In the dining room, damask Braqueni draperies lined in a Chelsea Editions check flank a bust statue. OPPOSITE: The reimagined south facade now opens to a sunny allée lined with boxwood topiary and brightened with Annabelle hydrangeas.

UNCOMMON GROUNDS

IN PROVENCE, A 200-YEAR-OLD FARMHOUSE BORDERING A PEAR ORCHARD BURSTS TO LIFE AS AN ELEGANT CELEBRATION OF ITS BOUNTIFUL GARDENS.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **SUSAN BEDNAR LONG**
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THE PHRASE "DREAM HOUSE" gets tossed around lightheartedly. But to anyone involved in a design project, the actual journey from dream to house is often a long and complex one. For Shauna Varvel, this process was set in motion by a clear and compelling vision. "Shauna had always envisioned having a place in France one day," says interior designer Susan Bednar Long, who previously worked on several projects for the client. "This was very close to her heart."

Finding the right property required patience, however. The Varvel family is large—Shauna, her husband, and five kids (two with new spouses)—and quite athletic, so they longed for a substantial house set upon flat, open land. This is a rarity in Provence, which is known for its rocky vineyards, olive groves, and ancient hill towns. But after spending a decade renting throughout the region, they landed on an ideal spot: a 13,000-square-foot *mas,* or farmhouse, bordering a pear orchard on an island in the Rhône River.

ABOVE: Hornbeam hedges, lamb's ears, and majestic plane trees line the home's entry allée. **BELOW:** Oversize sofas (by Sits and Pierre Frey) ensconce a custom striè velvet ottoman in the living room, which was formerly the barn. **OPPOSITE:** In the dining room, a collection of antique Delftware and faience pottery crowns a gilt-wood mirror.

The designer's aim was to create indoor spaces that would **PAY HOMAGE TO THE GLORIOUS GARDENS** outside without competing with them.

Although the structure was rough—unfinished grain storage areas and a barn attached to a long, narrow house—the client was undaunted. “I had such a strong sense of what I wanted to do,” says Varvel. The first step was to bring on board renowned local architect Alexandre Lafourcade. After taking a good look at the place, he announced, “I have the solution! I said to Shauna, ‘You have to modify everything.’ And when I arrived the next time with my drawings, to her, this was evident.” His plan entailed transforming the barn into a living room and flipping the arrival and entry sequences to the north side of the house. This would allow a refurbished south facade of French doors and casement windows to open directly onto a breathtaking array of patios and gardens, arbors and allées—gardens to be designed by Dominique Lafourcade, his illustrious mother.

Now, the fragrance of roses and jasmine fills the rooms. “We live with every door open all summer long,” says Varvel.

Transforming the interiors required an equally courageous vision. Although typical Provençal farmhouse style is fairly plain, “all cream and blue,” says Varvel, “the scale of this house called for so much more than that.” In particular, Varvel saw an opportunity to use Pierre Frey fabrics, “which I’ve loved forever but never had a place that was right for them.” Here, she’s found a home for them in every room.

Architect Alexandre Lafourcade designed an airy orangery for the owners Nagami kumquat trees. The flooring is limestone and the windows are framed in iron. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: The kitchen is painted Wimborne White and cabinetry is Light Blue, both by Farrow & Ball. Interior designer Susan Bednar Long furnished the entry hall with a French high-back canap and a 19th-century oak worktable. The globe lantern is by Vaughan Designs.

Original casement windows overlook the eastern edge of the garden, where laurustinus hedges and banks of hydrangea draw shade from centuries-old plane trees. BELOW: The iron stair banister was hand-forged on site with traditional provincial detailing. The antiqued verdigris lantern is by Jamb. OPPOSITE: A brilliant silk jacquard by Braqueni showers the bedroom in florals; on the bed, the pattern is trimmed in a lively coral sanguine silk. The Belgian linen bedding is by Restoration Hardware.

The task of balancing the fabrics' vivacious patterns with the simplicity of the old farmhouse fell to Bednar Long. She lined draperies in fresh, oversize ginghams and kept their designs easy and unpretentious. She paired exuberant floral canopies with simple white coverlets on the beds. "Part of my job was finding the restraint," says Bednar Long, "making sure we didn't overadorn everything." Her aim was to create indoor spaces that would pay homage to the glorious gardens outside without competing with them. She layered sisal carpets beneath rich Oriental rugs and introduced furniture with elegant lines yet simple, even rustic, finishes and neutral upholstery.

An equally important part of her job was to stay mindful of layout and scale. "The rooms are huge," says Bednar Long. "We spent a long time hunting for furniture substantial enough to occupy those spaces." The dining room table, for example, seats 12—even without its eight leaves—and the central living room sofa is nine feet long. To offset their generous proportions, Bednar Long composed vignettes of multiple smaller pieces in every room, grouping a statue, sconce, and intimate painting above a table in a bedroom, say, or mounting an explosion of blue plates over a mirror in

In the master bedroom, Bednar Long chose an embroidered cotton sateen fabric by Pierre Frey for the headboard and draperies lining, then tempered it with solid paneling and pelmets in a Jim Thompson silk. The aqua check is by Colefax and Fowler. LEFT: The tile flooring in the accompanying bath is antique terra-cotta. OPPOSITE: Beyond the new swimming pool, which is studded with slender cypr□s de Florence, the 65-acre farm produces an abundance of pears, sunflowers, and wheat.

the dining room. Often, the best solution required finding a creative way to marry authenticity, comfort, and fantasy. "We were taking liberties," she says, "but it was cool."

Bednar Long and Varvel also took liberties with the traditional designer-client relationship. Whereas the family's previous projects had been entirely in the designer's hands —"full-on, one-hundred percent Susan," according to Varvel—this time, the client became an equal collaborator, participating in every decision.

Epic as this process might appear, it moved along relatively quickly for its scale. The renovation and redesign were completed in just two years (with close to a year more for the landscaping). "Shauna's like me; she wants it done yesterday," says Bednar Long. Yet even now that the work is finished, the dream continues to unfold. Every summer, the climbing roses tumble more lavishly from their trellises and the jasmine thickens on the branch, as if inviting the house's profusion of floral patterns to come out and play. Meanwhile, the growing Varvel family adds a new layer of memories to their Provençal reverie. □