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Old World Estate
on the Waterfront

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A House Created

Interior designer Arlene Critzos's new home on Whitehall Creek near Annapolis not only showcases her talents but also serves as an ideal setting to display her exceptional antique collection

By Kelli Rosen

Photography by Gordon Beall



Architect: Dave Riegel, Riegel Design Studio, Severna Park, Maryland

Builder: Lundberg Builders, Stevensville, Maryland

Interior Design: Arlene Critzos, Interior Concepts, Annapolis, Maryland

Landscape Architecture: Eric Blamphin, Arnold, Maryland



To achieve an Old World European style, Arlene Critzos chose a combination of stucco and stone with brick accents for her sprawling estate home on Whitehall Creek in Annapolis (these pages). Lush gardens accentuate the property, along with ample alfresco seating to enjoy the water views. Critzos acquired the antique French walnut door (opposite) some 15 years ago and kept it in storage hoping to utilize it someday.





To say that Arlene Critzos is an avid collector would be like saying Tiger Woods is a good golfer, or that Gandhi was a nice guy. Finding things, beautiful things, is what drives her. It's what she's great at—it's her passion. Take her 18th-century Belgian tapestry, for example, which in her prior home could not be viewed in its entirety because no wall was large enough to display it. Then there is the set of antique French doors from the mid-1800s that she bought at auction some eight years before she even thought about building a home, doors in desperate need of restoration. "I thought to myself, 'I have no idea what I'm going to do with them, but someday I'm going to do something,'" Critzos recalls.

That something has since morphed into a 17,000-square-foot "Old-World European" waterfront dream home near

Annapolis for a woman who knows how to dream big. Critzos is the founder and president of Interior Concepts, a 95-person interior design firm with clients scattered throughout the United States and abroad, in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. She is no stranger to large-scale projects. So when it came time to fashion a place for herself, her husband John and their two sons, she knew it had to be a space built from the ground up, not merely decorated.

One of the key elements that drove the architecture of the home was an 18th-century Belgian tapestry, which measures 13 by 14 feet. Critzos wanted it hung in a prominent location where it could be viewed in its entirety, so it now presides in her foyer where the ceiling is 17 feet high (above). Other pieces in the foyer include candle piers from an auction at F.W. Woolworth's home in Newport and a throw made from a papal vestment Critzos acquired in Rome. The loggia, designed as a gallery to showcase her collection, is a work of art itself, with intricate plaster detailing by Giannetti's Studio creating an Old World patina (opposite).





"We wanted to create a family home," says Critzos, "and I wanted to be able to express my talents in something that I could share. Every other home [we lived in] was a built home and I decorated it. This home was created."

Indeed, virtually everything in the home was either designed by Critzos—the mahogany-and-iron wine cellar doors, the plaster fireplace in the family room, the distressed dining room table—or found by her, from the French walnut front door salvaged from a Boston public library to the old Tibetan bed she converted into a coffee table to the Hungarian trough-turned-sink in her powder room.

The home was also designed around Critzos's lifestyle. She and her husband entertain frequently. Almost every weekend in the summer, friends and family visit, and it's "blue jeans and T-shirts and lots of water activities," she says. But in cooler months, the tone becomes more formal with sit-down dinners.

The most formal of all the rooms, the living room is large enough for two seating areas (right and above). Critzos didn't want vibrant color here so she chose hues of "fog and cream." The space is also a fine example of how she juxtaposes varying styles of furniture and accent pieces. "I've mixed a steel table with Louis XVI, and there are some Chinese pieces as well," she points out. "I have a little bit of everything."



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The living room is the most formal space in the home, with its neutral color palette and a variety of furniture and art pieces from different periods and countries. It's the ideal place for guests to congregate, especially considering the enormous windows that give way to spectacular water views.

Although the elegant dining room, with a large mahogany table for ten and a cozy European-inspired décor, is usually the room of choice for intimate gatherings with friends, Critzos will sometimes opt to host larger functions in the billiard room, which can seat upwards of 40 guests by adding a few skirted round tables and covering the billiard table with a walnut top. "It's a room that really expands," says Critzos. The room exudes warmth with its deep hues, plush upholstery and gabled ceiling with solid wood beams. Again, Critzos opts for a plethora of styles for this room, from an Old World fireplace to Gothic-inspired windows, candlesticks and lamps. Accent pieces, too, span the globe, from France to the Southwest. "There are lots of styles in here," she says, "and it just all works."

"The plan really began with the French doors," admits Critzos. "Because they're 12-feet-tall, you needed a 17-foot wall to carry them. John and I knew we wanted a great room/billiard room concept on the main floor. We thought the doors would be a great joiner from living room into great room," she says. So the doors, along with the tapestry and a turn-of-the-century English fireplace, were "key elements that drove the architecture."

By the time she contacted architect Dave Riegel, Critzos had the blocks of rooms already figured out. "I knew I wanted the living room in the middle of the house," she says, "because I know if it's on an end it never gets used. When it's in the middle it's the hub—and it went from there."

The 12-foot-high French doors separating the living room and billiard room actually drove the architecture of the entire home because they required a 17-foot wall to carry them. According to Critzos, the doors exhibit the very rare "silvered" form of art, and although the glass was in perfect condition when she bought them at auction, the iron and woodwork required painstaking restoration. After formal sit-down dinners, the couple often invites guests into the billiard room for dessert and after-dinner drinks.







David Riegel took my blocks and created this architecture."

Another key element Critzos insisted upon was the inclusion of a loggia. "I like them," she says. "I'm half Italian and half German. I studied a lot in Europe and lived there for a period of my life, and so the influence does come through. It's what you see and live; it's what becomes familiar. A loggia is not just a hallway; it becomes a gallery, a holding tank, if you will, for art."

Critzos is a firm believer in surrounding herself with what she loves; the result is a home that's warm and friendly—overflowing with family photos and collectibles that truly mean something. "I was an equestrian and love horses," she says. "So we have a fair amount of them around the house. It's part of creating a real home." She's also not afraid to juxtapose various types of furniture and styles. "My taste is so diversified. I love the classical but I also love the contemporary and the clean, the today finishes," she says. "Mix and

use what you love. It can all work together as long as you understand scale and balance."

Finding a piece you adore and figuring out a way to use it certainly became a mantra for Critzos throughout the building process. "This is what started the kitchen," she says, smiling and pointing to an old French butcher's counter from the late 1700s that now houses her kitchen sink. "When I bought this, it was lying in two pieces. It had, honest to goodness, an eighth of an inch of layered paint. You could not see any carvings; it was so thick with paint. For whatever reason, I loved it. I bought it and stripped it, and now it's in its original state. I used up a major amount of kitchen cabinet space by using it but I didn't really care."

The mother of two energetic boys, ages 11 and 13, Critzos is also steadfast in the notion that a home should be lived in. "I really don't like houses that become shrines," she says. "This is a very active house. So one of the key things for me



Critzos designed the distressed mahogany dining room table (opposite), while an 18th-century butcher's counter (above, at right) served as the inspiration for the kitchen's design. The family room (right) was intentionally designed to sustain the active lifestyle of Critzos's three sons: Fabrics are rugged, the floor is mottled and the accessories are virtually unbreakable. She designed the plaster fireplace mantel, which was then handmade by Giennetti's Studio.



was that every floor finish is variegated or mottled. Woods are all distressed or aged. The family room has a floor that can see no harm ever."

With nearly 10 acres to play with along Whitehall Creek, Critzos sagely makes the most of her geography. Working with landscape architect Eric Blamphin, she set out two criteria for the gardens. "I wanted half formal and half not," she says. "So there are some willowy, unstructured things and then there's structure."

She entertains outdoors so in addition to a pool and outdoor fireplace near the main home, there is a series of terraces by a pier area and beach, with grills and lots of tables for weekend get-togethers. The backyard landscape was also planned so that a large tent, along with a tunnel walkway from the home, could be set up for more formal gatherings. "It's all in the planning," she says. "People are not organized enough to start thinking about how they're going to live until it's too late. Organize the plan far in advance, that's the key. You can change the colors you want and you can change the furniture, but you can't change the layout, you can't change the life."

Even with her hectic schedule Critzos still finds time to pursue another passion: gardening. Near the front entrance to the home is her vegetable and herb garden. "We eat out of it from summer till January," she says, and adds this garden was the first phase of construction because they had to move out of their previous home and she insisted on transplanting her established raspberry and blueberry bushes.

Part of this garden, too, is a modest potting shed, a charming structure Critzos is proud to discuss. "This was really an old roadside shed that I refused to throw out," she beams. "I found very old wood, 75 to 80 years old from an old barn, and I covered it."



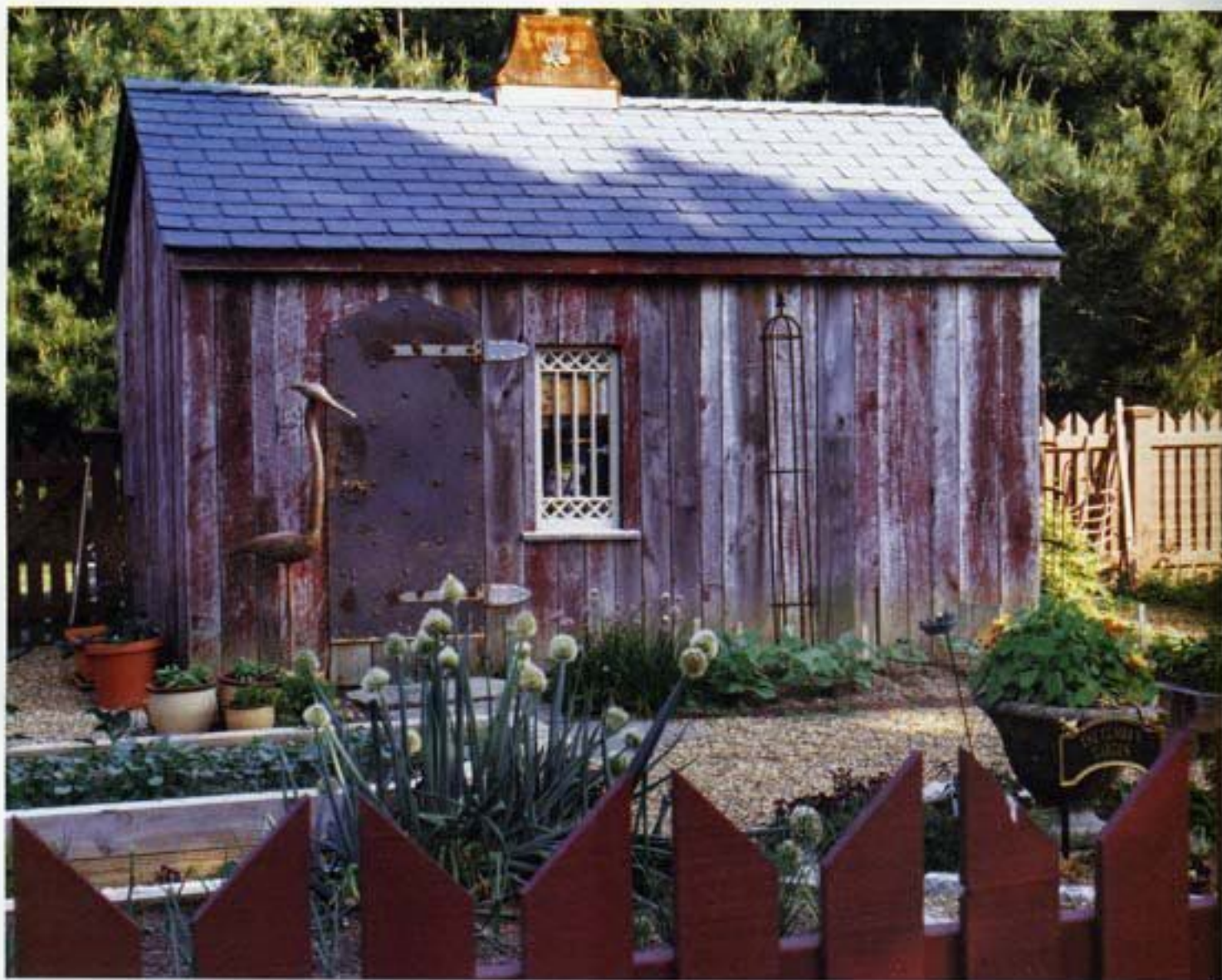


"OTHER THAN ART, I'M FINISHED. I'M HAPPILY FINISHED," CRITZOS SAYS. "IT'S VERY HARD TO DO YOUR OWN PROJECT. IT'S MUCH EASIER TO WORK FOR A CLIENT WHERE YOU CAN BE TOTALLY OBJECTIVE. OF COURSE, YOU'RE ALWAYS EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED BECAUSE YOU CARE ABOUT THE PROJECT, BUT WHEN IT'S YOUR OWN HOME, YOU KNOW THE WHOLE WORLD IS OUT THERE."



A "favorite" place for the entire Critzos family, the patio/sunroom (opposite top and top left) is a seasonal pleasure. It opens to the outdoor fireplace and pool, an area filled with guests almost every weekend in the spring and summer. A former equestrian, Critzos spotlights horses throughout her home. The patio mural (opposite bottom) was inspired by a town square in Salzburg, Austria, where 18th-century panels depicting horses are on display. Artists from Warnock Studios, who did the decorative painting throughout Critzos's home, recreated the magnificent creatures. Critzos worked with landscape architect Eric Blamphin to construct a formal garden area that complements her home's Old World style and displays her collection of sculptures and antique finials (bottom left).





RESOURCES

FOYER

19th-Century Belgian Tapestry & Candle Piers from F. W. Woolworth's Newport Home: Owners' Collection.

HALLWAY

Custom-Designed Plasterwork: Giannetti's Studio, Brentwood, MD.
Antique French Table & Two Antique Venetian Chairs Upholstered in Suede: Owners' Collection.

LIVING ROOM

18th-Century Over-Scaled English Sofa Upholstered in Caramel Velvet with Silk, Venetian 18th-Century Table With Marble Top, Sideboard with Custom Marble Top & Antique Sculpture: Owners' Collection.

BILLIARD ROOM

Red Wool Sofa: Owners' Collection. Pillows: Leather, Tapestry & Leopard.

DINING ROOM

Decorative Painting: Warnock Studio, Washington, DC. Custom Inlaid Dining Table: Arlene Critzos. Antique French Empire Chandelier: Owners' Collection.

KITCHEN

Custom Plaster Fireplace Design: Arlene Critzos. Plaster Hood & Fireplace Fabrication: Giannetti's Studio, Brentwood, MD.

PORCH (PAGE 144, TOP)

19th-Century Window as Art & Over-Scaled Marble Serving Table: Owners' Collection.

OUTDOOR LOGGIA (PAGE 144, BOTTOM)

Horse Mural Scene & Handpainted Ceiling: Warnock Studio, Washington, DC.

DINING AREA (PAGE 145, TOP)

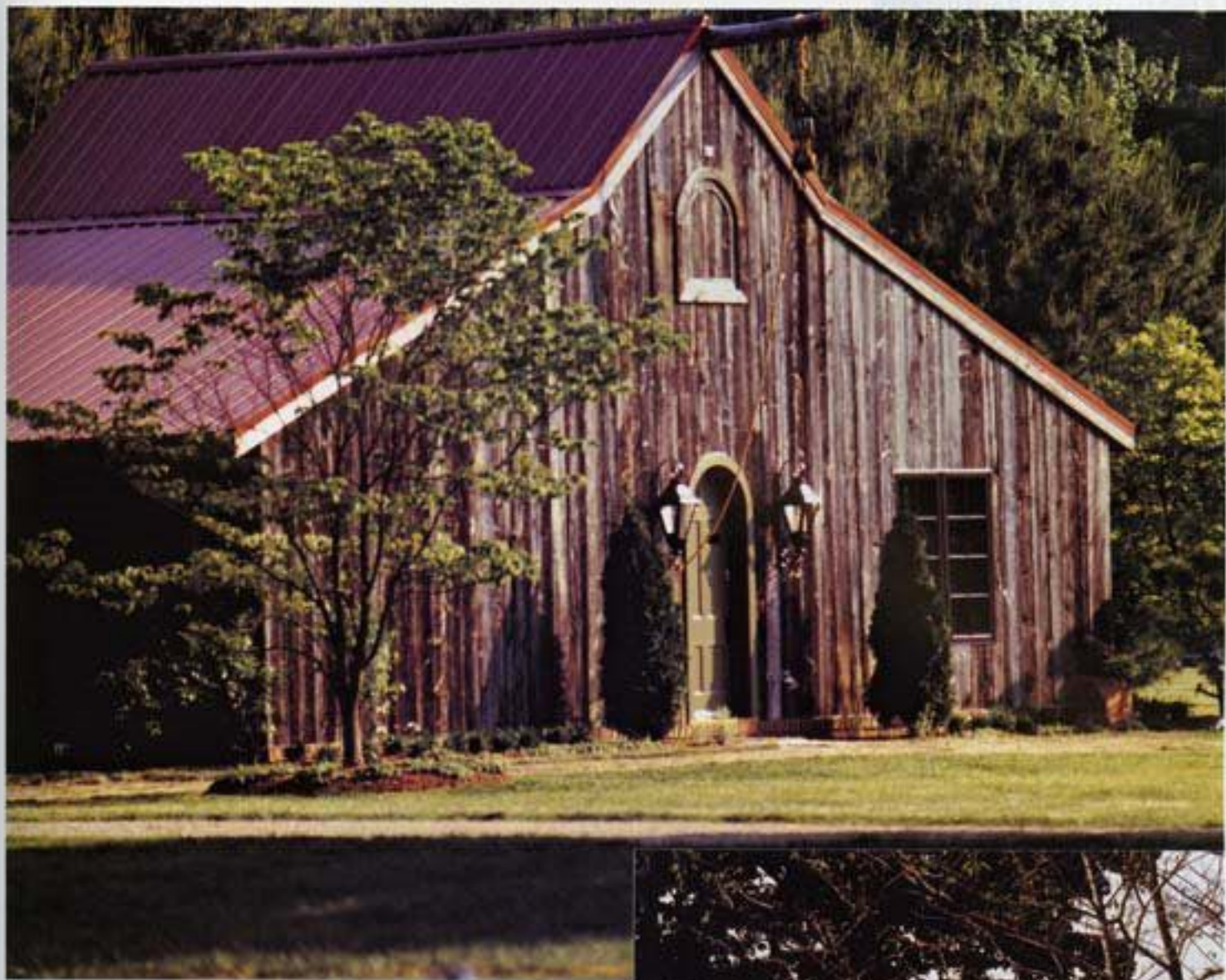
English Farm Table: Owners' Collection. Twig Fixture: Custom by Joe Niemann, Niemann Weeks, Washington, DC.

MASTER BEDROOM

Antique French Chandelier: Owners' Collection. Canopy & Drapes: Taile by Stroheim & Romann; Neutral by DuraLee. Sofa & Chaise: Henredon, Washington, DC. Cocktail Table: Tom Linson.

GUEST ROOM

Bedding: Italian Hand-Embroidered Linen. Antique Side Table & Ochre Handpainted Bed: Owners' Collection.



Critzos loves to cook and especially relishes the fact that many of her ingredients are grown in her very own herb and vegetable garden (opposite). The charming potting shed is actually an old roadside shack that's been clad in reclaimed wood and a slate roof. A French finial and antique vault door give it a pastoral look. Although the barn appears intentionally rustic on the outside (above), the interior is home to a fitness center used daily by Critzos and husband John. She works out each morning and he, a former karate champion, uses it for martial arts training. Water views abound from almost every vantage point in the backyard of the Critzos home. Situated on nearly 10 acres of land along Whitehall Creek, which opens up to the Chesapeake, there are ample seating areas to relax and enjoy the breathtaking sights (right). The property includes a pier, a beach and a series of terraces with tables and grills along the shoreline.

