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Entente CORDIALE

Jenny Rogers and her husband Paul-Henri Sohler have married their own distinct English and French styles to create an enchanting haven

WORDS ALAN O'KELLY PHOTOGRAPHY TONY TIMMINGTON



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Jenny Rogers already owned a cottage in a pretty harbour town on the Île de Ré, but when a friend told her about another property that was for sale nearby, she could not resist taking a look. What she did not expect to find was a house perfectly renovated in the traditional style that she adored. Jenny also knew her husband, Paul-Henri Sohler, would love the property, too.

It was while on a holiday that Jenny, who has lived in France since 1997, and Paul-Henri discovered the beautiful Île de Ré, just off the west coast. They started to visit it regularly with their sons William and Benjamin and eventually, in 2006, bought a cottage there to use as a holiday home – they already had a house on the mainland.

‘We hadn’t planned to buy another property here, yet when I came to view the townhouse,

I was entranced. And when Paul-Henri came and looked at it, he was as impressed as I was.’

But securing the property wasn’t easy. Jenny and Paul-Henri were not alone in their admiration for the townhouse and soon found themselves in a bidding war with another couple. ‘They offered more and had the benefit of being cash buyers,’ says Jenny. ‘But for some reason the owner decided to sell it to us, which was pretty amazing.’

None of the locals seem certain about the age of the cottage, but it may have been used for members of the clergy – there is supposedly a secret tunnel linking the house to a nearby church. ‘The previous owner had spent two years renovating the place to a high level,’ Jenny adds. ‘Apparently, he gutted it because it was in such poor condition and employed local craftsmen ▶



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to carry out all the work on the house, right down to fitting new wardrobes and cupboards.'

So on acquiring the cottage, the couple merely had to source furniture, fittings and fabrics to create the look they wanted. 'There was no structural work to complete and even the shades of the walls were to our taste,' Jenny enthuses. 'However, there are strict regulations on the island regarding the colours of the exterior; for example, the window shutters have to be green, grey or blue. So that was one little job we immediately had to tackle.'

Inside the townhouse, the walls and elegant panelled fixtures in the reception rooms and kitchen had been painted white, so Jenny and Paul-Henri found some complementing white-painted tables for the sitting room. The dark-wood chairs for the kitchen also match the tones of the worktops, while pink accessories add a pretty, feminine touch. There is also a grandeur about these ground-floor spaces,

1 & 2 KITCHEN/BREAKFAST ROOM White-painted cabinetry – Crabtree Kitchens (020 8392 6955) is a good source of such designs – is teamed with Bosch (0844 892 8979) appliances. The Chair Set (01428 707301) sells antique dining chairs, while Chic Shack (020 8785 7777) stocks red-gingham fabrics

3 GUEST BEDROOM The Country Quilt Company (05601 547886) supplies comparable blue-and-pink rose quilts, and toile and patchwork cushions

4 MASTER BEDROOM Jenny got the bench at the foot of the bed at a local antiques fair; La Maison (020 7729 9646) sells French period-style furniture

5 BATHROOM Pretty Practicals (01597 811321) stocks painted towel rails



LAST WORD *'The townhouse is such a wonderful place to live – the bustling port is close by, yet you come back here and it is so quiet and peaceful'*

enhanced by the high ceilings and elaborate cornicing. The wall panelling and floor-to-ceiling cupboards add to the classic French look.

Upstairs, the proportions of the bedrooms and bathrooms are equally generous, but are softened by the couple's choice of pastel shades for the walls and soft furnishings. In the master bedroom, a scheme of 'Île de Ré' green brings out the beauty of the tall, white-painted cupboards. In fact, here – as in other parts of this delightful house – there is a distinctly English Georgian feel. Of course, this Anglo-French style reflects both Jenny and Paul-Henri's respective heritages.

The couple have really made the most of each room by furnishing the spaces with flair and imagination. But the cottage is styled sympathetic to its age, and as a family home, it works wonderfully well. 'We get enormous pleasure from this place and neither of us can imagine ever selling it,' Jenny concludes. 'We love everything about it.' **BH**

INSPIRED BUYS

Furniture with caned panels has been used throughout Jenny and Paul-Henri's charming home, and helps give the place its graceful elegance. Here are three of the prettiest pieces around



▲ Fauteuil Sultane chair in solid beech, and available in the fabric of your choice, from £2,200, Roche Bobois (020 7431 1411, roche-bobois.com)

► Royale Cream French king-size rattan bed in solid mahogany, £669, The French Furniture Company (0845 054 7528, thefrenchfurniturecompany.co.uk)



◀ Parisian Toile bench, featuring a hand-carved mahogany frame, £495, The French Bedroom Company (0845 644 8022, frenchbedroomcompany.co.uk)

AFG KITCHENS UK



FAVOURITE ROOM

'The elegant sitting room makes such an impression when you walk in the front door'

1 SITTING ROOM Jenny sourced most of her furniture from local shops; Laura Ashley's (0871 230 2301) Burlington design is a good match for the upholstered armchair, while Juliette's Interiors (01789 721911) stocks similar coffee tables
2 DINING ROOM The lovely rattan-backed chairs are 150 years old and were bought from an antiques dealer in the region; Gustavian (020 7724 6444) sells comparable designs



MEET THE OWNERS



Jenny Rogers, a translator, her husband Paul-Henri Sohler, who is a company manager, and their sons William and Benjamin
PREVIOUS HOME 'We also have a house in the Bordeaux region on the mainland,' says Jenny.

CURRENT PROPERTY A townhouse on the Île de Ré off the west coast of France
ROOMS Hall, sitting room, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room, three bedrooms (all en suite)
PURCHASED 2007 VALUE £650,000