



# Cottage culture



## Small homes are made for lazy lakeside days

By **Sherrie Negrea**  
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**L**ate Friday afternoons in the summer, Helen Talty will leave work at the Tompkins Trust Co. in downtown Ithaca and pick up her 7-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, and a cooler full of food. Then she will head up the western shore of Cayuga Lake and turn down a gravel road, past a wheat field and a patch of woods, to meet her husband, Kevin.

It may be dark by the time the three of them gather at their clapboard summer cottage in Interlaken, situated on a shale bluff overlooking the lake. But it is worth the hassle just so they can wake up in the morning to the sound of the birds and fishing boats trolling in the water.

“When the sun rises up over that hill,” Kevin says, pointing to the other side of the lake, “the light streams into our windows, and the bass fishermen are out there. It’s just so quiet here. It’s tranquil.”

After a hectic week at work, the Talty family spends weekends enjoying the simple pleasures of life along Cayuga Lake: sitting on the

**The Talty cottage overlooks Cayuga Lake. Preceding page: Stairs leading to the water offer a place to take a rest while taking in the view.**

dock, playing board games, catching up on a novel, splashing in the water, taking out their kayak or 16-foot outboard, and toasting marshmallows on a bonfire. Occasionally, for a change of scenery, they will take a hike in Taughannock Falls State Park, four miles south, or drive up Route 89 to the Cayuga Lake Creamery for ice cream cones.

At 950 square feet, their three-bedroom cottage is cozy yet large enough to sleep six, including their friends from Ithaca who frequently visit for a weekend getaway. A 43-foot-long porch with four rocking chairs greets visitors to what Kevin has dubbed “The Emerald Cottage” (in honor of his Irish heritage and the green tin roof.)

Inside, a spacious living room with a high knotty-pine ceiling flanks a small but functional kitchenette, which leads to a bright sunroom. The light and airy decor is quintessential lakefront cottage: A pair of fish and a

painted canoe paddle adorn the wall of the guest bedroom, and strings of shells hang from the hallway ceiling.

Missing are phone service and an Internet connection. "When we're here, it's strictly about us and family," says Kevin, a manufacturing representative for a food packaging company. "There is no technology getting in our way."

When the couple bought the 1950s-era cottage four years ago, it didn't need much refurbishing except for removing an orange carpet in the living room, refinishing

the hardwood floors and repainting the interior. Last year they installed a 10-foot-wide, L-shaped dock; this June they put in a new patio where they typically eat their meals.

What they enjoy most is the slow-paced lifestyle along the lake and

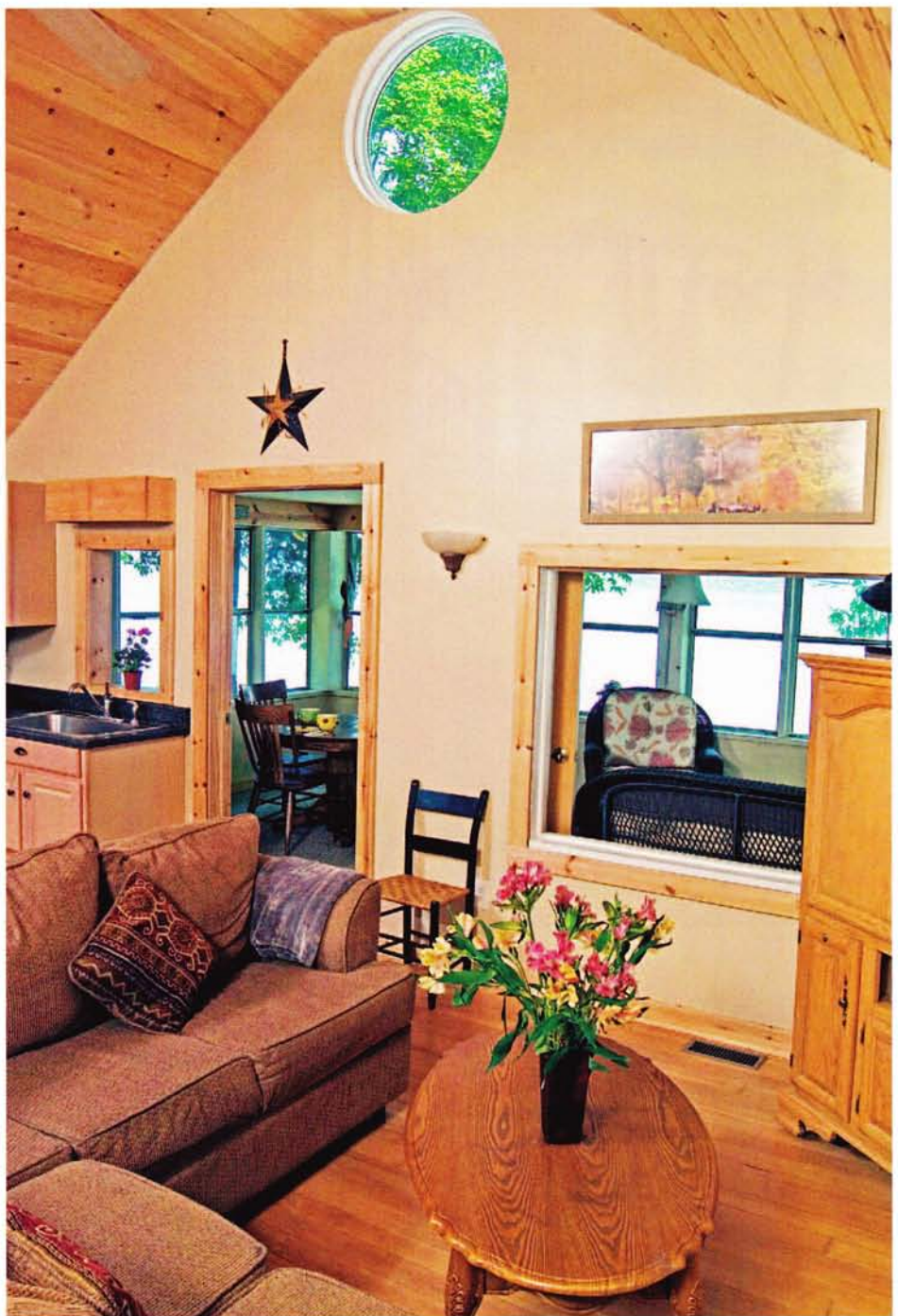
that relaxed feeling of being on vacation. "We like the idea of it being a little bit out," says Helen, who can drive to the cottage from her house in northeast Ithaca in 25 minutes. "We feel like we're away," adds Kevin, "but at the same time, if we stay for one night, it's not a big deal."

The distance from Steve and Clare Greene's home to their cottage on the western shore of Cayuga Lake in Ithaca is a bit farther: They were living in Santa Cruz, Calif., when they found their two-story summer home in 2003.

As an undergraduate at Cornell in the 1960s, Steve never expected to return to Ithaca when he retired. But that is what happened when he and Clare began searching for a lakefront cottage somewhere in the Northeast. They looked at the Great Lakes and the Georgian Bay, but couldn't find anything that matched Ithaca's spectacular views and many cultural attractions.



**A large dock offers room to spread out. There's even room for bonfires.**



**The Taltys keep the decor relaxed and appropriate for a cottage — wood floors, some wicker porch furniture and no telephones or computers.**

"When we're here, it's strictly about us and family. There is no technology getting in our way."

**KEVIN TALTY**



**Cottages are more about spending time outdoors than indoors, so porches, patios and decks become focal points. This is a view from the Taltys' cottage.**

“Eventually the first house we looked at was the one we ended up with. Even though it was in such terrible shape,” says Steve, a semi-retired journalism professor at San Jose State University. He enjoys Ithaca’s nearly daily menu of free concerts. “It’s incredible. There’s no other place where you can enjoy so much for nothing.”

Built in the 1920s, the three-bedroom cottage had been vacant and needed extensive renovation: All the windows and the deck were replaced, new flooring and a new pocket door were installed in the kitchen, and two bathrooms were added. “The secret to buying a dilapidated place is you have to have a vision of what it can look like,” Steve explains. “A lot of people have trouble doing that.”

The 1,750-square-foot cottage has a relaxed decor, with knotty pine paneling and ceilings in the living room, and a combination office,

playroom and bedroom, complete with a ping-pong table, on the second floor. In the sunroom, Steve designed a sunburst pattern into the marmoleum flooring and installed large floor-to-ceiling windows.

After six years of renovation, the Greens, who spend their winters in St. Petersburg, Fla., can now enjoy the fruits of their labor. Steve grows vegetables while Clare reads and volunteers at the Tompkins County Public Library.

Besides taking a spin in their 18-foot runabout, another favorite summertime activity is simply watching the changing face of the lake. “You see the same people come by at 6:30 in their kayaks,” Steve says. “There’s a rhythm to it.”

That routine can change dramatically, however, when thunderstorms rumble through. “It’s not every day, but it’s like show time,” Clare says. “It’s thrilling to watch.”



**Steve and Clare Greene like to watch the world go by from the porch of their Cayuga Lake cottage.**