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cottage INDUSTRY

BY JENNY BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY WERNER STRAUBE

DESIGNER TOM STRINGER
**CREATES A FANTASY
COTTAGE** FOR A YOUNG
FAMILY IN NEED OF A
LITTLE ROOM TO GROW



Sheila Keil had her hopes set on creating a comfortable, kid-friendly cottage reminiscent of her childhood home. What she got is part fairy-tale cottage, part summer camp. (And summer camp never looked so good.)

While it has the classic cottage essentials—cedar shingles, beadboard, vintage wicker furniture—the Keil family's home in Harbor Springs, Michigan, is more fantastical than old-fashioned. More fairy-tale than fusty. One almost expects to find bread crumbs leading to the front door.

With four young children (Hampden, 11; Jack, 9; Caroline, 5; and Kathleen, 3) and a charming property on Lake Michigan that lends itself to once-upon-a-time reverie, the Keils chose to build an enchanted dwelling with room to grow.

"I grew up here in Harbor Springs, one of 13 children," says Sheila. "My parents still live in the cottage that's been in our

Left: Designer Tom Stringer likens the living room's color palette to "a Midwestern garden in June." The periwinkle rug is from his collection for Textstyle. Armchair fabric is Victoria Hagan. Drapery fabric is Kathryn M. Ireland. **Above:** Sheila Keil with her children—Hampden, Jack, Caroline, and Kathleen. **Preceding pages:** For consistency, Stringer used the Victoria Hagan fabric from the living room on the Hickory Chair dining chairs. ■ On the porch, Jane Shelton pillows and wicker chairs add a little romance to a seating area overlooking Lake Michigan.



The large, cheerful kitchen with an adjoining office for Sheila is truly the heart of the house. A mahogany-topped center island is identical to one in Stringer's own home. Cabinetry is all custom-designed by Stringer. Pendant lights are from Vaughan. **Opposite, top:** Not an inch of wasted space! Drawers under the back stairway add storage. **Opposite, bottom:** Traditional cottage materials were used for the house's exterior.

family since the 1920s. When we decided to build here, I knew I wanted something that felt lived in—a cottage that could stay the same for a hundred years.”

Fortunately, Sheila found the perfect design partner—and cottage enthusiast—in Chicago-based designer Tom Stringer.

“For me, this kind of work is a natural because I grew up summering in the very same area,” says Stringer. “Both Sheila and I have a real fondness for turn-of-the-century cottages.”

While quirky details and bright, bold color are evident around every corner, any hint of fussiness was banished. “Ultimately the design was driven by the needs of four lively children,” says Stringer. “It’s a young family, and they wanted to live as a young family does. There’s also an emphasis on fewer, larger rooms.”

While the largest of those rooms—the sun-soaked living room—is predominately periwinkle (Sheila’s favorite color), sunshine yellow, lush green, and peony pink also convene here, having found their way from the spaces in which they rule. Pink from Caroline’s fit-for-a-princess bedroom. Yellow from the genteel dining room. Periwinkle from the romantic blue-and-white master bedroom. Green from the great outdoors.

“Sheila loves color, but sometimes an abundant use of very strong color can be overwhelming,” notes Stringer. “We ended up going with a color scheme derived from a prototypical grandmother’s garden. You have everything under the sun—periwinkle, aqua, yellow. It’s like a Midwestern garden in June.”

A vibrant floral fabric echoes the cottage’s quaint-yet-contemporary mantra—familiar at first glance, yet lively and updated on closer inspection. “I could eat that fabric,” laughs Sheila. “It makes me happy every time I see it!”

With four children (and a constant stream of summer “drop-ins”), the Keils need the kitchen to be extra-efficient—a workhorse that can handle a profusion of pint-sized play pals with super-sized appetites as well as short-order-style breakfasts. Thankfully, such thoroughly thought-out elements as a wall of cold storage, an oversized island with a mahogany countertop, and double ovens accommodate the busiest summer weekends.

In the dining room, optimistic yellow beadboard walls (narrower above the chair rail than below) increase the charm factor while “recycled” furnishings from previous homes add a touch of family history. Dining chairs confidently wear the same updated floral upholstery as the living room armchairs—creating continuity between the spaces.

Upstairs, the bedrooms have a fantasy appeal all their own. Caroline’s picture-perfect, ethereal-pink bedroom would make even the consummate fairy-tale princess green with envy. Its Swedish-inspired built-in bed—complete with secret stairs and a glide mechanism that allows the mattress to be easily pulled out to be made (genius!)—was the brainchild of builder Jeff Ford. “I’ve wanted this bedroom since I was a little girl,” says Sheila. “And it was so well executed.”



LOOKING FOR TIPS on how to create your own colorful summer-inspired interiors? To view our video of designer Tom Stringer sharing his trade secrets, go to gettag.mobi on your smartphone and download the free Tag Reader app. Hold your phone over this coded tag and snap it. For best quality, access a Wi-Fi network. You can also view the video at traditionalhome.com.





The bedroom shared by the boys is no less fanciful. Inspired by an adult's lingering memory of childhood summer camp, the room is oriented around two Sequoia-scale bunk beds. A seating area with wicker chairs dressed variously in red, white, and blue serves as a metaphor for tree stumps encircling a campfire. "It's designed to have a cool sense of wonderment," says Stringer.

In the master bedroom, color was kept to a minimum to encourage restfulness. And in case the soothing palette fails to induce REM, two layers of motorized shades with overlapping seams provide total darkness—converting the room from light and airy to deep-sea dark in the flick of the switch.

The fairy-tale pièce de résistance, however, is an attic playroom. With its garden gate, window boxes, and lush green shag "lawn," it provides rainy-day distraction for princesses-in-training.

"This house is really a place where we can all be kids again," says Sheila. "It's like being at a year-round summer camp."

Interior designer: Tom Stringer

For more information, see sources on page 148

Above: In the blue-and-white master bedroom, "We minimized the use of other colors to make it soothing and restful," says Stringer. Shade fabric is Classic Cloth through Dessin Fournir with Samuel & Sons trim. Top right: Cabinets in the master bathroom were custom-designed by Stringer. Fixtures are Waterworks. Top far right: Caroline's built-in bed features pullout steps cleverly camouflaged as drawers. Right: The summer camp-themed boys' bedroom has oversized bunk beds fitted below with drawers for storage. The rug is from Watson Smith. Shade fabric is Classic Cloth. The drum table is from Richard Mulligan.

