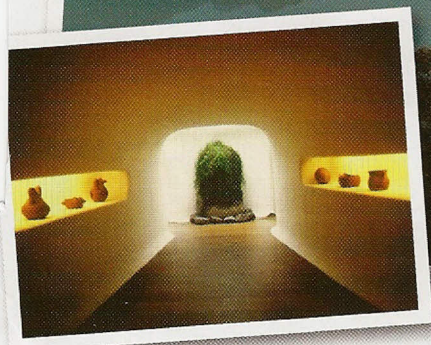


Who on Earth is César Manrique?



Winston

Churchill. Queen Elizabeth I. Lord Admiral Nelson. In the BBC's quest to find the Greatest Ever Briton, there was some pretty stiff competition. If a similar poll had been carried out in Lanzarote, however, the outcome would have been rather more straightforward. In fact, it's probably fair to say that one man would have clinched all the votes. And just who is he? The rather enigmatically named César Manrique.

Never heard of him? We're not surprised. Unless you've been to Lanzarote before he's most likely slipped under your radar. However, he's arguably up there alongside Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali as one of Spain's most prolific artists and designers.

Manrique was born in Arrecife, Lanzarote's capital, in 1919. As a child it was clear that he was a gifted artist and by the age of 23 had staged his first exhibition. In 1945 he hotfooted it over to Madrid where he studied art before crossing the pond to New York. Moving in jet-set circles, he hung out with the likes of Rita Hayworth, King Hussein of Jordan and Andy Warhol.

After much globe-trotting, Manrique eventually returned to Lanzarote. And just in the nick of time, too. During the Sixties and Seventies, places like Tenerife and Gran Canaria had thrown up high-rise hotels in order to satisfy the burgeoning demand for package holidays. Eager to spare Lanzarote from a similar fate, Manrique embarked on a one-man crusade to preserve the traditions and cultures of his beloved island.

He campaigned to encourage 'sympathetic' tourist development and was a major influence on the planning regulations in Lanzarote. It's down to him that all the buildings on the island are low-level and whitewashed, trimmed with jaunty blue and green shutters. He was also responsible for some of the island's most interesting art installations which worked in harmony with nature. And just for good measure, he banned billboards, too.

In 1992, Manrique was tragically killed in a car accident just by his home. He was 73. However, the great man's legacy lives on to this day. Without doubt, he is the Greatest Ever Lanzarotian.

The Manrique Trail...

1 César Manrique Foundation

Find out more about the man at his former home. Built around five cave-like lava bubbles, it's a subterranean wonderland. All red vinyl sofas and geometric objets d'art, the interior looks like something out of Austin Powers.

4 El Diablo Restaurant

Set in the heart of the Timanfaya National Park, this eye-popping eatery was the brainchild of Manrique and looks out over the volcanoes. It uses the volcanic heat, bubbling away below the surface, to fuel the kitchen's barbeque. Try the chicken – it's divine.

2 Los Jameos del Agua

This imaginatively landscaped underground grotto feels like Tracy Island. In one of the caverns there's a concert hall, in another a cutting-edge bar. In the centre there's a dimly-lit rock pool, home to tiny blind crabs, unique to Lanzarote.

5 Mirador del Rio

Manrique transformed an old Spanish fort into this bar-come-restaurant-come-lookout point. Perched on a cliff, high above the ocean, it offers up views across to the small island of La Graciosa.

3 Castillo de San José & International Museum of Contemporary Art

This old 18th-century fort was originally built to defend Lanzarote from marauding pirates. Nowadays it's a modern art gallery and features a Manrique-designed restaurant that overlooks the ocean.

6 Jardín de Cactus

Set in Guatiza, this was César Manrique's final project. And in true Manrique style he transformed what was an old quarry into a spectacular cactus garden. There are about 10,000 cacti here – everything from stumpy little numbers covered in feathery beards to tall, spiky one-armed jobs that wouldn't look out of place in a Spaghetti Western.

