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UNE MAISON MAGNIFIQUE

Practicality Blends With French Chic In Russell Woods

A Quebec-born wife, mother and former caterer transplanted into Russell Woods in 2003 had a specific ambience in mind for her family's custom-built waterfront home: Southern U.S. melded with the south of France in Southern Ontario.

From the curb, the cream-hued brick Georgian-style house exudes warm elegance. "There is nothing I love more than walking to a front door of a house and having a feel for what I should expect inside," the homeowner says. "The magical and visual impact of a house when you carry it from the outside to the inside makes you feel so welcome."

Her own house is certainly welcoming. "I have friends who have homes in southern France and I was inspired by them. I was looking. I was borrowing ideas." Ultimately, the homeowner says, "I wanted to feel that I was living in the South of France."

The woman eschewed having an architect and designed her own floor plan. A contractor built the square Georgian-style residence to her specs. "This ▶

The living room becomes an intimate concert hall when family members play the black grand piano, the music filling the open concept main floor; a chaise lounge in a quiet corner of the homeowner's office is ideal for perusing cookbooks; against the subtly faux finished cream walls, a painting of brilliant red poppies recalls France's vibrant fields. The hand-carved stone fireplace mantel incorporates polished black granite, relating to the kitchen counters.



style has been around for centuries and is very popular in the United States," the homeowner observes. "You get more for your money when you build a house like this: Every square inch is used."

"From day one, I had a vision of what I wanted the house to look like," the woman says. "I wanted to make sure throughout the process I was making the right choices." So she consulted the design team of The Room at Coulter's. Soon, the homeowner regarded Robby Lynn Young, Cindy Catton and Paulette Nicodemo as "design mentors." She admits, "I absolutely needed them because I didn't want to make the expensive mistakes that people can make."

Robby Lynn recalls, "This homeowner had more magazine photos to show me than anyone else I have ever met." Each image was built upon a cream colour scheme. Now, from the home's finished basement throughout the second story, tones of French vanilla unify the rooms. "I want to feel like I'm wrapped in the same blanket," the homeowner says. The four bedroom, five bathroom house measures 4,800 sq. ft., not including the basement. "It feels smaller than that, just because of the way all the rooms relate to one another as one big room."

"With cream, you have infinite possibilities to bring splashes of colour throughout the house, which I did with pillows and art," the woman says. Her favourite reds, oranges and blacks punch up the subtle foundation – which is about the only thing quiet in the house. "My husband and I built the house especially for ▶



This page, clockwise from top: Much of the homeowner's time is spent grilling and cooking dishes on the Viking range in the cream-hued kitchen; the small shades perched on the dining room's chandelier change with the seasons, including cream for summer and black for Halloween. The crystals sparkle in the reflection of the glass-topped table. Creamy silk draperies frame Palladian windows throughout the main floor; the bar and kitchen cabinetry is maple wood painted and aged in a cream tone. Windsor artist Jerzy Werbel created the bold painting of fruit displayed behind the bar.



our kids. We wanted them to bring their friends,” says the homeowner. Now young adults, they still overflow the house, crashing in the finished basement and lounging in the backyard. “It’s an extremely practical house to raise a family and their friends.”

Proof is in the textured faux paint finish that imitates aged sandstone throughout the main floor and carries over the high ceilings and up the staircase. “You feel totally enveloped,” the woman says.

Robby Lynn points out, “You see walls like this in old houses in France. It’s very, very French. Plus, you don’t see fingerprints, even after 11 years.”

Although the homeowner has travelled extensively in France, she avoided the temptation of buying furnishings and accents to ship back to Canada. Instead, “I brought a lot of ideas,” she says. Whatever was required to carry out her design theme was purchased with the guidance of The Room and often at Coulter’s.

The main floor’s layout spans out from the kitchen, where the homeowner is usually found. “I live to cook and to feed my friends and family,” she says. The large kitchen’s efficient triangle traffic pattern moves between stove, sink and fridge so “there is not too much walking involved” in whipping up dishes. Food prep is often done on the black polished granite top ▶



Clockwise from upper left: The Russell Woods backyard has everything needed for an endless summer: Cushioned rocking chairs, a footed wine chiller, a deep blue swimming pool, outdoor fireplace and a clear view of Lake St. Clair; stamped and tinted concrete provides a sturdy floor for the covered terrace, while a ceiling fan keeps everyone comfortable as they lounge on the black all weather resin wicker that remains outdoors year round; black Sunbrella cushions age well in the summer sun. The practical mother who chose them assures they do not show dirt; muskoka chairs circle at the edge of the 100’ wide property. Beyond the breakwall, the beach beckons.

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of the large, maple island, painted cream and given an antiqued finish.

"I wanted to have the option of entertaining around the island," the homeowner says. Guests watching her in action pick up cooking tips while relaxing on black metal barstools with curlicue backs. "Paulette helped me find the right leopard print fabric," says the homeowner, who adores animal prints. She used them sparingly throughout the home, though. "They can become tacky very quickly."

A huge stainless steel Viking range provides "room to have a lot of pots going," while also grilling bread and vegetables. A painted wood range hood cover and polished limestone backsplash tile continue the French décor theme.

In selecting wrought iron lighting fixtures to dangle over the eating bar, the homeowner received a decorating tip. "I was looking for black chandeliers but Robby said not everything has to be black." A pair of oil rubbed bronze chandeliers add dimension.

The spacious kitchen accommodates a table for 10 hungry people. "In summer, I often entertain in the kitchen because the table overlooks the pool and beautiful view," says the homeowner. Nearby is the bar, constructed to match the island and convenient for recharging glasses during mealtime.

Behind the bar is a big, bold painting of fruits and vegetables, inspired by a tiny image the homeowner spotted in a magazine photo of a famous chef's kitchen. Robby Lynn connected her client to Jerzy Werbel, a Windsor-based artist who could capture the spirit of the painting. "In the end, we had a piece that grabs my soul every day," the homeowner says.

Another little masterpiece is the pantry in a recess behind the kitchen. "It's my favourite room in the entire house," the woman admits. Fitted with the same style of cabinetry as the kitchen, the pantry glows with soft lighting highlighting stemware behind glass doors.

While preparing a meal, the homeowner can view the living room, family room and dining room. "I designed that area so I could see the kids playing the piano and other instruments while I was cooking in the kitchen. It's very cohesive and conducive to family life."

An arched doorway leads from the kitchen into the dining room, used mostly for entertaining formally, particularly in autumn, when the tall Palladian windows ▶

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reveal the changing leaves of mature trees. Two matching stone bases from Coulter's support a thick glass slab. "I like a glass top because it gives a crystal, sparkling theme from the lake to the house," the homeowner says. "It has an elegant air."

More down to earth are the Parsons chairs, slipcovered in a linen-look canvas. "It's very practical, because when you have a bunch of kids, you get stains," the woman says. "The chairs also had to be comfortable and inviting because I never want my friends to leave."

Another spot where everyone congregates is the living room. The gleaming black grand piano gave the homeowner her cue to introduce a major black note in the kitchen. "Because I had this big black mass in the living room, I wanted to balance the kitchen with black granite countertops," she explains.

For relaxing during cold weather months, the family room is the place to be. Ivory sofas and Bergere armchairs throughout the main floor provide a soft landing. Creamy silk draperies dress all of the tall windows. Polished limestone and light-stained hardwood floors are contrasted by black area rugs. Gas fireplaces add warmth to the open concept space.

During summer, the family enjoys their 100'-wide lakefront property, swimming in the pool, watching the boats sail by. "In the morning in the summer, everyone is in their bathing suits and we start the day," the woman says.

Dark all weather resin wicker and cast aluminum outdoor furniture stay out year-round. The former caterer's foresight is evident in the design of the covered porch, with its built-in barbecue. It's also handy to the indoor bar. "If I want to get a drink for my friends, I just open the door and lean," she says. "It's a great house to live in," the homeowner reflects. "It's always a work in progress. Your taste changes over the years." WLM

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