

La Vie Est Belle!

THE CRAFTING OF A TRADITIONAL FRENCH MANOR HOUSE

By Lisa J. Gotto | Photography by David Burroughs



If you ask any creative professional what their dream project would be, they will most likely say anything that allows them the freedom to create at-will—to have few restrictions when it comes to their imagination and design ideas. Complete freedom is a rare occurrence but it does sometimes happen. With this impressive custom home, the team at Purple Cherry Architects, of Annapolis, came as close to creative *carte blanche* as they may ever get.

The client, says Cathy Purple Cherry, is an incredibly unpretentious man, a widower, and father of three grown children. Because he is also an incredibly busy individual, he wanted something turnkey and he had just a few requests once the primary decision of the type of home was met. It was to be a French manor home of some scale, 9,000 square feet, and it needed to provide just the right scenarios to showcase some beloved furnishings and accents coveted by him and his late wife. So nailing down the architectural aspects of the home, was just one part of the plan that Purple Cherry would execute.

“We were hired to do the interior design, everything that physically attaches to the walls, cabinetry, tiles, lighting fixtures, countertops, all the mill work, et cetera,” Purple Cherry explains. “He hired us also to select all the furnishings and wall coverings.”

So our story of this French manor home begins with its prime position along the Tred Avon River on our inviting Eastern Shore. An expansive home like this could easily become imposing, but inspired material and design choices kept it from being so.

Stretching across nearly 128 feet of shoreline, the exterior of the two-story structure is constructed of personality-infused artisanal stone work and features steeply hipped roof lines with flared eaves. Copper metal accents appear on its dormers of stucco and its fireplace chimneys whose curves and clean lines are so reminiscent of French Country style.

“This is a house that is completely covered in living finishes,” Purple Cherry says, explaining that the roof is made of wood shake shingle. “There is just classicism and Old Worldly-ness that comes out of wood shake that you cannot repeat with any synthetic product.”

GREAT SCALE

The interior plan for the main level of this home is somewhat unique. Upon entry to the soaring two-story foyer past the home’s grand curved staircase with its antiques hand-forged brass railing, one enters the home’s living room, which is showcased by a series of welcoming timber trusses and a two-story stone fireplace. This room flows into a V-shaped centrally-located kitchen, which then extends out considerably on the left toward the home’s gracious four-season entertaining space. A magnificent master suite and adjacent club room is located on the opposite end of the first level floor plan.

“This house has great scale to me, in terms of living in it, and not feeling overwhelmed,” Purple Cherry says. Adding trusses and other design elements to the main level were keys to achieving this feeling.

Entering the kitchen and dining area from living room, there’s a gorgeous ceiling arch of stone overhead that complements the fireplace and marks the visual transition from space to space. This area, in the heart of the home, is designed not only with a generosity of flow, but with great care taken to incorporate one of the family’s most cherished pieces, a gorgeous limestone-top table with mosaic pattern inlay that the client and his wife had chosen together; it required being the focal point in the room. Because this was a must-have item, but its style strayed from French Country, Purple Cherry says they needed to do some design work-arounds to make sure the table made sense where it was placed in the formal dining space just off the kitchen.

The workaround introduced a second color found on the tabletop, a rich dense federal blue, into the space to work with their first choice of creamy French white cabinets. This blue picks up again on the backsplash in the kitchen, which also features a unique center island with a curved wall into which a cozy cream-colored upholstered banquette was fitted. A modern round table and four cream upholstered chairs make this space perfect for informal meals and coffee conversations.

Light, knotty-pattered hardwoods help to bounce all the generous natural light about the room. Contrasting orange cushions as well as a clever mix of traditional and modern lighting elements lend the space visual interest and warmth.

As rich as the look is, Purple Cherry admits they didn’t have to break the bank to get it. In fact, she cautions homeowners who are considering extensive tile projects to do their homework to ensure they are getting the right tile at the right price.



“Tile can be an incredibly dangerous thing,” Purple Cherry says of the costs of some of the tile options out there. “Beautiful tiles these days can go up to \$380 a square foot.” She suggests that by blending more economical variations with some of the more expensive options, you can still achieve great things. The glazed brick wall in this room came in well under \$380 per square foot yet it delivered the high-end look for less.

SUITE RETREAT

The first floor master suite is awash in a calming monochromatic scheme to allow for architectural elements such as the room’s lustrous walnut coffered ceilings and moldings to take center stage. Storage in this room is efficiently and beautifully executed with a system of generous built-ins and the strategically placed windows offer peaceful views out to the river. An ample cozy reading chair and ottoman are perfectly placed, ready for the evening’s wind down.

Adjacent to this room is the home’s dedicated office space which overlooks pastoral farm land. The owner’s private work-out space and a fully-equipped media room are also conveniently located close-by.

Three additional bedrooms in the home are located on the second floor which has a balcony that overlooks the home’s living room, providing an exceptional view of the trussed ceiling work.

All the upstairs bedrooms offer something special but one is uniquely designed to accommodate a family with children, as it is more like a suite with a specially designed playroom space. With three grown children, the owner anticipates many great family gatherings in the years to come and it was his wish to provide every convenience for those special visits.

FULL OF DESIGN SURPRISES

Along those lines, Purple Cherry’s firm was tasked with fitting out additional guest lodgings above the property’s three-car garage. What happened in that 1,100 square-foot space is a

design story all its own. Purple Cherry again got the go-ahead to create at-will and devised a coastal, cottage-like get-away for whoever was lucky enough to be invited to stay there.

The palette of the space carries the dominant creamy French white theme over from the main house in the wood trim and cabinetry, but the similarities end there. Cheery aqua subway tiles in the kitchen create an “on-holiday” vibe that extends into the open-plan living area, a generous space flooded by the natural light of three dormer-inset windows.

While you have probably seen dormer space used to create charming window seats in homes, Purple Cherry has a different take on what that space can provide.



TALKING TILE WITH CATHY

This home is an excellent example of how tile can add layers of style and substance to a project. One of the architect’s favorite rooms in the home was the first floor powder room in part because of its use of tile. The combination of rich hardwood floors, a primary wall treated with a herringbone print paper, and an accent wall of bronze fluorescent brick tile provides a look of understated luxury and sophistication.



LIFE'S A BREEZE

Just a few steps down the back stair and across the covered breeze-way, with its tongue and groove barrel ceiling, back to the main house you'll find the room that provides for the owner's most personal of design requests.

"When it came to things like the laundry room and the mudroom," Purple Cherry says, "...all he cared about was having a place to sit and take off his boots."

And at the end of a long, hard day, who can say they blame him?

"To me a window seat is useless unless it is useful," she says of most of these features that are usually made too narrow for them to be of any real use.

Her solution: tuck a queen bed into the space and turn a guest suite for two into one that can sleep three to four. Purple Cherry says she has executed takes on this concept in many of their designs often using a twin bed turned on the horizontal and tucked into dormer space to create a much larger bench seat with considerable degree of utility.

Lustrous white Blendart porcelain tile flooring that expertly mimics the look of wood runs throughout the space making it appear even larger than it looks. The sweet eat-in kitchen also accommodates four for meals and adds creativity to its coastal motif with its modern take on overhead task lighting.

The guest suite is complete with an additional stand-alone bedroom fit for a king, and his bed, and a pretty private bath.

