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Building Bonds

The owner of an historic Chester County property calls on **B&D Builders** to transform a 19th century dairy barn into a rustic yet elegant space for gatherings of friends and family.

In 2007, Erik Kolar purchased a sprawling historic property on a tranquil tract of land in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania. He adored the property for its grandeur, vastness, and natural beauty, as well as its proximity to metropolitan areas such as West Chester and Philadelphia.

As a Chester County native who has spent most of his life in the area, Kolar also appreciated the property's rich history. The home, which was built in 1789, had once been the residence of the late Owen J. Roberts, the Philadelphia-born icon of American jurisprudence who served on the U.S. Supreme Court. The property has since been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to the historic home, the property included a traditional bank barn dating back to 1873. Although the former dairy barn had been in decent shape, with

a strong foundation made from beautiful Chester County fieldstone, the structure had been used primarily for housing agricultural equipment, hay, and horses. Kolar had a bold vision for what he thought the structure could become: an elegant yet rustic space made for hosting gatherings both large and small.

"One of the inspirations was my family," says Kolar, the president and CEO of Patriot Equities in Wayne. "I come from a big family, with five older brothers and two older sisters. We lost our father a few years ago, and in some families, when you lose your parents, sometimes you lose the connection with your siblings. I wanted a place that would help keep us together."

In 2008, Kolar had worked with a Philadelphia-area architecture firm called Pe-



riod Architecture to design an addition and renovation of the historic home. When it came time to reimagine the barn, he asked Period Architecture's Douglas Mancuso to sketch out Kolar's vision. The question then became: Who would bring the sketch to life?

Period Architecture recommended Paradise, Pennsylvania-based B&D Builders, which boasted an impressive portfolio of residential, commercial, and agricultural building projects. Kolar was pleased to learn that B&D specializes in the renovation and restoration of historic structures, including bank barns similar to the one on his Chester Springs property. He also appreciated the fact that B&D strives to reuse existing materials whenever possible, enabling him to preserve much of the barn's historic construction.

Kolar wanted the barn to maintain its

Photography by Jana Bannan Photography

Old-World charm, while also offering modern conveniences such as heated floors, a full kitchen, and restrooms (fashioned out of old horse stalls), as well as an elegant suite to accommodate overnight guests. He also wanted multiple seating areas, fireplaces, and other spaces to facilitate get-togethers of all sizes.

Toward the end of 2019, Kolar met with Daniel Glick, a partner with B&D, to explain his vision and express his desire to host a party in the completed barn on Christmas Eve. The two forged a deal with a handshake in Kolar's driveway. Construction began in July 2020, meaning B&D had less than six months to complete the job.

"We have seen an uptick in requests for 'party barns' and spaces like Erik's because people are tired of being told what they can and cannot do," says Glick. "People who used to host events by renting out event centers are now taking control of the event by building or transforming spaces on their own properties. They want control, but they also want to make it more personal."

Whereas most builders would have struggled to meet such an ambitious deadline, B&D is unlike most builders. The company has made several strategic investments over the years to become a single-source custom builder. Five specialty brands—Mid-Atlantic Timberframes, Mid-Atlantic Steel Fabrication, Vintage Millwork & Restoration, Vintage Wood & Forged Iron, and Blackwood Equestrian Stalls—help B&D exert more control over the quality and fabrication of materials, as well as the lead time associated with each project.

"What we did in five months, others would take the better part of a year," Glick says. "We pulled up the original flooring and re-milled it, putting the same floor back down. Our steel shop did the metal work. We reclaimed as many beams as we could and turned them around pretty much on de-



mand. We have a lot of in-house components we can pull from for just about any project. That's what separates us."

Like any project, Kolar's barn had its share of surprises, which B&D took in stride. One example: The back wall had been parged over with a stucco-like material. This turned out to be what Glick refers to as "a happy surprise." His team spent several weeks chipping away the parging to expose the natural stone beneath—"like restoring an old castle," he says.

"Honestly, you can't tell the difference between what was added and what was original—it's seamless," Kolar says. "B&D moved heaven and earth to complete the project in time. We were able to host 100 people on Christmas Eve in a nice, safe, climate-controlled space. That's the benefit of 30-foot ceilings."

Members of his family spend a lot of time in the reimagined barn, especially in autumn, winter, and spring—watching football

games, working on projects that require peace and quiet, or just enjoying a drink with friends at a handsomely designed space known as "Eddie's Bar." Named for Kolar's late father, a bourbon aficionado who lived to the age of 85, Eddie's Bar has special meaning to Kolar and his family. He recalls the time a cosmopolitan friend of the family paid a visit to have a drink in tribute to Kolar's father.

"He sat there and said, 'I'm not sure bourbon has ever tasted as good as it does here,'" Kolar says. "This is a very successful man who has traveled the world, so it was an amazing compliment. That's the win of this place. There's a certain vibe you get from the history and the construction—it evokes emotion whenever you step inside."

Kolar sees no limit to the possibilities, and he looks forward to hosting gatherings in the barn years into the future. He's thankful for the role B&D played in turning his vision into reality.

"This place is a testament to B&D's skill, creativity, and willingness to roll with the punches," he says. "Even when the job was finished, if ever there was an issue, they would drop everything to come and help. I knew they were going to be good at the trade piece, because they're hard workers and incredible carpenters, but they were even better at the service piece. They're a very special organization." ■

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