



THE WELL

Enduring Gardens

The flourishing grounds at Toledo's centuries-old Galiana Palace are one of the quiet wonders of Europe

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Just as Toledo's Galiana Palace has stood in place since its construction in the thirteenth century, so have its gardens flourished. The plantings — rocketing cypresses, bountiful olives and pomegranates, oranges, myrtles, and figs—have come to mirror in form the edifice's Moorish and Romanesque architectural styles. At this point in the garden's long evolution, the outdoor rooms meld effortlessly with those of the palace, which remains privately owned.

The structure makes use of the foundations and other architectural elements of an earlier building dating from the eleventh century. The complex is just beyond the ancient walls of Toledo, a bucolic region of central Spain. Although it nominally served its royal functions, the palace was built by the Muslim king Taifa Al-Mamun as a playground for himself and his family, an extravagant folly. As the ruler of Toledo between 1043 and 1075, Al-Mamun established the city as a cultural locus, with the palace serving as an important symbol.

According to historical records, the garden was recognized early not only for its splendor, but also for its array of exotic and carefully tended botanical species — a valuable and highly coveted source of medicinal herbs and remedies. The many outdoor garden rooms were known collectively as the Al-Munyaal-Naura, referencing the water wheels that were once scattered throughout the grounds, along with orchards of fruit trees, mostly orange

and pomegranate. Apart from the garden's sheer beauty and its medicinal and decorative plantings, the grounds incorporated state-of-the-art irrigation engineering systems, the remnants of which remain visible today. A novel water clock, built by the eleventh-century astronomer Al-Zarqali, which kept time by harnessing the flow of streams, also was reputed to have been on the property.

Not all has always been peaceful on the now decidedly the tranquil grounds, punctuated by rectangular pools, contemplative courtyards, sunken gardens, terra-cotta planters growing with greenery, brick walkways, and plashing fountains. Over the centuries, various occupying kings waged war and fought off outside attackers, while the nearby city of Toledo often found itself under siege. The gardens were eventually destroyed, but never forgotten.

By the early 1930s, ambitious, privately funded plans were instituted to restore the palace and its gardens. Even as the first rumblings of the Spanish Civil War were

Opening pages: Spain's Tagus River flows just beyond Toledo's thirteenth-century Galiana Palace and gardens, an exemplar of Moorish and Romanesque architecture. Towering cypresses are among the most conspicuous plantings on the grounds. Left: Pomegranate and orange trees flourish in terra-cotta pots near one of the garden's secretive entryways and courtyards.



Left to right: Sunken courtyards function as outdoor rooms and were originally planted with small orchards of fruit trees. A Moorish-style archway, noted for its keyhole shape, becomes a focal point in the garden. The reflecting pool was once a pond, and a stone baptismal font now serves as a fountain.

Interiors blend seamlessly with the outdoors throughout the palace. The temperate Mediterranean climate allows outdoor living for much of the year. The barrel arches are composed of long narrow bricks juxtaposed with vigorous stone walls and floors.



*The garden and its palace reflect an amalgam
of Moorish and Western European motifs,
each complementing and highlighting one another.*

The palace's west façade is fronted by borders of lavender and roses. Romanesque archways line the top of the structure, framing a trefoil of Moorish-style arches below.

The palace's form is as much an architectural statement as it is a sculptural one. An up-close look at one of the walls of the main tower reveals a series of defensive merlons. Archways throughout the complex are outlined with brick, which melds with the stonework.





heard, the Spanish government declared the site a national historic monument, ensuring its preservation. The palace's name, Galiana, references a sixteenth-century Muslim princess.

The palace's architecture is noted for its rectangular form and rooftop perimeter marked by a handsome rhythm of merlons, a repeating crenellation of elements meant to shield soldiers during a siege. The building is bisected by full-length aisles and features an expansive internal courtyard — a space meant to foster privacy while also ensuring security. One of the palace's chief façades faces the Tagus River, while the opposite side takes in views of a pond, perhaps the site of the original pool.

Sofia Barroso, who spends time at the palace, relates how her grandparents, Carmen Maranon and Alejandro Fernandez Araoz, now the owners, would often stroll along the banks of the Tagus, studying the imposing ruins of the palace, with its vigorously articulated stone walls, keyhole Moorish archways, and delicate Romanesque archways open to the elements. The couple was entranced not only by the architecture, but also by the property's history and legends.

By 1960, Barroso's grandparents decided to restore Galiana to its original splendor and to recreate and reinterpret the Persian-style garden areas. They chose historian Manuel Gomez-Moreno and a then youngish architect, Fernando Chueca-Goitia, to undertake the project. The grandmother

helped conceive much of the gardens visitors encounter today — ones marked by cypresses, rose bushes, patches of ivy and fragrant oleander, interspersed with fruit trees.

Color is a major component of the property's identity, something for which landscape architect Jesus Moraima, who joined the project some fifteen years ago, takes credit. In some areas, plantings are arranged by gradations of color that range from pale rose to red to mauve, yellow, orange, and purple — a virtual rainbow of hues that are particularly apparent at the entrance. Throughout the spring and into early summer, before it becomes too hot, roses are always in bloom. By June, the lavender is in its glory. Pomegranate trees remain vibrant typically until fall, when they shed their leaves.

"I remember, as a child, when the cypresses were as tall as I was," says Carmen Maranon. "Now they tower, soar like giant green arrows and give the garden its elegance and majestic presence. Galiana is a place where you can find peace."

The privately owned estate is open to the public by appointment on select days, and the gardens can be rented for special occasions.

Part of the garden's overall restoration plan, conceived in the early 1960s, involved creating pathways, lined with large, bulbous flower pots and interspersed with fragrant lavender, behind which are planted taller expanses of narrow cypresses. Hedges are shaped as archways to frame views.

