

It's time to open up the summer homes

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Cottage season will soon kick into high gear, and as families head up to the lake to open up their summer homes they'll also be shedding light on some outdated decor.

"The cottage becomes the dumping ground for all these things they don't want in their city homes," says Karen Sealy, host of *Summer Home*, airing this summer on HGTV.

In *Summer Home*, Sealy takes cramped and cluttered family cottages and turns them into comfortable summer retreats, wiping away an awful lot of hunter green in the process.

"We have a very emotional connection to our cottages. It's our special time away," says Sealy, who will be sharing her cottage decorating tips at the International Home and Garden Show (www.internationalhomeshow.ca).

Because it's a casual place, it's a question, says Sealy, of "how do you take a dated space, not spend a lot of money, and update it?"

It can be fun to play up a theme, such as the cabin or seaside, in a cottage she says, noting it's a place to have a little bit more fun than our winter homes.

"We're not looking to wipe it out and make it look like your city home," says Sealy. We "can have a little more kitsch at the cottage."

One way to embrace this more casual vibe is to put treasured knickknacks on display. Sealy notes that it's good to group collections together for greater impact, for example by gathering a collection of tools on a shelf or displaying collected masks together on a wall.

Or use collections in new ways, she suggests, noting in one episode she turns vintage jars into pendant lights.

Even if you're not planning a decor overhaul, spring is a good time to declutter and freshen up the cottage, says Sealy, and also to "think about function, how you can better use the space."

This is particularly important, as in many cases, cottages haven't been updated to suit expanding family's needs, says Sealy.

"Cottages don't always service new larger family units well," she explains, citing one episode where a family had added a larger kitchen table to their space but didn't move the chandelier, leaving one end well illuminated and the rest of the diners eating in the dark.

In another makeover, the main cottage had a 10- by 10-foot kitchen, but the family was sitting around a card table instead of using a dark dining room. So, Sealy blew out the walls to open up the space, embrace natural light — and the view — and improve air circulation. Ever mindful of reusing and maintaining the cottage's history, she even used wood salvaged from the wall destruction to create a new dining table.

In addition to reusing pieces, storage is also key for the cottage, says Sealy, who learned how to make the most out of cramped quarters after living with her family on a boat for a year and a half while growing up.

This means, for example, opting for a big sectional rather than a bunch of chairs to open the space up visually while still providing the same amount of seating, or taking down view-blocking kitchen cabinets and relocating them for entryway storage.

If a bigger renovation is on your to-do list, Sealy recommends adding lots of windows to take advantage of natural light and orivude cross ventilation for those hot summer days.

“The main thing, regardless of what you’re designing, is to think about your function,” she says. You “can design a pretty room, but it needs to work for you.”