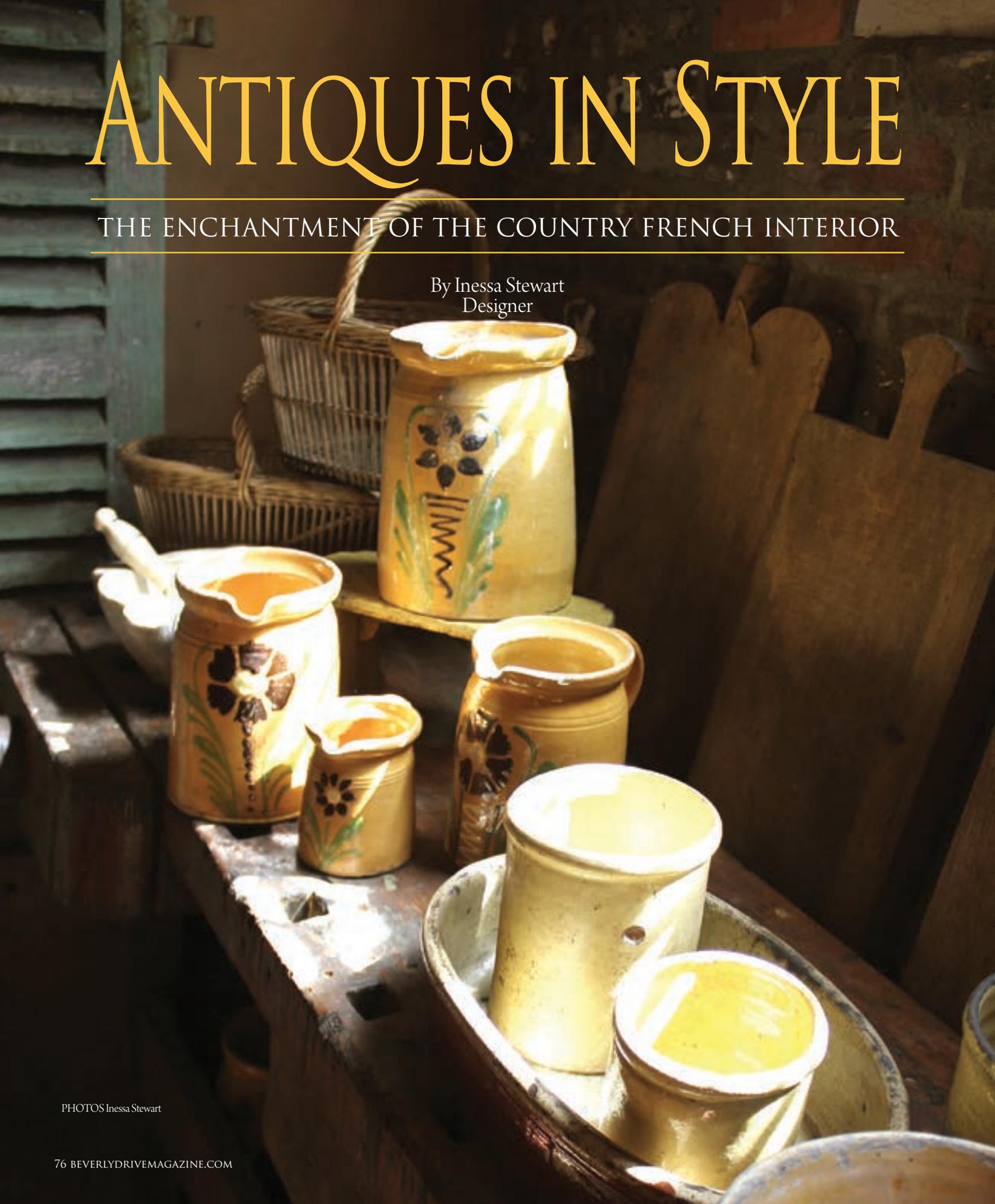


ANTIQUES IN STYLE

THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE COUNTRY FRENCH INTERIOR

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PHOTOS Inessa Stewart



Long ago, on a trip to the South of France in search of Country French antiques, I was introduced to a talented young lady named Brigitte. She spoke good English, which was a rarity in those days. She generously invited me to her family's country home, and her graciousness had an enormous influence on me.

This was well over two decades ago, and at the time I was somewhat new to the Provençal French experience, so naturally I jumped at the chance. I had been fortunate to travel through many other parts of France and Europe, but as I can now attest with certainty, the South of France is a truly unique place - possessing an amazing combination of charm, history and sheer natural beauty.

It was summer in Provence, and after taking a small and winding road that climbed up a rocky hill, we arrived at the picturesque ancient farmhouse, awash with warm ochre-colored stucco walls, adorned with bright blue shutters on an ivy-covered façade. As I entered the home I was immediately enchanted by what I have come to know and love - Country French antique interior. The furniture was elegant, yet simple and so charming - with a warm glow of rich, honey-toned patina acquired through the centuries. Brigitte showed me around her ancestral home, telling me the stories behind each piece that her family cherished for generations.

The large kitchen, open to the living room, housed the

most impressive piece of all - a magnificent Country French armoire. Brigitte explained that the beautiful piece had been in her family since the 18th century, and that a small dent on the side was made during the French Revolution more than 200 years ago by a careless revolutionary traveling through their village. As we walked through the home, each room revealed more timeless treasures acquired by her ancestors. Brigitte told me that a local craftsman hand-made a Louis XV style 18th century Country French commode from walnut trees grown in the region.

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After an enlightening tour of her incredible home, we ventured out onto a shady terrace surrounded by a rambling garden filled with olive trees, vegetable plants, rosemary and lavender. The warm summer breeze rustled through a canopy of fruit trees over the limestone-covered terrace, while sunlight peeked through the branches. In front of us was a rustic farm table with a wonderful timeworn finish that no modern manufacturer could dream of replicating. The table was covered with a splendor of seasonal offerings of local Provençal cuisine. We feasted on a lengthy, delicious meal prepared by Brigitte's mother from traditional recipes that were handed down in her family. As the afternoon turned to evening, our visit overflowed with lively conversation, exquisite food and wine. Before I knew it, it was time to bid farewell.

“Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced,” 18th century English poet John Keats said.

Memorable encounters with the warm and charming villagers of rural France taught me so much about the life and essence of the Country French style than any history book ever could. It gave me a glance into the exuberant and lyrical heart of Country French antiques - their heritage, beauty and cultural legacy.

