

Jorge Penadés designs a space for reflection, learning and encounter, drawing inspiration from the kitchen as a place of care, conversation and daily life.

THE REINA SOFÍA PRESENTS ALHACENA, A WELCOMING NEW SPACE OF REST WITHIN *COLLECTION. CONTEMPORARY ART: 1975–PRESENT*



Alhacena, on Floor 4 of the Museo Reina Sofía's Sabatini Building. Photograph: Germán Saiz

- Through this space, the Museo goes one step further, showing not only art but also care for those who come to observe it.
- The project introduces pieces and materials into the Reina Sofía by some of the most salient imprints in Spanish contemporary design.
- Sustainability runs centrally through *Alhacena* (Pantry): a large-scale, twenty-nine-metre *armoire* built from surplus wooden boards.

Every house has a kitchen, a place of conversation, learning, work, rest and daily occurrences. With Alhacena, pantry or cupboard in English, the Museo Reina Sofía incorporates this spirit into the exhibition route of *Collection. Contemporary Art: 1975–Present*. Designed by Jorge Penadés (Málaga, 1985), this new and welcoming room introduces, for the first time, a domestic element to the Museo, offering a place of restful reflection, shared conversation or somewhere to just be. For visiting a museum also means to inhabit it.

Located on Floor 4 of the Sabatini Building, Alhacena was conceived by Jorge Penadés after he won an open call established jointly by the Museo Reina Sofía and MANERA Magazine to create a new space to enhance the visitor experience, offering the public the chance to take a break from the artworks on display. Thus, Alhacena is a place for learning, encounter, reading, education activities and rest.

Penadés's submission was selected for more comprehensively meeting the functional, museographic and sustainable criteria established for the space, with the jury emphasising its capacity to factor the idea of domesticity into the Museo, its modular and repairable system, and its reuse of materials, as well as its sensibility towards the Sabatini Building's historical architecture.

The kitchen as a space of co-existence

The project takes as its frame of reference the Mediterranean kitchen as a space of co-existence, exchange and day-to-day life. Anchoring the work in this idea, Jorge Penadés developed an infrastructure made up of *armoires*, shelves and seats which adapt to different visitors, ages and uses. As in a kitchen, the space works at once as place of production, learning, conversation and encounter.

Moreover, the project engages in a direct dialogue with the Sabatini Building as Penadés recovers wood and places it front and centre, establishing a connection with the building's old laundry area, one of the few spaces in which the original wooden furniture from the former Hospital de San Carlos — today the Museo's Protocol Room — is conserved. The result is a contemporary intervention which brings into play warmth and closeness, yet without competing with the existing architecture.

Wood as memory and resource

Sustainability is one of the core strands running through Alhacena, which encompasses a large, twenty-nine-metre *armoire* built from Garnica wooden boards, surplus material in the manufacturing process and newly applied outside the industrial circuits for which it was initially intended. The project shows how these resources can find a new life inside a cultural institution — an international reference point — materialising into an example of the circular economy applied to contemporary design.

Built by Carsan Ebanistería, the piece incorporates a site-specific intervention developed by Jorge Penadés, based on the very nature of the material. After digitising the original texture of the poplar wood making up the nucleus of the boards, it has been reinterpreted using computer-aided machining on the visible surfaces, resulting in an abstract landscape of grains, voids and reliefs across the entire piece and transforming a material which is customarily hidden into the main visual language of the project.

Spanish contemporary design in the Collection

Alhacena also incorporates into the Museo's exhibition arrangement a selection of materials, objects and pieces made by distinguished companies within Spanish contemporary design.

The 220 plywood panels provided by Garnica have been transformed into a large-scale pantry-cupboard, twenty-nine metres in length, by Carsan Ebanistería, articulating the whole space, and incorporating ironwork supplied by Häfele.

The textile elements have also been developed and made specifically for the project by Grupo Lamadrid, with curtains that enable the room to be visually modulated and to create dark conditions for audiovisual activities.

This restful furniture is completed with special-edition Vibe sofas and armchairs produced by Sancal and worked upon by Jorge Penadés, while Nanimarquina supplies Chillida Dibujo Tinta 1957 rugs, designed from works by Basque artist Eduardo Chillida. The lighting is formed via a selection of Bicoca, Copérnica and Marset Babila lamps, designed to create warm, welcoming atmospheres.

A welcoming room in collaboration

Beyond their functional role, these pieces help to build an atmosphere devised for rest, reading, conversation and encounter. Thus, Alhacena demonstrates how design can play an active role inside a cultural institution, expanding relational forms between visitor and museum.

By way of this intervention, the Reina Sofía enhances its reflection on how we inhabit cultural spaces and reinforces its will to become not only a place to contemplate art, but also a place to be, encounter and feel welcome.

Interview with Museo Reina Sofía director, Manuel Segade

“ALHACENA RECOVERS A DOMESTICITY THAT WAS AT THE ROOT OF MUSEUMS”

- **“A MUSEUM MUST HAVE STATE MONUMENTALITY AND THE COMFORT OF THE DOMESTIC SPHERE. PERHAPS OUR MAJOR MUSEUMS IN SPAIN HAVE NEGLECTED THIS DOMESTICITY”.**
- **“VISITORS TO THE MUSEO DO NOT ONLY GAZE; THEY MOVE, REST, CONVERSE AND ARE PART OF THE EXHIBITION”.**
- **“ALHACENA WORKS AS A KIND OF MIRROR ON THE DOMESTIC MEMORY OF THE SABATINI BUILDING. THE HISTORY OF THE FORMER HOSPITAL REMINDS US THAT THE BUILDING ALSO HAD A KITCHEN, WHITE LINENS AND SPACES OF CARE”**

How did the idea of *Alhacena* come about?

Manuel Segade: the idea to produce a site-specific space for Floor 4 of the Museo is related to a very specific architectural characteristic of the Reina Sofía, an enormous museum and, undoubtedly, the only one of its size in the world without a large public circulation hall.

This means that we lack a clear space in which to welcome groups and a place where people can stop to think about what they're going to do across their visit. Each of the Museo's floors has a surface area of 3,000 square metres, so the visiting experience is extremely broad. Giving up an exhibition space, which for any museum is highly cherished, to turn it into a welcoming space is a direct response to this need.

We were looking for a space with natural light, because the Museo doesn't necessarily have to be a place closed off to the outside. Here it was especially important to create a time for visitors to take stock: the beginning of an exhibition route, a place to rest, read an exhibition leaflet or spend a little more time deciding how to move around the Museo.

There was also a continual request from our education teams to have more diverse multi-use spaces, beyond the traditional workshop. Places where a group can meet, where people can recharge, make comments or engage in the conversations that arise around an exhibition. The Museo brings together many communities: tourists, residents from the Lavapiés neighbourhood, collectives linked to the Museo's programme, different types of visitors, all of which led us to think about a more domestic space.

There is a phrase which is repeated over and over: when museums came into being in the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment and the Encyclopaedia, it was said that a museum must have a State monumentality and the comfort of the domestic sphere. Perhaps our major museums in Spain have neglected this domesticity. Alhacena was the perfect opportunity to recover it.

Why was it important for this space to be inside *Collection 1975–Present*?

Manuel Segade: in contemporary art museums — that is, those referring to present-day art and art closest to us in time — there is always a very direct relationship with the spectator's body. Art is no longer approached by solely observing works, as previously in a traditional museum, because you move around them, feel them with your body, establish a relationship with other visitors and, to a certain degree, when you enter an exhibition you become part of it.

On this floor, there is something key: thinking that the viewers, the visitors, the public, have a body. They create a highly specific social choreography when they move around the spaces in the Museo. If we centre an entire floor on speaking about the last fifty years, that which we call the regime of contemporary art, then that body must also be acknowledged in the visiting experience.

On the same floor there is a section devoted to emotions and affects in art, focused on 1970s feminism and feminism's second wave. That part speaks of how a traditional genre such as the nude is outmoded and the body appears as a place where art happens, not only on a canvas but also in a sculpture; it occurs on a person's body.

Understanding the body as a social space means having a place such as this becomes necessary. Spectators enter the Museo with a body with physical needs: to rest, sit, move, interact with others. Yet this body is also necessarily social. It is not an isolated, individual body, which is why it was important to create a space where other exchanges and other ways of relating could come about.

Moreover, in speaking about the past fifty years in Spain we also speak about the Transition, the end of Francoism and the slow construction of democracy. A construction that is collective and remains politically complex. This made having a place for collectiveness particularly relevant, a space to exchange, converse, discuss and create a more democratic relationship between those who come to the Museo and the different collectives the Museo works with.

What does Alhacena contribute to the visitor experience? What can happen in this space?

Manuel Segade: Alhacena is various things. It is, literally, a living room. I always think that museums must be places to lose track of time in; that is key. We have productive time with our work, productive time with our partner, productive time everywhere. Suddenly, a museum should be a place where time is something else. A place of rest.

Alhacena is also a distribution point. Here a group can start a guided tour and receive instructions on how to move through the rooms. It can be a place to introduce Spanish art to visitors from other contexts and who are unfamiliar with our environment. On a floor stretching across 3,000 square metres, this orientational aspect is very important.

And perhaps the most relevant aspect is its educational and pedagogical scope. Here, encounters with artists present in the Collections can arise, and so can conversations on their works that happen at another pace, as well as workshops, specific activities and even one-off screenings. A multi-purpose space in the broadest sense.

I believe that a museum's spaces are spaces of radical imagination. Perhaps we don't yet know the uses that this place could have. Because of Jorge Penadés's conception of a structure that is modular and can be re-organised and re-configured, Alhacena allows for many situations: from stands to tables, tables to sofas, and sofas to rugs on which to lie. All types of visitors, ages, accessibilities and bodies can find a different way to be here.

Undoubtedly, the use of space will exceed expectations, will go beyond what we have imagined with an architectural project, beyond the Museo's initial design. And that is also part of its meaning.

What role must museums play today beyond conserving and exhibiting artworks?

Manuel Segade: the role of museums has always been the same, actually. Museums are a space of tradition, a place where history becomes matter, is found and, to some extent, pains us. They have that confrontation with the past, of understanding why we have arrived where we are and to construct possible futures.

But for me the most important role played by museums, particularly contemporary art museums, is to preserve the complexity of the world. We are at a time in which black-and-white visions, or dark grey, are too prevalent. A museum must be a place that conserves diversity, variety, difference and that confrontation with the other.

Underlying this is a question around what art is and what it is for. Male and female artists create representations of the world we are unfamiliar with, which seem strange to us; they make us see life or reality differently. Confronting this way of understanding the world in

ways that differ to ours is increasingly more important in society. That is a core public and democratic role for a museum.

If I had to put it simply, I would say that museums are going to learn to be, at least, bilingual in the world.

How does Alhacena tie in with the history of the Sabatini Building and the old protocol rooms?

Manuel Segade: the Sabatini Building was, for centuries, the Hospital General de Madrid. In fact, a hospital established for people with modest means in the city. That's important because this place also had its own domestic layers of use: kitchens, work spaces, public and private areas linked to the staff working here. This all lends the building a very specific historical memory.

The Sabatini Building has two special wings, known as the protocol rooms, which conserve the original woodwork. These spaces are covered in wood and have unique wrought-iron spiral staircases. For years they were thought to have been the wings of the former hospital's chemist, but in fact these were areas where white linens were kept: bedsheets, towels, fabrics used to care for the sick. That which was in contact with the body and must be kept clean at all times.

When we started to think about this space on the fourth floor, those protocol rooms, located on the first, were very present. We were concerned with the warmth of the wood, this place full of pantries, spaces of shelter and storage. The model was apt for imagining a room in which, at any point, modules able to transform the use of light could appear. Therefore, Alhacena works as a kind of mirror.

When Jorge Penadés started to work on the idea of the kitchen, it helped to, literally, understand in what direction to move. A kitchen as such is impossible inside a museum owing to the strict conditions of temperature and moisture and, clearly for conservation purposes, we cannot have water near the artworks. However, gradually this idea of the Alhacena, the pantry, a wonderful word in Spanish with Arabic roots, arose, recalling the origins of domestic space in Spain and the mix of races we come from.

This idea translates well in carpentry work. The space almost becomes a Rorschach test: a place where each person can project what they bring with them. The interpretation is not limited, and each visitor can have their own reading. This perspectivist vision, that each person can find a different way of inhabiting the space, is what lends it a richness.

Interview with Jorge Penadés, the designer of *Alhacena*

“IN SOME WAYS THE KITCHEN IS THE HOME’S PUBLIC SQUARE. I WAS CONCERNED WITH MAKING ALHACENA LESS MUSEUM AND MORE HOME”

- **“ALHACENA COMES FROM A VERY SIMPLE IDEA: A PLACE IN WHICH TO WORK, SHARE, STORE, CONVERSE AND STAY”.**
- **“I WAS CONCERNED WITH WORKING WITH MATERIALS WITH A HISTORY BEHIND THEM. THAT WHICH EXISTS ALWAYS LENDS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE MANUFACTURED FROM SCRATCH. WE CANNOT KEEP THINKING ABOUT DESIGN SOLELY FROM PRODUCING NEW THINGS”.**
- **“THE BRANDS HAVE NOT ONLY SUPPLIED MATERIALS BUT ALSO CRAFT, TECHNICAL PRECISION AND KNOWLEDGE. ALHACENA IS BUILT BY MANY HANDS, MANY COMPANIES AND MANY WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING DESIGN”.**

Jorge Penadés (Málaga, 1985) is a Spanish designer of international renown. His work lies at the crossroads between design, material research and sustainability, exploring new ways of understanding resources, production processes and the objects that surround us. Through a methodology based on the analysis of materials and their life cycles, he has developed projects for brands such as Camper, BD Barcelona and CC tapis and has shown his work at institutions that include The Future Perfect, Mudac Lausanne, Vitra Design Museum and the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. With Alhacena he transfers his thinking to the museum space, transforming surplus materials from production into a domestic infrastructure conceived for encounter, learning and rest.

What was behind your decision to use the kitchen as the starting point of this project?

Jorge Penadés: the kitchen is the operational hub of any domestic environment. In our Mediterranean culture, it gathers different activities: it operates as a workshop of production and as a meeting point, a place of conversation, a social setting. In some ways, it is like a public square.

I was interested in transferring that quality over to the Museo. Thinking about a welcoming space not as an institutional waiting room, but as an active place of encounter, exchange and collective learning. A space that is less museum, in the more conventional sense of the word, and more home. It didn't involve reproducing a kitchen literally, but incorporating its logic: a place in which to work, share, store, converse and be.

The core idea of Alhacena is in relation to that, to a space that contains, orders and allows different things to happen. In a house, the kitchen is not only a functional room; it is also a place where daily ties are forged. That was the environment I wanted to take into the Museo.

How can design contribute to a museum being closer, more welcoming and inhabitable?

Jorge Penadés: design has the capacity to create new forms of relationships between people and spaces, as well as helping us to rethink or question certain conventions, certain established ways of using places.

In this project I was concerned with this reception room being that: a space in which to be, to feel comfortable, to spend time and enjoy a moment. Not simply a room of transit connecting point A to point B. The aim was for visitors to feel they are entering an environment designed to be inhabited, not only passed through.

Design can act as a catalyst for this to occur. It can invite people to stay longer in the Museo, to stop, absorb what they have seen or prepare for what they are going to see next. A structure, a scale, a texture or a way of organising space can mean it doesn't pass someone by, can mean they understand that this place is also designed for them.

That's why Alhacena transfers over to the Museo certain logics of the home: the comfort, presence, the conversation, the chance to be with others without a schedule, necessarily. It is not about a museum no longer being a museum, but rather introducing a closer way of being there.

The reuse of materials plays a key role in this undertaking. How important is this aspect within your way of understanding architecture and design?

Jorge Penadés: this reuse is not only related to the project's environmental responsibility, although it is a core aspect. It is also related to a way of understanding design and architecture from that which exists.

I'm concerned with working with materials that contain a story, a memory and a previous condition because they incorporate layers of meaning which are impossible to find in new materials. That which exists always contributes something that cannot be made from scratch. It has previous information, a previous life, a series of conditions the project can acknowledge and activate.

In Alhacena reusing materials allows me to establish a more honest and more aware relationship with resources. Today's logic can be no other. We cannot carry on thinking of design only through producing something new, but instead from the capacity of utilising what already exists, to the benefit of a project.

It also bears a direct relationship with the idea of the Mediterranean kitchen, understood as a culture of reusing. The pantry keeps, conserves and allows things to be used again. Therefore, the project doesn't only speak of sustainability in technical terms, but also a more daily material that is closer and with greater awareness.

One of the most unique gestures of the project is work on the boards' surface. How did this decision arise?

Jorge Penadés: the project starts out with 220 wooden boards donated by Garnica, boards with poplar wood at their core, and with an upper and lower layer of oak. The first question we asked in our study was around why oak is considered "noble" and is shown as a visible finish, whereas poplar, most of the board, remains hidden inside.

We were concerned with questioning material hierarchy. Why does one wood deserve to be on the surface and the other one doesn't? Why is one displayed and the other one concealed? And from there a very clear idea emerged: to return a visual dignity to poplar.

What we did was to take photographs of poplar textures, digitise them and then transfer them to the surface of the board with CNC machining. The machine removes part of the oak layer and draws upon the poplar texture at the heart of the board. In other words, the hidden material appears on the surface again.

For me, this gesture is a good summary of the project: it is not just concerned with decorating wood, but about revealing an internal condition of the material, of making visible that which is normally hidden. To some degree Alhacena works with this same logic: to give value to that which was already there, to what is often considered secondary, daily or invisible.

Alhacena not only incorporates a new way of inhabiting the Museo but also brings into the Reina Sofía materials and pieces by some of the salient figures in Spanish design. How was a collective project of this kind assembled and what have the contributors added to the final result?

Jorge Penadés: from the start we saw Alhacena as a project which must be collective. A space of this nature cannot be built unilaterally as it requires many different forms of knowledge: materials, craft, technical knowledge, industrial experience, furniture, lighting, textiles, ironwork, carpentry.

I wanted the project to work as a kind of cartography of contemporary Spanish design. Not as the sum of isolated pieces, but as a set of objects, materials and knowledge from different geographical areas in the country that were able to build a common language.

Each contributor has added a very specific part to the end result, as well as a form of knowledge. The brands have materially enriched the space, have brought their craft, technical precision and a more diverse, multi-voiced aspect. This as a whole allows Alhacena to be a contemporary and close entity.

The aim was for all these contributions to reinforce this domestic aspect and the idea of hospitality that runs through the project. For the space to not look like a catalogue of products, but to be a cohesive place built by many hands, many companies and many ways of understanding design.

What would you like visitors to feel as they enter Alhacena?

Jorge Penadés: I'd like them to understand that they are not only in a place of circulation but in a place where they can stop, rest, talk, read, learn, or just be. That the Museo also offers moments of reflection and not just exhibition routes.

Alhacena is devised for visitors to appropriate the space in a natural way, so they don't feel everything is established or programmed. Therefore, a main concern of mine is that the project can have uses we don't yet imagine. That the Museo and its teams and visitors can activate it over time.

If a kitchen is a place where different things are always happening, Alhacena must also work in this way: as a structure ready to embrace different situations. A space which does not impose one sole use but instead allows for different ways of inhabiting the Museo.

Design and craft in Alhacena

Carsan Ebanistería

Turning matter into architecture

Managed by Ezequiel and Nicolás Mochales, Carsan Ebanistería is a Madrid workshop specialised in tailor-made carpentry and cabinetmaking. With broad experience in making unique projects for the design sphere, architecture and interior design, they have been responsible for making, mounting and the CNC machining of *Alhacena*, designed by Jorge Penadés.

As a finishing touch, Carsan developed, with Jorge, a digitised texture from poplar wood: a landscape of mechanised grains, voids and reliefs which reveal the internal structure of the material, making visible that which remains hidden. The result transforms research on identity, memory and expression into an architectural intervention, where the surface ceases to be a decorative resource and becomes a narrative and structural element.

Garnica

Wood as the raw material

An international reference point in manufacturing innovative plywood, Garnica works exclusively with wood from sustainable and renewable sources, consolidating them as one of the leading companies in the sector globally.

Garnica has supplied 220 Elegance White Oak plywood boards which form the main structure of *Alhacena*. This material combines the warm, elegant aesthetic of white oak with the stability, lightness and resistance of high-grade plywood, turning it into a key element for constructing space. Its versatility resolves the technical requirements and visual qualities of the project.

Grupo Lamadrid

Curtains to transform and welcome

With more than fifty years behind it, Grupo Lamadrid is one of the benchmark Spanish companies in textile design for high-end décor, and is known for the quality, innovation and elegance of its fabrics.

Grupo Lamadrid has developed and produced tailor-made textile elements for Alhacena, supplying both the curtains to separate space and the blackout systems allowing the room to be set up for audiovisual activities and screenings. Therefore, fire-resistant, blue-toned Pope FR and Blockbuster materials have been used, selected for their capacity to lend warmth, acoustic comfort and flexibility when using the space. The production has been overseen by D+D, directed by Nacho López.

Marset

Light to build atmospheres

Founded in Barcelona and taking over an industrial tradition that dates back to the 1940s, Marset is today an internationally renowned lighting company through its capacity to combine technological innovation, light quality and design excellence.

Marset endows Alhacena with a selection of Bicoca, Copérnica and Babila light fixtures, each one responding differently to a way of inhabiting the space, offering reading light, atmospheric lighting and meeting points that facilitate rest, conversation and presence. Beyond their technical role, the lamps help to build a warm, domestic atmosphere, strengthening the will of the project to bring the Museo closer to daily life.

Nanimarquina

A Chillida footprint on the floor

Specialised in creating signature rugs, Nanimarquina excels in its capacity to unite craft, innovation, sustainability and creative excellence. It contributes to Alhacena with Chillida Dibujo Tinta 1957 rugs, designed from the original drawing by Eduardo Chillida. Hand-crafted from New Zealand wool using the hand tufted technique, these pieces imbue the visual language with expressive force and the characteristic lines of the Basque artist. The rugs, integrated into the rest area, provide comfort, warmth and a cultural dimension which connects the reception room with the Museo's own Collection.

Sancal

Seating for conversation

Few companies better represent the evolution of Spanish furniture design than Sancal, which has adroitly combined industry, creativity and local production since 1973 on its premises in Yecla. Sancal participates in the project with special-edition Vibe sofas and armchairs, reinterpreted by Jorge Penadés for Alhacena. Starting from the original design of Estudio Sancal, the pieces have been worked upon using a graphic design that employs the patchwork technique, incorporating a large blue circle into the tapestry to turn the furniture into an active element of space.

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Press material



With the collaboration of:

Carsan Ebanistería

Garnica

Grupo Lamadrid

Häfele

Marset

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