

In a village on the east coast of Gran Canaria, some hundred kilometers from Africa, is Swiss decorator Christophe Gollut's winter retreat. From 1981, he gradually bought three adjacent houses over 18 years, linking them all into one, in a kaleidoscope of color. When he moved in "I spoke five words of Spanish and it was complete 19th century! We just had water for washing twice a week for three hours."

At the heart of his rambling two story house, a tall courtyard provides cool respite from the sun, its stone walls washed in a pale periwinkle blue. This shade is enhanced by purple jacaranda and lavender in the saddle of a *papier-mâché* donkey on a skateboard. "That was a gift from a fun fair display—from a carousel." The donkey (an ever-present animal in the Canaries) seems to guard the traditional stone water system. This filters water through a hanging plant into a ceramic bowl beneath, to produce "the clearest drinking water ever." Called a *pila*—also meaning "battery"—the water system, and indeed the courtyard, is crucial to the house.

The lofty space connects Christophe's colorful abodes—guest bedrooms in pale pink, berry and papaya, an ample upstairs drawing room in pastel pink with original teal blue woodwork and, at the juncture of two original houses, his distinctive bedroom. This he painted a vivid Moroccan "Majorelle Garden" or "Jodhpur" blue with original untouched "Celeste Azul Añil" Canarian blue woodwork on doors and window frames. The room overlooks a terrace taken over by bougainvillea and wild roaming foliage, before the kitchen (originally a granary) next door.

The terrace ("raised two meters from the floor") is a world in itself, teeming with frangipani trees, said bougainvillea in fuchsia, purple and lipstick red, Jurassic-looking cactus plants indigenous to the island, and strong scented herbs and flowers from jasmine to the beguiling *El Galán de Noche* which "only flowers at night with this incredible scent—nothing until nine o'clock!" Flowers pour from every surface and stairwell yet when Christophe arrived

"There was not one plant! I planted everything and it grew like mad." Up on the rooftop, the flora runs wild, peeping out from under the decking and forming a miniature forest bordered with cacti. A bench has been consumed by bougainvillea, a view in itself, in addition to the church spire that marks, two streets up, the house of the late Min Hogg, Christophe's best friend.

Min came to photograph Christophe's house for *World of Interiors* in 1984. The owner had been reluctant. "She came much too early—I told her 'I only bought this house two years ago in a village that doesn't really have water.' She said, 'No, I'm coming—and I don't want that crap that it's not ready for me. I know it is.'" Min then returned and bought her own place in 1987.

In time, as well as connecting the three neighboring houses (the third is now his library) Christophe made "quite a lot of changes." These include joining two upstairs bedrooms to make his "now symmetric drawing room," installing a terrace, adding a bannister to the stone staircase of the courtyard and a gothic door "from Norfolk" at the top. He also put glass in all the windows and made a bathroom of the sitting room beneath his bedroom, installing a staircase made by a village carpenter. Meanwhile, André Dubreuil painted *trompe l'oeil* stone slabs on the walls of the courtyard entrance and around its doorways.

Throughout the rooms and corridors are a mix of décor and *objets* from Christophe's travels from antiques to toys and curiosities. Here, a grandfather clock and two 1880 family chimneys from Switzerland, there a miniature Egyptian sphinx and a tiny Velazquez. Indian fabrics line beds and screens, Chinese curtains hang in windows and Persian carpets line the floors. Arabic arches abound while walls are hung with grand oil-painted portraits, sketches of Christophe and pictures of bright turquoise Haitian harbors. An oil painting of a donkey is a charming Canarian reference and a nod to its playful counterpart, smiling on its skateboard in the courtyard.

A Winter Retreat

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