

MENU



The house in Seville where Diego Velázquez, left in a detail from his painting *Las Meninas*, was born is to become a museum

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Writer saved Diego Velázquez's home after a brush with Shakespeare

Isambard Wilkinson, Madrid

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A visit to the house where Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon has inspired a Spaniard to rescue the birthplace of a famed artist from oblivion, and transform it into a museum celebrating his early life.

The house in Seville where [Diego Velázquez](#) was born in 1599 lay abandoned for eight years after its fashion designer owner fell into debt during Spain's economic crisis in 2010. It was put up for sale by a bank in 2018 after a judge resolved a legal wrangle among creditors.

Now, Enrique Bocanegra, the leading member of a local group that finally bought the building, is hoping to take inspiration

from the restoration of the bard's home in the Midlands to bring the Seville building back to its former glory.

Velázquez spent four decades at court in 17th-century Madrid as painter to King Philip IV, producing masterpieces such as *Las Meninas*. But his hometown, where he lived for the first 24 years of his life, has paid him scant regard, Bocanegra told *The Times*.

"I was sure the city council would buy it to honour Velázquez," he said. "But they didn't. Velázquez is almost now forgotten in his own birthplace. There was a danger because the building was not listed or protected. It could have been demolished," added the writer and journalist from Seville.

That may have happened if it had not been for Bocanegra's visit to Stratford while he was in England researching a book about Kim Philby's life in Spain during the civil war.

"I was amazed by the house where Shakespeare was born and the energy that his legacy gives the town," he said. "In Spain we have towns that are famous for olives or wine, but Stratford is famous because it has Shakespeare. I simply loved this."



A visit to Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon inspired the project

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“But then I was struck by a feeling of deep shame that we were not doing the same for Velazquez, that his house was abandoned and nobody cared,” he added.

Bocanegra returned to Spain and with a group of four others managed to find investors willing to pay €1.4 million euros to buy the house in central Seville.

“We bought it like any normal house,” he said. “We are normal people making a big effort to save a national treasure from speculators and to turn it into a piece of art.”

After overcoming numerous bureaucratic hurdles, the city council has said that they will be able to start renovating the building for conversion into a museum in the coming weeks, he added.

The museum will focus on Velázquez's formative years in Seville when he produced his pioneering *bodegones*, or kitchen scenes, and the city, then Spain's largest, was the epicentre of international trade and a flourishing artistic hub.

The works for the museum will be produced by the Factum Foundation, a British-run art restoration group whose innovative 3D scanning techniques to produce precise reproductions of cultural objects have won international acclaim.

The National Gallery of Scotland has helped it produce its first piece for the museum by allowing it to scan one of Velázquez's famous early works, *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, which he painted when he was about eighteen years old.



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The group's founder Adam Lowe said his group, which wants to make facsimiles of all Velázquez's early works from Seville to give the museum "a great archive" that scholars can study, now aims to scan *The Waterseller of Seville*, which was part of a hoard taken by Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother, during the 19th-century Peninsular War.

The paintings were among French loot captured by the Duke of Wellington and is now in the family's London home, Apsley House.

"We have had meetings with the Duke of Wellington for permission to scan the painting," said Mr Lowe. "It is the most iconic painting from Velázquez's time in Seville. We are hopeful."

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