

Where Women Create

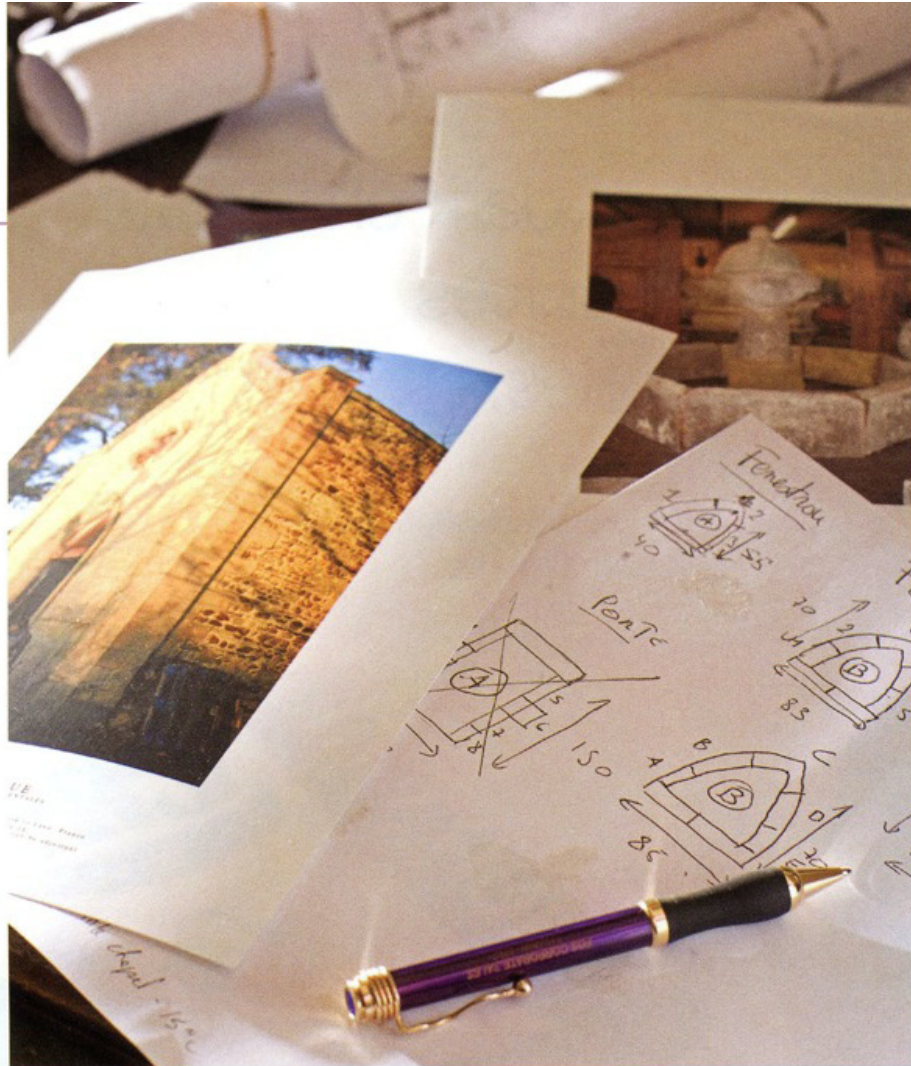
body +soul

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sweet salvage

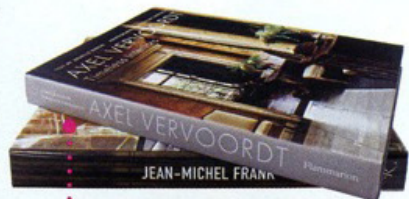
MISSING THE EUROPE
OF HER CHILDHOOD,
RUTH GAY **BROUGHT IT
HOME TO HOUSTON**

At work in her Houston home office, Ruth Gay jots notes on a client's building plans. Occasionally she glances up, scanning her elegant sanctuary for inspiration. Some of the best finds in her salvage of European antiques and stone pieces for her business, Chateau Domingue, surround her. A barrel-vaulted ceiling, >



I'm at my most creative in a dirty, dusty stoneyard in the middle of nowhere.

—RUTH GAY



book smarts

- Learn from the masters. *Axel Vervoordt: Timeless Interiors* (Flammarion, 2007), \$75, and *Jean-Michel Frank* (Rizzoli, 2008), \$95 (borders.com).

clad in 17th-century stone from a French vineyard, casts a butterscotch glow. Three pairs of 18th-century French doors open to the Texas sun. And a stone mantel where generations of French families have warmed themselves today warms Ruth's creative spirit. "I look for grandness and simplicity," she says of her buying trips to Provence, Tuscany, and Umbria. "I don't buy anything glitzy or over the top."

These are the words of a woman who admits there isn't much she likes that's less than a century old. As Europeans modernize their homes, Ruth gladly searches local flea markets to rescue items—everything from town fountains to simple linens and silver—for her stateside clients.

Some days her husband, Jack, knocks on the office door. "I'm not 100 years old, but can I still come in?" he'll ask. ▶



the write desk

Helene Aumont's "Medici" desk, available at Profiles (212/689-6903), trade only.

find it For more information on Chateau Domingue, call 713/961-3444 or visit chateaudomingue.com.



wisteria

Eileen Fisher's new "Wisteria" pillow covers. Raw Silk (front), \$45, and Silk Dupioni, \$94 (garnethill.com).



fabulously french

While Ruth's home office is relatively fabric-free, Pierre Frey can help add a bit of joie de vivre to any interior.

Fabrics, from left: "Les Quatre Vents," "Frontenay," and eco-friendly "Esprit" (pierrefrey.com), trade only.

Ruth grew up a missionary's daughter in Europe, and though she moved to Texas when she married, she retained the continental spirit. "People in Europe really stop and smell the roses," she says. "I know it sounds trite, but it's a way of life that is, to me, more pure. It's why I decided to bring these elements over here—it's rewarding to visualize the outcome of the unused pieces we rescue for people to enjoy in their daily lives."

When Ruth and Jack built their family home 12 years ago, they wanted to incorporate the elements she grew up with—stone flooring, ancient mantels, rustic beams, copper gutters—not only for themselves but for their children, Paul, Steven, and Jacqueline. But their search was frustrating, and Ruth ruminated over the lack of sources for such items. ➤

Top: Ruth's golden retriever, Sam, savors some downtime in Ruth's home office.

provençal inspiration

Planning a trip to France? Don't book a ticket without considering a few helpful suggestions from Ruth Gay.

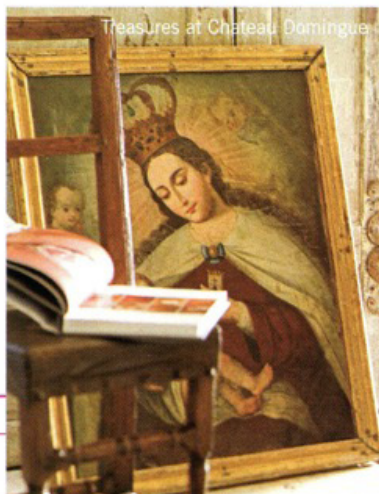
■ **La Mirande** When Ruth visits Europe during the school year, she keeps her stays brief so she's not away from the family too long. She makes her headquarters in Avignon, France, her

favorite larger city in Provence, where she stays at La Mirande, a four-star hotel with a cooking school and more than 700 years of history (la-mirande.fr).

■ **Eygalières** Each summer, she loads up friends and family for a six-week visit to the stone houses and sweet gardens of tiny Eygalières, France, just outside St. Remy (provenceweb.fr/e/bouches/eygalières/eygalières.htm).

■ **La Bastide de Marie** Ruth mines for inspiration in the neighboring village of Ménerbes, in particular at its enchanting small hotel in a vineyard, La Bastide de Marie (kiwicollection.com/property/la-bastide-de-marie).

■ **Crillon le Brave** One of her very favorite places is another small town, Crillon le Brave, with its stonework houses and a Relais & Châteaux four-star hotel (crillonlebrave.com).



work from the heart

Ruth Gay developed her reclaimed stone-and-antiques business to share a lifelong passion with clients. "I wasn't looking to start a business; it found me," she says. Here are her recommendations for creating an inspiring work life.

- **Cultivate ideas with care.** Know what you love to do, then dedicate yourself. "Forming a business is like having a child. You give your idea life, and then you raise it," she says.
- **Sustain your lifelines.** "My husband's support was integral to my success. He realized how serious I was when I asked for a forklift for my birthday."
- **Be patient.** "There have been many times I've questioned myself. Over time, you'll gain confidence and make better decisions."
- **Know you're a good example.** Ruth's kids often remind her when she's discouraged: "Mom! You can't quit. You're great at this!"



masterpiece mantels

Ruth offers an array of antique mantels among the reclaimed finds at Chateau Domingue, below. Above: For a similar look Phoenician Stone creates hand-carved limestone mantels, from \$7,000 (phoenicianstone.com).

When the kids were older, Ruth, still searching for the elements she recalled from childhood, headed to Europe on a scouting trip—the nanny and young Jacqueline in tow.

Four weeks and hundreds of miles later, her dream of bringing architectural

gems to American soil became a reality. Today, Chateau Domingue is a 5,000-square-foot space that transports visitors across continents and back in time. Chateau doors line the walls, and grand mansion gates are suspended from the ceiling. Ancient stone and tile flooring splays over two acres outside.

"I'm at my most creative in a dirty, dusty stoneyard in the middle of nowhere, climbing over old rock and looking at pieces on the ground—maybe finding a 17th-century surround that I can visualize in someone's house, or a spiral staircase on pallets that I know will end up as a completed piece," says Ruth. "It's not glamorous, but it gets me going more than anything in the world." ■

