

Building a *legacy*

Inspired by a love of Italy, Illinois homeowners build a home with a focus on gathering and enjoying life.

BY VICKI PICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL JACOB

For Belleville, Illinois homeowners Julie and Rob, building a home just outside the city with an authentically Italian feel – a *bella casa* – was truly a dream come true. Built three years ago on 16 picturesque acres, the magnificent residence is punctuated with well-appointed, comfortable décor and exudes a genuine taste of the country they adore.

Busy professionals (Julie is a professor and Rob is with a financial services agency), the couple called on talented interior designer Mim Phillips to help them realize their vision of an inviting, Italian-inspired home for themselves and their college-aged children, Kate and Dan. As a team, they channeled their energies to create a spacious, welcoming home with a decidedly Italian feel that would live beautifully within its countryside setting – with a nod to the family’s Italian heritage. (Rob’s family is from the island of Sicily in Southern Italy.)

“In Italy, we loved lingering at the table after dinners together and being with family.”

– Julie and Rob, homeowners

“In 1998, we took our kids and visited family in Sicily, and we brought Rob’s grandma with us,” explains Julie. “She, along with Rob’s Uncle Biagio, were our interpreters on the trip. Rob still has many relatives in Sicily, and 30 of them even met us at the airport. It was wonderful.”

“The month of August is when families in Italy take vacations at the beach and all stay at a simple beach home. We loved lingering at the table after dinners together and being with family. It’s what we wanted to have in our own home,” say the couple.



Opening pages: The impressive living and dining rooms exude a warm, Mediterranean feel. Among the custom details that create the rich, inviting ambience are beautifully trimmed draperies and a faux finish on the ceiling. The reclaimed fir hardwood floor is from an old farmhouse in Shiloh, Illinois, and its rustic, timeworn character helps to tie all of the gathering spaces together on the home’s main level. The family’s golden retriever, Doc, heads outdoors. **Opposite page:** A heartfelt motto is painted about the breakfast room window, which, when translated, refers to eating and loving well and laughing often. **Above:** A fabulous stone archway provides a customized niche in the spacious, Italian-inspired kitchen. A hand-painted, tiled backsplash with the family crest pays homage to “Castelvetro,” the family’s ancestral home.

“Tuscany inspired the look we desired, and now, our home has many of those same qualities.”

– Julie and Rob



Having traveled extensively throughout Europe and Italy, the couple admits, “Italy is our favorite place. On one specific trip, while staying in Tuscany, the memorable atmosphere inspired the look we desired, and now, our home has many of those same qualities.”

As if essential ingredients from one of Julie’s favorite Tuscan cookbooks, the home’s components – floor to ceiling – create the memorable look. The couple loves to gather with family, and a family holiday gathering may include 50 people. Desiring a warm, country home with the feel of the Italian countryside, the Tuscan-style home welcomes you with spacious, warm living and dining rooms, each emanating a sense of understated elegance and inviting European charm. Painted above the breakfast room window is an expression of a life philosophy that the family holds dear. It says: *Mangi Bene. Ridi Spesso. Ama Molto* (Eat Well. Laugh Often. Love Much).

Opposite page: A custom brick ceiling spotlights a rustic powder room on the home’s main level. A spectacular custom-made vanity brings an immediately authentic feel to the room’s natural, provincial look. **Above:** Subtle blues and taupes work together to create a relaxed feel in the custom-designed, luxurious master suite – a wonderful retreat for Julie and Rob. The bedroom leads to a handsome study through French doors. **Right:** The provincial charm and Old-World feel of this quintessentially rustic, *magnifico* entryway captures the heart of the Italian-inspired home.



“Kate’s room is a mélange of old and new furnishings updated in rich and vibrant colors that are fun and sophisticated!”

– Mim Phillips, interior designer



DESIGNED WITH PERSONALITY IN MIND

Mim Phillips of Mim Phillips Interiors offers her design philosophy: Every family has a story with “chapters” that relate to the past, the present and hopes for the future. Although design encompasses many components, such as scale, balance and proportion, it is the people who are most important in the “story.”

MIM’S TIPS:

- Respect the home’s architecture; emphasize any interesting elements while making it your own style.
- Add some pizzazz to all your spaces – an inspirational painting, a new coat of paint or an old artifact – or why not change the symmetry!
- Keep one focal point in each room by starting with a significant piece, such as a unique stone fireplace, as a springboard for the rest of the room.
- Allow your own personality to emerge through color, art and objets d’art.
- Relax, and inject “fun” into your design plan!

Left: Interior designer Mim Phillips used new and heirloom furnishings to create a vibrant, dramatic bedroom suite for Kate on weekend visits home from college. The family cat Jack relaxes on the comfy bed. **Above:** Mim shares her philosophy on designing personalized spaces.

Story continues...

Generous spaces flow from one to another with genuine ease and beckon both large and intimate gatherings that extend to a spectacular outdoor setting. Tastefully designed living and dining rooms – with a villa-like feel – open to a glorious veranda with sweeping views of a two-acre stocked lake, where leisurely moments are quietly awaiting. Reminiscent of the green rolling hills of Umbria, the home’s countryside setting is the ideal backdrop for the traditional Italian-style furnishings, look and ambience that the couple desired.

Incorporating the family’s personal keepsakes, Mim created exceptional spaces in tandem with the couple’s design wishes and added a sense of worldly sophistication to the home. “I was honored to work with Julie and Rob and help them to realize their vision of a home that would remind them of Tuscany,” says Mim.

Two years ago, the couple began growing two varieties of grapes – Vignoles (white)

“We love the rural, Mediterranean look and feel of our home.” – Julie and Rob

and Norton (red) – in their own “young” vineyard at the front of the property. “It’s part of my family heritage,” says Rob, “with family members having vineyards and olive orchards in Sicily. Bringing their tradition to the U.S., I hope to make a little bit of wine and have some fun with it.”

His hobby – to maintain the vineyards in the evenings and on the weekends – is a labor of love. “We’d love to have family here from Sicily someday to taste the fruits of my labor,” he says. And with their family-oriented setting, the visit will surely be one to remember for many years to come. •



Opposite page: A side porch off the breakfast room is reminiscent of leisurely outdoor settings in Italy. **Above:** A veranda looks out onto a stocked, two-acre lake, and it is an ideal outdoor living space. Its stylishly casual, serene ambience echoes a graceful way of life. **Right:** Rob and Julie matched the stone on their home, built by Crest Estate Homes, to stone they’d admired in Italy, visiting 5 quarries to find the type they wanted. Fondly, Julie recalls, “It was the perfect excuse for Rob to get a Bobcat and a tractor.” See page 76 for design resources.

