



THE WELL

An OASIS of the SPIRIT

Drawing on his Andalusian roots and knowledge of Moorish architecture, Spanish designer Pablo Paniagua brings a fresh interpretation to classic Moroccan style

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Pablo Paniagua*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *German Saiz*
WRITTEN BY *Jean Najar*



Opening page: As is typical of a traditional Moroccan *riad*, a restored residence in Marrakech centers on a private courtyard with a contemplative water source. Pablo Paniagua designed the reclining bench made of ebonized cedar with stone ball finials at the corners; traditional handmade and embroidered Moroccan fabrics were used throughout the home. Above: Paniagua positioned two antique Spanish walnut chairs along one of the courtyard's galleries; an eighteenth-century Syrian lamp hangs above. Opposite: The wall of an outdoor fireplace is set with traditional green ceramic tiles. The corner banquette, designed by Paniagua, is upholstered in fabrics from Jim Thompson and Soane Britain.





This page: At the entrance foyer, an upholstered pedestal designed by Paniagua emphasizes the presence of an ornate Syrian chest that dates from the nineteenth century and combines walnut, mahogany, and lemon tree with inlays of mother-of-pearl, ivory, bronze, and exotic woods. Opposite: A console table by Paniagua spans a niche in a parlor room. The eighteenth-century blown-glass lantern, one of four in the room, comes from Syria and served as an oil lamp in a mosque.

Two views into what is known in the home as the White Parlor reveal draperies at the entryway fashioned from fabrics designed by Paniagua and woven in Morocco. The made-to-measure sofas are adorned with pillows made of purple velvet and saffron chenille. Paniagua transformed old Moroccan brass vases into table lamps that he had fitted with white linen shades. A chair made of ebonized walnut is upholstered in an orange velvet from Rubelli. The brass floor lamp (far right) was made by Maison Arlus in the 1960s.





Opposite: A niche along the master bathroom hallway contains a locally made bench upholstered in an olive green linen from Loro Piana, the same material that is used on the adjacent curtain. The rhombus-patterned tilework was done by local artisans. This page: A corner of the master bedroom is occupied by a nineteenth-century walnut and exotic wood table that replicates the Spanish Moorish style. It is topped with a silver and bronze candlestick incised with a floral decoration.



The master bedroom sports swathes of color. All of the cotton and linen bedding was made by Matarranz, a venerable fabric maker in Madrid. The Syrian bedside tables are topped with Maison Charles bronze Pavot lamps from the 1960s, purchased in Paris. The wall hanging is a nineteenth-century Moroccan silk tapestry with Berber tribal motifs. Walls are finished in *tadelakt*, which contains natural pigment traditionally used in Moroccan homes. A Jim Thompson silk fabric adorns the bed.

ON A JOURNEY to Marrakech more than a dozen years ago, Maite Carpio Bulgari was reminded of everything about the former imperial city that had enchanted her as a college student when she traveled there in summers from her hometown of Madrid. “It is magical to hear the call to prayer of the *muezzin* at dawn,” she says of the energy that permeates the atmosphere in the historic quarter. On this particular jaunt, however, she was accompanied by her husband, Paolo Bulgari, heir to and chairman of the famed Bulgari jewelry dynasty, and their two daughters, Marina and Carlotta. The entire family found themselves equally captivated by the exotic ambiance of the ancient North African city—so much so that the couple settled on a residence (albeit a neglected one, scattered with rubble) situated in the heart of the medina near the royal palace.

Their idea was to create a getaway home in the form of a contemporary *riad*—a traditional multi-story Moroccan home centered around an interior garden or courtyard with shared living spaces and a fountain. With the help of a talented Moroccan architect and a local crew, they slowly and meticulously developed the two-story, eight-bedroom dwelling over the next five years. Keen to reflect the local context without getting bogged down by old world details, they opted to echo classic Moorish influences in various architectural features—the courtyard and fountain, stylized Islamic horseshoe arches, hand-carved wooden doors, and a rooftop terrace—with simplicity and restraint. “We deeply respect the ancestral creative impulse of Moroccan artisans, the vital force in the use of color, the delicacy of manual work, and the natural harmony of forms,” Maite explains. “It was our wish that this house pay tribute to all this.”

At the same time, the couple wanted their home’s interiors to be streamlined and relaxed enough to dovetail with the family’s modern lifestyle. Once the shell of the structure was complete, identifying the right partner to help them finish out and furnish the home took time—and some sleuthing. After exploring the idea of working with designers from various parts of Europe, Maite realized a fellow Spaniard with roots in Andalusia, where Moorish architectural influences abound in cities like Granada, Seville, and Córdoba, would be the kind of collaborator she needed. After learning about Málaga-born designer Pablo Paniagua, whose work includes homes and hotels from London to Barcelona to California,

the Bulgaris contacted him for a phone interview, later inviting him to visit their Marrakech home. They quickly realized they had found a *simpatico* spirit with whom they could create the home they envisioned.

As with the rebuilding of the house, the interiors were done at an unhurried pace, taking shape over three years. “They wanted the home to have real Moroccan soul, but they also wanted it to be relaxed visually without a maximalist design that would feel fake,” says Paniagua. “We started by looking at the interiors of North African homes in Orientalist paintings from the nineteenth century and saw how the works are chronicles of *viajeros*, or travelers, with depictions of pieces gathered from the Ottoman Empire, Syria, India, Sub-Saharan Africa. We realized we could include antiques from all these places and make the ambiance like a *cruz de caminos*, or a crossroads, of all of these influences,” says the designer, who traveled with his clients to Fez, Casablanca, and Tangier, and across the continent to Egypt, as well as to Spain, to find the right antiques for every space.

Working alongside his brothers—Alvaro, his studio director, and Gustavo, an architect—Paniagua also collaborated with a team of local craftspeople—carpenters, metalworkers, stone masons, plasterers, weavers—to bring a fresh approach to classic Moroccan artisanship. An intricate coffered cedar ceiling designed by Gustavo, for instance, adds gravitas to a living room, while custom latches and handles lend substance to the wooden doors. Walls were finished with traditional polished plaster known as *tadelakt*; windows were framed with hand-embroidered curtains; and floors were laid with terracotta brick and handcrafted tilework to imbue the spaces with an updated Moorish sensibility. The chosen color palette includes a deep green, a sacred hue used on the roofs of mosques, though other shades appear, many of which thread their way through the home in antique tapestries and kilims, fabrics that add finishing dashes of handicraft in lieu of art. Ultimately, the Bulgaris see their Marrakech dwelling as a restorative oasis. “Our *riad* in the heart of the medina is like a sanctuary,” says Maite, “a place where I can feel all the spiritual strength of Morocco.” ■

“The colors in the home have Moroccan influence. Some are serious colors, others are easy, *divertido*, fun,” says interior designer Pablo Paniagua.

“The interiors have a real Moroccan feel,
but they’re also calm, not opulent.”

—Pablo Paniagua

