

French Retreat

Each time Kathryn Ireland travels to her home in France, she embraces a way of life quite unlike the one that she enjoys at her residence in California

INTERIOR DESIGN BY *Kathryn M. Ireland*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Tim Beddow*
WRITTEN BY *David Masello*



Kathryn Ireland's home in the Tarn department of France is where she and her family spend part of every spring and summer. She added a swath of her own namesake fabric to the mantelpiece in the family room, as a decorative element and as a means of drawing air through the chimney. Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone sets the backdrop for the room. The floor lamp is from Vaughan and the George Smith sofa is upholstered in a fabric from Otis Textiles.



Above: Family and guests often gather around an upright piano, atop which sits a Vaughan lamp, whose glow lights the sheet music. Instead of a bench, she uses a vintage church pew. Opposite: Family photographs framed in Kathryn M. Ireland wooden frames adorn a kitchen wall. "I just took a series of new photos of my three children, all in their twenties, so I'll soon have updated photos to put up," she says.



The kitchen, not surprisingly, is the epicenter of the spacious home. Ireland placed Loom Italia chairs around the table, but also included a nineteenth-century French chair at the head. The table is set with a Kathryn M. Ireland Bouquet cloth, in turquoise. The backsplash is composed of Provençal tiles. The range is Aga.

Clockwise from above: The headboard in the master bedroom uses Kathryn M. Ireland's Lola pattern, in raspberry. The draperies in one of the home's many bedrooms are Kathryn M. Ireland Downton for Scalamandre. Elements in the master bath include a Kathryn M. Ireland Verlhac chair, sheers from Otis Textiles, and a vintage Anatolian flat-weave rug. An antique settee is repurposed with Bennison's Green Oak Leaf fabric.





Ireland's guest bedrooms include one above the property's barn, a room she says is "perfect for guests who snore and want to be away from the crowd in the house." For the headboard, corona trim, and draperies, she uses a linen fabric from her new Spring 2019 collection, Lilac, in pink. The room is equipped with a vintage pedestal sink.



Over each of the twin beds in a guest bedroom, Ireland has hung coronas, as a way to add a delicate and balanced decorative element. Farrow & Ball's Strong White provides a perfect neutral backdrop for the bedding from Peacock Alley and the headboard, which is upholstered in Kathryn M. Ireland's Lola pattern, in pistachio.

KATHRYN IRELAND'S house guests were arriving. Some came with evidence of their professional lives, such as the BBC filmmaker who arrived with a camera, the yoga instructor whose mat was curled and tucked under her arm, and the L.A. interior designer who carried a sketchbook, ready to record ideas for new projects. The ten or so guests who were unpacking upstairs in Ireland's twelve-bedroom home in the Tarn department of France were participants in her annual, week-long France retreat that fills up fast each time she holds one.

"I've been hosting these retreats here in my home for years," says Ireland, one of the most recognized names and talents in the world of interior design, "because I get to meet fabulous new people, all brilliant, smart, accomplished. Just getting to know other people and hearing their stories and their journeys is inspiring. I learn a lot from them, and they learn a lot from each other."

In part, Ireland is eager to share her home with strangers and friends alike because she understands something fundamental about our responses to where we live. "People have real love affairs with their houses, and this one is ongoing for me." Although her full-time residence is in Los Angeles, she and her three (now grown) children spend months at a time in Southwest France. She revels in the fields of sunflowers she cultivates, the nearby antiques markets, and the many rooms that she and her family have occupied for more than thirty years. Of those sunflowers, she says, "When they appear, it's a massing of yellow that is so overpowering and fabulous. I always tell the gardener to try to time their arrival exactly on my birthday, August 4th. Believe it or not, he does a very good job of making that happen."

Decades ago, Ireland and her then-husband discovered the rambling farmhouse and its fifty acres of working farmland while looking for a second home in Europe. It wasn't a hard sell when they came upon this residence, whose original parts date to 1750. "Something about the way this house sits on its lands, the views it affords, the sunsets, the sunrises, make it irresistible," she says, her love affair with the home still in full bloom.

She was not yet a practicing designer when she first started going to the house in France, but now that she is the expert she is, Ireland eagerly shares her wisdom—and decided wit—with family, friends, and, notably, participants of

her annual retreat (she hosts similar versions at her Los Angeles home). "Whether it's for the retreat folk or my family, much of the life here is about food, wine, design, and antiques," she says. "Just being here and bringing in guest designers and chefs and experts from various fields is what inspired my newest venture, The Perfect Room." She is referring to her novel, online business in which she has invited a select group of designers to fashion room designs that a shopper can buy outright.

"This is a home for family. I recognized its potential to become that when I first saw it. I also knew it would be a labor of love, that it would take time to do the rooms as I wanted. This home very much reflects me, in that it's not chic or decorated." In a home this expansive, it is not surprising that the elements accumulated over a long period. "I keep adding layers to rooms, and some of my finds get sent to my home in California; then I send them back here. Many things in these rooms have crossed the water more than a few times."

Every item has a meaning and memory for Ireland. For example, a piano tucked beneath a stairway has provided music for many sing-alongs. On one weekend, Ireland invited a couple from New Zealand, old friends, for a visit. She had another house guest there, too, that weekend—Barbra Streisand, also a longtime friend of hers. "When my friends found out Barbra was going to be here, too, they were terrified. But when I told Barbra it was my friend's birthday, she sat at the piano and sang 'Happy Birthday' to her."

If Ireland is careful about any part of decorating her house, it's that she tries not to be too careful. She is adamant that she never wanted the rooms to feel designed. The earthenware pieces she collects and displays on shelves and mantles, for example, are the result of an accidental collection, rather than something deliberate. "I'm always adding things and taking things out everywhere," she says, "but I have never wanted any of it to feel precious. That would turn this into a whole different house."

Years ago, she was offered a good price for the home. "When my kids found out, they organized what felt like an intervention with me. 'This is about our memory,' they told me. 'You can't sell it.' Well, here we all are, still." ■

Situated on a working farm, Ireland's property features an abundance of sunflowers.



*"This house has that good feeling—
whether it's sitting in the sun in the yard or
roasting chestnuts by the fire."*

—Kathryn Ireland