French Connection

The team at Decorations Lucullus blends Acadian and Creole influences with authentic French materials and antiques in this *résidence secondaire* located just outside of New Orleans.

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"Perfection is the enemy of beauty." It's a powerful notion yet also a tad ironic coming from Patrick Dunne, the legendary New Orleans antiquarian and decorator known for his unerring eye. "I find stories where others find flaws," he says. "To me, a timeworn piece of wood or a slightly tattered textile is special because it's a survivor. It should be appreciated and celebrated, not picked over or pushed aside."

It was this philosophy that resonated with Lafayette residents Germaine and Jerome Smith 20 years ago when they met Patrick at his former French Quarter emporium, Lucullus Antiques. Subsequently, it was the same philosophy that made Patrick and interior designer Nathan Drewes of Decorations Lucullus the perfect team to task when the Smiths decided to build a weekend retreat in Old Metairie, a quiet hamlet a few minutes outside the Crescent City.

"Patrick, Nathan, and I see eye-to-eye on everything, so I wanted them to be a part of the process from the very beginning," Germaine says. "They have contributed to many historic projects over the years, so I knew that their insight and experience would be invaluable as we embarked on building a new house with old Louisiana charm."

Designed by architect Kevin Gossen, the structure is rooted in the Acadian Cottage style that became prevalent in the late 18th century when the Nova Scotians migrated to Louisiana and settled in Acadiana, the region that includes the Smiths' hometown. For the front gallery, the architect employed modern construction methods that mimic old building practices—filling the poteaux-en-terre (heavy timber frame) with bousillage (a heavy paste made from moss and mud) and sheathing it with plaster in its final phase. He also used a split-shingle roof, solid wood columns, and board-and-batten shutters to honor the vernacular.

The use of authentic materials continues inside with rough-hewn ceiling beams and extra-wide floorboards salvaged from centuries-old buildings across the state. Any elements that were newly fabricated were instantly aged by skilled craftsmen who stepped in for Father Time. The rubbed-cypress mantel, washed-brick fireplace surround, and hand-glazed kitchen tiles are just a few of the new, perfectly-imperfect appointments that convey a little quirk and a lot of character. "When you cross the threshold, there is a subtle transition from rustic exterior to refined interior," says Kevin. "This is intentional because the home is designed for the homeowners' contemporary lifestyle and sophisticated aesthetic."

To balance the weight and patina of the architecture, Patrick and Nathan composed a lighthearted palette which they introduced with a soft rose hue in the entry. The shade was custom-mixed to match a splinter of paint they peeled off the wall of a drawing room that hadn't been touched since the 1830s. Instead of using standard white trim, the duo opted for an earthy gray as a nod to the natural stone that framed rooms throughout the Greek Revival architectural era. "There's also a practicality to the gray color," Patrick says. "It's got a hint of grit so it's friendly for housekeeping. No one has time for dusting baseboards anymore."

As the footprint progresses towards the back of the cottage, the palette subdues and creates the illusion of spaces that have faded over time. To energize these sun-drenched whites and neutrals, Patrick and Nathan peppered rooms with a few bolder hues like ochre and peacock which were used for the upholstery on the Directoire daybed and sofa in the drawing room. They also pulled from the myriad of blues in the dining room and kitchen that prevail on the chippy Louis XVI trumeau, gingham chairs, English tile backsplash, and custom enamel Hallman range.

"We used colorful and textural fabrics and finishes to lend rooms a vibe that feels fresh but not new," Nathan says. "Germaine and I also did a lot of tugging back and forth with the French influences to make sure they stayed tethered to old Acadian and Creole interiors which emphasized comfort and ease without sacrificing elegance."

PREVIOUS PAGES: The entry's faded pink hue echoes the color of the roses that climb the wrought iron fence in the front yard. **THESE PAGES, ABOVE:** Homeowner Germaine Smith and interior designer Nathan Drewes sit on the front gallery of the Old Metairie cottage. **OPPOSITE:** A Louis XV Duchesse en Bateau, clad in sumptuous Rubelli silk and placed on the diagonal, is one of the interesting French antiques in the drawing room.

"To give the open floorplan a more classic sensibility, architect Kevin Gossman designed graceful cased openings to separate the drawing room from the dining room and kitchen. Between them, an 18th-century faience lavabo mounted to an antique armoire door hangs on the wall. The oil painting above it is a 19th-century still life.

OPPOSITE: Fresh cornflowers burst from antique iron urns on the buffet in the dining room. The blue hue is woven throughout the space on the painted Louis XVI trumeau, the chairs' gingham upholstery, and a collection of Paris porcelain. **ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Rustic reclaimed beams and extra-wide pine floorboards balance the dining room's refined antiques. • Interior designer Nathan Drewes dreamed up the custom copper-and-brass range hood from a photo of one he had admired in the kitchen of a French chateau. • Although it could pass for a centuries-old antique, the custom worktable features electrical outlets for modern convenience. • Early 19th-century oil paintings hang above and below a gilded corbel topped with Chinese export porcelain.

ABOVE: The powder room is wrapped in a Robert Kime wallcovering. The gilded mirror is Louis XVI style, and the marble lavatory and sink skirt are custom. • **OPPOSITE:** The early 19th-century canopy bed in the primary bedroom is based on an 18th-century design.

For more information, see Sources, page 92.