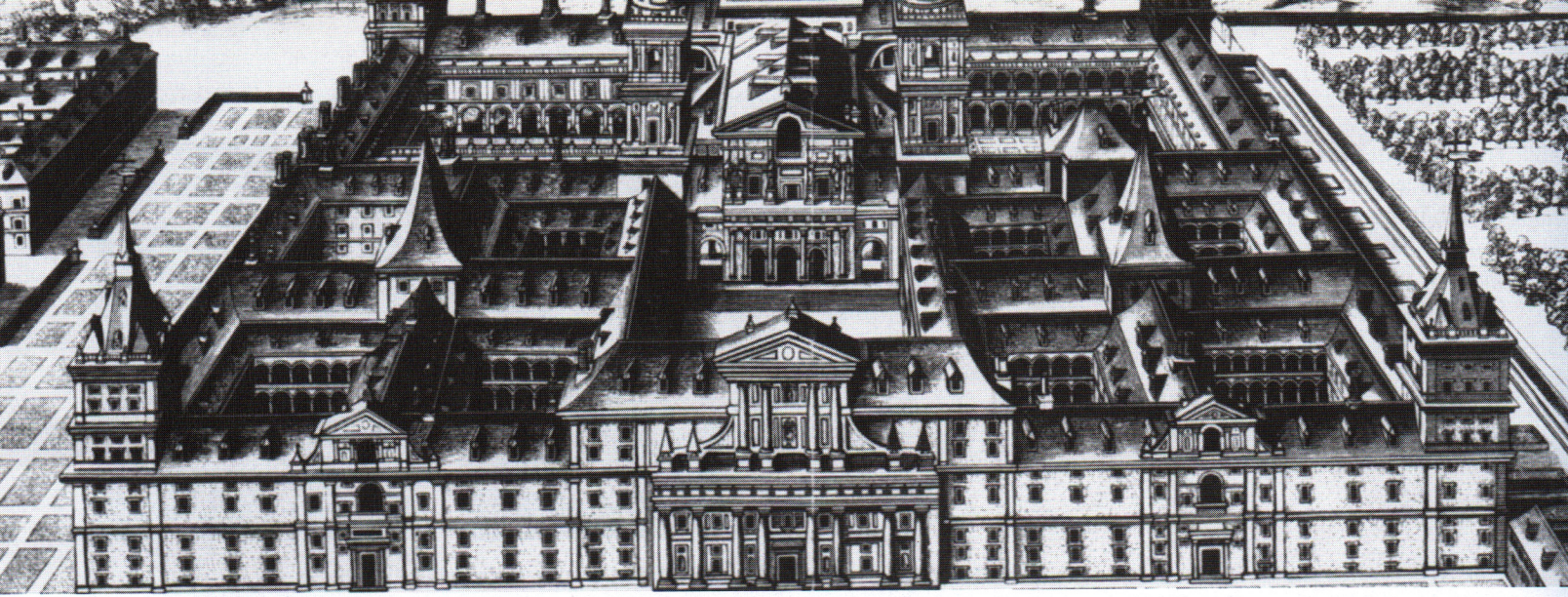




CHAPTER 13

Spanish Renaissance

1480–1650

Spain dominates the world politically and economically in the 16th century, but she, like others, looks to Italy for inspiration in architecture, interiors, and furnishings. Initially, the Spanish blend Renaissance design principles and motifs with 800 years of Moorish influences and a long tradition of lavish surface decoration. Major architectural projects often exhibit a blend of classical and Moorish designs. High Renaissance design concepts and details appear early in the 16th century, bringing greater severity to art and architecture, which is foreign to Spanish innate styles and tastes. Spanish emphasis on ornament quickly displaces High Renaissance plainness.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL

Spain's Islamic heritage, which begins with the arrival of the Moors (people from North African tribes) in 711, shapes her history, culture, and design sensibilities differently than that of the rest of Europe. Throughout much of the 800 years of Islamic occupation, Moors and Christians struggle for dominance, with

The rediscovery of the Classical past was one of the two great adventures that informed the Renaissance. The other was the exploration and conquest of America.

—Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture*

Christians gradually conquering more territory and driving out the majority of Moors by the 15th century.

Spain acquires her present borders late in the 15th century. The marriage of Ferdinand V of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 unites their respective states. The conquest of Granada and the annexation of Navarre complete the unification of the country. Policies and actions of these two monarchs lay the foundations of Spain's domination as a great world power in the 16th century. One important contribution is their sponsorship of the expedition of Christopher Columbus to discover new western trade routes to Asia in 1492. Within 20 years after Columbus's arrival in North America, the Spanish are expanding their territorial holdings into the Americas. Ferdinand also makes alliances with various European royal houses. When his grandson, Charles, ascends the Spanish throne in 1516, the power of the Spanish court is unmatched in Europe.

During the 16th century, Spain leads the world in exploration, trade, and colonization. By the 1550s, she controls most of South and Central America, Florida, Cuba, and the Philippines. Newly discovered gold and silver mines in the Americas bring enormous wealth into Spanish coffers. More European territory, including the Netherlands and Burgundy, comes with Charles V's election as Holy Roman Emperor in 1519. Spain leads European politics and plays a large monetary and ideological role in the Counter-Reformation.

Charles's son, Philip II, becomes the ruler of a major world power when he takes the throne in 1556. Through his marriages to daughters of royalty in Europe, he enhances Spain's stature and financial resources with important connections to England, France, and Austria. The peace that prevails early in his reign

soon vanishes in the face of religious conflicts, domestic turmoil, and epidemics that threaten economic and political stability. Maintaining territories proves costly, as does the rivalry with France, discontent in the Netherlands, and war with England. Philip's attempts at an absolute monarchy and his strong allegiance to the Catholic faith contribute to the decline of Spanish power. In addition, the Inquisition's conservatism prohibits new ideas. The defeat of the Spanish Armada by the English in 1588 marks the end of Spanish domination in both Old and New Worlds. As the 16th century ends, so does Spain's Golden Age.

CONCEPTS

The Renaissance arrives in Spain through political ties with Italy in the late 15th century. Deeply ingrained, however, are a strong medieval design aesthetic and centuries of Islamic heritage. So the sober, intellectual Renaissance has little appeal for the Spanish, who prefer lavish surface decoration composed of Gothic and Moorish forms and motifs, which convey visual complexity, emotion, and dynamism. Consequently, the classical Renaissance slowly merges with and overcomes indigenous forms and ornament. However, the monarchy and nobility prefer Italian High Renaissance classicism, which appears somewhat abruptly in the second quarter of the 16th century. Bearing little resemblance to native Spanish designs and associated with the court, it lasts only about 100 years. The Spanish love of ornament reasserts itself in the Baroque movement, which begins about 1650.

CHARACTERISTICS AND MOTIFS

- *Hispano-Moresque* (8th–15th centuries) reflects the Moorish architecture and decoration of Spain during Islamic domination.
- *Mudéjar* (13th–16th centuries) appears after the conquest of the Moors by Christians. Many Christian buildings of this period use Moorish details, such as the horseshoe arch.

- *Plateresque* (late 15th to early 16th centuries) describes the transition from Gothic to Renaissance. The characteristic minute, profuse surface ornament in low relief resembles silverwork, after which it is named. It has two sub-styles or phases. The two phases, Gothic and Renaissance, sometimes parallel each other, and some designers work in both styles.

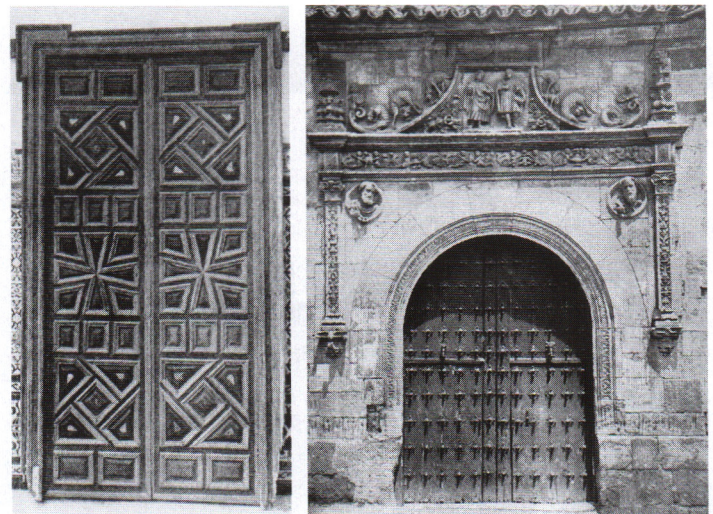
- Isabelline or Gothic Plateresque* (c. 1480–1504), the early phase, is Gothic in form and dominated by Gothic motifs, such as pinnacles and crockets.

- Renaissance Plateresque* (1504–1556), the later phase, reveals more classical motifs, such as decorated pediments, pilasters, and baluster columns.

- *Classical, Desornamentado, or Herreran Style* (1556–1650) demonstrates an understanding of classical design principles and order. Symmetrical and carefully proportioned, decoration is architectonic and emulates Italian High Renaissance forms. With



▲ 13-1. Motifs: Renaissance tiles, 15th–16th century; Portugal.



▲ 13-2. Door, 16th century; Seville; *Mudéjar* and door area, *Iglesia de S. Justo*; Salamanca. Plateresque.

the building of *El Escorial*, an even plainer, more severe expression becomes the official architectural style of Spain. It dominates Spanish architecture through the 17th century.

- *Churrigueresque or Baroque-Rococo* (1650–1750), named for the Churriguera family of architects, flourishes after the Renaissance. The style highlights architectural ornament such as stuccowork, twisted columns, and an inverted obelisk.

- *Motifs*. Moorish motifs (Fig. 13-1) are ogee arches, interlaced arabesques, and geometric shapes. Gothic motifs include heraldic symbols, pointed arches, pinnacles, and crockets. Decorated pediments, pilasters, baluster columns, and grotesques distinguish Renaissance Plateresque (Fig. 13-2, 13-3). Classical-style decoration more accurately copies Italian Renaissance forms and motifs (Fig. 13-2, 13-4, 13-5), such as columns, pilasters, pediments, medallions, stylized leaves and flowers, scrolls, fretwork, shells, and figures. Fewer Classical motifs are used on Spanish architecture than in Italy and France.

ARCHITECTURE

The Renaissance in Spanish architecture begins as the Plateresque style in the late 15th century. A transition between Gothic and Renaissance, its Gothic form features lavish surface decoration combining Moorish, Gothic, and Renaissance elements. Ornamentation, which concentrates around doors and occasionally windows, is not related to the structure and contrasts with surrounding blank walls. It is often complex and layered within a geometric grid as in Islamic design. Around portals, decoration extends to the roofline, resembling *retables*, the screens behind altars in churches.

By the second quarter of the 16th century, Spanish Renaissance enters a more Italian-like phase, revealing concepts of and antecedents in Italian High Renaissance and ancient buildings. Plain walls articulated with rustication and classical articulation and details replace surface decoration. Symmetry, order, and harmonious proportions are characteristic. Most structures reflect human scale. By the end of the century, design is even more severe and formal with minimal decoration. Plans and façades often reveal Italian antecedents as Spanish architects study Italian buildings and treatises. Nevertheless, some Spanish characteristics are retained, such as ornate portals, iron grilles at windows, and tile work.

Spanish building types, which are more varied than those in Italy, include churches, civic buildings (Fig. 13-3), universities, hospitals, palaces (Fig. 13-4, 13-5), townhouses, and *rancheros*. Despite a varied climate, most Spanish structures are designed for hot weather with small windows, flat or low-pitched roofs, and *patios* (courtyards) similar to those in Italy.

Public and Private Buildings

■ **Site Orientation.** Churches are dominant structures in the city or town environment. Most city buildings front on narrow streets. Public buildings and palaces may face squares or *plazas* (Fig. 13-5).



▲ 13-3. Town hall, 1527–1534; Seville, Spain.



▲ 13-4. Palace of Charles V, 1527–1568; Pedro Machua. Classical, *Desornamentado*, or Herreran style.

■ **Floor Plans.** Most churches have Latin cross plans. Other structures, including palaces and houses, center on *patios* or courtyards for privacy (Fig. 13-5). Like the earlier Moorish structures, rooms generally open out to one or more outdoor spaces. Rooms (Fig. 13-5, 13-6) are often long and narrow in shape or somewhat square; their dimensions are not mathematically derived. Symmetry in plan is not important until the classical period in the 16th century.

■ **Materials.** Granite, limestone, sandstone, glazed ceramic tile, and brick are typical building materials. Gray granite with contrasting white stucco details marks the classical style. The scarcity of wood limits its use. The Spanish are known for wrought-iron window grilles, handrails, and other decoration.

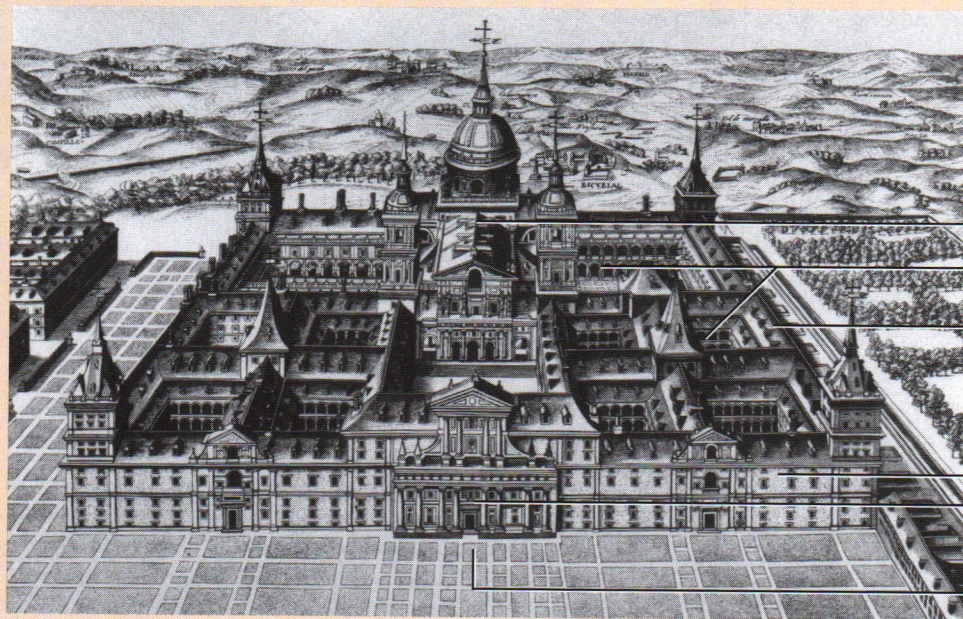
■ **Façades.** Walls and openings are usually symmetrical and divided into bays by architectural details. Surfaces (Fig. 13-3, 13-4, 13-5) are plain with little or no rustication until the classical period when rustication becomes a definitive characteristic. Sometimes string-courses separate stories. Ornamentation varies in form, intensity, and motifs with the style and often reaches the roofline. Plateresque or Classical decoration usually surrounds rectangular or arched windows that have one or two lights (Fig. 13-3, 13-4, 13-5). Some have *rejas* or wrought-iron grilles. Decorative surrounds emphasize entrances and are a distinctive Spanish feature. Rectangular doors have carved wood panels, often with geometric designs (Fig. 13-2).

■ **Roofs.** Roofs are flat or low pitched. Following the completion of *El Escorial* (Fig. 13-5), many houses have corner towers to imitate it.

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT

Architecture and Interiors: Constructed over a 20-year period, *El Escorial* contains a monastery, church, college, and state apartments for Philip II. The site, a bleak, windswept, semi-wooded plain at the base of mountains, is unusual for a royal palace. The plan, which appears to resemble the famous grill on which S. Laurence was martyred, centers on spacious courtyards, some with gardens. The most likely explanation of the plan is

that it is based upon descriptions of the Temple of Solomon, which centered on courtyards also, but extensively modified to suit the various needs and functions of a royal palace. Begun by Juan Bautista de Toledo and completed by Juan de Herrera, the buildings reflect the Classical, *Desornamentado*, or Herreran style with design attributes from Palladio and other Italian Renaissance architects and artists. The gray granite façade is aus-



Domed church

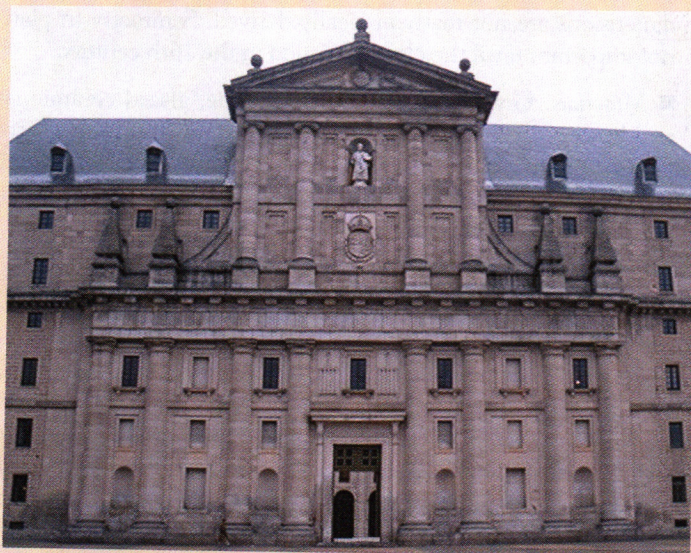
Courtyards or patios

Walled complex

Plain exterior façade

Main entry with classical influence

Symmetrical axis



▲ 13-5. Aerial view of *El Escorial*, and front façade, *Patio de los Reyes*, library, hallway in the state apartments, and bedchamber of Philip II, 1562–1582; near Madrid; begun by Juan Bautista de Toledo and completed by Juan de Herrera.

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT

tere and simple with little ornamentation, but major entries are highlighted with columns, pilasters, arches, pediments, and sculptures. Symmetry and impressive scale are important throughout. Within the building, the rooms vary in design, illustrating Moorish elements in the state apartments and Italian Renaissance architectural concepts in the library (below). Elaborate paintings by artists such as El Greco enhance the interior com-

positions. Simple furnishings are in traditional 16th-century Spanish designs emphasizing rectangular shapes, some with elaborate surface decoration. The library houses Philip II's collection plus documents and books from Spain and other countries. Ceiling frescoes depict the seven liberal arts. Philip II's rooms are small and austere, reflecting his tastes and passion for the Catholic faith. (World Heritage Site)



▲ 13-5. Continued

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT



▲ 13-5. Continued

INTERIORS

As on exterior façades, interior ornamentation concentrates around openings, and Moorish, Gothic, and Renaissance characteristics and motifs intermingle. Interior architectural features establish the design vocabulary, axial relationships, and general character. In private buildings, the most important rooms are the entrance hall, main salon, dining area, and bedchamber. Rooms have few furnishings, even in the wealthiest homes. Furniture usually lines the perimeter of the room (Fig. 13-5, 13-6).

Public and Private Buildings

■ **Color.** Colors (Fig. 13-1, 13-5), which are highly saturated, include reds, yellows, blues, and greens, and appear primarily in tile work, textiles, and decorative objects. Plasterwork is usually white. Ceilings and furnishings may be a combination of natural wood, color, and gilt.

■ **Floors.** Floors are of tile, brick, or stone, while wood is typical for upper floors (Fig. 13-5, 13-6). Knotted-pile rugs with elaborate designs and woven mats cover floors.

■ **Walls.** Walls are smooth white plaster. Colorful earthenware tiles highlight dadoes, door and window facings, window seats, stair risers, and interiors of wall niches (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-7). Dining rooms often have *lavabos* made of copper, pewter, or pottery that hang on the wall or are in a niche faced with tiles. Elaborate decoration and detailing accentuate grand stairways. Aristocratic houses have wall hangings of silk, velvet, or damask (Fig. 13-6). Some are embellished with embroidery or braid and fringe. Because Spain is a leading center for leatherwork, painted, tooled, and gilded leather often is used for wall coverings. Large-scaled mantels with classical elements usually dominate the main wall in important rooms. Occasionally, plasterwork decorates chimneys. Portable *braziers* (Fig. 13-6) of elaborate brass, copper, or silver supply heat or supplement fireplaces.

■ **Windows and Doors.** *Yeseria* or plasterwork often frames doors and windows. Doors of wood or with iron grilles may be used to separate interiors from *patios*. Doors and shutters may be plain, painted, or carved (Fig. 13-5, 13-6). Although curtains on windows are rare, occasionally heavy lambrequins and draperies surround doorways of important rooms (Fig. 13-11).

■ **Ceilings.** Ceilings are focal points in many interiors. Most are of pine. Those in important rooms feature elaborate geometric shapes with complex ornamentation enriched with painting, gilding, and *artesonades* work (Fig. 13-5, 13-6). Beams and coffers are plain or decorated with painting and carving.

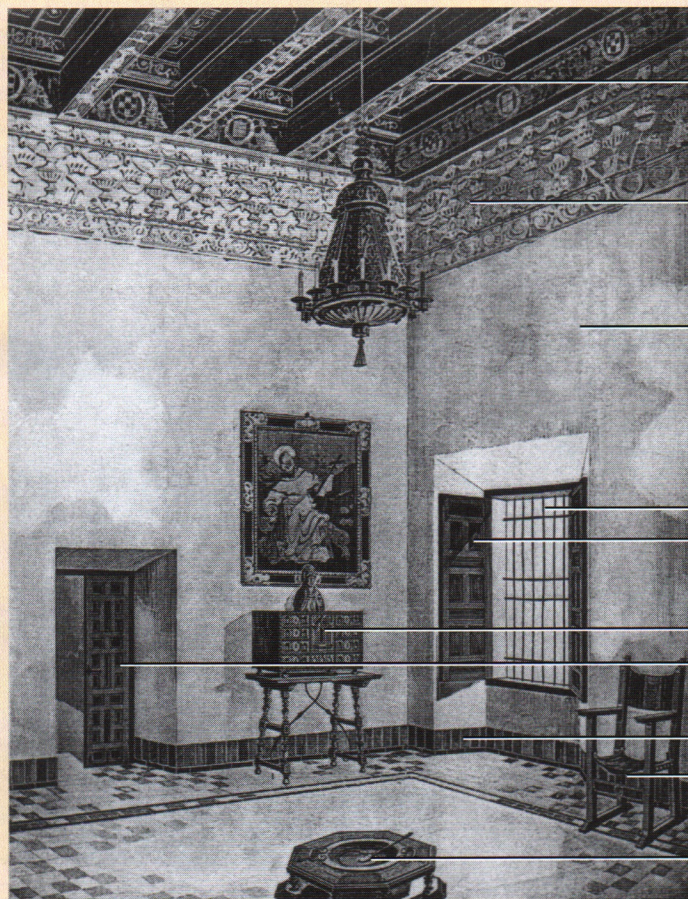
■ **Textiles.** Spanish interiors, like others, use textile wall coverings, upholstery, and bed hangings of silk, wool, or linen (Fig. 13-8). Velvet or damask, sometimes with embroidery or braid and fringe, covers walls in important rooms. Rectangular armchairs and side chairs have leather, velvet, and damask seats and backs, which may be decorated with fringe (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-7, 13-11). Some chairs, benches, and stools are covered completely with fabric. Important beds, such as Philip II's, display elaborate textile treat-

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT

Interiors: These interiors of the Palace of the Duke of Alba are excellent examples of Spanish Renaissance design. Used by an important family, the impressive spaces collectively feature tile floors, off-white plain stucco walls, geometrically carved wooden doors and shutters, decorative friezes, decorated beamed ceilings, *fraileros*, tables, chests, *papalera*, chandeliers, and a *brazier*. Paintings and a tapestry cover the walls, and a simple rug accents the floor in the main salon. The windows have carved interior shutters instead of curtains. The ground floor salon window has an iron grille to prevent intrusions. The scale of the rooms as well as their furnishings contribute to their importance and grandeur, as would befit a palatial environment.

► 13-6. Main salon and ground floor salon, Palace of the Duke of Alba, 16th century; Seville, Spain.

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT



Artesonades
ceiling

Decorative frieze

Plain stucco wall

Iron grille

Geometrically
carved wooden
shutter

Papalera

Geometrically
carved wooden
door

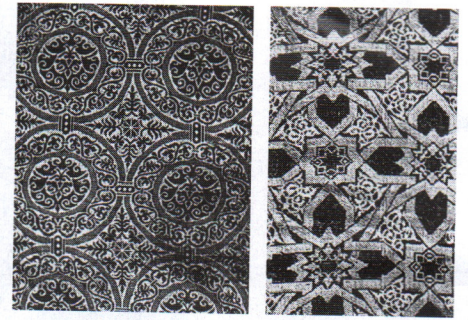
Tiled baseboard

Frailero

Brazier



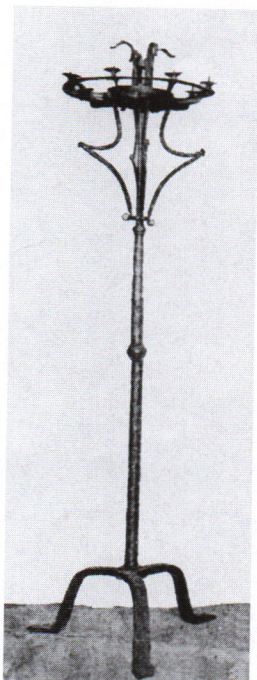
▲ 13-7. *Sala, Casa de El Greco*, 16th century; Toledo, Spain.



▲ 13-8. Textiles: Fabrics of wool and silk, 16th century.

ments trimmed with lace, embroidery, fringe, or braid. A Moorish legacy in the Spanish home is an extensive use of canopies and/or cushions trimmed with braid, cord, tassels, or nailheads.

■ *Lighting.* *Torcheros* or torch stands, hanging lanterns, *braccios*, *candelabra*, and chandeliers are common in all types of spaces (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-9). Designs may be plain or elaborate and often incorporate *Mudéjar* or classical features. Materials are iron and/or wood.



▲ 13-9. Lighting: Iron *torchere*, chandelier, and hanging lantern.

■ *Later Interpretations.* During the 16th century, Spanish forms travel to the Americas as abstracted and simplified renditions of their *Mudéjar*, classical, and Baroque precursors in Mexico, Central and South America, and the southwestern and southeastern United States. Spanish Colonial Revival (Fig. 13-10), beginning in the early 20th century, features plain walls, tiled floors, and dark-beamed ceilings of the earlier period, but with the addition of plasterwork, decorative tiles, and arches and more and varied furnishings.



▲ 13-10. Later Interpretation: Foyer, McNay Residence, 1920s–1930s; San Antonio, Texas. Spanish Colonial Revival.

FURNISHINGS AND DECORATIVE ARTS

Renaissance furniture is simple in design and construction and rectilinear in form with few moldings and architectural details. The scale of Spanish furniture is often heavier than comparable Italian or French furniture. The bold, vigorous ornamentation shows Moorish and classical influence. Particularly characteristic are wrought-iron mounts, locks, and underbraces. The most important types of furniture include seating, chests, cabinets, tables, and beds.

Public and Private Buildings

■ **Materials.** Walnut is the most used wood, followed by oak, pine, and chestnut. Luxury pieces are made of exotic woods such as ebony or mahogany. Decoration includes inlay, carving, painting, and gilding (Fig. 13-12, 13-13). Inlay of bone or ivory shows

Moorish influence in its intricate designs of minute details in geometric and stylized floral patterns. Silver from the New World often forms inlay or applied details.

■ **Seating.** Seating (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-7, 13-11) includes the *frailero*, X-shaped chairs, the ladder-back chair, stools, and benches. Chairs are less common than benches and stools. Most chairs have medium-to-high backs with ball or leaf finials and spiral, baluster-turned, or quadrangular legs with stretchers. Trestle supports are more common than legs on benches and stools, and they may have iron braces. Many rooms have built-in seating, and ladies sometimes sit on cushions on a dais in the Moorish fashion.

■ **Tables.** Most tables (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-7) are simply constructed and covered with cloths or carpets. Some oblong tables have turned, splayed legs connected with curving iron braces, which sometimes are gilded for formal rooms.



DESIGN SPOTLIGHT

Furniture: Used for writing or to hold documents, the *vargueño* is the most distinctive piece of Spanish Renaissance furniture. It consists of a drop-front cabinet on a base. Wrought-iron mounts and locks typically provide the only decoration on the façade. Inside are numerous small drawers and doors. The most characteristic base has splayed legs and iron braces. It, like the *papalera*, was designed to travel with wealthy landowners as they moved between city and country houses.



▲ 13-12. *Vargueños.*

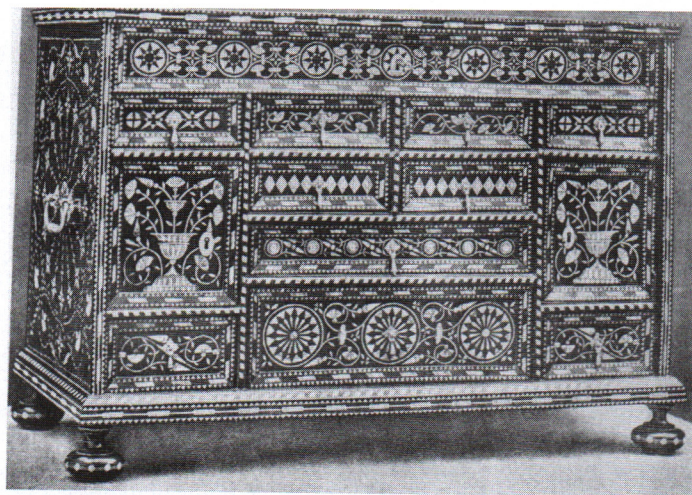


▲ 13-11. Doorway with embroidered lambrequin, damask draperies, and *fraileros*; and *frailero*, El Escorial, 16th century; Spain.

■ **Storage.** Storage pieces (Fig. 13-5, 13-6, 13-7, 13-12, 13-13) include chests in various sizes, built-in cupboards, the sacristy cupboard, the *armario*, and the *fresquera*. The *vargueño* (Fig. 13-12) is the most distinctive piece of Spanish furniture. Similar to the *vargueño*, the *papalera* is an elaborate cabinet without a drop front or a permanent base (Fig. 13-6).

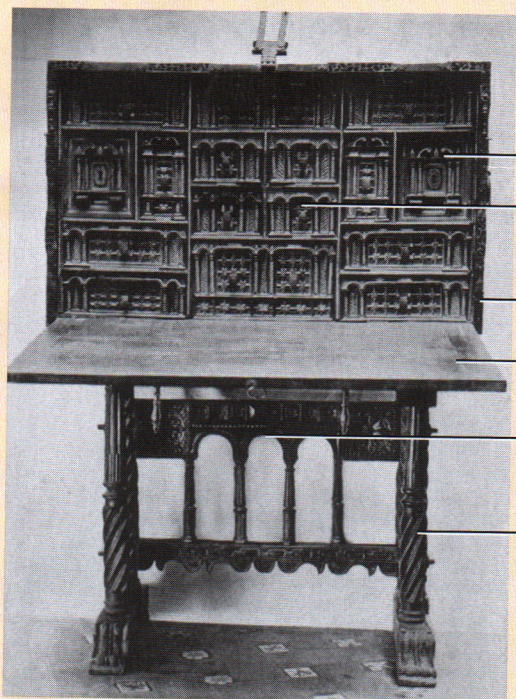
■ **Beds.** Spanish beds (Fig. 13-5, 13-14) have four plain wood posts and elaborately carved headboards; some posts are spirals with carving. Other beds are of iron or bronze. As in other countries, many are richly draped to demonstrate wealth. However, because of the hot Spanish climate, some beds have no canopy frames. Important beds, such as Philip II's bed, display elaborate textile treatments.

■ **Decorative Arts.** Sometimes small leather-covered chests and small boxes decorate tabletops. A Moorish legacy in the Spanish home is an extensive use of small boxes and canopies and/or cushions trimmed with braid, cord, tassels, or nailheads (Fig. 13-6).



▲ 13-13. Chest.

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT



- Classical details
- Drawers and doors for storage
- Wood construction
- Drop front for writing
- Italian Renaissance arch
- Spiral columned legs

▲ 13-12. Continued



▲ 13-14. Bed with spiral turnings, Royal Palace, 16th century; Sintra, Portugal.