

Inventing Beauty

A DESIGNER
TAKES A TEXAS
HOUSE FROM
MUNDANE
TO MAGICAL.



RENOVATION AND INTERIOR DESIGN BY PAMELA PIERCE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER VITALE WRITTEN BY DEGEN PENER



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PAMELA PIERCE KNOWS HOW TO PULL OFF A VANISHING ACT. WHEN SHE FIRST VISITED THIS HOUSTON HOUSE, IT WAS A TYPICAL 1950S STRUCTURE, ALL SHEETROCK WALLS AND CEILINGS HOVERING AT EIGHT FEET. TODAY, almost no trace of it remains. Through a complete interior reconstruction for her client, the designer has created a rustic yet grand Provençal-style residence that feels remarkably Old World.

“Nothing of the original interior is left,” says Pierce, who put nearly three years into the project. “Inside, it’s practically a new house. It surprised even me.”

The transformation required a veritable shipload of reclaimed and aged architectural elements from Europe. All were imported by homeowner Ruth Gay, founder of Chateau Domingue, an overflowing showroom of time-burnished objects ranging from fireplaces, doors and frescoes to stable lanterns, sinks and doors, all ready for the leap from rough to refined.

“I loved going to Ruth’s showroom, digging through wonderful things,” says Pierce. “I was a kid in a candy store. Ruth never tells me no.”

Before the renovation, a colleague advised Gay to consider tearing down the house and starting from scratch. But Pierce’s inspiring redesign of the kitchen—the first room she tackled—saved the place from the wrecking ball. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the new kitchen is its floor: Pierce oversaw the tedious installation of literally thousands of seventeenth-century Portuguese cobblestones, all placed one by one. Pierce added more texture with walls of antique limestone blocks from France. Gay also imported the limestone slab counters, which came from a monastery

Feminine slipcovers contrast with the rugged stone walls. **OPENING PAGES:** Jardiniere, engravings, lantern and antique architectural elements throughout house, Chateau Domingue. **COMMODE:** Watkins Culver Antiques. **RIGHT:** Custom sofas in French linen. Antique fauteuil in Rogers & Goffigon linen, trumeau and candlestick lamp, all Chateau Domingue. Antique Italian floor lamp, W. Gardner, Ltd. Swedish tea table as coffee table, Jane Moore Antiques. Agra rug, Carol Piper Rugs.



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fabulous!’ THERE WAS NO HOLDING BACK AFTER THAT.”



OPPOSITE: Wingchair from Watkins Culver Antiques, custom ottoman and toile-fragment pillow, all in French linen. Antique fauteuil, Chateau Domingue, in Rogers & Goffigon linen. Vintage table, Thompson+Hanson. Lamp, W. Gardner, Ltd. ABOVE: Pine farm table, apothecary flacons, ceiling fixture, sideboard and Swedish

demilunes, all Chateau Domingue. Custom slipcovered benches in Calvin Fabrics linen. Antique mirrors. Curtains in Scalamandrè silk stripe. BELOW: Antique iron ceiling fixture, garden table and Louis XV-style chairs in Alsace grainsacks, all Chateau Domingue. Range and refrigerator, Viking. Farm sink, Rohl. Faucets, Waterworks.





Pierce created purposeful asymmetry in the breakfast room. Curtains and antique French dining chairs, Chateau Domingue, all in Rogers & Goffigon linen. French table, limestone fireplace and overmantel, armchair, sconce, papier-mâché bull's head, étagère, Tuscan buffet and Swedish beams, all antiques from Chateau Domingue. Deift medallion plate. Oushak, Carol Piper Rugs.





in Burgundy that had switched to stainless steel. “It gives me goose bumps to think monks had been making goat cheese on these counters since the 1600s,” says Gay, who was thrilled with her imaginatively reinvented kitchen. “I said, ‘Let’s keep going and make the whole house fabulous!’ There was no holding back after that.”

Antique stone blocks also became walls for the living room, a powder room and the master bedroom. Reclaimed French limestone flooring replaced scuffed parquet. For spaces such as the foyer and dining room, Pierce used colored plaster for the walls: “It was important to have relief from all the stone.”

The designer also raised the ceilings a foot higher in some rooms and installed custom steel doors and windows. But the most dramatic change is in the freshly expanded master bedroom, which now features an extraordinary barrel-vaulted ceiling and a large fireplace.

For the furnishings, Pierce played against unyielding stone. Deploying a signature touch, she designed generously cut linen slipcovers for most of the upholstery, all romantically skirted. “It takes the seriousness away from the antiques,” she says.

Pierce selected lavender as an accent hue throughout the house, which suited the owner just fine. “I don’t love a lot of bright color,” says Gay, “but the lavender is just so pretty, and it adds life to stone. It’s my new neutral.”

The interiors now display the aura of a place that exists somewhere between the Old World and the New. “The secret, after you acquire the large antique elements from France,” Pierce explains, “is to install them the way they were installed during the period. You can’t put new surrounds around old doors. I loved finding the best way to implement the pieces. It takes patience. But it’s worth it.” □

ABOVE: Limestone mantel, closet doors, trumeau, lantern and iron bistro table, all French antiques from Chateau Domingue. Antique iron bed, Watkins Culver Antiques. Custom bedcovers and pillows in antique fabrics. Custom chairs and ottoman slipcovered in Bergamo linen. Accent pillows in Rogers & Goffigon

linen. Antique Italian candlestand. Oushak, Carol Piper Rugs. All flowers by Johnathan Andrew Sage. OPPOSITE: Antique wooden doors from Burgundy, toile chandelier, bistro chairs, iron urns and Anduze jars, all Chateau Domingue. Vintage toile tablecloth. Hydrangeas, boxwood and olive topiaries. Myrtle standards in urn.

