

Guests Love Staying In This Grain Bin B&B

“Why do people like coming out the middle of nowhere?” Donna Thieme admits she hasn’t quite figured it out, but a couple of articles and word-of-mouth advertising keeps her busy at her bed and breakfast located 17 miles from the little town of Trenton, Mo. The attraction is obvious to her guests, who seek the peace of being “in the middle of nowhere” and the adventure of sleeping in a grain bin.

Thieme and her husband, Jack, opened Granny’s Country Cottage Bed and Breakfast 15 years ago in the farmhouse Donna grew up in. It was something to do in their retirement. A few years ago, she was inspired by other grain bin homes she’d seen to turn the bin on her property into another B&B. Jack, a retired contractor, drew up the plans, and their son, Lin, did most of the construction with the help of other talented family members, Thieme says.

Insulated for winter use and with 2 stories, there were 2 main challenges in transforming the 18-ft. dia. bin into a living space. Sheetrock had to be gently bent to cover the curved walls without breaking, and the staircase kept Jack thinking for 3 days before coming up with a space saving design that wraps around the inside of the bin’s east side.

The “Round House” opened in 2012, and is often booked before the cottage. Guests are equally mixed from the city and the country. “Farmers come to stay to see what it would

be like to sleep in a bin instead of scooping corn,” Thieme says. “A while ago, a couple got married in a barn in Iowa and came to spend their honeymoon in the grain bin. What a story for their kids.”

Other regular guests include quilters who come to shop at a popular quilting business about an hour away as well as folks visiting the Jamesport Amish community 45 min. from the Thieme farm. In the fall, hunters book the units.

Guests appreciate details like the cream separator used for a trash can and the washtub transformed into an island for preparing meals. The hearty breakfasts complete with biscuits and gravy, homemade sweet rolls and meaty breakfast casseroles are popular too. For good measure, guests are welcomed by homemade peach pie baked by Thieme.

“That seems to draw their attention. I enjoy entertaining my guests,” Thieme says.

Running a B&B continues to be a blessing for her, after Jack died unexpectedly in the spring of 2015. The 75-year-old says repeat customers and new customers keep her busy. She plans to continue to run her business year-round as long as she is able.

The bin is easy to heat and cool, has a modern kitchen and bathroom upstairs next to the bedroom. A remodeled outdoor storm cellar provides protection during tornado season. An unused, but serviceable, outhouse



Donna Thieme of Humphreys, Mo., turned an 18-ft. dia. bin on her property into this B&B. A space-saving staircase wraps around the inside of bin’s east side.

also adds to the B&Bs uniqueness.

“People ask me what there is to do and I tell them ‘absolutely nothing.’ They say that’s what they are looking for,” Thieme laughs.

But they seem to find plenty to do – at the farm’s fishing pond, taking walks down the country road, and watching the neighbor’s Angus cattle graze.

It’s a view Thieme has appreciated all her

life and one she’s happy to share with others.

“This has just been the best thing for us in retirement,” she says.

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Converted Grain Bin Has Been Home For 30 Years

Kendell and Cindy Karlson raised four children in a grain bin and, for the most part, it’s been just like living in any other house, Karlson says. Karlson converted the bin in 1986 after working for his father putting up new grain bins. The house is inside a 36-ft. diameter bin that had a 18,000-bushel capacity.

To prove to himself that a grain bin could be made livable, Karlson first turned a grain bin into a garage. “I built the garage first because I figured I couldn’t screw up a garage,” he says. “When the garage turned out okay, we decided to go ahead with the house.”

The main floor of the home has a kitchen, dining room, living room, laundry room, office and a pantry that also houses utilities and storage. The upstairs has three bedrooms, including a master bedroom with its own bathroom, and a second bathroom.

The upstairs floor is supported by two steel beams. Access to the upstairs is by a spiral staircase that Karlson built. It has 3-ft. wide steps, which are twice as wide as many spiral

staircases. “We’ve always been able to get up and down the steps, but moving furniture up and down has been a challenge at times,” says Karlson.

Once the second-level floor was in place, Karlson framed the rooms with wood studs, then insulated the walls and installed sheetrock. The walls were framed to accommodate windows. The bin steel had to be cut and frames built to attach the windows. The original grain bin roof hasn’t required any maintenance or improvements.

The house has been virtually trouble-free except for some woodpecker damage to the foam around windows.

The house has always been climate-controlled because Karlson installed ventilation and heat ducts in the poured concrete floor prior to building the grain bin.

Three of the Karlsons’ children are now adults and live elsewhere, but their 16-year-old daughter still lives with them in the house. “The kids have all had to answer the question,



Kendell and Cindy Karlson’s converted bin has one special feature not found in most houses - a fireman’s ladder between the second floor and cone section loft.

“What’s it like to grow up in a grain bin?” And generally, they’ve just said ‘It’s just like growing up in any other house,’” Karlson says. One special feature not found in most houses is a fireman’s ladder between the second floor and the loft in the cone section. “There aren’t any windows up there, so the kids could sleep up there ‘until whenever,’”

he says.

Karlson says he’s happy to offer advice to people who might want to build their own home inside a grain bin.

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He Restored Imported Tractor, Trailer From Portugal

Kevin Moules of Turlock, Calif., recently sent FARM SHOW photos of an unusual tractor that originally belonged to his grandfather in Portugal. He shipped the tractor home to the U.S. in 2009 and it may be the only one of its kind in North America.

“It’s a 1978 Italian Bertolini walk-behind tractor coupled to a powered trailer,” says Moules. “I used to work the ground with this tractor with my grandfather so I have a lot of good memories of it.

“I spent 3 years restoring it to like-new condition in my spare time. I now use it for odd jobs as a parade tractor and have received many compliments on it.”

The tractor is powered by a Lamborghini 18 hp. single cylinder, pull-start diesel engine and came with a rototiller attachment as well as a 2-way turnover plow.

“The powered trailer was built in Portugal by Bertolini,” says Moules. “Machine

shops there used junkyard car parts for the transmission and trailer axle. The tractor is all gear-driven and has a 540 rpm pto to operate the attachments, as well as a synchronized pto to operate the trailer. The ratios don’t exactly match because the shops in Portugal just used random parts.

“My grandfather was a grape grower and wine maker but also grew sweet corn, squash, kale and other vegetable crops. The tractor pto-drives the tiller, and the trailer transmission is driven by the pto as well. I can go at speeds up to 10 mph.”

According to Moules, these types of tractors and trailers are still very common in Europe today. “I love how the single cylinder diesel engine sounds and how it makes people stop and take another look,” says Moules.

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Kevin Moules’ grandfather farmed in Portugal with an Italian-built tractor. In 2009, Moules shipped the tractor home to California and restored it.