



# THE WELL



# Keeping It in the Family

A Spanish designer decided that a former pheasant farm in French Basque Country would serve as the ideal second home for her husband and children.



INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Isabel López-Quesada*  
PRODUCED BY *Loreto López-Quesada*  
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Opening page: The new foyer of an old home in Biarritz was crafted to blend with the original farmhouse with exposed beams, salvaged doors, and reclaimed terra-cotta floor tiles. Previous spread: Covering a coffee table, an Argentine rug adds color to the sitting room of the guest house, rebuilt within a former hen house. Opposite: Atop a nineteenth-century marble-topped iron garden table, stuffed birds recall the home's history as a pheasant farm. This page: In the drawing room, antique American stoneware and Victorian Christmas balls align on an eighteenth-century French console.





In the dining room, black lacquered chairs from the 1970s surround an antique Italian table. Antique candlesticks topped with new shades covered in Branquenie and cushions covered in China Seas fabric from Quadrille inject shots of “Basque red,” says the designer. An eighteenth-century Swedish clock and English *faisanderie* add blue notes.



This page and opposite: In the rebuilt kitchen, new appliances, including refrigerators and a range hood from Neff, contrast with antique cutting boards, baskets, and animal horn-handled cutlery from Buenos Aires, along with small spoons from Zara Home. A new bench, custom made in Switzerland, is positioned alongside the breakfast table.







Opposite: The master bed features a headboard covered in white Belgian linen. Bedding is from Los Encajeros, the bench is covered in fabric from Bennison, and walls are coated in white Farrow & Ball paint. Above left and left: A seventeenth-century Spanish ironing table and a stool with a rush seat serve as “little *bibliothèques* for my books,” says the designer. Above: The master bath has a tub designed by Mark Newson and fitted with Lulu fixtures from Dornbracht. A nineteenth-century French oak cafeteria counter supports Villeroy & Boch washbasins.





Clockwise from center: A Gio Ponti wicker chair and nineteenth-century military lounge chair sit in front of a French vintage birdcage. The lantern was designed by Fernando Caruncho. A slipcovered sofa is topped with pillows covered in Bolivian fabrics. Concrete baskets hold hydrangeas. A Turkish flatweave rug was custom dyed. In a gallery, a harvest table supporting cement pots sits in front of a wall covered with a blue fabric from India. The mural by Maximo Gonzalez is called *La Reforestación*.



**SUMMERING IN THE** mountainous Basque Country has been a welcome and refreshing constant for Isabel López-Quesada and her family for more than thirty years. “I love the climate, the landscape—and the beaches are beautiful,” says the peripatetic designer, who spends most of the year living and working in Madrid, occasionally traveling to other parts of Europe, the Caribbean or South America as the mood strikes or clients call.

For many years, López-Quesada’s in-laws spent the season on their farm on the Spanish side of the Basque region, but the family later shifted to their other property near the elegant seaside town of Biarritz on the region’s French frontier, where López-Quesada, her husband, Álvaro de Llanza, and their three children have enjoyed the season in an ambiance that is decidedly quieter. Enthralled with the area, the designer and her husband decided it was time to plant their own roots in Biarritz and, in 2005, they purchased a getaway home of their own, where they could settle in for the season. In fact, the designer documents this very discovery in her new book, *Isabel López-Quesada: At Home* (Vendome Press), which also recounts the experience of finding and designing her other family home in Madrid (which *MILIEU* wrote about in our Spring 2017 issue).

Before starting their search, López-Quesada turned to her friend and colleague, the landscape designer Fernando Caruncho, for advice on the right kind of property. “He said, ‘Look for a property that has a lot of sky,’” she recalls. They found the ideal location in the form of a family-owned pheasant farm on a hill surrounded by acres of land. “There was an old nineteenth-century farmhouse and seven hen houses,” recalls López-Quesada. “I fell in love quickly.”

While the location was perfect and the original structures brimmed with the kind of character López-Quesada cherishes, making the property livable for a family of five required work. Since López-Quesada is a passionate nature lover, she collaborated with Caruncho to envelope the house with an enchanting garden. “We planted two hundred oak trees and thousands of hydrangeas,” says the designer. She also had a pool installed—“we spend half the time at the beach and half the time in the pool,” she says—and she enlarged the spacious main house with an extension that doubles its size. “There are now six bedrooms, two kitchens, and a drawing room close to the pool,” she explains. “And

one of the hen houses was converted to a guest house.”

Known for her skill in artfully mixing elements from different places and eras into inspired compositions, López-Quesada next turned her attention to knitting the new part of her home with the old by integrating architectural features that blur the lines between past and present. A pair of seventeenth-century oak doors, for instance, bring inviting rustic warmth to the foyer that leads to the home’s new addition. “I found them in a shop owned by a guy who specializes in old doors in the village of Bayonne nearby,” says the designer. She introduced more character to the newly built addition with natural materials, including pine beams and terra-cotta ceiling tiles from an old structure in Bordeaux, which bring a country warmth to the foyer.

Inside both the original and new parts of the dwelling, a spirited blend of antiques and objets enlivens living spaces with López-Quesada’s characteristic eclectic bravura. A collection of antique American stoneware crocks set atop an eighteenth-century gilt French console merge earthy warmth with refinement in the drawing room. In the dining room, lacquered chairs from the 1970s, inherited from her in-laws, ring an eighteenth-century chestnut Italian table. And in the master bedroom in the original part of the home, where López-Quesada left the crumbling plaster walls essentially as she found them, a humble white table from her grandmother’s kitchen contrasts with a noble Spanish Carlos Cuatro writing desk from her father-in-law.

A common thread that ties these disparate elements together is the color blue. “I love blue in all its versions—light blue, dark blue, old blue, navy blue, green blue,” says the designer. Elements in variable tones of the sea and sky—the embroidered indigo-hued fabric covering a pillow in the bedroom or the cobalt English Christmas balls in stoneware jars in the entrance—infuse the spaces with a cool air befitting a sunny getaway. Another quality that unifies the interiors is a sense of soul, which the designer admits was part of her plan. “I put my soul into this house, so it has a lot of soul—it’s a very real house, it’s not a house for show,” says López-Quesada. “This is the reason for the house—just to celebrate nature and family and life.” ■

Interior designer Isabel López-Quesada stands in the studio that adjoins her full-time home in Madrid.

*We go to the beach,  
play golf, garden,  
take siestas and  
read. The house is  
designed for that.”*

*—Isabel López-Quesada*

