



A Barn Reborn

An antiques-loving woman finds comfort and peace in a historic red barn home.

A sign that hangs over Sandy Wolfram's kitchen sink says it all: "A day in the country is worth a month in town."

Sandy was so smitten with country life that, with the help of a local architect, she turned the 1890s barn on her 172 acres of Illinois farmland into a comfortable country home.

Now, she cooks her meals in what once was a milking parlor and relaxes in what used to be a haymow.

"One of the things people say when they visit is the feeling of peace they get here," Sandy observes.

The barn-turned-house is the culmination of almost four decades of antiques

collecting, three decades of dreaming and 20 months of renovation.

Sandy and her late husband, Duane, bought the property in 1973 to escape city life. They took weekend retreats there, hunting antiques at auctions and picking up farming items from the late 1800s.

After years of returning to the city on Sunday nights, Sandy packed up and moved to the country full-time in 1999, several years after Duane passed away.

"For me, it was fulfilling my passion to get here. Every year my desire to get here full-time was stronger and stronger," Sandy says.

"My heart was here for so many years." At first, Sandy lived in the farmhouse

Sandy Wolfram turned an 1890s barn on her northern Illinois farm into a comfy home for herself. When she asked her builder to make the barn's old milking parlor into a kitchen, he crafted a country beauty that features light cabinets and a center island made with the original milking stanchions and barn hardware.





In the formal dining room upstairs, the oak table, chairs and sideboard were some of Sandy Wolfram's first antiques. She uses comfy armchairs to soften the look of the heavy wood. A crimson rug with gold highlights—one of Sandy's few new items—brightens the room. Antique doors on the right once graced the front of a church.

and used the barn to store the antiques she and Duane collected. They even set up an old-time general store inside the barn to display the antiques.

Later, when her daughter and son-in-law chose to move to the country and into her farmhouse, Sandy decided to convert the old barn—one of eight on the site—into a living space for herself.

"This barn has always been my favorite," she says.

Sandy tries to keep the history of the barn alive by explaining to

visitors what each room was used for and by displaying examples of farm equipment. She especially likes to tell how the upstairs living room, with 38-foot ceilings and original barn wood walls, once was filled with hay, so she displays its original hayfork on the wall.

"Once [visitors] realize the farmer's incredible job of filling it up with hay, they are astounded."

Living in a converted barn—especially one as old as Sandy's—presents its challenges, but Sandy revels in them.



Part of Sandy's extensive Red Wing crock collection graces the steps leading upstairs. Old lanterns and Red Wing whiskey jugs accent the ledge above the steps.



OLD HOUSE
SCRAPBOOK

Barn beams 13 feet apart naturally divide the large living space into three "rooms." Sandy further divides the massive area with furniture, choosing light-colored couches to offset the dark barn wood.



ABOVE: Sandy turned her old machine shed into a replica general store complete with display cases and oak counters bought from two different going-out-of-business auctions. **RIGHT:** Completing the transformation, her homebuilder ensures the shed's exterior looks like an old storefront.

"If I have a crowd upstairs (in the old hay barn), the next morning, there is a layer of dust covering everything," she says.

Downstairs, silt falls in the kitchen from an exposed rock wall. And though the high ceiling in the living room prohibits uniform heating during cold months, "I love it!" Sandy says.

"I like the primitive feel and the different textures. I was just so thrilled to have a rock wall inside."

The house is often dark due to its placement on the property, with rooms built into the side of a hill and few windows. But, for every dark corner, there is a light wall.

Sandy especially loves the light that pours in from her kitchen windows, with the view of a pond her husband



OLD HOUSE SCRAPBOOK



Initially, the antique child's alphabet quilt was a stopgap for covering window space in the antique door leading to a bathroom. Two years later, the quilt remains, adding softness and warmth to the wood-dominated decor.

built years ago. While living in the farmhouse, she had to hike across the property to enjoy the pond, but now that she lives in the barn, she can watch the scenery while standing at her kitchen sink.

"There are constantly deer coming to drink from it, and there are animals all around."

In keeping with her goal of preservation, Sandy's historic collectibles take center stage in the barn. And now that the house is complete, Sandy has plenty of opportunity to display her antiques in three additional outbuildings—a church, a replica general store and a one-room schoolhouse.

She moved the church, once slated for demolition, to her property, and her daughter now



In 1996, Sandy moved a church slated for demolition to her farm.

Gettin' hitched?

Not only has Sandy Wolfram converted an 1890s barn into her home, she also has moved—then restored—an 1860s church to her 172-acre northern Illinois farm. For the last two years, couples have been saying "I do" there with the help of Oak Hill Weddings, a business run by Sandy's daughter, Becky Riedl.

"One of the things that makes it so special," Becky says, "is the atmosphere—being back in the country. It makes for a good setting to start new."

Brides and grooms who choose to marry in the 200-seat church—complete with an organ, sound system and piano—can use the loft area of Sandy's barn house for dressing and photographs.

The wedding party can be transported from the house to the church in a 1931 Ford Model A, in a black two-seat horse-drawn carriage or on a white vis-à-vis carriage. Those who marry in the church "always say what a unique memory it will make," Becky reports.

For couples who don't live in the area but want to marry in the church, Becky acts as a wedding consultant, coordinating everything from flowers to photographs, catering and reception—she even can arrange for small wedding receptions in Sandy's barn house or for outdoor receptions on the farm.

For more information, call Becky at 815-594-2348, visit her Oak Hill Weddings Web site, www.oakhillweddings.com, or e-mail her at becky@oakhillweddings.com.



ABOVE: The school's last teacher gave the Wolframs the chair she used when she taught. Sandy found the desks, slates and other school accessories at antiques shows and auctions.



This late-1800s schoolhouse, a 50th birthday gift to Sandy from her husband, nestles in the woods on their farm.



Birdhouse by The Rick Williams Co.



ABOVE: Casual meals are served at the yellow reproduction dinner table. Nearby are some of Sandy's most prized pieces, including an old icebox that doubles as a bar and a dry sink that corrals seasonal accents. Quilts—both old and new—are a family favorite, and Sandy drapes one over her cupboard for softness and color. **LEFT:** Sandy hopes to raise chickens someday, but until then, she keeps her collection of chicken accents in her kitchen.



Original barn wood conceals a new Sub Zero refrigerated bar where Sandy can chill items brought up from downstairs on a dumbwaiter. Her builder fashioned two old stained-glass windows into a cabinet for glassware. Sandy uses an old feed cabinet for storage.



LEFT AND ABOVE: This bright bedroom area was a lean-to until Sandy's builder remodeled it with drywall, in stark contrast to the dark wood downstairs. Sandy found the arched door lintels, originally from an Iowa church, at a Minnesota architectural antiques store.

“One of the things people say when they visit is the feeling of peace they get here,” Sandy Wolfram observes.

rents the space for weddings.

Sandy set up many antiques in the outbuilding-turned-general store that her husband once told her was “a hobby out of control.”

She likes to keep the antiques there on display. “If things are in boxes somewhere,” she observes, “it’s kind of a waste.”

Finally, Sandy moved an old schoolhouse to her property. She restored it, and now schoolchildren travel there to spend the day learning the same way children from the late 1800s and early 1900s did.

Though Sandy and her husband originally bought the property for their children, she has found peace there herself, especially with her

collections in the barn house.

“It could have never gone this far if we didn’t both love it,” she says.

“We bought the farm to get away from the city for the kids’ sake, and it evolved from that to giving my husband and I the greatest enjoyment of something we did together. It was a great way to share a life.” ★

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FOR MORE INFORMATION,
SEE RESOURCE GUIDE, PAGE 171.



Besides using original barn hardware wherever possible, Sandy's builder constructed doors that look authentic to a barn. Pocket doors are space savers in a small bathroom, where examples of Sandy's crock collection peek out.

Sandy took a gamble one day and painted two of the bedroom walls dark rose. She loved it so much that she painted the two remaining walls to match. The two windows, original to the barn structure, open like doors and help lighten the dark walls. Sandy's antique bed yields a trundle bed, invaluable when family members visit.

