



## **CASE STUDY: BARCELONA DIARY/Before & After**

### **SPANISH REVIVAL**

How a La Jolla Decorator Brightens an Urban Apartment in Spain

Successful La Jolla-based decorator Jeanine Naviaux recently completed an eye-opening makeover of a vintage apartment in the heart of Barcelona's L'Eixample District. The before and after images show the third-story unit's complete transformation from a dated bygone era look to a vivid contemporary style that dovetails with the new owners exuberant lifestyle.

Homeowner inherited the unit that's located in a classic old world neighborhood across from a cozy public park. The nine-story building is classic European in that the ground floor tenants include a bank, grocer, and a bar/restaurant for your morning croissant and cortado (espresso). The metro is located directly across the street.

"My client's use the apartment as a primary residence, but units like this are available all throughout Barcelona and can be excellent pied-a-terre's for anyone traveling to Europe on regular basis for business or pleasure," Naviaux says.

On this particular project, Naviaux's client was a single man, who basically wanted to get into the residence quickly. That was a



perfect arrangement for a decorator like Jeanine, who does not get into wall removals or general contracting.

“He wanted a bold contemporary look and said just do it. I was able to do quite a bit of flash with hot colors, sleeker furnishings and accessories that complete the package. I was in and out in three weeks over a four month period and everyone was happy.”

How does a San Diego decorator land an international client?

“Working with a client in Spain happened through family contacts in Barcelona. My grandfather is a Catalan and our U.S. family is always returning home on visits.”

But before she arrived in Barcelona, Naviaux called friends and family and asked for references of trades people, painters, plumbers and electricians. She had two requirements: they would be able to start the day after she arrived in late November and each subcontractor had worked with the family or friends for at least two generations. That way their reputations were on the line and the saying is, “The Catalans never forget.”

“Day one was early November, the painter and I removed framed pictures that had been on the walls for at least 30 years. It was amazing to see how black the walls were once we took them down.



Soon after, I ordered furniture from a company that belongs to my Spanish cousin and he gave me a generous 15 percent discount, plus he hauled away the old furnishings and delivered the new.

With two workers, it took five hours to empty the apartment. The non-antique armoire had to be cut in pieces and removed via three flights of stairs and a tiny elevator that barely fits two persons.

With an empty apartment, it became obvious that the original parquet floor needed to be re-sanded. Also, one of the two bathrooms had dated 1970's tile and had to be replaced with local tile.

Fixture-wise everything went downhill from there because everything that could have broken—did. Because the client's building is near the Mediterranean all the lighting fixtures oxidized and had to be replaced.

“I also had to replace the heater, two of the burners of the stove, the dishwasher and one of the electrical vertical blinds. “When I arrived back in January, the furniture had been delivered and I had one wall painted in the living room to bring out the color of the white built-ins. Also, I brought the red light hanging over the dining room table from Cost Plus in San Diego.”



One eye-opener in dealing with a European client, she learned real fast how badly the U.S. Dollar has been mugged versus the Euro. “A lot of the accessories, like pillows, blankets, accessories and vases, I bought in San Diego because it was actually cheaper to buy everything I could in San Diego, pay the \$125 for each suitcase, than buy it in Spain. Everything was three times more in cost than the previous time I had visited. “My client and crew found it entertaining for me to show up at the airport with four huge suitcases. It all worked out because the client was thrilled to be such a trend-setter with an American contemporary look. We never told where the accessories came from. We left his family and friends guessing.”

Not everything was replaced. “Where I did keep some of the old charm is the room with the silver/brown bedding, the lamp on the bedside is original silver from the 1940’s,” she said. And some of the accessories were from the owner’s own travels throughout the globe.

“The job was completed by the end of February and my client is the envy of the neighborhood. It was a fascinating and rewarding experience and one that I’d like to repeat,” she says.

At present, she is on her way to becoming a licensed interior designer. “I have an MBA in Finance so I understand how to run a business. When I was in college I paid my bills by being an



interior decorator. I realized I was pretty good at it and figured out a way to launch a career.”

Back home, Naviaux is busy with her long list of clients ranging from the San Diego, Newport Beach, Arizona and Europe.

“Lately, towards the end of the day, I find myself missing Barcelona and being able to run downstairs to have an espresso in that small restaurant overlooking the park.”

She figures to return to Europe some day, but already she’s planning for her next client shopping adventures in bazaar oriented cities of Chiang Mai, Thailand and Siam Repp, Cambodia.