



SEVILLE SOCIETY

The opportunity to convert a premium piece of real estate in the Andalusian capital was like a red rag to a bull for decorator Javier Sánchez-Dalp. Better yet, the Art Deco apartment had housed his noble relatives for generations – the prodigal scion of marquesses and matadors, there's no question that Javier had time on his side. Indeed, history took centre stage in this shrine to his line, with totems of toreadors contending with countless Iberian inheritances. Cosmo Brockway meets the family. Photography: Mark Luscombe-Whyte





Previous pages: more than anywhere else in Javier Sánchez-Dalp's bright Art Deco apartment in Seville, the grand salon has been transformed into an atmospheric repository for family ephemera, including the astonishing pair of full-length Antonio Cabral Bejarano portraits that command the far wall. Opposite: a painting by Barcelona-born artist Joan-Pere Viladecans asserts itself above a 19th-century chinoiserie Charles II writing desk. This page: a mercurial portrait of Javier's father, the legendary bullfighter Manolo González sits atop a console in the Grand Salon. One of the most popular sportsmen of postwar Spain, he suddenly retired from a glittering career to quietly run a ranch in the hills outside Seville. *Sittings editor: Patricia Medina*



There is something about the light in Seville that makes it nearly impossible to feel melancholy. Even Christopher Columbus talked of the softness of its spring air, and indeed the entire city seems to be enveloped in a haze of, as the French say, *jouissance* – delighting in life. It is also a society tightly entwined with itself: the litany of old Sevillian families is only as long as the titles of the late Cayetana, Duchess of Alba, and they are all connected with each other. Flamboyant tradition, exquisite manners and an inherent sense of custodianship mark this tribe apart. Anyone who has been in the city for Easter Week in the city will recall the dignity and worldly piety of its residents – the mantillas quivering with devotion and excitement, the Moorish salons abuzz with chatter and courtyards

filled with generations of devastatingly chic locals.

Born into the inner sanctum of this world, interior decorator Javier Sánchez-Dalp has made it his life's work to steward his family history through possessions inherited and found. He is a man who patently lives for the *coup de coeur* of collecting on a grand scale, and his magpie's eye for ornament, textile and objet has quickly filled the pristine Art Deco apartment he shares with his partner, Roberto.

Built in 1910 by the Sevillian architect Aníbal González – creator of the Plaza de España, perhaps the most spectacular example of regionalist architecture anywhere – the apartment has always been owned by Javier's family, destined to become a temple to his discerning eye. He had been living in a 'rather poky flat' when an uncle







Previous pages: the salon is given impressive scale by a large pair of 17th-century Italian architectural capriccios. In the foreground, among the Classical marble pieces, is a biography of the Duchess of Alba, a close friend of Javier's father. Opposite: the view from the salon into the corridor that links all the rooms. A theatrical flourish of Javier's is the two contrasting draped textiles. This page: a Malaga girl holding wild flowers in her muslin apron, by 19th-century court painter Luis de la Cruz, greets guests in the entrance hall. Below, a volume on Javier's favourite artist, Claudio Bravo, rests atop a Louis XVI commode



asked Javier to move in and transform this neglected piece of the family estate. Set on an unassuming side street by a bustling boulevard, bristling with shops selling flamenco dresses and holy water, the space had the long windows and arching ceilings required for the stage set, but little else. With most of the rooms leading, railway-carriage fashion, off a central corridor, Javier faced the challenge of creating a sense of scale that would satisfy him, notwithstanding the luck of a large, light-filled drawing room. 'I was struck by the high ceilings, the decorative plaster and the light that enters through the balcony doors,' he reflects. 'It is crowded during the day in the streets below, giving a zing of energy, but entirely peaceful at night.'

A dark entrance niche was the first thing to be given the Sánchez-Dalp sleight of

hand, with the clever addition of raffia-toned Brochier fabric lining the walls above a skirting of geometric trompe-l'oeil painted wood. Throw in a handsome Empire commode and a full-scale portrait of a maiden from Malaga by court painter Luis de la Cruz y Ríos, and the mood is both Proustian and masculine. Javier, the son of a champion bullfighter and a bohemian heiress, retains both of these qualities as his own yin and yang – romantic and pragmatic – and is, without question, broodingly Iberian in his mien.

Fiercely proud of his maternal line – the Sánchez-Dalps were gifted the title of Marquess of Aracena by Alfonso XIII – Javier keeps the sprigs of the family tree close, scattered through the rooms and along the walls. He remarks, as we gaze out the window down to the citrus trees,



This page: a striking artwork by Jaime Burguillos dominates the small dining room, framed by four paintings by the late Baroque artist Luca Giordano. An African sculpture by García holds court on the adjacent lamp table beside two ornamental pineapples. Opposite: in the dressing room, which doubles as a study, Javier has paired an Oriental carpet, a jauntily striped office chair and a table clad in rich cerulean felt cloth, edged with a Victorian petit-point valance. A Murano glass lamp on the table ties in with a column of abstract paintings on the far wall, all by Jorge Freísner. A bronze bust of Javier's father by Miguel García rests atop an 18th-century English chest of drawers, flanked to the left by a French bergère armchair upholstered with a Rubelli textile

that the orange blossom became one of the symbols of the city due to an ancestor planting the very first one along the boulevards. The 'grand salon' was, in the decorator's words, 'a canvas waiting to be painted, with furniture and objects'. Using two large-scale, 17th-century Italian capriccios as a starting point, Javier has layered the echoing space with his individual sense of colour and scale; he cites his friend Jaime Parladé (*WoI* Oct 2021), scion of another grand Andalusian family, as a huge influence alongside Lorenzo Castillo (*WoI* Jan 2021).

The long bone-white room, entered by pushing through Javier's signature trick of tied-back curtains in contrasting textiles – one West African Kente cloth, one vintage French chintz in tobacco brown – is given a visual clack of castanets by

the two full-length Antonio Cabral Bejarano portraits of a 19th-century bullfighter and veiled, mischievous-looking con- tessa gazing down on to a round table draped in an antique piece of block print found in Jodhpur. Dashes of Spain's national sport, that ballet of life and death, are found everywhere.

This is unsurprising when one discovers that Javier's late father was the legendary matador Manolo González: escort of Seville's great beauties, patronised by the Alba family and one of the most photographed figures in 1950s Spain. Another influential family figure that seems to live on in spirit is Pepita, the Marquise of Salltillo, Javier's aunt and godmother, whose haute-couture-festooned portrait by Claudio Bravo, the Chilean hyperrealist artist, is the one possession that would be flung





Opposite: Javier spends much time sourcing treasures in souks and bazaars in far-flung places — the Moorish arched mirror in the loo was one such find. This page: an otherwise unassuming bathroom now delights with the simple additions of a draped Persian ‘kalamkari’, a striking Turkish dhurrie and an Isabel-style Spanish armoire



out of the window in a fire according to the designer.

As in much of Seville, legacy is cherished here, the ticking of clocks somehow accompanying an ancestral chant coming from the seams of the rooms. Each element has a familial anecdote that is woven into the very DNA of the owner, a man for whom loss has played a role. The *palacio* he would have inherited from an uncle was bulldozed to make way for a hypermarket. Kept behind the armchairs covered in Colony ikat are hefty albums purloined from elderly relicts showing the neo-Mudéjar colonnades where Javier might have held court. But such a conjurer has no need of such ballast. Here, tragedy is supplanted by vision and, with each deft swoop of his hand, whether mingling japanned cabinets with abstract artworks or Isfahan

kalamkaris with Renaissance grisailles, Javier wields his baton as assuredly as any great conductor.

As siesta hour beckons, plates of *jamón Serrano*, figs from his vineyard and chilled Galician wine are laid on mauve porcelain. Our raconteur host delights in sharing the story of the plates – designed for Amadeo I by the ceramicist Charles Pickman Jones, a Londoner whom the king made a marquess – with such vivid élan that the delicious food is soon forgotten. Perhaps the most gifted decorators are all storytellers at heart, with a sense of the absurd underpinning the theatre of it all. Javier is master of his own *estadio* as surely as his flamenco-pink-caped father must have been ☺
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