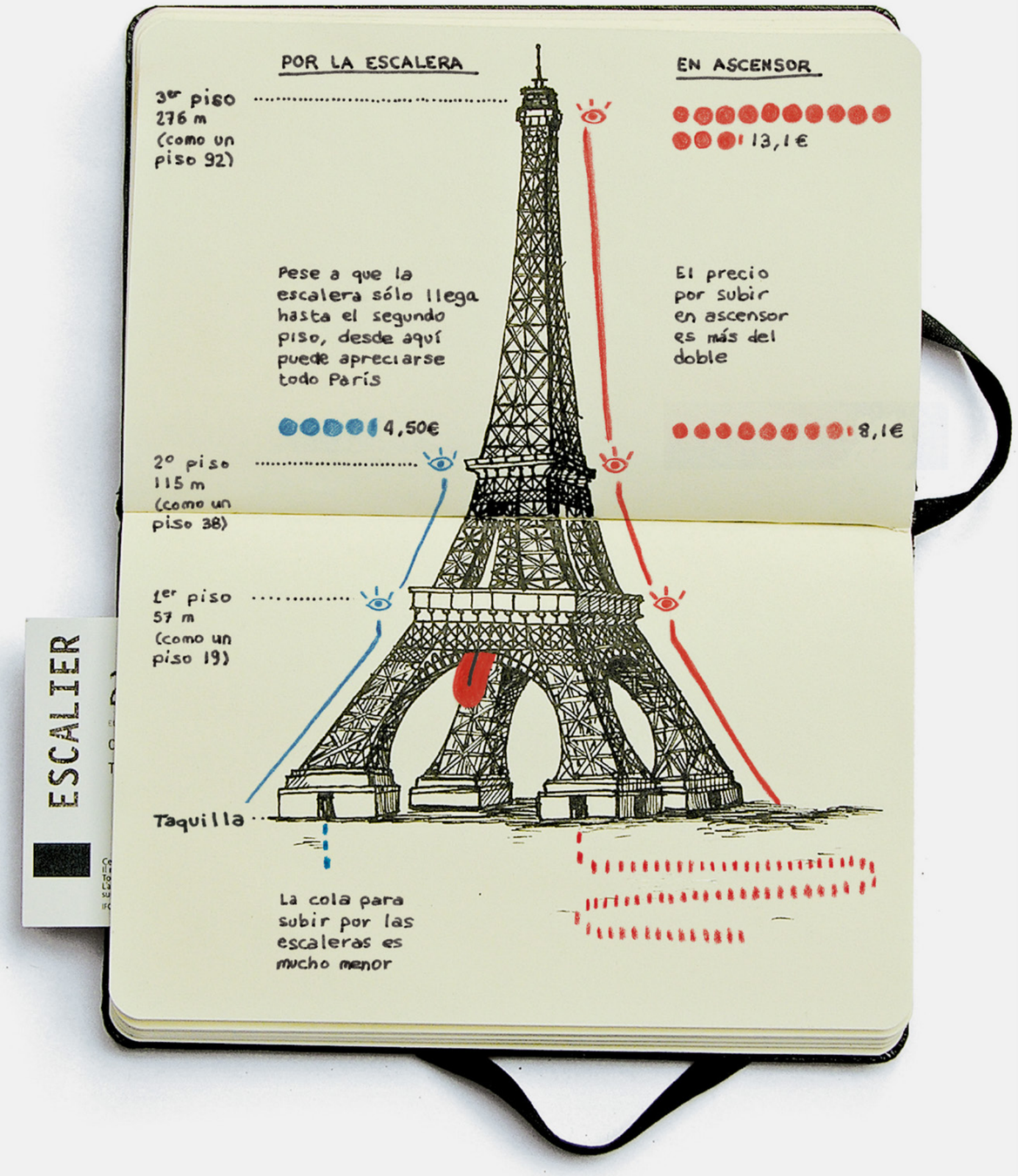

Público
Cuadernos de Viaje
Mónica Serrano

Cuadernos de Viaje (Travel Notebooks) is a series of visual columns presented in 2010 in *Público*. The format shuns the newspaper's style guide and converts a small Moleskin notebook into the field of play for hand-drawn illustrations and collages.

Mónica Serrano values the harmony between form and content. The goal of her work is to find a way of representing the available data that both truthfully reflects it and serves as a powerful visual metaphor. These two qualities combined are indispensable to getting the message across and are ultimately, she argues, what makes a graphic work.

Mónica Serrano

Many people still remember the speech that Serrano gave at the 23rd Malofiej Infographics World Summit in 2015. Her talk, titled *Del deber y la belleza* (On Duty and Beauty), was a brilliant presentation on the difficulties today's freelance visual journalists face in their efforts to adapt to a wide range of disparate media, platforms, editorial criteria, and audiences. It is a marvelous sort of schizophrenia that forces the development of creativity, sensitivity, versatility, and rigorousness. She was also speaking on her own behalf: at the time, she had been a freelance infographer who frequently worked with media outlets such as *Corriere della Sera* (Italy), *Courrier Internacional* (France), *El País* (Spain), and *La Nación* (Argentina). She spoke about working hard to expand her range of expression while never losing sight of the first duty of an infographer: to be a journalist. On the day of her speech, there was a solar eclipse that was a news story around the world. None of the other speakers mentioned it except for her. In her soft, Andalusian accent, Serrano turned the eclipse into a co-star of the event, an excellent demonstration of the fact that infographics and journalism inevitably go hand in hand.

The title of her talk, *Del deber y la belleza,* is indicative of the way Mónica Serrano has always approached her work. "The best thing that can happen for an infographer is to find a representation that faithfully reflects the available data and also serves as a visual metaphor to communicate the message. If you've got those two things, you've got the perfect balance. If you don't, the graphic will never be complete," she explains. This harmony of form and content is something she comes back to again and again. Although she was born in Cádiz, her grandparents lived in Morocco and she would visit them frequently. Her grandfather had a small art collection, and being surrounded by paintings and sculpture made a profound impact upon her. She would spend many hours drawing during those visits and later, after returning home in Cádiz, a city closely tied to the sea: for centuries, it was the port of departure and return for ships traveling to and from America. Sea-related things, boats, and sailing have also played an important role in her later achievements.

Although she initially studied engineering, Serrano soon realized she was more interested in artistic and creative pursuits. So she decided to leave engineering behind and enroll in graphic design at the Instituto de Artes Visuales in Jerez. She discovered infographics almost immediately. When the chance arose, she applied for an internship at the *Diario de Cádiz,* the oldest local newspaper in Spain (2017 marks its 150th year in operation). At the *Diario,* there was a tiny department of just two people, one of which was Chiqui Esteban, now deputy graphics director at the *Washington Post*. In 2008, she moved to Madrid to work for *Público,* a new daily paper whose infographics quickly became a point of reference in Spain and around the world. Led by Álvaro Valiño, who previously worked for *La Voz de Galicia,* the team at *Público* revolutionized the way graphics are produced at a newspaper. Using a minimalist, elegant style with a decided emphasis on data visualization as opposed to diagrammatic infographics, *Público* introduced infographics to sections of the paper that until then had only hosted them occasionally. The department reported on various subjects, ranging from politics and corruption scandals to sports