

Country French *Decorating*

Fresh
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Charming
Style

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MeredithSpecials

Featuring Designer
Charles Faudree



Designer Suellen Gregory added a cushion and pillows to make this cane settee in the living room inviting. The American chest of drawers is a family piece.

a dual
citizen

An American palette of red, white, and blue takes on a decidedly French slant when paired with European antiques, pastoral prints, and soft feminine touches.

photographer: GORDON BEALL field editor: EILEEN DEYMIER



With its red brick exterior and traditional Cape Cod dormers, there is nothing particularly French in flavor about a small 1931 cottage located in a historical district of Richmond, Virginia, but that hasn't dissuaded its new owner from lending its interiors a fabulous French accent. In fact, the theme of American on the outside, French on the inside, is a metaphor of sorts for the homeowner's life.

She was raised in Virginia, majored in French and business in college, and spent a brief time studying at the Sorbonne in Paris. She frequently travels back to France, especially to the coastal region of Brittany, and over the years has assembled a collection of



THIS PHOTO Painted, rather than stained, and featuring original fabric, a pair of Victorian chairs take on a decidedly French feel in the living room. A cotton chenille-covered sofa lends glorious texture without garish pattern. OPPOSITE TOP: A circa-1700s Dutch secretary and a pair of French chairs welcome in the entryway. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: From the outside, this cottage looks like an all-American Cape Cod, but its interiors are unmistakably French.

THIS PHOTO: The homeowner started collecting faience—French tin-glazed earthenware pieces—when she was in college, and displays a series of her favorite pieces on the antique French hutch in the dining room. OPPOSITE: The built-ins in the dining room are original to the house, but a coat of red paint inside the shelves helps the French collectibles stand out.



Casual and formal features mix happily in the small home, lending it an inviting and cozy *sophistication.*

treasured decorative objects and furnishings—each with a memory attached. When she purchased the small Richmond cottage as a weekend retreat to bring her closer to family and friends, imbuing the residence with charming French personality seemed like a natural fit for the petite rooms.

On one of her frequent shopping forays, she discovered a spunky toile featuring tomato-red scenes set against a periwinkle blue background. Contemporary in its boldness and yet traditional in its pattern, the fabric hit just the right balance of casual and formal, and launched the theme for the interiors—heavy doses of blue mixed with rich strokes of cherry red brightened with white.

"I wouldn't have picked those colors but they really worked in the fabric," the homeowner says.

Limiting the color palette to those in the fabric, kept the scheme for the house simple, which distracts from its small size. To that end, the entryway, living room, dining room, and kitchen all feature the same sky blue paint, which designer Suellen Gregory finished with a glaze to add subtle dimension. "It's a really small house," the homeowner says. "We kept the blue going throughout so it felt bigger."

Gregory further expanded the living room's sense of scale by adding a whitewashed diamond pattern to the floor. Filling out the room and in keeping with





“The paper makes the tiny bedroom look like a little *jewel*. Its unity opens the room up.”
 —designer Suellen Gregory

the home's square footage and the homeowner, who is petite, are small-scale furnishings found in France and stateside. “She shops everywhere—it’s part of the experience of her travels,” Gregory says. “It means everything has a story behind it.”

The sentiment lends the house its distinct personality. Pieces aren’t perfectly matched, but then again, mixing pedigrees is a hallmark of country French style, which prizes practicality over purism. “The owner knows what she likes, and when people have a strong sense of what they like, their things work well together,” Gregory says.

Case in point: the pairing of a secretary desk in the foyer with two French caned chairs. The Dutch piece, which is from the early 1700s, came from the homeowner’s grandmother and makes a fine mate for the textural chairs. In the dining room, a curvy carved hutch floats on the wall over a scrolled buffet, looking as though the two had always been a set rather than recently partnered.

Toile, which is lavished throughout the house on both walls and windows, unifies, too. In the bedroom, the walls are papered with a conventional blue-and-white pastoral scene for a soothing, feminine feel, while the lively red-and-blue toile is a constant throughout the downstairs rooms. “Toile can be stodgy,” the homeowner says. “But there was a lot of open space within the toile in the living and dining rooms. It has a looser, freer feel. It’s playful.” That makes coming home to her pocket of France on the weekends all the more fun. ♦



OPPOSITE: An antique French bed and French armchair echo the curves found in the delightful blue-and-white toile wallpaper. **ABOVE:** A slim French desk paired with an early-1800s American Windsor chair tucks neatly into a corner of the master bedroom. **RIGHT:** At the top of the landing, a pencil-smocked curtain provides feminine frills and fullness. The Victorian chair is a family piece and gives the area a sense of destination.

