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A capital way to celebrate

Birthday at the Ritz: Madrid's most famous hotel has just celebrated its 100th birthday. We head to Spain's capital to take part in the celebrations **BY ROSS MCGUINNESS**

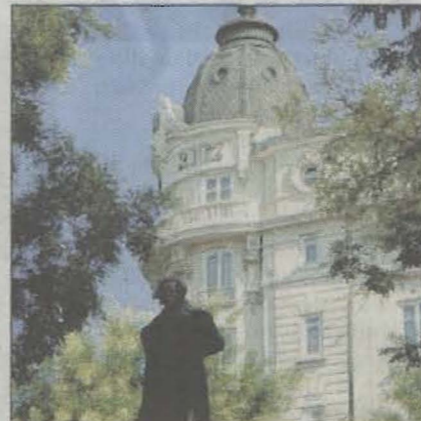
'B'zzzz...' I've pressed the button now. There's no going back. The door opens surprisingly quickly. I'm in. This is too easy. I didn't even have to mutter anything in Spanish. I step into a foyer decked out in brown. There is a man behind a desk, seemingly for no other reason than to be behind a desk. We look at each other for a moment. 'Casa de Granada?' I manage to mutter. He points at a rusting elevator door and mutters something indecipherably fast. 'Muchas gracias,' I say and step through it. The only way is up.

The grubby lift grinds its way to the sixth floor, rattling to a halt in a rather plain looking bar with metal chairs. This is the Casa de Granada restaurant. Located on a nondescript street in

Madrid and accessible only by hitting a buzzer, it isn't quite a gem but it's certainly hidden.

It's also completely empty. Until, that is, I step on to the terrace, where Madrileño couples gaze over their beautiful city between episodes of gratuitous smooching. As I peer over the railing, church spires fight to catch my eye amid a sea of glistening white and orange buildings. The dodgy lift and the equally dodgy-looking tapas adorning the bar don't matter: the magnificent view is what you pay for here, and it's the price of a cheap beer. It's not exactly the Ritz but I like it.

The reason I know it's not quite like the Ritz is because I'm staying there. Madrid's most famous hotel has just celebrated its 100th birthday and I'm in good company – it has been the hotel of



Duff Cooper 29, 2010

choice for the likes of Whoopi Goldberg, Sting and the Jonas Brothers. The king of Spain likes it too, apparently.

Despite its Overlook Hotel-style carpets – I expect to be greeted by The Shining's dead twin girls each time I turn a corner – there is something rather warm about the Ritz. The rooms are dripping in old splendour and have huge bathrooms. Even apparent drawbacks are charming. The shower is so powerful

I forget it doesn't have a light and that I'm washing/warbling in almost complete darkness.

There's no splendour in the Casa de Granada but I am sad to say goodbye. However, I do get to tuck into a six-course meal tonight. For the next year, Ritz diners will be able to feast on six courses from a €100 (£90) menu featuring dishes dating back decades in the hotel's history. I bite into my third course, hake in crispy bread crust, and vow to eat hake every day for the rest of my life. I glance up and on a nearby tree in the marble terrace, a creepy cardboard owl sways in the breeze, keeping the real birds away from my dinner. High above the dangling scarecrow, the moon is fat. And in three courses' time, I will be too. Muchas gracias, Madrid.

Stay three nights at the Hotel Ritz Madrid with British Airways from £616 per person departing October 2010. Includes return BA flights from London City and accommodation with breakfast. For reservations visit www.ba.com/madrid or call 0844 493 0758



Opulent: The rooms at Madrid's Ritz, which is celebrating its 100th birthday, are dripping with splendour

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