

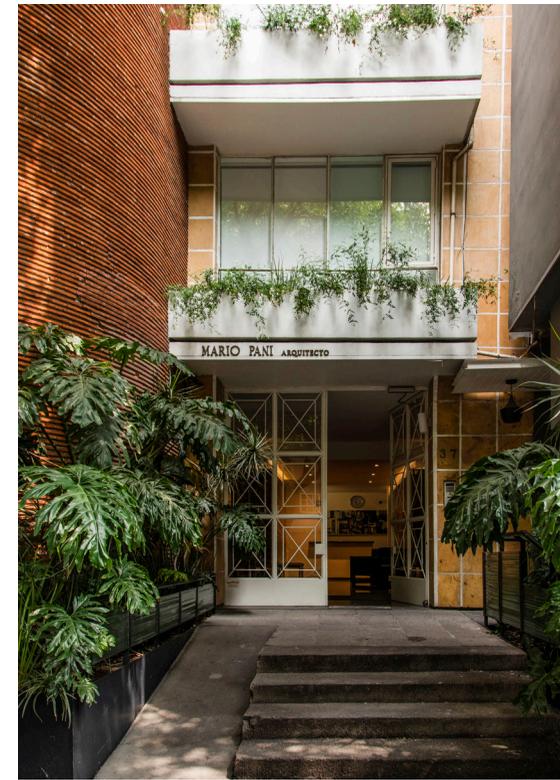
Artists in residence

An overlooked pioneer of mid-century modernism, Mario Pani filled Mexico City with spacious, meticulously designed apartments now cherished by the creatives who call them home.

By Ed Stocker
Photography Ana Hop



(1) Yolanda Jimenez (2) Large living area in Georgina Prieto and Sebastián Vizcaino's apartment (3) Yolanda Jimenez's dining room (4) Pani's 1940s Cuauhtémoc apartment building



Yolanda Jimenez is what you might call a Mario Pani mega-fan. Step inside her Mexico City apartment, designed by Pani, a modernist architect and urbanist, and you'll want to join the club. Stairs lead up from the front door to an ample living room dominated by a creamy-pink sofa and an antique Moroccan rug containing shocks of pink, yellow and brown. The first things to draw the eye are the unusually high ceilings, while a set of curved windows allows light to filter in through the trees outside. "I'd wanted to live in this building for years," says Jimenez.

Her apartment block in the capital's Cuauhtémoc district was built between 1943 and 1945 and, all red-brick and glass, is one of the finest examples of Pani's residential work. The mid-century renaissance man, who was Mexico's answer to



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Le Corbusier, experimented with new urban models during Mexico's boom years. These ranged from clever apartment to housing mega-projects such as the vast Conjunto Urbano Nonoalco Tlatelolco, also in Mexico City. For Jimenez it's a wonder that Pani never received the same global recognition as compatriots Luis Barragán and Pedro Ramírez Vázquez. "Barragán's spaces are contrived," she says. "His personality tells you where to look. But Pani was open; you feel relaxed."

Over several days spent in the Mexican capital visiting three different Pani buildings, a clear picture emerges of the type of residents attracted to them. Almost uniquely drawn from the creative industries, they are gallerists, photographers, artists and architects – or in Jimenez's

case, the owner of a mezcal brand. Everyone states similar reasons for wanting to be in a Pani apartment: in an ever-denser metropolis such as Mexico City, it's almost impossible to find buildings with the same generosity of space and attention to detail. "Pani thought about the moments that you spend in a place and your mindset," says Jimenez. "I don't think architecture is like that any more."

Pani often designed with a technique that he called *dos en tres* (two in three), which meant laying out two apartments over three floors and playing with room dimensions to create different moods in each. In Jimenez's home, steps up from the living room – where a print and an original by German-Mexican artist Mathias Goeritz (a frequent Pani collaborator) hang on the wall – lead to a floor



that's been cut away to allow the room below to reach its impressive heights.

Here you'll find more intimate areas, including a dining room, guest bedroom and what Jimenez refers to as the library. Packed with *objets*, from Mayan ceramics to antique masks, there are chairs by Don Shoemaker, a Nebraskan who moved to Mexico and crafted modernist pieces in dark wood. It's in this room that Jimenez gets to appreciate her "favourite thing by Pani": the curving shape of the building's brickwork exterior, viewable to the side of a balcony that's filled with large cacti.

A short distance south of Jimenez's home, two buildings face off from one another on either side of Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City's central boulevard. A departure from Pani's earlier work, these twin skyscrapers are made from metal and glass, with blocks of red and beige on the façade. They are clearly influenced by the International style; one was built in 1956 and the other in 1959.

The older of the two buildings has a definite lean – one of the hazards of building in Mexico City, which sits atop ancient lake beds. Not that it's enough to deter Georgina Prieto, a jeweller, and Sebastián Vizcaino, an artist and art-fair producer, from sharing an apartment there with

their two dogs. "The rooms are so programmed," says Vizcaino, admiringly.

Across the road and sat behind a table on the top floor of the second building, Raúl Zorrilla is looking remarkably put-together considering that he stepped off a long-haul flight from Japan the night before. His large corner apartment is filled with art from the likes of Manuel Felguérez, Jimmie Durham and Albania's Anri Sala – but then you wouldn't expect anything less from the director of the city's renowned contemporary gallery Kurimanzutto. The view is striking: a panoramic sweep of the surrounding high-rises viewed through giant windows, making you feel as though you're in the thick of the action. "I always say that it's the heart of the city," says Zorrilla, gazing out of the window at the Angel of Independence below, a golden statue that is a focal point for political gatherings. "But it's the heart of the country."

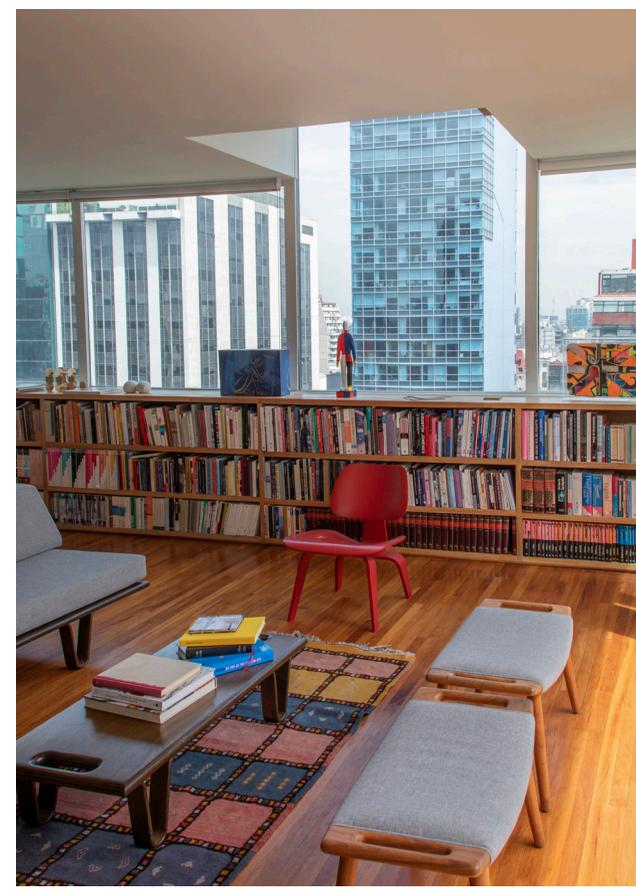
Zorrilla could give Yolanda Jimenez a run for her money in the Pani megafan stakes. As well as previously publishing a book on the architect, he owns two other Pani homes in the Los Cocos Condominium, an iconic 1950s building erected in the beach resort of Acapulco at the height of its popularity as a playground

Man about towns: Mario Pani

Born in 1911, Pani spent much of his childhood travelling in Europe due to his parents' diplomatic careers. He returned to Mexico aged 23 having studied architecture in Paris. During his career, Pani focused on the quality of urban life for Mexico's middle and working classes through housing – but he also designed tourism infrastructure.

Pani was behind projects such as the Ciudad Satélite, a suburban development northwest of the capital, and the Conjunto Urbano Nonoalco-Tlatelolco. Often collaborating with artists such as Diego Rivera and Mathias Goeritz – who painted murals for his buildings – he also founded the magazine *Arquitectura México* and helped to establish the country's National Academy of Architecture. He died in 1993, leaving a legacy of 136 projects.

(1) Zigzag stairs by Pani (2) Georgina Prieto and Sebastián Vizcaino (3) Mario García's apartment (4) Raúl Zorrilla's library (5) Architects Mauricio Mesta and Frida Escobedo





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(1) Fireplace detail at Yolanda Jimenez's home (2) Reflective screen by Frida Escobedo, in her bedroom (3) Downstairs jewellery showroom at Georgina Prieto's apartment (4) Corner nook in Escobedo and Mauricio Mesta's living space (5) Wooden floors to the fore (6) Jimenez's light-filled reception room (7) No home in Mexico City is complete without cacti (8) Mario Garcia's bespoke shelving, featuring a piece by Juan Carlos Merla (9) Raúl Zorrilla, who has written a book on Pani (10) Escobedo and Mesta have gone for a minimalist look



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Zorrilla's, that the architect shares with partner Mauricio Mesta, also an architect. The minimalist layout of the open-plan living area allows for a full appreciation of the architecture. The room contains an old Knoll Partners desk and some references of Escobedo's own work, including a volcanic rock chair she designed, made by Juan Fraga. But appreciating the flow of the space and the size of the windows is paramount for the couple. "The idea is to have as little furniture as possible and to keep it open," says Escobedo. "I don't like anything on the wall. When I moved in, it was so clean and white and I loved it."

Head down a few floors and you'll reach an apartment where artist Mario García has lived for the past three years. It couldn't be more different. Dark wood panelling and salmon-pink velvet curtains dominate – features that he inherited when he moved in. Artwork by Eduardo Terrazas and Ulises Carrión packs the space and beautiful bespoke floor-to-ceiling shelving contains books and art pieces, including a concrete work by Juan Carlos Merla. "I had to become a character moving here," he says, joking.

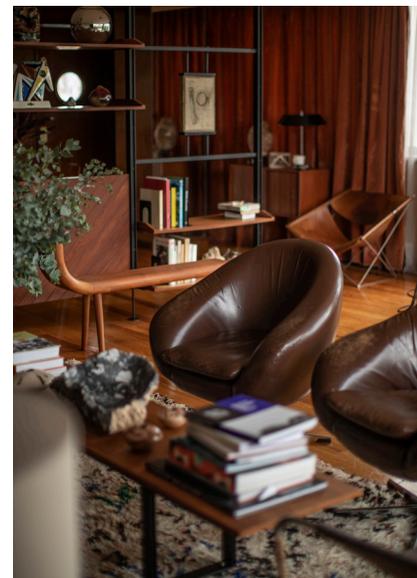
Far from running away from the 1970s feel of the place, he's even gone so far as to install carpet in the bathroom. Pani might not have envisioned it turning out that way, perhaps, but García is OK with that. "I'm embracing it," he says. — (M)



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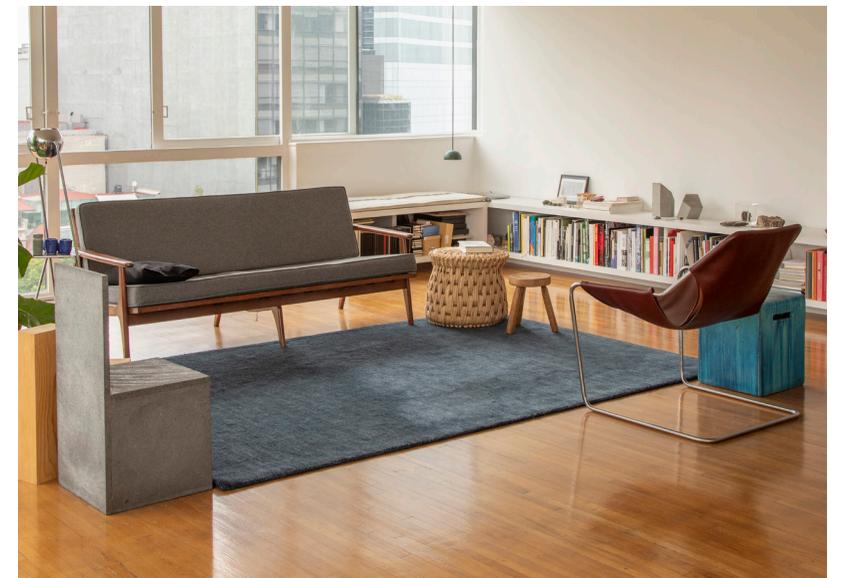
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for the rich and famous. Like Jimenez, he thinks Pani was a trailblazer who is still underrated. "That building in front of us was the first condominium in Mexico," he says. "People thought Pani was crazy." For Zorrilla, Pani was an urbanist who managed to reach across social strata to improve the way people lived – and the beauty was in the detail. "It's amazing how he thought about the wind, and the temperature of the buildings."

Zorrilla's home, filled with edgy artwork and mid-century furniture, is just one iteration of a Pani apartment today. Gazing into multiple living spaces in various Pani buildings reveals how each has been sub-divided or redecorated over the years and how current residents have chosen to leave their mark. Take Frida Escobedo's home, a few floors below



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