

SEVILLE

In this rambling *finca* near the Andalusian capital, interior decorator Javier González Sánchez-Dalp has cleverly coupled both branches of his ancestry. At once rustic and refined, it reflects the courtly formality of his mother's aristocratic milieu and the simple country life favoured by his father, a celebrated bullfighter. Cosmo Brockway toasts the happy marriage of family heirlooms, vintage haute couture, English chintz and matador's capes. Photography: Mark Luscombe-Whyte



Left: the 19th-century tower forms part of the original 'cortijo', or farmhouse, on the estate owned by Javier González Sánchez-Dalp's grandmother. Opposite: his dashing grandfather, the Marqués de Aracena, is the subject of this hunting portrait by Agustin Segura in the salon. Underfoot is a Persian carpet that adds, in the owner's words, "depth and a touch of the sultan's lair" to the room

CEREMONY



Every generation of a family needs a custodian of stories, someone who can hold the past and present safely in their hands for all those who follow them. For no matter how prominent or anonymous, every clan has its legacy, and the lucky ones will be blessed with a member who assumes the role of conservator. Javier González Sánchez-Dalp is precisely that thing: a curator of ancestral characters and chattels, as well as an interior decorator who creates beautiful homes.

One of a handful of sons born to a Sevillian heiress and a handsome bullfighter, Javier has made it his life's work to shore up the history of his maternal forebears, the Sánchez-Dalps. Ennobled in the early 20th century with the title of Marqués de Aracena by Alfonso XIII, one wealthy progenitor bestowed Seville with its first orange trees. This led to their blossom becoming one of the symbols of the city. A muddled inheritance running through uncles and nephews saw to it that the marquisate became extinct. And tragically the family *palacio*, with its arching terraces in the Mudéjar style, once one of the grandest residences of Neo-Baroque Seville, was demolished in 1967 only a few decades after its unveiling by the acclaimed architect Simón Barris y Bes. It made way for a hypermarket, an especially egregious example of philistinism and the march of commerce. All that remains is a series of photograph albums behind Javier's sofa documenting treasure-filled chambers now consigned to dust.

Remnants of this opulent lost palace have found an unlikely home down a red-earth track through a blossoming new olive grove. Javier and his partner, Roberto, have spent decades gathering together possessions connected to his maternal family and, simultaneously, carving a new *finca* from a warren of tumbledown agricultural buildings. The chalky-white turrets and arches pierced by juniper-green shutters of Malavista, as this creation has been christened, rise up out of a rolling hillside just a short drive from Seville.

Javier inherited the land from a formidable grandmother, who rejoiced in the title of Barones de la Vega de Hoz, and set about transforming the unpromising

landscape into both a successful olive farm and a pastoral sanctum away from the city. Brimming with vision, he combines the dark-browed intensity of his bullfighting father, who counted Cayetana, Duchess of Alba, among his intimate patrons, with the elegance of his mother and old-world Seville, where courtly manners are still prized and where everyone seems to be connected to one another.

The greatest surprise awaiting visitors to the *finca* is a splendid barrel-vaulted great hall, a former grain store that is hangar-like in scale and quite unlike the homely ramble of rooms on the other side of the tiled courtyard. Here an arrangement of deep armchairs covered in pretty Bennison chintzes sits in contrast to the patterned matting draped along the lower part of the walls, the *maghreb* arches a design 'from a madrassa near Fez', according to Javier. Dangling from a vast rail is half a century of haute couture, quite incongruous among all the antlers and trophies. 'This room is a homage to my late aunt, who was also my godmother,' explains Javier, as we stand surveying this sartorial panoply. A colourful matriarch in Spain's ancien régime, Pepita, Marquesa de Saltillo, is immortalised here in a rustle of scarlet New Look silk in a huge portrait by the society painter Baldomero Romero Ressendi, which dominates the room. A close confidante of both Queen Fabiola of the Belgians and the late Duchess of Alba, Pepita had a favourite refrain – 'I have seen it all before', something the doyens of Sevillian society used to trill regretfully in their mourning for a world that once was. Her annual charity ball at the Casa de Pilatos attracted the likes of Prince Rainier III of Monaco, Grace Kelly and Jackie Onassis, while designers such as Cristóbal Balenciaga and Oscar de la Renta dressed her sprightly frame. Pepita was celebrated for dancing late into the night at her 90th birthday party, and that spirit lives on in this surreal echoing mausoleum to style.

The other great personality much in presence here is Javier's late father, Manuel González, who was regarded as the most charismatic matador in Spain in his heyday before abruptly renouncing fame and glory to run a ranch. Reminders of his

torrid life, which was played out mostly in a glare of publicity, are everywhere in the *finca*, from a raspberry-pink silk cape, stiff with flamboyant machismo, to novellas featuring him as the hero placed on bedside tables. González's passion for rural life is one of the reasons his son decided to create this idyll. 'There is something of [my father] in the plainness of many of the rooms,' he says. That tension between both halves of his ancestry runs through the décor, which oscillates between postwar socialite and Andalucian rustic. The principal bedroom, which you enter through a patchwork curtain ('made by the mountain nuns of Carmona'), is almost simple by comparison. Dominating this austere space is a painting of an Indian tiger, while two single beds are primly placed together in a manner evoking a bachelors' quarters of old. Javier's zest for colour and the folk traditions of his native region and further afield, from the mountains of Anatolia to the souks of Tangier, has resulted in a melting pot of influences, although under his unerring eye they all dance together harmoniously.

During my visit he prepares a lunch of gazpacho, which he serves in entrancing mauve china. I am fascinated to learn that it's by Pickman, a ceramics factory founded at the Monastery of the Cartuja by a Staffordshire porcelain maker who landed in Seville in the 19th century and was created Marqués de Pickman. Typically these heirloom bowls are piled with a haphazard charm in a provincial painted cupboard lined with Chinese-yellow cotton. The farmhouse kitchen beguiles at every turn, with sunlight pouring on to chevrons of cream and agate-green tiles on the floor, which are found in the hill region of El Pedroso, and casual stacks of 18th-century plates featuring country chapels and prancing roosters. Somewhere in the midst of it all there is a purring cat. A man clearly at ease among his olive trees and trophies, Javier has found the freedom to create the world as he would like it to be. As I leave he announces he has another project up his sleeve: some pastoral coops in eccentric shapes for his hens © Javier González Sánchez-Dalp. Email jgonzalezsd@telefonica.net



A whole forest of hunting trophies surrounds an 18th-century giltwood reliquary shrine. The console table is in a style "charmingly known as Andalucian Chippendale", says Javier. The matting, bought in Fez, envelops the lower part of the room to dado height



A bronze of the Sánchez-Dalp paterfamilias, a copy of the effigy that adorns his tomb, reclines on an 18th-century table. Two bull trophies named Bailarin and Lucifer guard a 1950s portrait of Maria Josefa Sánchez-Dalp y Leguina, the Marquesa de Saltillo, who was Javier's aunt



A 'mashrabiya' screen separates the hall from the dining area beyond. Like the Berber rug, it was bought in Morocco, while the painted chair hails from Seville, the owner's home city. The Spanish armoire is a particularly treasured piece. Opposite: William Morris fabric on the chairs brings a touch of the English Arts and Crafts to an otherwise highly Iberian dining room. The side table is topped with a Peruvian textile, an expressive male sculpture by Miguel Garcia and a ceramic vase by Concha Ybarra



Next to the cooker hood in the kitchen is a painting from and by the late Cayetana, Duchess of Alba, a family friend. The tiles forming the jaunty splashback are from Manises, near Valencia, while the two grape-cluster ones above the built-in cupboard were bought in Seville's Triana district. Opposite: 19th-century 'azulejos' from Lisbon decorate the drinking fountain to one side of this arch, beyond which is a courtyard that still retains the rest quarters that were provided for labourers on the estate





In the hall, a family portrait by Carmen Larrañaga hangs above an antique Moorish table. "I fashioned the curtain from a patchwork made by Sevillian nuns," Javier tells us. Opposite: dominating the main bedroom is a Himalayan tiger canvas ("he watches over us and we dream of India underneath him") flanked by a pair of Gothic Revival frames found at a flea market. The blankets were made locally

