

## COVER STORY



STAFF PHOTOS BY JERRY KOLBERT

French dressing: Leslie Benser Luciani and Jennifer Tobias-Turner, owners of La Belle Provence in Birmingham, offer a wide range of French style decor and gifts at their shop.

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AT HOME EDITOR

Decor with a French accent speaks a universal language of welcome.

Country French has a timeless look that has found wide appeal. This can be seen at La Belle Provence in Birmingham, a shop that specializes in French country decor, design and gifts.

"It has a warmth to it. We can make it as sophisticated as we choose or as relaxed," said Cynthia Seidner, design consultant at the shop, 185 W. Maple. "Classic is always in style. There's nothing trendy about it."

The style is charming, with a romance and sentiment attached to it. Bright colors and vibrant patterns make up mix-and-match arrangements that say warmth, coziness and comfort.

"The vivid color is the thing that's so attractive to people," said Jennifer Tobias-Turner, who with Leslie Benser Luciani owns La Belle Provence. "The French seem to know how to get these really bright yellows and blues.

"You can dress it up or dress it down."

One example of the French style is to combine iron, cloth and silk — perhaps a chair with a large plaid design placed near a table with iron legs, with the table draped in a fabric of another design. The lively look is relaxing and inviting.

Majolica as well as pieces with a country design can adorn a variety of settings.

Santon dolls became popular at the time of the French Revolution, when churches were closed and public displays of faith were banned. The terracotta dolls depicted different people bringing presents to the Christ Child.



Comfortable: French fabrics, with their vibrant colors and lively designs, add to the coziness of a room's decor.

Quimper (pronounced kam-PAIR) pottery is made by a 300-year-old company, which closed in 1983 but was bought and restarted by Paul Janssens. Janssens was at La Belle Provence last week to present and sign pieces.

Unlike other styles, people are buying the accessories first, he said. More and more brides are putting them on their gift list.

"It's handcrafted, one of the very few (products) painted fully by hand," Janssens said in explaining the popularity of Quimper.

The Quimper president advised that the look goes best with informal settings.

"It has to be a country home," he said.

Quimper works are coated in a glaze made of water and glass ground as fine as flour.

Among the wide variety of the pieces are round plates bearing fins at top and bottom to give them fish shapes, a bowl with a tall handle made up of two long goose necks that meet at the top, and plates of all sizes adorned with colorful peasant men and women.

A cookie jar is derived from the shape of a covered pot from another century that was kept next to the fireplace and used to store leftovers. Bladder, fish-shaped Christmas tree ornaments are derived from snuff boxes.

French taste extends to the palette as well. Last month Le Cordon Bleu, the home of classical French cooking, marked its 100th anniversary by launching "Cordon Bleu Classic French Cookbook," a collection of 100 recipes.

# C'EST BON!

The country French look, seen in plates, gifts and fabrics, is tres popular for a lively, informal touch

### On the cover:

Porcelain and other objects with a French accent are part of the popular country French look in interior design.