



# French COUP DE COEUR

As an exchange student, Mary Stuart McCamy fell in love with the Dordogne and Lot River Valleys nestled within the resplendent Périgord region of southwestern France. The warm and welcoming people, the stunning landscapes, the impossibly charming villages, and the area's rich history and ancient pilgrimage routes have lured her back countless times ever since. Having explored the valleys slowly over the years on both foot and bicycle—with the climate, food, and wine an added bonus—she continues to discover a new *coup de coeur* with every bend in the river.

“Thirty years ago, I vowed I would live in a *Périgourdine* house one day,” says Mary Stuart, a Washington, D.C., literacy tutor who also, as it turns out, has an innate talent for interior decorating. “Actually, I wanted to live in a *pigeonnier*—after cleaning it thoroughly—but in the end, that seemed impractical with four children,” she laughs. “So, I asked Ankie Barnes if he could design a new traditional home that would incorporate some of my favorite architectural elements from the region,” she says.

Having spent a great deal of time in the French countryside himself, Washington, D.C., architect Anthony “Ankie” Barnes needed no explanation when Mary Stuart proposed a design wish list that included snubbed gables, a *pigeonnier* (dovecote), quoins, stone sills, a cobble courtyard, rough-sawn posts and lintels, reclaimed

AMERICAN HOMES

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ceiling beams complete with adze marks, and rounded wall corners inside and out. They also had the great fortune of finding a lot that backed up to sprawling parkland on two sides, an ideal setting for a home designed in the rural vernacular. To make the residence look more like a French country farmhouse rather than a townhouse in the city, Ankie scaled down the front profile of the home and added rustic elements to keep the style informal. The foyer and stair landing were designed to echo the farmhouses of France, which are often organized around a central courtyard and reclaimed outdoor spaces once used to shelter grain and animals. To ensure visual continuity, these quaint areas also feature the same tumbled limestone bricks that were used to cobble the entry courtyard. Squared off with a hipped roof, flared eaves, and quoins, a stair tower anchoring the two wings of the house nods to the picturesque dovecotes of the Périgord region and also creates an asymmetrical roofline that adds to the informality of the home's front elevation.

Out back, the lot tumbles down to a spring-fed creek—not exactly the Dordogne River Valley with villages built right into the slopes, but it presented an opportunity to create a more terraced elevation that takes advantage of the natural landscape. A completely above-ground lower level with multiple sets of French doors leads to a shaded loggia that offers a cool respite for the hot D.C. summers.

“This is the children’s favorite relaxation spot,” says Mary. “Mine is the terrace above that looks out over the surrounding parkland. The landscaping was as important as the home design,” she adds, “and we had the privilege of working on the garden design with landscape architects Leslie Gignoux and Scott Fritz, another team of remarkably talented Francophiles.”

Leslie and Scott found the perfect balance between structured garden spaces and looser transitional zones where the yard meets the surrounding woods. The stonework they designed is especially stunning and reminiscent of the building materials in southwestern France. Their custom blend of stones for the walls, piers, and chimneys in a serene palette of buff, rust, cream, and sienna brown complements the home’s stucco exterior, as well as the lighter shades of the paving material.

“My family was involved in every step of the design process, from wandering around stone quarries to visiting old barns to select beams,” says Mary. “We wanted to incorporate as many reclaimed, heavily textured, and organic materials as possible—the more imperfect the better,” she adds.

Throughout her entire house, rustic and weathered materials bring layers of texture and timeless patina to the overall design scheme. Lustrous wood floors in random widths and lengths are made of reclaimed antique oak, and old ceiling beams are split, hacked, twisted, and discolored. The courtyard and foyer pavers are tumbled and irregular, and many of the antique light fixtures take on the wonderfully heavy tarnishing of age. Even the paint and wall treatments were mottled and brushed to replicate a distressed look with variations in the finish.

“We decided all this imperfection makes us feel more comfortable,” says Mary, “and it seems to have that effect on our guests as well,” she laughs. “We relied on Ankie to advise us on proportions and details, including casement window styles and authentic ceiling beam patterns, and we also



**OPPOSITE:** Striking architectural features, including a magnificent stone fireplace, rustic ceiling beams, and soaring French doors and windows, give the family room an airy and spacious feel. Homeowner Mary Stuart McCamy kept the décor intentionally simple and chose colors that echoed the neutral palette of the fireplace. Rusty and crusty light fixtures, an elegant seagrass rug, and a side table made of petrified wood bring gorgeous texture and patina to this inviting living space.





The kitchen was designed around a mid-19th-century butcher block from the Périgord region. “I wanted the look of a more unfitted kitchen that was still functional for a large family blessed with lots of visitors,” says Mary Stuart. The kitchen cabinets and open shelving were created by Heartwood Design, as was the cabinetry in the adjoining library and dining room. The graceful gothic arches in the kitchen are reiterated in the fireplace surround and elsewhere throughout the house.



consulted with friends Elizabeth Boland and Caroline Wilson, the mother-daughter team behind Design in a Day, who were especially helpful with lighting selections and pulling together stray antiques in a way that made sense,” she adds.

A favorite space for gathering with friends and family, Mary’s inviting kitchen is centered around a mid-19th-century *billot* (butcher block) from the Périgord region. The room’s elegant gothic arches are repeated in the fireplace surround and elsewhere in the home. Throughout this extraordinary dwelling, many of the sconces are made from repurposed architectural elements, and the floor coverings are all natural, neutral, and highly textured. Quiet and serene, the interior color palette is mostly pale and muted with the exception of the light blue-green of the windows and doors that frame the surrounding landscape during the day and add a subtle splash of color at night.

“It has been an absolute joy to live and raise my children in this home,” says Mary. “It is a cozy family house most of the time but can graciously accommodate groups of friends and larger celebrations. The informal design and indoor-outdoor flow make it an easy place to gather,” she adds. “In fact, we don’t considerate it a successful weekend unless we find a couple of stowaway guests in the basement or loft.”



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