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# Arizona Foothills

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By Karen Flake Werner  
Photography by Dino Tonn

## FRENCH FLAIR

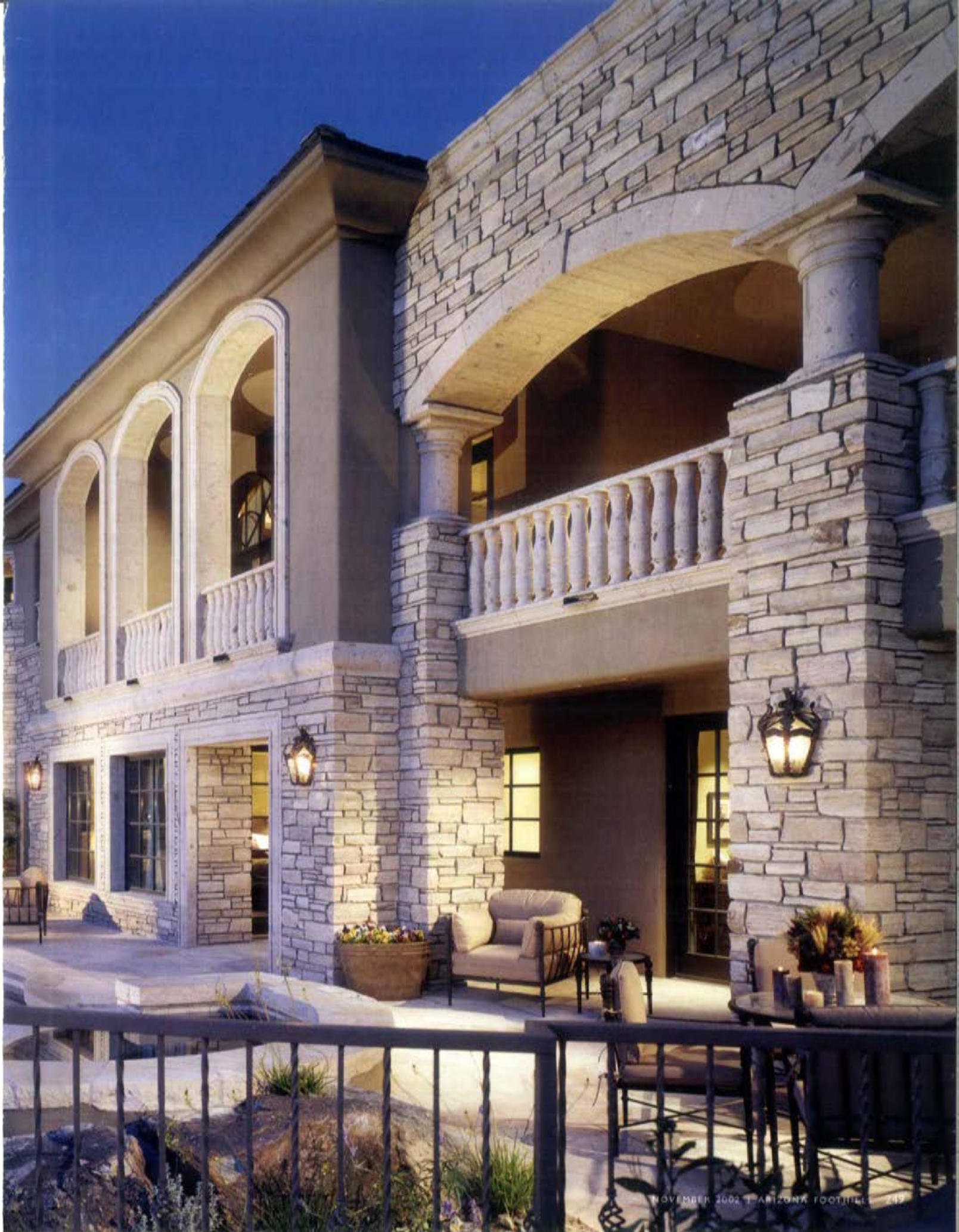
THREE-HUNDRED-AND-SEVENTY-TWO paintings, scores of antiques and even more memories—these are the things this exquisite house needed to contain. Its owners are a successful couple that hails from the Southwest. But before they returned to the Valley to replant their roots, they spent years living abroad, experiencing life and cultivating their tastes.

When it came time to build locally, they knew what they wanted: a sophisticated lair with a decidedly French feeling. So, they hired the architect Lee Hutchison to create the Parisienne by way of Paradise Valley. Because the homeowners still lived in Europe at the time, they communicated with Hutchison by mail, sending him photos that appealed to them. Their inspirations were varied—cathedral ceilings, houses, hotels, restaurants—but, says the homeowner, “Lee took the mishmash I had in my brain and put it all together.”

From mishmash to mansion, it's hard to believe that the house is merely two years old. It rests snugly in a mountain, as if it had done so for centuries. Inside, its domed ceilings, stone floors and deeply recessed windows have an air of antiquity that doesn't seem staged in the least. Yet grand as it is, the house is exceedingly livable—the ideal enclave for a down-to-earth couple that prizes practicality over pretense.

ARCHITECT / Lee Hutchison  
BUILDER / Shiloh Custom Homes  
INTERIOR DESIGN / Paula Den Boer  
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The interior design called for a masterful hand, as it needed to both live up to the large and lavish rooms and withstand the abuses of two free-spirited dogs and an owner who doesn't think twice about throwing silk pillows in the wash. Enter Paula Den Boer, an interior designer who is herself a fan of what she calls "the high-French home."

Den Boer and the homeowner immediately happened upon a common wavelength. They settled on a palette of French yellows and golds with touches of red throughout. They warmed the interiors with an abundance of fabrics: lush silks, lots of fringe, loads of swags and luxurious folds. Though they agreed that gold gilding would give them the look they were after, they decided to keep its use to a minimum. "This wasn't going to be Versailles," says Den Boer.

There was one area, however, where too much was not enough. In every room, on every wall there are paintings. Big and small, in ink and watercolor, they tell stories of where the homeowners have been. There are French boule players in the master bedroom, as well as drawings by an artist who signed his work SEM. A chronicler of the café class, he created likenesses of those who enjoyed fame in France—and in this Arizona bedroom, the Rothschilds, Josephine Baker and Coco Chanel hold court.

"She handed me a trunk of flea-market pictures and said we had to do something with them," says Den Boer. "She knows that I'm a lover of flea markets and frames, so we went to town framing everything in museum-quality fashion. That way, we could take a \$5 picture and turn it into something important."

The owner's acquisitiveness didn't end with the artwork. She'd also amassed antiques while living abroad. "I didn't have a work permit, so my friends and I would go



to flea markets in Geneva every Wednesday and Saturday mornings," she says. "And Paris was just a train ride away."

Today, those flea-market finds are sprinkled throughout the house, adding dignity, interest and whimsy. There is, for example, a 16th-century child's chair in the hallway that holds a tiny toy box. In what Den Boer deems "the bed-and-breakfast room," a Scottish oak trunk sits at the foot of a bed bedecked in colorful plaids. In the same room, there's an old library step that houses a hidden chamber pot.

IN THIS  
ARIZONA BEDROOM,  
THE ROTHSCHILDS,  
JOSEPHINE BAKER  
AND COCO CHANEL  
HOLD COURT.

Den Boer confidently mixed the old with the new and didn't take umbrage with having much of the décor handed to her. "You just don't see pieces like these in the States," she says. "We really had fun installing them." Den Boer particularly appreciates the spirit in which they were collected. "She bought things that spoke to her, which is the way you should get antiques," says Den Boer. "It wasn't about being a perfect 17th-century chair. It could have cracks, and that would be just fine."

Best of all, with a backdrop so beautiful, the stories behind these purchases take center stage. In the snooker room, a handsome hideaway of reds and blues, hangs an old mirror with obvious signs of wear. The homeowner bought it in Lyon and laughs at the memory of sitting on the wheel well in the back of a station wagon balancing it and a chandelier purchased by a friend. "That's what I love about this stuff," says Den Boer. "There's history in this house."

Romance, too. The homeowners are a loving couple that celebrates their lives in the



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objects around them. In the kitchen—a gracious space Den Boer augmented with polished and honed granite—frames hang from every conceivable locale. In them are menus from restaurants from around the world where the homeowners have dined.

Perhaps the most meaningful wall hangings are those without frames. Post-its affixed to walls contain love notes from a husband who is often away. His wife says that's part of the reason this house means so much. "When he comes home, he really does want to be in this place," she says. "We spend most of our time in the living room and out on the balcony."

The balcony, like the rest of the house, both affirms the present and alludes to the past. It offers a prime view of Paradise Valley that could easily be mistaken for a valley in Provence. Tile rooftops dot the mountain at levels low and high, much as they do in that portion of France.

For all its French flair, though, this house is a byproduct of the creativity residing here in the Valley. The architect, the designer, the builder and the craftspeople came together to create the luxury of a Loire Valley château, and they followed their vision through to the last, extravagant detail.

Before the homeowners moved in, Den Boer spent days hanging draperies, moving furniture and accessorizing the home with flowers, soaps and candles. Shiloh Custom Homes festooned the front door with a giant Welcome Home sign, and the entire team was inside, ready to surprise the homeowners with flickering fireplaces, a catered dinner and a bathtub embellished with floating gardenias.

"My husband was blown away," says the homeowner, still relishing the recollection. "He's a very quiet man, and he was even more at a loss for words. I was in tears too. It's one of my favorite memories." 