

Read a Room



Understanding the *Modern Cottage*

Learn how to design a cottage that works in today's world.

BY WILL LEVIN

For some, a cottage is a modest home that encapsulates a simple life.

For others, a cottage is a vacation home in a dreamlike location. The reality is a cottage is a lot of things. In her new book, *The New Cottage: Inspiration for America's Favorite Home*, Katie Hutchison describes what makes a cottage a cottage in the modern world.

[OPPOSITE] This guest room highlights the impact of simple and humble materials that are characteristic of cottage architecture: board-and-batten siding, a corrugated roof, nostalgic barn-red paint. The guest room also features its own entrance, which provides an informal outdoor living space as well as additional privacy.

THE HALLMARKS

"A hallmark of a cottage has long been how it's integrated with the landscape," writes Hutchison. Design features of a cottage should be representative of the context that surrounds the home. A cottage may be smaller in order to preserve outdoor living space. If a cottage resides in a community, it may engage with that context with strategic placement of rooms in relation to its neighbors and perhaps add something particular to the neighborhood like a porch.

How the materials are shaped and joined is important for both past and present cottages. Craftmanship is something that cottage owners and architects both take great pride in, as it communicates what their style is. And, in a small home such as a cottage, it is easier to notice these smaller details.

SIMPLICITY

"There's an inherent simplicity to a cottage, and that simplicity extends not only to its massing but to the materials that compose it," says Hutchison. A cottage uses materials that are simply assembled and are presented in a way that is easy to understand. Hutchison uses the example of a Monopoly house, a cube with a gable roof. While your cottage does not have to be that simple, it should be simple enough for you to wrap your head around its design.

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[TOP] This living room is largely neutral, as the homeowner wants the architectural design of the cottage to be the main attraction.

[OPPOSITE] Cuban tiles complement the white background, and the open shelves and farmer's sink add an informal touch in this charming kitchen.

“A cottage isn’t one specific style; it encompasses many *styles.*”

PHOTO BY SEAN LITCHFIELD

The Cottage *Great Room*

Getting to a cottage great room.

A great room is a large room that combines features of a living room and a kitchen/dining room. Traditionally, older cottages did not have great rooms but rather collections of smaller rooms. A great room allows cottages the benefits of shared common space in a smaller dwelling. “A successful 21st-century cottage gives a great room new definition, paying attention to comfort and scale,” says Hutchison.

A common principle in great rooms is they have architectural features that distinguish a change in activity within the room. There are plenty of things you can do to signal a change of purpose. An example Hutchison uses in the book is a family aligning and widening openings between spaces to allow the spaces to overlap while still remaining distinct. Ceiling treatments in the form of adding beams or a change in material can be another visual cue to a change of purpose. Floor-plane changes are another, more nuanced, way of communicating spatial differences.

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“Sometimes cottages with the most stringent restrictions result in the most interesting and *satisfying* results.”

Pocket Neighborhoods

Newly built cottages today are often built around what's referred to as a Pocket Neighborhood model. Here's a simple guide to understanding what it is and why its benefits have made it a lasting trend.

Pocket neighborhoods first came to prominence in 1996, thanks to architect Ross Chapin. Basically, a pocket neighborhood is a small group of compact homes arranged around a common place where residents have a greater sense of community. The common place is often a garden, courtyard, lawn or any type of shared outdoor environment.

People who live in pocket neighborhoods desire to live in a neighborly setting. They are not just living in close proximity with other people; they are choosing a specific lifestyle. Chapin compares it to eating at a dinner table. At the dinner table, people can comfortably converse with one another more intimately than they would with a stranger.

If you are worried that your privacy might be sacrificed by living in a neighborly setting, pocket neighborhoods have you covered. It is common to see pocket homes designed so that they are nesting together in a way that values privacy. No home has windows facing another home's windows. So residents can be assured that when they're in their home, they won't have neighbors peering in.

[LEFT] The homeowner painted the floor of this enclosed porch Blissful Blue to suggest the color it was when it was her childhood room.

The New Cottage: Inspiration for America's Favorite Home by Katie Hutchison, published by The Taunton Press, © 2018; tauntonstore.com.

One of the elements of cottage simplicity we are after is purposefulness. Today's cottages tend to have a straightforward approach in design and contain a limited palette of color and materials. This helps tie rooms together and adds a spacious feel to the cottage.

TODAY'S COTTAGES

One change you might notice between a newer cottage and an older one is the overall size. Cottages today tend to have more space to work with. Because of this, modern cottages tend to be more informal. Instead of a traditional dining room, a modern cottage may have a dining alcove.

To handle larger spaces, Hutchison recommends using opposite complements, as they add subtlety. An example would be contrasting an intimate room with a larger room, such as a family or living room. “The intimate space and the taller/public space are opposite but complement each other in the sense that they enhance each other, much the same way that opposite colors enhance or complement each other,” says Hutchison.

Another change you will see in newer cottages is the size of the windows. In the past, cottages normally had smaller windows because glass was more expensive to make, and there were concerns with cold air seeping into the residence. But thanks to modern engineering, these issues are no longer problematic. Large windows allow natural light to illuminate the cottage and provide gorgeous views of the surrounding landscape. **CB**

