

Duchess with 44 titles must bend knee to socialist diktat

Graham Keeley Madrid

She does not have to kneel before the Pope but she may have to bow to Spain's new property laws.

The Duchess of Alba, 82, holds at least 44 noble titles and can cross Spain without stepping outside her own estates, but the country's wealthiest aristocrat has become a victim of contentious new legislation that may result in the demolition of thousands of homes on the Spanish coast.

The Socialist Government, keen to clean up the ugly concrete jungle along its southern coastline, has taken a dim view of the duchess's turreted summer residence on the Costa del Sol and wants parts of it bulldozed.

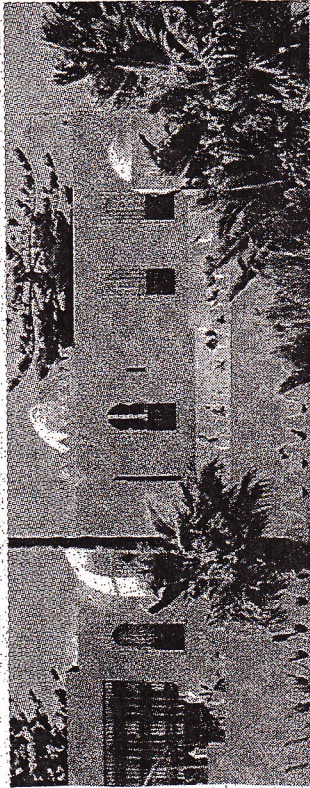
A wall and a lawn leading to Casablanca beach in Marbella may contravene the so-called Coastal Law, which

states that all land within 100m of a shoreline is public property and bans building within that area. Any private building falling within this zone can be knocked down, depending on a local authority's interpretation and enforcement of the legislation.

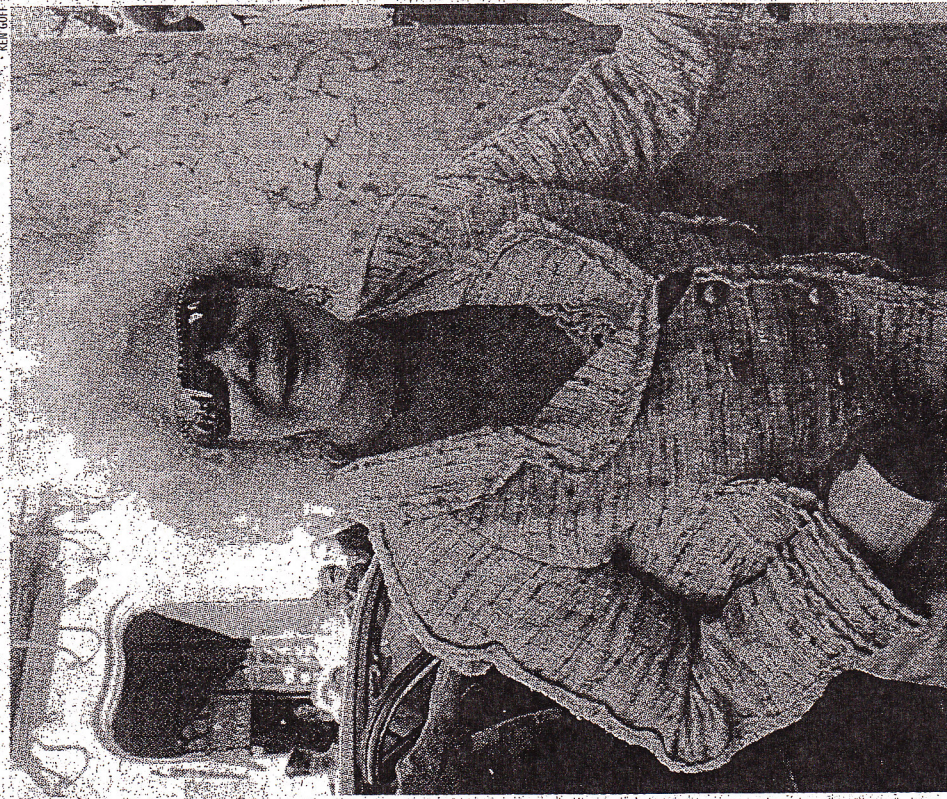
The law has ramifications for thousands of British expatriates who bought villas next to the Mediterranean and now face having their properties reduced to rubble. Homes owned by Spaniards have already been knocked down in Tenerife and Cantabria in northern Spain.

Francisco Javier Hermoso, head of the regional Coastal Authority, said that the Duchess had eight days to prove that her property was built with legal permission. If it is deemed to have broken the law, part of it could be knocked down. The fiery-tempered

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Las Cañas, the Duchess of Alba's seafront property on the Costa del Sol



The Duchess of Alba may have to demolish walls at her Marbella residence

aristocrat is a regular in Spain's prensa rosa, or gossip press. Her love life has recently provided succulent reading after it emerged that her children opposed her planned marriage to a family friend 24 years her junior.

"They don't want me to marry, but they change partners more often than I do," she told the Spanish media.

The waxen-faced duchess, whose full name is María del Rosario Cayetana Alfonsa Victoria Eugenia Francisca Fitz-James Stuart y de Silva — she counts the English King James II among her ancestors — is often photographed at society gatherings and bullfights, where her former son-in-law, Francisco Rivera Ordóñez, a popular matador, is the star attraction.

As well as not having to kneel before the Pope, her other ancient privileges include being able to ride into Seville Cathedral on horseback.

A previous Duchess of Alba was the model and supposed lover of Francisco de Goya. Two of his portraits, *The Clothed Maya* and *The Naked Maya*, hang in the Madrid palace where the present Duchess was born.

She was a dazzling beauty and her wedding in 1947 to Luis Martínez de Irujo y Artacoó was described as "the most expensive in the world".

After her first husband's death, she married Jesús Aguirre y Ortiz de Zarate, a free-thinking former Jesuit priest, in 1978. She was recently photo-

graphed in a wheelchair at a wedding and nearly choked to death on orange juice.

About 500,000 British and other property owners fear that the Government is not content with enforcing the

Coastal Law but wants to make it retroactive. After condemnation of the law by the European Parliament and pressure from the British and German governments, Spain has agreed to allow owners to sell affected properties.