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WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR HOME

In the living room of interior designer Luis Bustamante's Madrid apartment in a 1930 building, vintage armchairs covered in an Italian cotton fabric on 1950s ceramic gresolite, the pillows are upholstered in silk, and the custom upholstered sofa is in a Laura Planas fabric. Bustamante designed the lacquered coffee table and cocktail table, and brought in Moroccan. See Resources.

POLISHED PERFORMANCE

In renovating his apartment in an august Madrid building, Luis Bustamante finds that his favorite color—white, yields endless possibilities

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PRODUCED BY CYNTHIA FRANK



FACING PAGE, FROM TOP: Bustamante in the living area, beside a 1950s table by Emilio Terry. A collection of objects includes a wood-stain case model and Roman bronze sculptures. In the entry beyond, the painting is by Juan Hernández Piquan, and the sculpture by J. J. Rodríguez Hernández. **THIS PAGE:** A custom-made table and polished metal ladders in the library. — Cole Rosenthal



"I AM FASCINATED BY WHITE." Spanish designer Luis Bustamante confesses as he sits awash in the dazzling hue in the living room of his Madrid apartment. "But setting out to create an interior all in white is sort of like an artist staring at a blank canvas—it takes a bit of nerve and some skill to create something beautiful."

The artist analogy is especially apropos for Bustamante, who trained and exhibited as a painter and sculptor before finding his ideal medium in interior design. After stints working in both Barcelona and Mexico City, he returned to his native Madrid in 2000. Ten years later he bought his current home—an airy 3,500-square-foot apartment in a grand belle époque edifice on a leafy street near the Prado Museum and Retiro Park.

"The place hadn't been touched in more than 40 years, and virtually everything had to be ripped out and replaced," he recalls, adding that the renovation lasted seven months. Fortunately he was able to restore the original windows, which he credits with helping to maintain the sense of history and permanence he wanted in his century-old home.

"There is more of my soul in these rooms than in any project I've done so far," the designer says, referencing both the abundance of white—on the walls, moldings, furniture, carpets, artwork, and all manner of objects—and the easy mix of classical and modern elements. "I like clean and contemporary, but I also need patina and age. It's not un-modern to be drawn to old things."

Creating visual harmony with a symphony of whites is a Bustamante trademark. "Let's face it, white is boring," he admits. "But when you see masses of white houses on the hillsides of Santorini in Greece, or the pueblos blancos [white villages] of Andalusia, the color comes alive with blue-gray shadows and reflections of golden sunlight. The overall effect is spectacular."

To get more bang from the monochromatic palette, he varied paint finishes, enhancing what he describes as "the interplay between matte and glossy surfaces that helps define a space by revealing its structure and architectural interest." He can just as easily make architecture disappear, as he did in a hallway where shimmering lacquered walls seem to dissolve in a haze of reflections and light.

While many an interior designer renovating in contemporary Madrid would be knocking down walls to leave open, loftlike spaces, Bustamante wanted a proper entrance, so he enclosed part of the living room to create the library that greets visitors upon arrival. While its contents are decidedly old—leather-bound books and 19th-century Grand Tour souvenirs of French and Italian monuments—the crisp, bright room provides a modern frame in which to contemplate it all.

Similar juxtapositions of vintage and vanguard occur throughout the home, where 1st-century Roman busts stand before bold abstract artworks by such 20th-century Spanish masters as Miró, Chillida, and Millares. "From Praxiteles to Pollock—it's all a continuum to



me," Bustamante says, adding that he feels equally inspired at New York's Museum of Modern Art as at the Louvre.

In his bedroom, Bustamante accentuates nautical connotations with large vintage photographs of racing yachts adorning the walls. Carrying the sailing motif into his dressing room, he used glass-fronted cabinets backed with white and black canvas to imitate molding. A series of paintings by contemporary artist Emilio Gafán reads like a modern riff on old-timey displays of sailors' knots.

Throughout the house, light bounces off vast expanses of mirrored glass and the many silver- and nickel-plated boxes parked on tables and shelves or piled on the floor beneath consoles. "Boxes are so simple and offer such utility," he says, "but I can never find them in the right size or color, so I have them all custom made."

Bustamante also goes the custom route with his nickel-plated lamps and the columned library tables, bookcases, nightstands, and even the white-lacquered coffered ceilings, all of which he has manufactured in Spain and shipped to projects around the world. Currently he is working his white magic on a 17th-century chalet in St. Moritz, a sprawling hacienda in Mexico, a luxury apartment tower on the Thames in London, and a beach house in the Hamptons.

But here in Madrid, perhaps the most convincing blend of old and new is the dining area, which eschews all hint of old-world formality in favor of 21st-century functionality—much like the lounge of a stylish boutique hotel with refreshments, snacks, and cocktails always at the ready. (There is a smaller adjacent kitchen where the actual cooking takes place.) Ancient Egyptian sculptures appear to guard the refrigerators and china cabinets, while Renaissance bronzes and marble sculptures nestle amid the vermouth and whiskey bottles on the bar.

"As a designer, my work is about precision and perfection for my clients, but at home I want balance and relaxation," Bustamante says. "When family and friends come to visit, we all hang out here at the table and catch up or watch TV. It's terrific to live surrounded by luxury and beauty, but it's best not to take any of it too seriously." ■



Bustamante designed the master bedroom's four-poster and benches, which are covered in a Loro Piana linen; the vintage side table is by John Goldman; the sculpture is by Nicola Hicks; and the desk/cabinet is from Kooe Deco. **FACING PAGE:** The cabinetry, ebonized-wood counter tops, and fabric-covered wardrobe doors in the dressing room are all custom made. See Resources.