

Sixteenth-century tiles pave a terrace at Cigaral de Menores, the Marquess and Marchioness of Marañón's country house overlooking the Spanish city of Toledo. The estate has been restored in collaboration with the architecture, design, and landscape firm Marañón Longoria. For details see Sources.





STATE *of* GRACE

Once a convent and now a sublime family retreat, a grandee's 16th-century country house in Toledo, Spain, remains an object of devotion

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Gregorio Marañón and his wife, Pilar Solís-Beaumont, in the garden with their miniature schnauzers, Lao and Kofi.



From the moment one arrives at Cigarral de Menores, my family's house overlooking the ancient Spanish city of Toledo, all worries seem to fade. Strolling down a cypress allée that was planted a hundred years ago, peace and quiet prevail, soothing the soul. The views from the olive-treed hilltop have remained unchanged for centuries. Church bells are the only sounds that come up from the streets of the town, just a 15-minute walk away. This is the place my wife, Pilar Solís-Beaumont, a lawyer and historian, and I escape to for weekends away from Madrid,

where I serve as president of the Teatro Real opera house. Cigarral de Menores is our refuge.

Its story begins in 1597, when Jerónimo de Miranda, the very rich canon of Toledo's cathedral, acquired our home's original 15 acres. Three years later he appointed one of the best Spanish architects of the day, Juan Bautista Monegro, to design a *cigarral*—the name for country properties around Toledo—in the manner of Italian villas and gardens. Miranda enjoyed his paradise for nearly two decades, ultimately leaving it to the Congregation of the Clerics Regular Minor. The notably



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penitential religious order lent its name to Miranda's domain, adapted the house into a convent, and constructed a chapel dedicated to Saint Julian—and here they stayed until 1835, when the monks sold the cigarral.

In 1921 the estate was bought by my grandfather Gregorio Marañón, once described by King Juan Carlos as “a doctor, scientist, and humanist who defined the history of Spain during his lifetime.” (The king was speaking at the 1987 centenary celebration of my grandfather's birth at which my father, a judge and diplomat, was made the

first Marquess of Marañón and a grandee of Spain.) His faithful restoration of the buildings and grounds influenced the rejuvenation of other cigarrals. But during the Spanish Civil War—he and my grandmother Dolores were living in exile in France, returning to Spain in 1942—the house was bombed and looted. It was repaired by their daughter Carmen, who installed some extraordinary 14th-century plasterwork as well as 16th-century tiles salvaged from a Toledo convent.

When my widowed grandmother died in 1977, I bought Cigarral de Menores from my fellow

Above: In the living room, a 19th-century Chinese panel hangs between a 17th-century Spanish mirror and an easel that displays a late-1500s Juan Pantoja de la Cruz portrait of Felipe II of Spain; the side tables at left are travertine, and the bust behind the sofa is by Martin Chirino.



Above, from left: The old kitchen dates from the 1920s; displayed on the sheltering hood are antique Spanish ceramics. Iberian pottery from the 16th through 19th centuries crowds shelves in the kitchen office; the doors have been in place since the cigarral's convent days, and the table is 17th century.

heirs. Today its conservation and improvement is Pili's and my primary focus, though we have had the help of my son Gregorio IV, an architect and landscape designer, and the advice of interior decorators Carmen Alcántara and Eva Longoria, Gregorio's wife. Our efforts were officially acknowledged in 2007, when Cigarral de Menores was declared a historic monument. It is the first cigarral to receive this honor, which will protect it for future generations.

Since the goal is to respect the spirit of the place while providing a comfortable home for our large family, Pili and I have brought the house gently into the modern world without losing its traditional air. The decoration has a clarity and a simplicity that complement the sober brick-and-stucco architecture, which happily accommodates

contemporary gestures. In the living room, for example, an abstract work by Rafael Canogar and an oak sculpture by Pedro Chillida join Victorian-style chairs, side tables hewn from travertine, and fine straw carpets.

Family furniture fills the rooms. Among the highlights are 16th- and 17th-century Spanish chairs, benches, and tables. Shelves of books about Toledo climb to the library ceiling, and paintings by Spanish artists such as Joaquín Sorolla, José María Sert, Vicente López, Ignacio Zuloaga, and Toledo's own El Greco are placed on chalk-white walls or perched on easels. Antique Iberian ceramic vessels—fashioned in Talavera, Manises, Puente del Arzobispo, and the like—cluster in the kitchen area. In the living room hangs a rice-paper panel, picked up in China by Pili's

A work by the Italian Mannerist painter Cristofano Allori dominates the dining room, which is furnished with a 16th-century Spanish table and 19th-century chairs; the ceiling light is a brass votive lamp.



Says the Marquess of Marañón, “The goal is to respect the spirit of the place while providing a comfortable home for our large family.”

great-grandparents during a world tour, and a brass canopy bed that once belonged to the 19th-century Spanish queen consort María Cristina—a relative of ours—welcomes visitors in one of the guest rooms.

Pili and I have also revived the gardens—the property now covers 37 acres—using plants that can survive on an average rainfall of barely 14 inches a year. Several wells help, the oldest being a Moorish one dug in the tenth century. The area was famous in the 1600s for growing the best roses in Spain, so we have planted them everywhere. Olive trees give us excellent oil, and orchards provide almonds, figs, cherries, pomegranates, and apricots. There is abundant wildlife: ducks, partridges, herons, foxes, rabbits, owls, nightingales, golden orioles. We have a chicken farm, too, where a graceful donkey named Bruno and a pony called Chipirón also live.

Outdoor sculptures by leading Spanish contemporary artists now accent the grounds. One of these is Basque master Eduardo Chillida’s *Lugar de Asiento*, an imposing concrete seat that weighs six tons and had to be airlifted to its wooded site by helicopter. Our collection also features a beautiful fountain by Cristina Iglesias; it is lined with overlapping metallic leaves, over which crystalline water flows.

Weekends at Cigarral de Menores are invariably relaxed: meals with family and visiting friends, explorations of Toledo’s nooks and crannies, trips to the area’s endless historical sites. There are long walks through the countryside, and lively conversations indoors and out. And in the evenings, when the sun sets, we watch the last light of the day illuminate the city’s towers and red-tile roofs with gold and fire. □

Right: The marquess has carefully preserved the study of his celebrated grandfather, for whom he is named; the large photograph mounted on the bookcase shows the elder Gregorio seated at the room’s 17th-century table. On the windowsill is a Victoria Macho sculpture of the writer Benito Pérez Galdós.

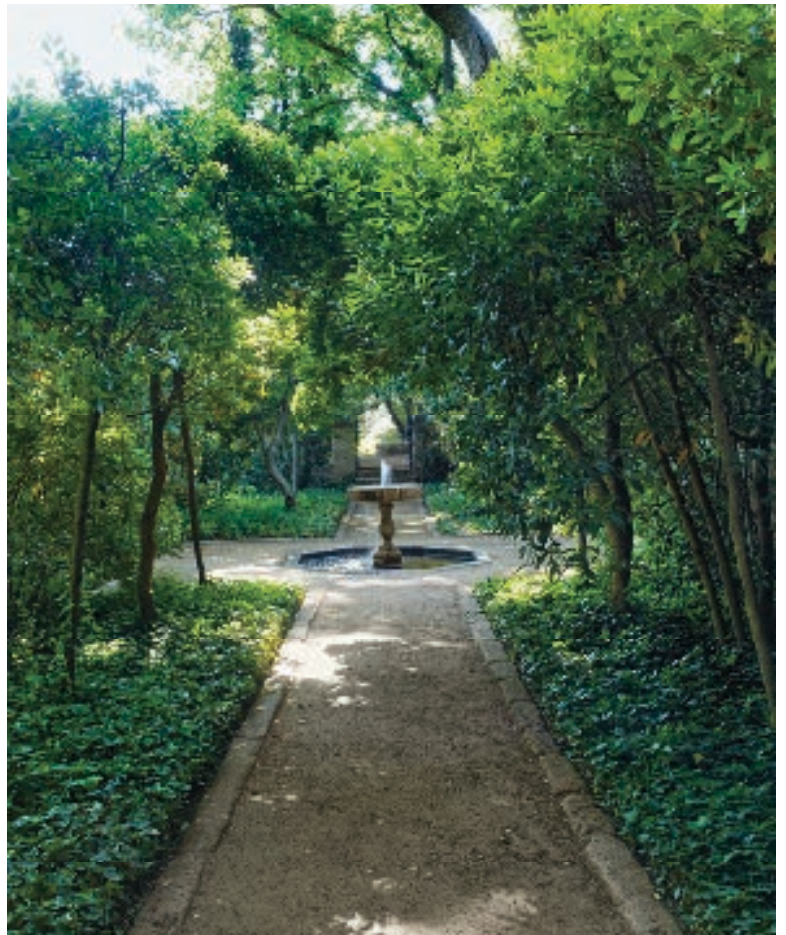






A 2005 Hernán Cortés Moreno portrait of the mar-
quess overlooks the master
suite's living area; the other
paintings include 19th-
century landscapes of
Toledo. **Opposite, from top:**
Fourteenth-century Mudéjar
plasterwork frames the cha-
pel's altar. Roses and wisteria
blanket a pergola that
leads to the swimming pool.





Toledo rises behind a water feature created by contemporary artist Cristina Iglesias. **Above, from left:** Lao sits on a terrace. A 17th-century fountain anchors the arbutus garden.

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One guest room contains a 19th-century brass bed and gilded mirror, both once owned by María Cristina, the wife of King Ferdinand VII. Beside the bed hangs a 17th-century painted-wood relief depicting Saint Peter; the chest of drawers is 19th century.

