

exploring french PROVINCIAL STYLE

French women are regarded as the most elegant in the world. Style and class seems to come naturally, and their homes are no different. The French can turn a humble home into a masterpiece.

French style in Australia

In recent years, Australians have embraced French decorating with enthusiasm. While we live in a different hemisphere, a different climate and with different pastimes, we can still learn a lot from the world's master decorators. We spoke with Sharon Mann of Blanc-Léger (www.blanc-leger.com), an Australian who spent many years in France and now brings French style to Australia via her wholesale business.

"French decorating is embedded in the culture, which is centuries old," Sharon explains. "The French worship their culture and its age."

With utmost respect for their national and family histories, the French appreciate antiques — not only valuable antiques, but also simple family heirlooms. The French use utilitarian furniture and household items that are generations old in respect of their families. This also preserves the national culture, has character and is comfortable.

"The French are amazing collectors. They collect and decorate all the time. They change their look not by buying expensive pieces but by collecting small antiques, or brocante," Sharon says.

Of course, many who grew up in France visited weekend flea markets with their families, something that few Australians experience. We can learn from these seasoned collectors. Rather than amassing an entire collection instantly, think like the French. Get a good idea of what you want to collect. You don't have to buy them all immediately but as you see them, collect them.

If your tastes change, change your collection. Allowing a subtle evolution in your home is a good thing and doesn't have to be an



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expensive exercise. Just as you update your wardrobe gradually each season, do the same with your home.

The French also make small changes to their homes depending on the seasons, changing accessories such as cushions or displays, which is simple and cost-effective. Believe it or not, the French don't generally sink huge amounts of money into their homes. The secret to their success is not in how much money they spend but in their dedication to decorating.

Traditions worth emulating

"The centre of the universe in any French home, no matter how small, is the dining room. I often spent time with friends in a small apartment; they have dining room tables that seat 10 without any hesitation," says Sharon.

Food is another passion of the French, so this comes as no surprise. The French set a beautiful table every day, not just for special occasions, and they value the conversations held over dinner; feeding the heart and soul as much as the body. In our harried lives, where

getting together for a family meal can be a challenge, this philosophy is worth serious consideration.

"The French like to bring the outside in because summer is so short compared to our summers," Sharon explains. "As a ritual, the French will buy a small potted plant or cut flowers every week."

Even though we have great outdoors and lovely long summers, we don't always take advantage of them. If we're stuck inside, it's worth bringing foliage in with us! Flowers are always a brilliant mood lifter and don't need to be extravagant.

One thing the French do particularly well is use their belongings. They don't believe in having mountains of stuff they rarely use or saving things for special occasions. "Everything in a French home is there to be used," Sharon explains. "It is admired, but adored even more when it is used." Rather than waiting for the perfect opportunity, enjoy your things every day.

Regardless of your budget, how much space you have or how much time you have, anyone can apply the principles of French decorating to create a beautiful, comfortable, classy home.



Chateau La Belle in Blackheath in the NSW Blue Mountains has recently taken delivery of an exciting new range of Italian indoor and outdoor lighting. Yes, staff know it's a French shop and these are Italian, but the range is just too fabulous not to have! The Il Fanale range boasts exquisite brass, copper, iron and porcelain fittings of the very highest quality and all are hand finished. The glass is from the world-famous Murano Island (Glass Island) in Venice and the porcelain is from the Bassano region. All fittings conform to Australian standards and specifications. You can see the range in-store or call the team on (02) 4787 5700 to be sent a CD catalogue and price list.

