



**THE
MOST
STYLISH
MEN
ALIVE
2016**

STARRING

**RYAN
REYNOLDS**

**TOM HARDY
DRAKE
LUCKY BLUE
FUTURE
THAT NEW
SUAVE CANADIAN
LEADER DUDE**

AND

**OTHER
MASTERS
OF THE
GAME**

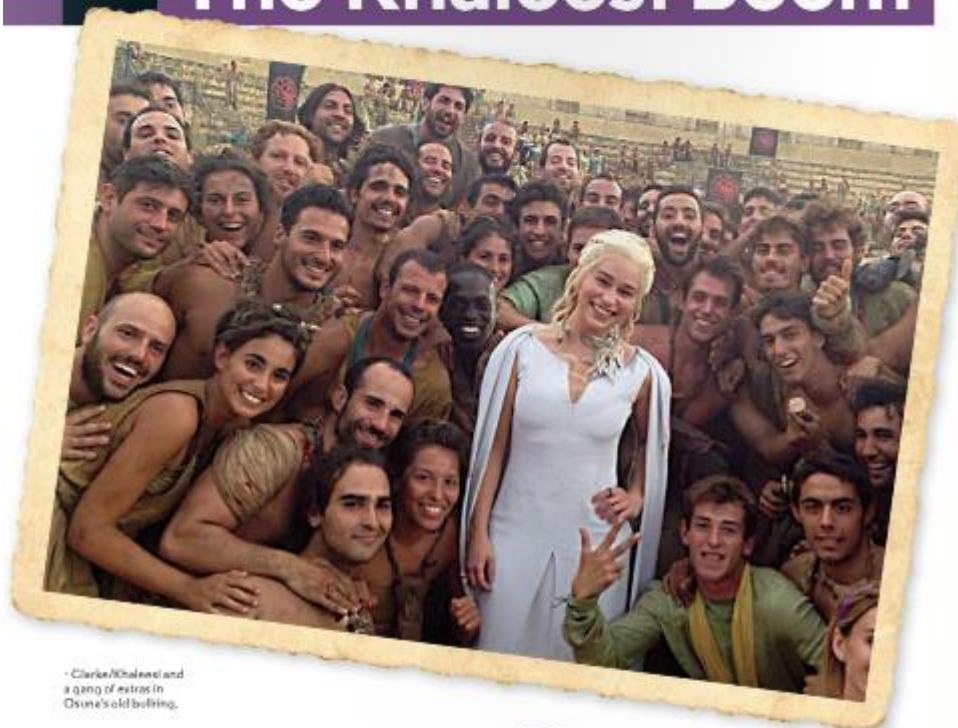
**SELENA
GOMEZ
IS ALL
GROWN
UP (AND
KINDA
BADASS)**

**THE
FITNESS
GUIDE TO
HAVING
BETTER
SEX**

**INSIDE
DONALD
TRUMP'S
(VERY)
WHITE
HOUSE**

**MOUNTAIN
HIGH
THE INSPIRING
FEATS OF THE
WORLD'S MOST
UNLIKELY
CLIMBER**

→ The Khaleesi Boom



• Clarke/Whale and a gang of extras in Osuna's old bullring.

The Miraculous Tale of How *Game of Thrones* Brought a Tiny Spanish Town Back from the Dead

BY MICKY BARKIN



GREETINGS FROM Osuna—a Spanish town so idyllic it looks like it's been drawn by Pixar! Picture, if you will, row upon row of white stucco homes, endless blue sky, Renaissance-era churches, a massive bullring, cobblestone streets dotted with orange trees, old men in cardigans sitting outside cafés sipping a morning coffee. The men barely move, as if some unseen artist is painting their portrait. Around 3,000 years ago this was a Roman stronghold; some archaeologists believe Julius Caesar fought his last victorious battle here. And the sunlight! It's like God kisses Osuna every morning at dawn. At the Monasterio de la Encarnación, a four-foot-tall nun sells lemon bars and offers tours of the private worship hall for two euros. Gazing out a window onto the vast olive groves surrounding the town, a visitor stammers in middling Spanish: "*Qué vista maravillosa.*" What a view.

The nun smiles back, beaming with pride, and says simply: "Osuna." →→

actor and host of the travel show *Hide Spain*, paid a visit to film a segment. One super-fan arrived with a Google Trekker—a wearable camera that intrepid explorers use to document far-off corners of the globe. Now, thanks to his efforts, you can find Doznak's Pit on Google Street View.

Game of Thrones literally put Osuna on the map.

TALK TO ENOUGH PEOPLE In Osuna and you'll hear the same word—a wonderful Spanish word—again and again: *aprovechar*. Loosely translated, it means to take advantage. But it's more than that; a hunger baked into the syllables, like a call to action. And right now, the name of the game in Osuna is *aprovechar*, what they've got thanks to *Game of Thrones*.

It's November, five months after the episode aired, and I'm standing inside the Museo de Osuna, which operates out of a stately 17th-century building near the town's main square. The collection includes ancient pottery that was used to preserve meat some 500 years ago. On the second floor, I come face-to-face with a seven-foot-tall creature with pale blue skin, a long beard, and blue eyes. "It's a White Walker," explains my docent, Jesús Cansino Lopez, a 42-year-old curator who smiles with his whole body (White Walkers, for those not in the know, are icy-creature beasts who rule the frozen land north of The Wall and command an army of zombies.)

Cansino is giving me a guided tour of Osuna's latest tourist attraction: a two-room scholarly exhibit commemorating HBO's three-book laborer of Osuna. The hall is dubbed the *salón de hielo y fuego*—the Room of Ice and Fire—after the George R. R. Martin books that inspired the television series. Though the museum itself is centuries old, the brick walls have been covered with the kind of stone-patterned wallpaper you'd find at a theme-park restaurant. Condeolara Becker to life with the flip of a switch. I half-expect a serving-wench Joseana Garofalo to hand me a menu and shout, "Welcome to Medieval Times!"

Díaz estimates the town council spent 30,000 euros on this exhibit, acquiring "artifacts" and converting a large storage closet into a *Game of Thrones* museum. They looked into it, Díaz says, and discovered that no museum like this existed. "So that's what we decided to do." In fact, a key component of the mayor's economic-recovery plan calls for turning Osuna into a first-class tourist hub for needs.

I ask Díaz: This exhibit is temporary, right?

"No," he says. "Permanente."
After the tour, Cansino and I sit down at Casa Curro for plates of the Joffrey (see box for ingredients) and the *Jon Snow* (chicken

A Meal of Ice and Fire

How do you turn a quaint Spanish town into a GoT amusement park? Theme menus! A sampler of Casa Curro's haute cuisine, Westeros-style



THE JOFFREY
Toast and bacon on a bed of macaroni, with peas in a melted-sauce sauce.
A plate inspired by... the poisoned wine that killed him?



THE BARATHEON
Wild boar with spinach and pine nuts in a honey-and-rosemary sauce.
You're probably not eating the boar that killed Robert. But you can pretend it is.



THE LANNISTER
Venison stew cooked in beer and served with fresh berries.
Much like this dish, Tyrion is both fresh and cooked in beer.

dipped in honey). Cansino pulls out his laptop to show me a series of TV commercials shot here to promote the connection between Osuna and *Game of Thrones*. The spots imagine that the production parked up and left town but the dragons stayed behind; the ads are clever and absurdist in that lost-in-translation way that foreign spots often are, the kind of thing you might share on your Facebook feed. In one, a man's shadow passes over his head. At one point, a huge pile of dragon dung drenches a will-drownd man and his car.

People here seem divided, though, between those who embrace the idea of Osuna as a mecca for *Game of Thrones* tourist dollars and those who think it will take more than make-believe to fight its crisis. "People who had mortgages and cars are now visiting food banks," says Melanie Bulstrode, a Scottish expat. Her friend, a local cook named Barbara Naber Aranda, is even less sanguine: "You must be so naive to think that the economy was going to change just for 30 days of shooting."

When I mention this sort of talk to Cansino, he bristles. "Small-town mentality," he says. For the record, Bulstrode lists her spare room on Airbnb and cites GoT as a selling point, though with little success. But Cansino can't understand why the bakery that made Cersei's birthday cake doesn't have a photo of her in the window. Or why her hotel doesn't have a plaque that reads: **KHALLESI SLEPT HERE**. Osuna's tourist numbers for 2015 are up 75 percent from 2014, all because of *Game of Thrones*. Come on, folks: *aprovechar*!

The real question, though, is what will 2016's numbers be? Or 2017's? And here I'm forced to reckon with Naber's point. Later in my stay, Cansino and I make plans to meet for breakfast at one of the three or four places in town offering a GoT-themed

brunch. This particular one had treated the *Desayuno Bárbaro del Muro* (Barbaric Breakfast from The Wall), featuring toast with olives, pine, grilled bacon, and sheep-milk cheese. But when we arrive, the dish is no longer on the menu. It was too expensive to keep the ingredients in stock, the chef tells us, and demand had started to wane.

After we part, Cansino urges me to visit a local bar called *Cafetería Tetina*, because it's got the Iron Throne, the show's iconic seat of power, forged from hundreds of swords. This confuses me. Why is the Iron Throne in Osuna? When I arrive, I ask the bearded young bartender about *Game of Thrones* in clumsy Spanish. He points toward the back, where—hidden behind a half-wall partition and some folding chairs—I find it: an honest-to-God full-size replica of the throne.

How'd they acquire such a treasure? I ask. From a *Game of Thrones* exhibit, the bartender tells me. "At the end, my boss went along as a joke to ask if he could buy it, and the guy said, 'Everything has a price.' I don't know how much he paid for it. When I asked him he said, 'I'm not telling you, because you'll just laugh at me.' In all honesty, I don't think he really wanted it. But he then it was too late and he didn't want to go back on his word."

Okay, I ask, but why is it all the way in the back of the bar?

"Well, at first, a lot of people came to take selfies. Little kids wanted pictures. But then from so much use it was damaged. There isn't really anywhere else to put it, and it costs money to repair it."

The bartender laughs, sliding me up.

"Why? Do you want to buy it?"

MICKEY RAPKIN is a writer in Los Angeles. He's lived about a couple of Pitch Perfects, inspired the movie franchise.

PHOTO: PATRICK GILBERT; BY MICHELE ALBERTI; PATRICK GILBERT