

# NEW FOUND FARM

*An architect-engineer couple build a home  
in an unlikely place*

New Found Farm is the name of this new home designed to look like an old barn. Features include barn doors that work as shutters for glass doors, double transom windows, and cedar shingles treated with bleaching oil and left to weather to a gray patina. The home was built over the course of 20 years. In the first year of building, the homeowners lived in an RV on the property. In subsequent years, they occupied the wing of the house, which is now used for their dogs.



by Debra Spark  
Photography Trent Bell  
Styling Janice Dunwoody



A view of the interior of the post-and-beam home (opposite) with hemlock framing, kitchen, and master bedroom in the upstairs hayloft. The ladder to the left is made of hemlock and ash. The gray barn-board walls are from Carlisle Wide Plank Floors. The new kitchen hutch was built to look like a family heirloom.

The underside of the catwalk with a fan by Lighting Concepts (above).



As a girl, I liked to imagine how I'd live in an unlikely place. It might be a clearing in the woods (I'd bury a metal box in the ground for food) or the upstairs bathroom (I'd put my sleeping bag in the tub, my cereal boxes on the shelf). Todd Bennett and Sue Mendleson's home in Washington is the same kind of fantasy, writ large and improved by talent and ambition. It's a house in a barn, designed by architect Mendleson, wired by engineer Bennett, and built over the course of 20 years on land that Mendleson inherited from her family.

The idea of building a traditional barn/home came to the couple simply because they like barns. Mendleson had some familiarity with their construction, having worked at a post-and-beam company when first out of college. The couple consulted coffee-table books and took drives in the country, in order to figure out what features they'd most like. They settled on an English barn (a barn with sliding doors on the eave side rather than the gable end) with weathered shingles, a cupola, black window sashes, and a catwalk. (They saw the latter feature in a barn in Union.)

Decisions made, Bennett and Mendleson built as their pocketbooks allowed. One summer, they put in a road and utilities. The next, they built the "dog wing," the area of the house where Bennett and Mendleson lived during construction but which is now occupied primarily by their prizewinning Newfoundland dogs (one of whom took second place at Westminster in 2013). The barn itself was completed in several stages. Bennett's uncle cut hemlock for

the frame, but the wood sat for several years until Bennett and Mendleson were ready to build. Hemlock is often ideal for post-and-beam construction, but it grew hard during the wait, which made the timbers difficult to work with when the time came. Marc Lorraine of Lorraine Construction in Rockport built the dog wing and exterior shell, then Tim Fortune (previously of Lorraine) finished off the interior under the auspices of his own business, Tim Fortune Carpentry and Design in Camden. When the builders were done framing, they put a tree branch on the roof for good luck, a custom that is meant "to appease the god of the trees, since you are taking trees to build shelter," says Fortune. (The practice is sometimes referred to as "topping out.") "Everything was financially based," says Mendleson of the building process. "We'd save money or refinance. I had the patience to wait to do what we wanted."

And what she and her husband wanted was an open-plan post and beam, but not "open" in the way most people use that term, speaking of a house where the ground floor has a single dining room, living room, and kitchen space. The Bennett-Mendleson house is open because, with the exception of a guest room, office, and pantry, the barn consists of one space open vertically to the rafters. The ground floor has a living room, dining room, and kitchen. The second floor consists of two "haylofts" joined by a bridge. The master bedroom is in one loft; a game room with an antique pool table (made in the 1870s on Cape Cod) is in the other. A third level consists of a catwalk from which you can access the cupola.



1. A Monel stainless-steel sink recycled from the home of one of the homeowners' clients.
2. Stone work by Caleb Hall of Hall Landscaping in Warren.
3. A shallow sink in the downstairs powder room is from F.W. Webb Company.
4. The metal plate is the registration for the sawmill (owned by the uncle of one of the homeowners) where the hemlock for the house was processed into timbers.
5. Blacksmith Joel Wentworth and his apprentice Gary Thorpe fashioned the hardware for the backside of the front door, including this hinge.

***“The design was always about what’s appropriate to a barn,”***

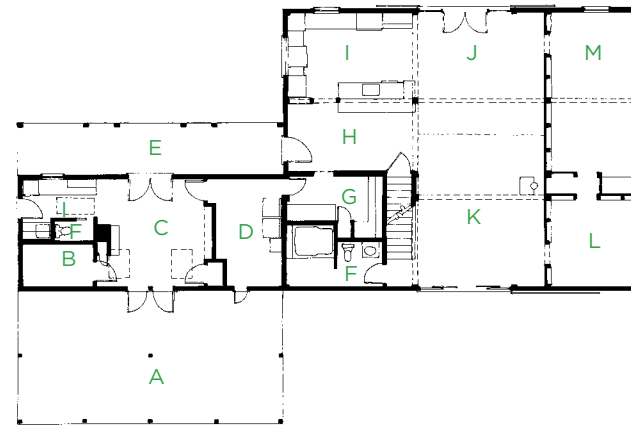
Mendleson says. She and her husband heat with a woodstove and in-floor radiant heat, because you wouldn’t see heating registers in a barn, but you might see a woodstove. The wiring for the lights is in exposed metal-case conduits, since a barn wouldn’t have electricity hidden in the walls. The office and guest room are set up in spaces that suggest horse stalls. Barn doors serve as shutters for large glass doors on either end of the living room. Ladders made of hemlock and ash (hand-hewn by Fortune’s father) lead from the first floor to the second, from the second to the catwalk, and from the catwalk to the cupola’s interior. The stools that are drawn up to the kitchen’s bar countertop look like tractor seats. Everywhere, wood abounds: pine on the floors, reclaimed barn board for interior walls, and whitewashed pine for exterior walls. The door hardware, fashioned by blacksmith Joel Wentworth of Union and his apprentice, is based on a design from the neighboring family home. Because barns don’t traditionally have a plethora of windows, the majority of the light comes from the glass doors behind the barn doors. When the barn doors are

closed, a transom window above the front entrance provides natural light and prevents the space from becoming too dark. Outside, a ramp, as if for farm equipment, leads to the barn door, which is sized to be big enough for a wagon full of hay.

Bennett and Mendleson picked furnishings that they thought might suit a barn: a bed and side tables made of timber in the master bedroom, an iron bedframe in the guest bedroom, and family heirlooms, which include a trunk, a bench, quilts, and etchings by artist Carol Lummus of Eliot, who is Mendleson’s maternal aunt. Other items have been collected, magpie-like, from here and there. The dining room chairs (which surround a live-edge table that Mendleson made while in architecture school) come from a former Boothbay inn. The kitchen sink came out of one of Mendleson’s clients’ homes in Greenville.

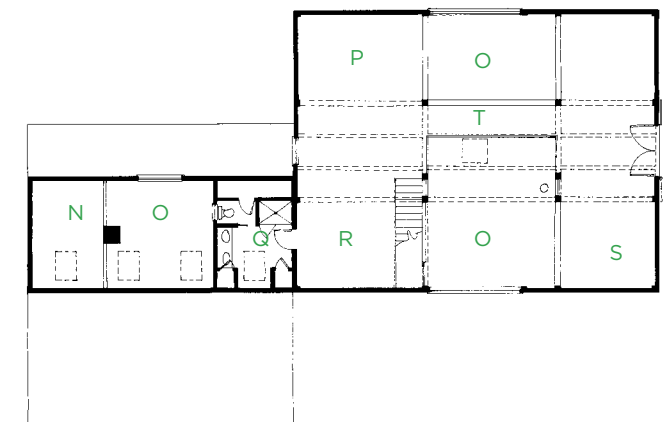
Bennett wanted the property to have a traditional rock wall as befits a barn’s surroundings, so he hired Caleb Hall of Hall Landscaping in Warren. What started as work for the front of the house—grading to repair the construction site and create a lawn bordered by a long, low wall—grew to include a stone ramp to the front door, retaining walls, a stone terrace, a fire pit, and a new foundation for the outdoor dog kennel. In keeping with the project’s overall goals, Hall created walls and foundations that

## FIRST FLOOR



- A Kennel
- B Dog Shower
- C Dog/TV Room
- D Laundry
- E Porch
- F Bathrooms
- G Pantry
- H Mudroom
- I Kitchens
- J Dining Room
- K Living Room
- L Guest Room
- M Office
- N Storage
- O Open to Below
- P Master Bedroom
- Q Master Bathroom
- R Master Dressing Room
- S Play Loft
- T Bridge

## SECOND FLOOR





The master bedroom (above) with family antiques and etchings, furniture made of timbers, and walls composed of boards that the homeowners whitewashed and installed themselves.

The front entry (opposite) with the kitchen to the right and a pantry and entrance to the dog wing to the left. The floor is ceramic tile. The kitchen stools are meant to look like tractor seats, and the industrial light fixture is part of the Roughlyte Series from Crescent/Stonco.

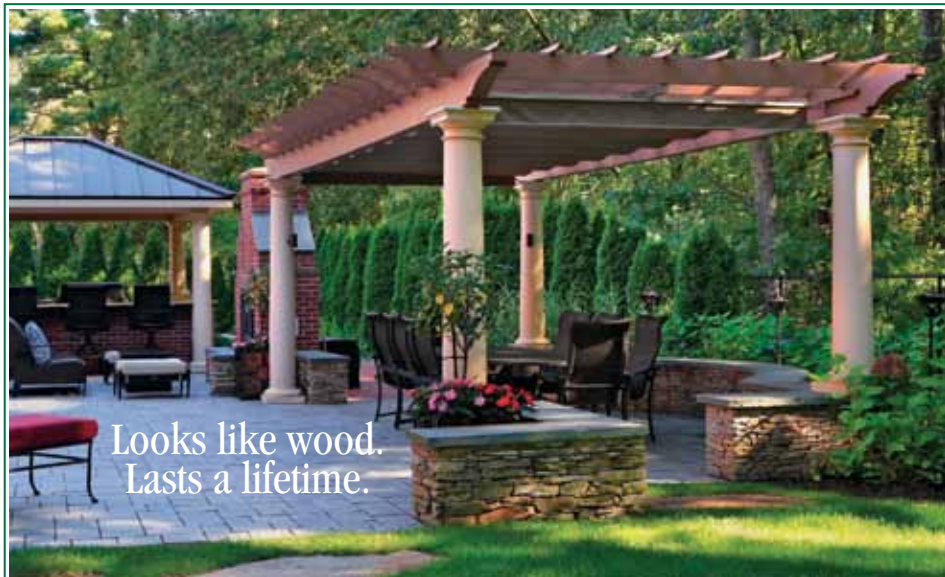
“look like they might have been there 100 years ago,” he says. He used three types of rock: Blueberry Stone (which he sells to order and comes from blueberry barrens in Cherryfield), local granite, and local Heritage Valley. All of this is artfully laid with larger and intriguingly shaped rocks (one looks like a prosciutto) serving as focal points within the walls. Because there is a garage under the barn, Hall had to build a 10-foot retaining wall on one side of the house, a 6-foot wall on the other. Yet another wall had to be built to contain the soil for the terrace. The final design for the terrace and fire pit incorporates an existing stone ledge, as well as large pieces of stone that serve as seats. Hall also placed solid blocks of granite under the dog pen. Smith and May of West Rockport used St. George granite veneer for the visible part of the foundation. Now the granite and granite veneer give “the feel of an old farm as it wraps the house,” says Hall.

A typical barn might house a farm dog. Bennett and Mendleson have two Newfoundland dogs, named Lewis and Quincy, but the animals, with their tendency to shed and drool, don’t have access to the barn. They reside in the “dog wing,” which is a family room

outfitted with a dog shower and kitchenette. Newfoundland dogs still have a presence, however, in the barn, as images of them are everywhere: on the bathroom tile, throws that hang over the hayloft railing, artwork, pillows, dishware, and more. Blacksmith Wentworth even incorporated the silhouette of a Newfoundland dog on the second-floor bridge’s railing.

There are, of course, a few items in the house that you would definitely not find in a barn: a kitchen, for example. But even here things were made to fit the aesthetic by eliminating upper cabinetry to keep the timber framing visible, building a hutch that looks like it could be a family heirloom, and using elm with a live edge for the bar countertop, an echo of the live-edge top on the dining room table. The kitchen was a collaborative effort with design input from kitchen designer Elaine Murdoch (who is a colleague of Mendleson’s at Knickerbocker Group in Boothbay and Portland) and Murdoch’s husband, Ray Menard of East Boothbay, who built the cabinets, bar top, and hutch. Collaboration was significant throughout the project. Mendleson says, “Ray, Marc, Tim, Caleb, and almost everyone else involved





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The homeowners with their prizewinning Newfoundland dogs (above). Behind them is the "dog wing" of the house, which has an oversized shower for washing the dogs.

BRIGHT IDEAS



- Reclaimed barn board
- Recycled kitchen counter and sink
- Locally harvested flooring
- Local stone
- Biofuel, wood, and passive-solar heating
- Sculptures of recycled/found objects

offered far more than their sweat and materials. Now they're all family, whether they like it or not."

My girlhood fantasy abodes represented the whim of the moment, not a 20-year effort, but they still had names, "The Club House" being a particular favorite. As for Bennett and Mendleson's home, it is called "New Found Farm." "It's a pun on the dog breed," Mendleson explains, but also apropos for other reasons: "Because it's a new 'old' farm. A new homestead." **MH+D**

For more information, see Resources on page 120.

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# The Art of Dynamic Collaboration

## RICK NELSON ON THE BENEFITS OF A DESIGN-BUILD TEAM

With so many cooks in the proverbial kitchen—architect, builder, interior designer, homeowner, and so on—you would think the process of building a house would crumble under the weight of all that collaboration. Quite the opposite is true, according to architect Rick Nelson at Knickerbocker Group. According to Nelson, bringing in more creative and technical minds—at the right time—leads to a smoother, more seamless transition from design to construction. “While different from the traditional design-bid-build model,” he says, “dynamic collaboration encourages the expansion of our collective imagination, which ultimately unearths a better product.” We asked Nelson to explain.



**Q. What do you mean by “dynamic collaboration”? How does it benefit the design and building process?**

**A.** As architects, we need to look deeper than the traditional architect-engineer relationship and engage with a full design-build team for inspiration and execution. With the proliferation of and growing desire for more energy-efficient and healthy homes, we as a team (from architects to interior designers to field crews) must be aware of our clients’ goals and intent, while staying on top of current industry trends, materials, and application methods. After all, we don’t want months of pre-planning to be upended by a formaldehyde-laden couch! Understanding building science is not just for the architect; it is also important for the contractors, installers, and even our clients, who will need to maintain the “science” of the home long after the crews are gone. This happens naturally when our clients are involved in the process, as they learn along the way about the benefits of the systems and the best practices for maintaining a healthy and energy-efficient home. This dynamic collaborative approach works best in a design-build environment. At Knickerbocker Group, we have constant contact with people in the field, and our process encourages a fluid design, allowing for some details to be worked out early on with a craftsman or later, during fabrication on the job site. While this process works best within the design-build model, it can also work within a more traditional architect-builder relationship if a builder is selected early and a level of flexibility is planned for in the design and construction schedule.

**Q. How has technology impacted this collaboration?**

**A.** Over the years, the way people live in their homes has changed, so how we design their homes needs to change as well. The popularity of websites like Houzz.com and Pinterest.com allow clients to easily access

design inspiration material and share it immediately with the entire design team. There is no longer any need to wait days or weeks to share new finds. This dynamic communication allows us to react to our client’s inspirations with our own ideas, quickly adapting the design and vision together in a truly collaborative fashion. Coupled with today’s modern technology, we can graphically present these ideas in a way that makes it much easier for our clients to visualize the spaces and the details, even when those clients are hundreds or thousands of miles away.

**Q. What’s an example of this integration of disciplines in your work?**

**A.** The importance of an architect’s dialogue with their team goes well beyond the technical to the aesthetic. As we personalize our client’s dream, we look for ways to make the home original and expressive of their unique interests and qualities. This can often be achieved through custom detailing and finishes. When we engage the craftsman as a member of the design team, their intimate hands-on knowledge of wood or stone, as well as their own creative energy, helps to imagine details that would be hard to conceive in drawing form. This approach works well with complicated trim details that seem reasonably easy to accomplish from a design perspective but may be difficult to successfully complete in the field. A chat, and sometimes a scaled mock-up, can often bring a successful resolution to a potential problem long before construction begins. By testing the constructability of our designs, we promote efficiencies down the line. **MH+D**

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