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## Transforming an old Berkshires barn into a contemporary home

A family gives a second chance to an old barn by stripping it back, Scandinavian style.

By Marni Elyse Katz Globe Correspondent, Updated July 23, 2020, 12:05 p.m.



The family stores their vinyl record collection under the bench of the new bump-out bay in the living room. GREG PREMUR

Carter Williams's first order of business was to persuade the builder that this barn in Alford was worth the investment. "He didn't initially share the clients' enthusiasm for putting so much effort into refurbishing the barn as it wasn't particularly valuable or historic," says Williams, an architect with LDa Architecture & Interiors, who collaborated with principal architect Michael Waters.

The classic red barn in the Berkshires is on a 108-acre plot, with 101 acres protected under a conservation restriction. The mission was to transform the barn into a guesthouse where the couple and their son, who live in Brooklyn, New York, could stay while Williams and Waters developed a design for the historic main house.

A Scandinavian aesthetic informs the renovated barn, which had been used as a three-car garage with an apartment. The original silhouette reminded the wife of the traditional barns the family saw in Sweden. Waters says, "It was a drab shed at best, but the shape was there."

Once the contractor, Lou Boxer, came on board, they needed to shore up the structure. In addition, the team replaced the asphalt shingle roof with a standing-seam metal one and converted the southernmost garage door into a recessed entry. The layering of the door "created an architectural invitation that is especially welcoming at night when it's illuminated," Waters explains. They aligned a new bank of three windows over the entrance, but left the existing three windows unchanged, despite uneven spacing. The casualness is charming compared with formal compositions.

The couple retained two garage bays on the first floor, which left just enough room to fit a new cement-tiled mudroom and a guest bedroom with a half bath. To increase the approximately 1,050 square feet of living space without enlarging the footprint of the building, Waters and Williams redesigned a porch that had once been part of the barn. The new one is screened in and topped by a roof deck that functions as the family's dining space in the warmer months.

By eliminating the attic and adding windows, the architects created a sun-drenched living space on the second level, with an almost 15-foot-high cathedral ceiling. "Having more air and light makes a small room a lot more pleasant," Waters says. They also paired up the collar tie support structures. Now, instead of them running across the top of the space every 16 inches, each pair is spaced about 3½ feet apart, lending a much airier effect.

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According to the homeowners, an eightysomething neighbor saw the barn transported from town to its current location when he was a boy. GREG PREMUR

Painting everything white was an easy change that made a dramatic difference. The homeowners liked the vibe and texture of the original random-width vertical paneling, but not the dark color. And where there wasn't paneling there was wallpaper — a lot of it. It came down, save for a narrow strip in the couple's bedroom. The wife also added a crisp blue and white floral wallpaper by Hygge & West on a tucked away wall in the kitchen.

The architects maximized storage by incorporating built-ins. Upper cabinetry would have overpowered the small kitchen, so they designed open shelves for under the eaves. The pine-topped peninsula ties into a bookcase along the half-wall that hides the stairs. To address what Waters calls "lack of elbow room," they designed a boxed bay window that pushes out the back of the house. Not only does it bring in afternoon light and provide a cozy spot to watch the sunset, it doubles as storage. Cubbies run along the front, and the top lifts up to reveal a spot to hide board games and blankets.

There's also a new boxed bay window in the couple's bedroom, which Williams likens to a chest at the foot of the bed. As for the bed itself, the homeowners chose one that sits low to the floor, so as not eat up visual space in the small bedroom. "It's a pleasure to work with owners that are engaged and understand the architecture," Waters says. "We just helped them realize the best this little building could be."

**RESOURCES:**

**Architect and designer:** LDa Architecture & Interiors, [lda-architects.com](http://lda-architects.com)

**Contractor:** Lou Boxer Builder, [louboxerbuilder.com](http://louboxerbuilder.com)

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The bay in the couple's bedroom provides hidden storage for blankets. The throw pillows are from Hammertown in Great Barrington. GREG PREMUR



Benjamin Moore Simply White paint brightens the rooms, lets the natural materials stand out, and creates a neutral backdrop that doesn't distract from the view. GREG PREMUR



For their son's room, the owners chose a scaled down bunk bed from Crate&Kids and a shallow, unfinished pine dresser from Ikea. GREG PREMUR



A strip of original wallpaper remains in the couple's bedroom. "Preserving old materials lends charm," Waters says. GREG PREMUR



A black steel panel held off the wall with pegs matches the inset steel hearth. "The concept of a heat shield is traditional, but the material and application are cool and modern," Williams says. GREG PREMUR

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