



GROWING THE DREAM

A COOKING SCHOOL IN THE FRENCH WINE REGION OF BURGUNDY HAS EVOLVED INTO A WHOLE NEW LIFESTYLE FOR ITS OWNERS.

WORDS HANNAH JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY ABBIE MELLÉ

FRANCE POSTCARD

Copper pans in The Woodland House in France, where Kendall Smith Franchini lives with her family. **FACING PAGE** The Cook's Atelier in Beaune is run by Kendall and her mother, Marjorie Taylor – shown at the shop with Kendall's husband, Laurent, children Lou, Luc and Manon, and golden retriever Rousseau.



IT ALL STARTED WITH A French teacher at a high school in Phoenix, Arizona. “I had a really good French teacher who made moving to France seem possible,” says Kendall Smith Franchini, co-owner of The Cook’s Atelier, a culinary school she set up with her mother in the medieval town of Beaune, in the heart of Burgundy wine country.

Her mother, Marjorie Taylor, says it actually all started with Kendall herself: “I blame it on Kendall because she’s a real Francophile,” she says. “Even as a child, she was always fascinated with France.”

But maybe it *really* all started with Julia Child, the TV chef whose 1961 cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, introduced French cuisine to generations of Americans – including Marjorie. “In my mid-to-late 20s is when I got into food and I wanted to learn classic French techniques,” she explains. “And first and foremost, I’m an entrepreneur. So, I wanted to figure out something I really like to do, and make a job of it.”

She did just that, launching an award-winning restaurant and cooking school in her home town of Phoenix. And when her Francophile daughter moved to France and studied viticulture in Beaune, Marjorie upped sticks to join her in 2008. “Kendall said, ‘Mum, you’ve been telling me my whole life I could do anything. Why don’t you try?’ I thought, ‘Well, worst case, it doesn’t work and I go back.’ So, I sold everything, packed up and left. And thankfully, it worked.”

The pair soon outgrew the two-bedroom flat in the centre of town where they started their cooking school, and moved it to their current location, an 18th-century shop, in 2013. “We did want to have a little shop, but it was too hard,” says Marjorie, 60. “Then this building became available, with its shop on the ground floor. Kendall and I were doing all the things you’re not supposed to do in front of the real-estate agent, getting really excited, saying, ‘We could put the stove here...’ We weren’t sure how we’d pull it off, but we knew we’d regret it for the rest of our lives if we didn’t just jump.”

After making the decision to buy the place, the ease with which the move happened proved to Marjorie and Kendall that it was meant to be. Once the kitchen was installed for their classes, the building required little else but shelves for the store and a coat of paint. “We held classes on Wednesdays and Saturdays, because those are market days in Beaune,” says Marjorie. “We did a Wednesday there and straight into a Saturday here – we never missed a beat.”

That’s all the more extraordinary given the many functions the building fulfils. The ground floor hosts the culinary shop, selling kitchen implements as well as wine; while upstairs is the teaching kitchen. Up another floor is the dining room, where students eat their creations. The building proved friendly, too, to the pair’s aesthetic, which is warm, homely, and based around second-hand finds.

“I’ve always loved to go to brocantes,” says Marjorie, “and when Kendall was a little girl, she would go kicking and screaming, but now she’s just as down as I am!” >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Beaune’s classic French architecture; pots and pans await enthusiastic students; time for a coffee break; many of the cookware pieces are for sale at The Cook’s Atelier website; plating up each course; garden-fresh produce at the market; Marjorie and Kendall cherish their roles. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Light fills the dining space at The Cook’s Atelier; historic Beaune is a storybook destination.





"The show-stopper is that glass wall," says Marjorie of the Cook's Atelier building. "The light is really pretty. And I love all the wood details – obviously the staircase is a favourite." **FACING PAGE** The Woodland House's original bread oven.



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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT “During our five-day masterclass programs, guests spend four days at the Atelier and then we spend the last day at the Woodland House. So, that’s where we have our cooks’ garden,” says Kendall; simplicity is key in the bedrooms; cookware and crockery is displayed on open shelves; the flower garden is well tended; original features meet modern touches; pretty chandeliers add sparkle among the stones; garden goodies. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Laurent and Kendall love their rural home; elegant furnishings are complemented by artfully arranged foliage.



“We want people to feel good when they come in here; to feel welcome,” says Kendall, 41. “For the shop, we put a lot of our personality into it – it’s important to live and work in a space that feels good to be in.”

That philosophy carries over to the Woodland House, the 19th-century stone cottage in a village outside Beaune that’s home to Kendall, her husband Laurent, and their three children – Luc, 11, Manon, nine, and Lou, four – plus Rousseau the golden retriever. Once a walnut mill, then the village baker’s house, the cottage is small in size but rich in character, which the family made sure to retain in their recent renovation.

“We brought in artisans we’d already worked with,” says Kendall. A stonemason who had restored the original bread oven repaired the beautiful Burgundian stonework, which had been hidden by a plaster wall. They called on a metalsmith to create all their ironwork, and a trusted plumber who handcrafted the taps and showerheads with a vintage look. “We kept with all natural materials because we’re in this idyllic woodland setting,” says Kendall, “but there’s a little flair here and there. The gold mirror in the living room was Laurent’s grandmother’s, which we restored. And there are a lot of flea-market chandeliers.”

The Woodland House is spectacular, but its garden is just as important. “During COVID, when we couldn’t do our cooking classes, we wanted to keep busy and keep moving forward,” says Kendall. “So, we decided to try out a little vegetable bed. Now we’re in our fourth growing season, and we’re adding a greenhouse this year.”

She also joined forces with a heritage tree company to plant an orchard packed with heirloom apples, peaches, pears, cherries, quince and persimmon. A neighbour taught her beekeeping in exchange for cuttings to start his own orchard, so now they have their own honey, too. “Slowly but surely, every year we add to the project, which is fun,” says Kendall.

And it’s fun, perhaps, that’s really where all this started – fun that’s passing down the generations, starting with Marjorie’s desire to make her living from something she loved, which was cooking; continuing with Kendall’s love of wine sparking her move to Beaune; and now manifesting itself in her own children, who adore their outdoorsy life. But if fun is the spark that lights the fire, community is the fuel that keeps it burning. Asked why Beaune has retained its rich traditions, Kendall says, “Good food is a huge part of French culture. We’re lucky, because Beaune has its living, breathing market where farmers still come and sell their own produce. The community supports it. That’s the most important thing, and it ensures all of this continues.”

Here is the heart of it. The importance of community, more than any cooking technique, is what Marjorie and Kendall want their students to learn. “It’s so much more than cooking,” says Kendall. “It’s getting together and getting people around the table. That’s always been an important motto for us, and that’s what we encourage people to take back when they go home.” *cf*

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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Tall sunflowers grow easily in The Woodland House garden and add cheer to displays; the old barn at The Woodland House, a dreamy setting for family gatherings and Atelier students' feasts, will soon be renovated to create a countryside kitchen; Marjorie harvests the vegetables; basket of beauty; the countryside on the road from Beaune to The Woodland House retains a traditionally French ambience; Luc's delightful treehouse-style bedroom; wooden furnishings reflect the natural environment. **FACING PAGE** A fresh white background and natural decor create a soft, airy mood in the girls' bedrooms.

