

# THE HIGH LIFE

*After buying her Bilbao apartment off-plan, Isabel Fernandez Miranda set to work turning its interior into a sophisticated home with modern overtones*

WORDS PHILIP B. SCHULZ | PHOTOGRAPHY NICOLE TORRES 2014

## TERRACES

Isabel Fernandez owned this outdoor garden area for several years. With a variety of plants, including succulents, she had a relaxing retreat in the city.

Materials: Chair, Urban Moss; Dining table, PVC with aluminum; Plates, Ceramic; Sink, stainless steel; Planters, concrete; Plants, various; Lighting, modern; Sink, stainless steel; Plates, ceramic; Sink, stainless steel; Planters, concrete; Plants, various; Lighting, modern; Sink, stainless steel; Plates, ceramic; Sink, stainless steel; Planters, concrete; Plants, various; Lighting, modern.



**T**he opening of Frank Gehry's metal-clad Guggenheim Museum 17 years ago on the waterfront in Bilbao made it the go-to city of the Basque country. Encircled by mountains just inland from Spain's north coast, this industrial centre has since not only become a thriving tourist destination, with excellent restaurants and shops, but has also attracted Spaniards themselves, such as businesswoman Isabel Fernandez Miranda, to make their homes there.

For the past three years, Isabel has lived in a modern penthouse apartment with extensive views over the city towards the mountains. She bought it off-plan: "It was wonderful that nothing existed here before," she says, "so it meant we could start everything from scratch."

Although she was clear about how she wanted her home to look, Isabel admits that the reality of turning the blank spaces into stunning rooms sometimes required professional help. As she called in interior designer Miguel Izquierdo, whose skill at mixing antiques with contemporary style has brought him plaudits throughout Spain.

Working closely together, Isabel and Miguel met every week throughout the whole planning process, to discuss each



#### LIVING AREA

The jewel—the painted wall (above right) is a striking tone of colour in the otherwise neutral-toned scheme (left and right), and adds a focal point to the apartment, as well as a curvy silhouette in the evening. A sense of space is created by the use of lightly polished wood flooring throughout and large, through-beam-style screens, custom-made from obsidian and silver-toned woods.

**Similar wall paint:** Laguna Bay, matt emulsion, £8.49 for 12.5 litres, Crown Paint, 0870 240 1877, [crownpaint.co.uk](http://crownpaint.co.uk). **Similar screen:** Home Zone Maestro screen-style system, from £508 for a single cube, MyLife, 0870 691 0423, [mylife.co.uk](http://mylife.co.uk). **Similar three-seater sofa:** Scand of Silver, from £5,995 including fabric, Borsari at Orpington, 070 842 1774, [borsari.co.uk](http://borsari.co.uk). **Similar coffee table:** Request recycled elm, 0285, C&A, 0844 815 7981, [candystore.com](http://candystore.com). **Similar white reading light:** Poppy Stone lamp, 075, Culture Event at Gung, 020 7593 7766, [gung.co.uk](http://gung.co.uk).



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step. "Mikel instinctively understood what I was trying to do," Isabel says. "Comfort and sophistication were most important to me, and I also wanted all the rooms to have contact with the terraces."

These terraces encircle the entire apartment and, together with an atmospheric inset courtyard garden, they flood Isabel's home with light throughout the day. Sliver white blinds keep the fiercest rays of the Spanish sun at bay, without sacrificing the seamless connections that Isabel wanted between the inside and out.

There are few divisions within the apartment, either: instead, rooms are separated by screens of see-through shelving, while a clever use of colour defines the hall, sitting and dining areas. The palette for the paint, wallpapers and fabrics is mostly soft creams, grey and beige, but a bold flash of dark peacock blue on the half wall between the dining and sitting rooms enlivens the space during the day, and creates a more intimate atmosphere in the evening. To ring up the atmosphere further, elegant table lamps and recessed LEDs are at the top of the wall, giving a warm glow.

The use of old and new, and cross-referencing of styles are put to pleasing

#### DINING ROOM

In this formal room (top left and right), the decorative legs of the glass table and Isabel's collection of glass vases add a playful note.

Four Modern Also dining table, HDL 2000/White, £1,995. Piero Lissoni for Glas table at Marage Inveris, 0431 795704, [www.marage.com.uk](http://www.marage.com.uk). Sivalde Laska XV-style dining chairs, from £160 each. Lillemor leathers, 01753 591119, [www.lillemor.com](http://www.lillemor.com). Sivalde Marie, Basso Laska Svalde, £15,995. Fabrics & Papers, 01215 491220, [fabricsandpapers.com](http://fabricsandpapers.com).

#### KITCHEN

The gallery-style kitchen (above right)

has an doors and is open to the rest of the apartment at both ends. Wood-laminate wooden cabinet units help give a sleek, clutter-free feel.

Similar handleless kitchen units: Piero Lissoni White Glass from £223 for a 60cm base unit. Cross-Island at John and Wood, 0151 772920, [www.johnandwood.co.uk](http://www.johnandwood.co.uk).



H&G | Penthouse apartment



## H&G | Penthouse apartment

### MAIN BEDROOM

Subtle use of bold patterns and colour glimmers across the living, increasing vibrance.

Curtain in Bukar in Avorio silk. C244506. Dedie: 020 7221 9492. [info@jim-lawrence.co.uk](mailto:info@jim-lawrence.co.uk). Similar textured fabric for throw. C100. The White Company. 02044 724 422. [www.whitecompany.com](http://www.whitecompany.com).



effect throughout the apartment. The long brilliant white, contemporary galley kitchen with reflective black glass cabinets, 90-degree, provides a marked contrast to the dining room, which is furnished with Spanish antiques, an ornate glass dining table and Louis XV-style upholstered dining chairs. Moving on to the sitting room, a black wood credenza holds a wooden screen that stands elsewhere, while latticed-leather chairs and occasional tables topped with wooden planks are a nod to the furniture used on the terrace.

Elsewhere, subtle patterns on a bedroom curtain reflect the shape and texture of the leaves growing outside on the terrace, while the planting itself serves as a frame for the view seen from the dining room. Not only that, it often the line of the terrace balustrade and provides a foreground to the city view that lies beyond. The overall effect is harmonious and elegant.

Smart yet welcoming, the apartment and its terraces are the perfect setting for host to entertain her family and friends. "I particularly love the sitting room," she confides, "and also the terraces – they're where I spend most of my spare time." ■

### GUEST BEDROOM

The sculptural shapes of the plants in the inner courtyard (far left), recessed LEDs and the varied colours of the scheme create a sense of visible calm.

Similar grey bedspread: Empire Star, C102. Silk & Sleep, 01465 45720. [www.silkandsleep.com](http://www.silkandsleep.com). Similar oblong cushion: House Silk, C50. Feather & Black, 01245 580600. [featherandblack.com](http://featherandblack.com). Similar ladder chair: Luis Snelid, C10399. Coramio at World of Benson, 01202 33245. [www.worldofbenso.com](http://www.worldofbenso.com).

### GUEST BATHROOM

Gold mosaic tiles are a dramatic and exotic touch for this space (left). For the adjoining bedrooms, coordinate the palette of inner courtyard garden.

Similar gold tiles: P5. Lazon. Middle Music. Polished, C88.76000. Topp, 0800 785 620. [www.topp.co.uk](http://www.topp.co.uk). Similar bath/shower mixer tap and pipe: Green, C490. Vitacore. Hurst, 0244 604 4646. [www.vitacore.com](http://www.vitacore.com).



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