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# Cottage days

**Thinking large and building small, a Virginia couple creates a home that offers a mix of breathtaking elegance and Southern charm.**

STORY BY MARGARET LOFTUS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICH FRUTCHEY

**ABOVE:** John and Jeannine Regan, having lived in many parts of the world during John's military career, based the design of their house on cottages they admired in Europe.

**RIGHT:** Light spills into the great room, a space where the timber trusses are complemented wonderfully by golden wall glazing.



# HOME OF THE MONTH

#### WHY WE LOVE IT:

It's tough to build a new home and have it look as though it's been around 100 years. Naturally, building a timber frame helps, but the Regans have guaranteed a timeless feel with classic furnishings and just enough modern flair to create a masterpiece.

#### FAVORITE FEATURE:

The kitchen: a smart work space with a gorgeous hearth.



**ABOVE:** A pot rack, fashioned from an iron gate, hangs above a multifunctional kitchen island that houses plenty of storage space, book shelves and a mini refrigerator. A fireplace warms guests during chilly mornings and nights in the Virginia countryside.

**OPPOSITE:** Just off the kitchen, a built-in window seat provides a welcoming nook for enjoying breakfast and the morning paper. Windows usher in lots of light, and storage baskets sit below the cozy couch. Jeannine loves that her home has an “uncontrived, functional, made-to-live-in look.”

**AFTER** living in their farmhouse in Charlottesville, Virginia, for some 20 years, John and Jeannine Regan were getting restless. The area’s development was encroaching on their once idyllic spot. “Traffic was getting worse,” explains John. “We wanted to live down a gravel road somewhere in the woods.” Besides, the Regans like to roam: Before putting down roots in Virginia, they’d spent much of their lives on the move with the Navy, living up and down the East Coast and in Hawaii, three times. “We’ve always liked to try new things,” says Jeannine. “All of our relatives think we’re crazy to start over from scratch.”

But they planned to do just that on a remote 35 acres in the hilly country about an hour south of Charlottesville, the perfect spot to build the kind of timber cottage they’d always admired in their European travels. “We were really intrigued by this ancient way of building a house, but most of the timber frame designs that we’d seen in magazines had a more lodge look. Our vision was con-

siderably different.”

Finding someone to realize that vision was easier than they thought. Jeannine spotted an ad in the newspaper for local custom builder and Timberpeg independent representative Smith & Robertson. On a whim, she stopped in their Charlottesville office. “I liked them, liked what I saw, and we never looked back,” she says, “It was sort of an intuitive thing.”

## Smart Design

With a background in design, Jeannine, who is an accomplished watercolorist, worked with builder Glenn Robertson on sketches for the cottage. One of the challenges inherent in designing a timber home is making the large, open spaces feel inviting rather than intimidating. Inspired by Sarah Susanka’s best-selling book *The Not So Big House*, the team varied the height of ceilings from room to room and used arches, little nooks with windows seats and a day bed in the loft to give





**TOP LEFT:** Instead of creating a formal dining room, the Regans combined an eating area with a library and dubbed the space their “libing room.”

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Taking a page from Sarah Susanka’s *The Not So Big House*, the design team used varying ceiling heights and arched entryways to give the home abundant character.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The design team created a two-bedroom suite connected by a spacious bathroom. A carved wood screen serves as an memorable headboard in the master bedroom. Four-inch-wide oak planks line the floor.





the big space a cozy feel.

The home's warmth is enhanced by earthy colors and glazing on the walls, a technique that gives drywall a texture much like plaster, explains Jeannine. "It has an uncontrived, functional, made-to-live-in look." The floors are 4-inch-wide planks of number-two oak, "We wanted a lot of character and knots," says John. A hearth, center island and travertine backsplash in the kitchen evoke a French Country aesthetic.

And rather than have a formal dining room, the couple opted for a cross between a dining area and library, which they dubbed the "libing room." The room's layout flows easily with multiple entrances, which makes the space perfect for entertaining.

One valuable lesson they learned from touring other timber homes in the area was to be mindful about the size of furnishings. "When you have open spaces, you can't have small furniture," explains Jeannine. As

a result, they invested in new furnishings and mixed in antiques, many of them picked up during their travels in Asia. One of the gems is a carved wooden screen that John brought home from Taiwan after stashing it in the bunk above him on a Navy submarine.

Looking back, the couple has few regrets. They wish they'd built more closets for all the belongings they've collected over the years. They're grateful that the folks from Timberpeg

talked them into building a raised patio off the great room. "It was a way to integrate the outside in," explains John, "It would have been a major mistake if we hadn't done it." They also realized that timber framing has some interesting challenges, such as lack of wall space to hang Jeannine's larger work. But overall, they're thrilled with the results and would embark on this style of homebuilding journey again—no matter where they roam. ■



Jeannine spearheaded the design of the house, and John lent his expertise as an engineer and foreman of the project. "Glenn Robertson (pictured with the Regans) was the referee," John jokes.

## Home Details

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 2,388

**BUILDER:** Smith & Robertson

**TIMBER PRODUCER:** Timberpeg



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