

The Detroit News

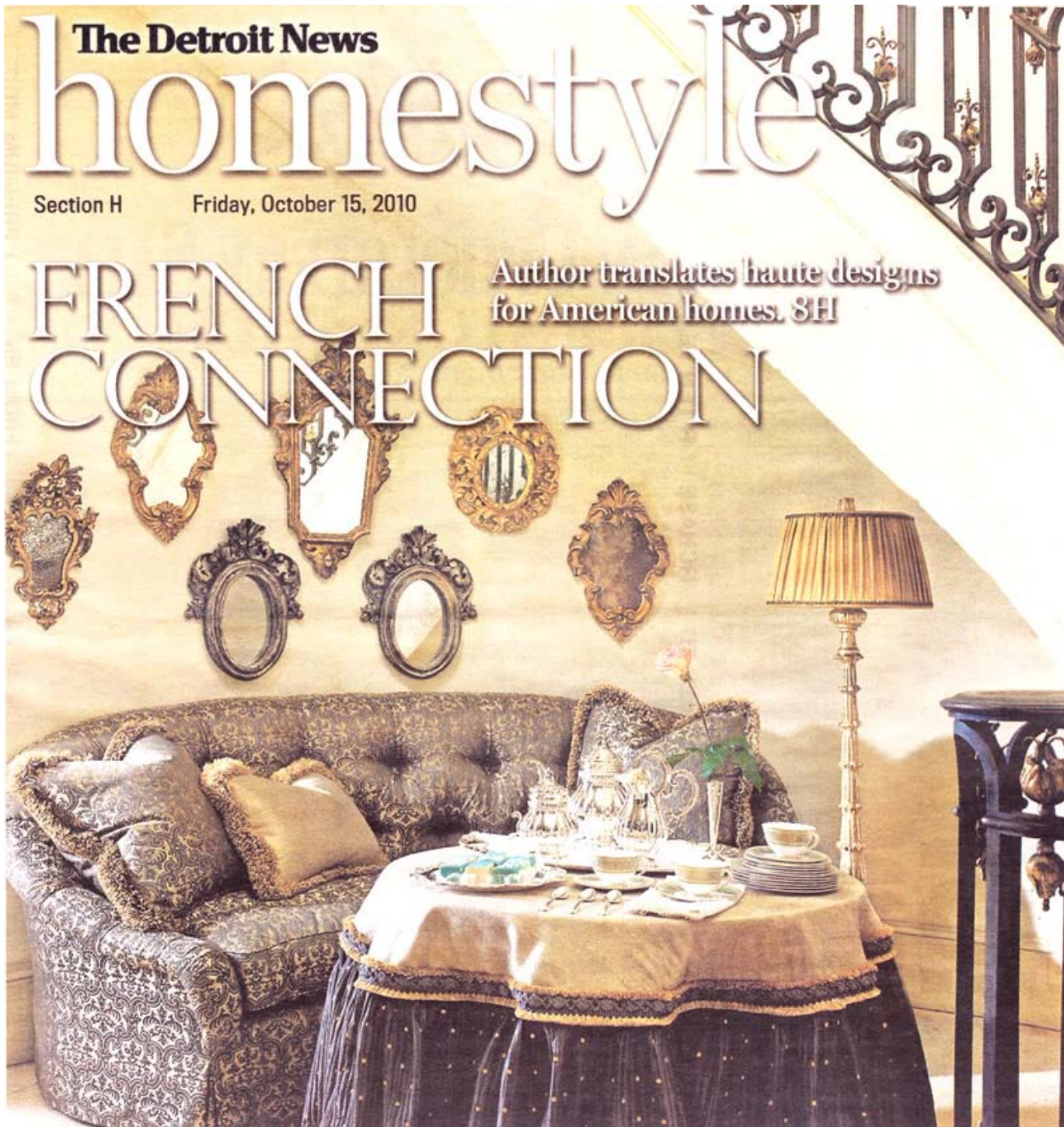
homestyle

Section H

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FRENCH CONNECTION

Author translates haute designs for American homes. 8H1



Ooh-la-la Interiors



All photos courtesy of Betty Lou Phillips from her book "French Impressions"

Designer and author Betty Lou Phillips cultivated a love for French design because of the attention to detail and respect for the past. This regal dining room features gold and crystal chandeliers, hand-carved wood paneling and splashes of blue hydrangeas.

Designer's latest book dazzles the eye with French style

BY KHRISTI ZIMMETH
Special to The Detroit News

Betty Lou Phillips was born in Ohio and lives in Dallas, but has been called "the Queen of French Design." The author of 10 books, including the haute-off-the-press "French Impressions" (Gibbs Smith, \$50), the tireless Phillips is an in-demand interior designer and an expert at translating Gallic style for American audiences. Her books have sold more than a half-million copies and, while filled with plenty of eye candy (yes, that's her two-story mirrored dressing room with the silk settee and chandelier on the "French Impressions" cover), they also pack plenty of sound advice (French table manners, anyone?) and timeless tips for how you can add a little "je ne sais quoi" to your home — whatever your budget.

Not surprisingly, the prolific interior designer is every bit as charming as her interiors. We caught up with her at her office in Dallas, where she's busy promoting the latest book.

Ten books — and almost all on French style — beg the question about where your interest in French design started. How did you get interested in the style?

An appreciation for art, architecture, music and travel to European countries all contributed to my initial interest in French design. Subsequent study further seduced me. The French sense of style, attention to detail and respect for the past all appealed to me.

What's the difference between French and American design?

One of the biggest differences is that Americans strive for perfection, while the French like things to be a little unexpected. ... That's part of what makes their rooms so interesting and gives them such great style.

What is it that makes French style perennially popular? What are the hallmarks of the look?

We are struck by the flair of the French,



Caramel sofas, moss-fringed pillows and a huge ottoman lend comfort to this room dominated by high ceilings, antique wood beams and a fireplace.

and understandably so. With their self-assured approach to design and mesmerizing way of projecting a rich cultural heritage with matchless sophistication, their homes exude timeless grandeur that never wanes.

While trends in the states come and go, the French seldom stray from well-practiced beliefs. ... They remain true to the following design principles:

Quality matters most. The past must be ever present. Interiors merit furnishings with presence. Settings must evolve over time. More than necessity must prompt the desire to buy. Family heirlooms merit a prominent spot. Balance creates the feeling of well-being. Harmony is more important than conformity. Size matters. Elegance must mingle with ease. An artfully assembled collection is fundamental.

I read on a blog that all of the photos are of one house — namely, yours. Is that true?

For the first time, I decided to photograph 100 percent of my own design firm's work, so all the rooms in this book have been designed by us. Since the owners are uncomfortable having their identity disclosed, I can't say more than that.

I love the attention to detail — from the sign above the elevator to the pantry in English and French. Is that attention to detail a hallmark of French

style or your personal style?



The artisan-built La Cornue range is a focal point in the kitchen. Oversized culinary utensils are from E. Dehillerin in Paris, which has catered to French chefs for 200 years.

Both. I grew up raising and showing American quarter horses in the Midwest. Together with my father, I attended a judging school where an attention to detail was honed in my teens. In the Ile-de-France — the most populous region of France with nearly 12 million inhabitants — more than 75 percent dwell in apartments. Many apartments are small, by American standards; the French attention to detail helps make the most of available space.

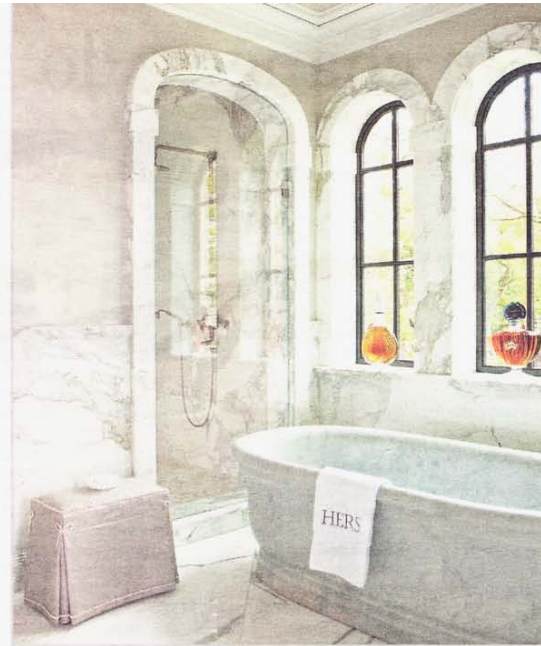
The house in the book is quite large. What can people who have smaller homes (and budgets) take

away from it?

I hope the images in "French Impressions" will stretch the imagination, suggest fresh ways of artfully enhancing one's surroundings and, of course, ultimately satisfy one's soul. Many elements will translate across all price points. ... Everyone can take something away. Maybe a table setting with pretty place cards or an interesting way to fold a napkin.

You're a prolific interior designer. How much of your time is spent designing for clients these days versus working on book projects?

Ninety percent of my time is spent



The marble tub and rhinestone- and bow-studded slipcovered bath stool are designs that date to the time of Louis XIV.

working with clients all over the country — as design is my passion. But writing also gives me the feeling of satisfaction, whether writing a children's book or writing about design.

With the economy being what it is, many people have limited design dollars. Where do you think money is best spent at the moment?

With the way priorities vary, I don't have a good answer for this question. I do know that the French are capable of living for years without a carpet, tapestry, commode or other furnishing until one comes along with the requisite French origin and a certain "je ne sais quoi" that makes the piece clearly worth the wait. Today it is more important than ever to develop a plan, so that a room has staying power. Avoiding trends helps save money over a lifetime. Not only is there less need to redecorate when moving but also family members may actually welcome any surplus furnishings.

What's next now that this book is done?

Probably a design book with a French and Italian mix. I love French, Italian, even Swedish. I love that Swedish design is cleaner, how it reflects the light, and I love painted furniture, especially the freshness of it. What I really want to do is another beach house. I love doing second homes. I like that they're relaxed, that they usually have more color and that people want something different than in their primary homes. They're looking for and are open to more offbeat ideas.

Khristi Zimmeth is a Metro Detroit freelance writer and Homestyle's Trash or Treasure columnist.