



French Country

COTTAGE

COURTNEY ALLISON

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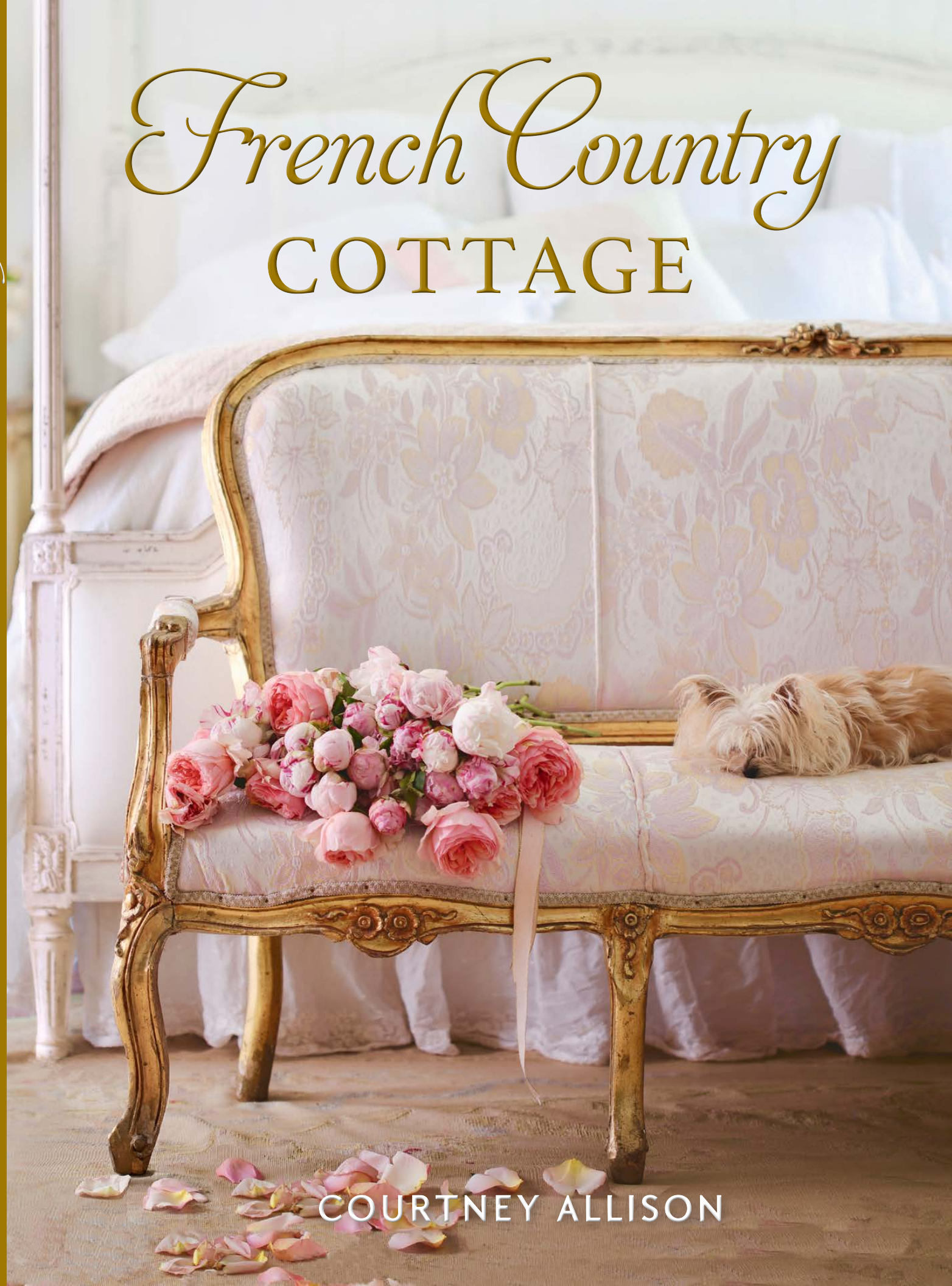


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MY HOME

From the very first week we lived in the house, we learned interesting and curious things about it. And through the years and the renovations, it has been a house filled with discoveries, many that were somewhat like kismet and others that made us scratch our heads and wonder—from things hidden inside the walls, to the slightly off-level floors and ceilings in some rooms, to old wiring and plumbing that didn't make sense, to missing insulation, to that time we discovered that the top of the wall boards and crown molding were not actually completely sealed (there was the tiniest of gaps between them, which we realized when we had an unexpected houseguest one of those first evenings in our home; a bat flew from the attic into the living room through one of those tiny gaps. And along with it, it brought a late-night impromptu project to seal every ceiling in the house).

When we were first working on renovations, my dad would come every couple of weeks and we would tackle a project or two. Being a contractor and builder, he knew how to fix the things we weren't sure about, and we enjoyed quite a few laughs as we dreamed up renovation ideas, right along with the mishaps and different things we discovered as we worked. And with what was quite literally a comedy of errors at times—there was also so much that we learned without even realizing it. Like that bees don't like to be disturbed, and they don't like construction—ever. That measuring three times is better than just twice, and that sometimes a simple fix is far better than an overly thought-

out plan. There was the time one of the main water lines leaked—after-hours on a weekend while my husband was out of town. Thankfully, our oldest, who was just about ten at the time, knew exactly how to fix the pipe because he had watched my dad work on plumbing the week before, and so we tackled it together and it worked. And another time, when trying to miter corners of the angled crown molding in the cottage unsuccessfully, our middle guy, who is gifted in construction, jumped in and cut the pieces right the first time and put them up. He was instantly hired to finish that project—and hired for a few others besides. There were the wonky, not-quite-level floors, the doors that didn't like to stay closed, and the little nooks and crannies we discovered as we worked that became charming spots in the house. And in those imperfections are many memories that are part of the journey of this house and how far it has come since we found it.

Part of the beauty of the long renovation process, which took much more time than we ever imagined when we signed on the dotted line, was that it allowed time for the house to talk to us. By living in the space, we could better understand the flow of the rooms and what worked and what didn't. And we noticed things like the path of the sunshine in the morning and where we seemed to spend most of our family time. This helped create a more refined vision for the house and how we wanted to live in it and what we wanted to keep and what we wanted to change to make it work better.

Our cottage on an early spring evening under a sherbet-colored sunset sky. My dad built window boxes and chunky corbels out of old fence boards for nearly every window on the house and cottage. Filled with perennials and fresh annual blooms each year, they add a perfect touch of cottage charm.

The Living Room

The living room is second only to the kitchen when it comes to gathering spaces. Our living room, with wood plank walls, hardwood floor, and an open, beamed ceiling has evolved from a dark and dreary space with small windows to a room filled with natural sunlight pouring in through several sets of French doors.

Over the years, the decor and furniture in this room have been on shuffle. When the kids were younger, for a more comfy and lived-in, relaxed look, I brought in inexpensive slipcovered sofas for plopping on. They were key in keeping my sanity when the boys had friends over, as well as for cleaning up any country dirt tracked in from outside. I paired the sofas with flea market finds, including an old bench made of fence boards that served as a makeshift coffee table for several years, and tucked in some of my favorites—gold tables—beside them.

With just this one room serving as living room and family room, it has always been a bit of a balancing act between what was easy and comfortable and what also created that more elegant style that I craved so much. And just as the kids have grown up, our home and the pieces in it were ever changing and growing to a different look as well. Those wobbly flea market benches and slip-covered sofas have done the shuffle just like so much of the rest of our home. And on occasion, those pieces have given way to more elegant French-style furnishings that created a refined atmosphere, even in the midst of the overall relaxed feeling the room has. But just like anything else in this house, the rooms change with the seasons, or sometimes, simply my mood, and those slip-covered sofas find their way here again and the French sofas will make appearances in other spaces as those whims give way to change.

In the living room, the antique gilded French mirror adds a bit of drama to an otherwise quiet corner.

Without formal rooms set aside for living, family, and dining spaces in the house, the large living room becomes all of those things and is truly an *everyday* space. It is where conversations happen while dining and while *relaxing* by the fire.





Flowers, French-inspired fabrics, and dainty tables create a cozy spot for retreating. A crystal-covered chandelier and candles tucked into the pea gravel create a cozy ambiance in the greenhouse for evening conversations.

The outside of the greenhouse looks much like a small cottage with crisp white paint. String lights illuminate the cottage-style garden, and vining wisteria on both sides of the greenhouse door climbs and covers the corners and helps provide shade from the hot summer sun.





THE HAMMOCK

I love the idea of smaller vignettes in the yard—I tend to think of spots in the yard as little moments. For instance, the front has the fire pit and oak tree, along with the pear trees—and tucked in between the pear trees is a secluded spot for a dining table or bench. The patio with Adirondack chairs is another, and the softly rolling landscape and the apple orchard in the far back offers a quiet spot for a fire pit. These little areas create smaller “moments” in the larger view.

When we first looked at this property, I didn’t see all of those “moments” on the acreage. We discovered them as

we explored the property after moving here. But that very first time that I drove onto the property, I was drawn to a distinct line of towering old-growth cedar trees that divided the more formal backyard area from the free-flowing country areas. Those cedar trees were originally planted to be perfectly spaced to create an old-style country fence; you can see the old lines in the bark even now, where barbed wire once was. And though the trees are not used as a fence or property break today, in between any two of them is a perfect spot for a hammock.

The hammock sits in between two stately cedar trees just a short walk up the hill from the dining area. If you follow the path from the table, it winds up through the bed of sweet peas, which grow naturally in abundance and carpet the ground underneath the hammock with purple, pink, and white blooms in the spring. The carpet of flowers creates a beautiful view and romantic mood, and beckons you to wander up and enjoy a few minutes swinging in the hammock in the breeze.

The hammock is a quiet place to rest. A spot to pause for a moment while clipping sweet peas or hydrangeas or to simply grab a book and settle in. I love to layer the hammock with fabrics, comfy blankets, and pillows to create a bit of a retreat feeling.





Simplicity is key in the cottage: an old pine board railing on the stairs, a vintage ironstone mold holding freshly picked apples, baskets and old chippy benches and tables. In the antique cupboard, stacks of collected plates, platters, and pitchers find a spot to land when not in use.

In the dining area, a small vintage table is a great spot for a cup of tea and a chat while gazing out the windows.

