

San Sebastián: Stars, Auteurs, Biz and More

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Cited by many creatives and execs as their favorite film festival, Spain's San Sebastián — a European A-list fest just below Berlin, Cannes and Venice in size — stirs up a classic cinematic cocktail for 2025 under director José Luis Rebordinos.

There's a choice selection of august auteurs and discoveries in competition, plus most of Spain's finest films of 2025, fresh winds blowing from a New Directors sidebar. There's also plenty for the industry to drink in, led by the CAA Media Finance-backed Creative Investors' Conference and projects at the Europe-Latin America Co-Production Forum. A beacon of stability, San Sebastián will, however, inevitably frame vertiginous change sweeping across the world's film and TV landscape.

Here are eight takes on the 2025 edition, which runs Sept. 19-27:

Stars

On Sept. 26, Jennifer Lawrence will pick up a career achievement Donostia Award, San Sebastian's highest honor. Then she'll present Lynne Ramsay's Cannes competition player *Die My Love*, starring Lawrence in a turn that kept the Croisette buzzing. Golden Shell contender *Couture* also screens but at press time, it was still up in the air whether star Angelina Jolie would attend. Expected at the fest are Colin Farrell, for Edward Berger's Macau-set *Ballad of a Small Player*, and Matt Dillon, for Claire Denis' *The Fence*, plus a litany of international cinema royalty, including Juliette Binoche (for directorial debut, *In-1 In Motion*), Richard Linklater (*Nouvelle Vague*), Olivier Assayas (*The Wizard of the Kremlin*) and Walter Salles.

Buzz titles

In main competition, there's good word on Arnaud Desplechin's *Two Pianos* and Claire Denis' *The Fence*, a return to her anti-colonialist mode. Also on the buzz meter is *Her Heart Beats in Its Cage* from former docu-



Anatomía de un asesinato.

based on a true event and acted by the real-life surviving family members. Generational conflict tale *Ungrateful Beings*, from Slovenia's Olmo Omerzu, has its fans, as does Alice Wincour's French fashion-industry *Couture*, anchored by a French-speaking performance by Jolie.

CAA Media Finance-San Sebastian Creative Investors' Conference: Looking to Europe

Last year's conference saw panelists sketch the opportunities and challenges for independent production: The audience revolution, not only in the U.S. but also France and Italy, contracting U.S. studio investment and fixed U.S. union shooting costs. One obvious solution for the latter is for U.S. producers to look to Europe, said CAA Media Finance's Roeg Sutherland. Expect 2025's conference attendees to pick up that conversation, which includes Sutherland, Annapurna Pictures' Skye Optican, Christine Vachon, Patrick Wachsberger, Vincent Maraval, Christian Vesper, Javiera Balmaceda, Juan

de Dios Larraín and Sébastien Raybaud, among many more.

Spain's finest hour?

Fifteen years ago, as recession austerity measures clobbered Spanish cinema, pundits worried about its future. Now, however, “probably from when I started to work in the world of cinema, Spanish cinema is enjoying its finest moment,” says Rebordinos, pointing to Albert Serra’s 2024 San Sebastián Golden Shell win with *Afternoons of Solitude*, a Berlin 2025 Spain Country in Focus tribute and two films in Cannes’ main competition this May. “There are upcoming films from Pedro Almodóvar, Albert Serra and Rodrigo Sorogoyen. Just in competition at San Sebastián, we have four Spanish films of power which are also highly different,” Rebordinos says. Two are Golden Shell entries, and notably, are Basque productions — *Maspalomas and Sundays* — while *Happy Valley Stories* is from Catalonia, illustrating that the entertainment industries from both

territories have become national cinema drivers.

Streamers dive into movies

Equally, streaming services, global or national, are diving into movies in the Spanish-speaking world. San Sebastián opens with Argentine Netflix film *27 Nights*, while the Horizontes Latinos sidebar bows with Chilean Dominga Sotomayor's *Limpia*, another Netflix title. Spain's top pay/SVOD operator Movistar Plus+, which is behind Cannes Jury Prize winner *Sirát*, accounts for 50% of Spanish Golden Shell contenders including the two most-awaited Spanish pics, *Los Tigres* and *Sundays*. In a world where movies need to break through the crowd of content, "there are very few tools to make large-scale films in Spain. One only option is making it with a streamer," says Guillermo Farré, head of original films and Spanish cinema at Movistar Plus+.

Basque Boom

In 2014, *Loreak* became the first Basque-language film to make San Se-

bastian's main competition cut. It's a mark of just how far Basque Cinema has come since then that three of this year's four Spanish Golden Shell contenders are Basque productions – *Sundays*, *Los Tigres* and *Maspalomas* – "made in Basque or Castilian Spain, as are three of its eight out of competition or special screenings from anywhere in the world: Netflix edge-of-the-seat thriller, *She Walks in Darkness*, *Karmele*, a sweeping epic I time and geography, and crime drama *Mouths of Sky*. Catalonia, meanwhile, sports 28 titles at San Sebastián. Both regional powerhouses are now national powers.

Conversation drivers

In the 1990s, San Sebastián was often rocked by polemics. Since then, under Mikel Olaciregui and Reborinos, now on his 15th edition, the waters have calmed.

Three titles, however, may prove conversation-drivers, led by Sundays from Querer's Alauda Ruiz de Azua, about a Basque family whose liberal convictions are tested when the young daughter announces she wants to become a nun. She Walks in Darkness, about a Civil Guard ETA infiltrator, will divide opinions in the Basque Country. One of the biggest talking points is likely to be series *Anatomy of a Moment*, a buzzy semi-fictionalized chronicle of how democracy was won and then saved in Spain. It begs the question of whether the best-received new title at San Sebastian will once more prove to be a small screen skein.

Latin America hurts

San Sebastián weighs in as the biggest festival in the Spanish-speaking world, but part of that is now hurting. For the first time in 15 years, there is no Argentinian movie in San Sebastián's Work in Progress. Of the three Argentine features in official selection, two, *27 Nights* and *Belén*, are backed by streamers; *Belén* by Prime Video. Milagros Mumenthaler's *The Currents* is lead-produced out of Switzerland. "That's saying something," observes Rebordinos.



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