

SECOND



OLD BUILDINGS, NEW HOMES—AND THE JOURNEY IN BETWEEN



LIVES

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# BORN A G A I N

## A B A R N R A I S I N G

*Reminders of the building's rustic past are everywhere in the granary. Wood dominates the house—the eye is drawn to each and*

AS HIS JEEP BOUNCES DOWN A NARROW road in Virginia's Bath County, some 150 miles from the Beltway, Philip Hirsh points across a newly mown hayfield toward what seems to be a classic barn, all weathered gray boards topped with a red-painted roof. Proudly, he explains that the road, barely more than a stony track running through the woods, dates back to the 18th century, when it was used by settlers to reach the chain of forts along the colonies' western frontier. Now it wends its way through Meadow Lane Farm, the 1,600-acre spread belonging to



*every timber and plank, knot and grain. The kitchen area has two tables: a small one in the nook above and the larger one at right. A pass-through increases the sense of light and space.*

Philip and his wife, Catherine. Turning off the old road, he loops around a tiny slave cabin—"the only one still standing in Bath County," he notes—and past the area where the remains of colonial Fort Dinwiddie lie buried. He pulls up to the granary.

If from a distance everything about the building reads "barn," up close its reincarnation as a contemporary home comes into focus—modern casement windows, brick walkway and even a tiny satellite dish out back. Built sometime around the turn of the century, for decades the granary held corn, oats and barley grown on the Hirsh family farm. For the last 25 years, up until the renovation began, it had stored "nothing but junk," says Catherine. In 1993 Philip, the retired









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A BARN RAISING





chairman of a Fortune 500 manufacturing company, began to think of making use of the worn, weather-beaten structure. Always preservation-minded, he had already restored several other buildings on the property, including the former farmhouse where the couple live and an inn they opened in their "retirement."

Philip sat down and sketched out some ideas for converting the granary into an additional vacation home for his expanding family, thinking he might also rent it out in their absence. Just then Georgetown architect John Blackburn turned up at the farm, an overnight guest at the inn. Blackburn's firm, as it happens, specializes in barns and had done a fair amount of historic renovation. The two men clicked, and in no time Blackburn & Associates was hired.

The project was to be a total overhaul. Never intended to house people or even animals, the granary lacked not only windows, heat, water and electricity but also solid walls: Gaps between the boards ran inches wide, giving, in some places, a view straight through the building to daylight on the other side. It was to be very much Philip Hirsh's show, for he is a vigorous 83-year-old who holds a degree in engineering from Yale—along with many strong opinions. "He had a lot of ideas already worked out," observes Blackburn, who worked on the granary with his colleague Mickey Finn. "We were mainly developing and refining his original concepts."



Reusing as much as possible of the existing materials was the team's overarching goal. "There was no drywall, not one piece of concrete, not one building block used," Philip proclaims. First the builders removed, numbered and waterproofed all the exterior planks. Before putting the boards back in their original configuration, they installed the guts of the building: plumbing, electrical work, insulation and watertight walls. Where there weren't enough of the original materials to go around, the team often used old lumber cannibalized from another collapsing barn on the property; its weathered-brown exterior boards now line the inside of the granary, and two of its cupolas perch on the roof.

Both outside and in, what captures a visitor's attention is a two-story corncrib stretching the granary's entire 50-foot length. Its thin horizontal

*When renovation began, the structure was filled with stored debris. Philip and Catherine Hirsh incorporated some of it: In the hall, far left, an old sign is built into the wall (Osgood manufactured scales for weighing cattle). The carpenter's bench used to build the granary is now a table in the loftlike living room, above. A hided box, left, was made from part of a trough.*





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