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moorish mix

Situated between Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains, this elegant house, with its airy rooms, is decorated in a combination of English country-house style and traditional Moroccan elements

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LOCATIONS EDITOR GABBY DEEMING

On the garden side of the house, a terrace shaded by a split-cane roofed pergola creates an outside seating area. The woven cane furniture is from Unopiù





OPPOSITE In the main entrance hall hangs a ceiling lantern from Henry Cath. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 From here, a cloistered walkway leads to the bedrooms. The large sitting room is decorated in a mix of
 Colefax and Fowler and Manuel Canovas fabrics. French windows lead out to the garden and courtyard on either side



FROM LEFT The bedrooms have access to terraces and the garden beyond. This one has a pretty delft-blue palette, with an Indian cotton bedspread and plates above the chimneypiece from Fez. In another bedroom, a rug – a gift from a friend – brightens the scheme. Trudi created a unifying element by using raffia ceiling lights from Henry Cath in all the bedrooms



It may be a first world problem, but it is valid nonetheless: how exactly should you furnish a holiday house – particularly one abroad? A quick survey reveals that the two most usual solutions are either to use the new as a useful dumping ground for the old – particularly bedding (lumpy pillows and utility blankets) and worn-out saucepans – thus saving a series of trips to the charity shop. The second solution is to be bright and jolly and smother the space in a riot of ethnicity – hand-carved this, hand-woven that, all accessorised with a plethora of mirror sequins and tassels. But luckily there is a third way and this house, about 20 minutes outside Marrakesh, is an exemplar of how to do it right.

Villa Mauresque belongs to Trudi Ballard, who for many years has steered the press and publicity of Colefax and Fowler, famous for its subtle, very English textile designs. Unsurprisingly then, there is more than a touch of the particular Colefax ambience in the house – but more of that later.

Trudi's project began over 10 years ago. 'I've always loved Morocco – the light, the smells and complete contrast to London living. While I was there, I had heard that someone was building a small group of houses between Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains. I went to look at the site and loved it immediately.'

The site is indeed perfect: down a dirt track or two and into an olive grove, where the house seems almost part of the landscape. At the end of a gravel path is a studded wooden door leading to a shaded walk and then a cool, airy hall through french windows. From here, a light-filled house ripples round a courtyard, with a traditionally tiled cloistered walkway to one side from which bedrooms lead off, each with its own terrace and access to the garden beyond.

On another side of the courtyard is a large, extremely comfortable and light-filled sitting room, with french windows on either side opening onto the courtyard and garden opposite. The room itself is an exercise in intelligent design, arranged to encompass both summer and winter living, with a traditional Moroccan fireplace at one end, flanked by built-in, L-shaped banquettes with large cushions. In the centre of the room are comfortable sofas covered in a warm tobacco and terracotta

FROM LEFT At the end of the walkway, a bedroom has French windows to the terrace with a carved Moroccan table and cushions in Colefax and Fowler fabric. Beyond this area is the pool, which has been clad in earth-coloured tadelakt, a typically Moroccan waterproof, polished plaster finish; the open pool house has built-in seating



striped fabric and Colefax honeysuckle chintz; at the far end, there is a round dining table. The decoration is concrete proof of something else Trudi has learnt over the years: 'The importance of proportion and how a room is used.'

The house was deliberately furnished over time. 'Even if I'd had all the money in the world, I wouldn't have wanted to finish it all in one fell swoop,' Trudi explains. 'I organised a small shipment of furniture from England and bought the rest in Morocco, which is a very craft-based country. I was given a good piece of advice from one of the Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler decorators who said, "If you do one thing first, it should be the lighting." So I did, and it gives a uniform, balanced look to the house. I also spent money on the beds, which I bought in Casablanca, and the terrace furniture. The rest I found locally, scouring the souks, where I took remnants to ladies with sewing machines, and buying from roadside stalls. I've learnt that the most important thing is to spend the largest part of your budget on the things you can't be without, things that are going to get most use, and things that will be there the longest. And will be most difficult to replace.'

On the colour front, Trudi wanted to keep the schemes simple, using the earth tones of Morocco, with the exception of one room in blue and white – her love of this colour combination was inspired by the late Colefax interior decorator Roger Banks Pye, whose favourite it was.

For the garden, Trudi was given another crucial piece of advice by the garden designer Christopher Masson: keep the planting close to the house to protect the roots from the summer heat. One of the extra joys is the elegant pool, which instead of being tiled has been clad with earth-coloured tadelakt (the waterproof polished plaster finish typical to Morocco).

All this makes for a house that is comfortable, pretty and elegant. Its charm is that it manages to convey a sense of English style, very much Trudi's taste within a completely Moroccan framework □

Villa Mauresque: villanovo.com