

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

# HOUSE & GARDEN

RENOVATION ISSUE

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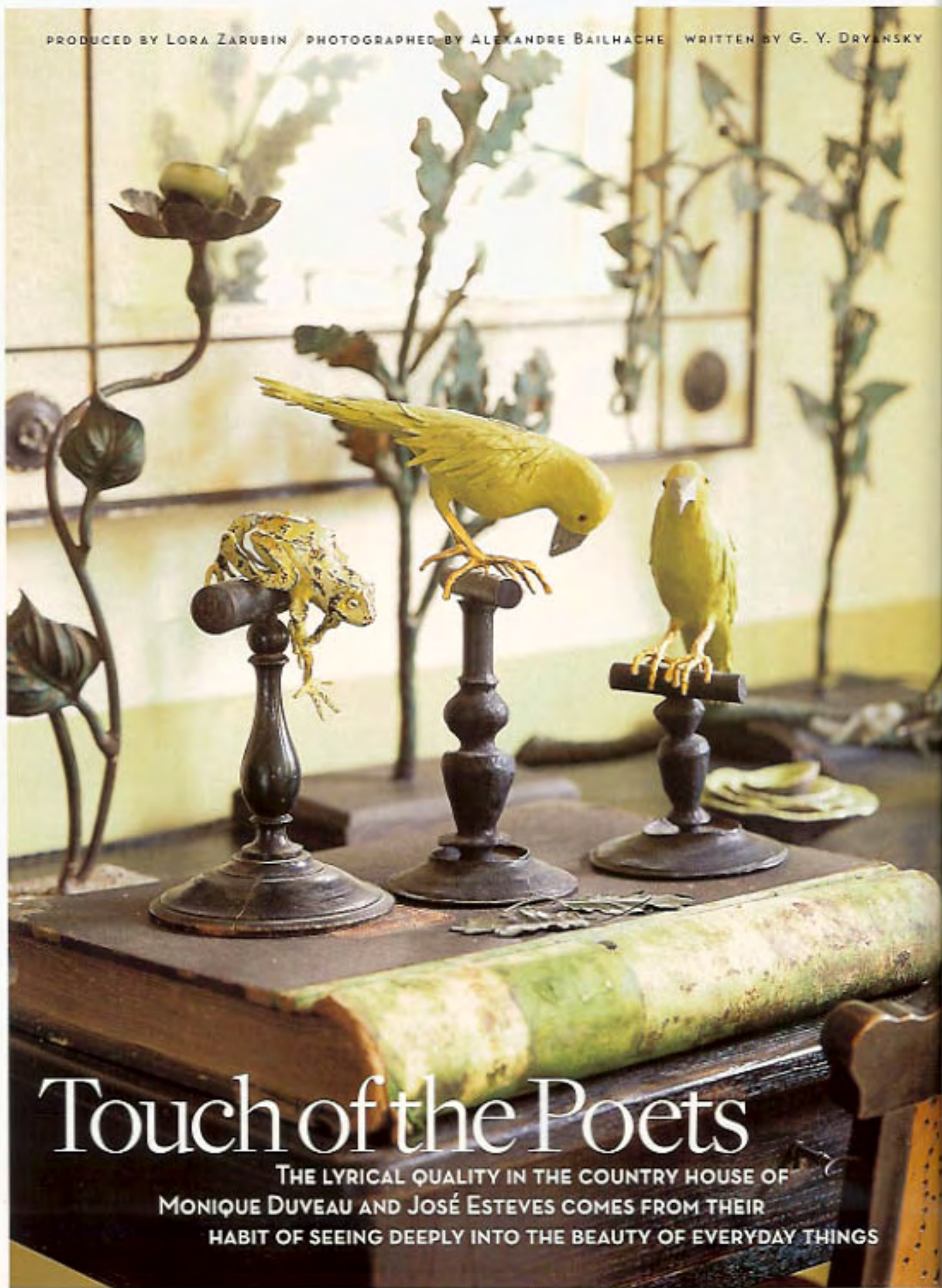
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# Touch of the Poets

THE LYRICAL QUALITY IN THE COUNTRY HOUSE OF  
MONIQUE DUVEAU AND JOSÉ ESTEVES COMES FROM THEIR  
HABIT OF SEEING DEEPLY INTO THE BEAUTY OF EVERYDAY THINGS

The living room, opposite page, includes a display of metal botanical sculptures, which Monique Duveau has collected for years, plus papier-mâché birds from Farfelus Farfadets, Paris, and a tin frog perched atop an antique stand.

• Duveau, this page, peers from the house that she shares with her partner, sculptor José Esteves. The building is surrounded by a romantic-untamed garden. A friend's Jack Russell terrier, Bessie, sits on the lowest step, while Duveau's own pups, Harley, left, and Bobo, join her at the doorway.





W e spoke about food during the two-hour drive from Monique Duveau's Parisian loft to her country house in the Perche, a rolling farmland not yet discovered by the well-off people who have made the nearby Normandy coastline around Deauville a weekend oasis. Duveau handles the food coverage and photo shoots for *Côté Sud*, *Côté Est*, and *Côté Ouest*—a group of French magazines about country living. She loves food, a passion she inherited from her mother, who owned a provincial general store and found her greatest joy in the family kitchen. Cooking is an art of transformation: Duveau can speak long and poetically about the way a milky jacket of gelée changes the character of chicken, or the way the oily flesh of mackerel becomes something new when steeped in the region's famed apple cider vinegar, or how a three-day-old loaf of brioche is fit for more than feeding the birds when it is used to make *pain perdu*—what Americans call French toast.

The spirit of transformation is at the heart of the uniquely personal decor of the house that Duveau shares with her boyfriend, José Esteves. He is a sculptor who turns ordinary things into new objects that can be used as well as contemplated. The house contains numerous examples of his work: lighting pieces, such as chandeliers made of reworked wire baskets, and other pieces made of hanging kitchen spoons and ladles—popular items at the Manhattan design store *Intérieurs*. ▷




Whether they are formal spaces, such as the living room, opposite page, or happily haphazard ones, like the entry, this page, the rooms in the house share an air of warmth and mirth. La Caravane, Paris, created the custom chairs and sofa, while Esteves crafted the coffee table (from an old church clock) and the pendant lights. The four mirrors are from La Petite Maison in Clignancourt, Paris.

• The entrance hall decor takes its cue from the building's original function as a schoolhouse. It features benches, coat hooks, and papier-mâché donkey heads from Farfelus Farfadets.

Whether lushly green or spare and natural,



all the rooms in the house whisper of ease and peace

A rustic master bathroom with a wooden bathtub, a wire mesh pendant light, and a log stool. The room features wood-paneled walls, a wooden floor, and a window with sheer curtains. A small table with a dark jar and a tray of soaps sits in front of the tub. A pair of white slippers is on the floor. A framed picture hangs on the wall.

There is a homespun elegance to the green bedroom, opposite page, where old window shutters serve as a headboard and the bed is dressed in a patchwork coverlet by La Maison Fossier. For similar wall paint colors, try Farrow & Ball's Cooking Apple Green or the darker Calke Green. ■ The woody master bathroom, this page, embraces sparseness and simplicity. The entry is lined with etamine gauze curtains from La Caravane, and the tub is made from a wine-making vat bought in Paris. The light fixture is by Esteves.



## Trade Secrets

MONIQUE DUVEAU AND JOSE ESTEVES WERE FACED WITH THE TASK OF RENOVATING A SCHOOLHOUSE TO TURN IT INTO A LIVABLE HOME. HERE IS WHAT THEY DID TO ACHIEVE THAT TRANSFORMATION.

**FLOORING** THE ORIGINAL FLOORS WERE KEPT INTACT, BUT THE TILES WERE STRIPPED AND CLEANED USING BLACK SOAP TO REMOVE WAXY BUILDUP AND BLEACHED TO WHITEN THEM. THE RESULT IS A SMOOTH, MATTE SURFACE.

**KITCHEN** SPACES AND OBJECTS TOOK ON NEW LIFE IN THE KITCHEN, WHERE THE COUPLE INSTALLED A LARGE STONE SINK FROM A FLORIST'S SHOP AND TURNED A SUPPLY CLOSET INTO A PANTRY.

### MAKING SPACE

A CLASSROOM MEASURING 80 SQUARE YARDS WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A SMALLER BEDROOM AND BATHROOM USING LARGE PLANKS OF SALVAGED WOOD TO CREATE A WALL. DUVEAU BOUGHT THE WOOD FROM A LOCAL CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP.

**NEW USES** THE OUTDOOR DINING AREA WAS ONCE A CHICKEN COOP. RATHER THAN SCRAP THE STRUCTURE, DUVEAU AND ESTEVES KEPT THE IRON FRAMING, ROOF, AND BRICK FLOORS INTACT, AND TRAINED VINES TO GROW AROUND IT.

**HIGH DRAMA** THE PAIR DECIDED TO USE A WOODEN WINE-MAKING VAT AS A BATHTUB—NOT REALIZING THAT THE WOOD HAD TO BE KEPT MOIST SO THE STAVES WOULD SWELL AND HOLD TOGETHER. ONE HOT DAY, BEFORE THE TUB WAS FULLY INSTALLED, THE TWO FOUND THAT THE VAT HAD DRIED OUT AND THE STAVES HAD COLLAPSED LIKE A PILE OF KINDLING. NOW THE TUB IS KEPT MOIST AT ALL TIMES.

Esteves was not at home when we arrived from Paris. Duveau speculated that he had gone off again to hunt for things to add to their furnishings, making a trip to the local *récupérateur*. (It turned out that he was at work in the little former metal spring factory down the road that they had bought for his studio.) *Récupérateur* might be translated as "junk man." He takes away what is left of wrecked buildings, and what he doesn't peddle for scrap he sells, often to those who love old floorboards, doors, tiles, and fireplace mantels. For Duveau and Esteves, a *récupérateur's* shop offers up a trove as rich as Ali Baba's cave.

Nearly everything in their house, it seems, is a studied recuperation. As with Esteves's sculptures, things that have had a different earlier existence are adopted as new figures in the owners' lives. (Even the house itself is a recuperation, having been built in the late eighteenth century by the local gentry as a schoolhouse and residence for orphaned children.) *Détourner* is the verb Duveau uses to describe what she and Esteves are up to here. "Repurpose," even if it is an example of ugly shorthand business-speak, conveys the idea best in English.

Examples of the things that the two have repurposed as furnishings are charming, lovely, and often stunningly imaginative. The living room features a coffee table that Esteves fashioned from the huge face of a church clock. Duveau's spice closet once housed stationery supplies for the school, the kitchen sink came from a florist's shop, and she mounts her family photos on a rack once used as a store display for postcards. Many of the pillows that are strewn throughout the house once did service as sacks for





Duveau and Esteves have an eye for objects both chic and whimsical. The dining porch, opposite page, contains a hodgepodge of useful and well-loved items, such as antique dishes and bowls from La Maison Fassier in Remolard, France, and the antique zinc watering cans and pitchers that line the wall. The twig shade pendants are by Esteves. • Each room has a signature color, none more striking than the lavender in a bedroom, this page, punctuated by silvery mercury vases and candlesticks. For a similarly cool yet energizing color, try Reverie from Farrow & Ball. The linen coverlet and pillows are from La Maison Fassier.



Duveau believes that the decor works because she and her partner trust their eye. "I follow my instincts, and I always buy quickly," she says. "I could never be a decorator. I put too much of myself into it." But there is more to it. Shabby chic embraces "distressed" pieces, but that look probably has more to do with conjuring up a romance than with what people like Duveau and Esteves are up to. They almost seem to adopt the orphans of the material world. For them, distress makes things noticeable as presences with historical—and even emotional—texture. By repurposing an object, Duveau and Esteves connect with that presence and give it a new life. What's more, nowadays when our sensibilities are blasted with bogus promotional sensationalism—from three-star restaurants serving foam as food to "reality" TV—to be able to see a personality in a true and modest object may be something almost like grace. *G. Y. Dryansky is a Paris-based writer.*

Duveau is a proponent of simple yet distinctive recipes, such as the tea with berries and herbs in an infuser, this page, left, by Paris-based designer Mathias, or mackerel marinated in cider vinegar, below. Duveau serves the latter in Cul Noir, a variety of faience earthenware from Normandy and Brittany. \*The down-home dining room, opposite page, gets a dash of élan from some of Esteves's most popular creations: brocantes single-tiered chandeliers made from antique spoons, ladles, and forks, available at Intérieurs, NYC. The antique table and chairs are from Xavier Nicod and Gérard Nicod in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, France. See Shopping, last pages.

flour or mail; others were sewn from bags that the Banque de France used to deliver coins. In one bedroom, the pair turned a set of window shutters into a headboard. Duveau and Esteves salvaged a long wooden table and benches from a convent refectory for use as a desk in their library. In the master bathroom, a barkless tree branch serves as a towel rack, while the bathtub is made from a wine-making vat.

Wherever you turn in this house you also see a personal touch of humor. In a nod to the building's past as an educational institution, Duveau and Esteves have styled the entry hall in the manner of a school cloakroom, with rows of coat hooks and benches for removing galoshes. On the wall hangs a papier-mâché donkey head—the French metaphor for a dunce. At times, the decorative wit is rather provocative. Duveau houses her collection of crosses in a confessional-like bathroom. In another bathroom, the couple installed a blackboard, inviting guests to scribble graffiti.

The decor is grounded in color. Each room is painted in a different hue, some Duveau's personal favorites, others cued by an object in the room. The living room is done in a Farrow & Ball absinthe shade with black accents—the sine qua non of color combos, according to Duveau. The library takes its hue from old maps, the kitchen from a butcher's table that was the first thing Duveau and Esteves bought for the house.



