

INSPIRATION FOR AMERICA'S FAVORITE HOME

# the **new** cottage



**KATIE HUTCHISON**

# POCKET PATTERN



ENGAGED WITH SITE



HUMAN SCALE



SIMPLE MASSING



SHELTERING ROOF



ECONOMY OF MEANS



INFORMALITY



SUNNY DISPOSITION



OPPOSITE COMPLEMENTS



CRAFTED DETAIL

**IN SPRING VALLEY**—a pocket neighborhood in Port Townsend, Wash.—Sheri Price owns a cottage architect Ross Chapin calls the “Betty Gable.” It’s a variation of a one-story, one-bedroom, side-gable cottage he designed for Betty Lu, an 80-something-year-old in another pocket neighborhood. The second iteration of the original “Betty Lu” cottage was a two-bedroom version he named the “Betty Lu Lu.” For the Port Townsend pocket neighborhood, he rotated the cottage’s gable, so it faces front and dubbed it the Betty Gable.

A pattern  
with layers of  
personal space.



Sheri’s Betty Gable cottage has five separate layers of personal space that transition from the sidewalk along the neighborhood green to the front door. The first is the 30-in.-wide swath of perennials that the developer planted;

the second is the low fence; the third is the front garden; the fourth is the low porch guardrail, complete with flower boxes; the fifth is the porch itself.



The simple massing, sheltering gable and shed roofs, and the human-scaled porch and guardrail make for an inviting cottage. The unique painted panel of flowers that Ross created on the gable face amid the economical board-and-batten siding adds a custom, crafted touch.

Architect: Ross Chapin Architects  
 Port Townsend, Wash.  
 838 sq. ft.



"The front portion of this house, with the main room and the little alcove and the porch, is what really the 'Bettys' are about," explains Ross. In Spring Valley, he anchored the eastern edge of the nearly 1-acre 10-house pocket neighborhood with three Betty Gable cottages in a variety of compatible colors. They're further differentiated by the custom paintings he created for the face of the gable end of each. Front, side, and rear yard landscaping determined by the individual homeowners also makes each cottage distinct. A red, 2-story cottage that Ross calls the "Egret" acts as a landmark structure at the street end to the southwest. The three homes

opposite the run of Betty Gable cottages are sibling "Betty Jane" 1-story, side-gable cottages. Two "Coho" cottages, which are 1½ stories, and a sweet little 1-story "Lisette" cottage round out the neighborhood of small dwellings. A modest side-gable commons building with a polycarbonate covered porch serves as a destination on the north end of the shared lawn. Together the cottages form a cohesive composition arranged around a commons, the hallmark of a pocket neighborhood.

Ross notes, "I approach designing a pocket neighborhood like a painter would a painting." So, among other



Sheri's cozy porch looks across the green as do the other cottage porches in the pocket neighborhood. The small red cottage to the right is the common building at the head of

the green, where the community gathers for potlucks, book groups, meetings, and the like.

things, he pays attention to creating a focal point, a calm center, a rich edge, secondary focal points, and transitions between spaces—like between the parking area and the central green. The structures, which are Ross's neighborhood building blocks, all display simple massing and sheltering roofs. In addition, they're punctuated with human-scaled front porches, which reinforce the neighborhood's sense of community.

When designing Spring Valley and the cottages within it, Ross applied a few particularly relevant patterns inspired by Christopher Alexander's master work *A Pattern Language*. One

such pattern is "layers of personal space." Ross created five layers of space that transition in stages from the public sidewalk in front of Sheri's cottage to the semi-public in-between zones and ultimately to the private entry door, all of which help engage the cottage with the site. "With these, a stranger will feel the boundaries of private territory, an invited guest will feel a special sense of arrival, and a resident will feel the comfort of home and the pleasure of community," he explains.

Inside Sheri's cottage, personal space is similarly layered, from the informal open living and kitchen area facing the community commons to the slightly more private intimacy



A long flowerbox provides another opportunity to layer space and add a personal touch to the cottage. Sheri says that often when she comes home at the end of the day,

she likes to putter around the house while the top portion of the Dutch door is open, inviting breezes and connection with neighbors passing by.

of the dining nook, on to the more private back hall and bedrooms, and ultimately out to the private rear yard.

The concept of a layered treatment also applies to layers of crafted detail which, when part of a larger whole, helps enrich the character of the cottage. The economical, mostly Sheetrock interior walls and ceilings gain depth with the application of considered trim. On the tall, flat ceiling, simple, applied ½-in. by 2-in. battens over the Sheetrock add pattern and dimension. Where the ceiling meets the wall, a pared-down crown of sorts, composed of two trim boards, finesse

the transition. A third, lower trim board wraps the wall of the open space at the height of the built-in bookcase top rail, the window trim, and the openings into the nook and work-counter recess, softening the scale of the tall wall and helping unify and organize the spaces into a larger room rather than disparate smaller zones.

Sheri's favorite spot in the cottage is the dining nook. It's a sunny, human-scaled getaway off the more open, taller volume of the kitchen/living area. Almost boat-like in how it's fitted to folks sharing a meal, the nook nicely complements



The cottage massing steps down toward the back—a form of three-dimensional layering—and terminates with a small bracketed rooflet over glass sliders leading from the bedroom to the private rear yard. Though the materials are basic and affordable, the assembled craftsmanship adds richness and depth.



Ross believes color is an important component of design. When the late afternoon sun strikes the melon-colored rake frieze boards, they glow, appearing to lift the roof. The three stacked trim boards that define the rake of the three stepped roofs are another example of layered detail that enlivens and completes the look.





The dining nook includes a lowered, 1×6 pine, tongue-and-groove ceiling for additional warmth. The wraparound windows give the nook a porch-like feel. The maple butcher-block table is a purposeful and readily available stock material that matches the kitchen island countertop.

the greater volume of the space it abuts. It also lends daylight to the adjacent space, which has smaller, higher windows on both ends, so Sheri isn't peering into her neighbors' homes. This attention to preserving privacy from cottage to cottage is the foundation of the pattern Ross refers to as "nested houses," which suggests that cottages with one side that's more open and one side that's more closed nest well together, making for a neighborly arrangement.

Ross summarizes that Sheri's Betty Gable in her pocket neighborhood is a cottage for townfolk today. "It's an every-person's house," he says. Sheri adds, "Having a smaller footprint on the world was appealing too."



The smaller dining nook complements the greater volume of the kitchen it abuts. Each borrows visually from the other, lending the kitchen greater intimacy and the nook some expansiveness.



Scrolled sides on modest glass overhead cabinets add welcome detail to the open kitchen. PaperStone® counters, factory seconds, add richness while maintaining the budget. The tall ceiling lends the kitchen an unexpected spaciousness.





A propane stove serves as the hearth of the home. Recessing it within a crafted centerpiece, flanked by built-in bookcases, dresses up the living area. The 10-ft.-tall, board-and-batten ceiling and layered crown and wall trim add cottage character with lofty reach.

## POCKET NEIGHBORHOODS

A pocket is a protected space where we tuck special things for safe keeping beyond the fray. The small, cluster communities within larger communities that Ross Chapin began shaping in 1996—composed of no more than a dozen compact homes arranged around a common space in which the neighbors all have a stake—struck him as pockets of sorts too. He began referring to them as *pocket neighborhoods* and the name took hold.

“The prevailing opportunity in America is to live on your own lot or in an apartment (where you’ve got no say). This is in between. This is saying, the people who live here want to be in a neighborly setting. That comes with a certain responsibility,” explains Ross. He believes in limiting the number of homes in a pocket neighborhood to what he describes as the “scale of

sociability,” while also preserving personal privacy. He compares it to thinking about the size of a group of people around a dinner table who together comfortably engage in a lively discussion. Such diners, like those who live in a pocket neighborhood, feel connected to each other and enjoy being part of a community. Pocket neighborhoods are suited to single people, both younger and older, couples, families of one or two parents with children, adult children with aging parents—really, all kinds of households.

A common building for gatherings usually sits at the head of the shared open space, which may be a garden, a lawn, a pedestrian street, a courtyard, or some other mutually beneficial outdoor environment. Pocket neighborhoods differ from co-housing in that in a pocket neighborhood a sense

of community may arise naturally or organically due to residents living closely around a shared commons, whereas in co-housing the community is intentionally formed by people with shared values and goals who may even participate in the building of the community itself. “This is kind of in between co-housing and a traditional development,” Ross clarifies.

For Sheri, the Spring Valley pocket neighborhood has been a comfortable fit because, as she says with a laugh, her teenage daughter has four sets of supplementary grandparents there. To learn more about pocket neighborhoods and the design principles that shape them, refer to Ross’s book *Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small-Scale Community in a Large-Scale World*.