

# GASTRO CHÂTEAU

*The thriving culinary school at this majestic manor house in rural Normandy attracts guests from around the world*

*Words* FRANCES HEDGES

*Photography* ROBYN LEA/GMA IMAGES/LIVING INSIDE

*Styling* GRAHAM MOSS













**T**he 72-room Château Bosgouet in France's Normandy region isn't just a supersized holiday home. For Australian couple Jane and Peter Webster, who bought the property in 2005, it offered the means to turn a hobby into a professional venture. Passionate cook Jane now runs her own culinary school, The French Table, from the château: each year, guests pay for the privilege of tasting, and cooking with, the best regional produce as part of a week-long stay.

The Websters had visited about 30 French houses before they alighted upon Château Bosgouet, which charmed them with its Napoleon III architecture and 50-acre grounds. The home's proximity to Paris and the presence of good local schools helped make the prospect of relocating from Melbourne with four small children less daunting, though the move didn't go quite according to plan. The house was burgled the night before the family arrived and the fireplaces were ripped from the hearths; they all had to be replaced as part of a two-year renovation process.

Having lain vacant for a decade, the five-storey building was, as Jane puts it, 'in a bit of a mess'. Still intact, however, were the oak staircase risers – disguised beneath layers of ugly green paint – and the parquet flooring, which Jane polished back to life using a solution of linseed oil and turpentine. There were some unexpected discoveries, too, such as an antique desk found in the stables and reinvented as a dining table.

Jane calls the interior scheme 'eclectic', with influences ranging from French country style to Australiana. 'My dad was an antiques dealer, so he left a lot of furniture to us,' she explains. She has also inherited his love of collecting: old leather books and gilded clocks are displayed throughout the house. A chandelier created by a Parisian artisan takes pride of place in the hall, which leads through to the main dining and sitting rooms; the latter features original plasterwork with motifs of ribbons, flowers and flying Cupids. In the first-floor bedrooms, silk rugs bought from a travelling salesman add texture to the neutral backdrop.

The home's crowning glory is the basement-level Rosières commercial kitchen, from which Jane operates her cookery school during the three or four months of the year that the couple now spend at the château. Her mission, she says, is to 'give guests a taste of Normandy'.



**Opposite** Homeowner Jane Webster, who runs The French Table, hosts a programme of culinary events that includes cookery classes, suppers and outdoor picnics  
**This page** The house is set in 50-acre grounds, in which the family enjoy going for morning hikes








**This page** Jane's collection of gilded clocks complements the home's original cornicing and intricate plasterwork  
**Opposite** With its four-metre-high ceiling, the living room has ample space for big, comfortable sofas (especially popular with dog Peppie)









A photograph of a living room interior. In the foreground, a white sofa with a herringbone pattern and several white pillows is visible. To the left, a dark wood side table holds a glass teapot and a glass vase. In the background, a dark wood console table holds a clock and a vase of orange flowers. Large windows with white shutters and decorative ironwork are on either side of the console table. The walls are light-colored with decorative paneling.

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STYLE TO AUSTRALIANA





*Living room* Antique wooden side tables are laid with china tea sets and crystal decanters – the latter perfect for storing homeowner Peter's liqueur collection, which includes a bottle of 40-year-old Calvados, a regional speciality









*Dining room* During their stay at the château, guests are treated to lavish banquets featuring the finest regional produce and Champagne from Peter's cellar







**Kitchen** The fully equipped kitchen in the basement was initially not for sale, but Jane and Peter negotiated its inclusion as part of their property purchase. Now, Jane uses the space to run cookery classes for paying guests







THE HOME'S CROWNING  
GLORY IS THE ROSIÈRES COMMERCIAL  
KITCHEN IN THE BASEMENT






**Hallway** A grand oak staircase leads up to the first floor. Jane polished the risers by hand to restore the original wood

**Details** Original plasterwork featuring motifs of ribbons and flowers can be found throughout the property; one of the home's ten bathrooms

**Bedroom** A silk rug bought from a travelling salesman adds texture to the neutral backdrop







## SNAPSHOT

*Jane Webster, homeowner*

***The thing I love most about the house*** is the kitchen – not the huge commercial one but the small service kitchen next door. I can spend hours in there with the kids beside me.

***From the window*** I can see a beautiful view of the parkland.

***A country home would not be complete without*** an open fireplace – we have one in most of the main rooms.

***My favourite memory here*** is of enjoying a barbecue with my family, seated at the long table beneath one of the linden trees.

***My most treasured possession*** is an antique armoire that I inherited from my father.

***My best piece of interiors style advice*** is to surround yourself with things that you love.

***If I could change one thing,*** it would be to live in two places at once. Melbourne is a long way from Normandy!