



Bruce Willemsen remodels older barns and builds new barns based on older styles. His latest project - a big round barn - is proving to be an interesting challenge.



The built-from-the-ground-up round barn has a root cellar and garage at the bottom, and a wood shop and canning kitchen on the next floor.

Barn Builder Preserves The Past With New Structures

Bruce Willemsen remembers sitting in the kitchen and watching his family's barn burn to the ground when he was just three years old.

At 37, the Pella, Iowa, businessman remodels barns (first featured in Vol. 31, No. 1) and he reports that his construction crew is booked several months out for work. But Willemsen also sells kits and builds new barns and other rural buildings through his business, Barn Builders. A new project - a round barn - is proving to be an interesting challenge.

"I just love to be in somebody else's barn," Willemsen told FARM SHOW as he looked out over an Iowa vineyard from the fourth story of the 7,600-sq. ft. round barn. Though still under construction, the building already had used two semi loads of field rocks, five semi loads of wood and 80,000 nails. The round barn has a root cellar and garage at the bottom, and a wood shop and canning kitchen on the next floor. The main living quarters are on the third floor and there's an office at the top.

Willemsen's customers - from farmers to judges - share his appreciation for quality, traditional buildings.

"All our buildings are based on a historical model somewhere," he says. For example, the 50-ft. diameter round barn is based on a 1914 pencil sketch he found in a book. Many buildings are similar to the ones he grew up with on the family farm.

Willemsen started building houses with a friend the summer he was 16 after his

father announced they wouldn't be farming anymore. After a few years he realized he wanted to build barns to honor his family's heritage and help preserve his state's rural history. He has experience working with a historical museum and on buildings at a living history farm.

Barn Builders precuts timbers and lumber for kits they truck to other states and Canada and can ship them overseas. The packages come with clear instructions for the do-it-yourselfer or contractor.

"We use full dimension, rough-cut timbers from small family-owned sawmills," Willemsen says. Ponderosa pine and white oak are common woods in the buildings. Buildings range from chicken coops and sheds to barns, horse barns and barn homes.

The 1 1/2-story barn kits are the most popular. With 14-ft sidewalls they offer the most barn for the money, Willemsen says. Carriage houses - with saltbox roofs - are also popular, as well as traditional horse barns in various roof styles.

Willemsen and his crew also build barns and buildings in their region of Iowa. Some styles, such as the round barns, require their building expertise. They also lay stone - the real kind, not manufactured.

"Our customers are building their dreams, not just a house," Willemsen says, adding that customers often build to pass the structures on to future generations, not for resale. For example, the company is working with a woman who wants to rebuild the buildings - based on a photo - that were on



Willemsen says his customers want classic structures that they can pass on to future generations.

a farmstead destroyed in a 1960s' tornado. Another customer had a barn home built with stairs that look like granary stairs and a bedroom that looks like a cow stall.

Those kinds of projects as well as restoring traditional barns are important to Willemsen.

"My focus is to promote barns," he says.

Costs for many of his new buildings are comparable to high-end steel buildings with all the bells and whistles. Catalogs are available upon request.

Kits can usually be sent out in about 6 to 8 weeks, though barn buyers often spend one to two years planning, Willemsen says.

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