

Old Barn Converted Into Beautiful Farm Home

With unused livestock barns falling down across the country, Shari Thoreson found a use for the one on her family farm. She moved in.

"Nobody in the family knows when the barn was built, but my great, great grandfather moved onto the land in 1856," says Thoreson. "When I moved back to the area, the barn had several holes in the roof and needed a lot of work. Instead of building a house, I decided to fix up the old barn."

Fix it up she did, with the help of a professional barn straightening crew, a professional draftsman, a crew of local carpenters, family friends and a lot of personal elbow grease.

"When I started calling builders about working on it, nobody would even come out to look," says Thoreson. "A fellow church member suggested I get it straightened first and gave me the names of a couple firms that do that sort of work."

The crew tuck-pointed the main barn foundation and rebuilt the foundation under a horse barn addition. Beams were straightened and tightened, rotted posts replaced and openings were made in an east wall on the first level for two car bays. On the south end, multiple large windows were set in the newly rebuilt ground floor stone wall to create a greenhouse/plant room.

Planning the renovation was a joint effort between Thoreson and an independent draftsman. Many hours of Thoreson studying books on design, combined with the draftsman's experience, resulted in a barn redo that retains the look of a barn with the feel of a house. The double windows with an overhead threshold window was one such idea that worked.

"When the carpenter crew started, it was with a nearly fresh slate. All barn boards and the few remaining battens were removed, as was the roof. Only the frame remained. The 12-in. wide boards were remilled to 6-in. widths that found new uses as interior siding and window and door trim.

"The wide trim fits the oversize windows I needed in the 15-ft. walls," she says.

Meanwhile steel siding was hung on the exterior, insulation filled the widths of the exterior beams, and wallboard finished it off. The interior walls were left with the inside face of structural beam showing, retaining the barn feel.

Feed Bags Recycled Into Tote Bags

Love Birds? Horses? Chickens? Tell the world with the tote bag you carry. Carrie Tessier makes them from an obvious source - the bags that feed your favorite critter.

"We have a farm, and we buy grain that comes in plastic-type feedbags," Tessier explains. "I mimicked the idea of grocery tote bags and started making my own and gave them as gifts."

Now the young mother of two sells Tess's Totes on her website and at local farmers markets in Maine.

"They are water resistant and very durable," Tessier explains. "I make all different styles besides the totes - little purses, backpacks. I have a type of scrap bag that is made from bits and pieces of leftover material, which I use to make different designs."

Tessier uses the polypropylene woven bags used for all types of pet and livestock feed and wild birdseed. She hand washes the bags in hot water and soap or sprays them down with Simple Green.

She cuts pieces out carefully to center

For nearly a year, the carpenter crew worked. The roof was replaced with two alternating layers of 3-in. thick foam insulation over boxcar siding and topped with a steel roof. "The roof has an R-39 rating," says Thoreson.

To match the energy-saving insulation, Thoreson added in-floor radiant heat. A geothermal closed loop with a water/glycol mix heats the house in the winter and cools it in the summer. The closed loop passes through a water-to-water heat exchanger that provides both hot water and radiant heat. The heat exchanger is backed up by a small supplemental boiler in case of extremely cold temperatures. The loop also passes through a water-to-air heat exchanger that provides hot air to the upper loft area.

"There was a loft over grain bins at one end of the barn, and I added a loft at the other end over my bedroom," says Thoreson.

The combination of 15-ft. walls in the living room, a garage in the basement, and workrooms and spare bedroom in the upper reaches of the barn made an elevator attractive. That, combined with the fact that Thoreson's mother still lives next door and the two do quilting in the loft area, made it necessary. For Thoreson, the elevator also is an insurance policy that'll allow her to live in her barn home as long as she likes.

"Originally the elevator was going to be at one end of the barn and on the outside, but we couldn't do that because of the roof," says Thoreson. "I moved it to the center of the barn, which meant we needed a walkway, so we ran a walkway from one loft to the other past the elevator. That also meant we only needed one set of stairs to the lofts.

"I wanted a roof over the garage stall doors and decided to add a deck with a roof to match the entry deck," explains Thoreson. "The first night I sat out there with my family, it became one of our favorite spots."

Thoreson acknowledges the barn redo ended up costing her more than she had planned to spend on a house. However, she has no regrets, knowing the old barn will be there for generations to come.

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Instead of building a brand new home, Shari Thoreson decided to fix an 1800's barn.



"There was already a loft over grain bins at one end of barn. I added a loft at the other end over my bedroom," says Shari.



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Carrie Tessier makes tote bags from plastic-type feed bags.

the images she wants on the front and the back, and she includes inside pockets for cell phones, papers and other items. She sews double folded seams and double stitches with an ordinary sewing machine. Straps are zigzag-stitched multiple times.

"I tell people that if the bags can hold 50 lbs. of grain, you can probably carry 50 lbs. of groceries in the totes if you can fit it," Tessier says. The rabbit backpack she made for her 3-year-old a year ago has proven to be more durable than a backpack she purchased.

Tessier lines her bags with cloth when customers request it, but she notes that they are much easier to keep clean without the cloth.

Tessier takes several bags into the grocery store when she shops and finds they are a great conversation piece. Her customers are generally rural people, pet owners or bird watchers. Horse bags are the most popular.

The 16 by 16-in. tote bags cost \$15 plus S&H. For a custom bag, send Tessier a feed or grain bag of your choice.

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