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barn again

JOEL WOODARD AND SUSAN NORTH RESCUE AN 18TH-CENTURY BARN



WRITTEN AND PRODUCED
BY JENNY BRADLEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN BESSLER

AND TRANSFORM IT INTO **A COUNTRY HOME WITH BIG-CITY STYLE**



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As dedicated champions of the underdog, Susan North and Joel Woodard have an innate ability to see the potential in things that others have simply cast aside. A stray cat plucked from a nearby animal shelter is now the self-appointed head of household.

An antique pedestal table, its beauty obscured by nine layers of teal paint, was rescued and restored to its former glory by a sandblaster at a local automotive shop (no doubt a first for him). The table currently holds court at the center of Susan and Joel's spacious great room—crowned with mounds of decorating books and a horse sculpture found in a favorite antiques shop in Gladstone, New Jersey. Now there's even talk of adopting an old mare that's been put out to pasture so she can live out her golden years wandering peacefully in their fields.

Ask Susan about renovating a 1770s barn in bucolic Tewksbury Township, New Jersey; however, and she laughs, "We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into!"

With hearts set on the sweeping spaces and open floor plan that a barn would offer, they spent months searching for the right one. Fortuitously, that perfect place seemed to find them. While visiting their real estate office, they spotted a photo of a ramshackle barn—one not on their list—in a meadow of daisies. Minutes later, they were parked in front of the structure—or what remained of it. Crumbling walls were hidden beneath vines and bramble; inside there was nothing but a bare dirt floor.

The couple saw not a dilapidated barn, however, but a hidden gem with original chestnut beams and 10 acres of verdant farmland. They made an offer within the week.

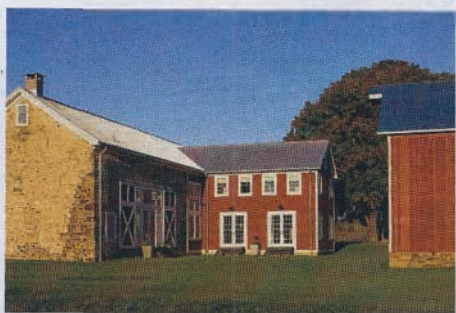


Above left: Rustic meets refined in the living room, where natural materials and subtle colors give the space warm appeal.

Above right: Stone walls and hand-hewn beams provide the breakfast nook with genuine farmhouse charm.

Right: The couple meticulously studied local New Jersey barns to retain the qualities they so appreciate.

Left: Susan North and Joel Woodard.
Preceding pages: Old and new blend in the great room, where original beams and stone walls mix with a sleek Rumford fireplace and heated cypress floors.





It's the yin and yang of contemporary and country.

—HOMEOWNER JOEL WOODARD



Without the slightest apprehension that they might be dangerously close to finding themselves in a bad *Green Acres* episode, Susan and Joel jumped in headfirst. "We knew instantly that this was the one," says Susan. "We even immediately envisioned what the floor plan would be. It was as if it was meant to be."

Two years after their serendipitous visit to the real estate office, the 18th-century stone barn has been rehabilitated into a country-meets-loft living home—an idyllic retreat from the hectic pace of New York City, where the couple work.

The renovation wasn't a project for the faint of heart, but one that both Susan and Joel were well-equipped to handle. Joel, conveniently, is the director of interior design for Lichner Craig Architects (who were the architects on the project), and Susan is vice president of design for E Schumacher & Co., the upscale decorative fabric house.

The design duo painstakingly preserved the integrity of the original structure, even immersing themselves in local weekend barn tours to ensure they got every aspect right—from the symmetry of the windows to the soffit details.

Luckily, they were able to refurbish the well-worn fieldstone exterior of the main structure while keeping it structurally intact. The original red-painted wood "L" portion, however, had to be razed to accommodate a basement and higher ceilings, and was then rebuilt in the same footprint.

Inside, Susan and Joel opted for an exposed, gallery-like layout. "We wanted it to be traditional American, classically simple, and graphic," says Joel. "Our design direction was to have the lofty feeling of the original barn, yet translated into a modern, comfortable home."

In the great room, those primitive dirt floors were replaced with wide-plank cypress. Chestnut beams weathered to a perfect patina reflect the home's heritage and provide a perch for Paisley, their liberated cat, who obviously rules the roost. Beneath the 28-foot ceiling, Joel and Susan sprinkled hints of barn red that enliven the neutral palette and offer a subtle nod to the home's heritage. And while hand-hewn rafters, stone walls, and accents of black iron remind visitors of the livestock that once inhabited these spaces, the heated cypress floors, open staircase, and clean lines of the Rumford fireplace surround bring a bit of modernity to the room.

"We didn't want the new materials to fight with the old," says Susan. "But we liked the tension of the two together."

In the kitchen, white cabinets, stainless-steel appliances, and granite countertops add contemporary flair without dishonoring the home's previous life. "It's the yin and yang of contemporary and country," notes Joel. "It's designed to have a farmhouse feel but with modern touches and appliances."

In the kitchen, the decision to go without upper cabinets gives the space an open, loft-like feeling. To warm up the predominately white palette, Joel added red-striped roman shades at the windows and a kilim rug.

A hammered-iron canopy bed holds its own under the master bedroom's lofty beamed ceiling—creating a graphic sense of geometry. **Opposite, from top:** The master bathroom's palette encourages relaxation. • White woodwork and nickel sconces and hardware play off the serenity of the spa-blue walls. • The loft above the great room takes on a new life as a reading room.





Incorporating color and texture was important as well, Joel scattered numerous warm-hued Kazakh kilim rugs and straw-colored sisals throughout the house and, wherever possible, added earth tones and dashes of red. Natural materials—predominately linen, sisal, cotton, and jute—were obvious choices when it came to fabrics.

"The mix of fabrics is rustic and honest, yet nuanced and sophisticated," says Susan. "We really tried to work with the colors and textures of the original structure and didn't try to make it anything it's not. It's really just about blending natural materials, old and new, with a warm but neutral palette—not about introducing heavy color."

Scale was an issue. In a house with proportions intended to accommodate hay bales and horse-drawn wagons rather than antiques and *étagères*, diminutive pieces were out. From kitchen hardware to furniture, "bigger is better" was the mantra.

"We bought everything to fit the space," says Joel. "We basically sold all of our old furnishings with our previous house and started over."

That meant weekend buying trips—scavenging shops for a mix of antiques and art. Painted chests and graphic 19th-century American quilts were paired with clean-lined pieces made of iron and reclaimed wood.

Upstairs, rafters that were originally part of the loft were given new life in the master bedroom—balancing the geometry and scale of the clean-lined iron canopy bed and adding simple charm to what could have been an overly grand room.

While the couple deliberately avoided saturated color in the home's main living areas, the master bath was an exception. Pale, spa-like blue walls and crisp white accents offer a scene of post-renovation serenity—a respite from the couple's many rescue missions.

What's next? "We're rescuing ourselves," laughs Susan. ■

Architect: Kevin Lichten

For more information, see sources on page 186

"Our designer says"

"How does one stay sane during a grueling resurrection, nay, resurrection, of a once-proud stone barn that had long since been left for dead in a waist-high hayfield?"

"Honoring the existing barn's architecture is key. It's not saying, 'I'm a wreck—dox me over; it'll be easier for both of us.' It's telling you how it was put together with muscle, sweat, and blood many years ago—way before chain saws and electricity.

Though it may appear a bit foolhardy, allow yourself to be swept up a bit in the romance of such an adventure. Wearing rose-colored glasses can actually be a good thing. Those glasses become X-ray glasses, allowing you to see the possibilities no one else can.

"There will inevitably be unforeseen twists and turns in an undertaking such as this. But view the challenges as design possibilities, not insurmountable roadblocks. Call in the experts before you make any definite plans. Listen to what they say. And when they tell you to just make a pyre of money in the field and light it, you know that you have already made the right decision to plow ahead and convert that old barn!" —Joel Woodard