





Thoughts of France

A FRANCOPHILE AND HER HUSBAND
BUILD AUTHENTIC FRENCH FLAVOR
NEAR THE LAKE MICHIGAN SHORE.

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Travelers often find themselves smitten by architecture they encounter abroad, but few are able to experience the beauty daily at home. After years of research, a Michigan couple, with the help of Grand Rapids home designer Chuck Carter and a host of talented design professionals, realized their dream: an authentic country French guest cottage near the shores of Lake Michigan. Their attention to detail, respect for comfortable scale, use of appropriate materials, and discriminating taste in interior design make the cottage truly *une belle maison*—a beautiful home.

Occupying the site of a former guesthouse, the cottage perfectly mimics the well-worn patina of the timber-frame architecture common in the French countryside. The couple used reference books, their own design concepts, and photos they had taken in France as a starting point for the cottage. They tapped Carter, who had designed their primary home several years earlier, to transform their ideas into detailed drawings.

Put ideas from travels to good use.

Digital photos of architectural features are among the best travel souvenirs, and they can be easily e-mailed to your architect, designer, or builder.



OPPOSITE Passages between rooms, such as this one from the living room into the entryway, were framed with laser-cut bluestone slabs. THIS PHOTO In the living room, a 17th-century butter table serves as a coffee table. English ladder-back chairs flank a fireplace made of Valders gray stone from Valders, Wisconsin.

THIS PHOTO An 18th-century French table anchors the dining room, which provides access to a backyard patio for meals *en plein air* (outdoors). Hand-scraped white oak flooring adds to the rich ambience.





Country French comes home

Cottages in the French countryside inspired this couple to transport design ideas to their new guest home, including:

■ **Hand-forged light fixtures.** The chandelier in the dining area, *above*, is a 19th-century antique purchased in Saint-Ouen, France, and wired for electricity. A Michigan blacksmith made the kitchen fixture.

■ **Traditional windows and doors.** Casement windows, *above right*, and the entry's Dutch door subtly convey country French style. A local mill shop made the window sashes and exterior doors, which were placed into frames built by the home's carpenters.

■ **Rustic ceilings.** Smooth oak beams with chamfered (beveled) edges, *right*, give the ceiling its country-cozy look. Sheets of lumber beneath the beams were sandblasted to "open the grain and to give it a contrast against the smooth beams," builder Jack Vander Meulen says.

■ **Floors with patina.** The home's main living area features $\frac{3}{4}$ x 7-inch quartersawn white oak planks in 3- to 10-foot lengths, which were hand-scraped by a local flooring company, then stained, oiled, and waxed.





Give your kitchen character.
Every element of your kitchen—light fixtures to faucets, cabinets to countertops—provides an opportunity to reinforce a style.



“After the design phase, the biggest challenge was re-creating the masonry aspect of the home, trying to make the exterior walls look as though they were built with individual stones collected from a field and stacked with mortar—a cobbled-wall look,” Carter says.

A three-step process achieved the sought-after stone-wall appearance. After creating construction drawings for the project, a timber-framing firm built exterior walls and a roof framework of oak timbers, then fastened structural insulated panels to the outside of the timbers. Next, contractor Jack Vander Meulen took over, filling in the spaces between the timbers with standard stick-frame walls. Finally, he applied a stone veneer to the exterior of the home; inside, extra trowels of randomly placed and smoothed plaster gave the walls a bumpy look, as though the plaster were covering actual stone walls instead of conventional drywall. The resulting wall depth and deep windowsills begin the illusion that one has been transported to a small town in France.

To complete the look, the homeowners worked closely with Vander Meulen, Carter, and a group of local artisans and craftspeople. “The challenge was to pull together the owners’ thoughts step by step, so we could build their dream,” Vander Meulen says. “This meant as a team we designed and built everything, from the stone fireplace to the windows to the beds.”

Using craftspeople to design and build meant the owners achieved the “perfect imperfections” they wanted. A local mill shop turned out the doors and windows; many hours were then spent detailing them and finding appropriate hardware. Blacksmith Harold Nelson set to work on

ABOVE LEFT Arched niches visually connect the kitchen to the rest of the home. The dark blue commercial-grade range was chosen to blend with the backsplash tiles, hand-painted by Michigan artist Anne Wiley. ABOVE A 19th-century butcher block from Brussels is set off by the light-color walls, which feature a handcrafted look of plaster over stone.



THIS PHOTO Michigan blacksmith Harold Nelson fashioned the chandelier following a design created by the homeowners.



creating light fixtures, hinges, and cabinet doors for the kitchen. Exterior trim boards were distressed with a draw knife, a two-handed straightedge, for a hand-hewn look.

Period pieces and new, yet appropriate furnishings fulfill the couple's desire for authenticity. An antique butter churn, a wine holder, and antique sewing tables are used as end tables. A reversing train-station bench from Provence provides seating in the living room, an 18th-century cabinet serves as a TV center, and armoires function as closets.

The architecture and design combine to evoke the rural landscape of France. Now, whenever the homeowners long for a little French flavor or a brief getaway, it's as close as their cottage on the shores of Lake Michigan. **BH**

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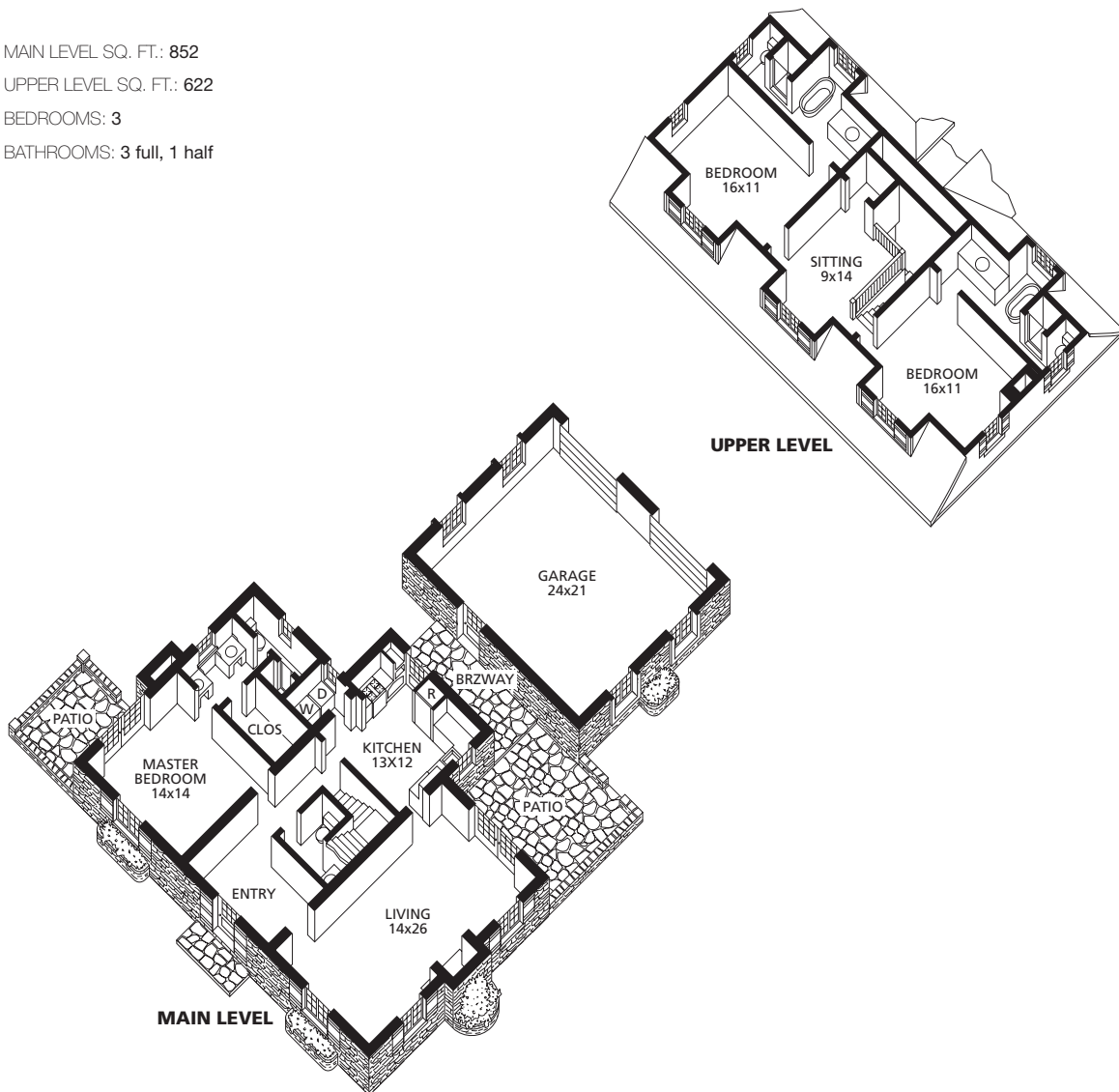
ABOVE In the main-level master bedroom, ceramic Quimper plates (named for the town of Quimper, France) preside over a custom bed.
LEFT Paintings by local artist Jennifer Jacobusse add a whimsical air to the master bath cabinetry. An antique sewing table joins the vanities.



Architectural Highlights

- Cottage curb appeal with detached garage connected by breezeway to rear of house
- Main-level master suite with private patio
- Powder room tucked under stairway
- Mirror-image upper-level suites

MAIN LEVEL SQ. FT.: 852
 UPPER LEVEL SQ. FT.: 622
 BEDROOMS: 3
 BATHROOMS: 3 full, 1 half



Home designer **Chuck Carter** Contractor **Jack Vander Meulen**