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Kari Whitman rolls out the red carpet for this regal L.A. pad



French Splendor

New York-based interior designer Brian J. McCarthy transforms a newly built Atlanta townhouse into an 18th century French showcase

STORY ROMY SCHAFFER

PHOTOS FRITZ VON DER SCHULENBURG



Trois Chic

When asked to choose his favorite spaces in the 11,000-square-foot Atlanta townhouse that he spent five years transforming into an homage to 18th century European interior design, Brian J. McCarthy of Brian J. McCarthy Inc. paused for a while before responding. "The dining room, because it's kind of a crazy, mad, régence-style room, with Chinese lacquer panels and mirror," he says. "It's so over-the-top, but in such a beautiful way. I love that." The room's ceiling was inspired by a Tiepolo ceiling, a ceiling fresco style named for Italian painter Giambattista Tiepolo. The library, another McCarthy favorite, features carved oak panels from Feau et Cie, a Parisian company that specializes in antique and reproduction wood paneling, and a fireplace with an original, Louis XIV marble mantel. "The tower guest bedroom is really like being in a garret of an 18th century building," McCarthy explains. "It has exposed beams and stucco, so you really feel like you've left the formality of the main part of the house as you go up into the bowels of the house but, again, in a beautiful way."







For many interior designers, turning an 11,000-square-foot townhouse into an 18th century French showcase could be a daunting undertaking. For Brian J. McCarthy, of Brian J. McCarthy Inc., such a project turned into a five-year-long adventure for the New York City-based decorator, architectural consultant and traditional European design devotee.

McCarthy's adventure began in 2004, when an affluent couple in Atlanta commissioned him to completely decorate the interior of their newly built, 20-room townhouse. Annual month long stays in France had instilled in the couple a love for late 17th century and early 18th century artwork and décor, which they wanted their new home to reflect. At the recommendation of their architect, Peter Block & Associates Architects Inc. in Atlanta, they sought out McCarthy to help them turn their dream into reality.

A graduate of the Pratt Institute in New York, McCarthy was recognized for his modern European furniture design and residential projects while still a student at the college's School of Art and Design. After receiving a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1983, he joined Parish-Hadley Associates, where he served as an assistant to world-renown interior decorator Albert Hadley, until being named a full decorator in 1989.

01 The ante room walls feature tooled and patinated leather panels and a rare 17th century portrait, also in leather, of Louis XIV.

02 The formal dining room imparts a sense of extravagance when combined with the regency style boiserie panels in peacock blue and oriental red.

03 Grand Salon in white and gold Louis XV boiserie and 20th Century Louis XVI style Aubusson.

04 Nestled beneath the eaves of the house, the guest bedroom features reclaimed antique oak, a carpet of Ukrainian design and a custom sleigh bed.

05 The Louis XVI Husband's bathroom exudes masculinity with a military green palette, gilt boiserie panels and finished with a parquet patterned oak floor.





Bonner Custom Homes

269 Lawrence St. NW | Marietta, GA 30060

P. 770.423.0249

BonnerCustomHomes.com




"The beauty of working there was that the four of us who were partners were each encouraged to create our own style and delve into whatever direction we wanted to take," McCarthy explains. "In my case, that was a much more European direction with furniture that was much more rooted, initially, in classical aspects."

Twenty years after founding his company in 1991, McCarthy's style is still rooted in traditional European design, but now incorporates a modern sensibility that comes from years of working with contemporary artists and furniture designers and in exclusive workrooms throughout Europe. As a result, the decorator was able to give his Atlanta clients everything they knew they wanted—and more.

"[The clients had] this complete fantasy about how they wanted to live their lives," McCarthy explains. "They could put their finger on it. They were able to describe the direction that they wanted to go in, which was not something that I had literally done before. So it became this journey that we all embarked on."

For McCarthy, the journey began by working with the clients to determine the function of each floor, the number of rooms on each floor and the needs of each room. "In this case, the couple had children and grandchildren, so [the house] needed to function a certain way for them," he explains.

And while the clients knew that they wanted an 18th century French interior, they were unaware of the amazing resources available to them. "They were completely unfamiliar with the workshops in Paris [and what they could do]," McCarthy says. He, however, was not.



"THE BACKGROUNDS ARE EVERYTHING FOR ME IN EVERY PROJECT. THE ARCHITECTURE HAS TO BE GREAT TO BEGIN WITH, BUT THEN THE LEVEL OF FINISH HAS TO EQUAL TO THE QUALITY OF THE ARCHITECTURE."

BRIAN J. MCCARTHY, FOUNDER





During his more than 35 visits to Europe while working on the project, McCarthy consulted with an exclusive French maker of appliqué and embroidery for the haute couture trade to design pillows, the dining room curtains, the backs of the dining room chairs and other items; with wood workshops to produce the hand-carved wood paneling and ornate architectural trim found throughout the home; and with furniture manufacturers to create reproductions of period pieces when originals were unavailable.

"The furnishings are almost entirely 17th and 18th century," McCarthy explains. "But we did make some things, like the dining room chairs. It's difficult to find a big set of 18th century dining room chairs or find the scale of an 18th century chair that's really comfortable. In this case, we found a beautiful pair of Louis XV side chairs that were quite big to use as the prototype, and then added to the set."

As with all his projects, McCarthy was involved in every aspect of designing the 18th century French townhouse, from choosing the door hardware and medicine cabinet interiors to specifying the floor, ceiling and wall finishes, of which the latter is crucial to the decorator. "The backgrounds are everything for me in every project," he says. "The architecture has to be great, to begin with, but then the level of finish has to equal the quality of the architecture. That's something that takes a lot of effort."

McCarthy, therefore, sought out Atelier Meriguet-Carrère, a Parisian company that specializes in producing and restoring painted surfaces of all types, to create all the finishes found throughout the townhouse.

Even when it came to the millwork and construction, McCarthy was indirectly involved, weighing in on material choices and finishes that might impact the construction process. "I have a very good understanding of all that, but that's really much more in the court of the architect," he says. "I supervise things as jobs are progressing and under construction."

Completed in 2009, the project "looked absolutely fresh, and there was something youthful about it," McCarthy reflects. "Yet it had all the layers of a home that had been lived in for 20 years by someone with curiosity and culture. It did not look like something that had just been finished. It looked like something that had really been a love affair for a long time."

And the love affair will likely continue for both the homeowners and McCarthy in the coming years. Says the decorator, "The wife said to me just last week—they're in Europe right now—I want you to make a list of more things that we need. We have to do more shopping. They love the adventure, and they're really collectors. They love the search and discovery."

McCarthy continues, "There are not a lot of clients like that. There are so many that approach a project as a start, a middle and an end. It's so nice when you can continue adding to layers because that's the evolution of life. Our lives are never over until they're over. You like to think that you're always learning and growing. With that comes this wonderful layered patina." ■

06

A flat screen television in the master bedroom is concealed behind a framed 18th century Louis XV beaded and embroidered textile. The Italian dressing box atop a gilded console table brings functionality to high style.

07

The first floor ante hall is paneled with painted scenes from Aesop's Fables. The Louis XV gilt wood, iron and marble topped console table leads into the library.

08

The lavish library with Louis XIV style oak carved boiserie and a 17th Century gilt wood chandelier encourages resplendent relaxation. The library also features a Louis XIV period marble mantle piece and a rare Oushak medallion carpet.

A MESSAGE FROM BONNER CUSTOM HOMES

For 40 years Bonner Custom Homes has had the honor of working with great teams on outstanding projects creating extraordinary homes. Paramount to the success of every project is communication. The client's ability to clearly articulate vision with the decorator and architect ultimately affects every step in the process. In this project, the client's clear communication inspired the phenomenal work of Brian McCarthy and Peter Block, ultimately making the experience gratifying for everyone.

A MESSAGE FROM P.E. GUERIN

P.E. Guerin is the oldest decorative hardware firm in the United States, and the only metal foundry in New York City. The company was founded in 1857 by French immigrant Pierre Emmanuel Guerin and has been at its current location on Jane Street in Greenwich Village since 1892. For over 150 years, P.E. Guerin remains the industry's gold standard for high-quality decorative hardware. In addition to a vast stock collection spanning historical to modern bath, furniture, and builder's hardware, there are more than 50,000 made-to-order models for customers to choose from. Custom items can also be created to customer specifications from existing patterns or a simple sketch. Every P.E. Guerin piece is created and finished by hand, using the same time-honored techniques that helped establish the company's reputation a century and a half ago.