

TOUCHES OF EUROPE

OLD WORLD CHARM IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

INTERIOR DESIGN BY ELEANOR CUMMINGS ARCHITECTURE BY MURPHY MEARS ARCHITECTS
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY DANNY MCNAIR & DOUGLAS HERBERT PICKWORTH PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRIA GIOVAN
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AS A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS, AMERICANS HAVE ALWAYS IMPORTED IDEAS FROM EUROPE, ADAPTING THEM TO CREATE THEIR OWN HOMES. TODAY, IN A TIME OF FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT, THE SEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS has motivated design professionals to look yet again to the Continent for proven methods and materials.

The mix of time-tested Mediterranean elements in this house responds sensitively to the climate in Houston. Architect Kirby Mears combined old French limestone and Spanish roof tiles with custom steel doors and windows, plus variegated stucco, to give the Lehne family a low-maintenance home suited not only to the heat and humidity of coastal Texas but also to the indoor-outdoor activities of three children.

For her first meeting with Mears and interior designer Eleanor Cummings, the lady of the house, Kathy Lehne, brought a photograph of an Italian villa she had torn from a magazine. Mears, who keeps an apartment in the Mediterranean town of Antibes, knew how to translate the photograph's European sensibility into a Texas house with a terrace and swimming pool in a courtyard setting. Privacy was also a priority. His H-shaped floor plan for the home maximizes a feeling of seclusion only two miles from the heart of town.

The flow of the interiors works for the family. Three arched and shuttered French doors in the living room lead to the pool area, and the large kitchen opens onto an alfresco dining room. "My favorite thing about the

TOP LEFT: In bedroom, painting of Avignon over Tuscan fireplace, both antiques. Antique French chaise in Rogers & Goffigon linen. Antique French bergères in Rose Tarlow-Melrose House linen; antique tapestry pillows by B. Viz. Draperies in Travers linen. Italian sconces. Spanish chest. Mahal rug. **TOP RIGHT:** Custom bed with antique Venetian carving; Rogers & Goffigon velvet for headboard. Sferra linens. Tapestry pillow by B. Viz. Commode, painting and reliquary, all French. Italian lamp. **RIGHT:** Custom chairs in Great Plains linen-jute. French antique table and oil. Italian fixtures and sideboard. Tabriz carpet.





Designer Eleanor Cummings and architect Kirby Mears enrich a Houston home with European élan. OPENING PAGES: Graveled grove of red cedar and river birch. Antique French iron deer and garden chairs. Custom shutters. ABOVE: Maquette over mantel, both French antiques. French skirted chair in Holland & Sherry cashmere. Italian sconces and stool. BELOW: Antique sideboard and wood fragments as lamps, all Italian. Antique French window surround as mirror frame.



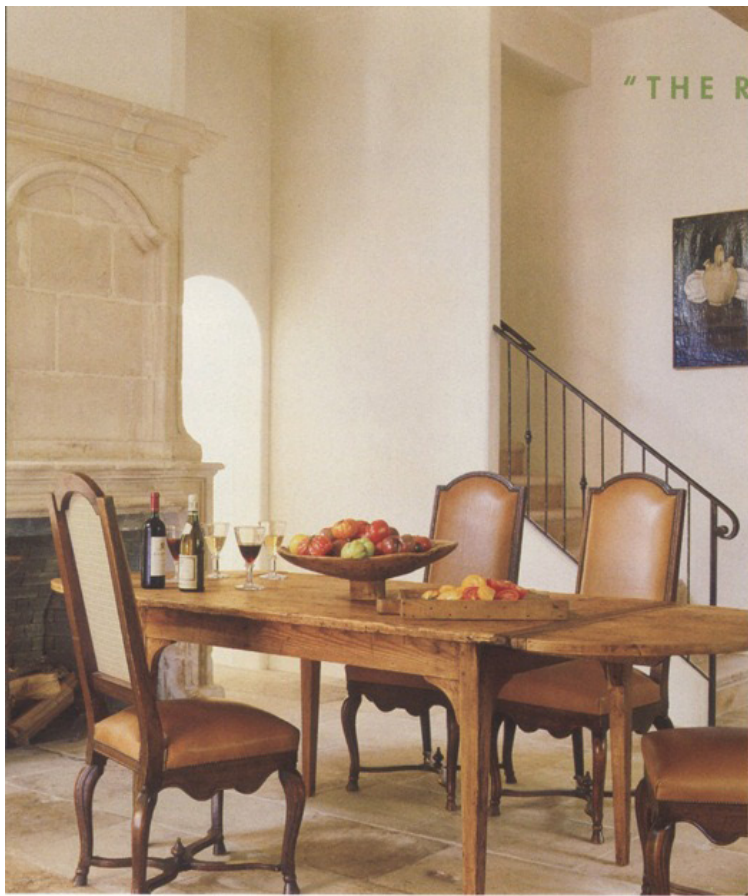
COVER AND THESE PAGES: Antique Italian chairs in Rogers & Goffigon linen and original leather. French daybed serves as coffee table; cushion in Kravet velvet. Settee, in Travers jute-linen, painting and torchère, all Italian. Throw by Loro Piana. Draperies in Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric. French reclaimed limestone floor from Chateau Domingue.





ABOVE LEFT: Antique Italian daybed in Rogers & Goffigon linen; antique tapestry pillow by B. Viz. Antique Provençal screen. Custom sconce. ABOVE RIGHT: In master bath, Roman-style tub, Venetian mirror and French slipper chair, in Rogers & Goffigon linen, all antiques. THG faucetry. Antique Italian angel table. BELOW AND OPPOSITE: In guest room, custom bed's headboard inspired by antique Italian carving. Antique Swedish tables. Draperies, bedskirt and antique Swedish settee, all in Les Indiennes paisley. Sferra linens. Italian lamp. Antique French chandelier and trumeau. Comb-painted walls. Floor of bleached, reclaimed white oak.





"THE RECLAIMED LIMESTONE FLOORS



INSPIRED THE HOME'S COLORS," SAYS ELEANOR CUMMINGS.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: In kitchen, fireplace, farm table and industrial stools, all French. Antique Italian chairs in Edelman Leather; backs in Brunswick & Fils cotton. Vintage French mercantile fixtures as custom cabinetry; Rocky Mountain Hardware. Counters of French reclaimed limestone from Chateau Domingue. Light fixture by Jill Brown. Custom hood. La Cornue range. Herbeau sink. Rohl faucetry. BELOW: Italian chapel fragment. Florals by Johnathan Sage and Mary Jane Ryburn.



BOTTOM: Wall lanterns by Eleanor Cummings. Pool, doors, shutters, awning frames and Hope's windows, all custom by Murphy Mears Architects. French urns. Barlow Tyrie chaises. Reclaimed French limestone terrace. Reclaimed Spanish roof tiles. **RIGHT:** In poolhouse, Belgian bluestone table for alfresco dining. Sempre woven chairs. Pillows in DeLany & Long fabric and Rose Tarlow-Melrose House fabric. Antique French lantern. Zinc lanterns on antique Provençal fireplace surround.

house—and what people comment on most—is its connection to the backyard,” says Cummings. “There is no separation.” Underlining the point is the uninterrupted use of reclaimed French limestone throughout all the rooms on the first floor and right out onto the terrace and pool surround. The children, ages 7 to 16, are in and out of the pool constantly in warm weather. “With a limestone floor, there’s no need to worry about drips from wet bathing suits,” says Mears. “And the limestone’s surface is rough enough so no one slips.”

Such practicality didn’t dampen Cummings’ desire to design elegant, comfortable interiors. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European antiques are relaxed with linen, cotton and other natural weaves. And a pale, neutral palette melts into the sandy tones of the tinted plaster walls and limestone floor.

“Many of the furnishings are fine antiques, but they are substantial in scale and built to last,” says the designer. She chose hefty mantels and large paintings to stand up to ceilings that soar fourteen feet high.

The dine-in kitchen offers its own charms, including a fireplace. Counters of limestone top cabinets of reclaimed wood with a multi-drawer island Cummings fashioned from vintage French mercantile fixtures, all bleached for an aged look. The kitchen is softened by morning light via mullioned windows, while later in the day the room is lit from the opposite side by warm afternoon rays. A functional but inviting realm.

Outside, the infinity-edge pool beckons. “I wanted to give the family a livable house that also feels like a second home,” says Mears, “so they don’t have to leave town every weekend just to see a horizon line.” □

