



# French, Houston-Style

JONI WEBB'S FRENCH-INSPIRED HOUSTON INTERIORS AND DESIGN BLOG  
ON THE INTERNET CAPTURE HER PASSION AND POINT OF VIEW

44

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Have you ever paged through a design book or beautiful home magazine and then wanted to discuss it in detail with someone who shares your tastes? What makes this room sing? Isn't this the cleverest upholstered chair you've ever seen? And what were they thinking when they put a hot-pink upholstered ottoman in an all-white living room, but then again, it's sort of wonderful, don't you think?

Houston designer Joni Webb loves to discuss interior design and home furnishings — specifically, interiors furnished in what she calls “French, Houston-style.” Whether they’re rooms she’s created in her West University home — pictured on these pages — or places she’s designed for clients or other home interiors she admires in magazines and movies, Joni needs to talk about them all (though she never names clients). But she admits that even dear friends may fatigue when conversation turns to the finer points of, say, placing a vaisellier versus a trumeau on a wall.

What to do with all this pent-up enthusiasm? This May she started a Web log, or blog, at [www.cotedetexas.blogspot.com](http://www.cotedetexas.blogspot.com) on the Internet, and it's become a smash hit. “It's one of the best things I've ever done,” she says.





**ABOVE:** Painted antique French chairs in the breakfast room are from Tara Shaw Ltd. Joni designed the slipcovers to show off the chairs' curves. The table is an antique wine-tasting table from Joyce Horn Antiques.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sofa and washable slipcovers by Hien Lam Upholstery make for a no-fuss, canine-friendly environment. Zebra stripe pillows are from Area. The lampshade, an antique map of Paris, is from Watkins Culver.



At last, she has found like-minded souls to talk to. Readers from all over the world comment on her postings, Google regularly picks up her keywords and editors of national design magazines read and e-mail her. "I started it just to talk about design, but I've met so many people online," she says.

With her trusty, tiny Canon PowerShot camera, she ventures into her favorite Houston retail establishments to show and tell why these shops are so special. Or she zips over to Round Top for antiques week and shows things from her favorite booths in her blog, peppered with comments and trend alerts. When a favorite national design magazine hits the stands, she posts her pointed opinions on various house stories. Sometimes her own home even makes cameo appearances on her blog to illustrate a point.

**THIS PAGE:**

**TOP LEFT:** The dining room tablecloth and drapes throughout the home were fabricated by Custom Creations by Monica. The vaisselier holding transferware is from Joyce Horn Antiques; antique dining chairs are from Lewis & Maese. Faux bois candlesticks on the table are from Indulge.

**ABOVE:** A hallway upstairs holds a portion of Joni's vast library of design and art books.

**LEFT:** Sammi Jo, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, rests on the chair in the den, while Georgie, an English Springer Spaniel, sits nearby.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** In the sunny yellow living room, the buffet *a deux* from Tara Shaw Ltd. holds a collection of antique Masonware. The daybed's slipcover, a bold check, was created by Custom Creations. All other fabrics in the room are Bennison Fabrics, available to the trade through George Cameron Nash. On the table to the left of the daybed is Joni's colorful collection of Chinese altar fruits. Chairs in the foreground are French antiques. Roses by Aubrey Sellers





**ABOVE:** Houston designer Joni Webb often uses her wireless laptop to create her blog while sitting here on her back porch.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Georgina, aka Georgie, welcomes visitors into the Webbs' garden. The rug is from Urban Outfitters.

**ELEMENTS OF STYLE FOR HOME AND BLOG**

Joni receives not a penny in compensation for her blog. It's done purely with a connoisseur's passion. In her home, as well as online, her enthusiasm and sharp point of view are on display. These are some of the elements of style that inform her aesthetic:

- A highly edited collection of genuine French antiques, not reproduction
- Painted antique French chairs, especially curvy ones covered with slipcovers Joni has designed to reveal parts of the prettily aged wood
- Unpatterned upholstery and slipcover fabrics, except for occasional bold checks for texture. Also, Bennison Fabrics from George Cameron Nash at Decorative Center, Houston.
- Distressed-wood French antique tables and hutches from Joyce Horn Antiques in Houston
- Perfectly upholstered chairs with clouds of fluffy down in the cushions (even her dogs' custom-made beds in large baskets are powder-puff cushy).
- Seagrass rugs everywhere to bring a casual look to her interiors
- "Very French colors," Joni says, like the sunny yellow on her living room walls accented with gray trim work
- Zebra stripes, a new passion
- Transferware, Masonware and ironstone pottery placed on shelves and tables for accent pieces
- Displaying collections of seashells from South Padre, where she and husband Ben and their teen-age daughter love to vacation; also Ben's collections of natural crystals
- Bedding, curtains and slipcovers by Custom Creations from Monica in Houston
- The bedroom her daughter decorated herself with furnishings from west elm
- Stacks of gorgeous design and picture books everywhere, on floors and tables
- Two photogenic spaniels, Georgina (aka Georgie) and Sammi Jo, who happen to look great in her home's interiors





## POINT OF VIEW

Joni Webb's eye for detail and ability to describe the elements of style that create a beautiful room distinguish her writings in the blogosphere. And her enthusiasm is infectious. Here are a few excerpts from her Web log postings at [www.cotedetexas.blogspot.com](http://www.cotedetexas.blogspot.com).

"Whenever I'm bored (well, before I discovered design blogs), I search the MSL for Houston homes. I always start with the most exclusive neighborhoods: River Oaks, Memorial Villages, West University or Tanglewood. It is so fascinating to me to take a glimpse inside a stranger's house. Mostly, though, I am searching for interiors that speak to me."

After visiting Thompson & Hanson Nursery and Gardens in Houston: "The building, an old, restored stone-clad structure — is a delight in itself. If I were to start over and build a house today, I would base it on this design.... I want to live here, I say every time I come."

On the Houston shop, M. Naeve: "First stop is the romantic antique store M. Naeve, eponym for Margaret Naeve, a darling, 20-something who actually looks more like a teen-ager. What's most astounding about Margaret being the owner is how does someone so young acquire such excellent taste? ... What she's bought for M. Naeve is exactly what Houstonians of means, taste and desire are buying these days. If you're lucky enough to hire one of Houston's top designers — you'll probably be the owner of something from this store."

On Kathryn Ireland's new home: "Having just published her first book, *Classic Country* (highly recommended!), she moved into a 'cluster of 1920s stable buildings' in Ojai. I adore her style — casual, warm and cozy, totally without any hint of pretension anywhere."

On Diane Keaton's character's home in the movie, *Something's Gotta Give*: "Scores of articles have been written about the Hamptons house, and people have designed their own homes based on it. Why is it so universally loved? It could be the soothing blues and creams, the famous striped dhurri rug, the ironstone dishes in the dining room with the Bennison slipcovers, the Swedish Mora clock, the dark wood floors, the fabulous soapstone counters in the even more fabulous kitchen — I could go on and on about why that house appeals."



**ABOVE:** A dainty desk in the master bedroom provides a place for old-fashioned correspondence on stationery. The chair's slipcover is by Michelle Fritz of Washington County.

**LEFT:** Joni Webb, Houston designer and design blog writer, at home in her den.

**RIGHT:** The Webbs' teen-aged daughter, a design aficionada herself, decorated her bedroom in plummy purples with furniture from west elm.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** A bright coral pillow from Area brings punch to the guest bedroom. The zebra striped rug is from Pacific Artifacts at Marburger Farm. Restoration Hardware lamps flank the bed.

### THE INTERNET INFLUENCE

Joni's home is an ever-evolving laboratory of her tastes, as is her blog. A native Houstonian, Joni majored in interior design at the University of Texas in Austin. "I've wanted to be a designer since I was 7 years old," she says. "My parents built a house, and that got me started."

After college, Joni worked as a secretary and office manager for various Houston retailers. About eight years ago, she decorated a friend's daughter's bedroom. "From there," she says, "I had a business going word-of-mouth."

She admits that her blog and those who correspond with her about it have changed her tastes and style somewhat. "I have younger readers, and I'm seeing design through a younger eye," she says. "They've exposed me to design I wasn't open to — for example, bright colors, graphics and young designers I hadn't really considered before."

Her home is becoming less monotone. At various doorways, she's scattered colorful print rugs from Urban Outfitters. And her tastefully muted gray-green master bedroom will soon change to pink.

Will she ever veer from her love of all things French? She casts her eye around her cheery yellow living room to the antique French buffet a deux to the magnificent French antique chairs she inherited to the daybed. "No," she says simply.

She has seen others close to her veer from French, she says. One person forsook all her French antiques for Biedermeier. Another switched from French to totally Swedish. And Joni was there smartly acquiring the pieces they didn't want.





## RESOURCES

**JONI WEBB**  
Webb Design  
713.898.9312

**CUSTOM CREATIONS**  
Custom furniture  
713.522.5833

**CUSTOM CREATIONS BY MONICA**  
Bedding, curtains and slipcovers  
832.443.1931

**JOYCE HORN ANTIQUES**  
1022 Wirt, 713.688.0507

**TARA SHAW LTD.**  
1845 W. Alabama, 713.533.9744