

HOME

french country in the Lowcountry

By Randolph Stewart

Photos by Tom Jenkins Films, www.tomjenkinsfilms.com and Eric Einhorn



When Eric Einhorn and his late wife, June, approached me about fulfilling their dream of building a French Country home on the Colleton River, I jumped at the chance. Envisioning a home with a centuries-old look the day of its completion, they felt my experience in restoration, antiques and period design was a perfect fit.

I must digress a moment to point out that Eric, raised in South Africa and a former circus trapeze artist when in his twenties, traveled from village to village in southern France. (Voila! The influence responsible for his dream.) Eric's career with one of the largest New York advertising agencies in the world allowed him to work on several successful advertising projects, such as the branding of Microsoft, the "Priceless," and "What's In Your Wallet" campaigns; as well as the "That Was Easy," campaign. When it was time to retire, he chose the Lowcountry.

The dream began with a challenging site—dropping the footprint of the house on a lot that sloped over 10 feet from front to rear with a majestic 250-year-old angel oak in the front, and spectacular Colleton River views in the rear. Working in close collaboration with Eric throughout the process, we designed a "ha-ha" wall that curved around the oak drip line and protected the tree, allowing for fill to create a motor court and formal raised terrace in the front with planters, French wall fountain and antique iron wall trellis.

The raised rear terrace faced due east to capture the perfect morning sunlight and rising evening moon



over the river. It features a covered pavilion with a raised fireplace, outdoor kitchen and infinity-edge, black marcite pool. When a large timber washed ashore one day, we knew the perfect spot for it was the mantel over the fireplace. The flanking antique iron fencing with jasmine growing through acts as a nature curtain and emits wonderful fragrance when blossoming. The raised terraces deter the local deer population from feasting on the wide variety of plants, yet encourages migrating butterflies and hummingbirds to visit.

True French Country has a warm and comfortable feel; is timeless, yet possesses chic elements. Traditions include materials both austere and durable, which is important in Provence style. French Country doesn't employ the frills one would find in Paris and, with this in mind, the facade of Sider-Oxydro stucco was selected, with the perfect mustard color. This stucco (first processed in Europe) is made in Georgia, and as you can see from the photographs, lends an old-world look, changing hues with morning or evening light, and in sun and rain.





The casement windows and doors are recessed, brick mold trim only, and feature beaded batten shutters with strap hinges, latch and rat-tail hold backs. The muted blue shutters and grey trim, exposed rafters, and blue and grey slate roof provides a sense of the old with sophistication. The travertine terrace stone front and rear are from French quarries and the planters have specially selected materials from the south of France. The cantilevered balconies over the front door and carriage house have very simple iron railings that provide an added dimension and the opportunity to view the panoramic golf course views from the second floor across the cul-de-sac. Also, note that the antique front door has a plain small knob, as it is intended to be opened from the inside with rim locks to greet visitors.

Entering the home, one beholds the two-story great room, warm heart of pine beams supporting a loft and the timber-framed pine trusses. The views beyond, through a wall of French doors to the pool to the river, are breathtaking. Oiled, not varnished, the heart of pine beams, with exposed iron fittings, were procured from a warehouse previously owned by Eli Whitney.

The walls are finished in Venetian plaster with soft, rounded corners. No base, as the plaster drops to the French limestone floors, clean and simple. Just the right color of paint was added to the plaster, so that the tones and hues change throughout the day. Instead of window and door trim, we utilized embedded pine sills and lintels, oiled and waxed and painted with blue milk paint, which is typical of French country. Anchoring one side of the room is an imported antique stone mantel, and on the opposite wall, a large French mirror.

Overhead is a deep three-sided loft, floored with reclaimed oily heart of pine. The exposed bottom of the wood-beamed ceiling was limed in a hand-rubbed blue. The oily floors are a product of whale oil drips that lubricated textile mill machines for a hundred years. This created a warm color, and no stain was required. The open staircase, clear of a window, is smooth stucco with





thick pine treads. The austere iron railing was oiled and left to patina naturally. The loft features a collection of personal art and musical instruments, as Eric and his children are accomplished musicians. The carefully selected light fixtures, inside and out, are a mixture of antique French or copper reproductions from New Orleans.

How do you make modern conveniences fit in with Old World design, you might ask? The air conditioning grills are filigreed iron, and the audio system has speakers behind the walls with a thin coat of plaster to hide them. The television was concealed in a wire door, painted French armoire. The interior decor is sparse and overscale with just the right mix of antiques, providing form and function that fit the home. The hardware is reproduction aged bronze, mostly hand-made, but typical of the genre—simple and understated.



The country washroom in the back service hall and kitchen feature imported, reclaimed French terra-cotta floors that were finished with multiple coats of burnished tung oil and carnauba wax. This wax is made from the leaves of the Brazilian carnauba palm, which finishes hard when burnished and can be polished to a glossy sheen. The doors in the back hall are antique, and oiled and waxed. The half-glass doors exiting from the kitchen to the terrace are antique.

The kitchen cabinetry was designed to appear as if they had been first made for Grandma, updated by Mom, and again by the children. Knotty alder base units with a few open shelves for basket storage, overhead cabinets with seedy glass, or wire mesh (to keep the rodents out); and the hardware is a mix of casement latches, bin pulls, or drop pulls. The island counter was made of antique reclaimed hickory. The ceiling has a major and minor beam ceiling with exposed fasteners. For color, the tile back splash behind the stove was specially selected by Eric in a Provence pattern. The undercounter lights are actually tarnished brass map lights, and notice the variety of small drawers, open shelves with iron brackets for ceramic storage, and cup hooks for cups. No French home is complete without a wine cellar! This one was built authentically with fumed oak and fastened with cut nails. The patinated oak door is handmade and has an iron peep door.



Pictures are worth a thousand words, so I will let the photographs tell the rest of the story. Enjoy!