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N A R R O W E S C A P E

Surviving a brush with death while driving to view a farm in central Spain, Blanca Entrecanales bought the property, naming it 'the Miracle'. Now her daughter, interior designer Marta de la Rica, has converted part of the complex, a long, thin adobe building, into a bolthole for visitors. As Ros Byam Shaw reports, the dynamic family business contrasts with its air of timeless repose. Photography: Ricardo Labougle

Opposite: the rolled rush blind between wooden corbels, inspired by Seville's Casa de Pilatos, gives a view from the first floor, with landscape design by Rent a Garden's Clara Muñoz-Rojas and Belén Moreu. Beyond that is the Sierra de Gredos. The circular building hosts the catering kitchen. This page: view from the central courtyard. The upper storey is adobe bricks, guarded by deep eaves and a layer of primer



A raised ceiling lends space to the narrow first-floor living room. Cubbyhole shelves are reminiscent of the nesting holes for doves that once lived here. The curtains and chair upholstery are by Lewis & Wood. At the far end, a screen is covered in De Gournay paper





Top: piled on the living-room corner sofa are Indian printed cottons. Above left: Marta found this painted Venetian mirror in Madrid's El Rastro flea market. Above right: one enters the kitchen, with its wood-burning stove, through reclaimed doors. Opposite: the plates on the wall and chairs in the dining room are antique Spanish. In the downstairs bedroom, Lewis & Wood fabric hangs behind the bedhead





All the house's doors, including for these cupboards, are reclaimed, bought from an architectural salvage specialist in El Puerto de Santa Maria. Where the flue from the stove passes up through this bedroom, it has been insulated with tightly wrapped rope



This four-poster bed in an upstairs bedroom is dressed in fabrics from Lewis & Wood and Nicholas Herbert, with the addition of some antique Indian textiles. It is a combination that has been repeated throughout the house



THE FARM was not always called ‘El Milagro’. It earned the name in 2011 in honour of an extraordinary event. Before finally deciding to buy it, along with the land she planned to farm sustainably and organically, Blanca Entrecanales was driving to have another look when she entered a level crossing that had no warning signal, and was hit by a train. The impact sheared the car in two, tearing off its bonnet, but missed Blanca’s legs in the driving seat by inches. Her only injury was to one elbow. She purchased the farm and called it ‘the Miracle’.

Despite the extremes of temperature and the poor soil in this area of the Toledo countryside, Dehesa el Milagro has thrived and become a focus for innovative and environmentally friendly farming, producing beef, lamb, poultry, and a range of fruit and vegetables, much of it delivered to Madrid. The farm buildings have been restored or rebuilt, using traditional methods, and energy is provided by a biomass boiler and solar panels. Arranged around the spacious oblong of a central yard, the single-storey main house used by Blanca and her family occupies two sides, and another single-storey building opposite is an events space, in which they host talks, discussions and tastings. Its connecting catering kitchen is contained in a circular tower with a domed top that looks like a large, white cafetière. On the fourth side are the housekeeper’s home and, in the middle, between two areas of terrace, the two-storey Casita de Adobe.

Of all the buildings, it is the most traditional in appearance, and the only one to have retained some of its original structure, although the height of the upper storey, once a dovecote, has been lifted by raising the walls using new adobe bricks from the north of Spain. Working with architect Arturo Grinda, who now manages the estate, Blanca decided this building should reflect the architectural vernacular, with its emphasis on insulation from summer heat and winter cold, so there are no open-plan spaces or large expanses of glass. The stone paving of the ground floor

has been kept and relaid, and new lime plaster on the walls sealed using beeswax. Most of the architectural additions – the roof and the upstairs floor tiles, the wooden ceiling beams, the room and cupboard doors, and the bathroom sinks – are reclaimed.

This is an impressively creative and entrepreneurial family. Blanca’s ex-husband, who works in finance, also sells antiques and homewares from a restored 15th-century Maison de Maître called Gaztelur in the French Basque country, where you can ponder your purchases over lunch in a Michelin-starred restaurant. Their daughter, Marta de la Rica, is an interior designer. She has worked for both her parents, on the interiors of Gaztelur and also here. In her early thirties, married with two small children, Marta has a design studio in Madrid that employs seven people and a portfolio that includes town and country houses in Spain, a New York loft and a Madrid restaurant. ‘I am very lucky to have been able to work with my parents on two exciting projects,’ she says. ‘Gaztelur was a more public space. This is a private guest house for friends and family, and feels quite intimate. We worked with a lot of craftspeople on the structure and interior fittings – which is something I love to do – and my intention was to reflect the architecture with furnishings that look as though they could have been here for a long time. This is why I looked for pieces that tell stories and have their own past.’

As you step through the front door from the blinding heat of summer into the shade of the entrance hall, with its hats and coats on pegs, shoes and baskets lined up on the worn stone floor, and an old Persian rug underfoot, it has the feel of a house with history. The air is cool thanks to the thickness of the adobe walls that shut out the sunlight (this is bolstered by an extra layer of thick cork sheeting that lines both the walls and roof, and air conditioning courtesy of a ‘Canadian well’ system of buried pipes). To the left is the kitchen, ahead is a door to the dining room and on the far side of the entrance hall, at the back of the house, are a bedroom and bathroom. Stairs curve up to the long, narrow first-floor living room with its sloping planked ceiling and two windows that overlook the central courtyard – and beyond it the jagged silhouette of the Sierra de Gredos, the highest peaks of which are white with snow from January to May. These bigger windows are shaded by rolls of thick rush matting, which hang from the façade at the top of the deep embrasures. On this upper floor there are two further bedrooms and bathrooms.

Most of the furniture is antique and Spanish. Traditional encaustic and *zellige* tiles pattern the bathrooms, and there is Spanish pottery too – plain white pots and vases punctuate the plastered cubbyholes built into a wall of the living room, and antique plates and platters dance with colour on the wall rack in the dining room. But the most striking element of these comfortable, shadowy spaces is the proliferation of patterned textiles; heavy curtains hanging at the windows, rugs scattered across the floors, upholstered chairs, big cushions. Some fabrics are old, as in the Kashmir shawl draped across a chaise longue in the hall, and the cushions in a patchwork of patterned Indian cotton on the fitted corner sofa, but many are new and from Marta’s favourite English fabric houses, Nicholas Herbert and Lewis & Wood. ‘I wanted the house to be properly “dressed”,’ says Marta. ‘I love that layering of pattern, colour and texture, and I love mixing antique and new designs’ ■

Dehesa el Milagro. Ring 00 34 619 561 608, or visit dehesaelmilagro.com. Marta de la Rica. Ring 00 34 915 644 043, or visit martadelarica.com. Lewis & Wood. Ring 01453 878517, or visit lewisandwood.co.uk. Nicholas Herbert. Ring 020 7376 5596, or visit nicholasherbert.com

Opposite: a fabric-covered screen forms a bedhead.
This page: the door between one of the upstairs bedrooms and its bathroom is hung with a velvet-crowned curtain in a Nicholas Herbert chintz. The basins are echoed in the pattern of the Spanish tiling

