

Americanos tour

The *Americanos* or *Indianos* were people who had immigrated to Latin America in their youth and years later returned to their places of origin having enriched themselves to a greater or lesser degree, and climbed the social ladder.

During the 19th century, almost two thousand people from Blanes emigrated to Latin America, especially between 1839 and 1862. They were mostly single men in maritime crafts or professions. They were seeking to make their fortune and with the journey they were risking their property and that of their families.

The overwhelming majority of the people from Blanes went to Cuba, especially Havana. Other destinations included Puerto Rico, Argentina, Uruguay or Venezuela. They normally went having been encouraged by relatives or friends who helped them to find work and settle in the new city.



The background to this migration is to be found among the sailors and employers who traded with the Indians from the 18th century onwards. Trade was the main commercial activity of the emigrants from Blanes. Specifically retailing through the typical “bodega”. This was the Cuban model. In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, the activity of the Blanes emigrants revolved around working the land.

The return to Blanes with the desire to enjoy the fruits of their achievements began during the wars of independence and the end of the century. On arrival in the town, the Americanos would build a house, usually in the Passeig de Mar or in l'Esperança, which they would decorate in Antillean style, and make donations for social and educational projects. Some participated in and encouraged cultural life in Blanes. Outstanding among these were Josep Cortils i Vieta, father of the Renaixença in Blanes, the poet Joan Ribas i Carreras, the writer and son of the Indiano Vicenç Coma and the writer and industrialist Agustí Vilaret.

The members this group were more interested in being landlords than investing in production activities. In fact, most Blanes Americanos did not succeed in accumulating great wealth, but they made enough to lead a comfortable life. The few who did make large fortunes built summer houses in Blanes but settled down and invested in Barcelona.

Today the legacy of the Americanos in the town can be traced through the houses that are still standing, from the buildings they sponsored or from the documents kept by their descendants or the Municipal Archive.



The philanthropy of the *Americanos*

Their footprint can be seen in various buildings and public services. Their wishes and financial donations made it possible to create the new Sant Jaume Hospital building (1913), the Colegio Blandense (1868), to restore the Convent and the Mont-Ferrant Wineries. They also contributed to the improvement of the Vilar Sanctuary, the Parish of Santa María and the Town House. Also notable is the construction of noble pantheons that embellished the cemetery.

Lost *Americano* houses

The demolition of many of these residences during the population and tourist boom of the second half of the last century brought with it irreparable loss to the architectural heritage of Blanes. The houses lost include: Villa Juanita (Puig), Ca l'Estanillo, Villa Obdúlia (Massó), Can Vicenç Udal (Coma), Can Guardiola (later Milà i Camps) and Can Gaspar (Ribas).

1- Can Massó (Passeig de Dintre, 2)

Esteve Verdaguer was a property owner who amassed a large fortune running a large sugar plantation in Guayama (Puerto Rico). Salvador Massó acted as administrator of the Verdaguer estates and also amassed considerable capital which he invested in land.

Much of this fortune was inherited by Obdúlia Verdaguer and her husband Fèlix Massó, with whom she had five children. Felisa, Obdúlia and Aurora, the couple's three daughters, were to maintain a close relationship with Blanes. The eldest daughter, Felisa, married Santiago Garriga from Barcelona and spent many summers in this house, which had probably been built by her father as a dowry for the wedding, and that was refurbished over the years. Their son, the politician Joan Garriga Massó, represented Blanes at the Grassroots Assembly of Manresa. Obdúlia married Senator Josep Elies de Molins and they built another magnificent house on the promenade, on the spot occupied today by the Miramar building.

Finally, Aurora married the cultural and political activist Joaquim Casas Carbó. Casas bought the former convent of the Capuchins of Blanes from the author of the well-known zarzuela (a Spanish lyrical genre) Marina, Francesc Camprodón, and commissioned the architects Puig Boada and Font Gumà with a painstaking restoration.

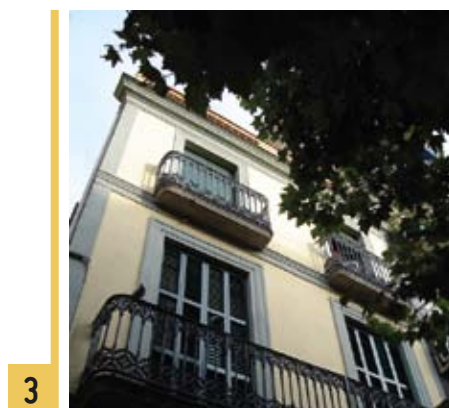
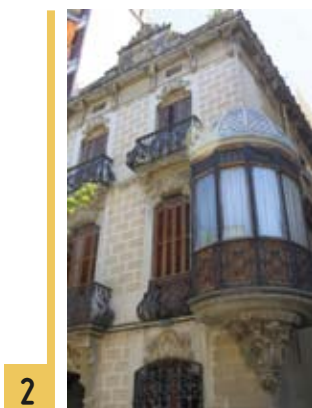
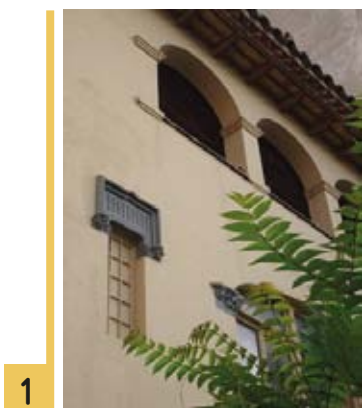
Maria Massó, sister-in-law of Obdúlia Verdaguer, and her husband Agustí Vilaret, also received a large part of the inheritance. The couple, who had also been settled in Puerto Rico, returned to Blanes to buy a spacious house on this same promenade, today the site of the Casa del Poble. After a few years Vilaret founded the Mont-Ferrant winery.

2- Ca la Teresina Savoia, 1903 (Passeig de Dintre, 26)

This was the home of the couple formed by Teresa Ferrer and the prestigious doctor Joaquim Albareda. It was probably built with money from her first husband, son of the Americano Massó family.

3- Ca l'Andreu (Passeig de Dintre, 34)

Josep Andreu Ferrer was a managing partner of the company Bitlloch i Cia., which at the end of the century owned the Gloria residence in Puerto Rico. For a couple of years, this house was the summer residence of the poet Joan Maragall.



4- Can Nonell, 1899 (Carrer Esperança, 8)

The wealthiest *Americanos* in Blanes included the brothers Josep and Francesc Nonell. They were shareholders in the company Brunet and Nonell of Havana and later obtained the exclusive concession for that city's National Lottery tickets. They opened a banking house in Barcelona where they received transfers from the Catalan funds in Cuba.

5- Can Gallet (Carrer Esperança, 14)

Bonaventura Puig Torrent was a Blanes resident who accumulated one of the most remarkable fortunes through the "Café de la Marina" he set up in Havana. In 1895 he returned from Cuba aboard the steamship J. Jover i Serra, allegedly with a Cuban wife and a daily income of one duro (5 pesetas). He had one of the most luxurious houses built on carrer Esperança, which became one of the town's streets with the most *Americano* houses. The decoration of this building, both externally and of the interior rooms, is a magnificent example for understanding the high lifestyle attained by the wealthiest families of that time. Bonaventura Puig was elected mayor of the town in 1898, which coincided with the moment in history of the loss of the last Spanish colonies. His son, Rogeli Puig Costas, was also mayor from 1939 to 1944. The small passage that takes pedestrians to the seafront promenade is named after this Blanes *Americano*.

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6- Can Girbau (Carrer Esperança, 16)

The Girbau family were shippers and traders who throughout the nineteenth century plied the difficult sea route of the Americas. Their large manor house, also located in carrer Mestrança, still maintains its original appearance and a typical courtyard with palm trees.

7- Can Panxo gordo, 1902 (Carrer Esperança, 22)

Francesc Vieta Ribas built this house using the capital he had amassed, the fruit of years of work running a winery in Havana. Today it is extensively renovated, but still retains its main facade on carrer Esperança.

8- Casa de l'estrella (Carrer Esperança 36)

The residence of Emilia Granés Vieta, aunt of Francesc Girbau Granés. The name of this house comes from the presence of this geometric figure in many parts of the building.

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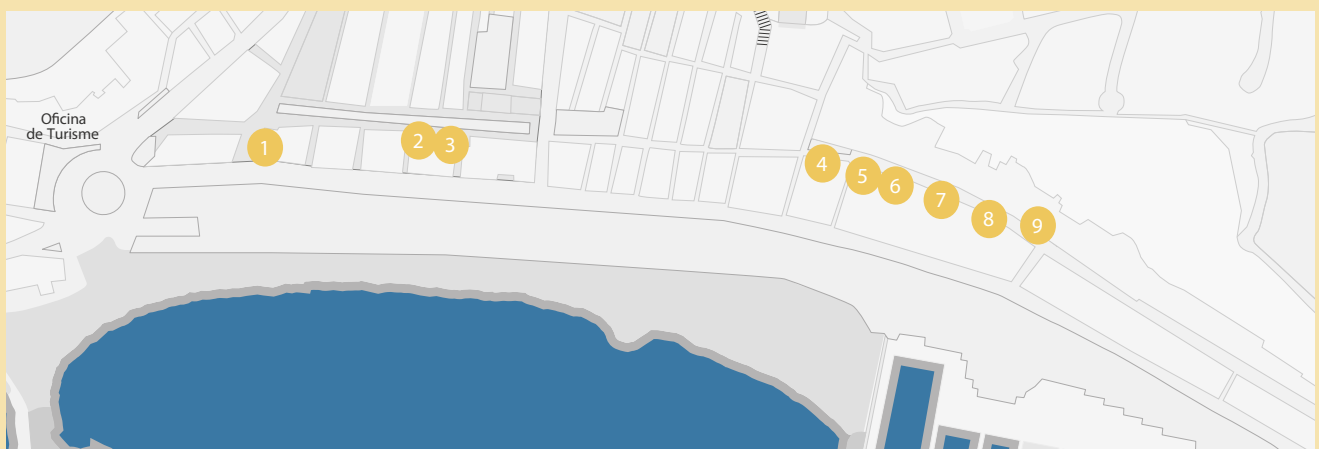
9- Sculpture of l'Avi Bagué (next to the chapel)

Josep Vieta Burcet was the founder of the long line of Vieta tile masters (Bagué). The shipyard of Can Bagué experienced a period of great splendour from 1830 to 1880, and became one of the most prestigious on the Catalan coast.

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Map



A- El Convent



The Convent's foundation dates back to the arrival of the community of Capuchin friars in Blanes in the late 16th century. The Diocesan Archive of Girona contains the license, dated 23 December 1583, which was granted to the juries of Blanes to build a convent next to the chapel of Santa Ana. The friars remained there until 1836, when the Mendizábal confiscation law was passed. This location housed the chapel of Santa Ana, who over time would become the town's patron saint. With the departure of the Capuchin friars, the building passed into private hands, but the final buyers knew how to preserve its privileged environment and commissioned the architect Isidre Puig i Boada (1891-1987) to restore the former religious complex, still in ruins in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and adapted part of it as housing. The married couple who ensured the restoration of the Convent were Mr. Joaquim Casas-Carbó, writer, linguist and editor, and his wife, Aurora Massó of Blanes, daughter of the Americano family of can Massó. The Biosca Garriga family continued the improvement works, and the new Santa Ana chapel was blessed in 1949. By then, painters such as Joan Llimona, Joaquim Mir and Joan Roig i Soler were regular visitors. The Convent has also been a source of inspiration for writers such as Joaquim Ruyra, Josep Pla, Ferran Agulló and Josep Roig i Raventós.

B- Hospital Sant Jaume



From 1910 on, Monsignor Jaume Arcelos and the American Joan Burcet i Camps promoted the creation of the new Sant Jaume Hospital building. It was inaugurated on 24 March 1913 on a piece of land belonging to the Horta de la Perla and the Horta d'en Creus. Its construction was funded by part of Mr. Burcet's fortune, but its opening was also possible thanks to the collaboration of wealthy families, who contributed to bringing about the construction of the new building, which was aimed at tending to the poor patients of the town. The Hospital combines simplicity with beauty: openings framed with solid brick, green ceramics on the cornice, alternation of simple and Gothic style windows, etc. But not all the pavilions still preserved date from 1913. Only one of them belongs to the first phase of the works, namely the one on the right, which for many years was the Hospital's main entrance. Building of the vestibule, the Chapel and the pavilion on the left began in 1922, as can be seen from the date on the facade.

C- Mont-Ferrant Wineries



The Bodegas Mont-Ferrant winery was founded through the initiative of the Blanes resident Agustí Vilaret i Centrich, the Americano who in 1865 bought the lands of the Mas Ferran from the widow of Mr. Bonaventura Ferran in a public auction. Today, this farmhouse is considered the geographic centre of this entire sector, although it is now surrounded by houses with gardens and some housing blocks that extend from Mas Massonet to Can Canaro.

Born in Blanes on 25 August 1820, he and his wife María Maria Massó moved to live on the island of Puerto Rico, with the purpose of running the sugar mills on the estates of the Verdaguer family, also from Blanes. When they returned, Vilaret decided to invest a large part of his fortune in a new industrial activity that was related to the development of a new drink. This drink was cava, a formula that had been created in the French region of Champagne and that was just being introduced into Catalonia. Surrounded by specialists and professionals from France, he rapidly devoted great efforts to research

and experimenting with new production methods. Some of the company's French professionals, such as Rodolf Bourlon, settled in Blanes. This work gave him great prestige and his cava was to earn numerous awards.

Map

