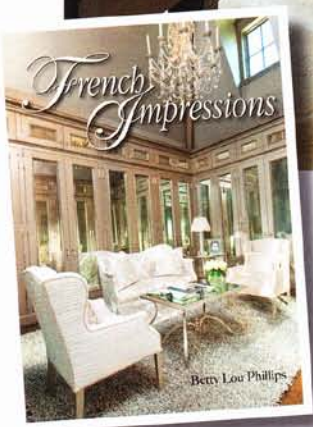


Je Ne Sais Quoi



FRENCH IMPRESSIONS BY BETTY LOU PHILLIPS

Text by Jack Frink



"When I was 12 years old, our family traveled to Washington, DC," recalls Dallas-based designer, author and tastemaker Betty Lou Phillips. "One of our stops was the Library of Congress. There, the docent pointed out the card catalog. Right then, I decided I'd write a children's book so I could be in one of those drawers."

Phillips stuck with her childhood dreams and is now enjoying the publication and popularity of her 10th design book, *French Impressions*. A self-styled "interpreter of



Inspired by characters from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, Limoges porcelain firm Bernardaud send a happy holiday message via toy soldiers, wooden horses and Christmas trees on "Grenadiers" dinner service. In France, water and wine goblets meet directly above each plate, rather than above the knife and spoon, as in the States.

French taste," Phillips is the author of a number of books dissecting, discussing and celebrating the lifestyle and high culture of France.

"I've long been enamored with the works of the Impressionist artists: Renoir, Monet, Manet, Pissarro and more," says Phillips, describing her inspiration for the book. "They were rebelling against the art establishment by looking anew at France's charming villages, flourishing gardens, early bridges, as well as the country's railway stations, cathedrals and cafes. Living on this side of the Atlantic means having the freedom to express our individual taste so we can put our own artistic spin on French style. The result is *French Impressions* with its iterations, or different versions, of French design."

Phillips continues, "Like many Americans, I am struck by the flair of the French – and why not? 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. There's a certain *je ne sais quoi* or indefinable something that is set in the classical splendor of France that eludes easy definition; perhaps because of its artistry, its attitude, its style and far more. It's a virtuous mix of panache and simplicity, taste and



As the holidays approach, this maison takes a minimalist approach, much like the broad, tree-lined Champs-Élysées, which gleams with lights. In French homes, trees often remain lit until the Feast of the Epiphany, which is the 12th day after Christmas and the religious observance of the three kings visiting the infant Jesus. Here, Fraser firs glisten thanks to the efforts of designer, Roegan McKinney at Todd Events, Dallas.

resourcefulness that is at once inviting, surprising and inspiring.”

Phillips, a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers, has filled *French Impressions* with lovely photos of upscale, French-styled houses and rooms. But that is not all. In between the details of the exquisite living spaces, Phillips has interspersed choice nuggets of wisdom. For instance, the bedroom was the choice place for high-level business meetings until Madame de Pompadour removed the room – or the “chambre” – from the list of public rooms in the 18th century. Now the bedroom is seen as the height of personal privacy. Also, if someone invites you to dinner at 8 p.m., it is expected that you should arrive 15 minutes after 8. The book is filled with charming tangents like that.

Phillips truly loves her work and sees seemingly infinite ways to keep the centuries-old design and living strategies relevant for today’s homemaker. She says that “imitation is now decidedly last century. I truly hope the glossy images will be inspiring – as they are meant to be translated across all price points. Ideas such as writing on walls, fabrics, furniture, bedding and towels can work regardless of one’s budget, much like a dose of color on a pillow, wherever, that brings pizzazz to a room or glazing that creates the patina of age.”

Phillips says her favorite part of creating *French Impressions* “definitely wasn’t writing captions. Because I like to include a bit of history yet shy away from repeating the text, I find captions difficult to write.”

“I loved writing ‘A Taste for Paris,’” Phillips affirms, talking about the book’s section on table and eating – or, rather, dining – manners. “Many French project an egalitarian image, yet Parisians especially have ‘attitude.’ I find their lengthy list of long-established ‘rules of conduct,’ or etiquette, fascinating.”

“This 10th book has more of an edge, a fresh approach to living glamorously,” Phillips elaborates. “It’s a blend of the traditional and edgy with a downtown attitude apt for an era with more choices than ever.” [PHOTO](#)