

Kathryn Ireland's French Country Style



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Extract from an article by Kate Betts

Photographs by Emma Hardy

On a retreat at Kathryn Ireland's bohemian-chic house in France, T+L takes in farmers' markets, antiques shops, and plenty of local characters.

"Darling, it's detox or retox," Kathryn Ireland had told me when she tried to explain the purpose of the retreat, her plummy English accent emphasizing the *re* instead of the *de*. I

had been on wellness and weight-loss retreats before, at sterile-looking places hidden away in the mountains where the only daily offerings are hiking and a few grains of quinoa. But Kathryn's approach—a week of restorative yoga and antiquing at her house in the lush hills of France's Tarn-et-Garonne department, an hour north of Toulouse—sounded like Gallic nirvana...

As Kathryn told it, Tarn-et-Garonne, though one of France's poorest regions, was rich in characters. Everyone was here. Just this morning Kathryn had bumped into the charming ex-model and actor Daniel de la Falaise, who lives on a nearby farm. The actress Louise Fletcher had a house down the road. "Bob" De Niro was mentioned a few times. And Kate Moss had recently been spotted in the local 8 à Huit convenience store....

In addition to the local cast of characters, Kathryn had imported several specialists for the week: Georgia Coleridge, a friend from London, was a "cleaner." I imagined a doe-eyed English girl with a broom, but Georgia was a healer who had "cleaned" La Castellane of all lingering spirits and would hopefully sweep out my spiritual space, too. Jan Scott, a former movie producer from Los Angeles, specialized in spiritual baths served up in tubs of flower petals. Zaza Guirey, a willowy aristocratic beauty who was Kathryn's oldest friend from boarding school, practiced Zero Balancing and acupuncture...

We rolled into La Castellane just in time for a glass of rosé. A light dinner of tapas was spread out on the kitchen table—stuffed eggplant, potato tart, salad from the garden, and a potato-and-string-bean salad. For dessert we dug tiny spoons into pots of compote with crème fraîche and listened as that evening’s guest, Daniel de la Falaise, talked about his olive oils and honey. I had first met de la Falaise and his sister, Lucie, 20 years earlier in Paris. They were bright-eyed kids from Wales blessed with the looks, charm, and connections to pursue modeling careers. Lucie became the face of Yves Saint Laurent’s fragrance Paris; Daniel, an actor. But now he was living the Gallic dream, working as a private chef, photographer, and food writer, occasionally venturing up to Paris to cater a party.

The next day Zaza, Georgia, and I walked the long alleys of Daniel’s garden, snipping off flowers of sweet onion, basil, and tarragon. Dipping slices of sourdough into tiny pools of oil flavored with hints of basil flower and bay and chili and sipping fresh Goldruch apple juice, it was easy to imagine the life of a gentleman farmer in these rolling hills. All I needed was a jaunty straw fedora like Daniel’s and pair of smart riding boots.

On the last day I took a cooking class with Sidonie in the chef’s kitchen, with its enormous Aga stove and hodgepodge of utensils and pots. We made a vegetable *tian*, thinly slicing and then carefully layering eggplant, tomato, potato, and red and green peppers in a vegan mille-feuille. At sunset, we gathered in the kitchen garden to taste the sweet organic wine of Laurent Cazottes, a fourth-generation local vintner whose Poire Williams is a favourite of Kate Moss’s. While we were sipping aperitifs flavored with cherries, elderberry, and pear, Stuart had been decorating the barn with hundreds of votive candles. Over dinner, we toasted Kathryn and her hospitality, raising our final glass of Pétale de Rose.

As the late June moon rose up over the old oak trees and darkness settled in the valley below, we gathered around a bonfire. Georgia had instructed us to write three words on a piece of paper—three things we wanted to discard from our lives. We tossed sprigs of lavender and rosemary into the flames and their spicy and sweet scents filled the air.

La Castellane; kathrynireland.com; all-inclusive. \$\$\$\$\$