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**You
Turn Me On!
But Why?**



The science of love at first sight





A place in the country

Designer Richar found the ideal getaway, one that was trapped in time. He's a high-end kind of guy, but this 'farmette' suits him just fine.

WITH HIS 30-SOMETHING YEARS of design experience as one of the city's most recognized interiors gurus, Richar appreciates good bones. 🍷 So one weekend, he was driving around in the country near the Indiana-Michigan border and encountered a for-sale sign on a 10-acre property with a 19th Century barn and Victorian farmhouse. He made an unexpected stop. 🍷 "It reeked charm," says the designer, who had previously lived on weekends in a Michigan log cabin and later in a nondescript split-level. But this place spoke volumes. He immediately made an offer. 🍷 And though Richar's forte is high-end, luxe lifestyle furnishings and design, the humble architecture and setting clearly dictated how to rejuvenate the tired property. 🍷 "To me, it's about stepping back in time to a more innocent era, preserving a bit of the past," says Richar, whose own roots are French Canadian. Born Richard Johnson, he uses only his first name, with the French pronunciation "Ree-shar."

BY ELAINE MARKOUTSAS | TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY BILL HOGAN



Richar added arches to the windows of the existing porch. Bronze screens allow vistas of the lush gardens. Signed hickory rocking chairs are teamed with a tin-topped vintage wood desk. Opposite: Jason Whelan (left) and Richar relax near his 1958 Chevrolet Apache pickup. The designer also collects vintage cars, including a 1956 Chevy Bel Air and a 1957 Corvette, all red.

“What I enjoy most is the peacefulness.

The rarest commodity of the future
may be having space.”



A Chinese chest in the living room probably dates to the late 1800s. On it is a centuries-old antique grinding wheel from Africa. The tall, primitive ladder also is African.

The fixup was mostly cosmetic, although it did involve taking the rooms back to the bare brick and redoing drywall. “I basically reproduced what was there. I kept old hardware—it’s kind of like restoring a vintage car. The old doors, windows are part of the patina.”

No fancy kitchen here. Granite counters, shiny appliances wouldn’t be a good fit. So it was simple, white-painted cabinets with glass panes, and beadboard wainscoting.

“It’s a feeling,” he says. “Like a recipe. You throw in some spices—but it’s spontaneous. I have a gut feeling for what works together.”

Like Mix & Mingle, the New Buffalo, Mich., shop Richar co-owns with his business and life partner, Jason Whelan, the philosophy of furnishing is an engaging if not surprising melange. White linen slipcovers are both cottagey and modern, while large art canvases are mostly contemporary. African art reflects a rustic primitive quality; Chinese antiques lend a little more refinement.

There might be a little Christian Liaigre here, some woven chairs by the Parisian Christian Astuguevieille, which he snapped up as a close-out, with a hint of Biedermeier thrown in for good measure. He can’t help it. But it all works.

With its intimate footprint, dark waxed floors (the original fir, simply waxed in a rich coffee bean shade), light upholstery punctuated with 18th Century French tapestry pillows from Mike Bell Antiques (one must-have splurge that set him back thousands of dollars), the interiors spell drama.

Simplicity really is an overriding design theme. In the windows, for example, there are sheers, which hang on hand-forged iron rods, with roller shades for privacy.

“Basically, it’s just an unpretentious farmette, almost like Grandma’s house.” Just a little more sophisticated.

He was faithful to a nostalgic spirit of the garden as well. “As much as I would love a great Japanese garden, it’s not at all appropriate. This place is about hydrangeas, roses, old-fashioned flowers, plants that are indigenous to the area.”

Though he drops into the shop every so often, Richar says it’s Jason’s baby. The former graphic designer and illustrator learned the collectibles part of the business by going to auctions and working previously at Lakeside Antiques.

“When I’m here, I don’t want to work,” says Richar. “I unwind once I pay that first toll. It feels totally like being on a vacation, a relief of stress.” □

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Interior design: Richar, Richar Interiors, Chicago. **Landscaping:** Janice Kasper, North Range Perennials, LaPorte, Ind. **Sculpture by pond:** Ann Nathan Gallery, Chicago. **Screened porch:** Metal and wood table, vintage; signed hickory chairs through Richar Interiors; lanterns, vintage. **Living room detail:** 19th Century Chinese chest—Pagoda Red, Chicago; antique African grinding wheel, wood rabbit box, African ladder—Douglas Dawson, Chicago. **Living room area:** Shot at Mix & Mingle, 19169 W. U.S. 12, New Buffalo, Mich.



Clockwise from top left: Tea is served atop a table made from the flooring of an old garage. Richar found the twig iron chairs in L.A. and topped them with white leather cushions; bales of hay are like sculpture, Richar says. "It's my tribute to Monet"; at Mix & Mingle, the New Buffalo shop co-owned by Jason Whelan and Richar, rooms are vignettes of vintage and modern pieces; the vintage birdhouse had been left on a floor in the house; the stonework outside looks original but was added to frame the 1885 brick home, along with 12,000 pachysandra plants.

