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DECEMBER 2009

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Springhill villa offers
cozy, Old-World charm

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A SWEET TOUCH | *Cafe du Monde* by Fairhope artist Randy Moberg adds warmth and familiarity to the kitchen's workspace.



This Springhill home combines classic architecture and European style

Old Ways Build New Beginnings

| By **HEATHER GOFF** | Photography by **COURTLAND W. RICHARDS** |



BRILLIANT BEAUTY | A hand-crafted chandelier by Bree Ennaco completes this upstairs bedroom with ornate charm.

RICH WITH CHARACTER AND OLD-WORLD CHARM, the Rusling home is a sight from the hills of Tuscany, found at a Mobile address. Its rustic elements and artful detail lend a Southern spin on European style. An open floor plan and townhome-feel particularly suited owners Van and Tomi Sue with a simple, welcoming design.

"We were looking to build a bigger house than what we lived in, but knowing that it was just the two of us, we didn't want anything too large," Tomi Sue said. "But we needed something large enough with easy flow because we loved having parties."

As owners of Carpe Diem Tea & Coffee Co. in Springhill, the Ruslings were natural hosts who enjoyed entertaining. So with their "dream house" in mind, the couple drew up this Italian abode in 2004 with architect L. Craig Roberts. ♦♦

CLASSIC CHARM | Greco stucco, iron railings and wooden shutters give this Tuscan-style villa an Old World feel.



CLASSY COMFORT | Set for company, the dining room table adds rustic feel with a pine surface and bench-like base.





OUTDOOR AMBIANCE | The courtyard, complete with cast iron foundation, offers a relaxing setting with European style.

"I just loved the design of a Tuscan-looking home, and I lived in New Orleans for 23 years, so I also loved that shotgun look – narrow and long and tall," Tomi Sue said. "With Craig's help, he had ideas and then we tweaked them to fit our needs."

A courtyard, garage office and customized kitchen were just a few things at the top of the list. A 'grand room' downstairs was also ideal, to allow easy mingling among dinner guests. With the dining area and living room combined, an adjacent kitchen additionally aimed to accommodate company.

"It was important to have a kitchen with easy access to the great room, sort of all in one but yet separate," Tomi Sue said. "So when you had your family over or you had parties, you could still be a part of the party and still do things in the kitchen."

Stately, granite countertops and an iron chandelier overhead bring elegance to the gourmet workspace. *Café du Monde* by Fairhope artist Randy Moberg also adds a touch of nostalgia in colorful hues. A farm sink, vegetable sink, pot filler and GE Monogram appliances round out the room with superior culinary function. ➤



"THE ONE THING I LOVE ABOUT THIS HOUSE IS THE OPENNESS and how the indoors and outdoors sort of flow as one by having the courtyard and French doors at every opportunity."

—Tomi Sue Rusling



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a long dining table repeats the
iron and refurbished wood
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COME ON IN | Heart pine floors and iron details, seen in the railing and fixtures, create a welcoming foyer for this European-type home.



UPON STEPPING INTO THE HOME, guests are greeted by its deep, cozy entryway. Heart pine floors and a matching staircase, which leads to two bedrooms upstairs, set the tone in a rich, friendly shade.

In the grand room, a long dining table repeats the iron and refurbished wood combination. Overstuffed furniture in the sitting area also lends an inviting touch. The ornate mantel and coffee table nearby complement the homey setting with its worn, faux finish. The interior's color scheme likewise relates comfortable, European taste.

"The palette that I like to use in my homes derives from nature," Tomi Sue said. "Muted earth tones, like ash green and gold with brown undertones, with a touch of silver added, so the walls take on a pearlescent hue and have more depth."

Oriental antique pieces, like a custom-made chinoiserie chest and gilded rice paper screen from Taiwan, also add a bit of Old World appeal to the grand room. For an accent of modernity and color, large contemporary art adds curiosity throughout the house, as well.

"I just love art," Tomi Sue said. "To me, you can decorate a house with your basic things but art color, through glass or art on the wall, just adds a bit of whimsy and fling – otherwise the house is boring."

Most pieces are local works by Mobile or Baldwin artists. The 4'x5' painting in the grand room is especially one of Tomi Sue's favorites. Created by friend Kent Walsh, the vivid abstract can actually be viewed from the street just outside the house.

"I like a statement," Tomi Sue said. "It also makes for interesting conversation pieces, and it just brings your friends into your home in a different way."

To passersby, the home's exterior accurately reflects the natural, Italian setting found inside. Greco stucco is adorned with wooden windows and real working shutters. A French door and iron-railed

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CREATIVE CENTERPIECE | Tomi Sue's love of art is evidenced throughout the home – even the master bath features a thoughtful piece.

balcony dot the area above. Gothic details, as seen in the front windowpane, also dress up the home by architectural design.

"All those little details are pleasing to the eye," Roberts said. "And then we have a real pretty clay chimney pot on top of the chimney, which adds a lot of charm."

The home's unusual build additionally lends personality. Its low-pitched roof creates one-and three-quarter stories, as the roofline dips below second-floor ceiling level.

"So you've got that little arch above the front entrance of the French door going into the upstairs bedroom," Roberts explained. "And on the outside, (the ceiling) raises above the roofline, which is a little unique."

Drawing new plans inspired by Old World structures creates a "new-old house" look, Roberts said. The use of stucco, iron, heart pine, crown moldings and 10-foot ceilings in the Rusling home displays a few of the timeless details that bridge hundreds of years in architecture.

"Most everything (in this house) are materials in the size and the scale of materials that were used 100 years ago," Roberts said. "It gives it a feeling of substantiality – that it will last the test of time, and that it will look

good 100 years from now."

In fact, Tomi Sue is so pleased with the home that she just might want to live there that long. Now five years since the planning stages, her "dream house" truly is all that she imagined.

"You know how you build a house and there's always something that you would change if you could do it all over again?" Tomi Sue said. "Well, I found that when you have an architect like Craig Roberts and a builder like Joe Bradley, they work so closely at hand with you that this is the first time ever I have said, 'There is nothing I would change about the design of this home.'"

The house also holds much sentimental value for Tomi Sue. While she and Van never got to live in their ideal home together, the months of preparation beforehand and years spent dreaming of its creation give the residence incalculable worth.

"It was much easier for me to move into a house where no one had lived, rather than staying in the house that we had together lived in for 14 years," Tomi Sue said. "It was like a new beginning of my life, but it also has all the wonderful memories of how much fun we had picking things out and making decisions – it's reassuring and warm." 🍷

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