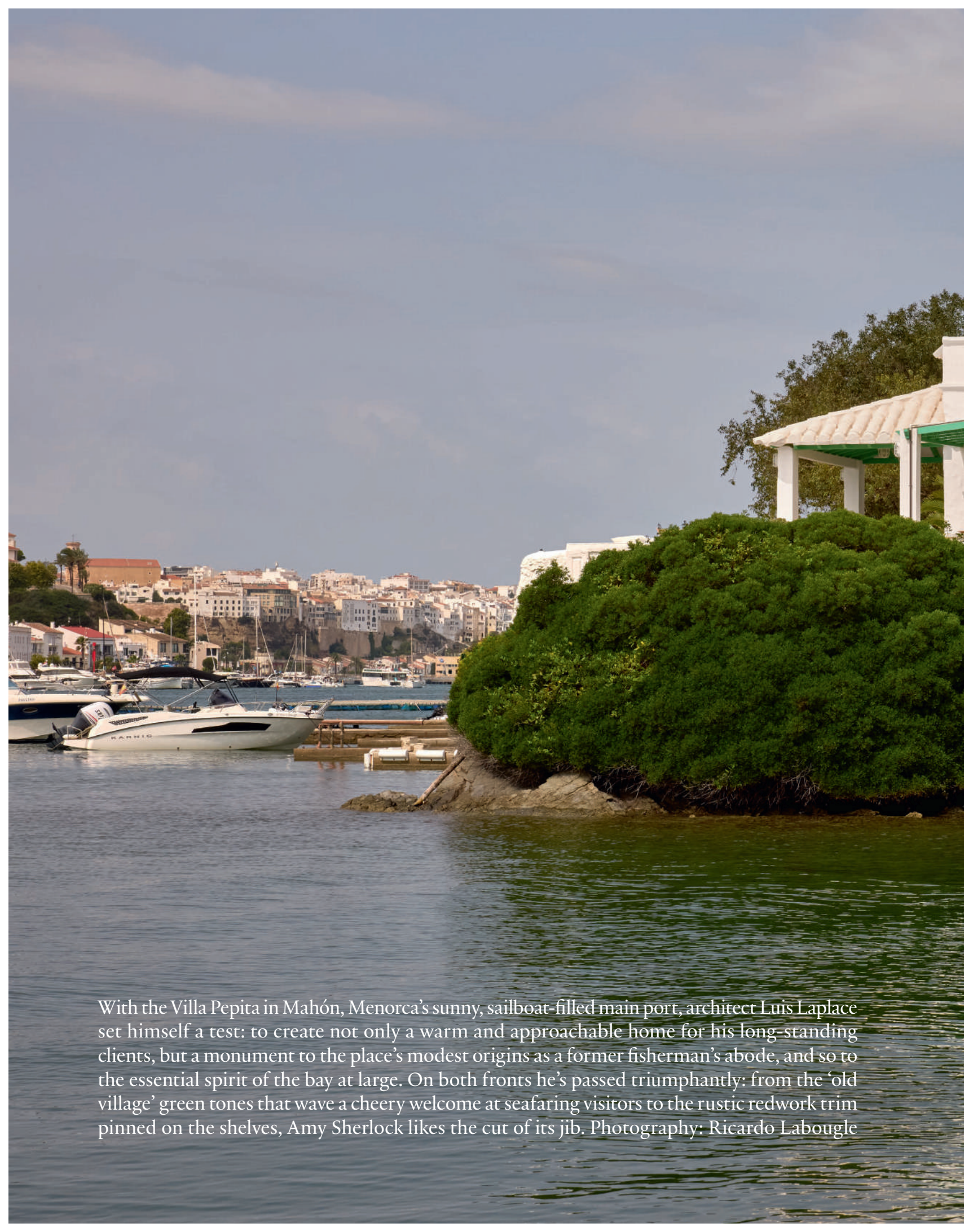


THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

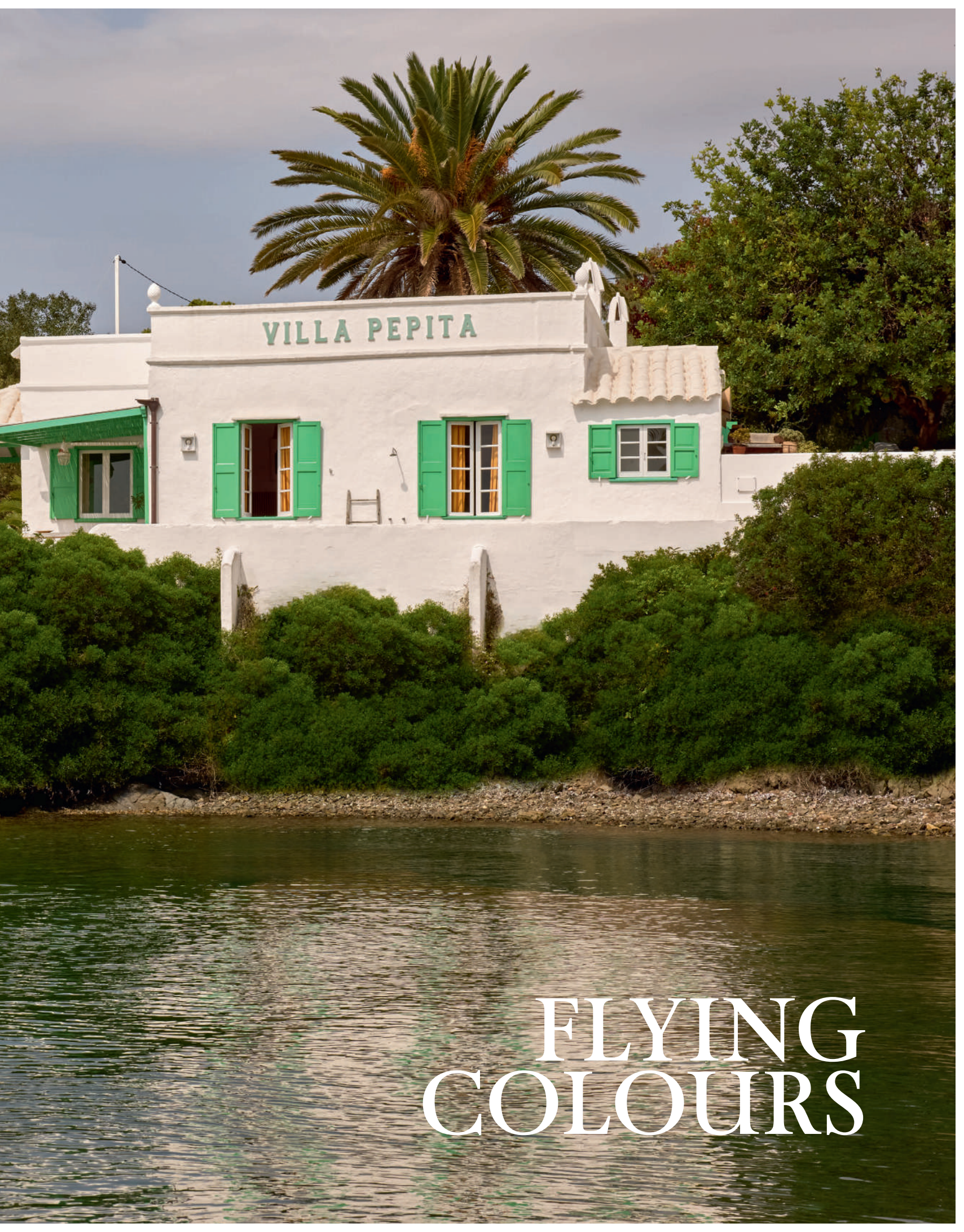
AUGUST 2025 £5.99

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS AUGUST 2025





With the Villa Pepita in Mahón, Menorca's sunny, sailboat-filled main port, architect Luis Laplace set himself a test: to create not only a warm and approachable home for his long-standing clients, but a monument to the place's modest origins as a former fisherman's abode, and so to the essential spirit of the bay at large. On both fronts he's passed triumphantly: from the 'old village' green tones that wave a cheery welcome at seafaring visitors to the rustic redwork trim pinned on the shelves, Amy Sherlock likes the cut of its jib. Photography: Ricardo Labougle



VILLA PEPITA

FLYING
COLOURS





Pages 48–49: Villa Pepita, given a human name like its neighbours, greets seafarers first. Previous pages: the living room's esparto-grass rug is from Antonia Molina Perez, while the 1950s trolley is by Mathieu Matégot. These pages, below: by a creamware-topped cabinet in the dining area is a wall of ceramics by David Zink Yi. Opposite: scalloped shelfliners echo the drape of cupboard covers in the kitchen



At the end of August, Máhon harbour fills with sails. From the terraces of Villa Pepita, on the far side of the bay, the classic yachts competing in the Copa del Rey regatta slice white through the limpid sea-sky blue as they come into port. 'It's one of the most beautiful experiences, seeing them coming in with their sails up. It is not often that boats can reach the very end of the port by sail,' says the architect Luis Laplace, who renovated the villa for two long-standing clients.

Just as the particular natural qualities of Máhon harbour – its unusual length and depth – allow this spectacular nautical display, so did Laplace draw on the architectural and cultural DNA of the 1920s *casita* in his redesign. 'It is a fisherman's hut,' he explains. 'It needed to keep that soul.' This meant, foremost, making a house that is in conversation with the sea. By creating several outdoor seating areas that give sun or shade at different times of day and are variously protected or exposed

to the Tramuntana, Menorca's infamous north wind, he has set a stage for living to the rhythm of the tide. If the house is unassuming from the road, it opens itself towards the water. Its name, Villa Pepita, painted along one side in sea-green lettering, is not visible from the land, instead offering its welcome to those who have toiled or adventured on the waves.

'The first thing you realise about this place is that you'll never feel alone,' Laplace tells me. The port of Máhon is vivid





Opposite: though modest by design, the kitchen feels abundant thanks to the haul of fresh vegetables the inhabitants frequently fetch from the island's food markets – echoed in the alimentary motifs on the antique redwork curtains. The collection of wooden mills on the shelf above adds to the sense of plenty. Below: in one of several outdoor seating areas, shade is provided by a porch made from reeds



and alive, from the small fishing boats that go out in the morning to the giant liners that bring tourists from Barcelona to the lobstermen and mussel-farmers, and the market on the harbour where fishermen and their wives sell the catch right off the boat – and, if you ask, it's easy to learn which is the best fish to cook on the grill, how many minutes in the pan one takes. 'It's like going back to our simple habits.'

Simple is a word that recurs in our conversation – to describe the sail-like awnings that cover an outdoor dining area, taking their cue from the design of the traditional Balearic *llaut*, or the shelving in the kitchen with its bounty of antique-market pottery, or the lifestyle of the original occupants of the house. 'You have to

remember that this place was not wealthy. So, for example, you will often see a house where one of the beams is actually the mast from a boat. The rest of the beams are squared and then you have one which is round. There's a very smart way of recycling or resolving daily problems.' To enter the spirit of the place, Laplace imagined a fictitious Doña Pepita and her fisherman husband, allowing their pragmatic approach to guide his own decision-making, a century later. The distinctive green (Laplace calls it 'kitchen green') of the woodwork, for instance, refers back to a time when that would have been the only paint colour available at the hardware store. 'Someone told me: "It looks like an old village." Yep, that's the point.'

Simplicity, of course, should not be confused with a lack of care or attention. As anyone who has ever made mayonnaise – that legendary gift of Máhon to world cuisine – can tell you, the basic recipes are often the hardest to get right. The Argentinian, Paris-based Laplace is perhaps best known for his expansive collaboration with the mega-gallery Hauser & Wirth, for whom, among other things, he transformed a hospital island in the centre of Máhon bay into a vast and supremely elegant art centre, which opened in 2021. But Villa Pepita, he says, 'took us out of our comfort zone. It required us to understand architecture from a different angle.' It would have been so easy, with a house like this, to have slipped into a

Below: through windows framed by tangerine-toned linen, the main bedroom looks out to sea from both aspects. Among the antique-market finds here is a 1960s Viennese dressing table in hand-lacquered metal. Opposite: in another bedroom, a poster for a Christina Quarles exhibition picks up the yellow of the curtains, while the table and chair's wicker rhymes with the pervasive rattan pendant lights



rope-and-rigging pastiche of a fisherman's hut. Instead, Laplace has cleverly updated the *casita* to 21st-century levels of comfort, fitting in an en suite bathroom for each of the three bedrooms and ensuring that the building is well ventilated to mitigate the humid Menorcan winters. He has breathed light and air into its bijou volumes. All of this is carefully considered, of course, but hardly high-tech. By design, Laplace's interventions have a kind of invisibility: 'I wanted it to feel as if I had not been there.'

'There is an easiness about this house that is very important,' Laplace goes on to explain. Easiness in the practical sense of being low-maintenance, so that its well-travelled occupants can open the

shutters after months away and know that everything is ready to go. Easiness in the sense of a place that allows an easy way of living – that takes the weight off. And easiness because it is a place that does not take itself too seriously, which is not overly studied or rigorous in its adherence to historical precedent. 'Obviously, it's no longer anything to do with fishing,' he explains. Deliciously, Laplace has not been denied the pleasure of a judicious sprinkling of kitsch in his choice of decorative objects – the rococo porcelain parrot who surveys comings and goings from his perch in the hall, for example, or the trim embroidered with vegetables that has been pinned along the kitchen shelves. This was not, alas, stitched by

Doña Pepita, doing needlework by candlelight as she waited for her husband to return home from the rough winter sea. But it keeps something of that spirit alive.

'I always refer to this house as a wish. It's an example of what people should be doing with the buildings here. The nature of this port is beautiful little houses and not modern luxury homes.' Laplace, who trained as an urbanist, finishes our conversation by describing another whitewashed *casita* on the rocks further around the coast. 'It's a small house, it's super-beautiful, and they are letting it fall apart. They don't realise that, fundamentally, this is Máhon's Eiffel Tower' ® To contact Luis Laplace, ring 00 33 1 53 16 12 96, or visit luislaplace.com

