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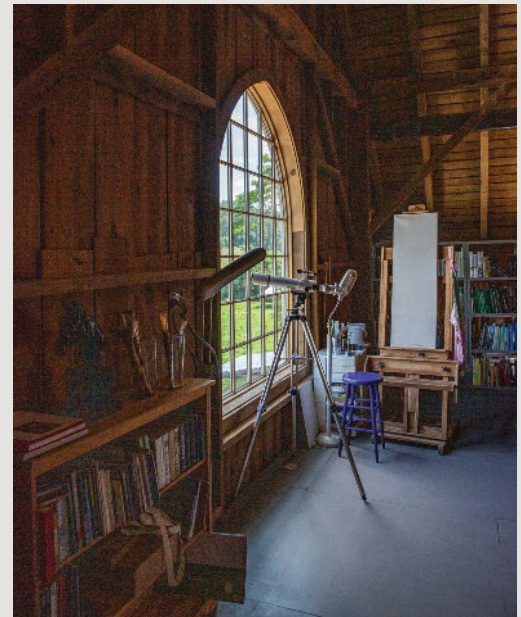




PASSION PROJECT

An artist turns to **B&D Builders** to transform a rundown bank barn into an exquisitely crafted multi-use space “where I love spending my life.”

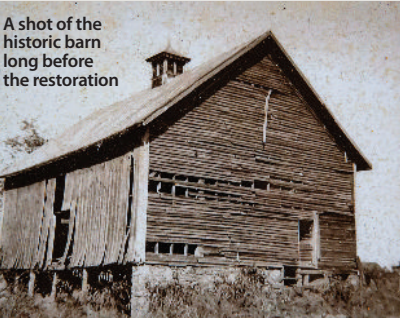
by **BILL DONAHUE**



Elizabeth Manierre used to eye the dilapidated bank barn on her family’s property west of Fairfax, Virginia, with a combination of pity and promise.

A few years ago, she stopped imagining and decided to restore the barn to its former glory—and then some.

The 19th century bank barn stands on a farm that has been in the Manierre family since the 1940s. She not only wanted to restore the barn, but also transform it into a multi-use building that would accommodate a gathering space on the main floor, an art studio in an overhead loft, and ample room downstairs for her five horses—plus, modern conveniences such as a bath, a shower, and a furnace. She also saw the act of preserving such an iconic structure as a responsibility to the surrounding community.



A shot of the historic barn long before the restoration

She could see every detail of the restoration clearly in her mind, but realized she needed a particular breed of builder to help turn her dreams into reality. When she spoke with Ben Esh from B&D Builders in Paradise, Pennsylvania, she knew she had found the right partner.

“The barn was important to me, and B&D understood that,” says Manierre, a former Chester County resident with a background in art and architecture who once studied at Winterthur in Delaware. “I wanted to build something with

craftsmanship that would last for generations. I didn’t even have to explain it to Ben. He just got it.”

Manierre brought in Andy Lewis of Neumann Lewis Buchanan Architects to sharpen some of the finer details, including converting the eight horse stalls into five stalls, a wash stall, and a tack room. In the first quarter of 2019, with the blueprints in hand, B&D began the task of recreating the barn according to Manierre’s vision.

“B&D has this old-fashioned mentality in terms of their craftsmanship and the pride they take in their work, but they also have all these modern tools at their disposal,” she says. “They had to prop up the barn to make it square and stable. They also essentially encased the barn in insulated panels; the interior walls are the original walls, but they sort of built a new barn over the old barn.

Photography courtesy of B&D Builders



They also had to replace the roof.”

In other words, this was no simple renovation project.

“I wanted to add some foundation stone, and they said, ‘Yeah, we can get a mason down here,’” she recalls. “I also wanted some embellishments, and everything I mentioned to B&D, they said, ‘Yeah, we can do that.’ Years ago, I had picked up this beautiful gingerbread ornament for the cupola. Bits and pieces had fallen off over the years, so I drove up to Paradise and handed them off, and they sent me home with the cupola ornament that was exactly the same.”

B&D was “happy to let me be involved in every detail,” she says, right down to the hinges and hardware. Also, she preferred a different exterior color than the traditional red. B&D helped her vet an exhaustive list of options so she could have the perfect shade of green—jasper—to please her discerning eye.

“We were thrilled to work with Betsy on achieving the exact right aesthetic for her bank barn renovation,” says Esh, co-owner of B&D

Builders. “When a client comes to the table with ideas and special requests for their space, that’s where we shine. It is always an exciting process to help make our client’s vision come to life.”

B&D completed the barn restoration and renovation, along with work on another outbuilding, in time for the 2019 Christmas holiday. The barn has been invaluable to Manierre over the past year, as the floor-to-ceiling space is large enough to accommodate “socially distant” gatherings of friends and family.

When I walk out to the barn, I get a deep sense of satisfaction because I feel like I’m saving a piece of American history. . . . The barn serves every passion I have.”

—ELIZABETH MANIERRE,
A CLIENT OF B&D BUILDERS

Manierre says she would not hesitate to call B&D again if and when the need arises. In the meantime, she recommends the builder to anyone willing to listen.

“When I walk out to the barn, I get a deep sense of satisfaction because I feel like I’m saving a piece of American history,” she says. “I take care of the animals in a workman-like place and then go upstairs and work on my art. The barn serves every passion I have. B&D took this old barn that was falling down and had standing water in the stalls, and turned it into a place where I love spending my life.” ■

