



# *Coming Home*

an old barn inspires a new home for an extended family

In New England vernacular architecture, the connected farmstead is characterized by the linking of house to barn. It is unique, not only because of the physical relationship, but because the architectural style of the house extends to the barn.

WRITTEN BY ERICA HOLTHAUSEN   PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROB KAROSIS







Previous page: The large timber frame barn, built around 1915, could have been demolished but instead became the inspiration for Sally and Matt Reynolds' new home. | This page: A large skylight in the kitchen floods the center island with natural light and provides a nice balance to the sunlight streaming in from the north-facing windows. | Facing page, from left: The beautiful Shaker-style hutch, handcrafted by Matt Reynolds, helped to set the tone for the design of the interior of the house. A custom cabinet at the end of the center island visually separates the kitchen from the dining room.



## DESIGN DETAILS

### ARCHITECT

Rob Whitten

Whitten Architects

207 774-0111, [whittenarchitects.com](http://whittenarchitects.com)

### BUILDER:

Larry Wagner (retired)

Eider Construction Inc., 207 883-0157



The contemporary farmhouse designed by architect Rob Whitten of Whitten Architects in Portland, Maine, and custom-built for Sally and Matt Reynolds by Larry Wagner of Eider Construction Inc. in Scarborough, Maine, is indeed attached to the barn, and the architectural styles of the buildings do complement one another. But it was a historic 1915 barn, not the adjoining house, that determined the style of this modern connected farmstead.

The barn, formerly part of a family-owned dairy, sat right in the middle of a new subdivision. Built of hemlock and spruce, the forty-by-sixty-foot timber frame barn was no longer in use but was still in excellent condition. With mortise and tenon joinery, it was extremely well-constructed.

"The farm had been a King's Grant farm on the coast of Maine. Originally, there was a large dairy barn with a smaller milking barn attached. The developer wanted to demolish the milking barn. So we took it, moved it to a new location and designed a house to go with it," said Rob. "It's still one of my favorite houses. I love that even though the old dairy was subdivided, we were able to maintain some of the integrity of the farm."

For Sally and Matt, the old milking barn was a perfect fit. "For almost twenty years, we had owned a forty-by-sixty-foot timber frame barn in New Hampshire, so we really had a strong affinity to that form," said Sally. "When we realized we would be able to use the existing barn, we wanted a house that would complement it."

The Reynolds' New Hampshire barn had been the site of Matt's first woodworking projects, and he was looking forward to having a larger shop. "I wanted a place where I could do some woodworking," said Matt. "That was one thing I really wanted."

Other considerations influenced the design of the home. "We wanted to have an open plan and we didn't want to have anything redundant in the house," said Sally. Every room throughout the home thus serves multiple purposes. "I wanted

family members with limited mobility to be able to get around, and I wanted our kids to really love to be here. I also wanted to be able to entertain our extended family on occasion. Those were my key requirements."

Rob Whitten and Larry Wagner worked together to design and build a home that would incorporate the old barn and meet the Reynolds' needs. In addition, elements of sustainable design were integrated throughout the home, making it energy-efficient and well-suited to the New England weather. "In terms of materials and finishes, most of Eider Construction's projects are coastal, so they really know which materials are going to hold up," said Rob.

The home was placed strategically on the site to take advantage of the outdoor spaces and natural lighting. The barn was placed on the northwest end of the house to shelter the rest of the home from the prevailing winter winds. "You pick your spaces and how you apportion the layout based on needs," explained Rob. "So the master bedroom is in the east







to get first light, and the four-season porch is in the southeast to get both early light and the low winter light. It is the perfect place to sit even when it's cold and snowy."

Today the barn is incorporated into the home and provides a woodworking shop for Matt and a perfect summer play space for grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Wide hallways, flat thresholds and simple ledges throughout the home make it easily accessible for those with limited mobility. Natural light streams through the windows and hardwood floors and bluestone patios provide simple, smooth and durable surfaces. The fieldstone fireplace in the living room is in the very heart of the home, and provides warmth and a connection to the natural surroundings.

In the kitchen, a large skylight floods the center island with natural light balanced by strong light from north-facing windows. Silstone countertops, which are made of recycled quartz composite, provide a durable work surface and reflect the task lighting from above.

Sally and Matt wanted the house to be a simple design, and they wanted to make the move from Boston as easy as possible. They wanted a home that would incorporate what they already owned. "We didn't even change the upholstery," said Sally. "It all came from Boston exactly as it had been."


To coordinate this process, and to ensure that the interior of the home would suit the existing furniture, Rob visited Sally and Matt at their Boston home. It was there that Rob first saw some of the furniture Matt had made and gained a true appreciation for his skills as a craftsman.

The dining room featured a handcrafted hutch and sideboard that Matt had made several years ago. It struck Rob that these elegant and simple pieces were reminiscent of Shaker design, and that the style would be a perfect accompaniment to the traditional, timber-frame barn. "That was a real breakthrough for us," said Rob. "We had been trying to talk about the spirit and character of the interior. Sally and Matt wanted a house that had a certain kind of energy — spare, simple, elegant, refined and indigenous to New England."

Their new home, built to complement an old barn and inspired by Shaker design and New England rural buildings tradition, had come full circle. Every

The living room is at the very heart of the home and showcases artwork from friends, family and local artists. Above the fieldstone fireplace is a painting of Harbor Fish Market on the Portland Pier, by Tina Ingraham.





With a bluestone patio, radiant flooring and floor-to-ceiling windows, the four-season porch is the perfect place to look out onto the snow-covered lawn. | Facing page, from left: The first floor of the old milking barn provides space for a garage and woodworking shop, both of which access the driveway and the mudroom entrance to the home. The mudroom serves as a transition from the garage and woodworking shop to the home and showcases the beautiful post and beam structure of the barn.





element exudes simplicity of form, utility and fine craftsmanship. Custom cabinets and bookshelves, handmade furniture, unadorned moldings and soft, natural colors carry the Shaker theme throughout the house. Another element reminiscent of the Shaker ideal is also evident. Throughout the home are pieces of artwork, handcrafted items, sculpture and gifts from friends and family.

That deep sense of history and community fills the home and also extended to everyone who worked on it; in the mudroom is a framed print of the house, signed by many of the craftsman, framers, builders and others involved in the project.

"We had a party about a month and a half after we moved in — October of 2006," said Sally. "We invited a lot of people involved in building the house and asked them to sign the print. It was a great party. People brought their families and showed them the work they had done."

Since then, Sally and Matt have hosted many family gatherings. While the house itself is not large, an efficient design philosophy and resourceful use of landscaping created a number of distinct rooms, secluded gardens, porches and patios where small groups can gather. As a result, the home can accommodate a surprisingly large number of people at any one time.

"We had a big family reunion over the summer," exclaimed Sally. "Dinner was set up on the porch and people brought blankets and sat under the apple trees in the front yard. The kids were scattered all over the lawn and groups of us gathered on the screened-in porch, in the garden and over on the patio."

The old barn is perhaps the most popular gathering place during the summer. The second floor is not insulated, but it is large and open, with a ping-pong table, comfortable couch and day beds for friends and family. For young children, it is the perfect playroom. "It was really heavily used all summer. We had play dates and sleepovers. It was just perfect," said Sally. "It's a lot like the spirit of our old barn in New Hampshire."



In fact, perched up in the rafters of the barn in Maine is a replica of the Reynolds' New Hampshire barn. The lifetime of memories that started in an uninsulated barn in the mountains of New Hampshire continue now on the coast of Maine. "In creating this place, it's like we merged our former home in the city with our old home in the mountains," smiled Matt.

"It's very important to us that our children and grandchildren enjoy being here," said Sally. "This space really works for them."

The space works for Sally and Matt Reynolds as well. Over the past few years, Matt has carved designs right into the post and beam structure of the barn. These small designs, including an owl carved into a crossbeam in the mudroom, and a bird peeking out from one of the support beams, would be easy to miss. But these carvings are now a part of the barn and will always put a smile on the face of those who chance upon them. ■