

# RELIGIOUS NICHE OF SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

By Natalie Taylor



# FORWARD

I have been using former city chronicler<sup>1</sup> Jose Cornelio Lopez Espinoza's book, *La Villa de San Miguel el Grande y la Ciudad de San Miguel de Allende*, as my source for information.<sup>2</sup> He provides a rich compendium of history, traditions, and architecture; based on previous historical works about our city, particularly those of Francisco de la Maza.

In his book, Espinoza catalogs many important structures in San Miguel de Allende—fountains, crosses, statues, and niches. He names 75 niches, but did not include any images, and I became fascinated in locating each of them, and photographing them. In a few of the cases I found that no niche existed at a given location, because the address was incorrect. In many of these cases I was able to find the described niche nearby. In other cases, I found nothing. Sometimes the location was there, but the wall on which the niche was supposed to be was empty. In other cases, the saint or iconography described was obviously incorrect. These were clearly unintended errors, and I made the corrections whenever I felt confident about doing so.

The niches catalogued by Espinoza included vacant ones, where a figure used to be, or where none ever existed. I chose not to include these in my list. During my many walks along the streets of San Miguel, I came upon a number of niches which were not on Espinoza's list. If I found them artistically worthwhile, I included them, and added any information I was able to gather. The descriptions of the niches are a combination of Espinoza's words and sometimes my own additions whenever I was able to find further data that was relevant, and supplemented the information provided.

The photos taken were done over a long period of time and in many cases required repeat takes. Some needed to be taken at a specific time of day to have the best angle of the sun. Some had to be taken from a location across the street because they were too high. In the majority of cases, my request to take such photos resulted in permission granted. Finally, many of the photos had to be photo-shopped in order to eliminate wires or other extraneous objects (no, pigeons were not photo-shopped—they are an integral part of statuary). I want to thank my husband, Dennis Taylor, for his many hours of photo-shopping work.

# THE BAROQUE NICHEs OF THE HISTORICAL CENTER OF THE VILLAGE OF SAN MIGUEL EL GRANDE, CURRENTLY THE CITY OF SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

(An abridged translation of Cornelio Lopez Espinoza, pp.82-86: Natalie Taylor)

In just the historical center of San Miguel de Allende you will find more than 60 niches, of which half were placed there during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They cover many architectural styles—Gothic, Baroque, Neoclassical, and others. There is something for every architectural taste, for both the simple observer, as well as for a connoisseur. The majority of the niches are made out of *cantera*<sup>3</sup>, in red, black, brown, or pink; although a few were made of brick and mortar. In some, the original colors still remain, and on some there are decorative tiles.

According to documents, the Plaza Principal was originally called the Plaza de la Soledad, in front of which were the Casas Reales<sup>4</sup> until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since this was the place where the first houses of the Spaniards were put up, it is natural to presume that the niches here are the oldest. Some of those along Mesones Street coincide with the architecture of the earliest buildings. They first appeared at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the majority of expressions of art were inspired by Catholicism.

Although the addition of niches on buildings was a tradition brought from the Old World, the styles adapted in New Spain mingled Spanish and Indigenous elements. This created a new fusion—a New Spain style, richly ornamented low-relief, suggesting lace work. It was named *plateresque* and was known as “embroidery on stone.” Such are the niches we find on Mesones, two of them dedicated to St. Joseph. The niche on Canal #14, the Holy Trinity, has cherubim and floral crowns. This style eventually changed to Baroque, which began with rather sober ornamentation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; and became a richer style in the latter 17<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually it turned into an exuberant ultra-Baroque in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

We do not have exact dates, but the styles and the iconography give us clues as to when they were constructed. For example, we can identify the niches dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto as appearing after 1736 because the major promoter of this image was Manuel Tomas de la Canal and his wife, who began construction of the Chapel of Loreto that year. On the other hand, devotion to St Michael the Archangel, St Joseph, the Santa Cruz, or the Virgen de la Soledad were all present from the time that the city was founded. Another way to date the niches is by the date when a specific owner built the house on which the niche is found.

The majority of the niches are in the Centro area, though a few are beyond. The ones listed here follow the exact order as they appear in Espinoza’s book. Vacant niches are not included.

## 1. SAN JOSE (ST. JOSEPH), Aparicio & Nuñez



This 17<sup>th</sup> century niche has a central figure of St. Joseph holding the infant Jesus in his arms. In spite of its age, it is well preserved. The blue and yellow on St. Joseph's clothes are still perfectly visible and fresh-appearing.

It was made with brown *cantera*, the opening has an ogival<sup>5</sup> shape with an upper seashell design. The figure within is flanked by two small, hourglass columns. The pedestal has foliage decorations.

## 2. SAN JOSE (Saint Joseph): Mesones 19



This relief appears on the façade of one of the oldest inns of the city, dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It's located on Mesones Street, one of the original cross roads along the Camino Real de Adentro<sup>6</sup> that ran into the village of San Miguel, and continued through the town. The street had many inns (*mesones*) from which it takes its name; this being one of the original inns that housed the mule trains passing through.

During the first years of the Vice regal period there was a lack of painters, and relief was used more frequently as a decorative element. St. Joseph is shown holding the baby Jesus in his right arm and a tuberose in his left. A tuberose is a fragrant flower on a long stalk. It is native to Mexico, and in Spanish it is called *nardo* or *vara de San Jose* (St. Joseph's staff). Like the lily, which it resembles, it's part of the legend about how Joseph was chosen among many men to be the father of Jesus. The staff he held, blossomed.

A canopy is in the background, above Joseph's head, has folds falling on each side; a ribbon at the lower end completes the niche.



### 3. VIRGEN DEL CARMEN<sup>7</sup> (Virgin of Carmen): Mesones & Juarez<sup>8</sup>



This pseudo-niche is one of the oldest in the city, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Virgin of Carmen, is in high relief, holding the baby Jesus in her arms. Beneath her are two small heads gazing up, they represent the souls in Purgatory.

A double cross appears above the niche, on the rooftop. At either side of the niche are two *Bichas*.<sup>9</sup> These allegorical figures were used frequently during the *plateresque* period of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Along the sides, there is a continuous, wavy, stem-like motif,<sup>10</sup> and a base.

#### 4. VIRGEN DE LOS DOLORES<sup>11</sup> (The Virgin of Sorrows) Mesones and Pepe Llanos



This niche and the carving of the Virgen de los Dolores is from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It was originally modeled in wood in an earlier century, then in *cantera* here. The building was also remodeled at the same time. The niche is protected by a screen.

The virgin is depicted with many swords surrounding her, a common way to denote her many sorrows. Often she is shown with one, or more swords piercing her heart, or as in this one, with a halo of swords.

## 5. VIRGEN DE LORETO (Virgin of Loreto): Pepe Llanos and Insurgentes<sup>12</sup>

Contemporaneous to the niche of the Virgen de los Dolores. The setting is small and quite simple in its design.

She follows the usual depiction of the Virgin of Loreto in that she is shown in a voluminous gown, no visible hands, holding the baby Jesus. Typically, she stands on top of a house or on a cloud.<sup>13</sup>



## 6. VIRGEN DE LORETO, Loreto and Insurgentes

This niche dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is now empty, with just traces of the figure that most likely was there originally. The figure disappeared many years ago. The location of the niche, behind the Santa Casa de Loreto, and at the beginning of the street of the same name, makes it almost certain that it must have been dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto.

The niche is small but finely done. It is framed by Baroque motifs and an oyster shell. The pedestal is semicircular with two tiny valances on the side.





## 7. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Callejon de Loreto 14

In the 1940s the city was gripped with a restoration fever as they celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of San Miguel. This is one of the few niches that were untouched as religious and public buildings were scraped and ancient paint was removed. This niche was left alone but not the image within. The child that was originally in the arms of the virgin was lost as was the color on the sculpture. The niche has a prominent dented cornice, a large shell acting as background for the virgin, and another smaller shell above that one. It's flanked by two double, straight pillars.



## 8. SANTA ANA (Saint Anne): Reloj and Insurgentes



This 18<sup>th</sup> century niche depicts St. Anne, the mother of Virgin Mary. From the slim Lorraine cross at the very top, hangs a stone canopy with pronounced folds which frame the rectangular niche. An oyster shell decorates the top of the niche. The central figure is more recent, made in pink *cantera*, while the rest is carved in black *cantera*. The screen before the niche detracts from our ability to appreciate it fully; but the sculpture looks well preserved.

## 9. SAN MIGUEL (Saint Michael): Insurgentes & Hernandez Macias<sup>14</sup>

Niche and figure of the patron of the city, dating to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Slim columns on the sides and a shell motif above.



St. Michael, normally appears victorious over a prostrated Lucifer, but here is shown standing on top of five child-like heads that might perhaps be cherubim. The reason for this is that he is considered the head of all angels.

In his right hand he holds a sword (now broken off), with this left he protects his body with a circular shield. The cape and clothing give the illusion of movement. The oyster shell motif was once covered with decorative tiles.

An interesting aside: I discovered a replica of the same on Salida a Queretaro 37, placed there by the owner in 2010. In this one, the sword is intact.



## 10. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Hidalgo 1<sup>15</sup>

This was the home of the second son of Manuel Tomás de la Canal, Mariano Loreto (1738-1794). He was married to Maria Francisca Landeta y Primo, daughter of Francisco Jose de Landeta.



One of the most beautiful niches of San Miguel because of the excellent ornamentation, and carving of the Virgin of Loreto. Aside from a shell, the niche has a lovely canopy, dropping along the sides. The niche is framed by stylized, slim columns with Corinthian<sup>16</sup> detail. Instead of acanthus leaves, there are palm leaves.

There is a cross on top of the building, and within the niche there is a Latin cross and two spires. Beneath is the coat of arms<sup>17</sup> of the de la Canal family.

## 11. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Mesones 79

A recent addition, from the 1980s. The niche is high up on the building's façade. The photo was taken from the second floor across the street, with permission.



**12. SAN FRANCISCO XAVIER (St. Francis Xavier),<sup>18</sup> SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA (St. Anthony of Padua),<sup>19</sup> SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO<sup>20</sup>(St. John Capistrano): Juarez 7**

This was the home and property of Manuel de las Fuentes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was in charge of the construction of the church of San Francisco. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the house belonged to the poet Margarito Ledezma (Leobino Zavala Camarena).<sup>21</sup> His daughter liked to carve diminutive religious statues, but it is unlikely that she did these. There are three niches here and within them you see the figures of the three saints. They are protected by screening making it difficult to see the figures clearly.



**St Anthony of Padua**



**St. John Capistrano**



**St. Francis Xavier**

**13. VIRGEN DE SAN JUAN DE LOS LAGOS (VIRGIN OF THE LAKES): San Francisco  
10**



This 20<sup>th</sup> century niche commemorates the Virgin of San Juan of the Lakes<sup>22</sup>. It's framed by two paneled pilasters, and a middle arch. Inside the niche there is a sculpture of the Virgin with detailed, and excellent workmanship. The material used throughout is red *cantera*.

Like the Virgin of Loreto, the Virgin of the Lakes is shown with a wide flowing gown, and a bulbous head covering. However, to differentiate the two, the latter has her hands in prayer. Also, she is often depicted with the crescent moon at her feet.

#### 14. SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS (St. Francis of Assisi), Principal and Hidalgo



This is one of the most prominent niches in the city, located high on the corner of the building at Principal and Hidalgo. It was done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and shows St. Francis in the act of giving a blessing. The top of the niche shows a Romanesque rood cross, and beneath it the Franciscan coat of arms.

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, was born between 1181 and 1182, in the Italian town of Assisi, and died in 1226. He became a mystic, and a religious man, and was one of the founders of the Third Order of the Franciscans. He saw nature and all creatures as his “brothers and sisters.” Because of this, he is often portrayed in a natural setting with birds, or animals of the forest around him. Or, as in this particular sculpture, offering a blessing.



**15. VIRGEN DE LORETO, Corner of Canal<sup>23</sup> and Hidalgo**



A small niche, with little ornamentation. The figure of the virgin was done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Informally known by locals as “the niche on the Starbucks corner.”

## 16. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Canal 4

The niche with the Virgin of Loreto<sup>24</sup> can be seen on the front of the of the stately home of the Casa de la Canal. On each side of the niche appear the coats of arms of the De la Canal and Hervás families. The former on the right, and the latter on the left. The niche is flanked by two Corinthian columns on each side, with partially fluted shafts. A circular pediment contains a medallion of the Cross of Calatrava, an order to which the builder's father belonged as a knight. Pediment and cornice are decorated with dentils. The niche is from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Virgin appears with her son in her arms, who attentively turns his face towards her, while holding the terrestrial globe with his left hand. The little house on which the Virgin stands has a tiled and gabled roof. Door and window are suggested in this niche, a perfect model of a baroque niche. Outlines of a window and door are etched into the stone.



The coat of arms shown on the right, below, is of the de la Canal family. The Virgin of Loreto at Hidalgo 1, has the same coat of arms—tower, cross, etc.



### 17. LA SANTISIMA TRINIDAD (The Holy Trinity): Canal 14

In this 17th century niche one can see the Holy Father depicted in priestly robes, with a mitre on his head. The Holy Spirit is represented by a dove on his chest, not a separate individual. Jesus Christ, the son, is at his feet. The niche is decorated with a shell, and a Cross of Lorraine on top.



## 18. LA INMACULADA CONCEPCION (The Immaculate Conception): Canal and Hernández Macías

Diagonally opposite to the church of the same name, also called Las Monjas<sup>25</sup>, we find this niche which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is quite large for a one story building, and decorative elements include an open sea shell<sup>26</sup>, and valances. Within the niche is the Virgin with hands clasped together in prayer, she is stomping a serpent. The face seen to the left of the virgin, represents the sun, a common iconographic element in the depiction of the Immaculate Conception.



## 19. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Canal and Hernández Macías

This niche dates to the 20th century, put in at the time the building was remodeled. It is composed of two niches, one on top of the other. In the upper one, there is a Holy Cross, and in the lower one you find the figure of the Virgin. Both the cross, and the Virgin are made of dark *cantera* stone, and have modern features.



In spite of the fairly recent works, the niche and the figures within show great deterioration, and loss of detail.

**20. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Hernández Macías 72**

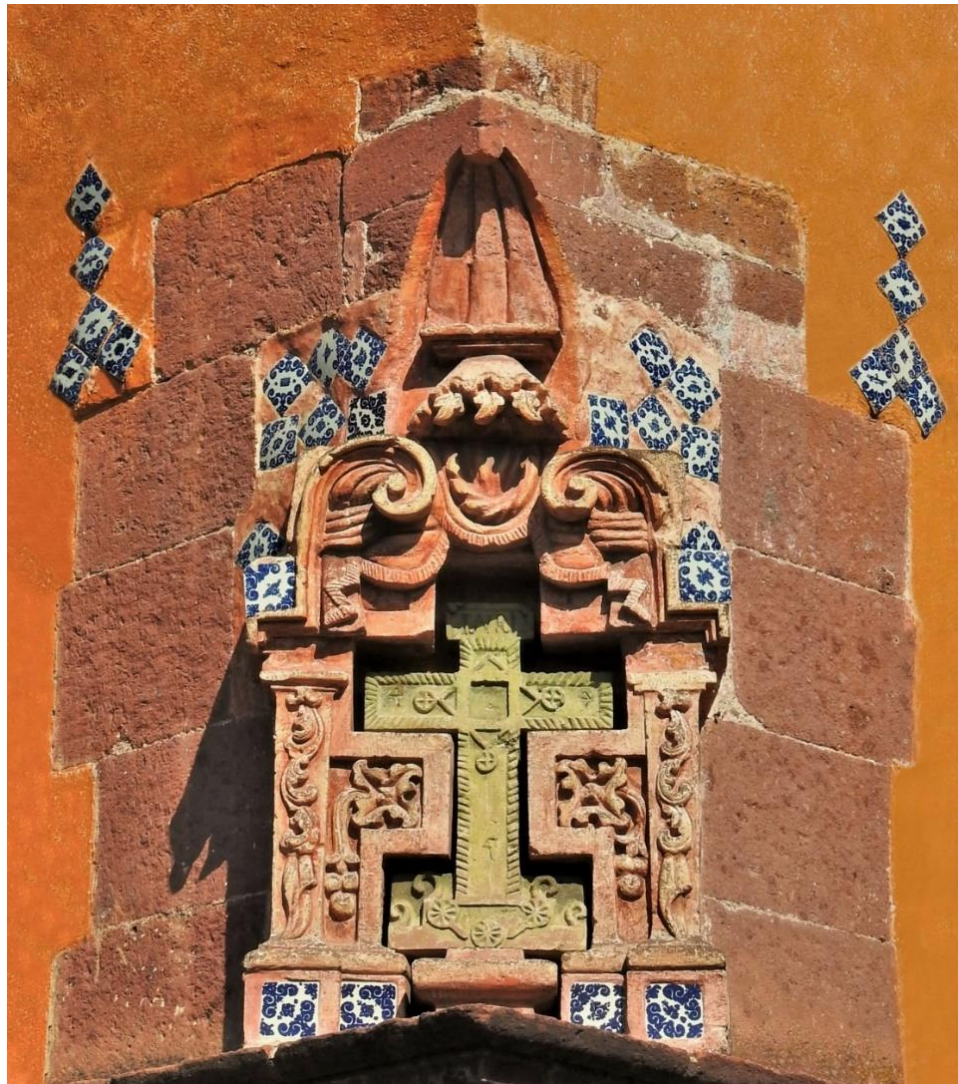
The diminutive niche, high above a doorway is from the 20th century. The face of the Virgin shows Indigenous features, and the figure lacks great detail, and has poor dimensions.



**SANTA CRUZ VERDE DE LA CARCEL DE LA INQUISICION (The green holy cross of the Inquisition prison): Pila Seca and Hernandez Macias**

This 18<sup>th</sup> century cross is beautifully executed in green *cantera*, and is covered in colorful tiles. The entire niche is elaborately decorated with sculpted foliage on the sides, as well as on top of the niche.

The grim objective of this niche was to remind the residents of San Miguel that there was another, similar cross in Mexico City, where the Auto de Fe trials and sentencing took place. There were no Superior Tribunals for the Inquisition in San Miguel. Therefore, those accused of crimes against the Church were placed in this jail—located across the street from the residence of the Inquisitor himself. Those arrested remained in custody here until transport was arranged for them to be brought to the capital of the Viceroyalty, which was Mexico City.



## 21. SAN MIGUEL ARCANGEL: Umarán<sup>27</sup> and Jesús



This niche has an octagonal arch framed by the valances serving as a base for an elegant Cross of Lorraine<sup>28</sup>. The central figure, the archangel Saint Michael, is quite deteriorated, with missing arms and the ever present sword. His skirt appears to be flapping in the wind, exposing his limbs. He wears a feathered cap on his head, in the Spanish style of the period.

The niche, and the sculpture within are from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## 22. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Portal Allende 4



This 18<sup>th</sup> century small, hidden niche, and its statue are easily overlooked unless you know where to find them. It is over a doorway, beneath the arches along the west side of the plaza of Jardin Principal.

The niche has minimal decoration; it is a simple rectangle with a rounded top. The figure of the Virgin is also simple, including the little house upon which she stands. It is no more than a rectangle with the insinuation of a doorway.



### 23. VIRGEN DE LA SOLEDAD: Correo<sup>29</sup> 4

This niche and the sculpture of the Virgin in its center were created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the building was rebuilt after a fire. It is one of the loveliest sculptures within a beautifully elaborated niche. The opening is framed by two small, twisted columns, with a shell motif behind the Virgin's head. A number of floral motifs appear throughout, along the arch that frames the Virgin, as well as on the decorative border beneath her. The broken arch over the virgin draws the eyes to it, where a cross stands above all. Varied colors of *cantera* were used to craft the entire work.



## 24. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Correo and Diez de Sollano<sup>30</sup>

Modern niche and sculpture from the 20th century. Several colors of *cantera* were used for both the niche, and the figure within. There is a plain cross above the niche.

The niche is high in the corner of the building, and the only way to get a proper photograph was asking permission in the building across, to get the proper view. Permission was granted by the manager of the hotel to go to the second floor, and take the photo through an open window, directly across.



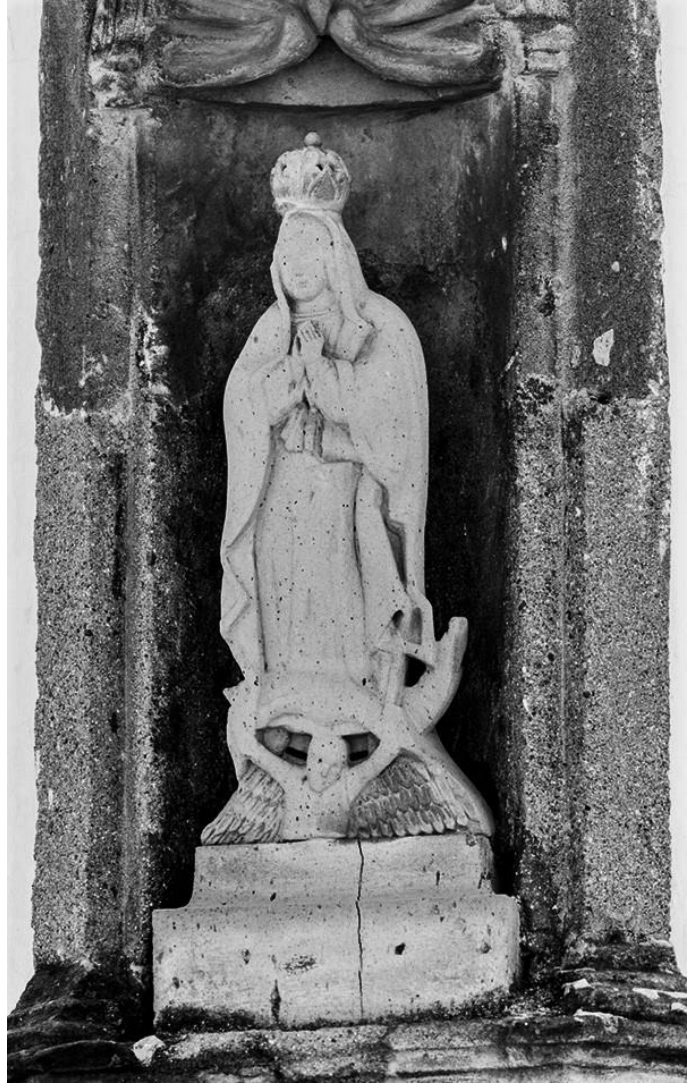
## 25. SAGRADO CORAZON DE JESUS (Sacred heart of Jesus): Diez de Sollano 4

The former residence of the Count of the Casa de Loja, Francisco José de Landeta, boasts a superb doorway. The high triangular pediment breaks to give space to the coat of arms of his lineage, stamped with a helmet and the arms of Landeta. Above this pediment is the niche which contains the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There is a prominent circular pedestal on two levels, two pilasters, and a radial shell-shaped enclose. The Cross of Lorrain stands on top of the niche. Originally, a Virgin of Loreto was within this space, but when the Diez de Sollano and Landeta families acquired the building, they replaced the Virgin with the current image in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, since they were devotees of the Heart of Jesus. The entire doorway remains one of the most imposing and architecturally interesting structures in the city.



## 26. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Hospicio and Recreo

A slender niche with classical lines, with a triangular top and a shell within. Two thin pilasters appear on each side of the central figure of the Virgin. It dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



## 27. LA SANTISIMA TRINIDAD: Recreo 28

This niche shows the Holy Trinity in the old version, today called heterodox. Here, the Holy Spirit is represented as a human being, and this manner of showing it was eventually disapproved by the Church, instead it was deemed that the Holy Spirit ought to be shown as a dove. This is one of the oldest niches, dating to most likely the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On top of the octagonal arched cornice, stands a Lorraine cross.



An interesting note is that all three figures within were carved out of a single stone.



## 28. VIRGEN DE LOS DOLORES: Recreo and Huertas



A lovely, imaginative niche created in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It has a pair of simple columns, a pedestal, and cornice richly worked with leaves and moldings adorned by series of eggs.

Surrounding the niche are whimsical figures of lyres, and botanical motifs, particularly grape vines. It is presumed that the figure of the Virgin was produced in a local workshop in San Miguel.

The niche and the figure within create a lovely architectural decorative work, among the most attractive in the city.

**29. VIRGIN OF SAN JUAN DE LOS LAGOS: Correo and Corregidora**



A modern, and rather simple niche placed here in the second half of the 20th century.

**30. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Recreo 98**



The niche has two small Solomonic columns, with Corinthian capitals which stand outside the opening. There is a shell motif within the niche, and a Loreto Cross stands on the wall above it all.

This is an 18<sup>th</sup> century work.

### 31. APOSTOL SANTIAGO (St. James the Apostle): Recreo 98

Above the doorway of this home appears this open carving of the figure of Saint James on horseback, from the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The scene refers to the legend which claims that the saint returned after his death as a fierce warrior who helped Spaniards defeat the Moors. Because of this claim he became known as *Santiago Matamoros*—Saint James the Moor Slayer. In the New World, he was associated with helping the conquistadores in their battle against the Indigenous people, and became known here as *Santiago Mataindios*. In both cases the name denotes a celebration of someone who slays others, in the latter case it is doubly repugnant because the saint is praised for slaughtering the native people who rightfully defended their lands from the European conquerors. In this carving it seems that the one being slain is a Moor, and not a Native American.





### 32. VIRGEN DE LA SOLEDAD: Baeza 18

A plain background characterizes this late 19<sup>th</sup> century niche, with only a shell ornamentation at the top of the rectangular enclosure. It is made of rose colored *cantera* stone to house the central figure, the Virgin of Solitude<sup>31</sup> in prayerful attitude, and in mourning.



### 33. SAGRADO CORAZON DE JSESUS: Cuadrante 4



A small, but beautifully executed 19<sup>th</sup> century niche showing good proportions both in the housing as well as the figure within. It was done with rose-colored *cantera*, with two lateral columns, and a shell. It is decorated with the cross of the Trinitarian Order, which was an order to which many distinguished members of San Miguel society belonged.

### 34. SAN PEDRO (St. Peter): Cuadrante 6



Practically next door to the previous, and almost of identical dimensions, is another small niche, also dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The niche is quite plain, but the figure within is well elaborated and well proportioned. Saint Peter is shown holding the traditional keys in his right hand, and a book on his left.

### 35. LA SANTISIMA TRINIDAD: Barranca 57



This niche was created for the owners of the house in the 1970s. It is therefore one of the newest niches in the city. It is a work of great beauty in pink cantera, with two columns on the side, and a large shell above. It follows Church cannon in that the Holy Spirit is depicted as a dove.

### 36. NUESTRO PADRE JESUS NAZARO (Our Father Jesus of Nazareth): Salida Real de Querétaro<sup>32</sup> 9



Another 20th century niche, this one showing some very attractive ornamentation around the opening. The shell on top is white and contrasts with the dark red cantera. The shell motif is repeated below the figure in lighter cantera.

This particular niche is eye catching, even though it is found high on the wall, at the level of the second story.

### 37. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: In front of la Cruz del Pueblo

To see this niche one needs to climb many steps along the Callejon Cruz del Pueblo, starting on Salida a Queretaro. High on the hill called “*aguinaldo*” or “the hill of Santo Domingo,” is the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It is not technically a niche, but rather an enclosure without backing. The sculpture is very well done and stands out within the arc that lets light through the side openings. It is dated from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



### 38. SAN MIGUEL ARCANGEL: San Francisco and Núñez



One of the most recent niches, it was placed on the corner of the building in the 21st century. It is also one of the most attractive ones. Elaborated in coffee-colored, and rose-colored *cantera*, with two columns at each side, and a decorative touch in the upper part of the arch. The figure is that of the archangel, patron of the city of San Miguel de Allende.

There is great detail in the figure's face, expression, and wings. Elaborate touches can be seen on the clothing, headdress, and footwear. The archangel carries a sword in his right hand, and leans on a staff on the left side. The face and clothing appear to have indigenous features.

### 39. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Terraplén 48

Modern niche from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, made of mortar. It is free of any type of ornament, except for the floral design at the bottom. The niche contains a sculpture of the Virgin of Guadalupe made of pink *cantera*. There is an almost identical niche to the right, on the same house. Within it is a plain cross, also made of pink *cantera*. The niche with the cross is not mentioned by Espinoza,



### 40. VIRGEN DE LORETO: Jesús 32



Modern niche surrounded by an arch made of coffee-colored *cantera*. The main figure of the virgin and child are also made of *cantera*, in rose-color. Some lovely details are present in the virgin's dress and headdress. No house appears at the feet of the virgin, as is commonly seen in the iconography of the Virgin of Loreto. She is firmly planted on a simple slab.

#### 41. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Canal 34



There is no information about this niche or the figure within in the book by Cornelio Lopez, not even a date. One can see that it is most likely made of cantera, as are most of the other niches, and in this case light brown was used and a bit of green in the triangle above.

There is a screen before the niche which diminishes one's ability to see it well.

#### 42. LA SANTA CRUZ: Zacateros 36

This niche is found high above on the old home of Roberto Lambarri de la Canal, the first city chronicler of San Miguel. It is a simple structure with a Latin cross, made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of coffee-colored *cantera*.

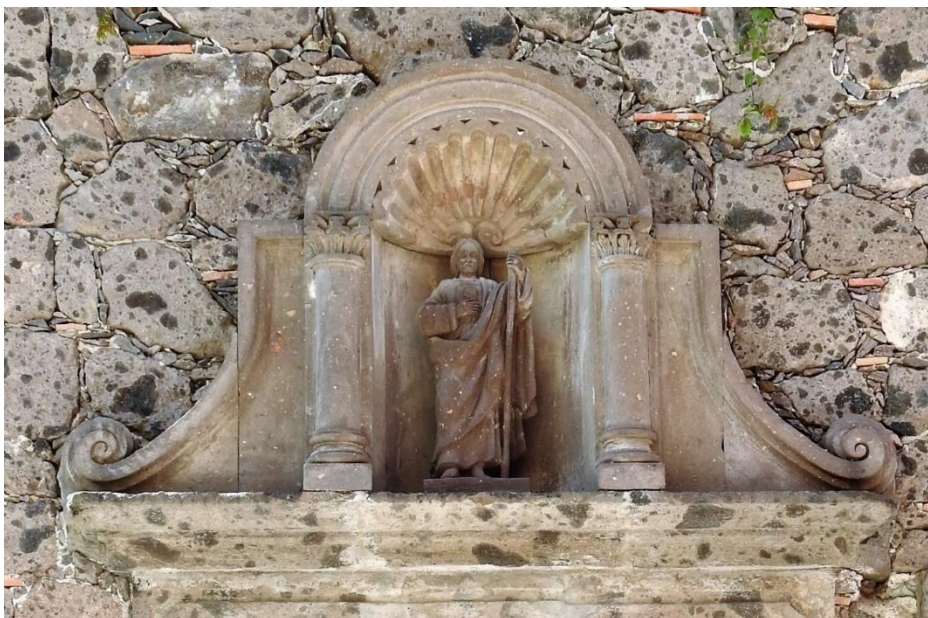


**43. SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA (St. Anthony of Padua): Ancha de San Antonio 55<sup>33</sup>**



Inside this 20th century niche appears the figure of Saint Anthony holding the child Jesus in his left arm and a lily in the right hand.

**44. SAN JUDAS TADEO (St. Judas Thaddeus): Chorro 33**



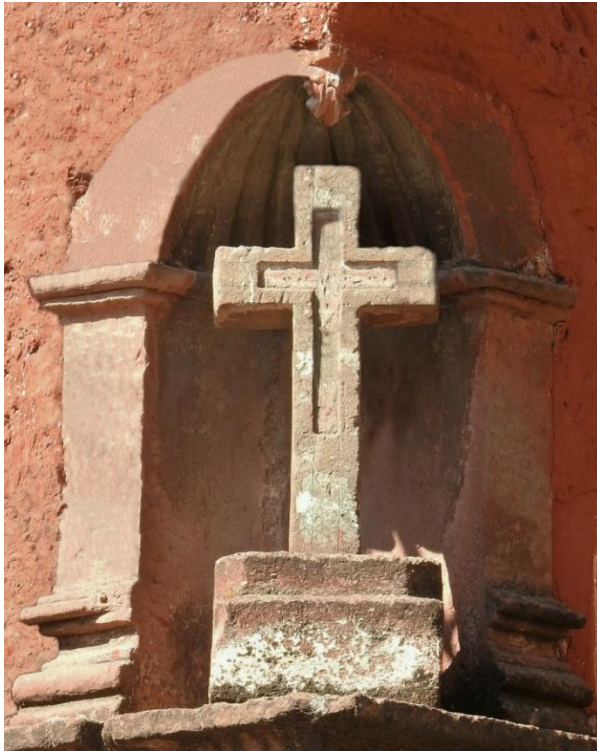
This modern, 21st century niche is among the loveliest ones in the city. The enclosure is decorated with two columns, and there are additional side detail.

The arch above features a shell in a lighter colored stone than the rest, which makes it stand out. The figure within is well proportioned and nicely elaborated. In

addition, the wall of the house offers a wonderful backdrop with *galleting*<sup>34</sup> and multi-colored stones.



#### 45. SANTA CRUZ: Pila Seca and Hernández Macías



A simple, angular niche from the 18th century. There are two side pilasters, and a pointed arch on top, with a suggestion of a shell.

There is a smaller cross carved within the larger one.

#### 46. SAN MIGUEL: Callejón del Pilancon 12



This is technically not a niche, but simply an engraved figure of the saint, on the exterior of a private home. It was placed there in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Another niche containing a cross is now empty and overgrown with vines. The cross, according to the owners was stolen several years ago.

**47. SAN MIGUEL: Mesones 99**

High on the wall of the building, is a niche from the 20th century. Within an elaborate archway there is a relief of Saint Michael fighting the devil. Above the doorway, there is an oval engraving in cantera resembling a medallion, within which is a Latin cross.



**48. VIRGEN DEL CARMEN: Hidalgo 42**



A lovely niche of small dimensions from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are two Corinthian columns and a shell on top.

As part of the iconography, the virgin bears baby Jesus in her left arm, and both she and Jesus hold scapulars in their right hands. A devotional scapular consists of a small, usually rectangular piece suspended from a band. It often bears a religious image or a text.

This is a much more elaborate depiction of the Virgin of Carmen compared to the much older version, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, found on the corner of Mesones and Juarez.

**49. SAN MIGUEL: Insurgentes 81**



A modern niche, (no date given), done in red *cantera*.

**50. VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE: Núñez 26**

A very plain, early 20th century niche, done in brick, and red *cantera*. The figure lacks the usual surrounding rays most often associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe. However, there are enough iconographic elements to identify the statue.



## PART II

### ADDITIONAL NICHEs NOT PHOTOGRAPHED

Various other niches were mentioned in the book of Cornelio Lopez Espinosa, many of them empty either from the start, or after the central figure disappeared. I have chosen not to feature those empty niches, but will give the list.

- Jose Mojica 14, above the doorway of the current hotel Villa Santa Monica
- Huertas 15, there is an empty niche where supposedly there used to be a cross
- Huertas 21
- Hospicio 20, there was supposedly a Virgin of Guadalupe, no longer there, and there is no trace of a niche on the facade.
- Aldama 7. Nothing on the facade of this house, not even a trace of a niche.
- Ancha de San Antonio 31. Two empty niches.
- Ancha de San Antonio 51, empty niche.
- Barrancas and Piedras chinas: There is an old niche made of mortar and brick, currently empty.

In the past it may have held the holy cross.

- Salida a Queretaro 6: Empty niche.
- Callejon del Pilacon 12. Aside from the engraving of Saint Michael, there is an empty niche high on the wall of the house which supposedly housed a holy cross. According to the owners of the house, the cross was stolen years ago.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Died on April 21, 2003. Current chronicler is Luis Felipe Rodriguez Palacios.

<sup>2</sup> Another source is the book about the history of San Miguel by Francisco de la Maza (1913-1972).

<sup>3</sup> The term cantera is technically "quarried stone," but refers to the volcanic rock found in the area. It is porous and easy to carve, and comes in a variety of colors. For this reason it is one of the most common materials used in architectural decorations here. Its properties are similar to limestone, but its origin is completely different. Limestone is a sedimentary rock and cantera comes from lava deposits.

<sup>4</sup> Vice Regal government houses.

<sup>5</sup> Also called Gothic arch

<sup>6</sup> Literally, "the Royal Inland Road," this was the road along which the numerous mule trains carried the silver collected from mines going all the way to Santa Fe, New Mexico. These loads of silver were transported along this road all the way to Mexico City from where it would be taken to either Acapulco (and on to China), or to the port of Veracruz and then on to Spain. San Miguel was strategically located along this path and served as a major stopping point for these caravans.

<sup>7</sup> In Catholic iconography, the virgin of Carmen is often represented holding baby Jesus in one arm and a scapular in the other. Often the infant holds a scapular as well. This is still visible in this particular relief, in her right hand and the child's left. The name Carmen is the equivalent of Carmel, referring to Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. She is the patroness of the Carmelite order.

<sup>8</sup> The street was previously called Azcapotalco

<sup>9</sup> Fantastical figures, the upper part usually that of a woman, and either a fish or other animal below.

<sup>10</sup> Called *roleo*, or *rinceau*

<sup>11</sup> In Catholic iconography, the Virgin of Sorrows is portrayed mournful and in tears; with one or several long knives or daggers protruding from her heart, often bleeding. In this particular sculpture, the knives appear as crowns above her head.

<sup>12</sup> The street was previously known as Santa Ana

<sup>13</sup> Traditional Catholic legend claims that the house in Palestine where Virgin Mary was born was transported by angels to its current location in Loreto, Italy. The house had been converted to a church, but at the close of the Crusades, it was feared that it could be destroyed. St. Michael, the Archangel, engaged other angels in moving the house to a safe location. It was first transported to Croatia, but was again threatened with destruction by the Ottoman Empire. It was then moved to its current location in Loreto, Italy. It is now believed that the legend originated after a family had stones from the Holy Land's house brought to Italy.

<sup>14</sup> The street was previously known by different names: Higueras, Maestranza, and Rejas de la Concepcion

<sup>15</sup> The street has had different names: San Joaquin, then Aduana.

<sup>16</sup> What distinguishes Corinthian columns are decorative, bell shaped capitals with spiral, scroll-like ornaments.

<sup>17</sup> To see another coat of arms of the de la Canal family, go to the estate house on Canal and Hidalgo.

<sup>18</sup> St. Francis Xavier is often depicted with a staff

<sup>19</sup> St. Anthony of Padua is often shown holding the child Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> St. John Capistrano: No specific iconography about this saint, other than appearing in a prayerful pose

<sup>21</sup> Leobino Zavala Camarena was born in Comonfort on 6-28-1887, and died in San Miguel de Allende on 12-27-1974. He studied law and worked as a *notario*. He also founded the Secondary School of Nursing and Obstetrics in San Miguel. He wrote poetry and published a book titled "Poesias" under the pseudonym Margarito Ledesma. He acquired this house, which most likely dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The niches and figures within may have already been there.

<sup>22</sup> This virgin is venerated in the city of San Juan de los Lagos. She supposedly was responsible for a number of miracles bringing children back to life. She is typically depicted with a voluminous gown (similar to the Virgen de Loreto), but she does not carry the infant Jesus in her arms. Instead, she is shown in a prayerful pose and often there is a crescent moon at her feet as shown here.

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<sup>23</sup> The street was previously called Calle Real, then Santísima Trinidad

<sup>24</sup> Beneath the Virgin of Loreto appears a small house, this refers to the legend associated with her. The house represents the actual home in Nazareth where Mary was born. During the Holy Crusades in the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was feared that the house would be destroyed by Muslim warriors. So a cadre of angels lifted the entire house and transported it to a safer place, first Croatia, and then (now threatened by the Ottomans), moved to Loreto, Italy. This is the reason why the virgin is depicted standing on a house, or sometimes on a cloud which refers to the celestial flight.

<sup>25</sup> Las Monjas means “the nuns,” and refers to the origins of the church and attached convent. It was constructed in the mid-1700s by the daughter of Tomas de la Canal, Josefa Lina, who herself became a nun.

<sup>26</sup> The sea shell has been used extensively in religious imagery for a long time. For example, the goddess Aphrodite who was worshipped by the Greeks, and Egyptians was believed to have emerged from foam on a sea shell. Shells were also used in images by Hindus and Buddhists, and by Christians in both baptism and funerals.

<sup>27</sup> The street was previously called San Cristóbal

<sup>28</sup> The cross with a double bar, shorter one above the central one, is called a Patriarchal or Lorraine cross.

<sup>29</sup> The street was previously called Guadalupe

<sup>30</sup> The street was previously called Calle de los Dolores, then Calle del Conde

<sup>31</sup> The Virgin of solitude refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus during her solitude on Holy Saturday.

<sup>32</sup> This street was previously called Calle de Pedro Vargas

<sup>33</sup> The address given by Espinoza is Ancha de San Antonio at the corner of Callejon de San Antonio. It is not exactly on the corner, but near it at #55

<sup>34</sup> Galletin, also called garreting or garneting, is an architectural technique in which small pieces of stones are pushed into wet mortar during construction.