



Modern touches like these large brightly coloured dice (above), white paintwork, rugs and artwork (below) make Paul's apartment a desirable home



It took a lot of work to renovate and decorate, but Paul is ultimately proud of the results

# CAPITAL GAME

Spanish city life appealed so much to Paul Rigg that he quit his job in Birmingham to buy a flat in the capital that he's since renovated. Penelope Parkin takes a look round his stylish apartment

**CHARITY** director Paul Rigg, 42, moved to Madrid eight years ago after coming to the realisation that his job in Birmingham was no longer fulfilling. Telling his boss 'I'm leaving because I'm unhappy here and I love Madrid', he caught a flight to Spain and rented various apartments in the city while teaching.

Six years later, he decided to buy in the city and is now the proud owner of a fabulous 144-year-old flat in the centre of Madrid. Typical of a growing trend among young, independent *madrileños* with high investment potential, he has chosen to purchase a piece of history by renovating an old apartment right in



Modern white furniture co-  
well with the dark wood





clockwise from above: washes of colour and some in the kitchen; it floods into one of guest bedrooms; modern sink and toilet in a walk-in shower in bathroom; A plain sofa bed for guests; Paul even has a room where he can work at his computer



the heart of the bustling city centre and has turned his flat into a mix of the modern and traditional.

Having had a good look at many areas of the city during his English teaching career, Paul felt drawn to the Lavapiés area close to the Plaza Mayor, which he already knew well. On the advice of a friend who had recently bought an apartment in the lively Plaza de Cascorro, Paul left his details with a local estate agent who returned several months later with his dream home in the same building.

It has proved a move that suits him down to the ground. As Paul confirms: 'Since I came to Spain, everything I have done has felt a part of an adventure. Thanks to fiestas and the outdoor life here, I think it's better than anywhere else in the world.'

Not only this, but also his working environment has undergone a truly dramatic transformation. As he himself laughingly admits: 'I now eat tapas on a terraza in the sun as opposed to sandwiches from a local garage at my desk.'

Plaza de Cascorro is the lively hub of a thoroughfare of authentically Spanish small streets running from the Plaza Mayor itself. Surrounded by small shops and small bars and cafés, it hosts the vivid colours, exotic delicacies and noisy hustle and bustle of the famous Rastro market every Sunday. The square also boasts

Madrid's beautiful old town hall, whose roof can be seen from Paul's balcony.

Despite initial difficulties sorting out a mortgage, Paul was able to use his existing flat in England as security for backing by his bank, which eventually meant he could borrow the £90,000 necessary to purchase the property for £100,000. He also obtained a European renovation grant which operates in the Lavapiés area (these grants can bestow potential developers with a lump sum of up to £15,000) and so he was able to begin work refurbishing the apartment.

The much needed grant, together with an £80,000 loan from a generous relative, has come in handy for hidden charges such as the Spanish 'ITE' or *Inspección Técnica de Edificio* required for wooden buildings. Meeting this standard will cost Paul at least a further 500 euros per month adding up to a total of 12,000 euros over the next two years. Also, as the apartment is in a listed building, Paul will be required to maintain the wooden balcony doors and the external shutters as features.

Luckily the shutters were the easiest item to renovate. 'I actually found these shutters, that were quite old, in a skip, which is really lucky because it was impossible for me to find the same kind in any shops round here.' He has also played to the apartment's strengths



## PROPERTY REVIEW

A guide to homes for sale in the area



by keeping its old beams, although these have been painted a subtle light grey to give the flat a modern feel and 'get away from the old English country pub look'.

Structurally Paul has opted for an open-plan arrangement, taking advantage of all available light. Traditionally many old Madrid apartment buildings were composed of a warren of rooms leading off a central corridor, so these had to be ripped out. A small dark room to the left of the main entrance was also opened up to create a welcoming entrance way.

The main apartment consists of a spacious living area and kitchen. To add privacy, Paul's bedroom and office are separate from the main living space. He has also installed two bathrooms explaining: 'I can get up, have a shower and work on my computer without having to wait for my guests to finish in the bathroom!'

As to his feelings during the major works required to create his dream apartment, Paul replies: 'That would take a book. Terror, fear and horror were my main emotions!' Nevertheless, after ten weeks of work that amassed a colossal 500 sacks of rubble that all had to be carried down five flights of stairs by hand, he couldn't be happier. As he proudly reveals: 'The housewarming was great! With the open hallway and kitchen it's a great place to have a party!'



### LA MORALEJA MANSION

A huge house situated in the most interesting part of La Moraleja just outside Madrid. Luxurious outside and in, it has a bathroom made of Brazilian marble, an exceptional garden, tennis courts and swimming pool.

Promora: +34 916 504242

[www.promora.com](http://www.promora.com)



### MADRID DE LAS ASTURIAS

This luxury flat boasts 250m<sup>2</sup> of living area and is situated on the third floor of a 19th-century building that's been recently refurbished. Boasts spectacular views on to the Opera square and the theatre.

Ambassador Inmobiliaria: +34 915 775642

[www.ambassador-inmobiliaria.com](http://www.ambassador-inmobiliaria.com)



### COSY APARTMENT

This one-bedroom flat is in a period property in the San Agustín del Guadalix area of the city. The living space amounts to 75m<sup>2</sup> and comprises a main living-dining room and kitchen. Plus shared pool and garage.

FDJ Inmobiliaria: +34 918 433510

[www.fdj-inmobiliaria.com](http://www.fdj-inmobiliaria.com)



### BRAND NEW FLAT COMPLEX

These one- and two-bedroom apartments with 140m<sup>2</sup> living space are in a brand new development on Calle Jorge Manrique and feature shared gardens, pools and garage. Near the new business district.

Ferrovial: +34 902 202365

[www.casasbienhechas.com](http://www.casasbienhechas.com)

## BUYING IN... MADRID

If you wish to buy into a city that never sleeps, then Madrid is your place! Although this buzzing capital receives a huge number of tourists every year, this does not seem to trouble the *madrileños*, who are more than happy to entertain and are all too used to out-of-towners.

Despite the crowds, Madrid is surprisingly compact. Perhaps this is the reason why houses are not priced according to the number of bedrooms they have but by the number of square metres of land on which they are built. Oscar Gras of Ambassador Inmobiliaria says, 'The price of a flat or a house per square metre can stretch from €1,200 euros to €9,616.' He maintains, however, that 'property development is becoming increasingly homogenised so that houses in a particular area are all priced the same.' In light of this, it's clear that houses built in richer areas tend to be more elegantly constructed, particularly in the suburbs where a lot of the houses have beautiful gardens and some are even equipped with 24-hour surveillance cameras.

Home to some of the world's truly great museums and lively neighbourhoods

brimming with character, it comes as no surprise that this magnificent metropolis of over three million people has a property market that matches its growing popularity. This Spanish nucleus has more to its houses than meet the eye in the centre of town.

As Oscar Gras of Ambassador Inmobiliaria points out, 'businesses are beginning to move out of the centre and are heading to the suburbs where business is thriving as much as it has always done in the centre. Property developers, meanwhile, are converting city slums into prime real estate and are now looking to attract the foreign buyer and, with names like David and Victoria Beckham, it looks like they are succeeding!'

The gap is closing between major cities and it is now an accepted trend for those who have both money and sense to move here; whether to relish the charm of central Madrid and the old city, with its dignified Hapsburg mansions and squares, or to stroll through the elegant Parque del Buen Retiro or to join the ranks of Beckham wannabes in the glitzy suburbs, the longer you stay here, the more you will become attached to this beautiful city.

For details of other properties for sale in Madrid, refer to our North, Central & Pyrenees Sales section, starting on page 143