WHEN IS A BARN NOT A BARN? WHEN IT’S A LIGHT-FILLED ARTIST’S STUDIO, A SHELTER FOR AN EXOTIC CAR COLLECTION, A MAGNIFICENT SPACE FOR PARTIES -- EVEN AN INDOOR BASKETBALL COURT. IN THE EYES OF ROB AND BETSY WADSWORTH, MASTER CRAFTSMEN AND OWNERS OF THE WADSWORTH COMPANY, A BARN CAN BE JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.
ascinated by the history of barns and inspired by their multiple uses, the Wadsworth’s entry into barn building evolved quite naturally. The couple left Connecticut in 1992, set on moving to Southern Vermont for a year to work in the ski industry and help his parents finish their ski home in Stratton. While teaching in the children’s program at Mount Snow, Rob met many families who had second homes in the area that needed repair. One of his regular ski clients asked if, come summer, he would paint their home in Vermont. He readily agreed and has been busy ever since.

“As soon as I set up in the neighborhood, I started to receive calls from the neighbors asking if I could help them with their projects,” he recalls. “After dozens of miscellaneous projects, my crew and I were named the lead trim carpenters for a large condominium development.” That winter, another ski client approached Wadsworth about building a timber frame home and The Wadsworth Company was launched. In the years since, the Wadsworth name has become synonymous with the finest custom timber framing, woodworking and home building in the area.

As the business grew, their clients’ expectations evolved. Out-of-state clients turned to them to oversee their entire projects and they began managing from the conceptual design phase all the way to building custom tables. The company specializes in such classic architectural styles as the traditional New England farmhouse, coastal cottage, rugged mountain retreat and authentic barn.

The company continued to build homes in Vermont for clients from around the tri-state area and, as relationships developed and trust grew, clients began asking for work on secondary buildings on the primary residences. To address their needs, Wadsworth launched Vermont Barns. “It was the right fit for the company and the crew,” he says. “Although we
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had some standard designs available for clients to choose from, we quickly learned that custom barns were our clients’ preference. Our first call was from a client who wanted a barn for kids’ getaway complete with full masonry fireplace and indoor basketball court."

What followed were exotic car barns, party barns, artist’s studios, libraries, dog training spaces and barns “just for stuff,” says Wadsworth. “Our barns are popping up all over the tri-state area. Frames come in all shapes and sizes, making a barn a logical choice when a homeowner needs more space for just about anything.”

But before you start to imagine a big, red blight on the landscape, consider this. Vermont Barns utilizes reclaimed or recycled lumber, timbers logged from the homeowner’s property or standing dead timber from out west (trees that have been killed in forest fires, for example). One project had roof boards that were once part of a boardwalk at a Connecticut beach Betsy and Rob frequented as teenagers. The most requested frame is the ‘aging stained’ frame. “Everyone wants their barn to look old so we created a special formula for aging stain. It’s an all-natural product that is applied to new rough sawn beams and after a very short period, gives them an old and distressed appearance,” Betsy explains. The siding board can also have the stain applied so that the barn looks old both inside and out.

In keeping with their aged appearance, Vermont Barns utilizes the centuries-old joinery process of mortise and tenon secured with pegs. After the design phase, the crew cuts the entire frame in the shop. It is then delivered to the site for raising. Signature elements of one of Wadsworth’s creations include magnificent exposed beams, hand-oiled timbers, cooper roofing and carriage-style doors.

“We are bringing back history,” she says. “The structure of a barn is to withstand the elements. From afar, it looks like a barn and nestles into the landscape in such a more aesthetically pleasing way, but inside the wide open space allows for almost anything.”

Among Vermont Barn’s most recent projects are a barn that is used as a dog training facility and another that is temperature controlled and features radiant heat floors. “It looks like a barn from the outside, but inside it’s home to six cars and a state-of-the-art automotive lift system,” she says. Another client’s new barn houses antique cars on the bottom and features caretaker’s quarters above.

Next time you see a barn along the side of the road, consider the possibilities.
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