



Provincial Perfection



The rolling countryside
of St. Albans is the setting for a
remarkable European-inspired residence.

BY VICKI PICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL JACOB

*“Tuscany is a state of grace.
The countryside is so lovingly
designed that the eye sweeps the
mountains and valleys without
stumbling over a single stone.”*

– Irving Stone, American writer (1903 - 1989)

For St. Albans homeowners with a passion for “creating a home and seeing it come to life,” a residence reminiscent of the quaint villages of Italy was the ultimate vision. The result is *magnifico*.

A scenic, winding drive through a wooded landscape ends at a quiet clearing, revealing a perfect countryside setting for the place that owners Gene and Marcia refer to as “village-inspired.” The exceptional residence – complete with a main house, a carriage house and a pub – is home to the St. Louis couple. They were fortunate to collaborate with a team of companies and extraordinary individuals



who contributed to the architecturally rich residence that exudes the appeal of a European country manor. “They are each incredibly talented and dedicated professionals who take pride in every detail,” say the couple.

The couple’s vision was for each of the three buildings to incorporate a variety of European-styled light fixtures and shutters. Inviting park benches and a charming group of chairs are placed around the “village” setting. The homeowners created a small park with a rippling creek, and used fountains, hanging baskets, flower boxes and rustic signs to punctuate the landscape. “Our grandkids love to play in our creek and enjoy catching frogs, tadpoles, turtles and an occasional lizard,” says Gene with a smile.

The couple drew on a wide repertoire of ideas, design experiences and travels to create the warm, eclectic look they desired – marrying an aesthetic that encompasses

Opening pages: The homeowners envisioned a setting for their home where each structure boasts its individuality in keeping with the feel of building façades in a small Tuscan village. **Opposite page bottom left:** Many sentimental family heirlooms contribute to the comfortableness of the house, making it feel like home. The Italian blue color of Marcia’s first Schwinn bicycle displays perfectly as a decoration in the yard, leaning leisurely against the house. **Above:** A mesmerizing waterfall highlights the heated, salt-water Mediterranean-style pool. This dynamic feature captures the essence of the outdoors, unifying it with its natural surroundings. **Right:** The pub is an eclectic space with an authentic, rustic European feel. Gene enjoys the space and occasional poker games. He is an avid hunter, and the couple has incorporated his hobby into the décor.



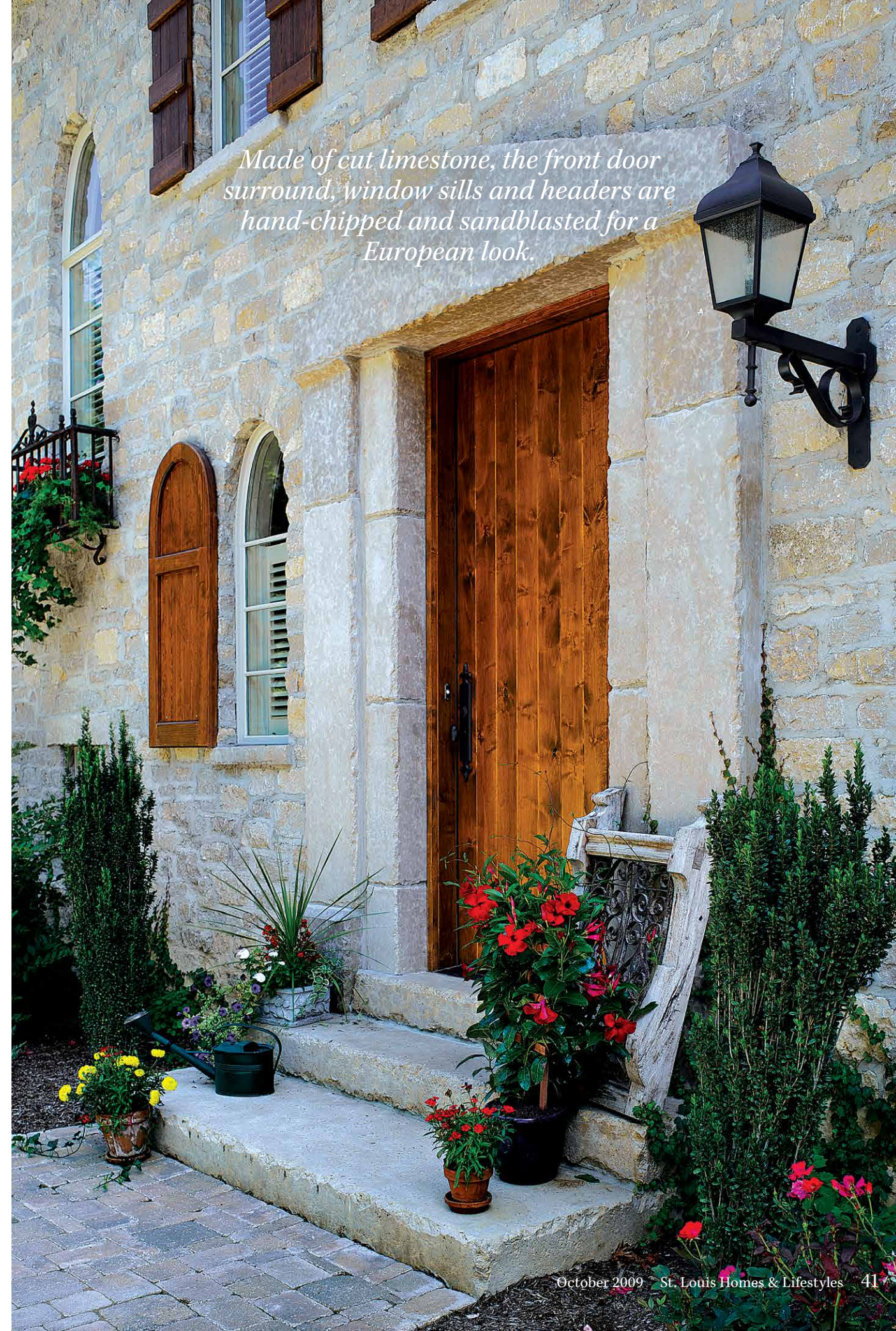


Above: Marcia hosts girls' weekends with high school and work friends. The carriage house, comfortably designed to mimic a countryside inn, provides a cozy, private space for guests to relax. **Below:** An iron window guard becomes the perfect spot for hanging herbs and dried flowers. An old, weathered door was reclaimed and painted. **Opposite page:** "Gene's ability to replicate things is amazing," says Marcia. A number of these recreated items have been motivated by favorite books, such as the limestone front door surround from *The Most Beautiful Villages of Provence*, by authors Michael Jacobs and Hugh Palmer. *Tuscan Elements*, by Alexander Black, inspired the light fixture at the front door.



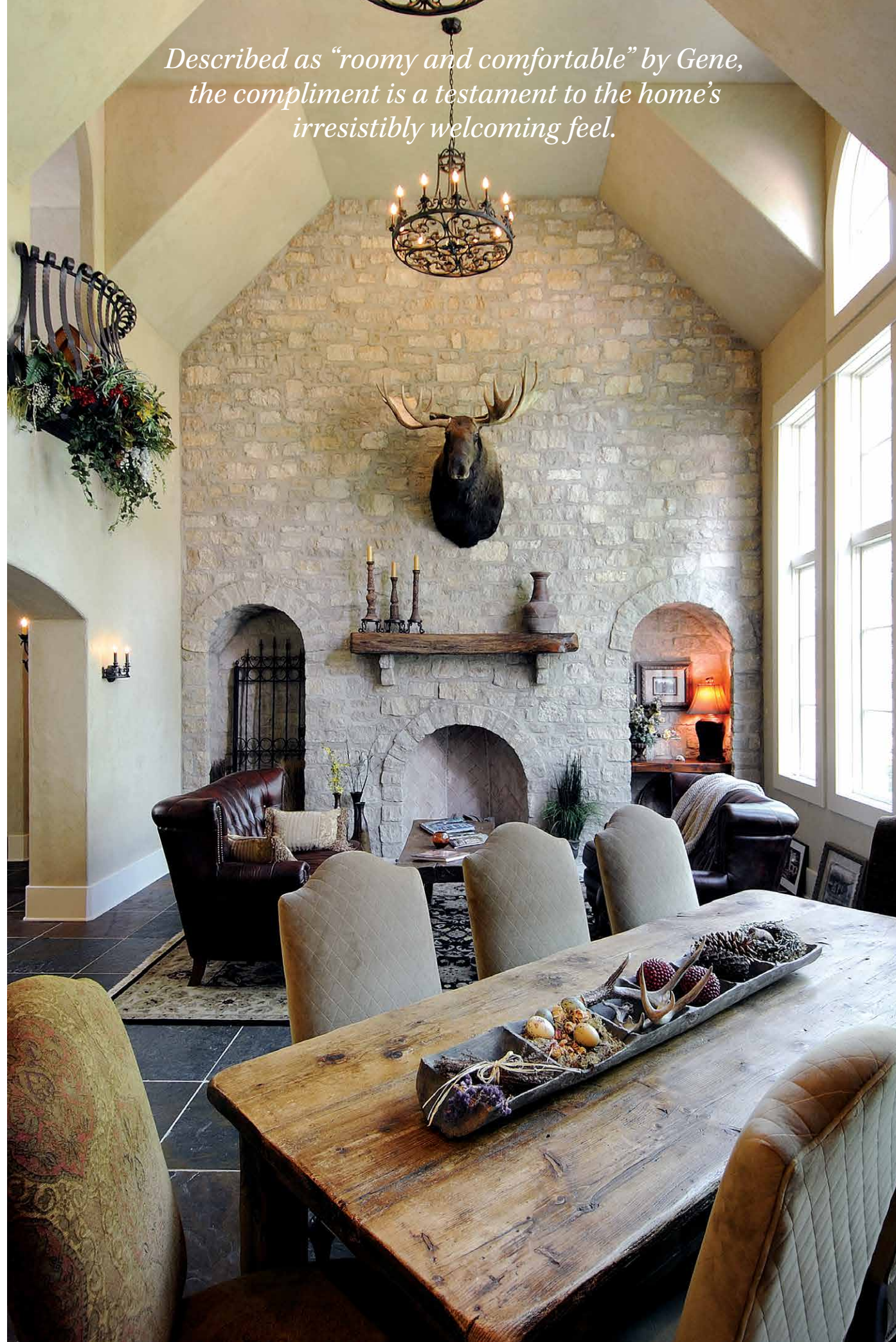
Italian and French Provençal design. "We began our personal building projects 25 years ago by renovating a farm house in Chesterfield. After that experience, we decided to go with new construction and have designed, built, and have since decorated 10 personal residences, and six have been at St. Albans," say the couple. "We name all of our homes that we build after our children and grandchildren. This home is the *il villaggio piccolo di Tessa Marie*, meaning the little village of Tessa Marie. Tessa is three years old and our youngest grandchild."

"I am always asked where I get my ideas for decorating, and there isn't any one source. I may find an idea in a travel brochure, on a wine bottle, or in a magazine," says Marcia. "Then there is always the unexpected. Ben, a 19-year-old college student, came with friends of ours



Made of cut limestone, the front door surround, window sills and headers are hand-chipped and sandblasted for a European look.

Described as “roomy and comfortable” by Gene, the compliment is a testament to the home’s irresistibly welcoming feel.



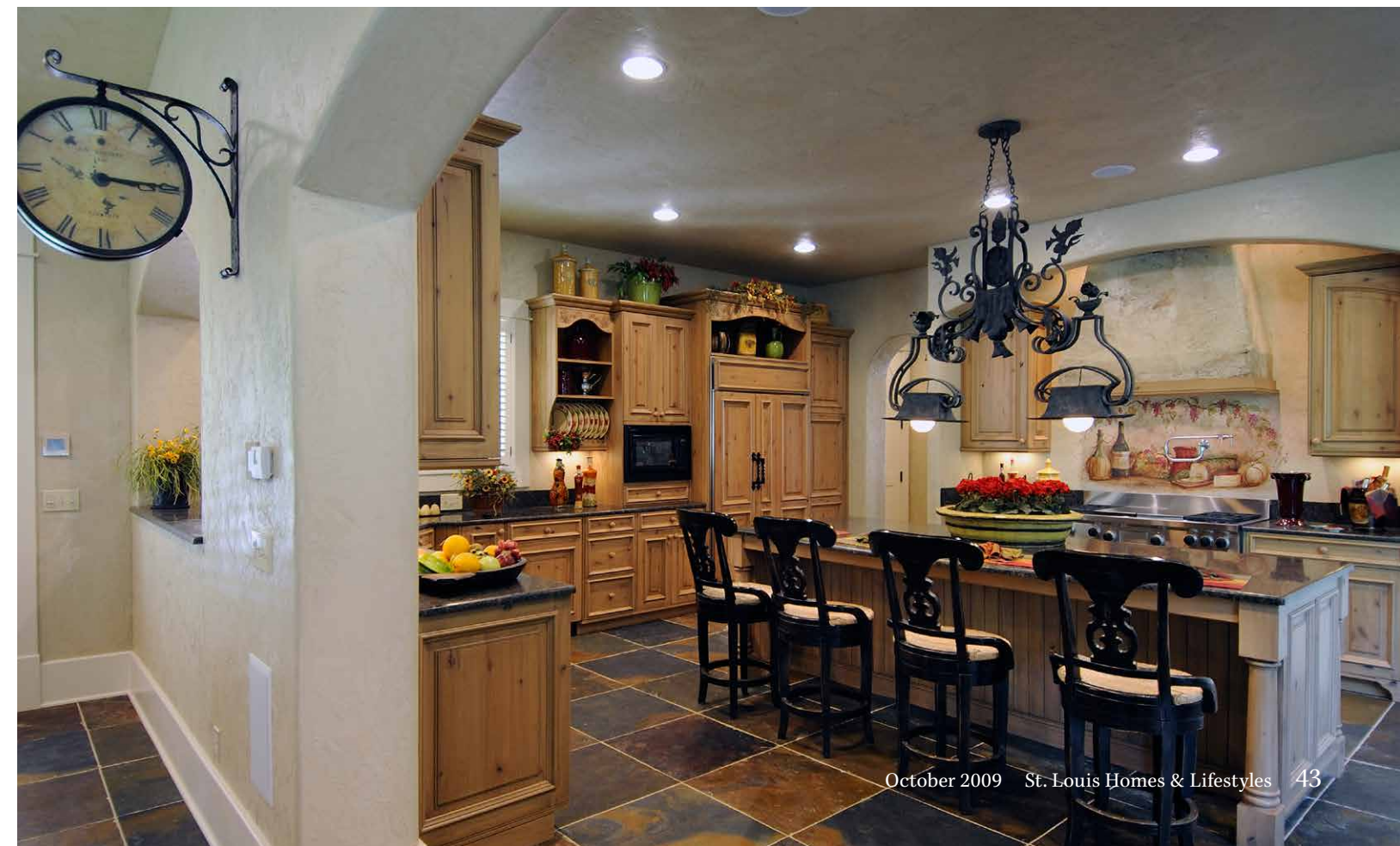
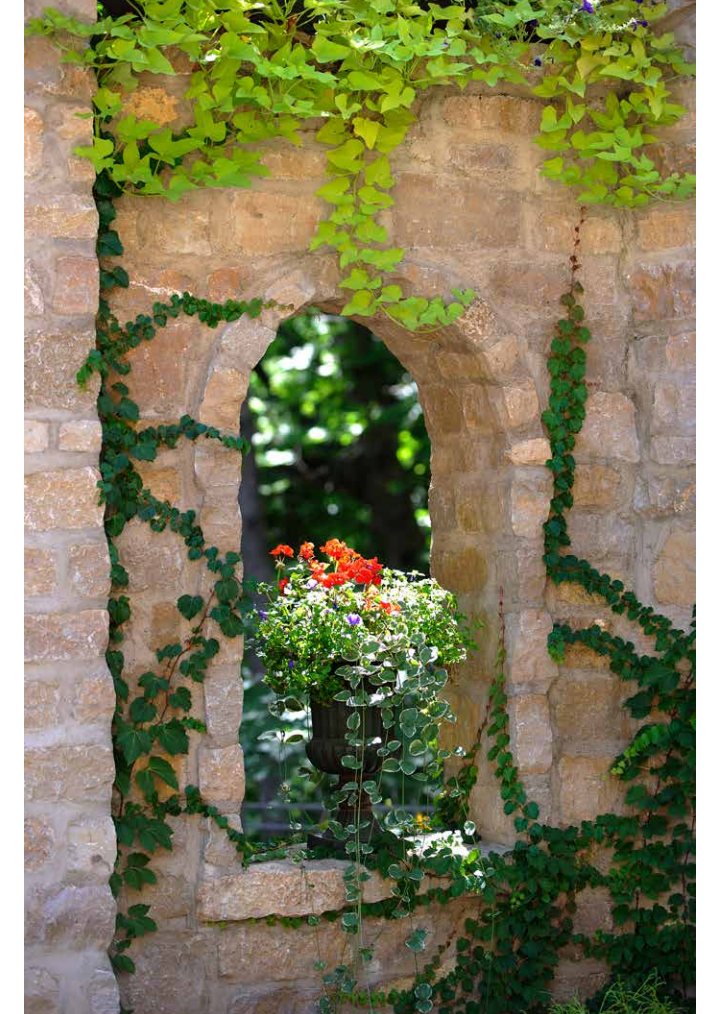
to see the house while it was under construction. We already had a window in the front of the tower in the pub. Looking up at the tower, Ben made the comment that a big clock would have looked good in the tower. We couldn’t believe we didn’t think of that. We quickly began looking at different clock towers on the Internet, found what we liked, and ordered the Roman numerals and mechanism. We named the clock ‘Big Ben’ after the college student who gave us the idea.”

Marcia and her sister began taking special once-a-year trips together to Europe when Gene went on hunting trips with his buddies. These trips inspired her to shape a look for their new St. Albans home that combined touches of Italy and France into both the furnishings and the design aesthetic.

“Gene and I work as a team. If I have an idea and share it with Gene, by the end of the day he has it figured out and finished. We’ve been known to get up at 2 a.m. and sit at the kitchen counter and design our next home,” says Marcia.

A stroll through the home is a mini-journey through time.

Opposite page: The great room evokes a European sensibility, and it features personal touches from both Gene and Marcia. An alcove spotlights an iron door – a piece of St. Louis trivia – from the Henry VIII hotel and restaurant on Lindbergh Blvd. **Right:** Authentic European ambiance overflows on the grounds and is apparent in all of the home’s materials, including the provincial-inspired landscaping. **Below:** The home’s gathering space is a wonderfully designed and functional room and exudes the warmth and character of a cozy Italian *cucina*.



"Both Gene and I like finding unique items and placing them out of their traditional use. We love mixing the old with the new."

— Marcia, homeowner

This page: The covered terrace décor includes a red oak fireplace mantel (and another in the great room). Both were crafted by Gene from trees that had fallen trees on the property 20 to 30 years ago. Selecting timber with just the right shape and character, Gene shapes the heart of the tree into a mantel with a chain saw and hand tools.



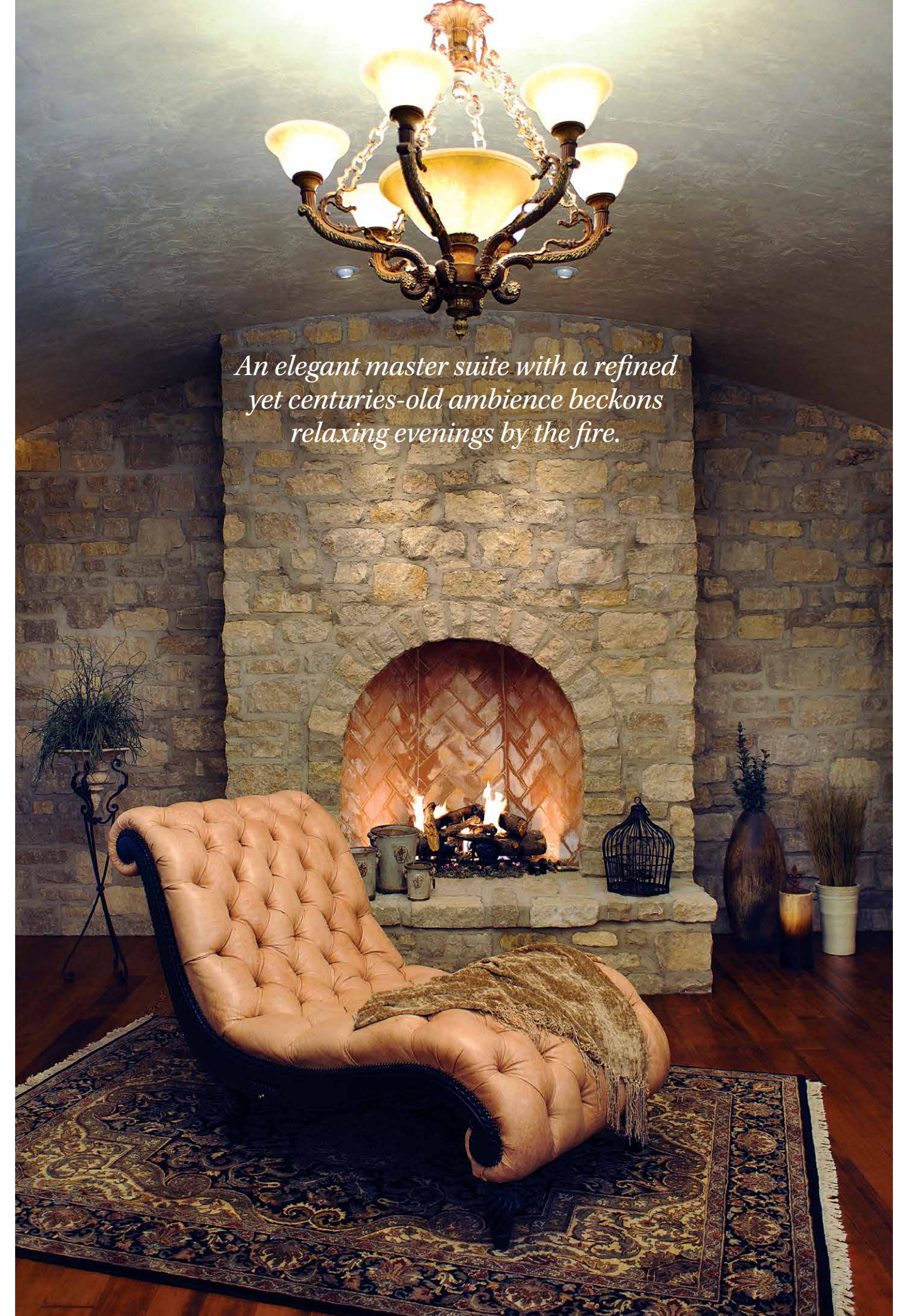
Above: A luxurious master bath adds rich architectural interest to the master suite. An arched entry niche and spacious shower with outdoor lighting are among the extraordinary features of the space. Tone-on-tone limestone spotlights the space and contributes beautifully to the earthy, natural palette. **Below:** The exquisite master bedroom reflects a timeless, European ambience. Gene and Marcia love to blend interesting pieces to create a vista that beckons a second look. **Opposite page:** A striking button-tufted leather chaise is a focal point in the bedroom's sitting area, complementing the spacious master suite and its understated elegance.

"Our dining table is a 100-year-old pine French library table. We have a wallpaper cart with pots in the yard, the 'table' in our bedroom was used in a furniture factory to move items through the building process, and old iron window guards are towel racks in the master bath," says Marcia.

With a spacious carriage house and two guest bedrooms with private baths in the main house, Marcia likes the fact that overnight friends and family have their own places with lots of privacy. And what began as a pool house turned into a pub that Gene and Marcia decorated with a rustic, European flair that includes pub décor from Marcia's parents' business.

The space joins the outdoor living area that features a spectacular Mediterranean-style pool, several waterfalls, cooling side misters, and a custom tanning shelf and hot tub. "When visitors comment that they feel as if they are standing in a village in Europe, we know that we have achieved our goal – to create a home with a touch of Tuscany," say the couple. •

See page 74 for design resources.



An elegant master suite with a refined yet centuries-old ambience beckons relaxing evenings by the fire.