

Converting A Barn Into A Home

In late 2000, I bought a piece of property that was used as a farm for the past three generations. And even though just under six acres, was one of the prettiest pieces of land you ever laid eyes on. One half of the property is wooded and the remainder is rolling hills. At the westernmost section of the land runs a bubbling brook fed by a gushing spring. The water in that spring is crystal clear, fresh, and cool, all year round.

My wife and I borrowed my families RV and moved onto the property that same year with all intentions of building an English Style Tudor home on the front side of the property.

I'm an architectural designer by trade and had spent months laying out my wife's dream home. (OK, I admit it was mine too!) It was going to be built using trees off the land that I spent six weeks cutting down and shaping into 8" x 8" beams with my chain saw.

Then we hit a snag. The place where we were to build our dream home sat too close to the power lines that ran across the front of the property. Sure, I could get the utility board to move them, but not at their expense. I'd have to pay for the entire shooting match and that just wasn't in the budget.

By the time we got the news about the power lines, we had already spent nine weeks in that old RV and to be honest, it was getting sort of cramped seeing that three of our five children were still living at home. I don't care how big the RV is, if there is a 5 year old, two young teens, and two adults packed in it, life gets interesting. My wife's nerves were getting a bit frazzled and to be honest, so were mine.

On our farm, the only other suitable place to build sat the most beautiful old barn you ever laid eyes on. 64' wide by 30' deep. This barn had good solid construction with 6" x 6" columns, true 2" x 6" girts and rafters, 1" x 10" & 12" planking on the walls and lofts floors. All rough sawn and true size. This building was nearly a century old and twice as solid as modern structures today.

When I got the news about the house, I tried to break it to my wife as easy as possible so I took her out for a moon light stroll. You know, one of those romantic type walks that women just seem to get all gushy about. On our stroll we walked up to the barn where I had stored all those beams I had made to keep them in the dry until needed.

Sweetie, I said. "We can't build the house right now. If I have to clear land to build it, there will be another three to four month wait before I can even start construction." Then, off the cuff I said; "Maybe I could build us an apartment in the barn until I can start on the house." Her eyes lit up and she asked me; "How long would it take to build?" I thought for a second and decided it would take probably a month to complete.

Her excitement returned and seeing her face light up like that spurred me on to swinging a hammer. I selected the widest open part of the barn and started the construction. I'm glad I had the utility board hook power up to the barn as it really made life easier to use my power tools.

I visited our local saw mill and bought as much raw lumber as I could. First I constructed a new loft area using some of the beams I had cut out, then using those same beams, started cutting out stairs. Next I enclosed the face of the opening with native rock and mortar at about three feet tall and then a wood wall on top of that.

I built the floor to the Living Room and Den and then started framing the Kitchen which would protrude out of the back of the barn. Next, the loft I had previously built became mine and my wife's bedroom. From there I opened an area into the existing loft and started building the bathroom and two other bedrooms.

It has been close to eight years now and that barn apartment has become a full blown home complete with five Bedrooms, a Living Room, Den/Dining Room, Kitchen, Full Bathroom, Study, Sunroom/Laundry, Sewing Room, and a Garage. We haven't even used up a third of the barn yet and our square footage is already around 2064 sq. ft. of heated area. That square footage doesn't include the Garage, or Woodshop. The Garage is 13'-4" by 20' and the Wood Shop is the same size.

If you are planning to convert an outbuilding or barn into a home, you are in for a treat. Not only is there a rustic beauty but a whole bunch of possibilities for layout and use.

About the Author

Tim Davis is a veteran Architectural Designer who also teaches architecture and drafting over the internet at <http://homedesign.8m.com>. He is currently planning the construction of a website devoted entirely to the subject of barn conversion. The info page for updates on the website can be found at <http://draftingservice.us/barnhomes>, which he plans to update often.

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