, Corpus vestments from France and a silver plaited canopy and embroidered pennant from Cadiz. In addition, he also commissioned Genoese craftsmen to create the marble statues and the image of the Immaculate Conception.



Photo: Pedro Hernández Luis



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Decorating the streets with flowers and volcanic sands from Mount Teide to mark the celebration of Corpus Christi is one of the most cherished and spectacular traditions of the Orotava Valley. This guide allows you to explore this tradition in greater depth, beyond the fragrances, colours and textures of the tapestries, in order to examine the origins and evolutions of this unique cultural manifestation.

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