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Rug Stark Carpets, 1940s bistro garden table, old French cabinet, Paris flea market

HOME WITH A SOUL

By Melissa Jacobs — Photography by Jack Thompson

Clients may hire interior designer Marilyn Phillips for her expertise in 18th century French, Italian and Swedish antiques but walking through her own River Bend home in Houston, it's clear this designer's real know-how is creating a "home with a soul." "We have a rather odd collection of random hand-me-downs and pieces that we have purchased over the years that mean something to us," says Phillips. "It's important to have what you love around you."

And while some of those pieces may include precious antiques, most hold special memories. For example, the artifact hanging over one of the family room windows was found when she put her girls to work measuring and photographing on a buying trip to France. "They made me promise to keep it for our home so that's the memory I have when I look at it," says Phillips.

The coffee table in the same room was a tall breakfast table in her husband's college apartment before she cut down the legs. Nearby is a 1920s Venetian swirl vase made into a lamp and a dining table made from reclaimed parquet flooring. "It's important to be unafraid and not worry what someone else might think about your design choices," says Phillips.

Recalling hours spent with her father making mirrors from seashells, she credits her discerning eye and confidence with a childhood spent "on the hunt" in auction houses and flea markets with artistic parents and early training with her mother-in-law, best-selling author and designer, Betty Lou Phillips. Now at least once a year, she travels through France and Spain searching for treasures.

"I love the process of creating something from nothing and working with talented architects and builders," says Phillips whose current projects range from new construction to a Virginia mountain retreat.

Her home, built in the 1950s recently underwent a year-long renovation. The roof was previously raised to make way for a new vaulted ceiling clad with reclaimed barn wood.

They also added a mud room, powder room and bathrooms. The new look is a sweeping sea breeze of soothing hues of blue and pistachio with hits of the sun gliding from fabrics, to walls and floor-coverings.

In the master bath, mosaic floor tiles laid the foundation for the horizontal weave grasscloth wall coverings layered with a window shade made with Hodssoll fabric. The old cabinet was part of a pair sourced from the South of France. The utilitarian, velvety blue bench fronting the tub, is an example of Phillip's penchant for moving furniture from room to room.

In the kitchen, an old French trestle table aged in hues of blue anchors the space while an old French window casement was eased into the space during the remodel.

Just off the kitchen, a 1940s French garden chair redressed in a velvet stripe sits next to one of her hand-me-downs, a sofa recovered in a Travers linen. In the playroom, a modern Ikat inspired blue gray floor covering rests under an old French -blue cabinet.

In the music room, a well-used baby grand piano plays foil to a pair of 18th century bergeres dressed with fabric from Phillips vintage collection. A pair of antique reverse paintings, a Christmas gift from her mother-in-law rests on textured grasscloth surrounding the space.

The family of five has lived in the home for 15 years, but Phillips fell in love with the house long before, when she and husband Bruce attended a party there.

"I told my husband it was just the kind of house I hoped we could have someday so when the home owners were ready to sell, we had to have it," recalls Phillips. Now elegant, casual and layered with memories, Phillips has created what most of us recognize as... priceless.



Driftwood coffee table from Found. 1940s French garden chair





All items sourced from France



One of Marilyn's daughter's bedrooms





Carol Piper Rug, Nancy Corzine fabric on the chairs, Painting is from an Atlanta Gallery by an unknown artist, music room- 18th century bergere chairs



1940s French Garden sofa, Zinc Dormer window



Mosaic tile from Architectural Design Resources, Cabinet from France