



Restored rail car, complete with hand-painted lettering like the original, rests under a protective roof, providing a Currier and Ives-like setting.

## Rescued Rail Car Now A Luxury Airbnb

“When I got a call from an elderly neighbor a few years ago needing help to clear snow from his old barn’s roof, I had no idea it would lead to an amazing 3 1/2-year restoration project that would produce a magnificent Airbnb,” says Idaho contractor Webb French. “Outside the farmer’s barn, under a lean-to,

was an almost unrecognizable old rail car. It was rotting, smelled terrible, and was infested with cats and mice. I’d always wanted to restore a rail car, so I bought it for \$2,000.”

Buying it was the easy part because it took nearly 3 years for French to get the car moved. “Guys promised and broke

promises right and left, but eventually, we found a crew to put I-beams and axles under it and pull it to our building site. We’d invested \$10,000 to move it before the real work started.”

French has eight sons, and they and their friends all had a hand in restoring the 61-ft. long car. “We turned the mail compartment into a bedroom, the cargo hold into a bathroom and the passenger space into a kitchenette, living area and lounge,” French says. “A lot of sweat equity went into cleaning, repairing, replacing, refitting, rebuilding, wiring and plumbing the old car.”

The car’s wood frame was structurally sound except for parts of the roof that weren’t under the old barn’s lean-to. “We had a coppersmith make an entirely new roof after the electrical was in, and he also recreated electric lamps from pictures we found. We spent many hours scraping, sanding and cleaning the car’s quarter-sawn oak walls and tight grain Douglas fir floors.”

French says the windows were rotted at the bottom, so they had a woodworking friend make new frames. “He aged the new pieces perfectly to match the good wood; then we installed double pane glass.”

The car was built in 1906 and ran on the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway from 1909 to 1955. Designed the WI&M 306, it carried merchandise, including large blocks of cut lake ice in the cargo hold. It also picked up and delivered mail from several



Rail car’s renovated interior includes a bedroom, bathroom, kitchenette, laundry room and casual living area.

towns and carried passengers. When it was decommissioned, French’s farmer neighbor dragged the car 10 miles to his farm, where it sat next to his barn for 60 years.

The restored car is now a quaint Airbnb, resting on a rise overlooking a quiet national forest with tremendous views of the setting sun and starlit skies. It’s sheltered with a roof that resembles a railroad depot to provide ambience lighting and protection from the elements. French says the car has produced nearly 90 percent occupancy rates with consistent five-star reviews. Amenities include Wi-Fi, central air and a washer/dryer. To further enhance guest experiences, they’re adding a barrel sauna and cedar soaking tubs.

French says the restoration was a long and tedious project worth every dollar and minute of work. “We couldn’t be happier.”

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Moran built the 3,500-lb. chainsaw when his business had extra conveyor chain and a V-8 engine from manufacturing work.



## No Project Too Big For Moran Iron Works

At 5, Tom Moran knew he wanted to be a welder. He had no idea how big or creative some of his creations would be as owner of Moran Iron Works in Onaway, Mich. It’s hard to miss Big Gus, the world’s largest working chainsaw at 22 ft. long by 6 ft. tall and dozens of other sculptures scattered around Michigan and in a few other states.

Founded in 1978, Moran’s fabrication facility is known for the big boats, turbine components, greenhouse gas reduction modules and equipment made for marine, power, industrial and hydro companies. Located 20 miles from Lake Huron, custom orders of all sizes can be shipped all over the world. Or they can be found as close as the 85-ft. aluminum ship built to ferry passengers to and from Mackinac Island.

“There’s less competition in manufacturing large,” Moran says. He figured that out in the 90s after successfully building the housing for the world’s largest Gemini telescopes in Chile and Hawaii.

Moran notes that he started small, learning by trial and error to weld broken desks and chairs at his school and graduating as the school’s unofficial repairman. When he started his business, he advanced his welding skills by learning from welders he hired.

When his business started to do well, he gave back to his community by welding a set of logging wheels for Onaway’s Fourth of July celebration as a nod to the local lumber industry and his father, who had been a logger.

“It was a great hit with the locals,” Moran recalls and started his tradition of creating sculptures every year.

He built the 3,500-lb. chainsaw when his business had extra conveyor chain and a V-8 engine from manufacturing work. It’s now one of the displays at Yooperland in Ishpeming. It’s also home to Big Ernie, the



Yooperland in Ishpeming is also home to Big Ernie, the world’s largest working rifle, at 35 ft. long and 4,000 lbs.

world’s largest working rifle at 35-ft. long and 4,000 lbs. and a giant hand-cranked water pump.

As his tools and skills improved, Moran welded more polished projects, including the head of George Washington. It has become a landmark in Onaway and started Moran on a journey to learn more about art.

He’s pleased with more recent projects such as his Atlas Holding the World of Tools in Chesterfield, Mich., and a gargoyle sitting on books reading a book at the library in Oscoda, Mich. Residents of a Colorado town appreciate his giant butterfly.

“My favorite one is always the next piece. I always know where I could’ve done better. My style changes and I hope it continues to change. It’s why I always want to do something new,” Moran says.

There are no specs with art, so welding sculptures is relaxing. Occasionally, students at the welding school he started also help with sculptures.

Along with commissioned work, Moran has created more than 70 welded sculptures. Many can be seen at Awakon Park in Onaway.

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## Orange Corn Adds Color And Nutrition To Eggs

Eggs are the latest food to benefit from the added nutrition of orange corn developed by Professor Torbert Rocheford of Purdue University (Vol. 43, No. 6). The corn is loaded with carotenoids, the same type of natural antioxidant pigments that give many fruits and vegetables, such as carrots, their orange or yellow color. Our bodies can convert some to Vitamin A, while others aid in eye disease prevention.

“The first phase of our USDA SBIR grant showed that orange corn can significantly enhance yolk pigmentation and antioxidant carotenoid content,” says Evan Rocheford, who owns NutraMaize LLC with his father, Torbert.

Yolk color is essential to producers in the specialty egg industry, who typically strive for an orange-colored yolk with a YolkFan score of around 10. When fed yellow corn, the yolks are paler, only achieving YolkFan scores of 5 to 7, so some producers add expensive carotenoid supplements.

Rocheford says that orange corn alone provides enough carotenoids to achieve YolkFan scores of 10 without added pigment.

“Orange corn is also roughly 20 percent higher in protein, so it reduces the amount of costly soybean meal that has to be included in the feed,” he adds, which is a good incentive for egg producers to use orange corn, which is non-GMO and suitable for organic production.

Previous grant-funded studies also showed improved bird health. An ongoing Phase II USDA SBIR grant is initiating commercial pilot studies with several pasture-raised egg producers. Another USDA grant will study the potential of orange corn’s antioxidant carotenoids to relieve heat stress, a major



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issue for the poultry industry. The Rochefords are also working with commercial grain growers and Purdue University. The eggs from chickens fed orange corn at Purdue are sold in the university’s store, the Boilermaker Butcher Block, for \$6/dozen.

The nutrient-rich orange corn is also used in NutraMaize’s line of milled products, including grits, corn flour, and cornmeal, which are marketed under the brand name “Professor Torbert’s Orange Corn.” These products are available on Amazon or at www.professortorberts.com.

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