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Party Barn in Leesburg

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AN OLD RED BARN GETS A NEW LIFE

A POST-CIVIL WAR BANK BARN IN
LEESBURG IS TRANSFORMED INTO A
STATE-OF-THE-ART PARTY SPACE

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John Blackburn and others converted a rundown bank barn into a fantastic party space/guesthouse.

How did a dilapidated barn with rotting wood, a sagging floor, and holes in the sides large enough to fit a hand through get converted into one of the most exciting up-to-the-minute party space/guesthouses along the Potomac? When the owners purchased their property in Leesburg, VA,

the old barn that came with it looked like a tear down. But they wanted to save the intriguing structure, which dates back to the late 1800s.

"Everyone who saw it said, 'You have to push it down for safety,' " the owner says. Everyone, that is, except Architect John Blackburn, owner of Blackburn Architects, PC. He specializes in distinctive equestrian architecture and adaptive reuse. "After

John said, 'I think you can do it,' it evolved." In fact, Blackburn did such an innovative re-adaptation of the barn, the conversion recently garnered him an "Award of Merit in Historic Resources" from the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

As you approach the red barn, it doesn't strike you as atypical. But slide open the big wooden barn doors, step inside past the glass doors, and you enter a space transformed.

Blackburn adapted the old structure to new technology, while preserving the original character of the building. The biggest delight is that the entire east end of the barn from the original wide plank floors to the rustic rafters is a wall of mullioned windows with a beautiful stone fireplace in the center. The series of windows overlook a tranquil pasture that is part of the spectacular 270-acre estate.

“IT’S SO GREAT THAT THESE OLD BOARDS CAN HEAR LAUGHTER AND KIDS RUNNING AROUND,” PHYLLIS WHALEY SAYS.

Baci relaxes on a Moorish day bed. Roberta Marovelli’s red painting of a bull behind him is on a pulley system and conceals a flat screen TV.



The renovated barn provides pastoral views.

Preserving Authenticity

“Everything had to come down to its bones,” Blackburn says. An adjacent smaller barn that was deteriorating was removed to open the view completely after Blackburn suggested adding the wall of windows. After discussing the removal with the owners, Guy Gerachis, owner of Gerachis Construction Group LLC, and Kenny Deneen, owner of Ken’s Kustoms, salvaged as much as possible from the larger old barn, which was built for animals and hay storage. For example, they reclaimed the original wide-plank barn board floors. They reworked the original barn siding, closing 100-year-old gaps, and where wood was rotting or missing utilized the wood reclaimed from the smaller barn and the east wall. When they exhausted those sources, Gerachis suggested using some of several white oaks that had fallen on the property during a storm for railing posts, stairs, and some support posts since the majority of the original timber framing was also white oak. “We left the new wood outside to air dry so it aged a little, then we dressed it to match. The doors to the kitchen are actually new, but we gouged and beat them with chains and used rusty nails. We also used old bridles and halters we found on the property for hardware,” Gerachis says.

Not only did they reuse the original wood for the sides of the barn, they even saved the original tin ceiling. An old hammermill, a block pulley, and a hay trolley with the hooks in the ceiling are all still hanging as they have been for decades. By integrating so many original materials, the team preserved the authentic weathered look of the interior. They also added six inches of structural insulation panels, then rebuilt the exterior of the barn following the lines of the original structure.

‘A Feets Up Room’

“When the architects opened this wall, it just dictated a smile. It’s a feets up room,” Phyllis Whaley, owner of Leopard Interiors Ltd., who guided the interior design, says. “You can curl up on the sofa, put your feet on the coffee table, and scrunch up the rugs.”

“I like sitting in that couch and just looking up at that roof with the music on at dusk,” the owner says. “At night, you can sit in here and see stars in the sky. It’s a big sky – a Montana sky.”

The inspiring barn, which is used for family events, parties, and retreats, provides lots of open space and several tables that can be used for large scale entertaining. For example, the hand-built dining table can seat 12. The gate leg table behind one sofa can be opened to seat 10, and the game table in a corner can seat six. The barn is often abuzz with activity.

“It’s so great that these old boards can hear laughter and kids running around,” Whaley says.

“This gets used multiple times a week. We have as many dinners here as we have at home,” the owner says. “When you invite people over to a barn, they wonder what they’re going to get for dinner,” he adds with a laugh. He’s got that covered. The couple had their kitchen designed with caterers in mind.



The party barn features a bar that connects to the kitchen. The bar stools are from Crate & Barrel. The pinecone chandelier is from 2nd Avenue Design. The sky painting is by Kurt Schwarz, whose work is exhibited at Gallery 222 in Leesburg, VA.

BELOW: The industrial kitchen was designed for caterers with double islands with concrete countertops.



Naturally Efficient

A barn door slides on a track and opens to reveal an industrial kitchen with red cabinetry and concrete countertops. Two islands, one with a vegetable sink, double dishwashers, and a rubber floor make this space efficient for multiple people to prepare food simultaneously. A bar opens into the great room making serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres almost effortless. Even unloading groceries is simple since the area that used to be the corncrib with a pull-through for tractors now provides a drive-in to side steps for unloading trucks with supplies.



TOP TO BOTTOM: The steel stair railings made by Michael Clay have a sculptural tree branch quality with a rustic finish that complements the existing weathered wood interior. The loft provides room to both sleep and play. The yellow cow painting is by Roberta Marovelli.

Maybelline, left, and Skip watch for a friend.

Guests have the luxury of soaking in a deep copper "cowboy" tub from Montana.

Twisting tree roots from Indonesia envelop the copper sink to form a unique cylindrical base.





LEFT: Blackburn converted the former corncrib into a private sundek that overlooks a bocce court.

BELOW: Before and After shots of the front of the barn.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: Barn doors can be slid closed to conceal the glass doors at the entry.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: The new wall of windows reflects the framework of the original wooden wall.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The back of the bank barn used to be dilapidated and the lower level was thigh-high with dirt. Now, however, the lower level holds a clean, reinforced floor and a four-car garage.



Outside, Blackburn followed the lines of the original corncrib and replaced it with a sundeck. The wooden slats on the side that echo the original structure provide privacy during the summer. Inside, he updated the original floorboards by having high efficiency radiated heat installed at the suggestion of the owners.

A close family friend, says, “It’s so nice in the winter when it’s snowing outside and you come in and take your shoes off and the floors are warm.”

Ahh, when’s the next party? **ws**

“The window wall was the biggest challenge,” says Kenny Deneen, owner of Ken’s Kustoms. He and his crew installed the trim, sidings, doors, and windows throughout the award-winning party barn.

RESOURCES

■ **Blackburn Architects, PC**
202.337.1755
blackburnarch.com

■ **Burgess Lighting & Distributing**
703.928.6883
burgesslighting.com

■ **Concrete Jungle**
301.874.1001
concretejungleonline.com

■ **Fine Landscapes Ltd.**
703.421.7441

■ **Foley Mechanical**
703.751.3288

■ **Gerachis Construction Group LLC**
571.225.3909

■ **Ken’s Kustoms**
301.724.2558

■ **Leopard Interiors Ltd.**
757.451.2440

■ **M&L Masonry**
703.830.9595

■ **Michael Clay**
540.882.4191

■ **McMullan & Associates**
703.556.0651
mcmse.com

■ **Wittman Mechanical**
703.430.2626
wittmanmechanical.com