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A Piece of Old Paris

A home in Massachusetts is a slice of 1800s French paradise, transporting those within to a bygone age.

Written by KAREN WILHELMSEN

Très Chic

The living room's neoclassical feel is in part due to the crown molding. "Part of [the idea] was to give the home character, so it wouldn't look like all or it was [remodeled] at once," says interior designer John Keesev. Though the home isn't a literal interpretation of French style, there are still classic elements, like the 17th-century Louis XVI sconces. "We tried to use visual cues and references to a style."

PHOTO BY LAURA MOSS



Full Circle

"In French foyer, you've got to have black-and-white checked floors—so we made sure to put them in," John says. "[For continuity], we approached it architecturally, so each room related to another somehow. For example, the foyer, with a French-Continental theme, is a thread throughout the house. The crown molding here is typical of old Parisian apartments, and using this particular style of trim gives the home character and cohesion."

PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE

"Mix sparingly and deliberately. Don't try to do too much."

No

estled in the Prides Crossing Historic District in Massachusetts is a home that reflects the bold sensibility of its owners. However, it looked drastically different in 2004. For husband-and-wife interior-design duo John Kelsey and Sally Wilson of Wilson Kelsey Design, the project, one of three condos built in the '80s out of a converted barn, posed many design challenges.

"It looked like a cheap dentist's office, right down to commercial hardware: metal treads and risers, half-inch steel balusters, no crown molding and a vinyl base," John says. Though it was a blank canvas for the new design, it gave John and Sally little to work with.

The homeowner brought John and Sally images for inspiration. "Most of them were European influence," John says. "This was really interesting because in New England you'd expect to see homes with Colonial or English influence because that's our culture ... It was pretty exciting because we were able to do something we typically weren't asked to do in the Boston area—villa or Continental style."


With a renovation taking several years, done one room at a time while the family lived in the house, the remodel had to logically make sense as well as look cohesive overall. "[The homeowner] wanted each room to be distinctly different, yet there needs to be continuity throughout the whole house," John says. John and Sally achieved a unifying effect by masterfully mixing antiques, colors and fabrics in a French aesthetic, such as in details like the crown molding, black-and-white checked floor in the foyer and light fixtures.

"We edit very carefully and rigorously," he says. "It all needs to have room to breathe, and when you give that to each one of your pieces, you give each of them the opportunity to have a voice."

SEE SOURCES, PAGE 128.



PHOTO BY LAURA MOSES



Glamour and Grandeur

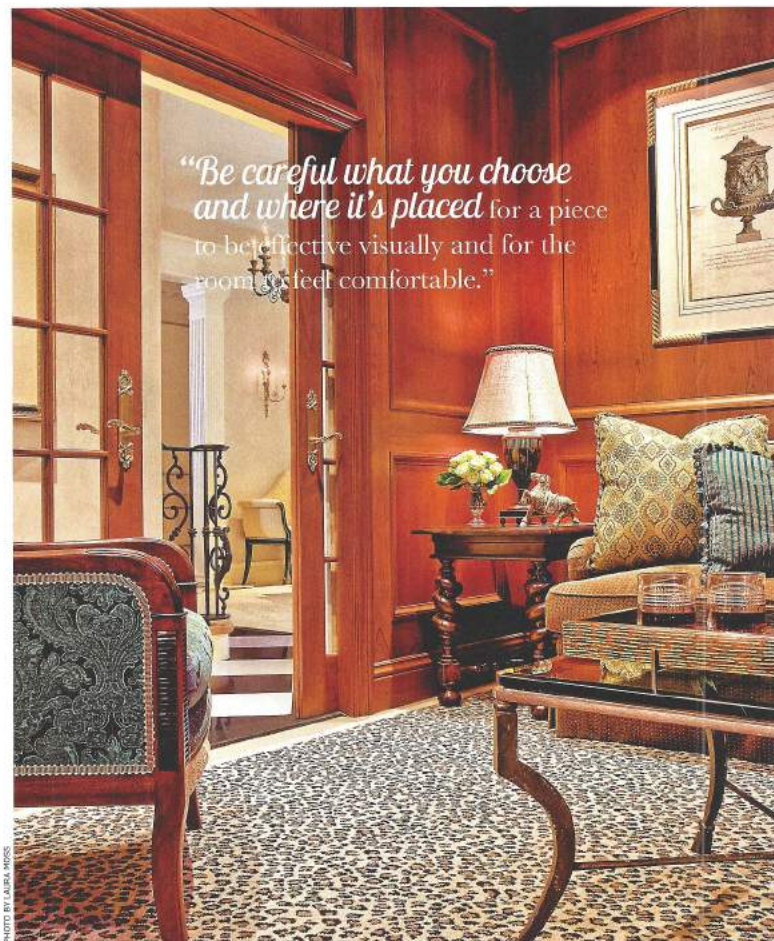
"She hardly brought a stick of furniture with her," John says of the homeowner; but the long table in the dining room did come from her previous home. A dramatic, large antique crystal chandelier hangs above it, and around the table are black Minton Spidell chairs, found at auction for a good price, refinished in coordinating fabrics.



Natural in Neutrals

Initially the homeowners wanted ample cabinet space, but the addition of a butler's pantry allowed for a roomy kitchen—equipped with a fireplace. In the corner, a custom-made plate rack displays the homeowner's collection of bird-themed plates. To continue the nature-inspired theme, a wooden carved fish on the mantel and moss balls finish the look.

PHOTO BY JANE DOW



"Be careful what you choose and where it's placed for a piece to be effective visually and for the room to feel comfortable."

PHOTO BY LAUREN MOSS

Animal Instincts

Behind the paneling in the library are the home's hidden heating and plumbing controls. "Even though [the rug has] a strong pattern, it ends up feeling quite neutral when you pair it with the weight and strength of the paneling and wood trim," John says. An antique black-and-gold column lamp, wine table and Chinese horse sculpture tie the look together.



PHOTO BY SAM GRAY

Unearthing the Past

During demolition, part of the home's original brick wall from the old barn was uncovered. "The brick added to the informality and the casualness of the space," John says. Though the homeowner initially wanted cabinetry lining four walls, eliminating some of the built-ins and adding a butler's pantry with a rod-iron door posed a better solution—which even allowed room for a fireplace.



PHOTO BY JANE GARY

Kitchen Keepsakes

Sally found several antiques that decorate the farmhouse-style kitchen: a French copper samovar and lavabo, an 1800s English copper ship's kettle, vintage rooster paintings, a copper lobster mold, cast-iron garden pots and German copper flagon. The color combination of copper, rich green painted cabinets and the red bricks all evoke the elegance of the past.

Informality at Its Finest

"The home really needed a place where you felt like, 'Here, I can loosen my tie and maybe even take my shoes off,'" John says of the informal dining area. An antique tole tray and Majolica plates line the wall above the built-in banquette. An antique verdigris chandelier and vintage Hull and Roseville pottery in the built-ins' exposed shelves complete the look.



"It all needs to have room to breathe, and when you give that to each one of your pieces, you give each of them the opportunity to have a voice."

"Some aspect, whether style or major piece, has to be the conductor—and the other pieces in the room become the parts of the symphony that support and enhance the performance."

Rosy in Red

John and Sally designed the guest bedrooms from scratch. "The challenge for us since we weren't developing the entire project all at once was that when we started on the second or third room, we had to visualize where we thought this is going to end up three years down the road." Keeping with the neutral color scheme while adding bold touches of red, the room is distinctive yet cohesive with the rest of the house.



The Petite Versailles

"That's the petite Versailles," John says of the master bathroom, which needed to be completely gutted during the renovation. Decorative onlays, columns and a neutral color palette further emphasize the room's French influence. "The other component that helps it all tie together architecturally is the lighting."

