Architect Gregory Palmer fashions an Old World-style manor house in Vienna for a family of five.

Text by LINDA HALES | Photography by GORDON BEALL
The great room serves as both living and family room. Niermann Weeks’ Avignon chandelier and a cast-stone Normandy mantel by Francois & Co. express a French accent. Faux suede from Osborne & Little covers the sofa; pillow fabrics are from Schumacher and the rug is by Tamarian.
Visitors to Guy and Angie Paolozzi’s Vienna home may be forgiven for feeling transported to the French countryside. The first glimpse, through an allée of zelkova trees, reveals a stone manor more typical of Northern France than Northern Virginia, with a castle-ready tower anchoring one end.

The house, designed by architect Gregory L. Palmer, a principal of Harrison Design, “fits like a glove” on its sloping five-acre site in a riparian wetland crossed by a rippling run. “The setting could easily be transplanted to France with a little change in vegetation,” says Palmer from his base in Naples, Florida. He came to the clients’ attention in 2005 as the architect of a Virginia show house; Angie and Guy Paolozzi, who is a land developer and small business owner, eventually invited him to design a French-accented dwelling to fit their site. The result, completed a few years ago, is an elegant but relaxed “country house” rooted in the timeless solidity of Normandy and Brittany, with touches of sunny Provence. Historical accuracy is honored in the details, but the spirit is spiced with 21st-century comforts required by an energetic family of five.

The impression is old, yet new. The exterior of Lueders limestone was craft-cut to expose natural veining. The steep slate roof was laid in staggered butts to suggest age-old handwork. The front façade, with its parade of arched double doors and Provençal blue shutters, hints at the house’s mythical French origin.

The layout, encompassing 14,142 square feet on three floors, is all American. With two teenagers and a youngster in elementary school, the Paolozzis desired five bedrooms, six full bathrooms and three half-baths, a lower-level theater and game-room complex, plus a mudroom and back stairs near the car court.

A classicist known for Old World finesse, Palmer imagined an authentic French farmhouse expanded over generations. At its core, the dwelling is a rectangular prism with extensions “added” for dining, guest quarters, a study and a pair of two-car garages. Reclaimed timbers crisscross ceilings, but the pièce de résistance is a 52-foot-long, groin-vaulted gallery fronting the farmhouse core.

The rustic kitchen (above) serves as central command for a busy mother of three. A La Cornue range is placed against a wall of Lueders limestone, also used on the home’s exterior, suggesting the long-ago outer wall of a farmhouse. The statement-making island is topped with Calacatta marble. The adjacent breakfast room (opposite) connects to the loggia.

front of the house, it’s fairly traditional from a proportion standpoint,” Palmer explains. “As we roll to the back, we’ve opened it up with large metal doors. It’s still very classical, but you never would have had these doors in a traditional house.”

The Paolozzis opted out of a formal parlor in favor of this plush-casual nexus, which flows into a 40-foot-long kitchen and breakfast room and onto an adjacent 32-by-19-foot arched stone loggia. “One of the best times to be out on the loggia is in the pouring rain,” observes Angie Paolozzi. For the kitchen, her essential command post, Portfolio Kitchens of Vienna produced double farm sinks, a La Cornue range and an oversized island topped with a 65-by-85-inch slab of Calacatta marble.

McLean designer Maria Galiani attributes her clean, neutral interiors to a client with “great taste and a great sense of style.” The first floor is a seamless visual journey in buff and blue. Floors are laid with Beaumanière limestone or wide wood planks. Walls were treated to a custom mix of stucco and Venetian plaster for a look that Galiani calls “not rustic, but not too formal.” Vintage lookalikes, such as mantels cast from antiques, blur the line between history and this new build by The Galileo Group. Only the dining room exudes formality, with pale painted molding and glass-fronted cabinets holding a collection of blue and white china.
The limestone walls of the loggia rise nearly 13 feet before reaching a vaulted timber ceiling. The 19-by-32-foot space with open arches overlooks the pool and woodlands. The flooring is reclaimed brick. Furnishings are from RH’s Provence Collection with pillows in Kravet outdoor fabric.

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The loggia, great room and first-floor guest suite form a U-shaped structure that embraces the pool terrace (above), designed by The Galileo Group with Chick Landscaping Inc. Plantings include boxwood, crape myrtle and European hornbeam trees; the pool deck and coping are travertine. Spirea and hydrangea shrubs (opposite) lead from the pool to a circle of Adirondack chairs around the woodland fire pit.

Throughout the first floor, fireplaces harken back to an era before central heating. Chandeliers styled as candelabras recall a time before electricity. Palmer, who takes historical authenticity seriously, offers a caution: “I tell people, ‘Don’t look at houses done in the last 50 years in this style. Go back to the roots, to the original designs and build from that. Create your own.’” But he is quick to add that historical style is only a beginning. “We wanted to be in this time and place,” Palmer reflects. “Certainly history is informing it, but we wanted this to be a modern house.”

SOURCES OF NOTE