



Casino de Madrid
Alcalá, 15

The History of the Casino de Madrid

The Madrid Casino, throughout its history, operated in various locations before the construction of its own building in 1910.

1836-1840. Café de Sólito

The Café de Sólito, mentioned by 'Figaro' in its articles on local customs and by Zorrilla in his 'Memories of times past', was on Príncipe Street (today Fernández González), at the corner of Visitación Street. The house, which no longer exists, was very close to the Teatro Príncipe (today Teatro Español) and to the café of the same name, also known as 'El Parnasillo'. The 56 founding members established themselves on the ground floor of the Sólito Café de Sólito at the end of 1836, and soon after, on 16 January 1837, they decided to formally constitute a recreational society.

1840-1848. Number 12 Príncipe Street

At the beginning of 1840, the casino founders, due to the high number of new members, were forced to look for a larger and more suitable location, which they found next to the modern Teatro de la Comedia at number 12 Príncipe Street. Thus, the Casino was named 'Príncipe'. The Casino management wanted to maintain a modest style, but a group of members led by José de Salamanca decided to 'rebel', disposing of everything and starting over. The Casino was then decorated with fine furniture and valuable works of art, and soon after the first social events were held.

Marqués de Santiago Palace. 1848-1888

In the summer of 1848, the Casino del Príncipe moved to the Marqués de Santiago Palace, located at number 29 San Jerónimo Street. The building had a beautiful XVII century baroque façade and large, beautiful rooms. On the ground floor was the famous Café de la Iberia, focus of the political and literary scene of the period.

1880-1891. Café Suizo

In 1880, due to the widening of Sevilla Street, the Casino moved again. The members tried to buy the Marqués de Santiago Palace, but were unsuccessful. The Casino's next home was in Alcalá Street at the corner of Sevilla Street, in the same building as the Café Suizo and which is today occupied by the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria.

La Equitativa. 1891-1910

From the Café Suizo building, the Casino moved to the other corner of Sevilla and Alcalá Streets, to the Equitativa building, which today belongs to the Banco Español de Crédito. The building was still under construction when the members decided to move, so its plans were adapted to the needs of the Society. A commission modified the project and supervised the construction work. After various delays, they moved in February 1891, under the Casino president General Dabán. The move cost 353.072 pesetas. The opening of the new Casino caused great expectation. Of special note were the Rotunda and the Library, which was

very well equipped and had an excellent newspaper library.

Alcalá. 29 September 1910.

At the General Meeting in June, 1902 a proposal to construct a social building was brought forward again. It was considered and eventually ratified by the Board of Directors.

In 1903, President Agustín Díaz-Agero, Count of Malladas, was re-elected. He gave the project momentum by purchasing number 13 and 15 Alcalá Street and number 20 and 22 La Aduana Street where the new building was to be located.

An international design competition was held in which the best French and Spanish architects of the era participated.

The French architect Tronchet's project was favoured by the jury. He was known for his pavilion in Trocadero, 'la belle Meunière', built for the Paris Exhibition. However, there were protests because of the stereotypical Spanish guitars and tambourines featured in Tronchet's bas-reliefs.

Finally, the jury decided to buy the projects presented by Jesús Carrasco, Martínez Ángel, Tronchet, Farge, Gómez Acebo and Palacios. The Farges, father and son, who edited a prestigious publication in Paris 'Recueil d'Architecture' and known throughout Europe, were selected to combine the best ideas of all the projects. For bureaucratic reasons it would be Luis Esteve who would sign the plans, as he did for the Metrópolis building, located at the corner of Alcalá Street and the Gran Vía. The construction of the Casino was overseen by José López Sallaberry, a member of the Casino and one of the best architects of the era, who is responsible for the brilliant treatment of the entrance, the staircase of honour and the ballroom (now the Salón Real).

The best materials were used in the construction of the building and the best artisans in Spain and abroad produced the furniture, draperies and stained glass.

The construction was completed in 1910, and the official opening of the building was held on 29 September of the same year. It was a great success as never before had a private organisation had such a spacious and magnificent building, built by contributions of its members, through bonds issued by the Casino.

Most notable among the Casino's numerous new facilities were the Salón Real (decorated with paintings by Romero de Torres, Alvarez de Sotomayor, Anselmo Miguel Nieto and Manuel Benedito), the sumptuous dining room, various salons, billiard rooms, rooms to play cards, the magnificent library, the spacious gymnasium with a sauna, showers and baths, the splendid rooftop for summer dining, as well as the top hairdressing, manicure, pedicure, shoeshine, medical and car services for the use of its members.

Several years later, the Civil War caused an abrupt interruption in the Casino's social life. The existing 'tertulias' (social gatherings) dispersed and shortly after the start of the war the building was seized and used briefly as a hospital before being used for other purposes.

At the end of the conflict, at the beginning of 1940, the Casino resumed its activities after repairing damage suffered during its occupation. The president was Lieutenant General Fernández Pérez, followed by General Aranda and then the

Count of San Julián followed by other noteworthy individuals. Cultural activities, especially conferences, were renewed and even grew.

Nevertheless, with the passage of time the Casino fell into disrepair, especially during the period between 1975 and 1986 for economic reasons. Cultural activities, social events and services were minimal and the survival of the Casino was threatened by many challenges that in recent years have done away with other institutions of longstanding tradition.

In 1986, formulas were found to ensure the economic survival of the Casino. An agreement was reached with a company that would undertake the management of the Casino. The agreement was renewed in 1994.

Thus, a new era began in which the Casino began to recover its former splendour, and was able to enter the new century with the same vigour that it greeted the last century. Since its opening in 1910, the symbol of the Casino has been the building at 15 Alcalá.

There have been many changes at the Casino. Correspondence with foreign clubs has been an enormous success as it caters to the boom both in business and personal travel. Currently there are agreements with more than 220 clubs in Spain and abroad.

Cultural activities have concentrated on Conference Series addressing the most important issues of our times and with the participation of the best known Spanish and foreign speakers. The Casino de Madrid Opinion Forum has become a key cultural centre.

Our magazine, whose first issue had 22 pages, has become a major publication of its kind with more than 100 pages. It has become the Casino's best business card, as well as a source of pride for its members.

Furthermore, existing facilities have been improved: cafeterías, a computerised Library, which is constantly being updated through an intensive acquisition programme. An Historical Archive, Photographic Archive have been created, along with a new Television and 'Tertulia' Lounge in Torreón.

The Lower Level has undergone extensive reforms with the construction of a heated swimming pool, an expanded gymnasium not only in size, but also in exercise equipment. In addition, saunas and Turkish baths have been installed and both the ladies and gentlemen's change rooms have been remodelled. The gentlemen's hair salon has been expanded to include ladies, and the traditional shoeshine service has been reinstated.

The Bullfighting Prizes of the Casino of Madrid, that recognize the work of the participants in the Madrilenian Fair of San Isidro, have become already, by own right, in one of the awards of more prestige within the Madrilenian bullfighting scope.

Another important development for Casino members has been the Casino Club de Golf Retamares, whose services are offered to members without an increase in monthly membership fees. The Casino de Madrid marked another milestone in its century long history when it became known as a country club as well as an urban club. The new Casino Club de Golf Retamares will no doubt attract young members, guaranteeing the future of the Casino.

Finally, since 1997 the Casino de Madrid's restaurant has been ranked among the best in the country under the direction of Ferrán Adrià, one of the top chefs in Spain if not the world, and owner and chef of the world renowned 'El Bulli'.