

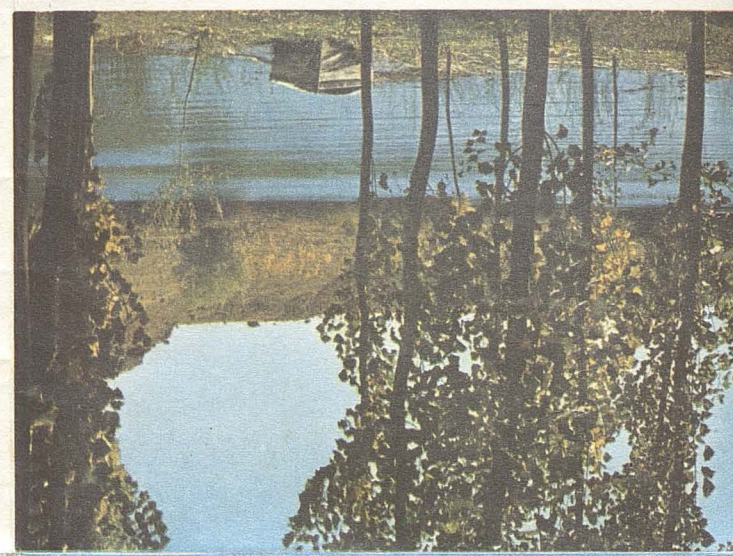
A factor of sleepiness or live lime seems to have marked the towns, great and small, in this large province. Once again, the situation of each in the plains or in upland districts conditions the character of these communities. Nestling in the mountains, Alcaraz gives an unforgettable impression with its air of nobility, its golden luminous Plaza Mayor (a national monument), its steeply sloping streets, the coats-of-arms on the stone façades, the beauty of the church of La Trinidad Gate. Close by is Riopar, at the source of the River Mundo, a spot of great enchantment with its waterfalls among the sheer rock. And Molinicos, Ayna and Yeste in wild, picturesque luxuriant country. The sheer beauty of the surroundings makes a visit to these little towns well worth-while. On the road from Madrid to Cartagena, La Roda is an interesting spot that invites the traveller to call a halt and enjoy a good lunch at any of its renowned restaurants serving traditional «manchegos» fare. Fourteen kilometres farther on lies Chinchilla de Monte Aragón, seat of the old marquises of Villena, with the gothic church of El Salvador and that of Santo Domingo, a masterpiece of Mozarabic style; the castle of the Marquis of Villena is an important sight. Another town with a historic castle is Almansa, on the border of the province of Valencia, with vestiges of gothic and baroque. Nearby is the little town of Alpera where can be admired the cave paintings of La Cueva de la Vieja. In the transition area towards the Murcian border lying to the southeast, sixty kilometres from Albacete is the town of Hellín, an example of the blending of two forms or characters, La Mancha and the South-east. The Holy Week ceremonies at Hellín are famous and

a dream of stone and lime: the towns

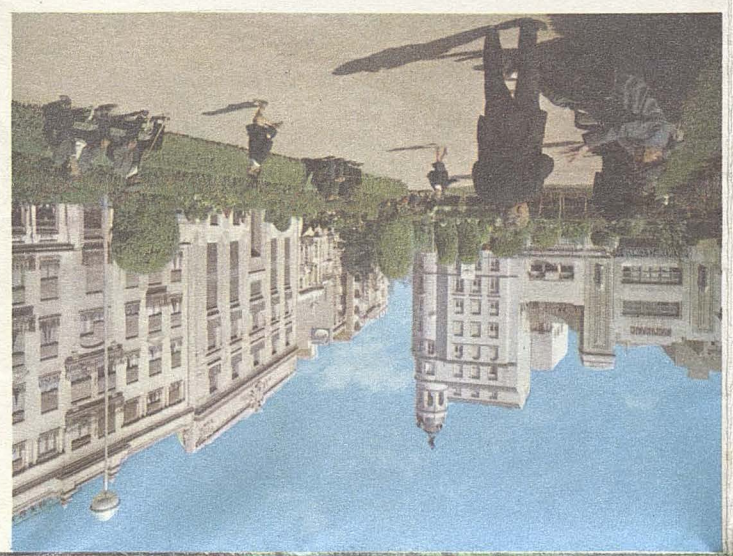
The city has a population of 75,000 and stands at 679 metres above sea level, at a distance of 245 kms. from Madrid, 168 from Alicante and 144 from Murcia. When the day draws to a close, returns home with the game he has shot, when conversation becomes more cordial and relaxed, that uncertain moment splendour in the late afternoon or evening, when the hunter seems immersed in light which achieves its moment of greatest horizon that is so much a part of life in La Mancha, and that any square, one captures once again that feeling of a far streets, for the most part flat and straight. On any corner, in Mancha», spreads out in an urban prospect of wide open Albacete, one of the capitals of the region known as «La No name could be more appropriate than «AL-BASITI» (THE PLAIN), given to this part of Spain by the Moors. The city of Albacete, an open city



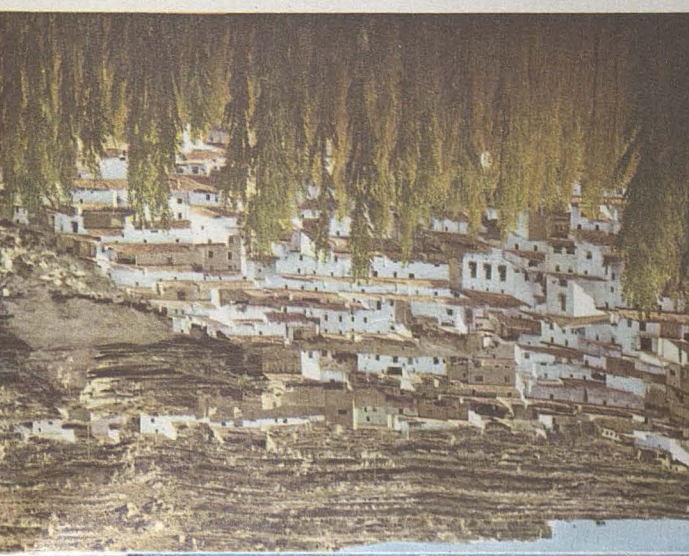
Ruidera Lakes



Plaza del Daudillo, Albacete



Alcalá del Júcar



ALBACETE ALBACETE

spain

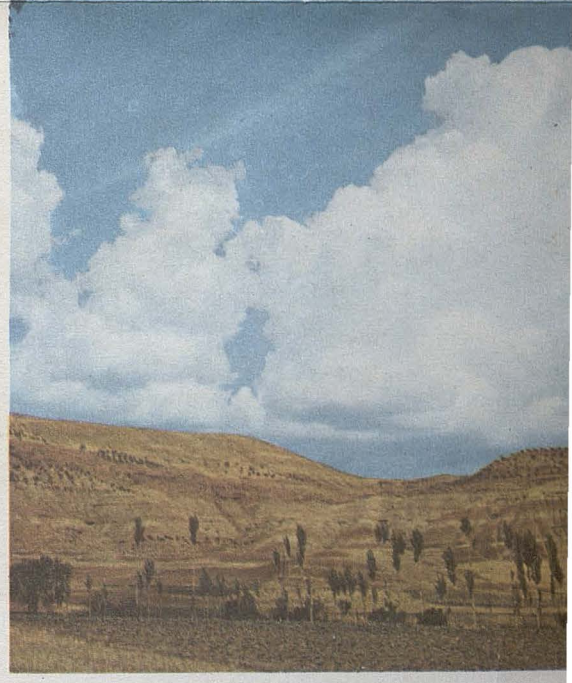


Trout Pool, Riopar

Strategically situated between Castilla (Castile), Andalucía (Andalusia) and the lands of Spain's southeast and Levante, Albacete offers a curious variety of scenery, people and customs. Arriving in this part of the country is like entering a world of wide open spaces and rugged peaks. The pinewoods and rivers with the open farmland are a live expression of the beauty of nature. In this countryside, the birds, light, the roads and the naked rocks are full of life and significance. In one's mind looms the silent spectre of Don Quixote, alert and watchful among the furrows.

the plains

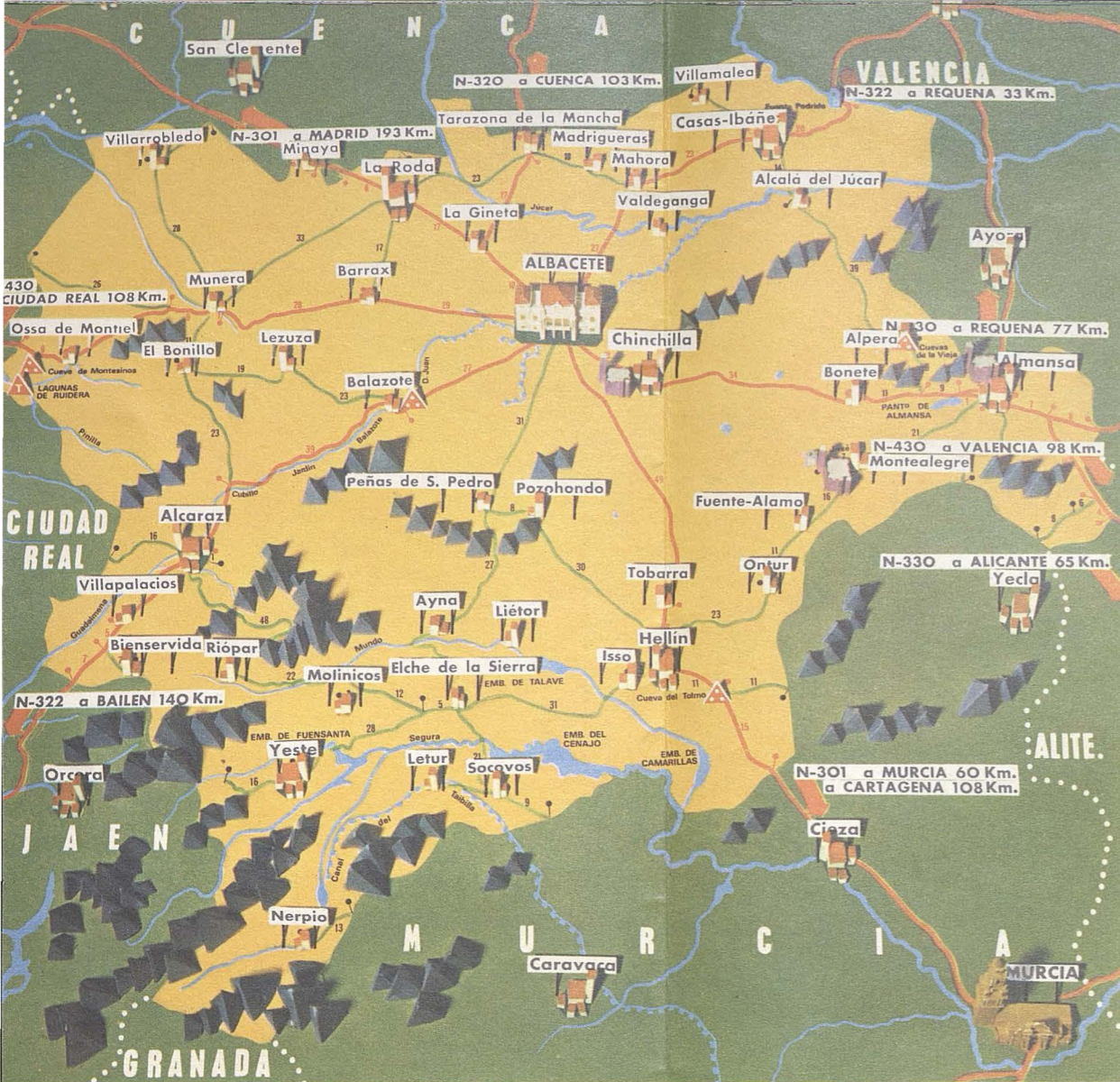
Arrival in Albacete from Madrid means passing through a countryside of ruddy soil, vineyards and fields of wheat, scattered with the lighter golden shades of the threshing floors. Roads become lost in the distance, more often than not leading to the townships that squat in the plain with their whitewashed walls standing out in stark relief. Townships with high bell-gables and rough cobbled streets off which there are wide gateways leading into the corrals. There, one can see the farm wagons, the shafts of the carts, the stables housing the teams of mules and the barns. Over the hilltops and fallow lands a bevy of partridges is liable to break cover at any moment, for game-fowl are one of the leading attractions in these parts. Amid the fields rise «majanos», small hillocks of boulders that stand out with their unusual forms, blending strangely with the evergreen oaks. To this scene scented with thyme and sage beneath a pale blue sky the hidalgo Don Quixote rode with his dreams, breathing the pungent air and basking in the atmosphere of the plains, the sun and the far horizon.



Countryside, Alcaraz

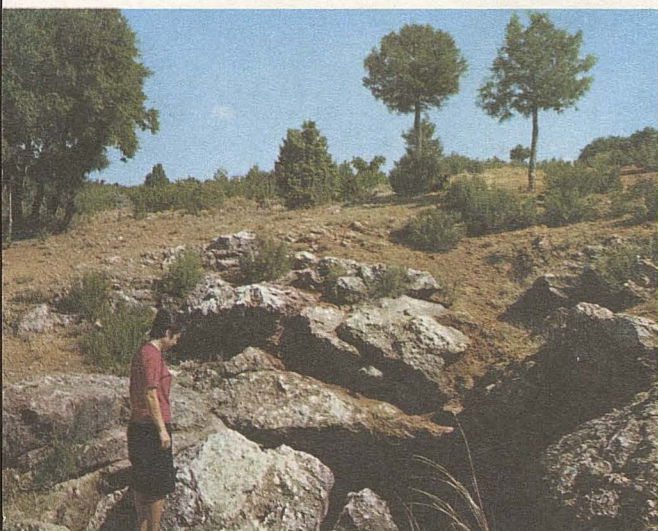


View of the Towers of La Trinidad, Alcaraz



and very colourful. A baroque touch is lent by the rhythmic and incessant beat of drums throughout Holy Week in all parts of the town.

The steepness of the mountainside on which stand the houses of Alcalá de Júcar, and the constant rumbling of the waters of the river make this a charming place.



Entrance to the Montezinos Caves

in the footsteps of don quixote

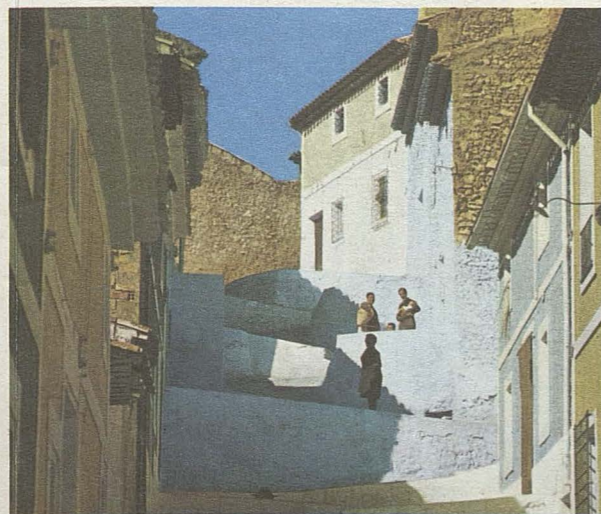
When Don Quixote's heart was bursting with melancholy his erant gaze saw beyond his human surroundings. The old hidalgo from La Mancha set off across the wide plain. Leaving behind him the towns of Barrax and Munera, where the quixotic event of the Wedding of Camacho is supposed to have taken place, Ossa de Montiel appeared on the border of the province of Ciudad Real. Here we come to the Lagunas or Lakes of Ruidera, a most attractive sight. There are fifteen of these lakes in the two provinces of La Mancha, namely Albacete and Ciudad Real, and they form the headwaters of the River Guadiana. The fine shooting and fishing, the clearness of the waters of the lakes and the impressive scenery are a pleasant surprise. There is a scheme under way for the building of hotels, installations for water sports, mountaineering, camping, etc. Farther up the Guadiana there can be seen the ruins of Rocafria Castle, a bastion whose fame was sung in many a poem of the days of chivalry. At its foot is the spring of cool clear water of Fontefrida. In the neighbourhood is the Montezinos Cave, scene of another of Don Quixote's famous adventures and one which seems still to retain something of the atmosphere that the «long-faced knight» left wherever he went. In fact, Don Quixote is to be seen everywhere in these parts, as if time were conspiring to keep his memory very much alive.

ferias, fiestas, folklore

Of the many religious feasts held throughout the province, the main one is that of the patroness of Albacete, The Virgin

de los Llanos, the dates of which coincide with the traditional Feria or fair. The custom of holding «romerías» or pilgrimages, and processions to shrines, lends a profoundly religious note. The most famous is the «romería» to the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Cortes, near the town of Alcaraz. At Jorquera is held that of Nuestra Señora de Cubas, with traditional battles commemorating the combats between Moors and Christians. The «romería» of San Pedro de Verona in Lagunas de Ruidera; that of San Bartolomé, at Yeste, on the night of August 23rd, is a spectacle with an air of unreality on account of the bonfires and flaming torches on the mountainside. The «romería» held at San Pedro de Peñas is of great interest on the first Monday of Pentecost when the statue of El Cristo del Saúco is carried to the shrine from the town.

The famous Albacete Fair in early September is a great event in the life of the city. The pavilions in the fair-ground, the typical 'Cuerda', the pretty lighting of the whole fair, the bullfights, the Festivals of Spain sponsored by the Ministry of Informacion y Turismo, all lend great colour to the event. The fair is held in a large compound specially built for the annual event. The inaugural ceremony commences with a cavalcade lead by the municipal corporation, whose presiding Mayor proceeds to open the gates of the fair-ground. As far as folklore is concerned, it is as varied, or more so, as the countryside, the cuisine and the climate. The regional dances deserve special mention. The best known is the 'seguidilla manchega' also common to the province of Ciudad Real. This is a sober dance, original and charming, its airs as lively as the plains from which it has sprung.



Typical street. Hellín



16th century parish church. Hellín



18th century baroque façade. Town Hall. Chinchilla

nature: shooting and fishing

The province of Albacete is one of Spain's leading and most tempting areas for the sporting gun. Its great geographical and scenic variety is especially suitable for the great variety of game. On the plains, enormous wide-open spaces, like a calm sea of russet earth, great bevvies of partridges and quail—the two most common species—bring life to the quiet of the countryside. They share the broad horizon with hare and woodland rabbit, and even the occasional bustard with its ponderous flight. The beautiful district of Ruidera and the lakes abounds with water-fowl and other species: mallard, grebe and fine specimens of the royal martin. In the mountains from Alcaraz and Molinicos to the borders of Jaén and Granada, besides partridges, which are plentiful throughout the province, and many birds of prey, there are also larger game from the mountains of Jaén; wild boar, stag and mountain goat, today specially protected in order to increase their numbers, for they are among the most highly prized of trophies among fine shots all over the world.

The old idea of Albacete as a land purely of plains and arid country must be forgotten, for it originated in the minds of people who have captured only a fleeting impression from the main highways crossing La Mancha to Albacete and Murcia, without pausing to see the great possibilities that the province also offers as a land of rivers and excellent fishing in dams and reservoirs. In the Talave, Almansa, Cenoja and Fuensanta dams and in the Lakes of Ruidera, nearly all species of fish to be found in Spain can be caught: carp, barbel, pike and bass. Trout and perch are to be found in the rivers Arquillo, Mundo, Zumeta, Taibilla and Tus. Crayfish—a most delicious accompaniment to an appetitif—live in nearly all rivers, although those of Júcar are the ones most sought after by enthusiasts, being large and particularly succulent.

cuisine of la mancha

The cuisine of Albacete might well be described as coarse yet tasty. The origins of these dishes are mainly found among the shepherds and nomadic people of the plateau, with characteristics similar to those of the other provinces of La Mancha. In these dishes reign supreme the spices that grow in the open fields—garlic, saffron, cumin-seed and caraway—lending a taste and aroma not to be found elsewhere. Before tackling any of the dishes of Albacete, one should recall, as a guarantee and added enticement, the wedding feast of Camacho. 'Gachas Manchegas' (La Mancha Gruel) made of vetch-bean flour, 'Pisto Manchego' of tomatoes and red peppers, and the renowned 'Setas a la Manchega' (mushrooms), are all vegetable dishes, or might be called so if it were not for the effective addition of bacon and of other tidbits to the hasty-puddings, and poached or scrambled eggs in other recipes. But where the cooking of Albacete really proves outstanding is in its meat dishes: fried and roast lamb, 'Pierna estofada a la Manchega' (Leg of lamb stewed in La Mancha style), 'Zarajos' (smoked tripe), 'Torreznos con huevos' (Rashers of bacon and eggs), 'perdices escabechadas' (pickled partridge), etc. The greatest praise goes to the 'gazpachos' or 'galianos', the quintessence of this cuisine, a delicious dish in which partridge or rabbit play a leading part with unleavened bread, garlic, tomato, peppers, salt and olive oil. Excellent Manchego cheese in any of its varieties—tender, cured or rancid in oil—is a perfect ending to a good meal. As regards wines, this province possesses a large and varied

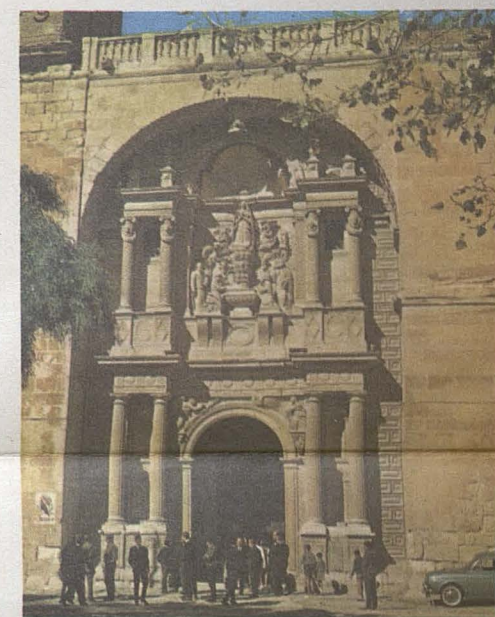
list of 'caldos' as they are called, ranging from the Casas Ibañez wines—closely related to the wines of Requena and Utiel—to those from Hellín and Fuentealamo with more body, light taste and fairly high alcoholic content, and including the pleasant tasting product of La Roda and Villarrobledo. The people of Albacete also drink the typical 'Cuerva' which is prepared from wine and slices of peach and has a bitter-sweet taste. This is served in a large enameled earthenware bowl known as a 'cuervera' with a number of cups from which it is drunk. It is curious to note that these 'cuerveras' possibly date back to the Iberian times, in view of the similarity existing between them and finds made at some of the local archaeological sites.

hotel capacity

In the province there are 11 hotel establishments, with a total of 576 places, of which 130 are in 1st class B hotels.

art and archaeology

Of great importance are the prehistoric paintings at Alpera, Minateda and Nerpio, corresponding to the Neolithic period. Outstanding among sites of the Iberian period are those of Abengibre, La Bicha de Balazote and La Cierva de Caudete. Likewise important are the finds of El Cerro de los Santos. There are some Roman remains at Ontur and Alcaraz. Valuable finds from these digs can be seen at the Provincial Archaeological Museum. The town of Alcaraz is of especial importance, having, apart from the monuments previously mentioned, the church of La Asunción with paintings by Pedro de Orrente. Peñas de San Pedro has magnificent gothic sculptures in its parish church, as well as several Salzillo statues and a Crucifix by Montañés. The Church of El Bonillo houses a painting attributed to El Greco, and an interesting crucifix.

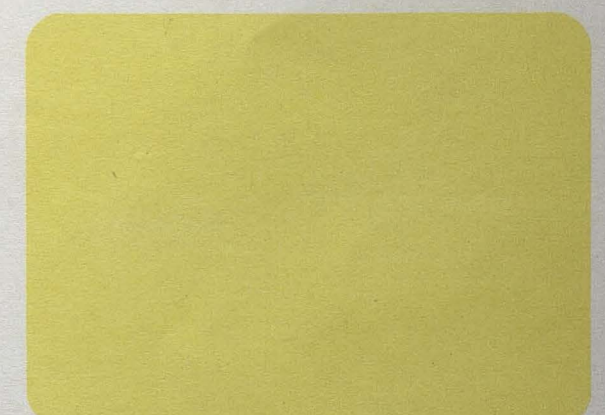


Renaissance doorway. Almansa

ALBACETE

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