

# Country French™

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A distressed wood  
console table stands  
up to the level of Joyce  
and Will Here's Herring  
boom. To enhance the  
effect, Joyce paired  
a French portrait of a  
petulant child, circa 1880,  
with a 19th century  
console from Normandy.



# honest *interpretation*

Beguiled by the beauty of France's timeworn country châteaux, a Texas couple use a host of authentic materials to create a fitting tribute to call home.

photographer: GUS SCHMIEGE produced by: SURAN FOX



OPPOSITE: A painted Louis XVI-style armoire displays Chinese porcelain and French barbotine, pottery decorated with a clay slip, in the living room. LEFT: This marble-top walnut commode is stamped with a Paris cabinetmaker's mark dated 1780. BELOW: Offsets of Texas limestone surround the home's entrance.



After three decades of importing antiques from France, Joyce Ham can tell a Louis XIV chair from a Louis XV one without breaking a sweat. She's partial to Louis XV, but she admits that she did let a few pieces from the other Louises' reigns into the Houston home she shares with her husband, Will.

"I tried to use elements that best represented a less-than-grand country chateau or Parisian townhouse, with an emphasis on a provincial interpretation of Louis XV style," Joyce says.

The house was originally a vaguely Italianate ranch until the couple embarked on an ambitious renovation with the help of architect Tom Novosad. Thanks to a mansard-style roof, old French balusters, zinc oeil-de-boeuf dormers, a dovecote tower, and a host of raw materials Joyce lovingly collected, the house now resembles a gracious French manor. "The trick was to make judicious use of the old elements yet limit divergent styles to avoid a hodgepodge," Joyce says.

"Mediterranean roof tiles from southern France won't

work for Norman style, and an Art Deco door with Louis XIV boiserie can spell disaster."

Antique French doors inset with ornamental iron grilles and painted with the soft green beloved by the French open to reveal a foyer crafted from reclaimed limestone and accented with terra-cotta cabochons purchased in Beauce, France. Mud plaster, layered and troweled to emulate the artistry of centuries past, gives the walls throughout the house substance.

"Colors in the great houses of 18th-century France were generally bright and a bit garish," Joyce says. Preferring a more muted palette, she introduced classic blues and greens in a time-faded state, carrying soft, tonal turquoise from one area to another. Pale rose and peach, along with a faint yellow, interject contrast, variety, and warmth into the cooler palette.

In the living room, the sunny vintage upholstery on an 18th-century walnut settee is echoed by painted wall panels, while the earthy blues and taupes found in the Savonnerie-style rug are mirrored in painted corner



THIS PHOTO: A salvaged brick fireplace and rustic cherry furnishings keep the mood relaxed in the breakfast room.  
OPPOSITE: A late-18th-century French statue depicting the Virgin Mary on a base of clouds enlivens the Horns' formal dining room. Eighteenth-century brazier, or carved paneling, in Louis XIV style lines the walls.





OPPOSITE: Antique French bonnets flanked with drapery panels creates a grand entrance to the tub in the master bath. LEFT: Joyce softened the lines of a four-poster with a 20th-century French jacquard tapestry. BELOW: Painted moldings accentuate the height of the sunroom's ceiling.



"In France, the ubiquitous color called *tendre gris* is everywhere. It morphs to green or blue depending on the light and the season."

—Interview with Joyce Hertz

moldings on the ceiling. Silk curtain panels cascading from intricately carved coxroces strike a formal note that is relaxed by simple wooden side tables. "The perfect curve of a cabriole leg is unsurpassed," Joyce says. "If realized in a beautifully polished and patinated wood that's lovingly created by a craftsman, it can live anywhere and be enjoyed for generations."

The honesty and lack of ornamentation in indigenous woods synonymous with country French style inspired Joyce to take a rustic turn in the breakfast room. Rush-seat chairs gather around a provincial cherry farm table, typical of those used daily in rural France, while a cherry

provincial vassiliot, or buffet, keeps antique earthenware at the ready. "I gravitate to rustic pieces that show a sense of humor and reflect nature," Joyce says.

The master suite returns to a bygone era, when rich tapestries, floral brocades, embroidered chair backs, and fanciful painted furnishings were popular. The layers of pattern and texture add depth and showcase Joyce's appreciation for diversity.

"In each French home I have been in, there is the striking feeling that people actually live there," Joyce says. "Grand-mère's Sèvres porcelain shares pride of place with a humble basket of poached mussel—I like that." ♦