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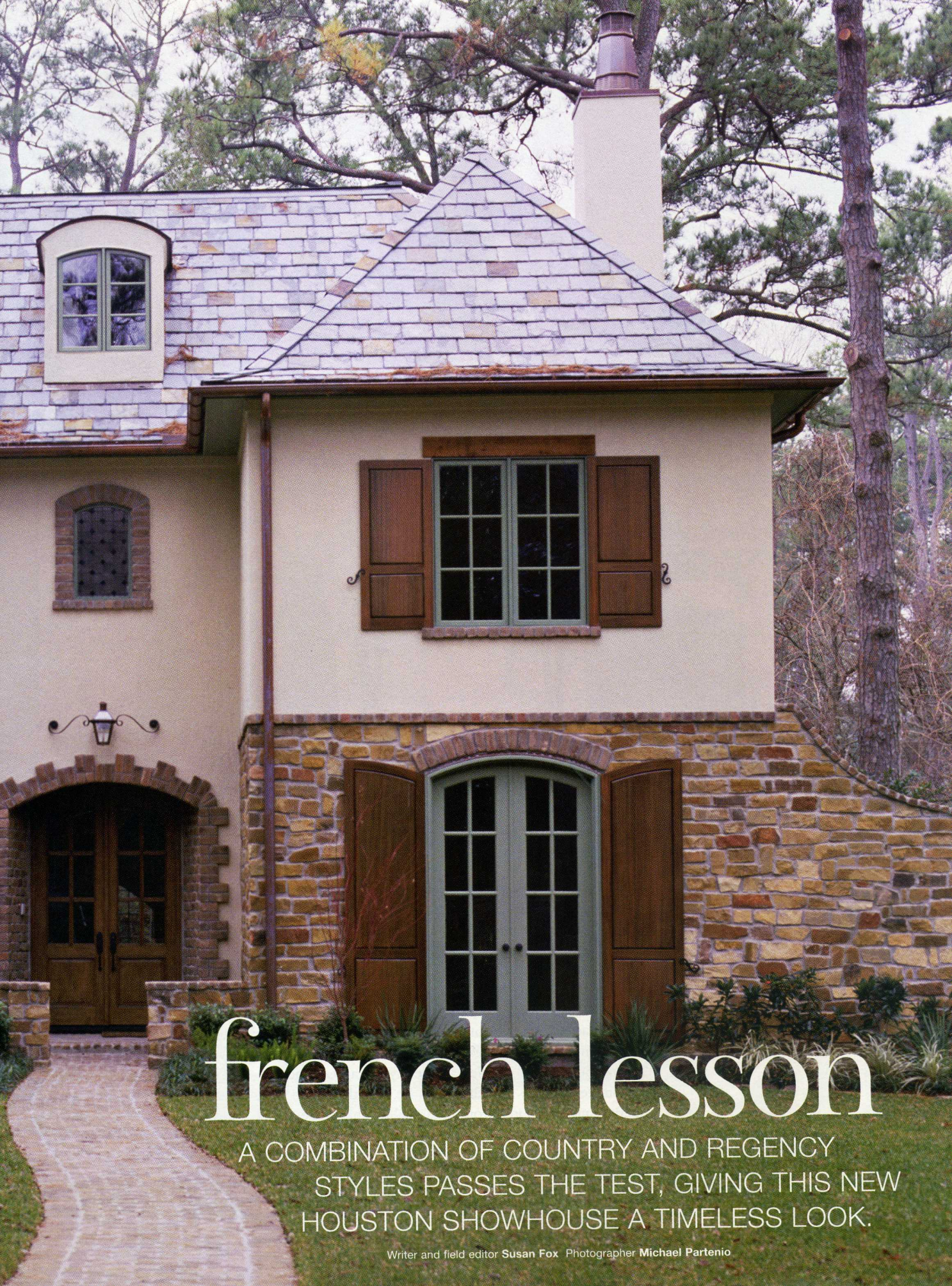
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french lesson

A COMBINATION OF COUNTRY AND REGENCY
STYLES PASSES THE TEST, GIVING THIS NEW
HOUSTON SHOWHOUSE A TIMELESS LOOK.

Writer and field editor Susan Fox Photographer Michael Partenio



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Brian Thompson satisfied his long-standing admiration for French architecture by conforming to a prevailing trend: Build it new but make it look old. As a Houston-area builder and a student of European design traditions, Thompson knew exactly how to marry the floor plan and construction techniques for a new home with the signature elements of a vintage country estate.

"I had seen a layout of a country French house in Dallas and I got excited about doing my own," says Thompson, who, as a college student years ago, found himself smitten by the French homes he saw during an engineering internship in Europe. His goal for this home: create the character and charm that usually evolves over decades.

Residential designer Robert Dame did the architectural plans. Thompson knew Dame's work firsthand: "I live in one of his designs, and I've worked with him before."

ABOVE Period-influenced light fixtures and furnishings in this study set an elegant tone, reinforced by white-enamel paneling and millwork. OPPOSITE Arched doorways and windows appear as a recurring theme throughout the home. Two sets of inviting French doors bring sunlight into the study and offer glimpses of the lush greenbelt outside.





Paneled walls and an arched alcove for the sideboard add architectural dimension to the dining room. The scrollwork sconces and chandelier contrast with the woodwork.







The house's L-shape configuration makes the most of views of a greenbelt along one side of the rectangular lot. And while the blueprint reveals 7,000 square feet, Dame says he designed the interior spaces with intimacy in mind. "I like delineated spaces," he says. "I like an intimate entry. And I like vistas from one room into others."

To create a flow of spaces, Dame opened the kitchen to a cozy breakfast area, spacious family room, wine room, and butler's pantry. An impressive brick archway frames the kitchen and creates a subtle separation from the family room—more informal boundary than barrier.

"It's my favorite room in the house," designer Kelly Welsh says of the kitchen. Welsh is part of a local design team, Bellacasa Design Associates, that Thompson hired to furnish the showhouse. "We got beautiful appliances and mixed them with an old look," she says, pointing to the new cabinetry that was painted and distressed. Welsh, principal designer Kevin Spearman, and their colleagues had walked through the home during construction, then

LEFT Hutch-inspired cabinetry, painted gray with green undertones, sets the mood for the kitchen. Hickory flooring and an island with a vintage furniture look help warm the large space.

ABOVE Fruit- and vegetable-motif tiles line the backsplash behind the farmhouse sink. The countertops are a honed black slate, another material that would have been used in years past.



ABOVE Pairing a brick floor in a herringbone pattern with tongue-and-groove wall paneling created a less formal look for the breakfast room, which gets its polish from a mahogany table. RIGHT An old wood gate now serves as a cocktail table. Designer Kevin Spearman painted the piece and paired it with a streamlined sofa, then brought a rustic-looking leather chair into the family room's mix.

developed their design plan—country French with a Regency flair. “We wanted it to have a certain refinement and sophistication,” says Spearman, whose firm selected paint colors, cabinets, moldings, and paneling. They also designed the wall and window treatments, selected furnishings, and consulted on architectural details, all of which were critical to achieving the timeworn look.

Just off the kitchen sits one of Spearman's favorite spaces: the breakfast room. “With the tongue-and-groove walls, you get the feeling that this room had been added on later,” Spearman says. It's an unexpected room, he says, and gives the feeling that it might once have been a porch.

When completed, the showhouse sold almost immediately to owners who had just moved to Texas from Colorado. One of the new owners struggled with deciding whether she'd buy the showhouse furnishings. The breakfast room, in particular, had her stumped. She thought the





LEFT The master bedroom's ample ceiling height prompted the designers to select a four-poster. At the foot of the bed is a hand-painted black settee with cane seating, reminiscent of the country French style. BELOW A new claw-foot tub is the focal point in the master bath, which features dressing suites on either side of the main bathing area.

shiny mahogany table might look too formal for the space. When she tried a more rustic style, the substitute altered the mood of the room. Not surprisingly, she recanted and the original furnishings stayed.

"We always get people who come in [to one of our homes] and say they love it," Spearman says. "But they can't say exactly why." He is never surprised to hear that sentiment, but he is always delighted when they figure it out. "We do have a formula," he says. "Opposites attract."

Such was the case in trying to create a character-laden look within new construction. Thompson gave the team a loose rein, but let everyone know what he wanted: attention to detail and relaxed elegance. "I knew I wanted a house with character, built with materials that look like they had been reclaimed," he says. "I wanted it layered with a lot of texture inside and out." **BH**

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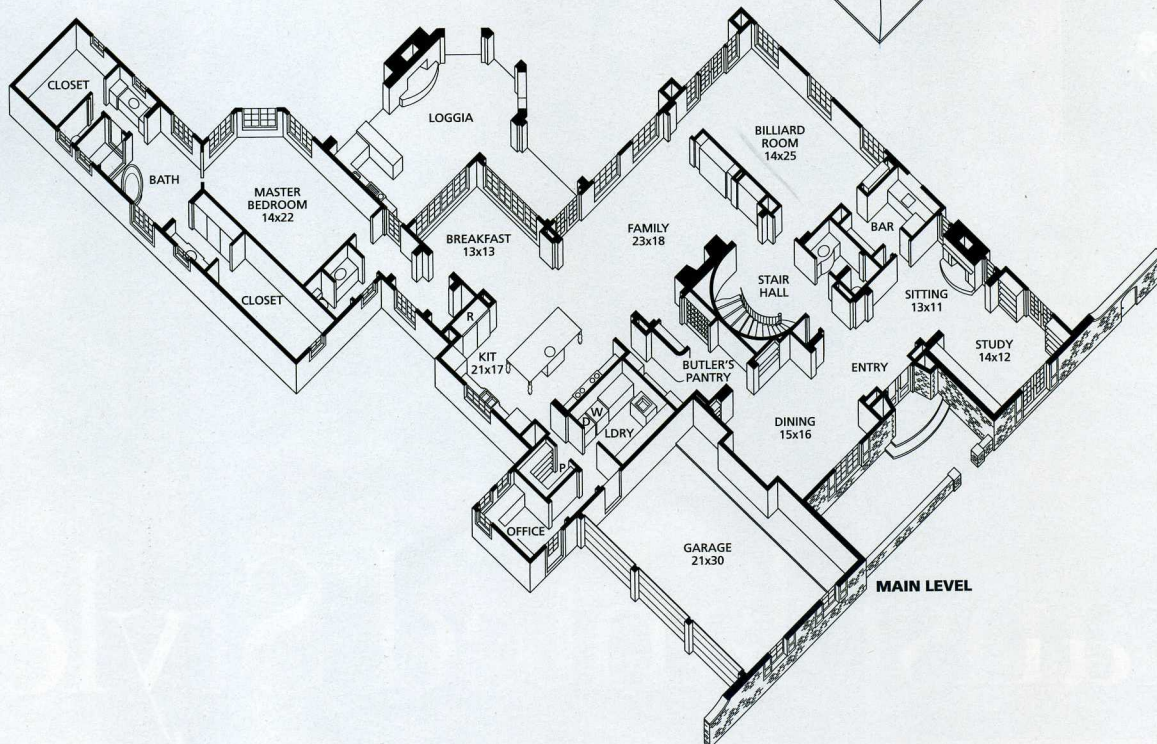
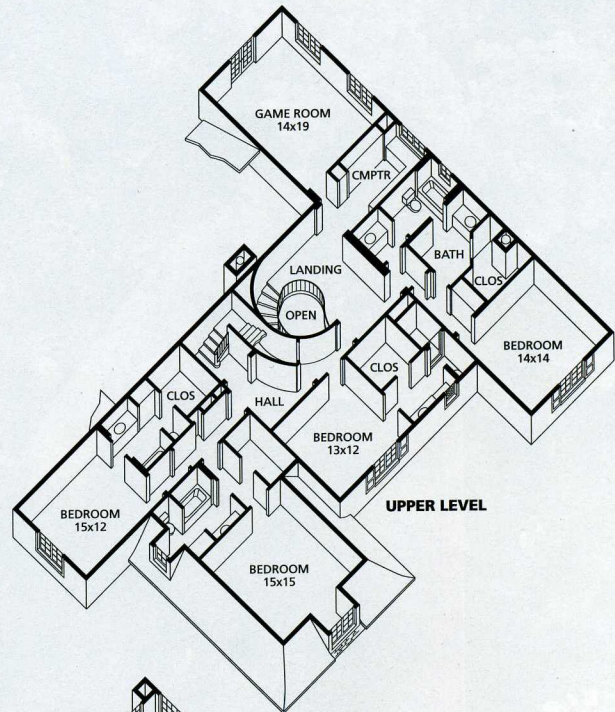
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EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN in this Houston home, inspired by the rich textures, materials, and charm of country French architecture. Inside, there's every amenity you'd expect in a modern home, but no hint of a hectic lifestyle. The spaces and views encourage deliberate living.



MAIN LEVEL SQ. FT.: 3,306
UPPER LEVEL SQ. FT.: 3,693
BEDROOMS: 5
BATHROOMS: 5 full, 2 half



Architectural designer **Robert Dame, Robert Dame Designs** Interior designer **Kevin Spearman, Bellacasa Design Associates**
Builder **Brian Thompson, Thompson Custom Homes**