French Connection

HOME SHOWCASES FRENCH ARTISTRY WITH A COMFORTABLE MIX OF CASUAL STYLE AND EUROPEAN FLAIR

BY SANDRA COOK • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIRO DVORSKAK

Native Houstonian Gina Luizza has a French soul. Though she grew up in Texas and studied and practiced law in Dallas, her knowledge of the French language and her mom Nan’s interest in European antiques led Gina to discover her French connection.

A collection of coral and shells sit on a dining room buffet from Joyce Horn Antiques. Lime green curtain worn is plisse acetate by Suede.

In this living room vignette, the bird cage art is from Veux Papoids in Saint Remy de Provence. The tablecloth is purposely folded and draped for a casual mid-mid look.
“I remember the first time I went to Paris, it was like this was how it was supposed to be,” Gina recalls. “I would never get lost or have the sense of being lost. It just felt right and I had a blast.”

Furthermore, she finds the scenery in Provence quite similar to the Texas Country. She later left the legal profession and followed her French bliss, opening her shop, Méli-Mélo, in Rice Village 14 years ago.

The shop's name is a French phrase that means a confused mix of different things. Since falling in love with French and other European potteries years ago, Gina has become a veritable sommelier of French pottery and tableware, with additional expertise in French fabrics. Her store and home occupy a 1938 story brick duplex, actually built as a duplex by the Elgin family. The fantastic first-floor store is a concentrated assemblage of French pottery and fabrics with pockets of Austrian glassware, Irish and Bulgarian pottery and decorative objects here and there, or, a mélange. Gina's friendly and well-behaved Golden doodle, Terra, politely greets customers at the front door — the French ideal.

LIVING UPSTAIRS

Gina resides on the second and third floors. Inspired by color as well as the beauty of nature, she often gathers decorating ideas from fabrics and nature. Wall color of her living room was based on lichen that grows on the glorious Rice University's walking path (encountered on frequent walks with her dog). Ralph Lauren’s Faded Silk matched nature’s paint chip proxy and provides a soothing backdrop for Gina’s abundant display of favorite fabrics, paintings by local and French artists and whimsical objects intended to inject humor into the everyday.

“I love whimsy,” she says. “One thing I've drawn from all the books I have on French design is that your eye should be entertained, not made anxious or crazed, but it should be entertained.”

Oriental rugs also capture her decorative passion. After taking a class on the subject, she befriended her teacher, then a rug dealer at Pride of Pasadena, and continued to learn, love and collect these walk-on woven works of art.

“Anything that you can tell is done with a lot of love and care just makes happy to look at,” she says.

The many rugs in her home provide the foundation, both literally and figuratively, for her rooms. She determines rugs first, fabrics second and then paint before choosing anything else for the room.

Next to the living room, the dining room features a somewhat
The cozy kitchen showcases a portion of Gina's own pottery. These pretty pieces serve to decorate and, well, serve, with no item off-limits for daily use. She feels all pottery should be accessible, touchable and not off-limits. "I grew up using my great-grandmother's beautiful tea cups and emisse cups," she says. "I was never told, 'Oh no, you can use that.' It's important for children to learn how to use things and to learn there are some things that you are careful with."

A wall-mounted black Wolf range, complete with bright red knobs, provides a fitting stage for her gleaming French copper pots to perform. At the foot of the kitchen, the peaceful porch is the perfect spot to enjoy a glass of wine in the company of Sidonie, the official potted plant. Here, subdued colors, based on a well-aged rug, keep the mood serene. Gina had carpenter Bob Kirkwood add the porch. Louvered windows keep the elements out when necessary and allow breezes and birds' songs to drift through.

Setting comfortable:

Steps away from the kitchen, the cheerful guest room evokes the Provence landscape's alternating fields of lavender and sunflowers. The wall color is inspired by flowers on the warm, yellow drapery fabric; Benjamin Moore's Lilac Pink did the trick. Gina used a more wine-purple toile print on the bed to play off the simple floral motif on the drapes. The color scheme is apparently quite conducive to sleep, as overnight guests often nap late when visiting.

Down the hall, the casual den is a multipurpose room, often used as a home office, TV room or conversation area. Gina had Kirkwood build a narrow maple bookcase to provide attractive storage and display that doesn't hog floor space. Warm neutral walls (textured, not printed), red tapestries and whimsical animal paintings by French artist Marie Amalia keep the mood relaxed and fun.

The master suite occupies the third floor, where the ceiling and walls are painted Mellow Yellow by Benjamin Moore. An elegant, yet playful, emulate canopy gives the bed plenty of style and aition. Two recognizable blue fabrics found in Marseilles during one of Gina's many travel-as-gathering trips to France.

The more collected artwork and exquisite crafts personalize this space. Top is an armoire from Marseilles features traditional wedding figure figures surrounded by precious detail, while a carved wooden church from Mexico stands with its dozens of doves gathered on the miniature rung.

"I like to create little still lifes," says a smiling Gina, who feels it is short, so the things around you should make you happy.
In the master bath, the Art Nouveau mirror is a cast-iron reproduction; the blue and white curtain fabric is from Marche St. Pierre. Colors for the bright guest room mimic the Provence landscape’s alternating fields of lavender and sunflowers. The wall is Benjamin Moore’s Lilac Pink (2074-40). Mustard-colored fabrics are from Provence. Golden yellow roses are by Audrey Sellers.