


ALCHEMY IN IBERIA

DRAWING ON THE TRADITIONS OF ASIA, FRANCE, AND MOORISH SPAIN,
DAVID LLADRÓ CREATES A RETREAT IN HIS NATIVE VALENCIA
THAT IS AS RICH AND DIVERSE AS THE WARES OF HIS FAMILY'S PORCELAIN FIRM



PRODUCED BY CAROLINA IRVING PHOTOGRAPHED BY OBERTO GILI WRITTEN BY JORGE S. ARANGO



The rough architecture of the 17th-century convent annex that houses the Lladró apartment contrasts vividly with pieces in the living room, opposite page, such as a Noguchi sofa and ottoman and a daybed by the Louis XVI-era master Jean-Baptiste-Claude Sené at the rear wall. In the same space, this page, a Nanda Botella painting hangs over a Ming console that holds terra-cotta vases found in the annex basement.



High and low design are mixed ebulliently in the vast living room space. One area, this page, is anchored by a huge velvet ottoman with Turkish kilim pillows. An 18th-century Spanish Carlos IV armchair stands nearby. Original tiles were taken up and replaced randomly as borders for cement floors. ■ A creative composition is formed, opposite page, by terra-cotta pots, an anonymous 18th-century Madonna and child, two tiny porcelain cachepots (in niches) reputedly made for the dauphin of Charles X, an 18th-century French screen frame, and—of all things—a 1950s steel washing machine.

Cultural grazing comes naturally to the Lladró clan. Since the early 1950s, when brothers Juan, José, and Vicente began firing decorative china and figurines in a small kiln in Almacera, Spain, a village outside Valencia, they have built a porcelain empire based on the idea that all the world's peoples and any fine or decorative art movement in history were fair game in their pursuit of creativity. Their output, snatched up avidly by collectors the world over, runs the gamut from harlequins to Greek mythological figures, from flora and fauna to religious iconography, and from Spanish literary characters to quotidian scenes from the native cultures of Africa and the Americas.

So it's hardly surprising to find that their family pied-à-terre in Valencia is a mélange of creative inspirations. "A variety of styles is always interesting," says David Lladró, Vicente's 31-year-old son, who was charged with supervising the renovation and decoration of the loftlike space. A quick scan of the place assures you of his unquestionable sincerity: it looks as if someone dropped ideas and objects from disparate continents and epochs into the design blender and pushed the frappé button.

The apartment occupies the third floor of an annex to the fifteenth-century Real Monasterio de la Trinidad, a functioning convent. The annex was built in the seventeenth century to house noncloistered nuns and convent employees who worked the groves of Valencia's eponymous orange and other fruit





When it came time to decorate, says Reyes Medina, "we found it interesting to play with contrast. We had a unique space and wanted to keep that energy throughout the decor." To wit, the apartment was filled with textural and aesthetic variations. An antique Turkish kilim hangs over an Empire daybed that has ormolu mounts and is dressed in Versace patterned gold silk. The tub in the master bath is tiled inside in one pattern, outside in another, while the floor has still another. Instead of traditional plumbing that might have complemented this look, Reyes Medina chose sleek chrome Vola fixtures designed by Arne Jacobsen.

The view through the gilded frame of an eighteenth-century French room screen (archly missing its upholstered panels) is of a picturesquely crumbling brick wall displaying a 1700s Neapolitan painting of a Madonna and child, terracotta pots found in the basement, two tiny cachepots that reputedly belonged to the last dauphin of France, and a 1950s brushed-steel washing machine. The latter is fully functional and, says Reyes Medina, "fits in as part

A partially upholstered vintage Thonet chair, left, sits beside a fireplace made of ship steel. ■ David Lladró, below, poses before Peter Phillips's *Stormy Day* (2001). ■ A Turkish kilim hangs over an Empire daybed with ormolu mounts, opposite page. A custom cabinet made in Valencia showcases antique porcelain and books.

trees. The property was eventually sold to private owners, and by the time the Lladró family bought the structure, in 2000, it was disintegrating from neglect.

The purchase actually saved the annex from a potentially disastrous conversion to apartment housing. "The usual practice in the city was to maintain only the facade of historical buildings, demolish the interior, and rebuild with a concrete and steel structure and a housing program that in no way respects their previous nature," says Lladró. "Our basic idea was to enhance the most valuable features of the building and to preserve, as much as possible, all traces that the passing of time had left on it, treating it as if it were an antique piece of furniture."

His collaborator was Francisco Reyes Medina of the firm *Arquitectura Básica*. Reyes Medina chose to highlight the building's rawness by leaving support beams, columns, and bricks exposed, and repair where necessary without glossing over the wear and tear of centuries. Anything that was salvageable was reused, though not necessarily in the same way. Original floor tiles, for example, were taken up, cleaned, and redeployed as borders around new poured concrete areas, thus helping to delineate various spaces within the open plan. Wood fragments even found new life, as the frame of a full-length mirror in the bedroom.







THE MIX HOW IT WORKS

- COLOR** The overall sense of peace owes much to the decision to use calm, monochromatic upholstery on both the traditional and modernist pieces and to set them against the more ornate, colorful designs of floor tiles and accent fabrics. Don't drown noble old architecture in too much pattern and radical color.
- TEXTURE** The rough brick walls and exposed beams attest to the passage of time. To preserve a sense of history, keep the cracks, and restore with prudence. Excessive restoration robs antiques—and antique walls and floors—of their patina as well as their charm.
- CONTRAST** The rich quality of the decor is derived from the inventive pairing of old and new, such as the contrast of a 20th-century abstract painting with an 18th-century Madonna, or a French Empire daybed with a sofa and ottoman by Isamu Noguchi. Such bold pairings are deployed sparingly for best effect.

of an overall pop art composition." Mid-century furniture (a Noguchi sofa and ottoman, Arne Jacobsen's Sputnik-like Square Moon pendant lamp) and pop art (Communist Chinese images by Manolo Cáceres and Jose Miranda) bring the look into a whole new millennium.

The refurbishment of the building took two years, so client and architect had ample time to mull over the many compositions that fill the sprawling, 3,500-square-foot apartment, which gives the lie to the belief of Miguel de Cervantes—whose characters from *Don Quixote* are a favorite subject for Lladró porcelains—that "to protract a great design is often to ruin it."

There was, of course, no question that the decor would include Lladró works, yet these were deployed with great subtlety and purpose. The company's St. Michael and Golgotha

relate to other Christian imagery and objects (an Italian processional lamp, a Spanish silver reliquary). The company's Madonna of Rocio and elephant supporting an obelisk mirror other European-Asian pairings in the room. Divine Love—a limited-edition statue of Eros riding a unicorn adorned with 24-karat gold, diamonds, and sapphires—echoes the luxuriously decorative feel of a gold-leaf painting behind it.

This freewheeling heterogeneity could have tipped into caprice or pastiche, but Lladró and Reyes Medina's collaboration unfolds with wit and elegance, resulting in an almost melancholic space without a single predictable sight line. "People's ideas about what is harmonious are relative," says Lladró. "What I think we achieved here is a wonderful integration of styles." □
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A photograph of a bathroom interior. In the foreground, a bathtub is partially visible, covered in white tiles with intricate blue and gold floral patterns. To the right, a modern black vanity holds a white ceramic basin with a sleek chrome faucet. The floor is covered in matching patterned tiles. In the background, a doorway leads to another room with a brick wall, a framed picture, and a white ceramic jar. A window with a wooden frame and shutters is on the left. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the textures and colors of the space.

The entrance to the loft bedroom, opposite page, features a painting by Manolo Cáceres and Jose Miranda inspired by Maoist propaganda posters, a hand-carved bench by a Valencian artisan, and an antique Chinese chair. • Sleek Arne Jacobsen chrome Vola fixtures make a striking juxtaposition with the ceramic basin and the traditional tiles that cover the tub and floor in the master bath, this page. See Shopping, last pages.