



NEST A QUARTERLY OF INTERIORS



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Goya's Quinta del Sordo: Reconstructed

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Francisco Goya's Black Paintings are among his most haunting and cryptic images. They have been interpreted in many ways, from the wild imaginings of a lonely deaf man, to a commentary on the superstition and corruption prevalent in the Spain of Goya's time.¹ Imagine the impact of these paintings on a first-time visitor to the Quinta del Sordo, Goya's summer home. Upon entering a dimly lit space, mysterious figures would be barely discernible around the room. Then, as one's eyes adjusted to the darkness, the disturbing images would begin to materialize—Saturn gorging on the decapitated corpse of one of his children, then a witches' Sabbath, then others. In all, fourteen compositions were painted in oil directly on the plaster walls of this country home sometime between 1819 and 1823.² Because the paintings were stripped from the walls over a hundred years ago and the house has long since crumbled to dust, *nest's* only means of allowing its readers to view the paintings at the Quinta was to rebuild these lost rooms in miniature.³

Our sojourn back to 19th-century Madrid began naively. We thought this simple little project only meant amassing a few

pieces of information and images, fitting them neatly together and, in no time at all, our recreation would be complete. But like all old puzzles, pieces were missing from the box, and that's not apparent until you start putting the bits together. We began with a few contemporary descriptions of these rooms, an 1857 inventory of the property and, most importantly, fourteen photographs taken by J. Laurent in the 1860s.⁴

Laurent documented every picture individually and included a meter stick for scale.⁵ Each photograph shows an area slightly larger than the painting. The photographs, taken together, give us three pieces of the puzzle. First, two wall treatments are visible, verifying which paintings were grouped together and that they were in two separate rooms. Second, the meter stick lets us scale the images providing the minimum width, length, and height of the two rooms. Lastly, the photographs are clear enough to make out the decorative wall treatment for each room. One had a marble frieze, diaper-patterned wallpaper, and simple moldings surrounding Goya's works, while the other had an architectural frieze, floral wallpaper, and more

THIS ELEVATION, RECONSTRUCTED FROM 1860s PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATES THE WALLPAPER SCHEME FOR ONE OF TWO ROOMS THAT HELD GOYA'S BLACK PAINTINGS IN HIS VANISHED COUNTRY HOUSE, THE QUINTA DEL SORDO, OUTSIDE OF MADRID.

