

In the front parlor of Julia Reed and John Pearce's home in New Orleans, a 19th-century lacquer cocktail table is flanked by a pair of English Regency faux-bamboo benches upholstered in a Clément fabric; the Italian marble mantel is original to the house, and the gilt mirror and painted chairs are antique. The chandelier is from New Orleans Auction Galleries. The side table belonged to Reed's great-grandmother and the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Sutcliffe Green. See Resources.



AFFAIR of the HEART

*When Julia Reed fell for
a house in New Orleans's Garden District,
she forgot that every
great love entails heartbreak*

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When my husband and I bought the “House on First Street” in 2004, neither of us imagined that it would turn into a book title. Located in New Orleans's Garden District and purchased almost a year to the day before Katrina's floods devastated the city, the three-story, mid-19th-century Greek Revival was our first house together and my first, period.

All my adult life, I'd lived in apartments, most recently dividing my time between Manhattan and the French Quarter. During every move, I would tote boxes of dog-eared shelter magazines—inspiration for the house I knew I'd one day own. Which meant that when I finally got it, at 44, the house was nothing less than a symbol of my slightly delayed adulthood and the commitment to a single city (and settled lifestyle) I'd been so hesitant to make.

By the time we finished (sort of), the house had become something else: a full-fledged renovation nightmare. We'd endured the storm and a contractor who inflicted even more damage. When I sat down to write the book—about the resurrection of my adopted city as well as the house itself—my friend William Dunlap, an artist whose work graces our walls, gave me a spot-on working title: “*A Year in Provence Meets The Poseidon Adventure*.”

It's a good bet that when an iconic disaster movie is invoked to describe a renovation, the curtain fund—and the chandelier fund and the rug fund, and on and on—has been depleted. (It was Christmas #2 when my father inquired how much longer we'd be dining beneath a bare bulb dangling from an exposed wire.) Too broke and exhausted to turn my attention to the fun stuff, I took a decoration vacation.

Fortunately there were already plans and paint and the bones of the decor in place, thanks to what



FACING PAGE, FROM TOP: Reed in the sunroom; the table is covered in a Rogers & Goffigan linen with Clarence House fringe. The pochoir prints in the front parlor are by Eugene Alain Seguy, and the olive wood chest is Italian; the curtains are of a Claremont silk, and the heart pine flooring is original. **THIS PAGE:** The Greek Revival house was built circa 1847 in New Orleans's Garden District. See Resources.



The dining room's Federal table is surrounded by painted Louis XVI chairs, the chandelier is Roccoco Revival, the mirror is late 18th-century French, the curtains are of a Claremont silk, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Fort Pierce Green. **FACING PAGE. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The sunroom sofa is slipcovered in a cotton duck, and the armchairs are upholstered in Bernison's Crewelwork linen; the cocktail table is painted in Benjamin Moore's River Blue and the lamp is by Roy Hamilton. The cabinetry in the butler's pantry is painted in Ball Green by Farrow and Ball. The countertop is pine, and the sink and fixtures are by Waterworks. The kitchen's vent hood and range are by Southbeta. See Resources.



«THE LAYERING THAT HAPPENS OVER TIME HAS BROUGHT MORE MEANINGFUL PLEASURE THAN ANY 'INSTANT HOUSE' WOULD HAVE»

ELLE DECOR



ELLE DECOR

The library features faux-bois painted cabinetry and shelving, an armchair covered in a Claremont velvet, and a pair of Queen Anne chairs that belonged to Reed's great-grandmother; artworks on left include, from top, a William Christenberry photograph, a 19th century map of Mississippi, and an Audubon print. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** the couple's beagle, Henry, sits on an Aubusson rug atop a Beauvais sisal in a guest room; the suzani is from Afghanistan, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Elephant Tusk. The guest bath tub and fittings are by Waterworks. The early 19th-century prints are of Napoleon and Pope Pius VII and the stool is Chinese. See Resources.



ELLE DECOR

my friend the designer Thomas Jayne drily dubbed the Committee on Taste. (Thomas knew I was lucky enough to have many decorator friends, including Suzanne Rheinstein and Patrick Dunne, who would contribute to the project.) Having worked on my New York apartment, he also knew that my design Rosebud was my great-grandmother's house in Nashville, from which I have several pieces. I'd seen lots of pictures, but even better, Albert Hadley, one of Thomas's mentors, had worked on it as a young assistant, and had described the drawing room scheme to me in vivid detail. So when Thomas arrived with my own former assistant Egan Seward in tow (she's now his senior project manager), they were well armed with swatches for the bold-yellow curtains they knew were a must, as well as an acid-green swatch for the English Regency benches I had bought before we even found the house.

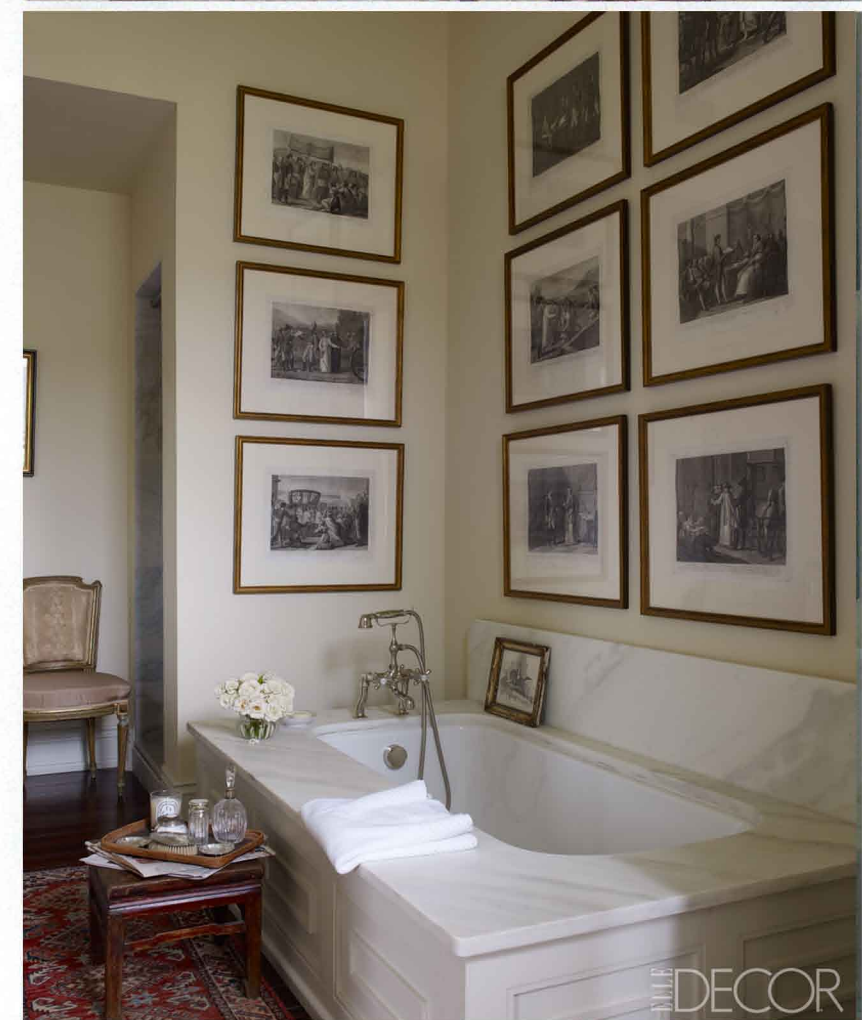
In the sunroom, I finally got to use Bennison's Crewelwork linen, a piece of which I'd been carrying around for more than a decade—the French windows open onto a tropical garden that mirrors the pattern. In the library, my childhood friend Anne McGee transformed the unidentifiable brown-stained woodwork into a gorgeous honey-toned “bois.” Upstairs, we mapped out a couple of guest rooms, one of which all but swallowed the entire contents of my New York living room, which had once seemed so enormous. Some necessary sofas and cocktail tables were ordered, and everything else went on the wish list.

In the years since, I've learned that a decorating moratorium (even an involuntary one) is not a bad thing. I still adore the Claremont chintz we chose for the master bedroom, for example, but now that I'm finally turning my attention to that half-finished room, I'm in a far less dressed-up frame of mind. Also, the layering that happens over time has brought more meaningful pleasure than I imagine any “instant house” would have. When I finally added the tortoiseshell blinds in the parlors two years ago, they made me almost as happy as the curtains themselves. Finding the right beat-up rug for the butler's pantry proved to be at least as gratifying as the storage containers of brand-new upholstered furniture that sat outside the house while the contractor made—and remade—his mistakes.

Finally, I likely could have survived without the Waterworks nozzles and temperature gauges in our baths. Had I not ordered them, I would surely by now possess one of the fabulous consoles from Niall Smith that I have long coveted. But I'd lived with glorified water closets as bathrooms since college, and the Waterworks catalogue was like porn. Yet another lesson is that a house is never done. Even at my glacial pace, a Niall console may be in my future yet. ■



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