



In the entry hangs an 18th-century Italian oil of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Watkins Culver, above a thistle-cloth slipcovered daybed. To the left, the stone room is used as both a passageway and another entertaining space, with a wine grotto built into the reclaimed limestone walls, originally from an old farmhouse in Provence.



Left: In the living room, a collection of Hispano-Moresque *reflejo metálico* (luster earthenware) originates from the town of Manises near Valencia, Spain, and dates from the 16th and 17th centuries; it is displayed on an 18th-century Italian console table. The oil painting is a 19th-century French depiction of a country landscape.

Bottom: In the living room, the sofa, slipcovered in antique thistle cloth (a hemp fabric), was created by Pam Pierce, and the embroidered pillows were purchased at The Mews in Dallas. A pair of carved and painted 18th-century Venetian mirrors has its original looking glasses. Duo of Louis XIV armchairs and a French bergère covered in lilac gingham, from Tara Shaw Ltd. and W. Gardner, Ltd., respectively. The Oushak rug from Carol Piper Rugs was made in Turkey. A pair of 19th-century French stools, along with the iron garden table that serves as an end table, from Chateau Domingue.

Below: Covering the surface of an 18th-century English table in the living room are hand-painted 18th-century Delft tiles found at Jane Moore Interiors. Sterling roses with pale blossoms are arranged in a French 18th-century faience vase.



countryside. They didn't find much on their initial scouting trip, but Gay came away realizing there was a market stateside for reclaimed architectural pieces.

Taking the maiden name of Gay's mother-in-law, who was raised in New Iberia, Louisiana, the four-year-old company works with both pickers and demolishers scattered throughout France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Sweden.

"The demolishers go in before a property is slated to be leveled, buy the building and reclaim anything that can be resold," explains Gay. "Other times, people renovating, who perhaps want a more contemporary space, call us. And there are other people, too, who know the value of their architectural piece, and they want to sell it and replace it with something less expensive."

With a trove of stunning pieces available to her, Gay has recreated a timeworn *mas* for her family. "*Mas*' is their word for an old farm compound," says Gay. "Something very rustic with old stone walls and floors. I think the look is really comfortable and casual with an atmosphere of Provence." She worked with interior designer

Continued on page 24

REINVENTING PROVENÇE

BY LAURANN CLARIDGE
PHOTOGRAPHY TRIA GIOVAN

INTERIOR DESIGN BY PAM PIERCE

Stone by stone, beam by beam, Ruth Gay constructs a rustic Provençal house at home in Houston.

Ruth Gay, owner of the much-admired Houston-based architectural antiques store, Chateau Domingue, has reinvented a rustic, Provençal-inspired home for her husband, Jack, and their three children.

The emporium Chateau Domingue is known coast to coast as a source for aged architectural elements from Europe; many are pedigreed, all with magnificent style. Gay has brought such elements to life in her own house, steeped in perpetual transition and featuring treasures such as a set of gently worn, sloping stone stairs from a farmhouse in northern France or a 17th-century Louis XIV *cheminée* from a *bastide* in Provence that stands at the hearth in the sunny, lavender breakfast room. Seventeenth-century cobblestones, culled from a street in Portugal, line

the floors in the kitchen; a shallow sink and stone surrounds were saved from a 17th-century French monastery after the resident monks, still making goat cheese today, decided that greater demand necessitated a remodel.

"I buy materials you would use, reclaimed, to build a new house — floors, doors, stone walls, mantels, beams, stairs and door surrounds, for example," says Gay about her treasure-laden atelier. Her venture into antiques of an architectural nature arose a dozen years ago, when she and her husband built a house in Houston. Gay, who grew up in Germany, Ireland and Belgium, wanted to incorporate elements of the Old World with her new one and traveled to France to scour the

In the dining room is an 18th-century painted *enfilade* from Umbria with a collection of 19th-century apothecary jars, all from Chateau Domingue.





Continued from page 23

Pam Pierce to perfect that atmosphere. "I am really grateful to find these things; it's what I do best, but Pam has the vision to know how to use it and put it together beautifully," explains Gay.

Filling the house with mostly 18th-century European antiques culled from fellow dealers in town — such as Joyce Horn Antiques, Ltd.; Brian Stringer Antiques; Watkins Culver; Annette Schatte; Thompson + Hanson Nursery & Garden Center; Jane Moore

Interiors: Twenty Six Twenty; and W. Gardner, Ltd. — Pierce and Gay have carefully placed furniture in the well-edited space. Starting from the wing of the house on the lower level, the duo tackled the skeleton of the former Georgian interior, reinventing rooms with reclaimed beams, floors, fabulous old doors and stairs. Fueled by a fascination for the history behind each piece, the process, although a rich lesson in architecture and geography, is a painstaking one

that won't be fully completed for years to come. "My husband actually needs a little break from the construction inside," says Gay. "That's why I've started on the gardens now." Fittingly, Gay, who established an event and floral design company before her children were born, has imagined a garden like that of a *bastide* in southern France. She envisions neat, but not terribly manicured, greenery and blossoms, accented with stone fountains, pillars and old iron gates.

Left: In the breakfast room, a 19th-century, three-shelf étagère is layered with the Gays' collection of old faience, hotel silver and antique baskets and glass. The cow paintings above are 19th-century French.

Below: Ruth Gay with her children, Jacqueline, Steven and Paul, standing. Chaise is 18th-century Louis XV. The stone mantel is a 17th-century Louis XIII *cheminée* holding a collection of 18th-century *demoiselles d'Avignon*.



“I buy materials you would use, reclaimed, to build a new house — floors, doors, stone walls, mantels, beams, stairs and door surrounds, for example.”

Below: In the breakfast room, the mantel is a 17th-century Louis XIV *cheminée* from a *bastide* in Provence, and the charger is a signed Lambeth 17th-century piece made in England. At right is an early 19th-century *biat*. The French antique table is paired with a set of 18th-century Venetian chairs. The centerpiece is an olive tree from Thompson + Hanson, potted in a 17th-century Nevers faience flowerpot. The Tuscan 18th-century painted buffet holds a pair of 18th-century faience tureens. The ceiling is covered with 19th-century pine planks from Sweden and antique reclaimed beams from France, all from Chateau Domingue.



Above: A 19th-century rustic farm table serves as the Gays' dining-room table. Four lavender linen slipcovered benches seat eight. The table holds antique French linen napkins, hotel silver, 18th- and 19th-century faience pieces and an antique lavender *cloche* from France. The candle chandelier is an early-17th-century, three-light lustre from Lombardy. It's coupled with a pair of 18th-century appliques from Florence.

Left: The floor is made of 17th-century cobblestones culled from a street in Portugal. A collection of 19th-century

yellow pottery from Provence, beneath a stone sink from a French 17th-century monastery. The sink is often used to trim flowers and fill pots.

Below: The kitchen's stone walls were reclaimed from a 16th-century Provençal *mas*, and the counters and shallow sink were formerly used to make goat cheese in a 17th-century monastery outside Avignon. The large carved board hanging over the stove hailed from a *boucherie* in France. The pot rack was originally an 18th-century iron meat rack. The iron

candlelit chandelier was made in Tuscany. The wooden cabinet doors were once Tuscan shutters used in the 18th century, and the beams are antique reclaimed beams from France.

Below, left: A pair of Anduze *jarres*, circa 1817, filled with boxwood balls graces the entrance of Ruth and Jack Gay's Tanglewood-area home. A 19th-century faux bois bench (one of two outside) is pulled up to an antique set of French chairs and a garden table, all from Chateau Domingue.

