



Belle Maison

INTERIOR DESIGN

French Aesthetic, American Convenience

“Growing up in Paris I remember going to old chateaus and walking through the rooms and beautiful gardens,” Catherine Engelmeyer says. “This was my favorite after-school activity.” She remembers these walks through the great French heritage sites as the first visual training for her career in interior design.

“I would observe the fabrics, colors, and textures and spend time figuring out why that pillow matched or why that window treatment was used.” This French aesthetic continued to grow through her studies in art history at the Louvre. After moving to the United States as a young woman, she studied at the New York School of Interior Design to learn, as she puts it, “the mechanisms.” Some things must be learned, she explains, but things such as a sense of scale and color come naturally. “I can look at a room, design it in my mind, and know exactly how it will come out.” To this inner eye she brings an elegant French style, which she has been perfecting for 20 years as proprietor of Belle Maison, her interior design firm in Maplewood.

What is French style? Some might say it has that *je ne sais quoi*, a not totally definable quality that gives an air of beauty and elegance to a room. Perhaps it's the use of color, the selection of furniture, the mix of textures, or the play of light. Catherine combines her French background with an understanding of American design and function to offer clients the best of both worlds. The French might say she has *savoir-faire*, that ability to know what to do.

“In the French style your home is a work of art,” says Mitchell Engelmeyer, Catherine's husband and business partner. “And for the French there is little in life more important than art.” Belle Maison brings that approach and artistic vision to every element of its designs.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

On an equal footing with art is empathy. “It is vital to capture the client's personality in their home,” Catherine explains. For some this means a home that requires the least amount of work to maintain beauty and elegance; for others with staff, this is not a concern. For some the space must become a glittering atmosphere for entertaining; for others comfort, like a particularly well-fitting shoe, is of primary importance. Some like understatement; others want a bold design approach. Whatever the direction, the goal of Belle Maison is to create an environment of

Warm earth-tone paints and fabrics make this large, high-ceilinged great room intimate and welcoming.

Photo by Brown Cathel



TOP: A light, airy dining room features a cool palette and a mix of textures to create a sophisticated and understated ambience and to accentuate the architectural details.

ABOVE: Belle Maison uses a stylish mix of classic fixtures, contemporary art, and neutral colors to create elegant simplicity in a living room.

Photos by Rosemary Carroll

lasting beauty, grace, and comfort that exceeds the most discriminating clients' expectations.

The listening process begins with a consultation to establish the chemistry that is central to a successful partnership. When the chemistry is right, Catherine will know what clients want without them having to verbalize it. She'll know when to gently push and when to acquiesce.

After the consultation, the next step is an in-depth meeting to generate direction and educate the client to the possibilities. Then Belle Maison will propose the design concept through floor plans and elevations, presenting color samples, fabric swatches, and furniture choices. At the presentation Catherine explains and further educates the client about the choices. "The client might suggest a direction," Mitchell says, "Catherine will listen and then present something that fulfills this direction in ways the client could never have imagined."

Next, Belle Maison calls on a network of skilled craftsmen and suppliers to implement the design to the



A papered ceiling, brick walls, and lively patterned fabrics lend a relaxed, informal feel to a family room.

Photo by Rosemary Carroll

highest standards, with Belle Maison taking full responsibility for the finished product. "Catherine works with the best suppliers and gets their best work because she has a hands-on knowledge of how it all gets done," Mitchell says.

LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

The result of the process, from the first consultation to the final placement of accessories, is a level of satisfaction that is best measured by the long-term relationships that characterize Belle Maison's business. Once clients experience the level of service and ability Catherine provides, Mitchell says, they don't want to work with anyone else.

The foundation of Catherine's skills was forged early on, during those walks in the great buildings and parks of Paris. Asked about her personal dream home, she takes you on a verbal tour of the best of French style. She describes a beautiful French Manor overlooking the hills of Provence. It's filled with a generous helping of stone and millwork, the best silks and other rich fabrics, antique floors, as well as awe-inspiring and abundant artwork of all kinds. The home would be a showcase of Belle Maison's art, an environment that combines elegance with warmth, sophistication with accessibility, and an artistic aesthetic with a perfect fit.

— by Rosemary Carroll

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