

Chris and Simona

Photo by Robert López

UNTIDY BLOG / A HOUSE OF WOMEN

DECLARATION: I don't like the impersonal houses and I do not conceive that people might live in prefabricated houses, catalogue houses or falsely minimalistic ones. Although I do like many of those which appear in magazines, I can't really believe them; so much design, brand names, everything so precisely placed, so perfect... Having said that, and supposing quite a few of you have stopped reading me, I continue: because from now on I want to talk about houses that surprise me, those that are different and personal, that speak about their habitants, their lives and their history; houses that often are quite full of furniture, and why not say it, untidy. Houses of friends and acquaintances, anonymous, unknown artists, antique dealers, country folk, outsiders, extravagants and bohemians.

This is #Desordenado_blog (#untidy_blog) and our first guests are Chris Bartels, her mother Hanna, her daughters Ana and Simona, and her grand-daughter Judith, a family of German origin that lives in inner Majorca.

Pie de foto: Judith, Chris, Simona, Hanna, Ana and Noëlle.

When Chris arrived in Majorca in the seventies for a few days holiday, accompanied by some friends, the image that she had at that time of the island wasn't really good, but something happened when she arrived at the Port of Palma: the smell of salt water caused such effect that she was taken by the place. In a short while she bought, with her partner Bert, a tiny country house near Sineu.

Pie de foto: The garden.

In the Winter of 1978 Chris and Bert went to live there even though the house was practically in ruins. The first months they slept in sleeping bags, cuddled up near the fireplace of the old kitchen, which didn't even have a roof.

Pie de foto: The old kitchen, now restored.

Without any previous experience they themselves restored the house following the advice of an old builder from the village, reconstructing the roof, the ironwork, they fixed the falling walls, and even opened a road from the house to the main road; they washed with a watering can, and because they didn't have electricity, they used petrol lamps and cooked with a camping stove.

In 1980 her daughter Anna was born, and the following year Simona, who shared with their parents an unconventional and alternative life, without electricity, television, nor washing machine. "Little girls playing with branches and flowers", as a family friend would say, whilst they helped their father reconstruct the old walls of the house.

Pie de foto: Chris and her daughters Anna and Simone.

They even hanged a notice in the entrance of the road way announcing in German that they sold fresh eggs, some fellow countrymen would come and sit and talk and have a tea, but little more.

In the mid '80s Chris started selling antiques, first of all in the flea market in Inca, and later in the one in Palma.

At first sight, Chris didn't fit in much in the ambience. She was German and had a distinction and elegance not usual for that time and place.

Pie de foto: Flea market in Palma, 1993.

I think it was in 1993 when we met; at that time Robert and I lived in Palma and like good apprentice antiquarians, as we were at that time, the Saturday mornings we would go to the flea market.

I remember purchasing a manual loom from her; and years later, after finding her again in Sineu where she had opened a small and coquette antique shop, "Antik & Deco", I do remember buying a large quantity of wool of unbelievable colours that came from a long gone carpet factory from the village.

Pie de foto: Corner of Chris' bedroom.

Over the years Chris has become one of the dealers of reference of the island. On market Wednesdays she opens her shop in Sineu, on Sundays we find her in the flea market of Consell. She participates in annual antique fairs, travels regularly to France and Germany searching for furniture and unusual antiques.

In her house she combines perfectly Nordic objects, French garden furniture, materials like zinc, fabrics, books, ceramics, baroque carvings, dolls or antique paintings with the authentic Majorcan construction, that she has known how to respect and maintain like the fireplace in the old kitchen, the lime wash of the walls, or the Majorcan '*trespol*' made with lime and cobblestones.

Pie de foto: A typical Majorcan door with a German touch.

Pie de foto: Some nosy neighbours.

At Christmas they illuminate the house only with candles. This photo was taken on any given day at dusk, and that way we can imagine how it looks on Christmas Eve.

Pie de foto: Chris' bedroom, books, books and more books... a beautiful light that comes through the window at dusk.

A lived-in interior, quite baroque, a little mad, intentionally untidy, in a simple construction and as austere as the Majorcan typical country house.

I definitely love it, and without doubt is the reflection of the kind of life Chris had for many years with Bert, and now continues with her daughters, mother, and grand-daughter.

Pie de foto: Boxing gloves.

Pie de foto: Simona, Noëlle and Chris making magic.

Finally I stick with the observation that Chris made about the years lived in this house with her husband Bert, when their daughters were small, while they were reconstructing the house and at the same time fighting to live in a Majorca that wasn't always the Paradise dreamed of: "They were hard years, but the most happiest of my life".

Perharps that is the same that Mascha Kalenko wanted to say in her poem:

“From this extreme land I write you

In the shade of a tree that yesterday wasn't here

Since everything grows here suddently

Hardly a plan is made, and it is done.

Too vehement is our land,

I don't know if you can adapt yourself to this climate,

I admit I frequently fear it myself.

The sun burns,

Like wrath on fire,

And it ripens the grain, toasts the grain

To its taste. You can't trust it:

Today it represents love;

Tomorrow, hate.

From a nothing, from a fountain,

A swift river is born suddently,

It floods all the country around,
And then suddenly is gone in an instant.
All that you wish is fulfilled without delay,
Because the wishes have an evident power,
-I do not wish badness, thankfully,
Otherwise one would enter in a sea of blood.

Text: Marie-Noëlle Ginard Feron, September 2016.

Photos: Robert López Hinton.