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French Twist

Old, new, and even borrowed elements make this year's Ultimate Home the ideal architectural marriage of classic European style, modern proportions, and American functionality.

"Intimate," "warm," "subtle," and "functional" are not words typically used to describe large-scale homes. However, this 40,000-square-foot residence, located on a 2.5-acre lot in Beverly Hills, avoids the rigid formality often associated with mammoth dimensions, offering instead human proportions and a restrained sense of luxury.

The design team charged with accomplishing this feat consisted of architect Richard Landry, associate Marc Welch, and project manager Juan Carlos Ornelas; interior designer Joan Behnke; art consultant Deanna Postil; contractor John Finton; and landscape designer Dennis Hickok. The project required approximately three and a half years to complete—a relatively short cycle for a house of this size. "I have built a lot of homes in this square-footage range, and this one truly has the warmth and charm of a much older and smaller home," says Finton. "Everything was hand-picked specifically for the project and tailored to suit the homeowner's exact needs."

"It was important to me to create a home, not a mansion," says the homeowner, a businessman in his 50s with five children ranging in age from 5 to 27. "I wanted a place for my kids and their friends to come over and have fun without feeling like they had to be on their best behavior." While the French-inspired home is furnished with antiques and newer pieces inspired by antiques, the contemporary art collection—which includes works by Richard Serra, Damien Hirst, François-Xavier Lalanne, Helen Frankenthaler, and Roy Lichtenstein—keeps the interiors vibrant and fun. ➤



By
SAMANTHA BROOKS

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Not for Show | In order to make the home more inviting, Landry divided the floor plan into clusters of rooms, eschewing long hallways and grandiose spaces. “The rooms are all a very human size and scale,” he says. “There is no massive living room that never gets used, or worthless rooms just for show. It’s not that kind of home.”

Stone pavers line the driveway, which runs along the front of the home (previous pages, above). Visitors are welcomed through a pair of wrought-iron double doors backed with glass that Behnke found in a French antiques shop. The foyer (right) features a 19th-century hanging lantern. A pair of vases by Hervé van der Straeten and a Bernar Venet sculpture are displayed on two glass-topped tables with 18th-century French bases.

Directly off the entry are clusters of rooms for entertaining, including the dining room, the family room (left), and the living room (above). Designed to evoke the ambience of a Parisian apartment, the living room displays a collection of antique furnishings and decorative pieces spanning centuries that give the impression of having been accumulated over time. Mid-century French parchment-and-brass sconces, intricate moldings, gray walls in a custom antiqued-furniture finish, and a variety of textured fabrics—including mohair, silk, and horsehair, which covers an ottoman—define the space. The family room, with its beamed ceilings, warmer color palette, casual furnishings, and television, has the feel of a country house.



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Cloistered Retreats

The loggia (right) is one of the homeowner's favorite areas and one of the residence's most versatile ones. Accessed from either the living room or the library (above), the loggia has folding doors that open up two of its walls to the outdoors on warm days and enclose the space entirely during the colder months. "During the holidays, we put a big long table in the room and have our family and friends over—sometimes as many as 50 people," says the homeowner. The fireplace provides warmth, while the cushioned wicker outdoor furniture from Brenda Antin in Los Angeles accentuates the indoor-outdoor theme.

Dark woods and navy blue accents lend a masculine sensibility to the library, located just off the loggia. "I use the space for small groups when I entertain, but I'll also take business calls here if I'm working at home," says the homeowner. Artist Paulin Paris created a contemporary version of a fresco on the ceiling by applying painted canvases to its coffers. A Guy Diehl panting hangs above a Belgian marble fireplace purchased at Richard Shapiro. French antiques and finely crafted details provide an aesthetic link between the library and the rest of the house, while its darker color scheme and cloistral setting distinguish the space from the adjacent living and family rooms.



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Master Class | The home's second story houses most of the bedrooms, the gym, a private office, and the expansive master suite, which comprises a bedroom, a sitting room, his-and-hers bathrooms, and his-and-hers closets. "I've never liked his-and-hers bathrooms that are located on opposite sides of the bedroom, so we located them right next to each other," says the homeowner. "You have privacy, but you can also check in with each other while you're getting ready." His bathroom is finished in polished golden marble and dark black-walnut paneling, while hers (left) is done in shades of light gray with hints of powder pink.

In the master bedroom (above), a canopy bed offers a cocoonlike retreat for sleeping, while the sitting area, which faces a fireplace, creates a cozy enclave for reading in the evening. A cabinet behind the sofa conceals a television that can be watched from the bed. "We gave this room a lot of layers so that it would feel glamorous and comfortable," says Behnke. "There's cream-colored chenille on the walls, silk wall-to-wall carpeting, hand-embroidery on the headboard, and four layers of sheer fabric on the canopy that creates an ephemeral feeling. We added these kinds of contemporary details in a room that has an old-world feeling to add a youthful balance."



Wine and Dine | Although the home has a formal dining room and a catering kitchen, most family meals are eaten in the combination family kitchen/sitting area/breakfast area (above), located in a cluster of rooms at the opposite end of the first floor from the living room, library, and loggia. The warm country elegance of the adjacent family room carries into the kitchen area, which features a large center island topped with striking white-and-gray marble and appliances scattered around the island for easy access. A sofa near the island faces a television, so that the family can relax together while meals are being prepared. The floors of reclaimed antique French oak, which are used throughout most of the house, add a vintage touch. The breakfast table overlooks the backyard.

The lower-level wine room (left), which houses approximately 2,600 bottles of wine, features an inner sitting room separated from the wine-storage area by glass walls and allows for dual climate zones. The space can be accessed directly from the dining room via a spiral staircase or from the home's lower-level entertaining area (see page 98).



A Whiff of Gallic | The home's subdued landscaping gives emphasis to the architecture. "Every time I go to France, I feel very comfortable and at home. I love the stone and the roof lines that are typical of French architecture," says the homeowner. Because a direct replica of a French château would not be appropriate to Southern California, Landry took cues from the lines and materials traditionally used in France and adapted them to these surroundings. "Whenever we work in an architectural style that has precedents, we aren't attempting to make an exact copy," explains Landry. "We used classical French proportions, but made it our own. It's inspired by history but truly modern in its layout."

The guesthouse is located just to the left of the main house's entrance and surrounded on three sides by the larger structure, so that the two buildings appear to be one. The guest quarters have easy access to the main home's kitchen on the first floor and the gym on the second floor, which is linked to the guesthouse by an outdoor walkway (left).

The pool area (above and right) is furnished with wrought-iron lounge chairs from France and new antiqued wicker furniture from Brenda Antin.





Velvet Underground | Originally, the homeowner asked for a “Michigan basement” similar to the one he knew growing up. “He wanted a more rugged space for playing cards and hanging out,” says Behnke. “However, we quickly urged him to go in another, more sophisticated direction that would complement the rest of the house.” The lower level includes a circular sitting area with a big-screen television, a card room, a billiard room (left), and a home theater. “My 15-year-old daughter recently had a slumber party for her birthday, and she and all of her friends watched movies and hung out in the theater all night,” says the homeowner. “The area gets a lot of use.”

An Art Deco theme gives the lower level an air of elegance. “We found most of the lighting fixtures in Europe,” says Behnke. Five identical glass chandeliers, originally from an old French hotel, are scattered throughout the space, while a series of honeycomb-like brass fixtures hang above the billiard table and near the card room.

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Perfectly Fit | The home's ample square footage allows for a variety of specialized spaces, all of them used regularly. "I had a rule when we built this house: If a room was only going to be used 20 percent of the time, we'd eliminate it," says the homeowner. Equipped with a variety of cardio and weight machines, the home's fitness center (left) makes getting to the gym easy.

The second-floor outdoor terrace (above), can only be accessed off the homeowner's master bath, and serves as a second office or private lounge. "Nothing in the home screams 'over the top' to me," says the homeowner, who has now been living in the residence for just over two years. "I was lucky enough to work with a design team who wasn't just concerned with creating a 'wow project' for their portfolio but were practical and did what was best for me and my lifestyle. There were times where as many as 150 people were working here a day, many craftspeople and talented workmen whose hard work and attention to detail really made this home come together. The longer I live here, the more appreciative I am of what was created." ☐

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