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This Old House

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2005

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0A massive Douglas-fir timber frame underlines a triangular gable window—a copy of one in the original barn that occupied this site. The kitchen, with its mix of simple, earthy materials—cherry cabinets, Fireslate counters, and a ceramic tile backsplash set without grout lines to imitate stone—is a nice complement to the exposed timbers. The homeowner eschewed the convenience of an island in favor of an old-fashioned kitchen table.

A new timber-frame house draws its inspiration and form from the old barn it replaces

BARN AGAIN

BY JILL KIRCHNER SIMPSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE STANDART STYLED BY GERRI WILLIAMS

Jan Campaigne always had a soft spot for the dilapidated barn that dominated her property in the pre-Revolutionary seacoast town of Guilford, Connecticut. Located in its historic district just off the town's main square, the barn was built in the mid-1800s. Its distinctive triangular-shaped, gable-end windows and elegant eaves brackets—added in the Victorian era—gave it a bit more polish than its rural cousins. But it had been so neglected that its roof had caved in and it was being held upright by cabling. Nonetheless, when Jan's husband passed away, she decided to rent out her home and restore the barn for herself.

To her disappointment, the restorers she consulted told her that the barn's wood frame was too far gone to repair. Still determined, she decided to retain as much of the original materials as she could and build a home that captured the barn's history and look. Her plan appealed to the board of the historic district, but they took it one step further: They required that the exterior of the new structure match the old barn in appearance—in fact, it had to be built within the old footprint. Jan enlisted the help of her architect son, Russell Campaigne, and his wife and business partner, Mary Jo Kestner, to draw up the plans and oversee the construction.

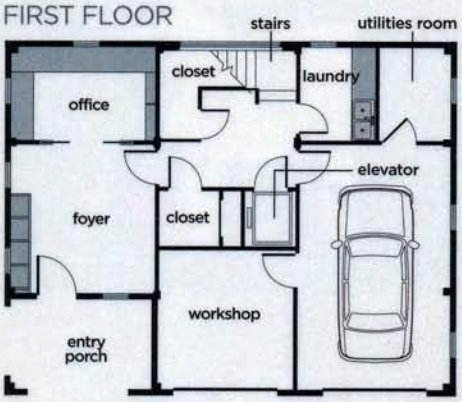
CHOOSING TIMBER FRAMING

Russell and Mary Jo wanted to preserve the barn's rough-hewn character inside as well as out, but also needed to come up with a floor plan that handled Jan's needs within the tall, cavernous space. It didn't take long to settle on a timber frame—large beams joined to vertical posts and exposed on the inside of the structure—as the right construction method. Russell chose Steve Amstutz, a timber framer from Upper Jay, New York, to apply this centuries-old craft to the new home. Because the original barn, whose shape had to be dutifully replicated, was a large rectangle with no basement, attic, or separate wings, the frame could be kept simple. The house is a "four-bent" design in timber-frame speak, meaning it has four equally spaced, A-shaped frames that span the house from side to side. The wall and roof panels that sheathe the exterior are attached to these bents, as is the floor framing on the interior. "We kept the design of the bents simple as well," says Amstutz. "And

What They Did

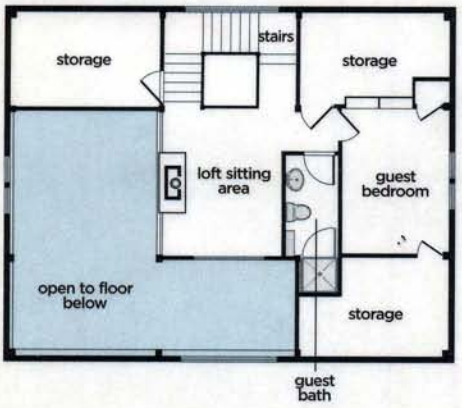
The first floor incorporates the entry and utility spaces. The primary living area is concentrated on the second floor; the living room, dining room, and kitchen on this floor all run double-height to the rafters. The partial third-floor loft includes a guest bedroom, bath, and sitting area.

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

THIRD FLOOR



The paneled enclosure for the living room fireplace and chimney incorporates a pantry on one side and stereo cabinets on the other. With approximately 800 square feet on each floor, every inch of space was used for built-in storage.

each bent is the same." Uncomplicated design is one of the keys to controlling the cost of a timber-framed structure, and it creates a consistent interior look.

When the old barn was torn down, the crew recovered everything useable: a triangular window, eaves details and rafter tails, as well as some floorboards that became cabinetry in the new house. Inspired by an adjacent—and unused—1880s stone pigsty, they gathered fieldstone from the property for the foundation. Above the stone, wide clapboard siding echoes the original barn, and the scale and symmetry of the windows are also appropriate to the era and similar to that of neighboring buildings.

THREE-LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

Since the original barn was rather tall (being in town, the first owners had to build up, rather than out, even in the 1800s), Russell and Mary Jo had three floors to work with—which allowed them to squeeze in 2,400 square feet of living space. After much consideration, they chose the second floor for the main living area of the house, which provided better light, taller ceilings, and a sense of security for Jan. The space contains a double-height living room, dining room, and kitchen; and a master bedroom suite, a small study, and a powder room. "I love living up," Jan says. "The light makes me happier, especially in the winter." This leaves the first floor devoted to utility spaces—an foyer, garage, workshop, laundry room, and home office/crafts room. Tucked up on the third floor are a guest room and bath, and a sitting area overlooking the living room.

Because she plans to live in this house for years to come, Jan wanted it to be fully accessible, so an elevator was installed to connect the first and second floors. "Residential elevators have become much more affordable," says Russell, who often stacks closets and pours a footing to support the addition of an elevator for clients who might want one later. But Jan doesn't just want it for her later years: "I still downhill ski, so if I break my

The three-story stairwell rising up through the back of the house provides a dramatic perspective. Architect Russell Campaigne, the owner's son, built the stairway himself, designing the tapering newel posts and incorporating stock porch-railing balusters from a home center.

Although open to the underside of the third-floor-loft roof, the second-floor dining room was made more intimate by the addition of exposed timber joists at ceiling height. A bank of tall, 12-inch-deep cabinets—used for china and table linens—divides the dining area from the kitchen. The homeowner had a local blacksmith forge the dining room's chandelier.

leg, I'll need it now," says Jan, "and it's incredibly helpful with the laundry and groceries." The elevator is barely noticeable, however, as it is tucked within the central core of the house, just steps away from the alternative: a bold three-story staircase at the back of the house, designed and built by Russell.

THE OPEN LIVING AREAS ALLOW ADJACENT ROOMS TO VISUALLY "BORROW" FROM ONE ANOTHER.

THOUGHTFUL CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

Although timber framing is more expensive than a conventionally framed house (by 30 percent in this case, Russell estimates), it offers several advantages. One is how the house is enclosed. Russell and Mary Jo used structural insulated panels (SIPs) on the outside of the Douglas fir timber frame. The panels, which consist of rigid foam insulation sandwiched by oriented strand board (plywoodlike sheets of large wood chips and resin), have more insulation value than conventional walls. They are also are extremely weathertight and go up very fast, which helps limit the frame's exposure to weather during construction. And because the panels are applied on the exterior, the timbers are fully exposed inside.

Another advantage of a timber frame is that its exposed wood reduces the need for moldings and elaborate interior finishes—in this case, the walls are primarily painted drywall. Russell and Mary Jo left a space of ⅝ inch between the SIPs and the timber frame so the drywall could be slipped behind the posts and not have to be trimmed out where it met them.

The floor framing is also a little unusual. In many timber-framed homes, 2x6 or 2x8 planks are nailed on top of floor beams, creating a finished ceiling for the rooms below and a floor for those above. In this case, Russell and Mary Jo used a conventional floor system—joists and subflooring—on top of the planking. This allowed room for sound insulation between floors, as well as plumbing for the kitchen, bathrooms, and the radiant floor heating used throughout the house.

Shawn Mohovich, a friend who helped with the design and oversaw the construction,

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE DIRECTORY, PAGE 95

underscores the importance of planning everything early with a timber-framed structure. "It's important to have a detailed image in your head of how it looks and works in the end," says Mohovich. "In this case, we were constrained not only by the frame but by historical guidelines." In fact, the historical board came out and measured to make sure the house wasn't an inch bigger than the original.

FINAL RESULT

Given the compact size of each floor of the barn, Russell and Mary Jo made the most of every square inch. Pantry and stereo cabinets are tucked into either side of the gas fireplace, and the bedrooms and study are lined with walls of built-in cabinets, drawers, and closets. The open living areas allow adjacent rooms to visually "borrow" from each other. For example, the study looks bigger because it's open to the living room, yet it has frosted-glass pocket doors that offer privacy for overnight guests sleeping on the pull-out couch.

Jan spent much of her time during construction researching materials and finishes, and choosing colors, hardware, and fixtures in the Colonial style she has always loved. In the kitchen, the cabinets are a mix of cherry flush-inset doors and drawers with frames painted in the sage green and grayed blue found throughout the house. Fireslate counters offer the richness of slate in a durable and more affordable man-made material.

"I worried about what it would be like to live here,"says Jan. "But I felt a sense of security and comfort from the moment I walked in the door." She shares that feeling with others by entertaining frequently in her new home. Her first party was an open house for 150 people to celebrate her new digs; for her it was a kind of barn raising. "We couldn't have neighbors actually help build the house, but I had my friends and all the people who worked on the house gather together to help christen it." ■

UNCOMPLICATED DESIGN IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO CONTROLLING THE COST OF A TIMBER-FRAMED STRUCTURE.

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Timber-Frame Options

Folks who choose timber-framing over conventional stud-wall framing are drawn to the handcrafted nature of this brawny construction and the historical continuity its joinery techniques represent. Until recently, however, a scarcity of builders had limited its popularity. Fortunately, the ranks of such craftsmen have grown, and there are now more than 400 timber-frame builders across the country. While most of these businesses are regional, some will build a frame to specifications and ship it to your site.

Most timber-frame builders work in a similar way. The timbers and their joints are cut in a large shop, carefully tested for fit, disassembled and shipped off to be reassembled and raised under the builder's careful supervision. The actual erection time is just a few days. Choosing a timber-frame builder is like qualifying any contractor. "Find out how long a company has been in business," advises Mike Morris, coauthor of *The Timberframe Way*. "Do they build custom or just stock designs? Also talk to previous customers about how it went, then look at the work itself, especially the craftsmanship and whether the various members are in pleasing proportion to each other."

Another important choice is the species of timber. Hardwood will span the greatest distance, allowing for larger rooms. Oak is the most commonly used, but cherry, ash, hickory, and poplar are sometimes options. However, hardwoods have a tendency to check (split) and shrink more than other choices. Most people who come to timber-framing love the characteristics of wood,

including checking," says Frank Baker, president and owner of Riverbend Timber Framing, in Blissfield, Michigan. "If not, we direct them to soft woods like Douglas fir, white pine, cedar, and hemlock; kiln-dried material; or timber salvaged from old structures, which has had decades to dry." All will develop less checking than a new hardwood frame.

The appeal of timber framing isn't limited to people building new homes, either. It can be used for additions and combined with other construction. "That's why we do so many 'hybrids,'" says timber framer Steve Amstutz. "People ask us to add a timber-framed great room or a timber roof for a stick-framed home."

Looking for a timber-frame builder near you? The Timber Frame Business Council* (www.timberframe.org) *can help.

"Barn Again," p. 86: Clever storage in this new timber-frame includes a pantry and a stereo cabinet tucked into either side of the fireplace.

The American House and the Evolution of Modern Convenience, Three Rivers Press, and *Open House: A Guided Tour of the American Home*, Henry Holt and Company.

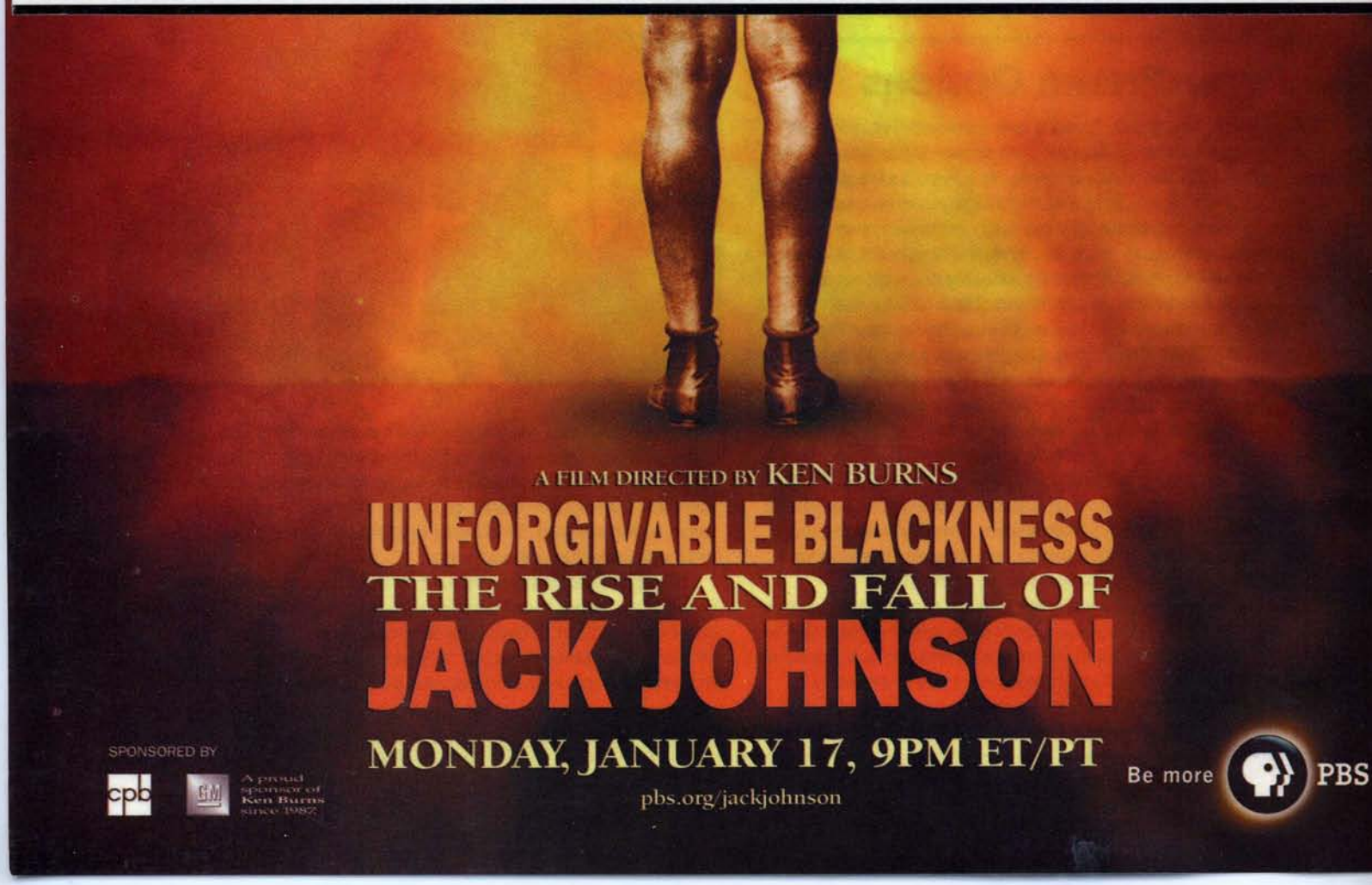
BARN AGAIN
pp. 86–91

Architect: Russell Campaigne, AIA, and Mary Jo Kestner, AIA, Campaigne Kestner Architects, Guilford, CT; 203-453-1224; *www.ck-architects.com.* **Builder/designer:** Shawn Mohovich, Mohovich Design & Carpentry, New Haven, CT; 203-887-7347. **Timber framer:** Steve Amstutz, Amstutz Woodworking, Upper Jay, NY; 518-946-2662; *www.amstutztimberframes.com.* **Panel supplier:** Foard Panel, West Chesterfield, NH; 603-256-8800; *www.foardpanel.com.* **Stonework:** Duane Perreault, Moodus, CT; 860-873-9601. Geoff Brooks, Arcadia, Guilford, CT; 203-668-6252. **Electrician:** Fred Allen, FMA Electric, Madison, CT; 203-421-8376. **Plumbing and radiant floor heating:** Ron McGlinchey, Madison, CT, 203-245-7765. **Elevator:** Jack Whaley, Connecticut Residential Elevator Co. Inc., Guilford, CT; 203-457-0566. **Cabinetry:** Leo's Kitchen and Stair Company, New Britain, CT; 860-225-7363. **Painting:** Brian Mahoney Painting Co., Centerbrook, CT; 860-767-7823.

Kitchen—

Metallic chrome stand mixer: KitchenAid; 800-422-1230; *www.kitchenaid.com.*

Living room—

Framed fruit prints: Takashimaya, New York, NY; 212-350-0100. **Area rug and coffee table:** Ethan Allen, Danbury, CT; 888-324-3571; *www.ethanallen.com.*

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