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A writers' view of Spain

PROPERTY

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AS IN just about every major city the world over, finding a flat to rent in Madrid is a tricky business. Scouring the small ads only to find that when you ring, the flat has already gone or when you get there it's big enough for all your stuff as long as you live in the lobby, is all part of the fun. However, every Madrileño knows that if you see the magic words *mucho luz* and *terraza* you jump right in there. As New Yorker Fawn Galli says: "We didn't even look at any other flats. We saw the roof terrace and the Madrid sun and that was it."

The flat is situated in the barrio of Malasaña, named after a 17-year-old seamstress, Manuela Malasaña, who was shot by French invaders at the beginning of the 19th century for smuggling weapons to the Spanish troops. During the 1980s it was home to the cultural movement known as the *Movida* which spawned such stars as filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, whilst at

the same time having a slightly seedy reputation. Nowadays, it's still the centre of Madrid's bar culture and streetwear shops while retaining a real neighbourhood feel. Redevelopment schemes have spruced up the plaza and, night-time noise notwithstanding, elderly residents can still be seen carefully watering their plants and shopping in the quirky corner shops.

All human life is here and it can be seen from Galli's roof terrace; the real Madrid, not a sanitised postcard impression; a bizarre mix of rows of colourful geraniums and yapping dogs on tiny wrought-iron balconies, young crowds piling into trendy bars and the inevitable scaffolding – so much a part of the city that no view would be complete without it. Even in December the winter sun makes it warm enough to sit out over coffee and watch the world go by. As Galli says: "It's the perfect spot for spying. You can see everybody, but nobody can see you looking." ▶

When New Yorker Fawn Galli found a central flat in Madrid with a terrace looking over the city, she was determined to create something a little bit different.

DEBBI CHRISTOPHERS visits her retro pad









Previous page: Galli's decorating style for her Madrid flat is a mix of vintage and modern. Main picture: Although she hasn't worked on the bedroom yet, Galli's personality shows in the faux-fur headboard with patterned textiles. Left: A cerise shower curtain, hot pink and yellow towels and kitsch pictures brighten up the white bathroom. Below: Eggs and aubergines are used as decorations throughout the flat

Like the rest of the flat, the terrace is done out in Galli's inimitable style. She may be an interior designer, but she is quick to point out, "this isn't my style *per se*. My flat in New York has lots of antique stuff in it. But here, because of the sun and the confined space, I wanted to create a kind of travelling mode of lightness".

The terrace itself is pretty standard – although more generously proportioned than most – with terracotta tiles and wrought-iron railings, but rather than stick to the standard deckchair and geraniums Galli has let her imagination run wild. The terracotta tiles are partly covered with hot pink and lime green rugs and fairy lights hang from the railings. The white-washed walls are decorated with collages of photos cut from magazines depicting outdoor scenes, under the headings "thinking like a plant" and "the mystery of spring". A long trestle table is covered with stripey orange material and strewn with pomegranates and vintage pastis bottles, while seating is provided by director's chairs and funky plastic stools.

Going through the almost invisible French doors to the living room, which make the terrace an extension of the salon, the same quirky style is very much in evidence. Galli's Spanish partner is an architect, who prefers minimalism to Galli's eclectic look. "It's not quite his cup of tea," she says diplomatically. "I frequently get up in the morning to find he's put things away, but no worries, I just put them back again."

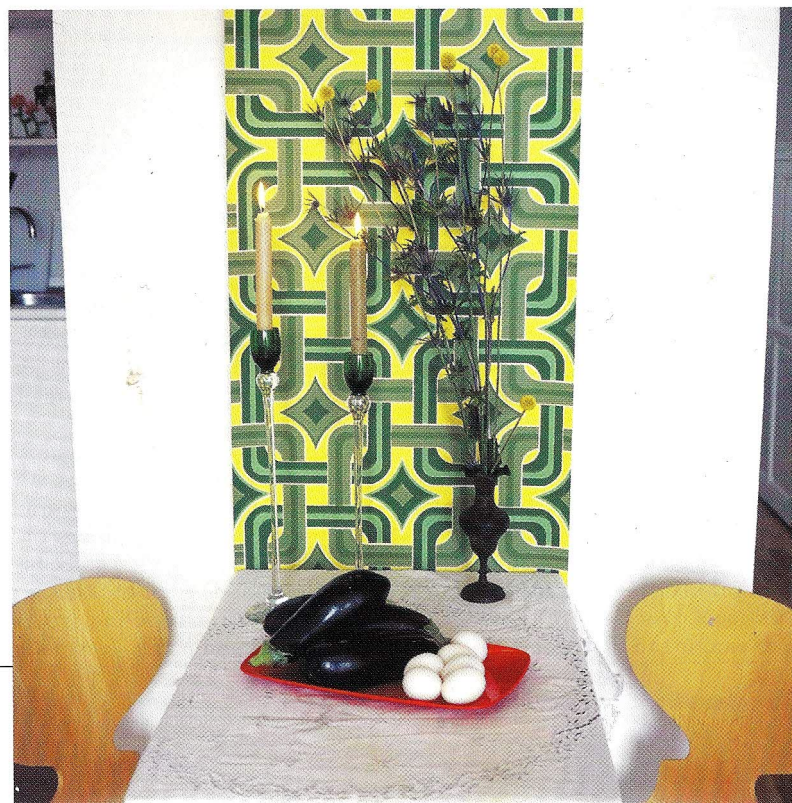
The living room is a wild mix of

vintage and modern. A 1950s beige linen, quilted chair sits happily under a modern lacquer picture by Madrid painter and DJ Kate Gooding. A white 1950s standard lamp stuck with feathers stands on the parquet floor which is covered with a massive cowprint rug. Galli explains the inspiration: "In order to decorate this crazily, Bob Dylan's music was necessary. I just put his music on the CD player and this happened."

A lot of the furnishings, such as a triangular side table, a black and silver chair and a wonderful candelabra, were shipped from Denmark. "I just love the Danish aesthetic – so bright, modern and unpretentious." Galli then adds her own personal touches: the

candelabra, for example, is hung with beads and bangles; a thrift shop sofa is covered in fabric from India and stripey cushions. And rather than flowers and ornaments, eggs, artichokes, aubergines and peppers are scattered around in plastic dishes.

Just off the living room is a tiny kitchen which has yet to receive the Galli treatment. Her only contribution so far is a large poster showing the workings of the human intestines. When I ask what she plans to do with it, she shrugs, indicating the smallness of the space. "I dunno. Rip it all out?" But the designer in her isn't going to be defeated and she reconsiders. "I'll probably paint the ▶





ceiling and put up some kind of doorway to divide it from the living area ... maybe shells on fishing wire would be cool."

Heading off from the living room to the main bedroom, pictures created from Ecuadorian fabrics line the hallway. Galli often uses ethnic fabrics as details, evidenced by the bits of material cut off to make a funky sofa trim. "I like to mix modern furniture with fabrics from all over the world – it gives soul, depth, colour and flavour."

The same combination is at play in the bedroom, where a low bed covered with African fabric is teamed with a furry bedhead, while a row of black and white photos of New York add a little bit of home. Although Galli has only really dealt with the living room and roof terrace so far, her unique style and personality is in every room. Books on art, architecture and design and stacks of style magazines reveal her interests, while Galli's outrageous wardrobe and shoe collection bring life and colour to a bare room.

Next to the bedroom, the tiny

bathroom offers limited potential to the less experimental decorator, but Galli has left the white tiles and suite uncluttered to maximise space and light, while a cerise shower curtain, funky towels and colourful rows of bath oils, perfumes, lotions and potions add interest and character.

The final room is designated as a study, but at present is still "under construction". The plan is to create a chill-out zone; a space to relax as well as work and Galli is playing with different fabrics to create an atmosphere that's "relaxed, colourful, eclectic and fun". A quirky touch is the liberal use of floor cushions created for Jarvis Cocker's recent wedding to über-stylist Camille Bidault-Waddington.

Having only been in the Spanish capital a few months, Galli is still finding her feet and gets comfort from surrounding herself with things that remind her of friends and family. Just inside the front door she has created a wall of memories, recalling experiences, people and places. It includes

pictures by a five-year-old cousin, a photomontage of her grandmother standing alongside a cow, photos of the Manhattan skyline and more photos taken by a Chinese friend.

However, Galli is clearly looking to the future, rather than clinging onto the past. "In Madrid everything's possible: it is very spontaneous. It is late. It is food. It is talking. There's a great spirit and energy." ■



Fawn Galli (left) has taken the quirky style of the interior to the well-proportioned terrace. A blue 1950s table, red Chinese lanterns and fairy lights and a trellis table spread with an orange cloth brings colour to the outdoor space