

Inspired by *Provence*

A magnificently designed St. Albans home exudes the refined elegance of a *grande maison* in the South of France.

BY VICKI PICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL JACOB





The home's French ambience is immediately apparent, with a foyer that invites guests to relax and enjoy the spectacular presence of the space. A circular staircase wraps the impressive entryway in magnificent fashion and draws the eye to an extraordinary 32-foot ceiling, crystal chandelier and majestic rotunda. The beautifully distinguished, dramatic space is architecturally rich with front doors that aptly characterize the home's grandeur with their French-inspired silhouette.

“When you do a thing with your whole soul and everything that is noble within you, you always find your counterpart.”

– Camille Pissarro, French artist known for painting French landscapes

One might say that nature's breathtaking landscape was the motivation for the serendipitous inquiry to St. Alban's Realty by former St. Louisans who were living on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. John, a retired businessman, and Cindy, who refers to herself as a “world traveler,” discovered the St. Albans property while searching the Internet. It would happily prove to be the perfect setting for their future Provençal-inspired home, with an aesthetic that mimics the various regions of Provence – a region of southeastern France on the Mediterranean, adjacent to Italy.

With John's career taking the couple abroad – to Australia for four years, London for seven years, and Lake Geneva, Switzerland for seven years – coming back to the states would allow them to continue their adventurous lifestyle. While overseas, the couple frequently went on holiday to a favorite destination in Provence. There, the grand chateaux and splendid countryside *maisons* of the region captured their hearts. An adoring couple for decades, John and Cindy saw



Opening pages: A splendid hearth room is replete with a painting of a French vineyard scene above a stunning limestone fireplace. The design inspiration for the space was a Schumacher floral fabric with rich browns, pinks and greens. “The fabric created the strong impact that set the mood for the warm feeling that John and Cindy desired,” says interior designer, Rose Roberts, ASID. The room opens to a wonderful, spacious terrace.

This page top: A handsome library includes favorite art pieces: Tanzanite elephants; an ebony sculpture (carved over decades) of an 11-generation family tree; and a silk needlework dragon on display. A stone fireplace, leather wing chairs and a wool Persian-style area rug warm the space.

Below: John and Cindy enjoy a quiet moment in the exquisite grand hall.



“Every piece in the home is unusual, special and exquisite.”

– Rose Roberts, ASID, interior designer



Opposite page top: The home's lower level bar features Black Beauty granite with a mosaic look. A vineyard mural by Gene Scott shows the life and layers of a family in France and highlights the wine tasting area. A family crest displayed in the wine room has a traceable history dating back 900 years. **Opposite page bottom:** The gourmet kitchen was designed by Cutters Custom Kitchens & Baths with a unique stone overmantel. The couple enjoys “conjuring up delectable meals on weekend mornings with croissants and mimosas.” (There is also a second chef kitchen.) **This page:** Wheat-colored linen panels – with tassel trim on the lead edge – are presented on iron rods and rings with French-style finials, and outline the informal dining room. A British collection of watercolor etchings of the four seasons were found in a quaint art gallery in Richmond, England.



retirement in their plans. Having looked around the U.S. and Montreal for nearly two years, the property at St. Albans – with its 12-plus acres beginning at a tranquil lake, wrapping over a wooded hillside and following a limestone bluff with scenic views of the majestic river valley – was a setting reminiscent of a limestone plateau overlooking the sunset landscape of the Alpilles (a chain of small mountains) in Provence.

The couple's desire – to replicate a French home in all its splendor – would evolve superbly over the next couple of years with the help of talented professionals who brought the

extraordinarily detailed plan to life. Architect Dick Busch, in tandem with St. Albans Construction, put the plans into motion. A fortuitous meeting with interior designer Rose Roberts, ASID, led to a glorious collaboration and helped the home's European ambience prevail. Using a stack of books that Cindy had collected as a template of ideas for the home, Rose proceeded to sketch out a sophisticated design plan that evolved as a result of a wonderful client and designer relationship – one that was based on mutual respect, trust and passion for the project.

“I was inspired by the architectural details that John and Cindy



"We have a wonderful view of our woodland garden; it is nature's artistry at its finest."

- John and Cindy, homeowners



Opposite page: Cindy's plan for the sitting room in the master suite was for two chaise lounges to face outward and let the natural landscape envelop the serenity of the space. The family cat, Mistletoe, fondly referred to as "Missy," poses for her photo. **This page:** A resplendent master suite is punctuated by a French blue painted cabinet to introduce a Provençal look, and leads to a luxurious master bath. Its sunlit, glistening ambience captures the essence of sheer beauty. A separate shower room is another exceptional feature in the remarkably designed bath space. Stunning, custom-designed cabinetry features Swarovski crystal handles.

initiated, but I was also inspired by their wealth of knowledge and especially, travel knowledge,” says Rose. “Seeing the house in progress and helping them achieve [and exceed] their highest expectations excited me. I couldn’t wait to get started on such an extraordinary project.” Room by room, furnishings were carefully selected for each of the home’s remarkable spaces.

Although a formidable home, it is graciously welcoming. A stunning tapestry from Belgium takes command in the magnificent entryway and was purchased by the couple for their new home to make a statement. “The tapestry helps to define the home and is reminiscent of our life in Europe,” says Cindy.

With its chateau-like feel, the house is set perfectly north and



is fondly considered the couple’s “True North” on life’s compass – with views that allow the home to capture the daylight in abundance. An authentic compass rose – an artistic inlay in the home’s spectacular entryway – points to the northern view of the glorious surrounding landscape through impressive, window-lined rooms. “Its Provençal beauty and simple elegance shine through,” says Rose.

The home’s design plan was directed for optimal flow when entertaining. “We love to entertain,” say the couple. “And a party for 100 is in our near future. Our first Christmas here was with our grown children and their families.”

In the spectacular grand hall, a soft coral pink and chocolate brown silk stripe fabric – fashionably showcased on two of the room’s predominant chairs – inspired the refined look and extraordinary presence of the room, as well as of the formal dining room. The outstanding flow of the home’s main level – around the sweeping entryway staircase – leads to a welcoming hearth room. In an adjacent informal dining room, a 16-foot turret spotlights a 72-inch round European-inspired dining table. With two chair styles – Parsons chairs covered in a rich toile and ladder-back chairs with silk plaid fabric – the room exudes a French appeal.

“We were all on the same page in terms of achieving the desired feel for the home,” says Rose. “When I found the drapery fabric for the sitting room in the master suite, it shone with the look of a lined, tufted silk ball gown – and it was very romantic. John and Cindy loved it immediately. The drapery hardware is painted gold with a hand-finished rod and rings. Even the finials had to be an exquisite accoutrement in allowing the drapery to sweep the space in waltz-like fashion.”

This is a home that proclaims its timeless feel with all of the details considered, and it is truly a place of respite for the couple. “We feel extremely fortunate to have lived in many exceptional places and have had the wonderful opportunities we’ve had. Our home is a culmination of a grand life we’ve shared together and all of the memories we carry from our travels,” say the couple. “We’d like to live here for the rest of our lives, though we’d love to have a small house in the South of France.”

“You can take a girl out of France, but you can’t take France out of the girl,” says Cindy with a smile. •

Opposite page: The home’s formal powder room has an Oriental flair with its striking red wallcovering. The baroque console table belonged to the homeowners; Painter John Pitts applied layers of gold to achieve the desired look. A red onyx countertop and sink spotlight the console below a gilded French mirror. An antique bench from Paris completes the space. **Above:** A richly designed lower level family room is the gathering spot for family get-togethers. In their free time, Cindy enjoys golf at St. Albans, and John loves “being with Cindy.”

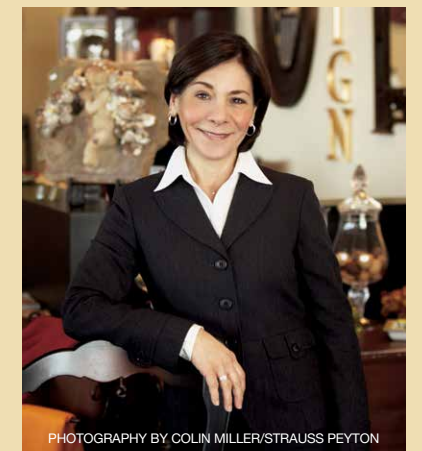
ROSE’S TIPS:

Rose Roberts, ASID, principal designer for Rose Roberts Interior Design, Inc., shares her design tips for creating inviting, personalized spaces.

THE ESSENTIALS:

- Research the design style that interests you. Scan magazines and books, and make a file of pictures that excite and inspire you. Refer to them throughout your project.
- Purchase pieces that you love, even if you think they won’t work with what you have. Things you love always blend well, making for a more interesting home.
- Don’t skimp when it comes to accessories. While they don’t have to be expensive, they should be plentiful. Shop flea markets and antique shops to find unusual items.
- Pay careful attention to detail. Select drapery hardware, for example, that is appropriate for the room. The right size and style of finial can take the treatment from ordinary to spectacular.
- Keep your home warm and inviting. Create seating groups so people feel connected and comfortable.

See page 70 for design resources.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLIN MILLER/STRAUSS PEYTON

*“Love your home.
Wake up every
morning and think,
‘I love it here.’”*

– Rose Roberts, ASID, interior designer