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# A Château, in Pieces

***A Paris-based antiques dealer is looking to sell the four outer walls of a Bordeaux-area estate. But the buyer will have to relocate and reassemble the 1890 structure.***

***Balusters lined the balconies of the 19th-century home. The herald of the château, with the original owner's initials, decorated the pediment above the main entrance. Doric-style solid stone columns adorned the château's main entrance.*** *YANN TERRER (CHATEAU RENDERING); Antoine Doyen for The Wall Street Journal*

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# A French Château Could Be Your Dream Home—If You Can Put It Back Together

*By J.S. Marcus*

In November 2020, Alisanne Frew, a Paris-based antiques dealer specializing in fine salvaged stone, was alerted by text message to a rare find: a superb 19th-century Bordeaux-area château was for sale.

Built with the same type of limestone used for the Unesco-listed historic center of Bordeaux, the two-story château—at 46 feet high and 133 feet wide—had beautiful proportions and refined classical detailing. The catch? It had been disassembled some three decades earlier and was stacked on pallets in a warehouse in southwest France. And the offer was only for its four outer walls.

***France-based Ohioan Alisanne Frew, shown near a landmark Bordeaux château, is selling another château from the area—in pieces—for $7.5 million.*** *DRAGONFLY MEDIA*

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***Once it has been reassembled by a buyer, Alisanne Frew's château might look something like this rendering.*** *PHOTO: YANN TERRER (RENDERING)*

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Frew jumped at the chance. "I knew I would buy it," she says, recalling the moment she saw the vintage photo negatives on her phone screen of the château as it once stood. She booked a train right away. "I was there the next day."

Now, all 5,389 pieces of those château walls have been cleaned, cataloged, repacked and readied for export. Frew expects to send them to America. A real-estate agent based in Austin, Texas—Kumara Wilcoxon, of Sotheby's International Realty—is fielding offers.

Frew said she paid $2.25 million for the pieces and invested an additional $650,000 preparing them for resale. She is asking $7.5 million.

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***Cristiano Cerrone, Frew's project manager, works in the Bordeaux warehouse where the château pieces are stored. A plan, using a lettered and numbered code, will help the future buyer's architect and builders turn the pieces into a new upscale private home, shown in a rendering.***

*DRAGONFLY MEDIA (WAREHOUSE); ANTOINE DOYEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (PLANS); YANN TERRER (CHATEAU RENDERING)*

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***Alisanne Frew's château is stored in a warehouse east of the city of Bordeaux.***
*Antoine Doyen for The Wall Street Journal*

A 67-year-old native of suburban Cleveland, Frew first moved to Paris as a college student. She has since come to specialize in outfitting multimillion-dollar U.S. homes with luxurious European stone. She maintains strong business ties in the U.S., where she meets with clients. Most recently, she has worked on mansions in Texas Hill Country near Austin and in suburban San Diego. "I have also built a ton in Vegas," she adds.

Frew says she is making a concerted effort to find an American buyer to reconstruct the château, which once would have had more than 14,000 square feet of indoor space. The only requirement? A minimum of 3 acres, the smallest lot size she says is needed to accommodate the rebuilt structure.

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***The 800 tons of pieces are now stacked on 432 pallets, ready for shipping.***

*Antoine Doyen for The Wall Street Journal*

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Frew says the facade pieces, weighing a total of 800 tons, would require some 40 shipping containers, which she says would likely arrive via the port of Marseilles at about two containers a week. Her estimate is that it could take up to nine months for the pieces to arrive in the U.S., at a port likely determined by the buyer, at a cost of about $500,000.

The sale comes with a detailed dossier indicating how the buyer could go about reassembling the facades over the course of roughly seven months. The cost of the reconstruction of the outer walls alone is expected to be about $3.2 million.

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***Frew's Project Manager, Cristiano Cerrone, is standing next to one of several of the château's original windows, which can act as templates for contemporary replacements for the rest of them in the rebuilt home.***

*ANTOINE DOYEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

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***Carved-limestone detailing marks the château's elegant facade decoration. Frew is an antique dealer who specializes in salvaged European stone.***

*ANTOINE DOYEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

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The château has a back story only some of which Frew is willing to share. Built in 1890 by an aristocratic family with ties to Toulouse—these days, the largest city in southwestern France—the château apparently was intended as a hunting lodge. Frew says she tracked down the family's descendants, as well as the original spot south of Bordeaux where the château once stood, but says she will only reveal that information to the eventual buyer. "The owners still use the property and the extensive grounds for their country home," she says, alluding to an 18th-century residence still standing "with antiques and the like."

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In 1989, the château was bought and taken apart by hand by a master stonemason named Claude Lacoste, who Frew says relied on a chisel and his own strength. Lacoste bought the château intending to send its pieces to a Japanese buyer who planned to rebuild it as a clubhouse for a golf course. The deal fell through, and the pieces never left their warehouse south of Bordeaux until Frew and her team gained entry following the late-2020 sale.

As it turned out, the 1989 date of the purchase and disassembling was key, Frew says, allowing the château to bypass France's strict patrimony laws passed in the early 1990s that forbid the export of this kind of structure in any form.

During the disassembly, Lacoste devised a system using letters and numbers to keep track of the pieces, labeling them in blue crayon. Frew and her team updated his system using digital technology, and have produced detailed diagrams. Hence, the garlanded keystone atop the château's north facade doorway can be fit into place by using the signature "R99," rather than the skills of a jigsaw-puzzle fanatic.

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***Beaux-Arts columns and a pediment decorate New York's Grand Central Terminal, built in 1913.*** *PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO*

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The harbor city of Bordeaux, from which centuries of winemakers have exported their vintages, boasts France's greatest concentration of neoclassical 18th-century architecture. In subsequent decades, the region's winemakers and landed gentry copied the style when creating showpiece châteaux meant to function as impressive calling cards for their wines, or just as family status symbols.

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***Frew's château is in a distinctive classical style known in the U.S. as Beaux-Arts, which inspired a number of landmark American buildings, such as the New York Public Library.*** *PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES*

Marc Favreau, chief curator of the city of Bordeaux, says Frew's château was built at a time of great prosperity for the region, when numerous grand châteaux were going up. Looking at photographs, he says Frew's château is in a local style associated with the late-18th-century reign of Louis XVI. It draws its beauty from the region's pale limestone and the restricted use of purely decorative motifs, he says of this variant on neoclassicism. Frew's château largely confines its decorations to the classical pediments, the rooftop and terrace balustrades, and areas below the window frames.

Relocating a mammoth historic structure embedded in the history and culture of Bordeaux to a U.S. site is something of a return to a past practice, says New York architect Peter Pennoyer.

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***One of New York's most celebrated surviving Beaux-Arts residences, the James B. Duke House off Fifth Avenue, is now home to New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. French curator Marc Favreau says Frew's château is 'reminiscent' of the Duke home's facade.***

*PHOTO: JAMES B. DUKE HOUSE/NYU'S INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS/N.L. ROBERTS*

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The late-19-century variation on French classicism became a trademark of early-20th-century America, especially in New York City, under the name Beaux-Arts, in honor of the French training that was key in the career of American architects at the time, says Pennoyer.

New York's Beaux-Arts monuments include Grand Central Terminal and the main branch of the New York Public Library. Pennoyer and Favreau cite the James B. Duke House off Fifth Avenue, a Manhattan Beaux-Arts landmark, as a relative of the Bordeaux château for sale.

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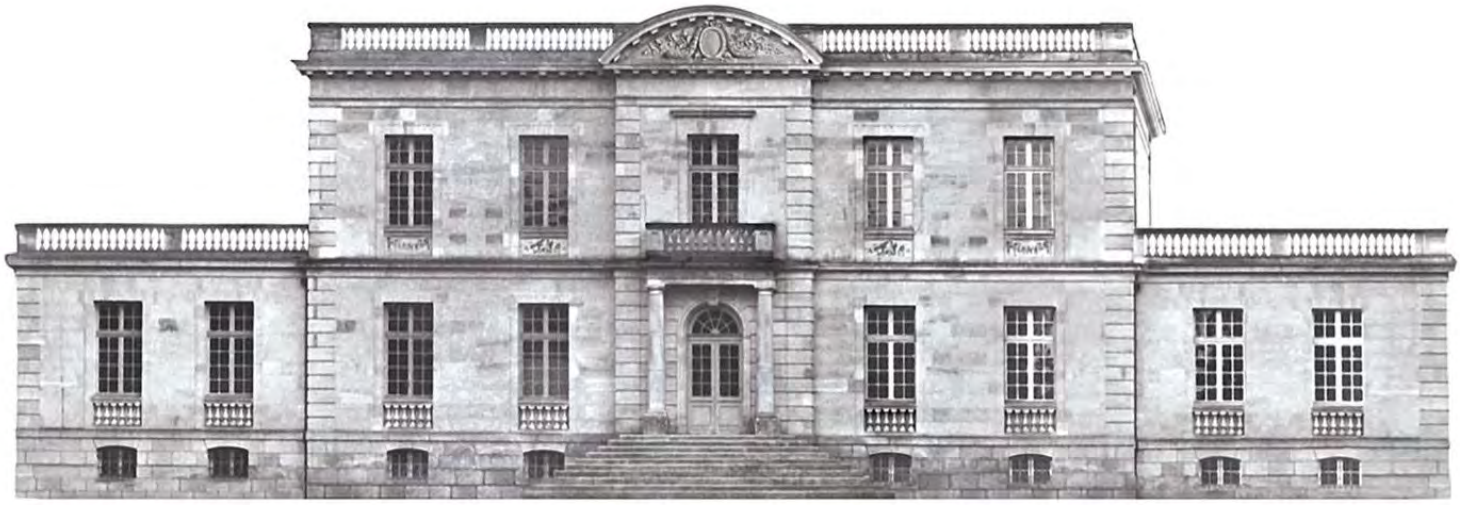

***This photo, developed from a negative dating to the 1980s, shows the château's main, or north, entrance not long before the building's disassembly.***

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Mr. Pennoyer, who specializes in classically minded residential projects, also was shown photos of Frew's Bordeaux château. How might he go about turning it into a modern American home?

"If we were doing new rooms within a historic or salvaged shell," he says, "we would want to make it inspired by that style but also make it feel American."

While a French client might go all out in a new version of a historical interior, marked by elaborate paneling and stucco, he says, he would aim for something less ornate with less ornamentation. "I wouldn't put gilding on the carved elements of that paneling," he says, but would plan on adding paneling and moldings.

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***A photo showing the château's rear, or south, facade.***

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Frew believes a future château owner might need additional limestone to finish off the home. This could be used to expand exterior walls or add modern extensions, or even be incorporated into wholly new elements, such as a pool deck, fountains, terraces, walkways, stairwells and garden walls. The purchase price includes two containers of additional stone blocks from the building's original Bordeaux quarry.

Pennoyer, who says he knows the city of Bordeaux well, says the local limestone is a remarkable building material. "You get a differentiation in the tone of the stones instead of it looking pure white," he says. "This variety of the color is what's beautiful—the way it reflects light."

Should a future owner want even more stone, Pennoyer says they could source it from Indiana quarries, which send their limestone to clad Manhattan's latest luxury residential projects. Frew, however, insists the French version is superior in its marbling and veining than U.S. variation.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Now that she is getting ready to part with her 800 tons of stones, how is she feeling? “It will be great when it sells,” she says. “That poor château has been sitting there for 35 years. I saved it.”

***Alisanne Frew, shown this past fall in the area south of Bordeaux where her château-in-pieces once stood.*** *PHOTO: ANTOINE DOYEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

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