Restrained Beauty

Artisan-carved limestone mantels, reclaimed timber trusses, and a subdued color palette imbue a new Minnesota home with timeless French flair.

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Handmade trusses draw the eye upward in the great-room, while raised wall panels lend an air of refinement. A retractable wall of doors beckons guests to the pool terrace.

THIS PHOTO: Residential designer Jeff Murphy created built-in bookcases, overlay-paneled walls, and a raised ceiling with corbels and supporting beam details to lend distinction to the study. OPPOSITE: Steep rooflines with varying dormer details and timber-pegged corbels supporting ancillary roofs lend the exterior an updated English-country look.

For interior designer Marita Simmons, there's beauty in restraint. She and her partner, Krysta Gibbons, employed that mantra in this new home near Minneapolis, where rooms gracefully whisper—rather than shout—a refined elegance borrowed from a traditional French château. "Our first step was to convince the homeowners that a light, white-oak wood floor would be a better choice than the dark floors they were envisioning," Simmons says. "The lightness of the floor feels very French, yet relaxed and simple."

Taking its cue from the floors, a subdued palette of grays and blues renders a sense of calm throughout the interiors. The herringbone backsplash tile in the kitchen, for example, hints at blue tones while still appearing off-white, and the steel-gray sheen of the painted millwork in the study feels masculine yet fresh. Walls of windows, particularly in the trussed-ceiling living room, further enhance the airy feel of the home.

Substantial millwork imparts a stately European patina that anchors the ethereal rooms. In the kitchen, cream-color cabinetry with elaborate crown molding and eyebrow-arch detailing evokes a sense of warmth and antiquity. "Even the way the cabinets terminate just below the beams lends an authentic feel," Gibbons says. "In historic French country homes, the beams would already be there, then you'd bring in the cabinetry. It's all about appropriate context."

Residential designer Jeff Murphy championed an attention to authenticity from the start. On the home's exterior, a smart mix of stonework and cedar shakes establishes what he describes as a casual European feel, while a grass driveway (boasting a hidden system that supports vehicle weight) gives the overall impression of an established country estate. Murphy also commissioned a French artisan to hand-carve the limestone mantels in the living room, master bedroom, and loggia—turning functional fireplaces into stunning focal points. "The owners weren't afraid to go the extra mile to make sure the details were executed correctly," he says. "They wanted to get this home right."

RESOURCES BEGIN ON PAGE 140.

OPPOSITE: Glass-front cabinets provide a sparkling juxtaposition to the kitchen's rustic beamed ceiling. CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Intricate ceiling moldings foster elegance in the dining room. Set against simple cream walls, the great-room's carved mantel draws attention without appearing overly lavish. The great-room's ceiling trusses were handmade in New Mexico. A motorized screen on the loggia deters bugs. Carved legs provide an elegant contrast to the kitchen island's informal butcher-block countertop. Classic columns line the main hall. Subway tiles above the range radiate a soft hint of blue.

OPPOSITE: The master suite features a raised-panel-lined alcove sized for a bed and nightstands. LEFT: The bathing niche in the master bath was designed in perfect rectangular proportion to the soaking tub. BELOW: A steam shower and expansive double vanity embellished with marble tile maintain the home's whisper-soft, blue-gray palette.

Floor plan

TOTAL SQ. FT: 6,503
BEDROOMS: 5
BATHROOMS: 3 full, 1 half

Floor plan © Murphy & Co. Design