



A saddle stone decorates the garden outside the Gadboises' cottage.

T

To reach Sherri and Steve Gadbois' home in the tiny village of Siddonsburg, between Dillsburg and Mechanicsburg, one must first exit busy Route 15, pass underneath an arched stone railroad bridge, go up and then down a winding, wooded hill and cross over a creek. Add to that the stormy torrents of Tropical Storm Cindy and a small herd of deer crossing the narrow road, and the leisurely drive quickly becomes an adventure.

The Gadboises' home is not just off the beaten path geographically. Their white stucco English-style cottage is a rarity in the United States, let alone Central PA. Even though the cottage was built in 2002, it melds perfectly with the land and looks as if it has existed on the one-and-a-third-acre plot for hundreds of years. It is a "new old" house, constructed in tandem with the architectural philosophy advocated in architect/author Sarah Susanka's popular book *The Not So Big House* — specifically, that a house should never look or feel like a holding pen for its inhabitants, but should be a real home that reflects the lifestyles and tastes of the people living in it. A not-so-big house emphasizes quality (of materials and, more importantly, of life) over quantity (in particular, size). The idea is to "build better, not bigger."



BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON PHOTOS BY SEAN SIMMERS

THIS NEW OLD HOUSE



Steve and Sherri relax in their home's cobalt-blue great room, a sitting space that connects to the kitchen and small dining area. Windows line both the front and back of the house, providing views to the woods and to Pippin's Run, the creek just beyond the bounds of the small yard. A tall, thin Rumsford fireplace and a crest painted on the wall above it serve as the focal point of the room, illustrating the owners' attention to unexpected and unique details and brazen individuality. The colors found in the crest — purple, green, blue and red — are also found in various rooms, maintaining the easy flow of the house.

Cradling Pippin, the couple's gray miniature schnauzer, in her arms, Sherri reflects on the principles that guided the initial planning stages of building their home. "When we designed the house," she says, "we wanted space that we'd utilize, that had dual functions, not just spaces used for specific functions. We wanted the inside and outside to flow together, which is not easy to do with other houses."

The Gadboises' great room reflects these ideas of space and flow. The small space between the kitchen and living room holds a dining table that can be extended when company comes. During large gatherings, the couple can easily rearrange the furniture to

provide more space for mingling. The open flow of the great room also prevents whoever happens to be cooking in the kitchen from feeling left out of the action. They can even share the same views of the fireplace and of the backyard.

In theory, the great room, which has become a popular fixture in all styles of recently constructed or renovated homes, creates a more expansive gathering space by opening up the "public" parts of a house while maintaining the necessary privacy of the bed- and bathrooms. Most great rooms connect the kitchen, dining and living areas into one seamless space in lieu of a series of separate, smaller rooms. The great room idea trumps togetherness over segregation, and more living space over a greater number of rooms.

Prior to building the Siddonsburg cottage, Sherri and Steve lived in a renovated townhouse in downtown Harrisburg's Historic District. The design of the townhouse could not have been more different than that of the cottage, and it helped them determine what they *didn't* want in their new home.

"In the row house," Sherri says, "there were no windows on either side, and [it] had rooms that went march, march, march. There were so many rooms, but not a lot of room in each."

Steve, a native of Cape Cod, adds in a thick Massachusetts accent, "We didn't want to build the kind of house that our parents and grandparents had — and that's still being built today. A lot of homes have a formal dining room and living room that never get used. You throw a party, and everyone's in the family room and kitchen. You can't get them into the other rooms. We didn't want that separation."

Initially, Sherri wanted their new home to be a Victorian house, but after choosing the plot on which they would build, they "listened" to the property and determined that a big, tall house just wouldn't work with the land and the tree line. Inspired by the paintings of Thomas Kinkade and British sitcoms, they decided to entertain the idea of an English cottage. Sherri took a bicycle trip through the English countryside to study the real thing and returned with a slew of ideas.

Both Sherri and Steve repeatedly refer to the cottage as their "dream home," and their ideas of what they wanted, including a steep-pitched roof, large overhangs, low ceilings and doors that open out to the surrounding land rather than inward, were very specific. Finding an architect and builder who understood these ideas proved to be a major hurdle. After interviewing a dozen prospects, they found a kindred spirit in Lemoyne architect Kurt Oravec.



Steve Gadbois with one of his miniature schnauzers, Bunny



THE COTTAGE
 INCLUDES A
 STEEP-PITCHED
 ROOF, LARGE
 OVERHANGS,
 LOW CEILINGS
 AND DOORS
 THAT OPEN
 OUT TO THE
 SURROUNDING
 LAND RATHER
 THAN INWARD.



Top: A modern feel and old-world country style meet in the kitchen's handmade cabinetry.

Left: A view of the great room, including the crest bearing the name of the Gadbois home: Pippin's Cottage

Sherri says, "Once we told [Kurt] our philosophy, it just clicked. He understood what we were saying. Other architects said, 'This is what we like to do and build,' but we said, 'OK, but that's not what we want.' Kurt really listened and was able to repeat back to us what we just told him."

"The main design spark was Sherri and Steve's passionate interest in the beauty and eccentricity of English cottage-style homes," says Oravec. "Never having designed one myself, I did some research on my own while Sherri supplied me with many photos and magazine clippings for visual inspiration."

Oravec understood the Gadboises' choice to invest their money in the quality of their home rather than the sheer size of it, even going to bat for them when the builder tried to talk them into ceilings a foot higher than they actually wanted.

"Instead of building a 5,000-square-foot starter castle," Steve says, "we decided to save money to spend on the inside, on richer woods, details, built-ins, window seats, things that add to the human spirit, not just space."

While an English cottage in Central PA is certainly unusual, the architectural details of the home are not out of the ordinary. The great room, with its emphasis on coziness and unity, for instance, is one example, according to Oravec.

"I see a great room generally as a centerpiece of a home where people live, where they can gather and do various activities depending on their preference," he says. "Some see [a great room] as just a sitting room with a fireplace, with a dining room or kitchen with a fireplace, et cetera. The most important thing is that it's a really relaxed place to be, that it's an informal space. Usually it's open to the kitchen — not always, but often, so that whoever's in the kitchen can be included in the conversation or activity."

He adds, "The great room itself isn't the soul of a house, but oftentimes it holds the soul of the house, because it's the space that's most lived in and because it's tailored to the likes and lifestyle of the dweller in an artistic and cohesive manner. It's a space where everyday activities can occur in an open and collective setting."

More people want to integrate "traditional" architectural elements when building or renovating a home, Oravec explains, including gabled roof lines, double-hung windows and porches with columns. At the same time, people are forgoing other traditional aspects, such as grand, empty entryways and foyers and the series of compart-

Top: An alcove showcases a wooden Moroccan screen that Steve and Sherri found at an architectural remnant store.

Bottom: The bedroom has a window seat, also a feature in other rooms of the cottage.



mentalized, single-function rooms, as reflected by the popularity of the great room. He sees people more and more wanting to live in their whole house, not just in a few rooms, and cites the Gadbois cottage as an illustration of this idea.

Nothing was more important to Steve and Sherri Gadbois as they were completing their home than efficient utilization of space and rich details. These details — some historic, some modern and some Steve even refers to as downright "odd and quirky" — express the individuality and personalities of him and his wife.

After an attempt to mimic the look of old leather on the floor leading from the garage



Sherri and Steve Gadbois with Pippin

entry into the kitchen went disastrously awry, Sherri came up with the idea to paint the floor a swirling, watery blue and dot it with waterlilies and fairies, as inspired by the Impressionist paintings of Claude Monet. The sink in one of the bathrooms is a hollowed-out antique phonograph cabinet. A reading nook, accessible via a set of steps in Sherri's home office, boasts built-in bookshelves, a window seat, and an old, filigreed Turkish screen and finials. Its raised level brings the occupant even closer to the low ceiling, giving the feeling of hiding away in an attic alcove. The heating system is in the floor, which Steve jokingly claims "promotes messiness," as it warms clothing strewn on the floor in the winter. Authentic chimney

pots and a staddle stone (large, mushroom-shaped stones that were traditionally used as supports for granaries) imported from England, and rain chains (chains of round metal links that hang from the roof down to the ground and allow rain-water to sprinkle down) in place of unsightly downspouts add to the cottage's whimsical charm and centuries-old appearance.

Though the house boasts many eclectic flourishes, nothing is overdone. The idea is that these elements catch one's eye while maintaining their status as details, so as not to draw too much attention from any other part of the house. More importantly, the home never feels generic or stuffy, or that it has been decorated by a stranger. It feels, well, like home.

"Because the house was to stay fairly small, it became important to design spaces that flowed into one another, both for a feeling of roominess and to allow for flexibility of furniture arrangements for special occasions," says Oravec.

"Being the largest room with the highest ceiling in contrast to every other room in the house, the great room is the central gathering space in the house, the soul of the home."

After returning to the great room, Steve explains the crest, which he and Sherri designed themselves, above the fireplace. The bottom of the crest bears the house's name, Pippin's Cottage.

The Gadboises' dog alternates from Sherri's lap to Steve's and back again, and the couple take turns stroking her as they talk about their dream home. When Steve rises to take a phone call, Pippin quickly seeks out Sherri, who explains the origins of Pippin the run, Pippin the cottage and Pippin the dog. Drawing inspiration from the eponymous creek, the Gadboises continued the English practice of naming their home, eventually following suit with the schnauzer.

"Some people associate all of it with the character Pippin from *Lord of the Rings*," Sherri says, petting the contented dog on her lap, "but I liked the idea that our house had a name. You're not just a number, you're a place." **PA**

VISIT KURT ORAVEC'S WEBSITE AT: WWW.ARTISTRYINHOMEDSIGN.COM/INDEX.HTML

Through the river and over the woods.

The new H3 starting at \$29,500.
Fords 24" of water at 5 mph and is fully off-road capable.

HUMMER | **H3**
LIKE NOTHING ELSE.



**SUTLIFF
HUMMER**

WE HAVE A REPUTATION TO UPHOLD

717-691-2000
SUTLIFFHUMMER.COM
6462 CARLISLE PIKE
MECHANICSBURG PA