



Country French

Live in
Comfortable
Elegance



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February 2012
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THIS PHOTO: A solid limestone fireplace anchors the keeping room—the family's primary relaxation spot. LEFT: Simple wood shutters, a stone facade, and gracefully arched windows proclaim the home's French architectural influences.

Ironically, interior designer Meridy King's modern approach to country French style in this Atlanta home was inspired by an ornately gilded antique mirror—the lone material survivor of a fire that destroyed her clients' previous residence. "It's French, and it reminds my clients of New Orleans, where they're originally from," King says. "So much of New Orleans is a whopped-up version of the ornamentation we associate with Paris. But Paris is too formal for this family—they needed a casual, comfortable house. The mirror became a counterpoint to the more simplified look we were after."

Streamlined furnishings—largely devoid of frippery and frills, save the occasional brass nailhead or velvet band of upholstery—and quiet, barely there shades of cream and gray announce an airy point of view and a hushed, unadorned aesthetic. "The rooms flow, the light flows, and the decor flows," King says. "You could take any piece of furniture and put it in another room, and it would work. It's an easy house to live in."

King's clients, parents of four teenage children, sought flexible, fuss-free interiors that would easily accommodate dirty shoes, mountains of sports equipment, and the crowds of friends they cheerfully welcome into their home. "We made sure all the fabrics are durable," King says, "but trust me—nothing looks



“I like to achieve an *elegant* casualness with a sense of *whimsy*. I use lots of graphic patterns, which read as ‘no pattern’ to me.”

—interior designer and homeowner MICHELLE NIDAY

Inserting antiques into the industrial space honored Michelle’s No. 1 design credo: “I’m all about mixing indoor with outdoor, expensive with inexpensive, industrial with froufrou,” she says. The living area’s crystal chandelier, a find from a Paris flea market, was grounded with the addition of a simple wood ball at the bottom. “I’ve also been pulling off the crystals one by one for a more skeletal form,” Michelle says. To balance the romantic chandelier, she incorporated organic side

tables and a straight-line Asian-style coffee table in the seating area.

Her palette of gray and cream with anchoring accents of black is more complex than it appears—various intensities of the hues are used to create an ethereal depth that’s luminous when light floods the loft. “Some of the colors aren’t even definable,” Michelle says. At the end of a workday spent helping clients make color decisions, it’s restful to come home to a neutral palette.



When Alix Rico starts talking about design, her enthusiasm is infectious. The spirited decorator has been designing interiors in New Orleans for more than 30 years, and there's one style she never tires of. "French country is my forte," Alix says. It's also her passion.

Alix and her husband, Paul, a retired food photographer, search for French antiques using their second home in the Luberon Valley in Provence as their base. They offer their finds to clients and collectors at an annual New Orleans antiques show, but the couple's shopping forays come in handy for their own homes as well.

In the Ricos' New Orleans home, Alix's brand of welcoming and refined country French—as well as her good taste in antiques—shines. Curvy bergères mingle comfortably with the straight lines of a silk-velvet sofa in the living room. An antique French cane-back chair pulls up to a leather-top desk in the library, while

warmth—stronger even than that given off by fires in the limestone hearth—radiates from an intricately carved French *bibliothèque* in the family room. "A romantic look should be an authentic look," Alix says. "When you really fall in love, it's not about the hearts and flowers and turtledoves; it's about comfort, security, and authenticity."

In keeping with this sentiment, touches of gilding throughout the house reflect an honest patina Alix keeps approachable by mixing in warm wood tones. The home's architectural accents also do their part to deliver timeless authenticity. There's nothing about the home's graceful arched French doors or its chunky moldings to suggest the house was ever bland—or that it weathered two renovations in a decade.

According to Alix, the early-20th-century brick house was "only the second-worst-looking residence" in the