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## Design in Focus: Q & A with Intérieurs' Francine Gardner

BY JORDAN WHITLEY FOR LA2DAY.COM FEB 2, 2009



LA2DAY's Jordan Whitley sits down with New York's hottest *design* export, Francine Gardner, to talk trends, art and mixing up the old with a little bit of new.

When you meet Francine Gardner, you kind of want to be her. You want to see the world the way she does. You want that lightbulb to switch on in your own head, illuminating the colors, scents and sounds that come together so easily for this French-born-and-raised icon of design. You want to run off to the markets of Bangkok and Marrakesh to snatch up exotic pieces that transform your home into, well, a very fabulous version of who you are.

And then, you remember you're 25, broke, and sharing a one bedroom with a socially challenged girl you now only refer to as "Cookie Crumbs and Diet Coke Cans" (thank you, Craigslist).

Fortunately, with Francine's new Robertson Boulevard showroom, **Intérieurs**, we can glimpse out of our own circumstances and peer ever so slightly into the highly styled life we will one day embrace.

In the following Q & A, Francine appeases our senses with a little perspective. So read on, dream on, and take notes (yes, that Mediterranean look is *sooo* passé).

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**LA2DAY: When it comes to decor, what is your philosophy?**

**Francine:** My design philosophy is derived from my personal lifestyle and aesthetic. I believe that interior spaces should provide a calming influence and elegantly reflects the individuals who live, work and play in them. The tones, textures and volumes must be harmonious. The furniture is to provide comfort and interest. My philosophy is "modern soulful living" which encompasses my lifestyle.

**LA2DAY: What's keeping you busy these days?**

**Francine:** We are currently working on a custom house in the Hamptons: [a] fairly intense project. Also, lofts and apartments in New York, a large house in New England, and we are still in the process of the finishing touches on a hotel and getting geared for new projects.

**LA2DAY: With all your projects, you must live at the speed of light!**

**Francine:** Outside of my home, my lifestyle is hectic, fast, stressful, adventurous and fulfilling. A home is where you leave everything behind and reconnect with yourself, your family, your friends. Your environment is your support system. It should provide peace, beauty, sense of happiness. One should not be rigid or too contrived about their home, on the contrary, one should be daring, creative. A home is meant to be lived in, enjoyed.

**LA2DAY: What Design Era inspires you the most? (Please don't say the '80s)**

**Francine:** I am not particularly inspired by a specific era but rather by different cultures and a sense of history. I love to integrate different cultures and periods to create harmonious, rich environments.

**LA2DAY: You've had a wildly popular showroom in New York for some time now, how does designing in LA compare?**

**Francine:** I look at the LA showroom as a "pied a terre." The more masculine, industrial, edgy look of the New York showroom, once taken out of its structure, is transposed into an elegant french style architecture, and takes a softer more gentle tone. LA is about beautiful skies, scents of Thyme and lavender, open spaces, canyons, pale hues, a gentleness that lacks in New York.

 lame. But this >>



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**LA2DAY: What New York trends are you bringin' to your work on the West Coast?**

**Francine:** I always used the NY showroom to experiment with styles, concepts. I started to bring industrial furniture from the 1800s and juxtaposed these rough pieces with soft, delicate sofas, accessories. Then I introduced the edgy modern bamboo pieces and reached a harmonious environment that is now our concept. This trend has now been embraced by many of our designer clients. I would love for that trend to become a part of the LA design landscape as it is now in New York.

**LA2DAY: Though we're young broke and fabulous, we're willing to splurge on some serious Art. How would you suggest incorporating it into our homes, ehem tiny apartments?**

**Francine:** When clients are not collectors and unsure about their taste in Art, I first leave them with a stack of my art books. I try to direct them to various mediums, periods etc. I give them a list of Art galleries or gallery websites. Meanwhile, I look for the ideal pieces for the space and submit them to the client. When I travel, I always check local art galleries with my clients' needs in mind.

**LA2DAY: What LA-based artist should we be buzzing about?**

**Francine:** Danny Hughes is an artist whose work we are carrying in our showroom. His sensitivity spoke to me immediately, his work is rich in tones, texture, very spiritual.

**LA2DAY: You grew up in Bordeaux, France. (We seethe with envy.) How did that affect your style?**

**Francine:** I grew up in a tiny 12th Century Roman village, surrounded by vineyards and fields of sunflowers, my summers were spent in Eze Village, a small medieval village on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean near Nice. Our houses were old. Furniture, linens, silver remained in the family from generation to generation. Huge vegetable gardens fed the family and the farm workers all year. There were chicken coops, an aviary and kennels for the stray dogs found abandoned by their previous owners.

This had a profound influence on my design work. I have a deep love for nature which I always try to bring in the spaces that I design through wood textures, always fresh flowers, and landscaping when there is outdoor space.



**LA2DAY: How do you feel about antique knockoffs? The cheap, mass-produced version of the real deal?**

**Francine:** I love integrity of design, if I cannot find the perfect antique, instead of ordering a copy or a manufactured antique, I will look for a modern piece instead. I believe in the integrity of the design - real stone, solid wood, antiques mixed with contemporary pieces. I also love the juxtaposition of contemporary architecture with a touch of the old.

**LA2DAY: What is the most prized piece in your showroom collection?**

**Francine:** I could not name just one piece, but I would say the objects and the art that we surround ourselves with. Each piece has a special meaning to us.

**LA2DAY: We feel very pauperly. Tell us something about your first apartment to give us a smidgeon of hope.**

**Francine:** I remember my very first apartment in Boston. Beautiful wood floors and a charming view. However, I had no budget for furniture. I saved until I could buy the right sofa that would anchor the space. I worked a color palette and always carried it with me. I painted the walls, found floor pillows (in lieu of armchairs) and decorative pillows in fabrics to work with my color palette. Then came the cocktail table, dining etc... I shopped at vintage shops, fabric houses, always on the look out for a piece for my space

**LA2DAY: When we finally get a place of our own, god-willing, what words of wisdom will you give?**

**Francine:** My advice is to make sure that you take time to feel the space first, do a basic floorplan with measurements to avoid costly mistake. Work on a color palette and start having fun. First paint the walls, start with the bed and the sofa and go on from there.

**LA2DAY: Any movements in design we should know about?**

**Francine:** I do not follow markets or trends. Just start collecting what appeals to you, you will never regret it.

**LA2DAY: What Los Angeles design trend do you wish would die a slow, painful death?**

**Francine:**  
Please enough with the fake Mediterranean look. I am regularly in the South of France for work and this "Mediterranean look" is so passé.

*Francine Gardner's showroom, Intérieurs, is now open in Beverly Hills.*

**The Details: Intérieurs**

450 Roberston Boulevard  
Beverly Hills, CA 90048  
310.652.5002

[www.interieurs.com](http://www.interieurs.com)

[www.dannyhughes.net](http://www.dannyhughes.net)

Story by Jordan Whitley.

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