

Fargo Couple Built Their Own Grain Bin Home

Dick Beckett and Judy Gilbertson's 10,000-bushel grain bin home fits well in the meadow and forest of their 40-acre Richwood, Minnesota, property. Besides living in an unusual structure, the couple purchased a wind generator and solar panels to charge 16 6-volt batteries with a 120-volt inverter.

"We're both interested in being off the grid," Gilbertson says, explaining that they have always been inspired by publications such as *Mother Earth News* and *FARM SHOW*. They use a propane refrigerator and stove and they heat with wood. A 12-volt pump supplies "running water" from a 150-gal. tank.

Gilbertson, 68, is an artist and suggested the grain bin idea since she has always been fascinated with round homes. She was surprised when Beckett, 78, and a retired master electrician and farmer went along with the idea. There were plenty of challenges, he says, but the Fargo couple appreciates the features of their unusual second home, which they've worked on for about five years.

They built the foundation forms and had a cement floor poured, then put in two rings of grain bin steel to create 7-ft. basement walls. They backfilled it carefully to maintain the 24-ft. diameter round shape. After Rudy Braseth of Ulen, Minnesota, put up the upper part of the Brock Bin and another contractor sprayed the interior with 4-in. polyurethane foam, the couple did most of the rest of the work themselves.

Beckett layered rings of plywood to maintain the bin's round shape and support two floors - a living room, kitchen and bathroom on the main floor and two bedrooms on the top floor. Beckett attached furring strips to

the walls on the main floor and covered them with plywood. He built a jig to make steps that hug the round walls to go upstairs and to the basement.

The couple purchased carpeting pieces that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle and laid tile on the floors. After trial and error they learned that Milwaukee blades worked the best for cutting metal. The home includes window shutters made of the same metal, which can be closed and locked inside the building.

"Dick is very creative," Gilbertson says. "He always manages to make things work."

One of his biggest challenges was raising the 75-ft. three-phase AC wind generator with a small tractor. Beckett also installed two 45-watt, 12-volt DC solar panels and has two wiring systems - one is DC and one is AC, with a 2000-watt converter.

Adding a 12 by 14-ft. sunroom off the living room brings outside light in. "When the sun is out it heats up the whole place," Gilbertson says. It also offers a great view of the Master Gardener's five flower and vegetable gardens.

When it's hot, the couple opens the grain bin's top to let heat out.

Because they did much of the work themselves, the couple says they spent only about \$22,000 for the grain bin home. They still have work to do upstairs, but Gilbertson is already thinking about other projects.

"I would like to put up another one for an art studio or maybe a corn crib for a gazebo," she says of her future dreams. "And we're thinking about making a pond."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dick Beckett and Judy Gilbertson (ph 701 235-6739).



Dick Beckett and Judy Gilbertson converted a 10,000-bu. grain bin into a second home.



They laid the foundation and poured a floor, then put in two rings of grain bin steel to create 7-ft. basement walls.

Post & Beam Kits For Beginners

You don't need to know a mortise from a tenon to build a post and beam barn, garage or even a house with do-it-yourself kits from Shelter-Kit, Tilton, N.H. The kits are designed to be so easy to construct that the owner says two people can build them with no experience needed.

"Our primary goal in starting the business was to produce affordable buildings that people could put up themselves," says Dave Kimball, owner. "We have kits that go from 144 sq. ft. to 2,800 sq. ft. The most complex unit we have sold so far was a barn house with two 24 by 40-ft. kits that fit together in a T-shape."

Shelter-Kit kits have been shipped all over the U.S. and Canada. Kimball has even shipped one to Spain and three to Japan. He claims more than 1,400 satisfied customers in the 35 years the company has been in business.

The most popular size, Kimball says, is the 24 by 32-ft. barn model. Kits are available in a wide range of styles from one-room cabins to garages to barns and barn/houses.

"We don't use mortise and tenon construction, which reduces the cost and makes assembly easier," says Kimball, noting that members are joined by heavy-plated steel hardware and fasteners. "The energy efficiency is comparable to or better than stick built construction. Our customers save quite a bit on labor and design-build costs because everything is precisely cut in our factory."

Posts are made up to the point that ledgers are attached for supporting girts or headers. Kimball says some header assemblies will be made up at the factory if they are difficult to do in the field. Each piece is pre-cut, numbered and labeled on the plans.

Larger buildings are designed so the frame



Post and beam barn kit is so easy to construct that two people can build it with no experience needed, says the company.

for the first floor is completed before the second floor is started, eliminating the need for mechanical lifts. No single piece is too heavy for two people to lift.

"We customize most building plans for people to some degree," says Kimball. "We offer optional doors and windows and can do different spans to accommodate different uses of the buildings. We can also provide engineer-stamped drawings that meet the 2006 International Building Code."

Kits can be ordered complete with everything needed for a weather tight shell, or windows, doors, roofing and other components can be purchased locally. Prices vary with a 16 by 16-ft. standard barn selling for \$11,610 and a basic 24 x 64-ft. two-story barn priced at \$45,000.

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Brad Blonjeaux re-sided his house with "composition siding" because it looks like wood.

Cheap Way To Get Log Cabin "Look"

By Janis Schole, Contributing Editor

My neighbor, Brad Blonjeaux, came up with a creative way to give his 1941, 1 1/2 story, Cape Cod-style house the look of a log house.

When I drove by it for the first time, I thought he had put log siding on the house. But a closer look showed something different. I called Brad for an explanation.

He told me he had re-sided the house with "composition siding" bought at Home Depot because it looks like wood. To mimic the chinking, he painted a white strip onto each siding board.

He saved time painting by pushing two of the 12-ft. by 12-in. boards together before applying a 1 1/2-in. white strip on each board (at the same time). Once the boards were painted, he installed them on the house.

"I think it looks nice from the road," he told me. "I'm happy with it."



To mimic the chinking, he painted a white strip onto each siding board.

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