

## Barn Beauty

by BROOKE LANGE



Photography by Kenneth Wyner

that numerous extended family members would inhabit four of the farm's six residences, he recommended the barn be given a second chance as an old-time gathering hall, convincing the owners — who love to entertain — that the wide-open and capacious floor plan would be perfect for parties.

Now completely restored as a grand home for hosting guests and gatherings, the 2,590-square-foot Bank Barn remains banked into the hillside of the property's highest crest, overlooking a horse meadow to the southeast and a cow pasture to the northeast. The ground floor, which originally housed livestock, is now a four-car garage. The threshing floor — where wheat, rye, barley, and other crops were “threshed” (to separate the grain from the harvested sheaf) — now serves as the great room and kitchen. And the loft into which farmers used to toss hay is now a decked-out playroom, complete with a pool table, flat-screen TV, dartboard, and custom-built Murphy bed.

Much of the siding and flooring has been replaced with wood reclaimed from a nearby barn that was too damaged to renovate, and antique block and tackle pulleys that were once used to hoist hay hang from the ceiling in a nod to the barn's former life. The original tin roof remains intact and can be seen peeking through the ceiling slats from the interior, though it had to be topped with insulation and new tin paneling.

Likewise, most of the barn's exterior had to be replaced, with the exception of the sturdy stone base. “The barn's foundation probably dates back to before the Civil War,” says Blackburn, explaining that farmers often rebuilt barns on top of surviving foundations.

But when looking at the Bank Barn, most would never know it's the product of laborious restoration. “It's critical [that a renovation] is done so it doesn't look like a residence that's been added onto,” Blackburn says. “I try very hard to preserve what's unique about the original structure — you don't want to lose the sense of the structure.”

The only obvious architectural alteration is the contemporary glass paneling along the north wall. “While trying to figure out where to put in windows [without making it look] like a barn that's been converted into a house, I thought we could replace the wood siding with glass,” says Blackburn. “It's almost like having a three-sided barn with one open wall.”

To some, a dilapidated old barn is nothing more than an eyesore. But to others, like architect John Blackburn, it's a slice of Americana. So when he was hired as the master planner of renovations on a farm in Loudoun County, Virginia, Blackburn knew he had to save the original barn from a future as firewood.

“Barns like that tend to be boarded up or butchered to sell off the wood. ... The roof was peeling back, some of the wallboards were torn off, and the weather was blowing in. My first thought was we better do something fast or we're going to lose it,” says Blackburn, who was commissioned to design a new barn, covered arena, service building, and staff residence for the property. Knowing



[+](#) Enlarge

Along the great room's eastern wall, a custom cherry wood dining table

Just as he hoped, the wall of windows doesn't detract from the barn's authentic aesthetic because the north side of the barn isn't visible from the public road, the private entry to the property, or even the majority of on-site locations. But it does allow for plenty of natural light to illuminate the space and offers an unobstructed, verdant view of the surrounding countryside — and the sparkling night skies.



[+ Enlarge](#)  
With coordinating red cabinetry, the kitchen has two of every appliance to allow for cooking large meals for parties.

for 12 sits beneath a chandelier fo  
candles.

Indoors, interior designer Phyllis Whaley helped the home-owners to create a rustic refinement all their own. “They wanted the barn to reflect its original use, but they didn't want it to look like something ‘of the period,’ where everything had to look like it came from the 18th century,” says Whaley, who had come to know the couple well while working on their 6,000-square-foot Norfolk residence a few years prior. “There are no wagon-wheel coffee tables or any gold-panning buckets — we just added what we liked.”

Later incorporating custom pieces to complete a cohesive look, Whaley styled the space with an eclectic variety of décor, including old and new furnishings, items acquired during the owners' world travels (including an Indonesian daybed that doubles as a sofa), and accessories from the owners' previous home — as well as some from her own. She even offered up her former husband's surveying instrument, fashioning it into a floor lamp. “It has a history to it — an owner's name, dates used, and what it was used for,” she says. More modern touches include the great room's two right-angled red suede sofas, which were chosen to complement the contemporary painting by Roberta Marovelli that graces the adjacent wall (and rises to reveal a large flat-screen TV) and were the inspiration for the bright red cabinetry of the adjoining kitchen.

“There's something that feels very right about the party barn. It's very open, the furniture is very comfortable, and it feels very warm,” says the wife — who recently held a 50th anniversary party for her parents in the barn, lining the windowpanes of the north and side walls with a host of glittering votive candles. Thinking back on the special evening, she adds, “It's really a magical space.”

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