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Two epochs seem to meet at Don and Trish Stephens' Napa estate, where an ancient weathered stone entryway and arch give way to a more modern-stucco structure that is home to the couple's formal dining room. In reality, the entire house is a new construction. Above: A breezeway with New Orleans-style gas lanterns welcomes guests.





RECENT VINTAGE

FOR ANYONE WHO HAS RAMBLED ALONG

the fruitful hills of Tuscany or Burgundy, a trip to Northern California's wine country is apt to trigger an intoxicating wave of *déjà vu*. The area's rolling vineyards, luxurious light and Mediterranean-style architecture conspire to conjure a slice of old-world heaven on American soil.

All of which explains the epiphany Trish Stephens had back in 1996 when she attempted to transfer her distinct dream to a draftsman's table. Stephens, an interior designer by profession, was charged with creating a signature retreat that would serve as the focal point of a 27-acre vineyard that had become the newest passion of her husband, Bay Area real estate investor and vintner Don Stephens.

Her vision: Create the impression of stumbling upon an old European stone farmhouse that had been restored and expanded over the centuries . . . from scratch. What she had at her disposal was a relatively flat and empty four-acre parcel at the top of a Napa hillside just outside bucolic St. Helena.



Above: When Napa's sultry summer days roll around, quick relief comes courtesy of a pool that practically disappears into its pastoral surroundings. Left: Although evenings are invariably chilly, dining under the pergola is a year-round affair thanks to overhead heaters and an outdoor fireplace.



RECENT VINTAGE

"I was aiming for a very French feel, but more in the manor style than cute country," says Trish, whose interest in all things Gallic borders on a delicious obsession. She made numerous antiques-hunting trips to France during the years the house was under construction, shipping back everything from fragile wood hutches to imposing limestone fireplaces.

Trish enlisted Bay Area architect Sandy Walker of Walker & Moody Architects as her co-conspirator in the project. One of his biggest challenges was choosing exterior materials that would convey the impression that the home had wings that were built during different historical periods, while at the same time ensuring that the overall look was harmonious. "Maybe we were lucky, because the stone used in the main house seems to fit in nicely with the stucco we used on the so-called newer sections," says Walker. "It wasn't easy, and it was a lot of fun."

The fun truly begins after snaking up the property's half-mile driveway, which deposits visitors in a basketball court-size piazza filled with polished pebbles and anchored by a stone fountain with a Bacchus-like head spouting water into a massive trough.

Entry to the Stephens estate is gained through a pair of weathered Louis XVI doors, one of many sets of antique portals that transport guests across the Atlantic and back in time. An Arizona flagstone path and flowering gardens give way to another set of doors, the metal handiwork of landscape architect Jack Chandler. His arched creations are laced with a pattern of cabernet leaves that pay tribute to the owners' well-regarded D.R. Stephens Estate Cabernet Sauvignon.



Far left: A lush valley view is revealed when the four floor-to-ceiling glass doors in the living room recede into the woodwork. Left: Trish Stephens left no stone unturned in France when she shopped for antique mantels, panels and columns. Guests dine beneath a chandelier carved with forest images and near a mural by Rod Knutson.

Right: Trish Stephens conveys the impression that an aging farmhouse had a more modern wing grafted onto it by revealing a patch of stone through the dining room wall. Far right: A walnut-paneled library mixes an old-world feel with modern touches such as a home theater system hidden in the ceiling.

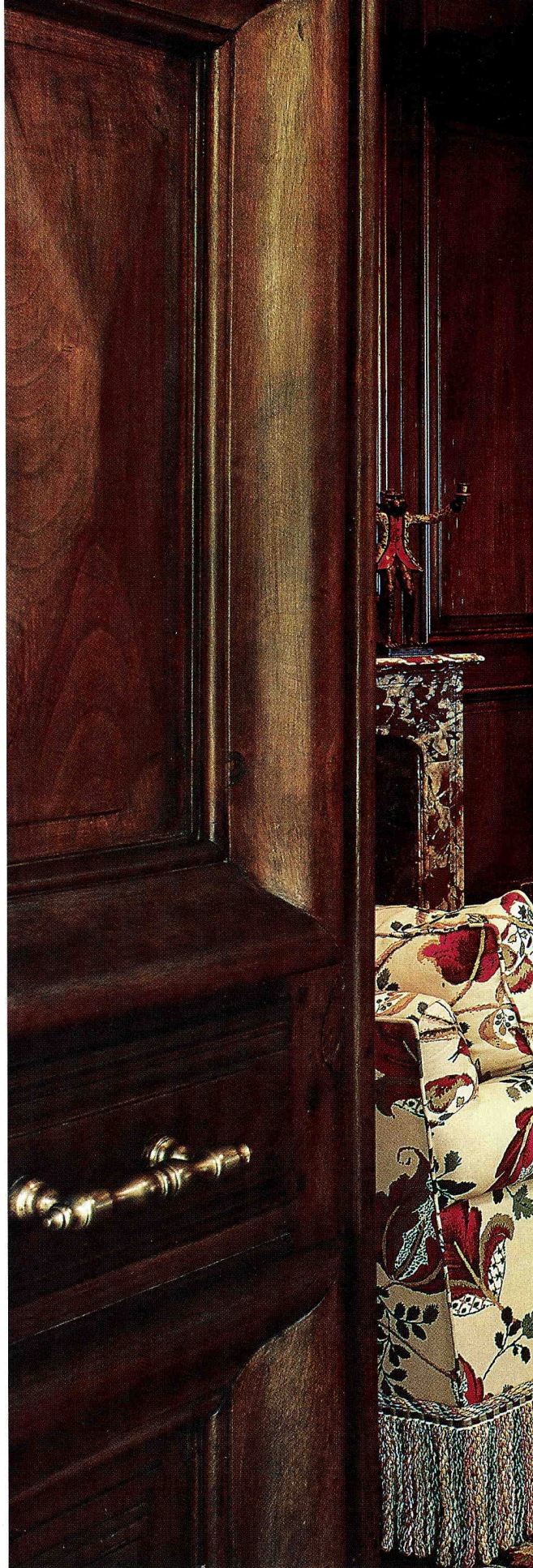


Once through the main breezeway, with its moody New Orleans lanterns and weathered Louis XVI table, an intimate dining room sits on the right, dominated by a massive French wine country-themed landscape commissioned from noted Napa artist Rod Knutson. Overhead hangs a distinctive 19th-century bronze chandelier from Florence, one of only a few Italian interlopers on Trish's French dream. Another set of floral-themed Chandler gates leads into an expansive wine grotto.

"And here's one of my favorite touches, although my kids think it's a bit nutty," Trish says with a laugh, pointing to two areas of the dining room's smooth yellow walls that appear to have rough stone blocks protruding from the adjoining breezeway. "The idea is to give that sense that you're in a newer part of a very old place."

That mission continues on the other side of the breezeway, where the living room features a limestone fireplace that looks to have warmed the bones of land barons in centuries past. In fact, Trish designed the ornate piece, had it carved in Italy and assembled in the States, where it was chipped and scuffed to achieve a distressed appearance. Four wood ceiling beams sourced from a 200-year-old chateau in the south of France simultaneously contrast and complement the look.

The intermingling of old and faux-old is a recurring theme in this plush-but-casual retreat. The library's rich walnut panels were designed to echo a set of walnut Louis XVI doors, while a multihued turn-of-the-century Languedoc marble fireplace picks up where a dramatic rug leaves off. The master bedroom boasts a variety of 19th-century antiques, including a hand-painted secretary from Italy and a floor-to-ceiling





Below: A limestone mantel dominates the master bedroom.

Opposite: The metal gates at the entrance to the Stephens estate were hand-forged by landscape architect Jack Chandler. The Cabernet leaves hammered into the pattern are a salute to the owners' well-regarded wines.

18th-century limestone mantel from France, both of which coexist well with other contemporary creations.

The result—by design—is that you are never quite certain which items in the house are new and which are the result of husband-and-wife antiquing expeditions overseas. “Antiquing is the only kind of shopping Don will do. If it’s for clothes or shoes, forget it. So this is a passion we share, and he’s a great negotiator,” says Trish, who notes that her husband’s winning techniques range from keen bargaining to making offers that cannot be refused.

For his part, Don enjoyed being integral to the creation of Oz II (his first Napa retreat, named Oz for his adoration of *The Wizard of Oz*, was ceded in a divorce, but he wanted the name to live on). “It was a great joint effort in many ways,” says Don, who in another joint venture years ago cofounded the Bank of San Francisco with Charles Schwab. “We designed the layout together, picked the furniture. Trish oversaw it all, of course, and it’s turned out to be much more than I ever envisioned it to be. We love entertaining, and what I love most about the house is that it works so well on that level.

I just love those sliding glass doors,” he says, referring to the home’s singular showstopper: Four floor-to-ceiling glass panels in the living room that disappear into walls to reveal the pool area, a natural oasis behind which unfold endless and staggering valley and vineyard views. Dinner guests enjoy drinks in this setting from beneath a canopy of heat lamps that warm chilly Napa nights; those lucky enough to receive an overnight invitation are ensconced in a poolside guesthouse. And friends are frequent visitors to this wine country estate that artfully blends modern materials and antique gems.

“Being a vintner really is a lifestyle issue first and foremost,” Don says. “How many people do you know, other than the Gallos of the world, who have made their fortunes in this business? The answer is zero. So being out here in Napa is really all about trying to create something beautiful—whether it’s the wine or the house—and sharing it.”

Patricia Hamilton Stephens, 415.567.8227

Sandy Walker, Walker & Moody Architects, 415.885.0800,
www.walker Moody.com



