

FRENCH LEAVE

Full of history – Napoleon stayed here – but once neglected, this villa is now an exquisite retreat on the sun-drenched Côte d’Azur

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EXTERIOR

'We are close to Italy so you can see lots of Italian influences in this region. The olive green paint blends with the trees and creates a calm ambience,' says owner Madelon.

Exterior in KEIM 9385: try Eddy exterior masonry, Farrow & Ball





OUTDOOR AREA

Shade can be found under a tree or in the pavilion that houses a kitchen and dining area. This is where the family spend most of their time during the summer.

Try the Zamna indoor/outdoor weave **fabric** in Pool, Zinc

Madelon Oudshoorn Spaargaren and her husband first laid eyes on their French Riviera house back in 1999 via a friend who was looking for projects in the region for interested parties. It was a house with history, not far from the famous Route de Napoleon. Napoleon himself stayed in this house, which was his admiral's family home at the time, when he and his fleet were stationed in Villefranche.

But time had not been kind; the house that greeted Madelon and her husband was poorly maintained, its layout bland and rooms small. Not to mention the grounds of the property, which resembled a junkyard more than a garden. Nevertheless, the couple, who aren't averse to renovation projects back home in the Netherlands, immediately saw the potential of the old French country house. 'The house was a mess,' says Madelon, who runs and owns her own design studio, MOS Interiors. 'But we saw straight away that this could be an amazing place for a large family. Moreover, we just love to sink our teeth into a project.'

This was indeed a big project. Everything needed fixing. A construction team started a renovation that lasted almost three years: years in which Madelon spent a lot of time in France, managing the contractor and his team. Luckily, it was familiar territory for Madelon: her mother lives just down the mountain.

Because of their many relocations, Madelon and her family have built up quite a furniture collection. 'I'm not in favour of throwing out everything and starting over each time. I love the challenge of seeing what I can do with existing elements. Put a new fabric on a chair or give an antique cupboard a lick of paint, and they're like new again,' explains Madelon.

Madelon mixed old pieces that came with the house, with pieces from their own. Then she added new items from all kinds of design stores and finds from Troc de L'île (a French thrift shop/flea market). The results: an interior where Provençal meets contemporary, with modern lighting and a kitchen table by Piet Hein Eek. For the outdoor furniture, Madelon chose pieces from Dedon mixed with handcrafted pieces by Moroccan craftsmen from a local store.

The wild terrain around the house was completely redesigned with walls, stairways and pathways made with stones from the area. 'The house came with a pool but there was nothing surrounding it. It was an abyss,' Madelon shares. Today, there's a fully-fledged outdoor kitchen with fireplaces inside and out.

A few years after the initial renovations, the upper floor was redesigned to accommodate the children growing up. The small bedrooms were merged into suites with a boutique hotel vibe. The house now has eight spacious bedrooms and five bathrooms. The main bedroom used to be three separate rooms, which Madelon and her husband turned into one.

The most important thing was that it had to be a real family home, where everyone feels good. 'I like big furniture with room for lots of people, which is perfect for family and friends coming and going all the time,' says Madelon. 'We put a lot of work and love into this house, and it has become a permanent fixture in our lives. In the Netherlands, we move a lot, but this is where we've seen our children grow up. I think it would be amazing to have a family wedding here. The house is perfect for that, with the rose arch running along the house. So romantic.' 🌹

■ mosinteriors.nl

“THERE ARE SEATING AREAS AND TERRACES ALL AROUND THE HOUSE – PERFECT FOR WHEN THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE AND YOU WANT TO WITHDRAW TO A QUIETER SPOT”

DINING SPACE

The outdoor pavilion has a fireplace made of stone from the surrounding area.

Try the Hancock extending zinc dining table. Barker and Stonehouse. Try the Grand rattan hessian lined log basket. The Willow Basket





KITCHEN IN OUTDOOR PAVILION
Madelon designed the tiles herself over 20 years ago when the family first bought the villa. The cupboard (above right) is an old butcher refrigerator, which Madelon found in a thrift store.

For similar **wall tiles**, try the Harlequin Quarter wall tiles in Navy, Your Tiles. For similar **floor tiles**, try the Square Tile terracotta tiles, Handmade Terracotta Tile Company. For bistro **chairs**, try Fermob

MAIN KITCHEN
An old French bread rack that came with the villa is now used to store piles of crockery. The cook space leads through to a lounge area. 'In a holiday home, you need to be able to sit and relax with many people,' says Madelon.

For a similar storage **rack**, try 1stDibs





MEET THE DESIGNER/OWNER

Madelon Oudshoorn Spaargaren shares her style inspiration

GO-TO DESIGN I love using lots of fabrics in my projects. It's also important that I mix and match those pieces or objects that are important to my clients with new – combining design with vintage.

FAVOURITE CREATIVE Serge Hautvas, a Belgian art painter. His creativity is mind-blowing.

YOUR MENTOR Suzanne Loggere from Loggere Wilpower. We became friends when she helped with my first project. She told me to turn professional as I had unique taste – I haven't been without work since I did.

SECRET ADDRESSES I love to visit vintage markets in person, as well as sourcing online via Dutch sites such as whoppah.com and bestwelhip.nl.

A HOME SHOULD BE...

Warm, homely and personal.

BEDROOM

Arched wardrobes were chosen to echo the windows. 'I often start my designs with a fabric I totally fall for,' says Madelon. The curtains informed the monochrome aspects of this scheme, while the villa's lush surroundings influenced the vibrant green.

For a similar paint colour, try Sage & Onions, Little Greene

BATHROOM

This fresh space combines a traditional bathing space and a wet room-like area.

Try Glass Square clear white mosaic tiles, Walls and Floors





TERRACE

This is one of the many inviting lounge spaces around the house. The furniture is handmade by Moroccan craftsmen from the area. Madelon decorated all of the outside areas with cushions and fabrics from Ghana and Morocco.

Try LinenBeauty for similar plain and stripe linen **fabrics**

POOL

When Madelon and her husband took on the villa, the property's terrain was rugged and uncultivated. They designed and constructed pathways, stairways and terraces. They also completely redeveloped the area around the pool.

Try The Lantern Warehouse for large outdoor **lanterns**

