

Mary Engelbreit's
Home Companion

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HERE COMES SINTERKLAAS

Join an Illinois family in their Beaux Arts-style home for a Netherlands-inspired Christmas, complete with budget decorating ideas and assorted Dutch treats





In the front salon, cedar-boxwood garlands decorate a fireplace surround salvaged from a Chicago brownstone. The tallest candles on the mantel are waist high, which puts them in scale with the 15-foot ceilings.



“If something gets **NICKED** we say, ‘Don’t worry. That’s the look we’re going for.’” —ANNIE BRAHLER

ABOVE LEFT: For luxury on a budget, Annie made inexpensive, tissue-thin silk appear lush by interlining it with double flannel. ABOVE RIGHT: Bought for only 30 Euros (about 38 bucks), all the French console needed was fresh paint.



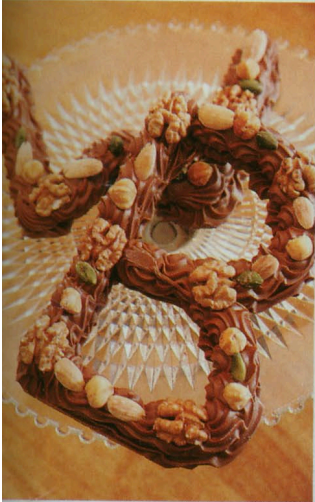
ANNIE BRAHLER HAD DRAGGED A CHANDELIER onto a plane in a garbage bag for the very last time. For years, she’d tagged along on business trips abroad with husband Richard, who owns a Holland-based tool business, in search of treasures for their 1868, six-bedroom home in Jacksonville, Illinois.

“One day, Richard said, ‘You know, you could get a container for the house,’” recalls Annie, referring to the professional practice of shipping goods in bulk. That was the beginning of Euro Trash, a furnishings import business that sells to shops, designers, and individuals.

Now Annie takes her own business trips, as many as eight annually. “Some of the things I bring back wouldn’t appeal to everyone,” she admits (old moose horns are her latest obsession). “I never buy for the market. I stay true to what I love.”



FAR LEFT: Chocolate initials are a traditional Dutch treat. LEFT: Annie with the kids, from left to right: Isabel, 9; Daniel, 11; and William, 13. Reflecting their heritage, they're holding Dutch teacups.

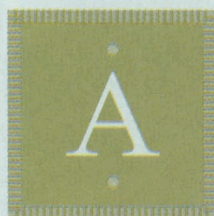


"The Dutch revere children and animals—they're welcome everywhere. That's how we live." RIGHT: Jack (on daybed) and Ralph unwind in the morning room. Vintage Delftware ornaments decorate the tree (detail, ABOVE).





ABOVE: Button-back silk chairs in the dining room. The carved-*armoire*-turned-china closet was pieced together from parts by Euro Trash custom furniture designer Phil Black. LEFT: Fresh paperwhites mark each place setting.

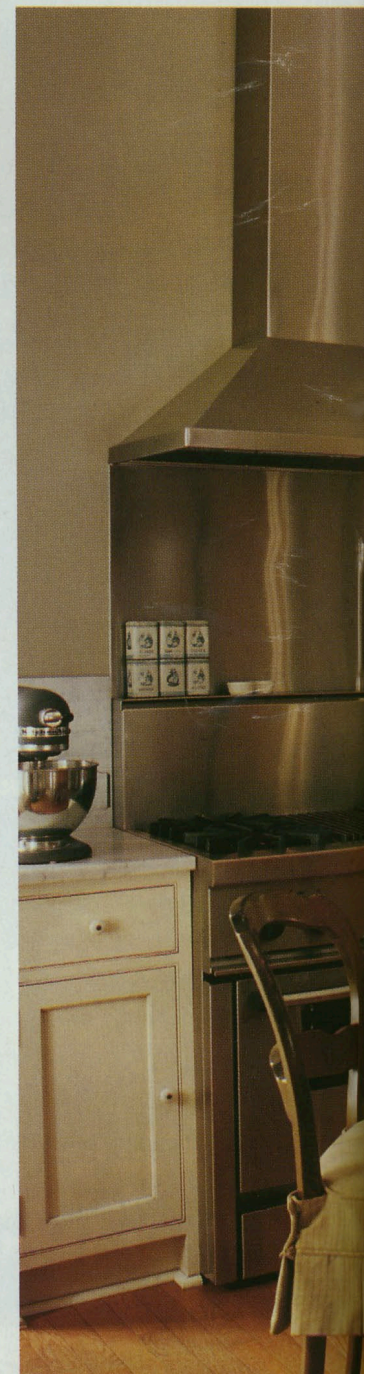
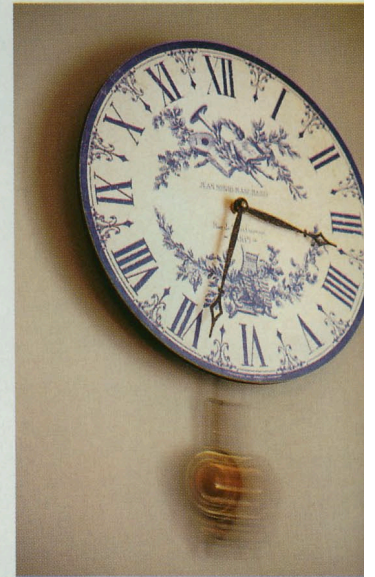


STURDY CAR CHUGS SLOWLY ALONG A COUNTRY road in the Belgian countryside, its interior bulging with sundry cabinet parts, mirrors, light fixtures, and compotes. It's a typical Euro Trash buying trip, with Annie or her longtime Dutch buddy Wendy Weper at the wheel, scouting out such unlikely locations as chicken coops and construction sites across France, Belgium, and Holland. In turn, Wendy often visits stateside, especially for the holidays. On one memorable Christmas Eve, blizzard raging outside, she entertained the Brahler kids with stories of the Dutch Santa, Sinterklaas, and his sidekick, Zwarte Piet, who carries off bad children to work in a toy factory in Spain for a year. "You should have seen their expressions!" says Annie, herself of Dutch descent. "Especially when Wendy admitted that she'd once spent time at the toy factory herself."

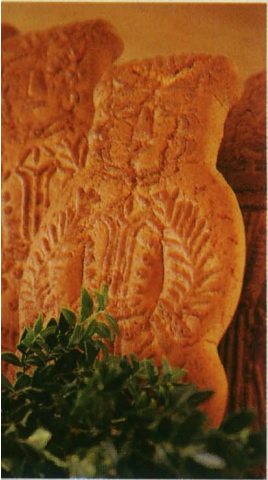


Throughout the house and grounds, a pale palette prevails. TOP RIGHT: Compotes full of white chocolate initials and gingerbread-like pepernoten cookies, which are thrown during Dutch holiday parades. ABOVE: Jingle bell wreath by artist Cody Foster. LEFT: Vintage French tapestry purse. BOTTOM LEFT: The porch is decorated for the season with candles, which Annie lights nightly.





Friends thought Annie was crazy to remove cherry cabinetry and brand-new countertops from the kitchen, but she wanted the space to have an authentically old Dutch look. TOP LEFT: Antique tiles from the Netherlands decorate the fireplace surround. ABOVE: Vintage spice tins and a Delft-inspired pendulum clock continue the blue-and-white theme. LEFT: A photo of her Dutch grandparents near the kitchen sink. OPPOSITE: "Doll-shaped cookies are a real treat in Holland. They smell and taste like black licorice." Twin refrigerators placed side by side with opposite hinges create an armoire look. Down cushions on chairs disguise broken rush seating.



“Too many times,
YOU WALK INTO
THE KITCHEN
of an old house and
it’s jarringly new.”

—ANNIE BRAHLER





TOP LEFT: Euro Trash designer Phil Black transformed a table with good lines into a pier mirror in Isabel's room (seen in reflection). ABOVE RIGHT: Tins and hatboxes hold ponytail elastics and other girl-ish goodies. The window treatment was fashioned from a bolt of linen from a fabric store. RIGHT: Following in Mom's footsteps, Isabel studies classical ballet.



URING THE HOLIDAYS AND THROUGHOUT THE year, Isabel is on ornament-sorting duty. Whenever Annie dusts off a charming decoration in a second-hand shop, it's Isabel's job to place it in the proper tub according to color.

"She really understands the beauty of vintage," Annie says. She tells a story of how one day when Isabel was a preschooler driving along with Mom, she spotted a broken-down chaise curbside and pointed out, "That's a pretty chair." Annie agreed and stuffed it in the car, pleased to have an accomplice.



Isabel's bed once belonged to Princess Lillian of Belgium. "It's the only thing of provenance in my home—I usually don't care about pedigree," Annie says. When she found it at a

European estate sale, it was painted a screaming yellow. Inspired by a friend, designer Nancy Schultz, she redid it in creamy tones.



