



**HOME  
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Pages 12-13

**HOME  
MAGAZINE**

Tallahassee Democrat  
Saturday, January 28, 1979



on our  
cover...

Laura Jepsen lives in a cottage that looks as if it may have been imported from 16th Century England. But it's constructed from fine American woods and stone. And the story Laura tells of its construction is something else again. Her story pages 6-9.

## Table of contents

House doctor	4,5
An English cottage	6-9
All about improving	10
Real estate mailbag	11
Flea market finds	14,15
Sunflowers	16
Big bend gardens	17
Design for living	18,19
Antique auctions	20,21
House plan	22
Basket weaving	23

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A mighty oak shields Laura Jepsen's cottage from the traffic on High Road, right. The great room of her sparsely furnished, but still charming home is viewed through an upper level window, opposite page above.



Democrat story  
by Hettie Cobb

Democrat photos  
by Ray Stanyard



# *An English cottage*

Laura Jepsen calls it her dream castle — the steep-roofed cottage that looks like it came out of 16th Century England. She's named it "Litchgate on High Road."

Set against a dense wood, far back from the street, it can be glimpsed through the branches of a mighty oak tree, whose tired old limbs must prop on the ground for support.

Friends who have visited her from around the world have said it reminded them of an Alpine chalet, or the Anne Hathaway Cottage, birthplace of Shakespeare's wife near Stratford-upon-Avon, or the Hansel and Gretel house of fairytale fame.

At one stage of building, when the frame was wrapped in black tar paper, children called it the "Witch's Hut," Laura confides.

"Litchgate," as she explains, during medieval times, was a convenient bench near the church graveyard where a coffin-bearer could rest his burden.

But in modern use, the word means a memorial.

Litchgate on High Road is a memorial "to the world of retrospect," said Laura, long-time English professor at Florida State University. She will retire in June.

It was built to preserve the past, using Tudor architecture, antique furnishings, a variety of ancient woods, and granite that Laura estimates to be about 300 million years old.

The granite came from Lithonia, Ga., from the same quarry as the old Capitol steps.

The woods are from "the far corners of the United States." They were shipped to Tallahassee and the lumber hewn on the three-acre homesite. The cedar came from the state of Washington, the redwood from California, the white pine from Vermont, and the cypress from Florida.

"A cypress tree more than 2,000 years old was cut in a Florida swamp," she said, "antedating the birth of Christ."

The inside of the two-bedroom, two-bath, two-story home is paneled in cypress. The outside is weathered redwood in a ship-lap pattern.

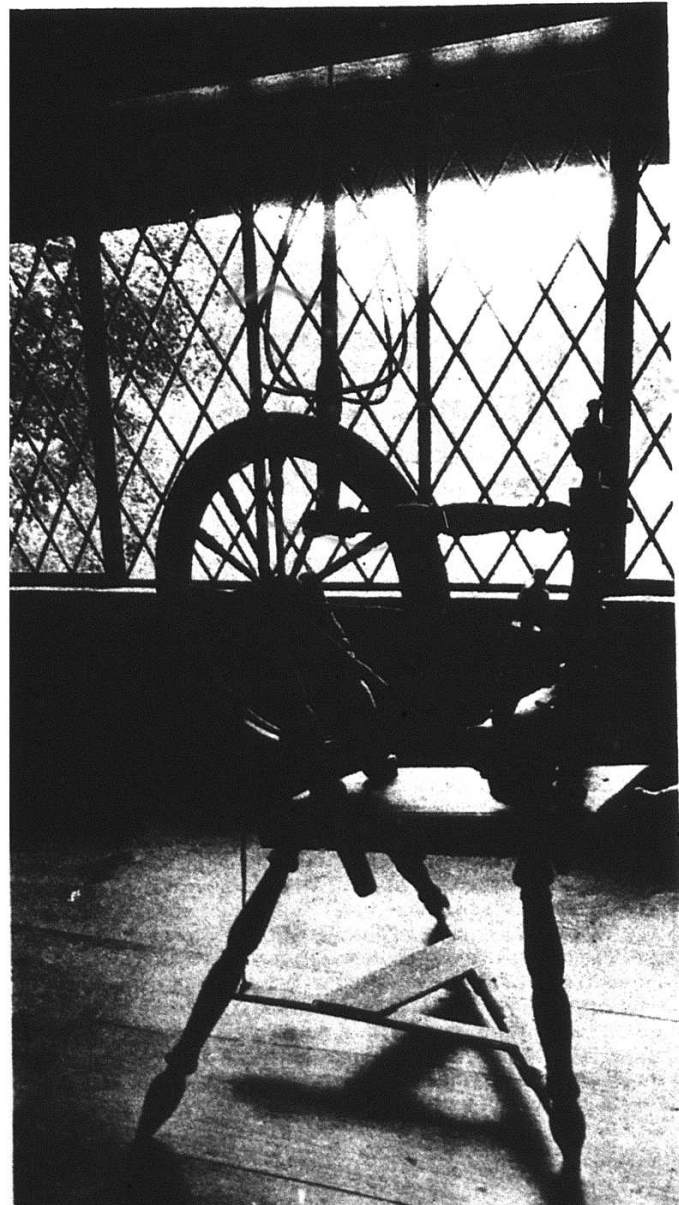
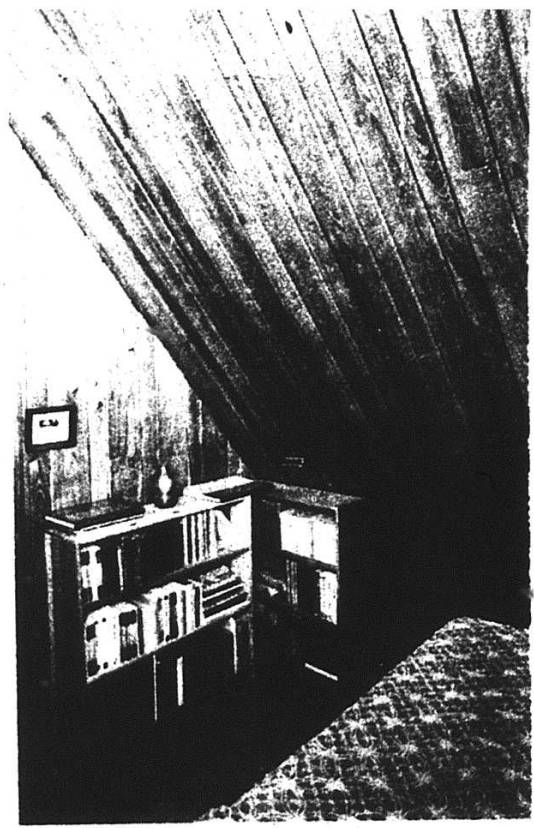
Laura considers the floor boards to be the most unusual wood. Some are nearly two feet wide. They came from a Vermont house, built 14 years before the Revolutionary War.

"Much of the difficulty in laying the floor arose from the boards being not only uneven but unequal in thickness," she said.

The house has a great room, dominated by a stone fireplace. There is a Harvard student chair, an old-fashioned buggy seat, a blanket chest, spinning wheel, and a bonnet chest.

"Some people call it a dry sink, or a sugar box," she said. "But I prefer the name bonnet chest, for it has a

The cottage, opposite page, is nestled against woods, with the yard defined by a picket fence.



The steep roof gives quite a slant to the ceiling in the spartan upstairs bedroom, above. A spinning wheel is among the antique pieces that furnish the house, left.

drawer to hold m'lady's hat pins and ribbons."

Doilies on top of an antique desk were crocheted by her mother. A Brussels lace doilie is placed on top of an old Victrola where Miss Jepsen plays records of John Barrymore reciting Hamlet, T.S. Elliot and Robert Frost reading their own poems, E.S. Southern doing Julius Caesar, and Caruso singing Aieda.

She also has recordings of frog songs and birds singing.

A corner cupboard with a glass door holds the ribbons won by Laura's champion bulldog, Kip.

Except for a few hooked rugs in a Cape Cod pattern, done by Laura herself, the floors are bare. And but for framed maps of the British Isles, giving the crests of the cities, so are the walls.

A picture window offers a generous view of *The Tree*.

The panes of the picture window, like those of the single windows on either side of the fireplace, are leaded in a diamond pattern.

The downstairs bedroom is only large enough for a single bed — covered with a Tartan plaid blanket from Scotland — and a chest, with windows on either side.

Through folding, pine doors is the one-woman kitchen with a vintage stove and refrigerator and white porcelain sink.

To reach the upstairs bedroom you must climb a narrow, rail-less stair case.

On the balcony, a triple-window opens out for an in-depth view of the great room and the fireplace.

The Spartan, steep-ceilinged bedroom has a single bed and a corner bookcase, with a half-bath adjoining.

The thing that attracted Laura Jepsen to the site on High Road was *The Tree*.

"For two years I walked in almost every direction within a dozen miles of Tallahassee," she said. "I considered site after site for a home. But I always returned to the cow pasture at the foot of High Road, climbed the barbed wire fence, pushed aside dense foliage of myrtle, mimosa, and chinaberry undergrowth to get to the tree."

To build the house, Laura brought down Bascom Hoyle, a carpenter and stone-cutter who had helped build her mountain cabin in Little Switzerland, N.C.

She remembers the morning he arrived in March of 1956.

"The carload of granite was waiting on a spur of the railroad track, and half a dozen men were standing about speculating upon the best way to unload it," she said.

"They decided that if four men lifted each piece of granite piece by piece — some weighing more than 300 pounds — and loaded it onto a truck, it would take two days to deliver and cost about \$800.

"Bascom was aghast. He stepped forward and said, 'You don't have to handle those pieces like lumps of sugar.' Then the men began tossing the almost indestructible granite blocks into the truck . . . the car was empty in a few hours. . .

"With resourcefulness and originality, in about eight weeks, Bascom and one helper built a foundation of solid granite, and a chimney more than 20 feet high — massive, rugged and firm.

"Thereafter, for many years, his helper came back



each year to inspect the chimney and to remark, 'Ain't cracked yet!'"

When the \$5,000 Laura had borrowed to build the house was spent, construction came to a stand-still.

"I had the skeleton of a house: four walls, a chimney and sheathing overhead," she said. "But as protection against the weather, the house would have to be shingled. I had to borrow again."

When the roof was covered with cedar shingles, she began living in the house. The cracks in the floor were covered with newspapers. The openings in the walls let in such creatures as a rat snake, field mouse, a flying squirrel and a wren.

"During the winter the house was always cold, even though logs were burning in the fireplace," she recalled. "For several hours in the mornings my bulldog and I would go outdoors and sit in the car to keep warm."

Like the American essayist Thoreau, Laura Jepsen had often dreamed of a house with one room and not much housekeeping to do — pots on pegs near the fireplace, clothes on pegs behind the door.

"I had almost realized that dream," she said.

After a lapse of two years, work on the "tar paper hut" began again — this time by Hoyle and two helpers.

When the boards for the floors arrived by truck from Vermont, "with the gray dust of two centuries embedded in their rough texture," the workmen didn't know what to make of them, she said. From the look on their faces, they didn't consider them worth splitting for kindling wood.

After the floors were hand-sanded, Laura sealed and varnished them. The result was "a mellow walnut brown that only age can give."

Nails of many descriptions were used, all of copper. Wrought iron hinges for the entrance doors were found at a forge in North Carolina, and the house was finished. □