

# LIVABLE *Luxury*

OLD, WORN PIECES FROM  
ABROAD ARE GIVEN NEW  
LIFE WHEN DESIGNER ANNIE  
BRAHLER IMPORTS  
EUROPEAN STYLE AND  
SENSIBILITY INTO A  
MIDWESTERN HOME.

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SOMETIMES, PROVENANCE, MATTERS. Sometimes, the value of an item rests entirely on the ability to track where it has been and what it was doing there. Delicate egos and thousands of dollars—millions, occasionally—can rely on provenance. In other cases, there's EuroTrash and the functional beauty it lends to a Jacksonville, Ill., home.



**[opposite] NATURAL LIGHT FROM THE LARGE WINDOWED ALCOVE**

illuminates the formal living room filled with one-of-a-kind antique imports. The stunning crystal chandelier and the pair of white-linen-upholstered bergère are from Belgium. Dutch footstools are upholstered in the same dark-chocolate-colored velvet as the gilt French settee. Ornate plasterwork molding, original to the house's Beaux Arts renovations, frame the room's high ceilings.

**NATURAL BEAUTY KEEPS A SPACE FEELING APPROACHABLE**

without sacrificing sophistication. Flowers, shed antlers and taxidermy birds inspire wonder on top of an occasional table.





### TREASURED EUROTRASH

When Dutch transplant Annie Brahler named her interior design and antique import business EuroTrash, she put her tongue firmly in her cheek to refer to literal European trash. Not one to balk at back-alley treasures, she brings exquisite cast-offs to the States from Holland, Belgium and France. Flea markets, barn sales and the like yield an abundance of anonymous furnishings and accessories that boast the quality and integrity of true historic craftsmanship. "I love authenticity; it's real and not fabricated," Annie says. She prefers genuine, original designs to mass-market reproductions. To her, there is beauty and soul in age and years of use that do not exist in recent copies.

Annie uses these antique pieces in all her design work, for clients as well as her family's own personal use. Although marble-topped tables and velvet upholstery may seem intimidating, the designer insists on putting beautiful furnishings to work in their intended way. A posh antique bergère is still a chair for everyday use and is not at all off-limits to children and pets. "Things are meant to be used, not revered," Annie says. "They are not important in life. Family is important. Use the beautiful china. If a dish chips, that scar is a part of its story now." This Jacksonville, Ill., home is a perfect example of Annie's approach to livable luxury.



**[opposite] MAGNOLIA BLOSSOMS** and branches rise dramatically from a modern, clear glass vase. Look inside and you'll see a piece of coral acting as a natural juxtaposition to the bust. Gilt details and the large mirror add warmth to the vignette.

**THE LIBRARY HOSTS** many volumes of randomly arranged, leather-bound books. These shelves are not too sacred for eager readers and offer encouragement to pluck a good novel out of the collection. A pair of velvet-upholstered *fauteuil* flank the built-in bookcase and offer a plush spot to sit.



**OPEN FLOOR PLANS ARE A SOMEWHAT MODERN CONCEPT,** but the wide doorways that allow spaces to seamlessly flow from one room into the next are original to the home. The foyer welcomes guests with a first impression as to what can be expected throughout the home: white trim, ornate furnishings and plenty of gilding.

*“GOLD IS MY PERSONAL NEUTRAL.”*



**THE FAMILY STARTS  
THE DAY IN THE  
BREAKFAST ROOM**

surrounded by the warmth of provincial ambiance. The cane-back chairs and naturally finished china cabinet were imported from Holland. The collection of blue Delftware harkens back to Annie's Dutch roots.

**[opposite] THIS BUILT-  
IN GLASS CABINET**

showcases the glamorous collection of gold and white china. When serveware is as lovely as these pieces, it's a shame to keep them hidden out of sight. Behind glass, they are kept dust-free yet still visible for appreciation.



**UPDATES AND UNIMPROVEMENTS**

Built in 1868 as an Italianate villa, the home was renovated in 1901 in the Beaux Arts style, which had become popular in the U.S. after making its way from France. Over the years, the home was lovingly maintained with the exception of the kitchen, where renovations in the 1980s included imposing dark cherry wood cabinetry. "The contrast between the lightness of the home and the darkness of the kitchen was jarring," Annie recalls. Although these updates were not yet outdated, she felt they had to go.

Under the designer's creative influence, the newly remodeled kitchen fits the home's historic aesthetic. A crystal chandelier sparkles above a unique center island, custom made by combining an antique demilune chest with a cabinet for storage and extra countertop workspace. Modern stainless steel appliances offer convenience without distracting from the room's character. Renovations also revealed a previously walled-off fireplace that is once again put to use. The previous kitchen may have been functional, but Annie could not imagine truly enjoying it. "Trust your gut," she urges. "Be confident to use a bold look that gives you butterflies instead of settling for something safe that you aren't attached to." The results will be worth it, she assures.





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### GILT COMPLEX

Other rooms in the home did not require renovations, just redecorating. Trademark details of the Beaux Arts style—ornamental plasterwork, parquet flooring and elegant moldings—inspired Annie to find furnishings that could suit the home’s grandeur. Her treasure hunts abroad delivered crystal chandeliers, oversized mirrors and gilded items in abundance.

The foyer provides an accurate first impression. Guests are greeted by an oversized gold mirror that sits on a gold-and-white table underneath a glittery gold-colored chandelier. “Gold is my personal neutral,” Annie says. The phrase is one of her mottos and a dominant motif that unifies the home’s overall design. The rich metallic hue enhances the feeling of opulence, but the frequency of use throughout the home makes it feel familiar rather than gaudy.

### CREATIVE CONTRASTS

Annie has other methods of creatively contrasting splendor with comfort in a way that seamlessly blends both together. She chooses to decorate with a limited color palette, beginning with crisp white and antique gold with shades of brown and gray layered in. White surfaces amplify natural light, high ceilings and spacious rooms to make them appear even brighter and larger.


Conversely, earthy neutrals like brown and gray have a grounding effect that makes items or surfaces feel cozy and approachable. The natural finish of a timeless china cabinet gives the breakfast room a provincial ambience that is perfect for the place where the family starts their day.



**[opposite] DELICATE BLOSSOMS** sit pretty on top of the breakfast table. These shades of blue reference the nearby collection of Delftware.

**FUNCTION COMES FIRST** in the kitchen, but the necessities do not skimp on style. The room was remodeled to suit the home’s historic flair with custom cabinetry and focal point pieces like the center island, which offers plenty of storage space. The chandelier is a Dutch import and other touches, such as the gray-painted floor and Delft ceramics, remind Annie of her homeland.





**THE DINING ROOM PROVIDES** an open and airy space for entertaining. Wainscoting, gold accents and the crystal chandelier reference the rich formality of the home's history. Linen chairs, curtains and the lavender-colored table runner lend the space a relaxing feel.

“THINGS ARE MEANT  
TO BE USED,  
*NOT REVERED.*”





**THE FRENCH BEDROOM**

sprung forth from a Francophile's dreams, with imports such as the plush Louis XVI bed and ornate gilded mirror. A sitting area, composed of two arm chairs and a pedestal table, makes the space feel like a suite.

**"DON'T JUDGE AN ITEM'S ORIGINS, WHETHER YOU FOUND IT BY THE DUMPSTER OR AT AN AUCTION HOUSE, IF YOU LOVE THE WAY IT LOOKS, IT DESERVES TO BE IN YOUR HOME."**



**HIGH-CONTRAST NEUTRALS**—a thunderous shade of gray paired with crisp white—provide a bold but relaxing atmosphere in the master bathroom. The modern lines of the all-glass shower pair unobtrusively with the antique flair of the reclaimed claw foot bathtub. Overhead, a chandelier sparkles with bubble-shaped crystals.

When decorating with a limited color palette, visual variety comes from texture. The differences in appearance between glittering crystals, matte Belgian linen and the shine of polished marble offer necessary dimension where color is absent. Annie mixes nature-made wonders with ornamental accessories, high-gloss lacquer with rustic wood and modern glassware among her ages-old antiques to keep spaces feeling balanced.

**FUNCTION OVER FORM**

Balance and beauty may be important, but Annie argues that function should always be the first consideration. "Things need to work the way they are supposed to and fit the lives of the people who live with them," she advises, reminding that fine things should be practical and serviceable for everyday life.

In all decorating endeavors, Annie recommends a combination of patience, tenacity and dispensing with any pretentious feelings toward furnishings. "Give yourself permission to love the things you are drawn to," she says. "Don't judge an item's origins, whether you found it by the dumpster or at an auction house, if you love the way it looks, it deserves to be in your home." ■

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