

HOW TO LIVE IT UP ALFRESCO

A quirky French farmhouse is the perfect family home, thanks to a heavenly outdoor space

REPORT Emma J Page PHOTOGRAPHS Frenchie Cristogatin



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In the farmhouse's courtyard, the first-floor veranda has been turned into a covered walkway. The space also serves as an office

A local craftsman made the kitchen from stained and oiled French oak, topped with black granite. Below: Christelle Rouméjon. The trestle table was sourced from a Lyons flea market



The sitting room, with bronze painted beams, a Nordal leather chair and Blown by Samuel Wilkinson pendant light. Below: straw holiday mementoes on a landing



Christelle and David Rouméjon's seductive farmhouse, 25 minutes outside Lyons, might look as if it has effortlessly evolved into the epitome of French rural chic, but the couple's first few months there were inauspicious. "When we got the keys, we thought we could just move in," says Christelle. "But we'd underestimated the renovation work needed. There were dangling cables, layers of dust and just one loo serving the whole building. The best option was to rent nearby for a few months and roll up our sleeves." Having lived in a former silk warehouse in central Lyons, the couple were no strangers to unusual builds. They quickly decided this 18th-century farmhouse, which forms a U-shape around a partially covered courtyard, was the perfect pastoral setting in which to bring up their sons, Pierre, eight, and Thomas, three. "It had quirky appeal," says Christelle, who markets lifestyle brands and has her own website. "Everything was wonky, there were steps and half levels everywhere and, most of all, there was space, with a barn and a vast cellar."

Together with David, an air traffic controller at Lyons airport, she formed a plan to preserve the building's rustic appeal while enhancing its practicality. Key was to make sense of the space without compromising its period features, which include exposed beams, original *tomette* (hexagonal) floor tiles and a big kitchen chimney breast. Their most dramatic design decision was to encase the building's sagging first floor veranda in smart metal-framed glass. The contemporary addition is both aesthetically pleasing – throwing the ancient stones and wooden beams into sharp relief – and practical, providing a link to the attic floor, whose snug rafters now accommodate the master bedroom via a new run of stairs. Downstairs, the couple removed walls to turn a warren of small rooms into one largely open-plan space, comprising kitchen, dining area and sitting room. "We really like the imperfect feel of mixed materials, so we deliberately opted for varied floor treatments – ceramic in the kitchen, original cement tiles in the dining area and oak in the living room," says Christelle. The result is a natural zoning,

plus an air of informality. "I think there was an expectation from our builders and even our friends that we would whitewash everything to enhance the sense of space and balance out the lower ceilings, but there was no chance of that," she adds. "We'd rather experiment." Working with French paint specialist Ressource, the couple opted for a blue-grey palette, complemented by greens and mustards. Beams were left "raw" or painted in a mellow bronze, creating a striking frame for gilt and metal elements. The middle floor, accessed by a staircase in the sitting room, was reconfigured to allow for two bedrooms and a bathroom for the boys, plus a generous landing, which is used as a playroom. A collection of wall-hung rattan and straw holiday mementoes runs through the house. One of the family's favourite pastimes is treasure-hunting for vintage pieces and bric-a-brac at Lyons' Les Puces du Canal market – an old cash register, which has a new home atop a metal chest of drawers in the kitchen, and a typewriter were recent finds. "We had fun explaining the gramophone to Pierre and

Thomas, who had never seen anything like it," says Christelle. "Now we play my father's old French records on it, which makes me so happy. Our rule of thumb is that everything around us should make us feel good." In summer, the courtyard takes centre stage. The temperature is cooler in its shade and Christelle describes it as an "outdoor sitting room". The family rolls out an oversized rug at its centre, where the boys can play, while the couple lounge on a pair of vintage army daybeds or host barbecues for friends and family. "Our children adore it," says Christelle. "They treat the whole place like a giant climbing frame, hiding out on its various levels or playing table football in the barn." Next, plans are afoot to dehumidify the cellar so that the couple can host winter wine tastings for their friends. But for now, their summer schedule involves weekly family picnics at nearby Lac de la Madone and keeping an eye on the swallows nesting in the courtyard. Truly *la vie en rose*. ■

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