

Inspired by P.E.I., the décor is 'simple, casual and kind of country'



# INTERIOR DESIGN GURU COBI LADNER

INVITES 'HELLO!' TO HER RUSTIC SEASIDE RETREAT ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND AND OPENS UP ABOUT DESIGNING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF HER LIFE



Cobi says that buying her bucolic cottage (below) on laid-back Prince Edward Island made her want to bake an apple pie, because 'when was the last time I actually took the time to make a pie crust?'



Cobi Ladner has had quite a year. The famed editor – who left the helm of *Canadian House & Home* last June after 18 years at the magazine – has been doing some serious soul-searching, and during the warmer months, her Maritime cottage has been the ideal place to do it.

"It's been an incredible year on many levels," the 47-year-old shares with *Hello! Canada*. "It's really great in your 40s to reassess what you've done and where you've been, and where you are headed for the second half of your life. We all work so hard through our 20s and 30s to get somewhere, plus family is happening," she continues. "You get to the point where you say, 'Wait a minute – am I going in the direction that I want?'"

For the Mississauga, Ont.-based design guru, that point came in February 2008, when her father passed away from a sudden aneurysm. A robust, healthy man, his death came as a complete shock. The tragedy caused Cobi to re-examine her priorities. "It became very clear to me that life is just a period of time, and that if you're going to get to where you want to go, you've got to get at it," she says. "It's easy to put those kinds of decisions on the back burner. That was part of my leaving *House & Home*."

And so Cobi decided to take a breather. She passed some of that precious downtime at her idyllic rural retreat – a cottage on Prince Edward Island, near where her dad grew up – settling in with her husband, Bob Brehl, 47, and two

children, Aidan, 13, and Charlotte, 10.

"It's such a special place in that it feels like you go back in time when you go there," Cobi remarks. "I feel like we've turned the clock back 50 years and life is simpler."

And it's the "simple pleasures" she likes most about her time there. "We play Monopoly for an afternoon if it rains. We go with the kids out to the water, and you can swim in the ocean. I remember when I bought the cottage, I said, 'I want to bake an apple pie, because when was the last time I actually

PHOTO: VIRGINIA JOHNSTON



**'Your home should really be the place where you feel your best'**

Cobi's cottage has three bedrooms, including a kids' room (above). The holiday home also features quiet corners for reading, writing, drawing or painting (left). The bright kitchen (top, right) is a place for Cobi, her husband, Bob, and their children, Aidan and Charlotte, to congregate, cook and share stories from the day. 'It feels like you go back in time when you go there,' she says of the serene P.E.I. retreat. 'I feel like we've turned the clock back 50 years and life is simpler.'

took the time to make a pie crust?" For Cobi, decorating the "humble" holiday house – which is located about 30 minutes from the Charlottetown airport, near the town of Morell, and boasts spectacular views of the Gulf of St. Lawrence – proved to be a pleasure, with comfort as the guiding principle. "I would never have done anything that was particularly sophisticated," Cobi explains. "I was looking to reflect the charm of the Island, something that just felt simple and casual and kind of country."

Cottage guests are greeted by plush armchairs and comfy beds perfect for naps. Warm blankets are always within arm's reach and lamps are positioned in every nook and cranny so that everyone can curl up with a good book. It's a cozy oasis designed to encourage rest, relaxation and reflection.

And that's exactly what Cobi has been doing this year. "I've taken that time, that moment," she says. "Now I'm revving up for my next thing." In July, Cobi will usher in a new era of her life when she launches her new website, *cobistyle.com*. "I feel I have something to say in the world of design and I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to express that," she says. "It's an attitude about lifestyle that's missing from the marketplace. People are generally too stressed – they're not enjoying the process of decorating. Your home should really be the place where you feel your best, that reflects you and brings you joy."

Island culture seems to be particularly conducive to this joyful state of mind, which is why Cobi will no doubt head back to Prince Edward Island the next time that she's in need of inspiration. "There's something about it," she muses. "There's a casualness and an easiness – a friendliness and sense of family – that's perfect for us. We really treasure our time there. I'm hoping that it gives our kids memories. I want to show them that there is a way to live that isn't so rushed." **H**

REPORT: TARA HENLEY  
PHOTOS: ANDREW WALLER