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Inside A Mobile French Colonial

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text | Mary Nestor
images | Jonathan Harper

Architect L. Craig Roberts, AIA, has been designing homes in Mobile for 30 years. He works comfortably in a wide range of styles from Palladian to Italian Renaissance. But he does have a favorite. He and his life partner, Rob Spicer, have just marked the fourth anniversary in their very special home, which pays homage to the practical elegance of French Colonial architecture.

With its authentic brick exterior, ridge

tiles, gallery porches, hipped roof line, and livable interiors, the Roberts-Spicer home captures the essence of the period. "This house is a reflection of what would be considered indigenous Gulf Coast Architecture," explains Roberts. His mentor, architect Hays Towns, who died recently at the age of 101, was renowned for restoring the genre to its rightful heritage among the old sugar plantations of Baton Rouge.

The 3,000-square-foot home, with an



Top: Each of the bricks from St. Joe Brick Company is stamped with its original mold and the date of production (1891-2001).

Opposite: Creamy marble countertops look even warmer under the bronze glow cast by the hand-blown, teardrop globe lights.

Bottom: The beautiful interiors are a blend of eclectic and antique elements that create an inviting and comfortable atmosphere.







additional 1,000 square feet of covered patio, is designed in perfect symmetry, around a central great room. French doors access the side porches and the private courtyards, complete with unique water sculptures. A third porch at the back of the home is surrounded by formal gardens beyond which lies one of two pigeonaire

work provide the accent colors of orange, red, and gold.

The galley kitchen features glass-front cabinets, garaged appliances, Newport brass fixtures with oil rubbed bronzed finish, a farm sink, and honed Alabama marble countertops. Flame orange-colored, hand-blown, teardrop globe lights are suspended from an arched wall, which offers an unbroken view from the kitchen to the formal dining room and beyond that, the great room. The heavy beams that span the ceilings came from an old tobacco warehouse and were secured by Antique

Building Products of Virginia, especially for the project.

A central feature of the home is the abundance of French doors. Roberts says he also incorporated plenty of floor-to-ceiling bookcases not only to display interesting pieces and provide storage but also to help bring a weighted precision to each room. "That's what we architects do," he explains. "We determine proportions and that's very important." He says the casework prevents the rooms from feeling "cold" with too much glass.

Although he did not develop the blue-



out buildings. And although the acre lot sits in the center of town, lush landscaping and soundproof interiors eliminate the usual intrusions from neighboring homes or passing vehicles.

"Privacy is a big part of the design," explains the architect. "When the weather is nice, you can open up the French doors and it's like you're living in a pavilion surrounded by the sounds of water."

Throughout the interior, the rich patina of reclaimed 200-year-old heart of pine flooring combines with a wash of soothing "Tea Leaf" green to create a very comfortable, restful space. Persian rugs and an extensive collection of local art-

Opposite top: A pair of antique French garden obelisks creates a division between the dining and seating areas.

Opposite bottom: Crisp lines and a mix of warm and cool tones define the master bedroom.

Top: Reminiscent of Old World architects, even this small desk area has a distinct style and utilizes space to the fullest with the built-in bookshelves.

Bottom: Alabama marble countertops and Bijou vessel sinks supported by cast iron balustrades are duplicated in both master bathrooms.



print, Spicer also appreciates the atmosphere they have created. "Nothing is pretentious. Our friends and family feel invited and welcome here. It's not a place that is so formal that people are afraid to touch," he explains.

With its emphasis on symmetry, the back of the home forms the top of the "T," where the master bedroom is flanked by Spicer's study on one side and a guest bedroom on the other. Here, they replaced the green walls and ceiling beams with "Magic Spell" ivory paint and narrow wooden joists. The ceiling height comes down from 11 feet to 9 feet in this part of the house.



Top right and above: One of the two pigeonaires on the property, this one houses tools and is the perfect backdrop for some stunning foliage.

Bottom right: Water cascades from the scalloped bowl of the courtyard fountain.

The home actually has two identical master bathrooms, each designed for convenience and privacy. Alabama marble vanities with cast iron balustrades support porcelain Bijou vessel sinks. Each has a walk in shower, a clothes closet, and a linen closet. "You get up and get ready, take a shower, and you never have to back track," explains Roberts of his design.

As summer waxes and the foliage grows thick, this special home nestled in the urban landscape, will continue to offer a refuge of good taste and great design. And when summer rains fall on Mobile, Roberts and Spicer—their French doors thrown open to the elements—will surely be high and dry, enjoying every moment of it. |

