

Mix Master

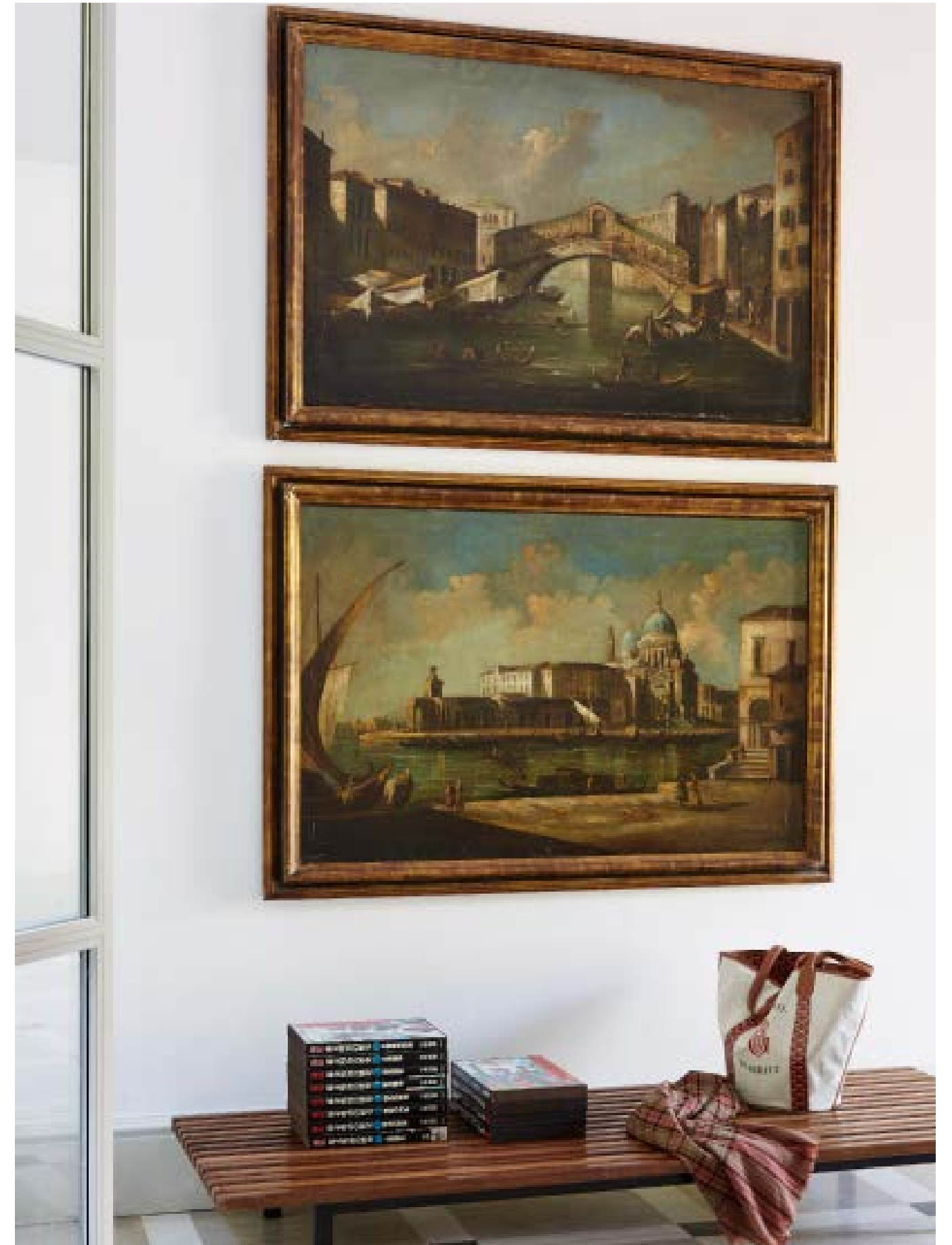
Spanish designer Isabel López-Quesada crafts a family sanctuary that blends sensuality and bravado



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Opening pages: Red-painted chairs, upholstered in velvet from Osborne & Little, surround a dining/breakfast table of a home in Madrid. The walls carry striped fabric from Schumacher. The family dog, Olivia, reclines in the entry, amid an eighteenth-century Swedish bench covered in black raffia from Dedar and a bench by Charlotte Perriand. Walls are covered with Farrow & Ball's Off White.





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Talk for awhile with Isabela López-Quesada and it quickly becomes clear that her temperament — not unlike her interiors — brims with appealing contrasts. Bold and reflective, spirited and laid-back, she is known for bringing multifaceted flavor to the homes she designs for her clients around the world. “I love colors!” exclaims the stellar Spanish interior designer as an example of what she values in her work. “But I also love peace, so I use them with peace.”

Given her penchant for variety, it’s no surprise then that the *mélange* of attributes she brings to the spaces she designs for others would also permeate her own home in Madrid. Situated on a tree-lined street in the leafy El Viso neighborhood in the northern part of the city, the house she shares with her stockbroker husband, Álvaro de Llanza, and their children sits on the site of a former wax factory. When she first laid eyes on the structure almost seventeen years ago, she knew its L-shaped configuration would ideally accommodate a long-held dream of how she wanted to live and work.

“It was built in 1931 and consisted of two warehouses made of red brick,” explains López-Quesada, who envisioned the footprints of the structures as the foundation for her house. “And in the garden, there was a completely separate house,” she says, which she pegged as the perfect place for her work studio. “When I started, it was like a project of a lifetime, because working and living in the same place with a garden is something that is very convenient for a mother,” she recalls. “My children, the three of them, were very young.”

And so, after convincing her husband to relocate the family from their spacious apartment in central Madrid to the new home she would create from scratch, the designer turned to a trusted pair of friends in the business to aid her in realizing her plan. Working simultaneously with architect Pablo Carvajal and landscape guru Fernando Caruncho, López-Quesada was intent on orienting both house and studio toward the patio and garden.

“The patio is very much the protagonist, the main actor,” she says. So Carvajal suggested joining the two legs of the warehouse foundations with an entrance hall that would unify and lead to both parts of the house and López-Quesada incorporated ample iron French windows and doors that fling open from every room onto the garden, forging a seamless transition between indoors and out. At the same time, Caruncho transformed the courtyard into a secluded mini-paradise with a modest swimming pool bordered by a low boxwood hedge, crisp stands of bamboo, and flowering jasmine, roses, and azaleas, which inject fragrant shots of color into the atmosphere.

When the compact garden and shell of the house—now clad in cream-colored cement—were complete, the designer turned her sensibilities toward the interiors. A key to the appeal of her home, like all the spaces she creates, lies in the art of the mix. “I think that people

Against a wall covered with striped fabric from Dominique Kieffer, a Venetian antique mirror set above a marble basin adds sparkle to a bathroom. Faucet is Samuel Heath and wall lights are Vaughan.



Flanking a Louis XVI fireplace surround in the salon, custom López-Quesada–designed sofas upholstered in linen from Nicholas Haslam off set off an eighteenth-century French cabinet, circa-1960s Italian chair in blue silk by Bruno Triplet for Sahco, and a 1950s marble and bronze coffeetable.



The patio is the setting for family lunches. Iron chairs from López-Quesada's studio sport cushions covered in fabric by Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam and surround a table topped with an Italian linen tablecloth from Madrid's Los Encajeros.



The honed Noir Belge marble floor in the library contrasts with a creamy custom sofa, white leather Eames chair and ottoman, stone amphora lamp from London, and framed photograph by Juan de Sande.

love to do things that they did with their grandfather and grandmother, or we love recipes of our mothers and vintage dresses from our aunts,” says López-Quesada. “At the same time, we love technology and we love modern things. Although she relies on no particular formula for deftly pulling these disparate elements together, a unifying common thread, she admits, is passion. “I fall in love, desperately, with something that I have to buy and then I mix it. I don’t why, how — but it works!”

Evidence of such can be found in every room. In the entrance hall, for instance, floors composed of three kinds of marble — two from Spain and one from Belgium — strikingly set off an eighteenth-century Swedish bench near the staircase and reinforce López-Quesada’s no-nonsense bent for practicality. “I don’t have carpets, so the children could swim in the pool and then jump all over the floors — it doesn’t matter because they’re stone,” she says. “Stone on the ground floor was also very convenient for keeping rooms cool in summer,” she adds. In the drawing room, a seventeenth-century Dutch tortoiseshell mirror inherited from her parents-in-law contrasts with a simple pine table. “The mirror is the best piece I have at home,” says López-Quesada. And in the library, a seventeenth-century stone fireplace (found on a snowy day at a reclamation yard in France) stands as a dramatic backdrop for a mid-century Eames chair and custom sofa.

Another constant in López-Quesada’s work is authenticity. A French Louis XVI secretary, snuggled between two curtainless windows in the salon, mingles with a pair of Maison Jansen lamps and a 1960s painting by Luis Feito, instilling an air of casual imperfection.

“You bring a piece from another house and if it’s too tight it doesn’t matter — I did my house when I was forty and now that I am fifty-four it is still very actual and very me,” she attests. “I believe in what I’m doing. My philosophy is to have beautiful things with a real style of life, not pretentious.” And many of the pieces she’s found on her travels or acquired from antiques dealer friends and lived with for decades bring continuity and a sense of sanctuary to her dwelling.

“Every month I travel, so my home is like *el descanso del guerrero*,” she says, referring to the title of a poem by the Salvadoran journalist and poet Roque Dalton that roughly translates to mean the soldier’s repose. It’s also a place where old dreams and new continue to auspiciously unfold.

Atop oak floors pickled with talcum powder in the bedroom of López-Quesada’s younger daughter, a nineteenth-century French iron bed is covered with linen bedding from Zara Home, toile pillows from Laura Ashley, and an Hermès blanket. Picked up on a trip to the Dominican Republic, a flower-inspired table by a craftswoman echoes the tiny flowers in the retro-inspired wall covering by Neisha Crosland.





Flanked by a pair of late eighteenth-century Italian paintings, a painted custom four-poster bed anchors the master bedroom and is topped by white linen bedding from Los Encajeros and Bennison. Bedside lamps are Spanish, circa 1960.



“I love the mix of everything. It makes magic. It ages with you”

— Isabela López-Quesada