

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

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**SMARTY**

Fashion flat  
in Paris

**ARTY**

Considered cool  
in Yorkshire

**HEARTY**

The good life in  
a French manor

Garden paths  
Coral fabrics  
Wire furniture

*shell mirror*



# PUT TO THE TEST IN THE GERS

*It only took a weekend for Karen Howes and Fritz von der Schulenburg to fall in love with and acquire Talaysac, a manor house in the Gers region of France. But there were testing - and pleasurable - years ahead of grappling with the difficulties of restoring a house from afar, as Karen Howes relates*

*Photography: Fritz von der Schulenburg*

*At the centre of the summer dining room is a local 18th-century marble table with stone base. By the door is a circular two-tier oak table laden with plaster objects; these, the framed cameos and the urn of Bacchus all came from Anthony Redmile. In the urn, which is perched on a 19th-century cupboard, are brass parchment holders. Terracotta tiles were laid during the restoration of the house; the bare plaster walls were varnished with three coats of matt varnish and two coats of gloss*



daunted by the financial implications of the restoration so far, this next construction necessitated the sale of our flat in London - an irony not lost on Fritz.

Every small detail becomes a major problem when exacerbated by distance, and trying to distil some of the *gardien's* more excited telephone calls put to the test all our powers of understanding and patience. I began to dread my weekly discussions from wherever we were around the world, the *gardien's* tone full of imminent disaster and stories of violent storms, trees and walls falling down, and problems with the builders.

Life in London became a series of rented flats, while the outbuildings at Talaysac, which made up most of its charm, were alternately restored or fell down. Our peaceful summers on the terrace were drowned out by the noise of the cement mixer, and the builder's taciturnity made any attempt at communication a battle.

Guests and family alike became involved in Talaysac's day-to-day progress, roped in to do anything from painting shutters to cooking the evening meal. One year we harvested the grapes in the small vine-

effect on the local inhabitants, with the insurance agent devising an amazing policy while under the influence of Fritz's best bottle of Macallans, and the landscaping team downing a series of miscellaneous malts in their combined enthusiasm for the project.

An uninvited guest who arrived one summer simply never left. As if to the manor born, Tâti, a demonstrative and affectionate Alsatian of indeterminate age and origin, moved in and took over. Not for him the constraints of the *gardien's* house. He preferred the comfort of George Sherlock's pink sofa in the study and the warmth of the big kitchen fire to his designated place as guard dog. The only member of the household to show a disinclination to carry out any duties, he would bark at the moon in a perfunctory manner and chase shadows around the garden, if only to dispel any suspicion we might harbour that he was not earning his keep.

Hot, lazy summers and winter days spent skiing in the Pyrenées; long lunches on the terrace and evenings around a crackling log fire, Talaysac was the focal point of a dream. Some dreams are destined to be shared ■

*Right: The bathroom adjoining one of Talaysac's five guest bedrooms. The Victorian bath was found in the garden of a local brocante and was 'given the Fritz treatment' - painted by him - as were the iron basin-table and the Regency-style screen. Above the table is a shell mirror by Blott Kerr-Wilson. The Pompeiiian-style prints are from a book*



