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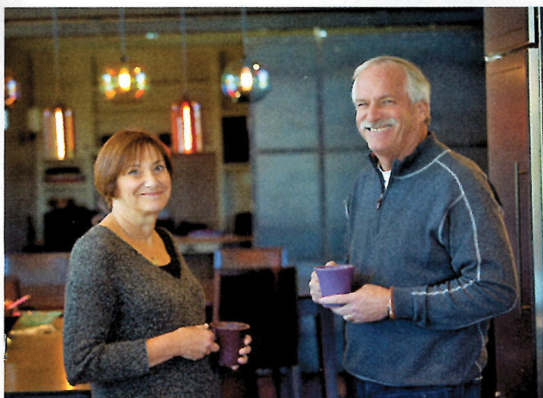


# Our House

ONE COUPLE'S CONTEMPORARY FARMHOUSE BRINGS EVERYONE HOME



BY ABBY WOOD // PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT BARROW



WHEN MERYL AND BARRY FREEDMAN began making plans to build a home in the Berkshires, they had one thing in mind.

“First and foremost, we hoped that the home would be a magnet for our children and our grandchildren,” says Barry as he relaxes on a washed-linen couch and gazes out an expanse of windows to the rolling hills just beyond. Taking a quick look around at the toys strewn about, and no-fuss, lived-in furniture, it’s easy to tell that the couple achieved that goal. What makes the home even more special, perhaps, is the “hands of the artists,” as Lenox designer Karen Beckwith puts it, seen in many unique aspects of the house and fostered by the Freedmans’ creative vision.

Barry, who works in hospital administration, and Meryl, a homemaker, had dreamed of having a place in the Berkshires ever since both their children attended summer camps here and they fell in love with the area. Years later, two pairs of friends from Chappaqua, New York—where the Freedmans had lived for over 20 years and raised their children—both happened to build homes in Alford. For the Freedmans, that made it an easy decision to purchase land there in 2007. Coincidentally, both friends also used Williamstown architecture firm Burr & McCallum. “We really loved our friends’ homes,” says Meryl, adding that she and Barry were inspired by Burr & McCallum’s application of “simple, clean lines but with surprise elements.”

The first glimpse of the Freedman’s home comes about a third of the way up a winding dirt driveway, just past a herd of cows. The dark-green compound looks as if it was always a part of the landscape. “It does have a presence as you come up to it,” explains architect Andy Burr, “but our intention was the house should kind of blend into the trees in the background.” >



One of the first “surprise elements” of the architecture is that such a rural-looking exterior could be so clean and modern on the inside, yet completely welcoming. “I wanted it to be farm-like without being a farmhouse,” says Meryl with a laugh. She and Barry wanted a lot of light, which tends toward a more contemporary design, but did not want a contemporary house overall. “The key was to have something that was comfortable and easy and not stiff,” Meryl adds. In the end, what Burr & McCallum created was a home that is part-farmhouse in structure, part-contemporary in its clean lines, loft-like space, and large industrial fixtures. The firm’s signature can be seen mostly in the great room of the main house, which encompasses the living room, kitchen, dining area, and office.

Coming through the front door, one is struck by the sheer amount of light entering the room from floor-to-ceiling windows on every side. “This window I was insistent about,” says Barry as he looks out at the Eastern horizon. “I love sitting and just being able to look out and see that hillside in the distance. It’s soothing to me.”

To the far right, a massive metal fireplace, with a television cleverly hidden behind a pair of doors above, beckons all who enter to gather round. The worn-metal finish is echoed in perhaps the most unique structural aspect of the home—three sets of massive barn doors that hang from factory-like trusses, which conveniently slide closed to separate the room into smaller spaces.

Burr was thrilled to incorporate the sliding doors, even admitting that he tried to convince previous clients to try them, to no avail. “But Meryl and Barry liked the idea and we were so excited,” he remembers. “It’s kind of fun to have these big rolling doors. It allows you to close off areas or partly separate areas, but still overall have a great big loft-like space.”



**NO FARM ANIMALS HERE**  
Meryl and Barry Freedman envisioned their home to be "farmlike without being a farmhouse." With the artistry of Lenox designer Karen Beckwith, Williamstown architecture firm Burr & McCallum, and colorist Doug Paisley, the Alford house is just what the couple envisioned. It is filled with special touches such as hand-blown glass pendant lights over the dining table and a carousel horse purchased at an auction.



**WELCOMING TOUCHES**  
The home is comfortably set up for family members—especially the Freedmans' grandchildren. Reclining white chairs, left, are made of ultra-suede—and are easy to clean. The marble coffee table is custom-made, constructed out of two slabs of marble taken from the original steps of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Bottom left, a set of antique stamps that the grandchildren love to play with, and, bottom right, a “gather” sign hangs on a wall at the top of the stairs, next to the playroom. Right, the main living area of the pool-house, filled with lively colors and eclectic accents.





Once the architectural plans were in place, everything else just seemed to fall together. As is often the case here in the Berkshires, the degree of separation is like a Kevin Bacon game—everyone is linked in some way, or a “friend of a friend.” On a visit to West Stockbridge, Barry ran into an old college friend, Lou Boxer, and subsequently hired him to build his home. Both Boxer and Suky Werman, innkeeper of Stonover Farm in Lenox where the Freedmans often stayed, recommended Beckwith.

When Meryl worked with colorist Doug Paisley, an artist and studio assistant at Williams College, on the main house, she gave him one simple inspiration: Rome. “In Rome,” she says, reminiscing on a visit there, “the painted old buildings are faded, warm-honey tones; I loved the pinks, the roses, the golds, all of the different shades.” Paisley worked his magic to create a warm, inviting space full of honeyed golds, worn-denim blues, and pale greens, which soften the sharp lines of the architecture.

It was then up to Beckwith to further soften the industrial features of the home. “[Meryl] saw it as a country house, but I kept thinking, God, this is modern, because it’s very loft-like,” Beckwith recalls of the first time she saw the plans. “So I call it ‘factory modern.’ It’s old, weathered, organic looking. That’s the vibe of the house that was going on when I got involved and I just kept going with it.”

Beckwith added neutral textiles, like washed-linen slipcovers and custom-made, printed pillows with pale yellow gussets, to continue the organic theme while still keeping with Meryl’s request for a relaxed setting. One-of-a-kind antique pieces, like a stunning, wood dining table from Painted Porch in Sheffield that extends to seat 24—perfect for holiday gatherings—and a collection of rusted pliers in graceful positions, offset the ultra-modern structure.



### CRAZY WITH COLOR

Fun touches are found all over the home, including clown pillows in the children's playroom and an antique miniature ferris wheel just inside the main entryway. Bottom photo, a guest room in the pool house, where Meryl just loves the bright green shade on the wall. "When we gave [colorist Doug Paisley] the assignment of the guest house after the main house was already built, I said now I really want to go crazy with color." Opposite page, a yellow 1940s "womb chair" also is found in the pool house. Meryl took a liking to that style of chair after her friend used one for nursing.







One favorite piece of both owners and designer is the stone coffee table that sits in the middle of the living room. The table, which Beckwith had custom made, is constructed out of two slabs of marble taken from the original steps of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The massive piece required ten men to bring it into the home, but the effort was worth it—the table is still a conversation starter. Beckwith also carried a bit of the industrial flare over to the pool house, where she and Meryl went wild with vibrant colors and a retro design feel, including another custom table made out of rough metal to mirror the barn doors in the main house. It is engraved with the “Pool Rules”—all of which do not apply to Barry, of course.

When all was said and done, the Freedmans and their collaborative team of architects, colorist, builders, and designer, had created a home that was country yet industrial, modern yet relaxed, playful yet sophisticated. Family members young and old from across the Northeast reunite each year for the holidays, and old camp friends gather here each summer to catch up.

The door is always open, and there is “always commotion, which is nice,” says Meryl. “One thing that is very dear to us is that our four-year-old grandson, Jack, refers to the house as ‘my country home.’ ■