

An Island Vibe

When commissioned to recreate the interiors of an old farmhouse on Ibiza, a designer tapped into her own deep connection to the sunny Spanish isle

Although she lives and works predominantly in Northern Europe, designer Melissa Vale is enchanted by the relaxed spirit of the Spanish isle of Ibiza. “My family began wintering there when I was just a child,” says Vale. “When I first visited Ibiza as a young person, I noticed a kind of spiritual, Zen feeling—everyone is in love with each other—and that island vibe is in my blood.” So, when a young family from Holland tapped her to turn an old farmhouse into a cozy getaway home on the island, the Dutch-born, Belgium-based designer welcomed the opportunity to bring her talents to a place she loves.

“One of my favorite things about the island is that it’s so quiet and removed that you can really hear nature—birds singing, pine trees rustling in the wind—and take in its colors—vibrant blue water, sandy beaches, intense green vegetation,” says Vale. She also appreciates the whitewashed walls, flat roofs and Moorish-inspired doorways of the historic *fincas*, or traditional Ibicencan farmhouses, that dot the island, including the one she was charged with revitalizing. “The house is an 80-year-old structure set on top of a hill,” says the designer. “It’s actually the oldest dwelling in the community, so I wanted to preserve its authenticity.” But it had also been neglected for decades. “Nothing much had ever really been done to it,” explains Vale, recalling the tangles of overgrown vines in the garden that had choked off its charm. “It was like a jungle. The trees and plants were so dense you could hardly walk through to the front door.”

Undaunted by the challenges, Vale drew upon her longstanding knowledge of the environs to guide the restoration. “The home wasn’t getting enough love,” she maintains. “My goal was to give her identity and charm back in a modern way without breaking from her history.” She started by clearing the excess vegetation on the grounds. “I pared back much of what was there, leaving just some palm trees and bougainvillea. Then I introduced plateaus of stone, or turf, on different levels and added fruit trees and herbs to establish an appealing connection between the house and its garden.”

Forging a more harmonious relationship between inside and out was a priority. Vale worked to lay the groundwork for the rapprochement by replacing dark,



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An old farmhouse on the Spanish island of Ibiza was restored and updated. Opening page: From the entry, the TV room/family room is visible, where a series of low-rising side tables work as both seating and serving areas. This page: Throughout the house, walls wear a shade referred to as “White Sand.” Living room seating areas are set close to the windows to take advantage of views and breezes.



Designer Melissa Vale had the home’s original wooden ceiling beams bleached and then treated with a transparent stain. A seagrass rug demarcates a seating area in the living room, which centers on a sculptural fireplace.

damaged floor tiles with a smooth, light stucco made of marble powder and shells, a treatment that extends from the exterior staircase up to a covered terrace and into every room of the four-bedroom house. “It’s soft underfoot and sometimes you can see a whole shell embedded in the floor,” says Vale. “I wanted to feel the beach inside, to let the house breathe.”

To bring in extra light and air, Vale had the crew knock down interior walls, sandblast the dark stain off original Sabina wood ceiling beams, widen passages between rooms, and enlarge the windows throughout. “I wanted to stay true to the soul of the house, so I had the walls re-plastered by hand and added a fireplace to the living room where an old steel stove had been. It’s like a traditional bread-baking oven but larger, and I had it covered with plaster to blend with the walls.”

She also refreshed the kitchen and baths while honoring the home’s essence by introducing handcrafted grace notes. “We kept the plaster shell of the kitchen but replaced all the cabinet doors with old French oak that came from castles,” she explains. “And we covered the walls in a bath with local stones and gave it a custom vanity with a sink carved from island rock.”

Once the decades-old spirit of the home was revitalized, Vale turned to her favorite Belgian suppliers to enliven the interiors with a mix of modern and rustic furnishings. In the living room, a seagrass rug, side tables made of driftwood, and handwoven baskets contrast with a pair of slipper chairs and an oversized sculptural sofa. Mid-century-inspired chairs set around the table in the dining room, along with rattan chairs placed at a massive farm table on the terrace, foster a more contemporary, yet earthy, flavor. A profusion of handwoven pendant fixtures and lampshades from Indonesia punctuate rooms with accents that are as pragmatic as they are artful. Indeed, the only actual piece of art in the home is a massive plate-like work on a wall of the dining room. “It was made by Bert Kuizenga, an artist from the Netherlands—I’ve followed him on social media for a long time,” says Vale. “I asked him if he could make a work in the sandy taupe, brown, white, and cream colors of Ibiza—and he did.”

In keeping with the refreshed island atmosphere, rugs made of seagrass, *rayung*, and pineapple palm ground the rooms with infusions of warm textures, while glass, ceramic, and mother-of-pearl accents add pep to the dwelling with soft notes of sun-washed color. With her mission accomplished, echoes of the past graciously merge with the serene energy of the present in a home where the family—along with the designer’s fondest memories of Ibiza’s spirit—can now thrive. ■



Opposite: Beachy hues and tones prevail in the rooms, notably in the kitchen; cabinets are made of French oak. This page: Handwoven Indonesian lamp shades and baskets serve as décor in the dining room. In her redesign, Vale created larger windows and more direct access to the outdoors.



Opposite: Morning glories grow in profusion in the home's garden and are used to adorn the table. Much of the home's glassware is designed by Scandinavian artisan Anna von Lipa. This page: One of the home's outdoor dining areas is set at the front of the house. Handwoven lampshades from Belgium create a diaphanous light in the evening and serve as visual focal points by day.



Calming island hues appear in the primary bedroom—an array of soft blues and pinks and whites. A carved wooden nightstand is both practical and sculptural.



A wall of the primary bedroom reveals the typical stonework of Ibiza. A geometrically articulated plaster basin is fitted with a sink fashioned from Ibiza stone.



Opposite: The main entrance to the home leads to a covered porch. This page: A stand-alone guest house features a roof deck, draped with a fabric for sunshade.