

# French CONNECTION

A NEWLY BUILT HOME IN LOUISIANA INHERITS THE ESSENCE OF A CENTURIES-OLD CHÂTEAU

WRITTEN BY SALLY FINDER WEEPIE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMILY FOLLOWILL  
STYLED BY ELEANOR ROPER





**B**efore-and-after tales, it turns out, can open on something other than a design horror story. No one was looking to exorcise last decade's dated finishes or a nonfunctional floor plan on this Lafayette, Louisiana, lot. Instead, Frankie and Charon Harris wanted to imbue their brand-new home with the soul of a venerable French château.

"We let our passion for Provençal homes lead us," Frankie says. "We wanted to take that passion and turn it into something we could live with and enjoy every day."

The couple's ardor for Old France kindled during travels through Europe. "We became big fans of French architecture and antiques," Frankie says.

Like other travelers, they returned home with photos of favorite scenes. The stacks of snapshots grew through the years, later joined by antique French furniture, and then architectural salvage pieces,

"Long before we drew up plans for this house, we were collecting—300-year-old doors, Dalle de Bourgogne limestone flooring, antique hardware and fireplace surrounds, even the tiles of an entire roof from the days when Rome ruled France,"

Frankie says. In addition to picking up treasures at French markets, the couple worked with antiques dealer Robert Smith of Au Vieux Paris in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, to procure exceptional pieces.

"I had to get a warehouse in Lafayette to store everything," Frankie says. "But I knew one day it would all come together."

And so it did, in a new build fitted like a puzzle by architect Tim Adams. "They had all these amazing pieces of history," Adams says. "It was an architect's dream and a challenge to get artifacts to fit the new construction and feel like they be-

**Entry** French artifacts and antiques define Frankie and Charon Harris' Louisiana home. **Vignettes** Pieces that are centuries old feel at home in rooms coated with traditional limewash plaster. "It's a living, breathing thing," Frankie says, "not like a painted wall." Architect Tim Adams shaped a symmetrical main facade. The roof features a génoise architectural treatment created by cantilevering stacked clay tiles that date from Provence's Roman era. Other reclaimed gems include the powder room sink (a font from a cathedral that burned to the ground) and many doors, such as the one in the garden and others that were repurposed to serve as wine cabinets. White limestone and reclaimed timbers, as seen in the keeping room off the kitchen, were regionally sourced but match the Provençal aesthetic. Steel-frame windows welcome garden views. **Previous pages** A piano tucks under the graceful architecture of the staircase. Exterior lanterns are vintage Paris streetlamps; balcony ironwork once decorated a château in Anduze.



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—homeowner Frankie Harris

**Living room** Architectural salvage pieces imbue rooms with timeworn character. Fossils are visible in a reclaimed fireplace surround from Marseille.



longed, to create a house that feels like it grew out of Provence and landed here in Louisiana.”

Adams slotted the old doors in just the right spots—heralding the home’s history at the entry, beckoning to an enchanting garden path, or contributing character to interior rooms. In some instances, doors were left as is. Other times, hidden beauty was rediscovered. “The doors had layer after layer of paint,” Frankie says. “We stripped them down to a color and patina we like or, in some cases, down to the natural wood.”

Doors that once graced a monastery near Lyon—paired with modern insulated glass counterparts—now serve the wine cellar. Other portals were repurposed, like the ones used as paneling in the study.

The found limestone flooring unfurls in heavily trafficked rooms, contrasting stately parquet in the study and bedroom. Frankie ensures the wood—tongue and groove, never nailed, glued, stained, or waxed—is cleaned and finished the Provençal way with Savon de Marseille, a hard soap made of vegetable oils that has been used in the region for 600 years. “We keep things as true to that life and tradition as we can,” he says.

Like the home’s artifacts, limewash plaster gives a feeling of the Old World. Ruth Gay of Houston-based Château Domingue

and her business partner Eddy Dankers, known for his work with the Belgian royal family, directed the application of architectural finishes authentic to age-old châteaux.

French antiques offer gracious seating and surfaces that jibe with the architectural aesthetic. Cindy Nunez Medlock of Antiques de Provence in New Orleans helped the couple fine-tune their furnishings blend. “We mixed in new pieces by Verellen that you can lounge on but don’t fight with the antiques,” Frankie says. “A new sofa works next to an 18th-century bergère.”

Most lighting is French salvage, although local ironworkers handcrafted replicas when an old chandelier needed a mate. Exterior lights are authentic Parisian gas lanterns. “They had been fitted for electricity, but I retrofitted them back to gas to get that ambience,” Frankie says.

Sinks mostly hail from houses and barns from across Provence that had succumbed to the centuries. In the kitchen, they’re framed by newly crafted cabinetry with an appropriately rustic air. A farmhouse table that the couple found in London continues the warmth of wood as it contrasts

**Kitchen** Reclaimed terra-cotta tiles form a backsplash over the La Cornue range. Cabinetry by Darienzo Custom Woodworks in Lafayette, Louisiana, suits the home’s centuries-old aesthetic.





**Study** "The study is one of my favorite places," Adams says. "I love the cozy mood." An earthy-hue limewash on the cove ceiling accentuates the patina of wood paneling and a parquet floor. **Dining area** The Harrises sited their formal dining table in the orangery, a greenhouse-like outbuilding that ushers in views of the Provencal-style garden.



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—architect Tim Adams

the metallic glimmer of a showpiece La Cornue range. "I really love the kitchen," Adams says. "It has an unexpected look. And I love how they really use the La Cornue. They're great cooks who truly understand cuisine."

The cozy kitchen serves as the perfect spot for intimate dinners. But when company's coming, meals move to the formal eating space inside the orangery. The outbuilding, with glass doors on all sides, takes both its name and inspiration from Versailles. Frankie even followed the lead of French royals by securing Anduze clay garden urns to house his citrus plants.

"We love to host dinner parties, and people love to come here," Frankie says. "You walk in and feel like you've been transported to France. It's so fun to share this house and the stories it tells."

**Architecture and design:** T.S. Adams Studio

**Builder:** Mark Laborde **Landscape architect:** Ted Viator

**Primary suite** Carved wood paneling in the French boiserie style works with soft textiles in royal purple and rich aubergine hues to spin a comfortable cocoon in the bedroom. Charon and Frankie bought the painting at Ransom Gallery on Pimlico Road in London, their favorite gallery. The work by Italian artist Roberta Coni is titled *Sophia*. "That's our granddaughter's name, so we just could not pass it up," Charon says. "Plus, it's stunning!" A regal freestanding tub perched on marble flooring welcomes relaxing soaks among private garden vistas.





**Pigeonnier** Frankie wanted a garden shed, and Adams delivered—with a pigeonier. The architect coated the copper roof with zinc to give it the look of lead. **Pigeonnier interior** Rather than housing birds like its French predecessors, this building holds garden tools and a collection of clay pots. Charon also uses the space to dry garden herbs. **Patio** A pea-graveled nook shelters a snug alfresco retreat. **Orangery** Glass doors admit views of a bubbling water feature and invite diners and citrus trees to bask in the sun. 