

Palatial Life in Spanish Andalucía

I have been fortunate to have grown up in large houses, and after my parents separated when I was 14 until around 20, when not abroad in school I lived mostly with my father at my grandmother's house, a house palace in the centre of Seville, the "Casa Palacio de Guardiola".

Life in a palace provides many differences to life in an apartment, and in most cases, the difference is for the worse – at the palace. Most of all, there is the sense of homeliness, which in a palace is challenged simultaneously on many fronts – the cohabitation of a private life with a family office, with employees, business visitors, coming and going. There is also the cohabitation with the service, who live in several parts of the house, and you share the courtyards, the kitchen with them. There is also cohabitation with other members of an extended family, in various generations. Each member ends up in one corner of the house, and has their own bedroom, bathroom and sitting area, so for any particular member, the real part of the house they use has a particular path with some stops, and perhaps most of the house, is not for anyone.

Furthermore there is the aspect of your use of the house: a large palace is seldom the property of a single person, and many persons live in it. Property is something that is still mostly of the old. When you have access to property as a young person, many times it comes with ties – be it state taxes, a mortgage, maintenance demands, or pro-indiviso sharing with brothers and sisters. Older people are more likely to have lived in the house for longer, have made up their minds on what yes and what no, and have learned how to impose their rules – and this was truly our case.

Large houses have to be lived publicly – with at least people cleaning, maintaining and gardening, or you are bound to become the mad uncle in the attic with the rest of the house falling apart around you. The privacy is confined to your bedroom and bathroom, sometimes a small living room, adjacent to your bedroom, very much like in a hotel. To eat, you are served, and if out of hours you venture into the kitchen, you quickly realize it is definitely not your space – you do not know what's to be found in the fridge, nor where things are kept, so you get used to pretty quickly adapting your eating habits to the usual meals.

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The significance of a house is the part of the house that you use, what you use it for, and what demands it makes upon you. Perhaps the worst relation with a large house–palace nowadays is to be the owner. As an owner, the experience of the house cannot be disassociated with the direction it is taking. The large houses are always making demands on their owners – monetary and management – and unless the owner is sufficiently wealthy to be able to provide both without much effort, the demands become tiring, and the relationship of the owner towards the house turns into a challenge. A house too large is an instance of inappropriateness and an expression of waste, day after day.

Living in a house – palace turned into a hotel provides much of the positive experience without the negative of experiencing the palace as a member of the owning family. First, the costs of a hotel room night are negligible compared with the costs of owning and maintaining a house. Then the rest: no management demands, no efforts, and practically all the benefits: a great location in the centre of town, easy parking within the property, your own private room, gardened courtyards, ample, well decorated living rooms, nice people (they have been selected for niceness and it is their job to be nice), the ease of being served, no need to go shopping nor cooking, nor cleaning... in sum an amplification of the time available for yourself, with substitutes for your functions up to or better than those most people are accustomed to running their own home.

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