



Dick Schwab built this 100-ft. dia., 8,000 sq. ft. round barn with the help of volunteers.

“Twice Built” Round Barn

When Dick Schwab decided to build a barn to host community events, he made it very special. As a contractor who had already put up four round barns, he wanted this barn to be the biggest and the best.

“We did the site work in 2005,” recalls Schwab. “In 2006 we framed the 12-ft. walls and I created a jig to make 24, 57-ft. long, bell-shaped roof beams. Each beam was made with 35 1 by 6’s.”

To mount the beams, Schwab created a ‘truss ring’ at the center. Beams and ring were constructed in an open field next to the barn. Once in place, the beams could be lifted into position, and when all were set, the roof would be self-supporting.

Like the beams, the truss ring was laminated. Schwab used 210 sheets of 4 by 8-ft. OSB board cut in half. Each of the 50 layers consisted of eight 4 by 4-ft. sheets. Each layer overlapped, creating a 2-ft. thick ring. When completed, it had a 75-ft. circumference and weighed 12,000 lbs. On top of the ring, he built a cupola with 6 ft. high walls and a roof with 2 by 10’s for joists.

“When I was ready to set the ring in place, I built a 33-ft. tower at the center of the barn floor,” recalls Schwab. “A crane lifted the ring and cupola into place and then raised up the beams.”

Once the beams were in place and secured to the walls and the truss ring, Schwab dismantled the tower. He then covered the roof beams with 2 by 8-ft. rafters with a layer of plywood sheathing over that.

“Because the roof beams were bell-

shaped, we had to bend the plywood to fit,” recalls Schwab. “We put winter guard over the roof that fall and came back in 2007 to finish it with a 50-ft. wide by 16-ft. deep timber frame porch on the back side. We used 36-ft. long floor joists out of an old barn and covered the entire barn with 3/4 cedar shingles.”

After working on the barn 10 to 20 hours a week for nearly a year with an all-volunteer crew, the barn was nearly finished. Schwab began accepting reservations for weddings and other events.

Then tragedy struck. In July 2007, the barn was hit by lightning and burned to the ground.

When Schwab called the couples with wedding reservations for that fall, two said they would postpone until the following year if he would rebuild. One couple even offered to help with construction.

Schwab started his rebuild immediately with a few small changes, like plans for a steel roof and a lightning rod. “When people heard I was going to rebuild, they started to call about barns where we could salvage wood. Others brought meals and treats for the building crew.”

This time the barn went up faster, though it was also more elaborate. Beams for the 100-ft. dia., 8,000-sq. ft. barn, were 50 ft. long with the cupola set 36 ft. in the air.

Round outside walls were laid stone. On the inside they were covered by 16, 11-ft. 4 1/2-in. high, flat sections. Exposed sections were composed of 24 by 24-in. panels, 6



Built to host community events, there’s a 500-seat stone amphitheatre outside and a large, mortarless stone arch.

An Amazing Volunteer Effort

wide and 5 tall, made from cherry, red oak, white oak, hickory and elm. The interior ceiling is covered with 12,000 sq. ft. of 3/4-in. thick, home sawn cherry with pieces of maple mixed in to create a spiral that carries the eye to the cupola. At one side is a massive 12-ft. tall, stone fireplace that rests on 9 tons of concrete. It has room behind it for restrooms with a banistered loft area above. On the other side of the barn are the kitchen and storerooms with a loft area above them as well. An aluminum staircase stretches in a 180° semicircle from the loft to the cupola, which has a railing for an observation area.

The barn, including the rebuilt back porch, is ringed with a 20-ft. deep circle of pavers, around 50,000 in all. They, too, were recycled, with some coming from street projects in area towns, salvaged brick from an Illinois factory, and around 16,000 from the old Lincoln Highway (U.S. 30), torn up when it was paved in 1947.

Two sets of French doors made with local walnut look out on the brick patio and a terraced, 500-seat, stone amphitheatre. Behind the stage is the largest, mortarless stone arch in North America. It is 40-ft. in diameter with the keystone set 20 ft. in the air. The entire arch weighs more than 50 tons.

Both barns were built largely with volunteer labor. The second barn was completed the night before the first scheduled wedding in May 2009.

“During the last month, we spent on average 14 to 16 hours a day here,” says Schwab, who wanted to be sure everything was just



Interior ceiling is covered with 12,000 sq. ft. of home-sawn cherry and maple. Note massive 12-ft. tall stone fireplace.

right.

The first couple to get married in the new barn had not only delayed their wedding a year and a half. They had also done a considerable amount of the rebuilding.

“I figure they spent between 1,000 and 1,500 hours helping us rebuild,” says Schwab.

Schwab has a special zoning permit that allows him to hold 12 events a year in the barn. Several of the events are for local charities, and he donates the use of the barn. The limited number of events makes the already special barn even more special.

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He Collects “Portals Into The Past”

Upscale city folks might call them “19th century hand-made wood sculpture decorating accent pieces”. Anyone else would just call them outhouse seats.

But who ever heard of anyone collecting them?

Writer Robert Kyle used to ask himself why he started collecting outhouse seats until he saw one in a new barn built for the former Deputy Chief of Staff to President Reagan.

“I was at a party there and when I entered the men’s room I was met by a magnificent three-holer hanging on the wall. I had to have one,” Kyle says. “If a man of that importance appreciated outhouse seats, then I must not be crazy to like them as well.”

Kyle is an antique dealer, firearms consultant and writer for antique and gun publications. His outhouse seat collection started with a few one and two-holers.

“I found them at auctions and flea markets,” Kyle explains. “All had been cleaned, but I think after decades of non-use any germs on the seats would have disappeared. However, I’ve seen too many over-cleaned

seats where much of the original old paint has come off. Paint is important to preserve.”

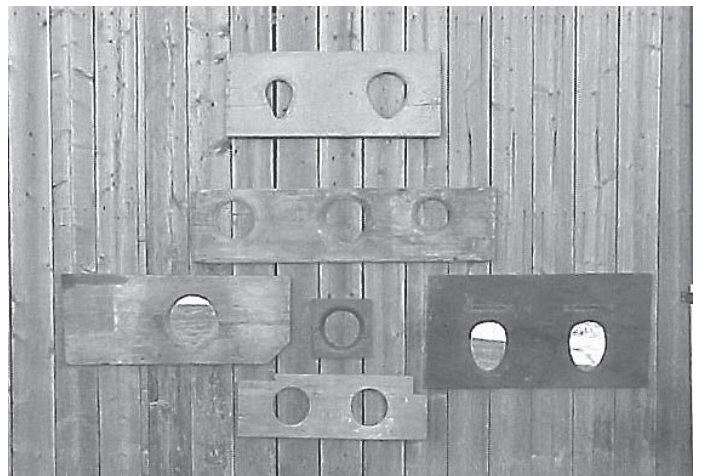
Kyle views the seats as artifacts from American history and a bygone era when times were hard. It’s a history that could be forgotten if collectors don’t keep some of the old seats as reminders.

“I’ve had visitors see my three-holer on the mud room wall off the kitchen and not know what it was,” he says. “Too many Americans are growing up without the outhouse experience. I would teach ‘Outhouses 101’ in college if someone would hire me.”

“I refer to the holes as portals into the past because of the material that accidentally fell or was purposely tossed down the holes,” Kyle says. “Scientists have been able to discern much about early American life by what’s been found in outhouse pits.”

Kyle purchased his first three-holer on eBay; he was the only bidder. Fortunately the seller was just 40 miles away so he picked it up and saved the shipping.

Outhouse seat prices range from a few dollars to \$100 or more depending on the



Part of Robert Kyle’s outhouse seat collection hangs on the mud room wall off his kitchen.

region, clientele - and, of course, the number of holes.

Over the past 15 years, Kyle has collected about a dozen seats.

“I’m always looking for the better ones.

A friend in Maine is saving a nice two-holer with lids for me,” Kyle says.

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