



Red is for passion, and emotion, and vitality. Red is for blood, too: it's a nod to the deep historical connection between flamenco – the culture of music and dance rooted in Andalucía, southern Spain – and bullfighting. You might think that an anydne nursing home in Rooty Hill, western Sydney, on a chilly Wednesday morning is an odd place and time to be contemplating such things; but appearances in a photograph can be deceiving.

The 106 residents of Parque Habitacional are all native Spanish speakers, hailing originally from Europe and South America. It's a curious fact that, after long lives working and raising families in Australia, many in old age have lost their English and reverted to their mother tongue, says the facility's operations manager Robert Aquino. At Parque Habitacional they're immersed comfortably in the language and cultures of their formative years; even the staff speak Spanish, and the food and entertainment is geared towards Latin tastes.

Flamenco dancer Pepa Molina, pictured in a shot from the *Australian Life* exhibition, opening in Sydney's Hyde Park on September 13, made weekly visits over a two-month period this winter to perform for residents. To glean their memories of flamenco, too, as part of her research for a new work she's developing with Blacktown Arts. "I wanted to engage them on an emotional level," says the 47-year-old Sydneysider, who spent 25 years in Spain studying under the great masters and performing before returning four years ago to open a dance studio in Parramatta. "I wanted to make them come alive with the memories of their culture, to get them talking about their lives and their histories. It was beautiful and touching."

There were two special people among Molina's weekly audiences at Parque Habitacional, too: her own mama and papa, who emigrated from Granada in the Franco era and now live in the nursing home. They're in their late 70s. They must have been thrilled, right? "They were so proud," she beams.

Photography Joshua Morris

By Ross Bilton