

# Designer uncovers global treasures

## Finds from Spain, France and England make their way to Los Altos

By Gina Viscusi Elson

**N**o matter where I go or what I am doing, design is always on my mind. I just cannot stop searching for that perfect piece to complement a house. I love finding new and old objects, including art, antiques, furnishings and accessories. In my travels, I often stop to marvel at a beautiful building or sneak a peek into a hole-in-the-wall art gallery.

For the past couple of years, I have been drawn to Europe to find what is new in the international design world. Last summer I took a trip to Europe with my 8-year-old son. We traveled from Lake Como to Tuscany, stopped by Andalusia, Spain, ambled through Paris, spent a great week on the Picardy Coast in France and then made the beautiful drive from the forests of Dartmoor to Cheshire in England. I found inspiration everywhere and let my interior designer's mind run free.

### Stunning fabrics in Lake Como

I found that Lake Como has been a muse to artists for hundreds of years. There are many textile artists hidden in the steep hills of the once-active volcano who spend hours sketching from their balconies overlooking the lake. These artists draw inspiration from nature and the daily wonders that unfold. They sell the rights to their one-of-a-kind patterns for milling into fabrics used as pillows, bedding, drapery, reusable bags, stationery and more.

I recognized several artists' works from the fine fabrics I had purchased through the years. It was wonderful to put a face to the art. In fact, many of the patterns I recognized have found their way into the beautiful pillows procured for my interior-design business.

### One-of-a-kind furniture in Andalusia

In Andalusia, I found beautiful boutique, handmade, quality furniture crafted mostly of wood, with intricate carvings and hand-painted details. Although the area is known for its ceramics and sherry, the government has begun subsidizing its furniture craftsmen to enable them to promote their goods internationally. When importation begins, these unique items made by talented artists will introduce an exceptional addition to the design world.

### Colorful houses and nature's patterns define the Picardy Coast



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GINA VISCUSI ELSON  
Artists are inspired to create colorful artwork for textiles, like the one above from the hills of Lake Como.

**T h e**

Picardy Coast of France is a delight.

You can drive from the country to the coast in 30 minutes. The inhabitants of the coastal area exhibit a natural sense of design. Brightly colored houses line coastal towns where crumbling castles sit near restored chateaus that make the countryside curiously stately.

The Picardy Coast is a shining example of balance: the new with the old, the crumbled with the standing, the white with the black. Drives down the coast, scallop shells collected at the beach and long walks through the mussel farms created wonderful memories for my son and me. Watching the water roll away from the mussels as they made graphic patterns in the sand was like watching nature create textiles.

### Parisian blend of old and new

Strolling Paris is like being in a storybook. The city is so rich with design and history that it is impossible not



Inspired by Parisian homes, interior design can seamlessly incorporate antiques with modern pieces, left. Animal portraits, above, are a popular home decoration in England.

to be inspired with mounds of fresh ideas. French Oak floors, laid out in the chevron pattern created by craftsmen hundreds of years ago, can be found in many homes. The traditional flooring has made its way to the United States. French Oak contains a natural tannin that caramelizes with heat, which produces the color of the floor. Thus it requires no staining. Once installed, all it needs is a bit of oil to bring out the natural luster. What an incredible find.

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Quirky yet artistic signature artwork and furniture can define and personalize a home interior.

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Brightly colored walls, whimsical asymmetrical rugs, oversized art next to petite antiques and repurposed industrial machine parts made into lamps work together to perfect the play of historical architecture with eclectic and contemporary interiors.

**English portraits, enduring memories**

We traveled from Dartmoor to Cheshire, stopping for several days to enjoy the coast of Devon. The interiors were warm, inviting and full of family memories. Art plays a big role in decorating in these parts, as homes are often passed down through generations. I especially love the oil portraits, so classic in their nature, that add history to a room.

Clever designers harvest the pub signs that line the alleys for clients' homes. The images and messages of pub signs usually revolve around food, drink and lodging, making them great additions to dining and family rooms.

The English, like Parisians, love their pets, and animal art is an easy find, especially if you like horses and other farm animals. These whimsical pieces add humor to any space and are great to hang in unexpected areas.

I enjoy traveling the globe to discover unique items to bring back for my clients. Life is a story – tell yours in style.

*Gina Viscusi Elson owns Viscusi Elson Interior Design, 147 Main St. in Los Altos. For more information, visit [www.veinteriordesign.com](http://www.veinteriordesign.com).*

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