

La Casa BLANCA

THIS WHITEWASHED HOUSE, IN THE PRETTIEST VILLAGE IN MALLORCA, MIXES TRADITIONAL RURAL CHARM WITH CHIC MODERN TOUCHES

Photography Philip Rogan Words Catherine Coyle

AWAY FROM THE LAGER-

soaked resorts of the southern coast is another side to Mallorca, one that few visitors get to see. The island, in fact, has a long history as a magnet for artists, writers and musicians, and towns such as Deià, on the mountainous west coast, have long been a destination for bohemians and celebrities. It was here that Lorraine Elkins and interior designer Pat Renson headed in search of ideas when they were renovating a traditional property in nearby Fornalutx.

Lorraine and her husband Stuart bought their Mallorcan hideaway in 2013. The Comrie-based couple had viewed dozens of properties on the island, but it was this 150-year-old house at the end of a narrow bougainvillea-lined alley that they fell in love with. And Fornalutx, a UNESCO world heritage site in the hills above Deià and Soller, is charming and beautiful.

The structure of the house was sound, but the interiors were badly in need of an overhaul. "It was very dark inside," recalls Lorraine. "It felt enclosed and the layout was all wrong." With the right touch, though, she knew it could be special, so she and Stuart turned to Pat Renson, who'd worked on their previous homes. ▶





Pat and Lorraine flew to Mallorca to meet builder Rocky Abrams. He took them to Deià to view a large property he'd worked on there. The materials – polished plaster, distressed paint finishes and exposed stone – would, he suggested, work just as effectively at Lorraine's La Casa Dos.

Next, they looked at the layout: "The original configuration didn't make the best use of the light and space," says Lorraine. The property is now arranged over three floors – the *entrada* and kitchen on the ground floor, a bedroom and bathroom on the middle level and the lounge and terrace on the top floor. The decision to bring the bedroom down a level (it is cooler here, which makes sleeping easier) and move the sitting room up to the top floor beside the terrace had an instant impact on the dynamics in the house.

Once this improved layout had been agreed, the graft could begin. With Pat doing most of the work out of her Perthshire studio, the designer had to be precise with her ▶







planning. Not only is Fornalutx is off the beaten track but the house sits on a steep gradient (to reach it from the car park below means a climb up 60 cobbled steps). More tricky still, there were no architect's drawings; Pat and Rocky had to template everything in situ to take account of the old building's quirks and irregularities. "We started to open up the spaces, taking away unneeded walls and the huge fireplaces that simply took up too much room. We also realised that the most effective use of space would be to have a built-in bed and sofas. There was no way we could have put in furniture of any scale anyway, because the staircase is only 67cm at its widest point."

The project quickly gathered momentum. Goods were ordered and shipped from the UK, while window treatments were measured on site but custom-made in Scotland. This, says Pat, was the most cost-effective way of doing things. Lorraine visited often, the rest of the time making do with phonecalls to Rocky – who would email photos to show progress – and frequent meetings at Pat's Auchterarder studio.

It wasn't long before all the stairs up to La Casa Dos started causing headaches: "Getting materials in and out was a real challenge – it took four men and two wheel- ▶



barrows to get the carved stone kitchen sink into the house.”

Rocky’s work on the Deià property showed Pat and Lorraine how the mixing of old and new could be achieved without it feeling contrived or jarring with its village surroundings. The metalwork on the external door was rusted beyond repair so the local blacksmith fashioned new pieces; these, like all the metal throughout the property, were then deliberately aged so they’d look like original features. Doors were sanded and distressed, as were the beams and window frames. Walls were given a stucco plaster covering that has a shimmery finish, reflecting the light to give the illusion of greater brightness and, in turn, space.

The kitchen units were made by a local craftsman to fit the space. The huge sink that was so much trouble to deliver was hand-carved from a single piece of stone from a Mallorcan quarry. The inside has a polished finish but the outer surface has been left untouched, making it look like a boulder, oversized and unspoiled.

Removing a fireplace, wall and archway on the middle floor has given the bedroom and bathroom room to ▶





breathe, with the furniture built in to maximise the floor space. “We used brick and breeze block to make the bed (and the sofas on the top floor) and covered them in cement to give the polished plaster effect we were after,” Pat recalls. “It was important that our scheme was true to the property’s origins but that it was cool and sexy at the same time.”

Each floor has a distinct personality. On the ground floor, Ralph Lauren fabrics from the new Artiste de Mer range are luxurious but ‘lived-in’, while the copper light and weathered dining table in the *entrada* hint at the building’s rustic roots. The bedroom’s cabinets, lights and chests are all from Pat’s shop, and the understated fabrics – from Ralph Lauren, Designers Guild and Costa Este – help to keep the room feeling cool in the Balearic summer.

On the top floor, Pat installed bi-fold doors to give the illusion that the terrace is part of the upper floor. The colour palette has broadened here: the corner sofa is covered with a linen by Jessica Zoob, with voiles from the same designer on the terrace doors. “The morning sun streams in from the terrace, making the lounge a very special space, with lots of energy,” smiles Lorraine. The colours make it feel warm in the evening, and the space is perfect for entertaining when the terrace doors are open.

“We have breakfast most days on the terrace,” Lorraine continues. “It’s small but we worked really hard to make it feel as special as the rest of the house, with a new stone floor, repainted walls and outdoor furniture bought locally in Soller. You look at this and you know that small really can be beautiful.” ■