



Country CHIC

Designer **Mayke Hogestijn**, founder of interior decorating company **Lavender & Sage**, reveals how you can introduce a touch of authentic country style to an urban home...

Many of us want the best of both worlds. If you can't say goodbye to the bright city lights and the cafés, restaurants and theatres, but you want a change of pace when you come home, a sense of peace and tranquility redolent of the countryside, then you need the simplicity of a French country house. Thankfully, there are many ways in which you can introduce this to your own home.

COUNTRY STYLE

French houses are often square shaped with high ceilings and tall, shuttered windows and doors. The floors are tiled, often with intricate designs. Wide, tiled stairs with wrought-iron banisters sweeping up are common, as are big fireplaces in every room. Both farmhouses and townhouses, even relatively simple ones, were built this way. If there was more money to spend, the size and number of rooms would increase, as would the intricacy of the ceilings, fireplaces and floors. However, the basic concept would remain the same, and this concept gives even the simplest period French house a sense of space, light and airiness that's beguiling. You feel you can expand your chest, throw your arms apart and actually breathe in these rooms.

Since our houses are different in design, it's impossible to copy the French style inch by inch, and in any case, it isn't a good idea – imagine a

winter in those huge rooms with tiled floors! Instead, you can marry the two and create a much more liveable and loveable result. To give you an example, a classic French kitchen is usually a cavernous space with a ceramic sink or drainer unit – more often than not at hobbit height – in a corner, and with very little storage space. There is, of course, always a huge table in the middle, where meals are eaten and around which, as in our own country kitchens, life revolves. As attractive and airy as it may be, it's not necessarily a place that exudes warmth and comfort, but there are aspects of this design that we can incorporate into our own city rooms to add a feel of country life.

GET THE LOOK

So how do you recreate the French country look in your own British house? Though the rustic provinces may seem a world away, it's actually easy to marry the two styles. Just remember that the French country design is an altogether simpler look in every sense. The thing to keep in mind is that sense of space, light and airiness that I mentioned earlier on. Envisage light curtains or *voiles* gently moving in the soft breeze coming through the open window, and picture the sunlight as it streams onto your natural floors and country-style furniture. Simplify your interior and think fresh, clean and light – the French country look is one of simplicity with a light dusting of rusticity, making it the original 'less is more'. »



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French country style in 14 simple steps

1. Lighten – but don't brighten – the colour palette that you use in your rooms.
2. Let as much light in as possible. If you're overlooked, you could consider using pretty window shades on the lower half of your windows, rather than nets or *voiles*.
3. Clear away part of your clutter. Leave out old and antique items, though. Sit them together in cohesive groups, rather than dotted about everywhere.
4. Use chunkier, simpler items for decoration. For instance, use a pitcher instead of a vase for your flowers.
5. Use light-coloured and lightweight curtains that can move freely in the breeze.
6. Use large mirrors, preferably ones that have chunky and interesting frames.
7. If your sitting and dining room ceilings are high enough, hang chandeliers, either electrified or simply lit with candles.
8. For your hallway, again if your ceiling is high enough, consider hanging an electrified wrought-iron lantern. »

Above: Light-coloured walls and an airy, spacious and uncluttered look are key to the French country style
Facing page, clockwise from top left: Use white linen in the bedroom; a large table forms the focal point of any kitchen; curtains should let plenty of light and air in; choose mirrors with large frames, and if you have the headroom, try to swap your lamps for chandeliers





“YOU SHOULD ALWAYS GO FOR THE COMPLETELY INDIVIDUAL PIECE THAT NO ONE ELSE HAS, EVEN IF IT NEEDS A LITTLE WORK”

Above, left to right: Simple bedspreads in white with a touch of lace work brilliantly in the bedroom; swap the three-piece suite for individual items of furniture that complement each other

9. In the bedroom, use white bed linens with a bit of lace or embroidery. White or ivory bedspreads in lace or crocheting complete the look.

10. If you still need to invest in furniture, stay away from the three-piece suite. Instead, opt for separate sofas and chairs that sit together well in terms of both upholstery and style.

11. In the bathroom, store your towels on an old kitchen chair. Hang them over the back and stack them on the seat for a great country look.

12. In your kitchen, tidy away unnecessary clutter, but see if you have any old items that would look good on display, such as earthenware pots or an old copper pan. Concentrate on functional items though, rather than clutter.

13. If you can possibly fit a table into your kitchen, put one in – a table is always the focal point of a country kitchen.

14. The best hunting grounds for missing items are most definitely auction rooms and flea markets. You should always go for the completely individual piece that no one else has, even if it does need a little work doing to it, rather than opting for anything that's mass produced. **fm**