

# Creating château chic

The mix of grand period architectural features with contemporary interiors is a winning combination, reports Faith Warn



Château du Percy



Less is more: in both properties, the bedrooms are simple but stylish (Percy above, Bellegarde below)



Restoring a dilapidated château or small stately home in France is a challenge. Combining original architectural features with sumptuous yet practical interiors is an inspired achievement. Two young families in different parts of the country have done exactly this – and both are now running their properties as successful gîtes.

The interiors they have created are essentially contemporary, with antique touches and artistic use of colour. Their simplicity allows the beauty of each

“ Our aim was to create a contemporary feel within this grand period building ”

house's original features to shine and creates an irresistibly luxurious feel that is at the same time serviceable, practical and uncluttered.

## Belle regard

Domaine de Bellegarde is a late 19th-century stately home in Soustons, near Biarritz on the Atlantic coast. Its owners, Quintin and Marilyn Hetherington, bought the property in 2005 as a business venture and now live on the estate with their two small children, running the Domaine as a luxury holiday property through the French Connections website.

The house boasts original parquet flooring and an impressive oak staircase. Downstairs are a grand reception area with wood-

The interiors are essentially contemporary, with antique touches and artistic flourishes (below left Bellegarde bedroom, below right Percy lounge)







Domaine de Bellegarde

The dining areas are grand but not intimidating – perfect for a romantic meal or a family get-together (above left Percy, below Bellegarde)

panelled walls, dining room, billiards room and kitchen while upstairs are seven double bedrooms and one suite.

"We took inspiration for the interiors from Corsica, Sardinia and Tuscany as well as from south-west France," explains Quintin, "and furnished the rooms from Britain, Belgium, French *brocantes* and local shops. Our aim was to create a contemporary feel within this grand period building."

#### Colour and character

In the heart of Burgundy wine country, *châtelaine* Lara Lunow and her husband Pauwl have restored the fairytale Château de Percy to create a dreamlike retreat. They decided to live with two daughters in the main part of the house and run a three-bedroom *gîte* in its romantic south tower, also let through French Connections.

Here, every room has its own colour scheme and character, the floors are of marble from Oman and the curtains on the ground floor are silk. The decorations are modern with antique accents and on the walls hang contemporary paintings by international artists. Lara's collection of antique china now finds pride of place in a charming tearoom and she, too, has been



resourceful in sourcing her interiors.

"Our furniture is a blend of antiques and modern design that we've collected over the years on our travels – from the village of Woburn Abbey to art galleries in Leicester via *brocantes* in France, antique shops in The Hague and even the *souq* in Muscat." □

Both properties can be rented for holidays and short breaks through French Connections

Tel: 01580 819303

[www.frenchconnections.co.uk](http://www.frenchconnections.co.uk)

(Domaine de Bellegarde: property 104682; Château de Percy: property 147703)



## Tips for creating modern *gîte* interiors in a period building

- Reveal and restore every possible original architectural feature
- Use the best quality build materials you can afford
- Keep features and furniture in proportion with the height and size of the room
- Choose colours that are muted without being dull
- Decorate each bedroom in a unique style and colour, but choose from a limited palette range theme. Lara has used café brown, moss green, yellow, light green and beige, while Quintin chose ochre washes for texture and toning shades.
- Research local hotels and grand houses for ideas
- Keep fabrics plain to appeal to a wide range of tastes
- Use art imaginatively for colourful focal points
- Use removable upholstery covers for easy cleaning
- Work on the principle 'less is more' and avoid overstuffing rooms with furniture and ornaments