

## The Royal Palace of Madrid

The Royal Palace of Madrid is the official residence of His Majesty The King of Spain, who makes use of it for official ceremonies, though not residing there.

The origins of the Palace go back to the 9th century, during which the Islamic Kingdom of Toledo built a defensive fort on the site, later used by the Kings of Castile. It was on this ancient fortress that the Old Alcázar was constructed in the 16th century. The Alcázar was destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve, 1734, and King Philip V wished for a New Palace occupying the same site. The entire complex was built with stone and brick vaulting, without any wood, so that no future fire could destroy it. Building work took from 1738 to 1755, and King Charles III took up residence in the Palace in 1764.

The decoration of the Royal Palace of Madrid has evolved over time in accordance with the styles prevailing at different moments. From the reign of King Charles III are the Throne Room, the King's Chamber (or Gasparini Room), and the Porcelain Room, a masterpiece produced by the Royal Factory of El Buen Retiro. Rich materials were used for the construction and decoration: Spanish marble, gilded stucco, mahogany in doors and windows; and important works of art include frescoes by the principal artists of the period, Giaquinto, Tiepolo and Mengs, and their Spanish followers Bayeu and Maella.

### **The Throne Room**

The decoration of the Throne Room has been preserved intact from the reign of King Charles III. The ceiling fresco, completed in 1766, was painted by Tiepolo; it represents the Allegory of the Spanish Monarchy, with personifications of the different Spanish possessions around the world. The carved gilt furniture and the embroidery of the velvet wall-hangings were manufactured in Naples, where Charles III had reigned previously. The mirrors, enormous for the period, are from the Royal Factory of La Granja, and the rock-crystal chandeliers were purchased in Venice in 1780. In 1650, Velázquez brought from Rome the bronze lions flanking the throne dais; originally, they were placed in the Throne Room of the Old Alcázar, which was on virtually the same site.



### **Surroundings**

The Palace gardens are known as the Campo del Moro ("The Moor's Field"), but they originated during the reign of King Philip II. Their present appearance dates from 1890. The square situated to the east of the Palace, and known for this reason as the Plaza de Oriente, has recently been remodelled. It contains several of the statues of the kings of Spain carved during the reign of King Ferdinand VI.

## El Prado Palace

Set in the wooded parkland known as the Monte de El Pardo, an area of some 16,000 hectares to the North of Madrid, is the Palace of La Zarzuela, residence of Their Majesties The King and Queen of Spain.

During the Middle Ages, this parkland (which even today preserves considerable ecological treasures) was used by the Kings of Castile. Over the centuries a small settlement developed, where the Casita del Príncipe ("Prince's House") is situated, together with the Convent of Concepcionistas Franciscanas and the Capuchin Friary founded by King Philip III. The latter contains some notable works of art, including a sculpture of the Recumbent Christ, by Gregorio Fernández, and the Virgin of the Angels, by Francisco de Rizi.

In the first half of the 15th century, King Henry IV of Castile ordered a small castle to be built at El Pardo, and this was rebuilt by the Emperor Charles V in 1553, being completed in 1558 (in the reign of Philip II).

The Palace of El Pardo inherited its general layout from the mediaeval castle, with towers at the corners and surrounded by a moat.

Still preserved from the interior decoration of the Palace, is a ceiling painted by Gaspar Becerra during the reign of King Philip II, and paintings from the reign of King Philip III by artists such as Carducho and Cabrera.

A prominent feature of the interior decoration of the Palace is the tapestry collection, woven at the Royal Factory of Madrid following cartoons painted by Bayeu, Castillo and above all Goya, who produced five of his best-known series for this Palace.



Among the other works of art displayed here is an equestrian portrait of Don Juan José de Austria, by Ribera, La Cuerna by Velázquez, and furniture dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Since 1983 the Palace has been adapted as a residence for foreign Heads of State on official visits to Spain.

Apart from the palacete (or villa), the property includes wooded parkland and gardens with ornamental fountains.

The interior of the palacete is decorated with 19th-century wallpaper, furniture, paintings and carpets from the reigns of Ferdinand VII and Isabel II.