

# CAN Xicarró



Each time you visit Can Xicarró, you notice something new. Entering the grounds, huge, automatic gates swing silently to a close behind you and immediately there's that unmistakable lifting of the spirits which always occurs when a haven like this reveals itself.



However familiar the driveway, dappled as much by the curiously-patterned bark of the Plane trees which line it as the sunlight which invariably filters through their branches, the house beyond is always a breathtaking revelation. As you pass the trees on either side they open up to glimpses of the lush green lawns which carpet a two-hectare walled garden, complete with rose beds, tennis courts, solar heated pool, ponds and orchards. The villa stands imposingly four-square in the centre of all of this, flanked by enormous, swaying palm trees, embraced by its protective bounds. Free to wander the grounds, this comforting feeling of security seems to liberate all sorts of faculties normally suppressed by the stress and bustle of everyday life; for example, it's possible to circumnavigate the entire estate without once having to open a gate, so as the heart is unburdened, the eye is left to admire the intriguing detail and compelling mystery of it all



If the horseshoe arches and ornate *façade* don't immediately suggest a strong Moorish influence to the architecture, the stunning entrance hall will leave you in no doubt. The main door is pure Arabian *Mesquita*, reminiscent of the entrance to an Andaluz bullring. Inside, paired columns shore up elaborate, foliated plaster-work capitals which dramatically open into a delicately coffered and paneled ceiling... it's all very Moorish, except Xicarró is a late 19th Century construction, a whole era apart from its mediaeval inspiration. Designed and constructed during a Romantic revival in which architects melded together the best of Moorish, Renaissance and Gothic styles, followers of this *Neo-Mudejar* movement built some of the most striking buildings in the whole of Spain. Some, like Antoni Gaudi's famous Casa Vincens, have become national treasures. Many, like the ubiquitous bullrings, grandiose universities (including the nearby University of Barcelona) as well as Xicarró itself, survive intact partly due to their 'listed' status and largely thanks to the enthusiasm of a handful of *aficionados*.



One of those is Glasgow-born businessman John Duffy, current owner of Can Xicarró, who recently finished its painstaking five-year restoration. Everything, even the chicken coops, have been totally overhauled and in some cases partially rebuilt. A cursory glance around will confirm that, despite the resplendent 19th century appearance, 21st century life is very much provided for. Harmoniously integrated with the salubrious, ornate interior are all the trappings - satellite TV, DSL connection, top quality AV, super-modern kitchen, en-suite jacuzzis - that you would expect of a luxury retreat of this stature. Of course, with nine distinctive bedroom suites at his disposal, John is rarely home alone. "I realized, as soon as I saw the place, that it had huge business potential. We are based in an area which is basically one of the best-kept secrets in Spain," he enthuses, "not only for the fantastic Penedes wines and wild, unspoiled coastline, but for it's proximity to Barcelona, surely one of the most exciting cities in the world."



Indeed, it's hard to believe the city could be so close-by, but then Can Xicarró is very much a self-contained complex. Apart from the house itself, the walled grounds are home to a quiet cottage, a gymnasium and a huge *bodega*, a beautiful, lofty barn built behind the main house used to store wine in days gone by. "It would be great to fill it with wine again," says John with a glint in his eye, "but we prefer to use the space for parties and conferences and so on, and it's largely because we have this space that Xicarró is so popular for wedding celebrations. We even have our own chapel, annexed to the main house, which we've just about finished restoring. Most of the time, especially in the summer, the villa is full of folks on holiday, or people staying here simply to enjoy a bit of peace and quiet."



Surprisingly, the villa hasn't always enjoyed such popularity. For over six centuries the surrounding fields were open farmland and the *Masia* an important producer, providing as it did for the nearby population of Vilanova i la Geltru. Records show that, just over a century ago, a local entrepreneur by the name of Manuel Olivella Samá took it upon himself to transform the main farm building into the veritable palace it is today, but its more recent history is even more phoenix-like. Having completed the project in 1903, the family of the apparently giant-sized Olivella Samá (who gave the property his ironical nickname - Xicarró - Catalan for "little man") seem to have died out within a decade, leaving the house and its vast walled gardens to fall into disrepair. By the time John took it on, it was in a sorry state. Looking at it now, in all its glory, it's hard to imagine it as a ruin, but that's exactly the way it had been heading. "The main house took the most work, of course, but when I recall the effort which went into irrigation and drainage - let alone planting and landscaping - to transform the parched wilderness that was the grounds into the garden oasis it is today, I'm amazed we ever got that far!"



The interior of the house is testament to the enthusiasm which drove the project that far and beyond. The white marble floor of the entrance hall extends to two huge living areas to either side which afford open views of grounds and open out into ample terraces. Upstairs, each of the individually themed bedroom suites has its own unique character; some have beautiful, gilded bathrooms, others (like the amazing 'Sultan' suite) are almost independent apartments, affording the visitor every conceivable luxury. Everywhere is adorned with exquisite *Mudejar* detail, Moorish decor and Arabian ornamentation, much of it contemporary. "Putting the finishing touches has been a real delight," explains John, "as we had the perfect excuse to travel North Africa, shopping in the *souks* for furniture and accessories. It's still possible to find amazing craftsmanship at incredible prices, so we invariably returned with crates full of intriguing bric-a-brac, vases, lamps and so on." The biggest and most impressive of which is the huge pendant lamp hanging in the great hall on the first floor. A vast brass-and-stained-glass structure, its thousand-kilometer journey must have been quite nerve-wracking, but seeing it suspended beneath the most beautiful, hand-painted, paneled ceiling, you'd be forgiven for thinking it had always been there. Along with the gilded marquetry lavished on the walls and door-frames, the whole room is an evocation of the wonderful excess of the *Mudejar* style.



Like all truly magical places, Xicarró never ceases to entertain the eye. Like a real haven, you always leave feeling rejuvenated, ready to face the world again. Quite unlike anywhere else, it combines these things in an unforgettable setting which beckons you back, certain that there is more to see, reassured that life can, for a while at least, be all wine and roses.

*Can Xicarró is available to let all-year-round for parties of 18 to 24, weddings, conferences, gastronomic and cultural events, Holidays etc.*

See <http://www.canxicarro.com> or contact:

*Pascale Kiger on +34 686 489 031 for further details, pricing and availability.*