

Adding On Separately

A latter day barn-raising changes the lives of a Woodbridge couple

BY DUO DICKINSON

A barn built by an intrepid young couple in a backyard cleared of 60 years worth of overgrowth. Its windows salvaged, its roof designed to fit the pattern of the photovoltaics that sit upon it and newly set arched frames ready for summer plastic cladding to create a greenhouse for vegetables.

PHOTOS: ANTHON DECARLO

When Marlys and Trevor Youngberg purchased their home in early 2009, they wanted a traditional house in a town with a great school system. Starting a family was definitely on the agenda of the soon-to-be-married couple, and Trevor had plans of his own as well. As he puts it: "We were looking for a traditional New England home that could be embellished with additions that flow naturally with the form of the original structure. Beyond house design, we were looking for a property that had room for a barn."

They hit on all criteria in the inventory-rich housing market and found a 1946 Cape with lateral wings, sitting to the south end of a nearly two-acre lot in Woodbridge. Traditional home, roomy site, great school system — but a completely overgrown lot and a house in need of some cosmetic repair and, as one might expect, precious little budget left over after the purchase to do what the Youngbergs wanted to do.

They set about clearing the site of 50 years' worth of overgrowth and added some crown molding and fresh paint to get the home's interior family-friendly. Even though they had taken the leap to start a family, they also realized they could not have the home they wanted without some help. But instead asking the in-laws, they found the state of Connecticut might offer them a helping hand to create an addition that stood alone — a barn where teacher Trevor could pursue his "other" life as a potter.

The Connecticut Clean Energy Fund's (CCEF) Solar Lease Program offered the Youngbergs an opportunity to have save money now and in the out years. The



The site: a 1946 Cape in the foreground (right) fronts the street with a classic, timeless presence in the rural Woodbridge neighborhood while the new barn (background, left) has sufficient distance to allow for full solar access to its various sun-worshipping design influences.

Photos: Anthony DeCarlo

program offers a 15-year lease for a photovoltaic (PV) panel array that would eliminate their monthly \$110 monthly electrical bill. There was one hitch, however. “We have mature sugar maples in the front yard that prohibited the installation of the PV array on our new home’s front south-facing roof,” Trevor Youngberg explains. “We were unwilling to cut the trees in the front yard.”

Not only was the siting problematic, the array had to be installed by before December 2009 to take advantage of the CCEF program. Absent money, innovative thinking and elbow grease get results. The Youngbergs opted to get the “future” garage up as an armature for the virtually free electrical power as soon (and as cheaply) as possible.

That meant repurposing, scavenging and bartering *in extremis* to get a frame up to accept the PV array before the December 2009 deadline. A short list of some of those free found objects were many. Spending \$500 to rent a portable sawmill and some backbreaking log moving, the timber for the barn frame came largely from trees cut down from their yard. The rocks for the heat sink came from the excavation for the barn’s foundation. The Youngberg’s created their own exterior rigid wall insulating panels insulation from salvaged material from a program offered by Firestone in Bristol. Windows were bought dirt cheap from the Habitat Restore shop in Stratford. Copper wire, butcher-block rubber membrane roofing and other insulation were also scavenged, salvaged or bartered for.

Trevor and a hired hand used a rented tractor to dig the foundation trenches and to remove the old driveway and repurpose the asphalt for fill

beneath the barn’s concrete floor. That concrete mass was designed to be an active solar heating device where the very thick concrete floor is surrounded by insulation that the sun heats in the winter and the ground’s 50-degree subsoil temperature and shade (and a venting cupola) cool in the summer.

Once the site work and concrete were completed, the wedding and honeymoon could consume the balance of the summer of 2009. The carpentry side took over in the fall, with Trevor creating the salvaged timber “bents” on the slab that then were raised vertically to create the entire barn frame. As Trevor notes: “The barn raising went well after literally finishing up the last joints that morning. Once the raising was under way and three and a half hours later the structure was standing. It went together perfectly — no cuts or chiseling required!”

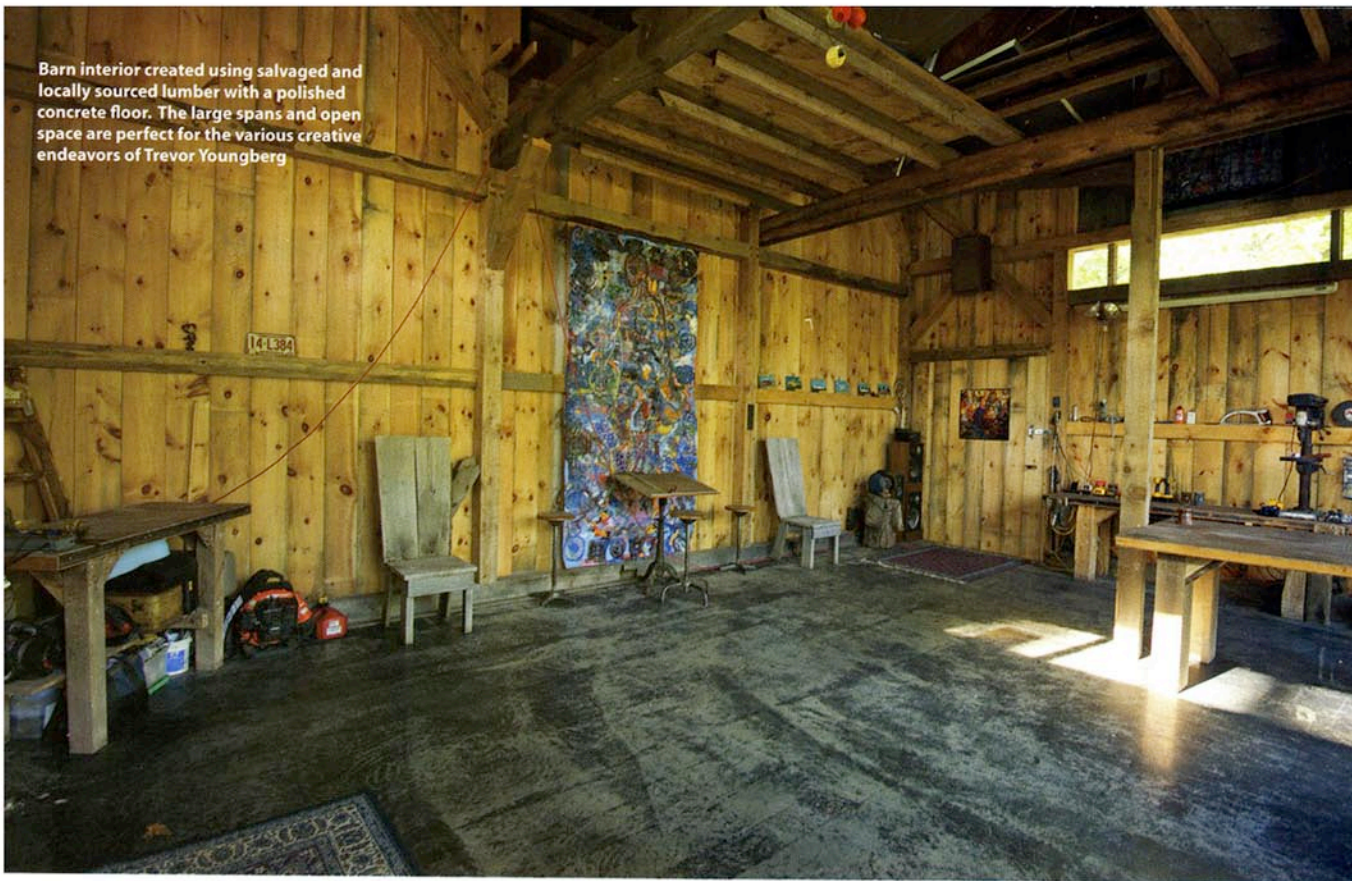
That degree of precision was not by chance. Trevor Youngberg spent many hours during his youth in Minnesota and here in Connecticut working on framing crews — building a deck here, a DIY project there. But clearly the barn was his biggest building challenge to date.

With the frame and roof in place, the PV array could be ordered to meet the December deadline. Taking a breather through the winter, work began after the school year ended in 2010. Installing siding, doors, trim and making the cupola windows were the next order of business.

The new domestic duet that is shaping up on this Woodbridge site benefits from the diversity of its parts. A soft and comforting street-facing home seems virtually unchanged from its mid-20th century conception. But the raw and clearly kinetic barn is set almost parallel to it, but 80 feet away, back-dropped by the



Marlys and Trevor Youngberg celebrating Trevor’s pottery, the near-completion of their backyard focus — a new barn, and the impending birth of their first child.



Barn interior created using salvaged and locally sourced lumber with a polished concrete floor. The large spans and open space are perfect for the various creative endeavors of Trevor Youngberg

trees, surrounded by the trappings of long-term, owner-builder paced construction — stacked lumber, raw earth, in-process parts.

The original home is the safe harbor of met expectations — an interior of compact, defined rooms, the exterior a yellow-painted nicety, fully symmetrical at its Cape core. The barn is inherently ad hoc and its untreated wood and crafty expressions of hardware, material and home brew technology are a perfect foil to the Cape. The contrast is made present in the visual connection between the two parts — each is the visual focal point as seen from the other's interiors.

You might think this was an all-consuming endeavor that caused Marlys and Trevor to take time off from work, but that did not happen for two simple reasons. After the PV array was installed, timing was determined by the couple's work schedules: She is the director of social work for the Smith House elder-care facility in Stamford, while he is a ceramics instructor at Trumbull High School. Secondly by adding on remotely,

home and hearth remained intact — there was a walk-away reality to the project — other than the muddy boots and sawdust that occasionally staged a home invasion.

Indeed, the nest was so inviolate that another new addition has been conceived and is close to being delivered — the Youngbergs will welcome their firstborn any day now — something a more stressful in-your-face add-on to home and hearth might not have allowed for.

Additionally Trevor and Marlys are exercising the options of work/home juggling that have become the norm. Trevor can now work from home during summers and school vacation days, but the home can be completely distinct from the noise, heat and toxins of pottery making.

Taking time in building usually saves money — spending hours to shop, barter, or sleuth for freebies took thousands upon thousands of dollars off the barn's price tag, not to mention the free hours upon hours of sweat equity invested in the project. But an open-ended schedule means chaos can destroy domestic

tranquility. By keeping chaos at arm's length, away from the finished nest, economy and sanity can coexist.

A new family has many things to be concerned about, but here the house part is palpably present in the barn's zesty innocence and in-process status (bent wood ribs are newly in place to act as armatures for a removable plastic sheet greenhouse for the non-summer-solar-collecting south side, and the kiln has yet to be installed).

Clearly the metaphoric reality of these dynamic dyads (both house and marriage pairings) is not lost on Trevor.

"Overall, the project has already surpassed my expectations," he says. "The barn itself has exceeded my hopes, but the connections with friends and family throughout the project have made the hard work and expense totally worthwhile. I think of the project as 'captured energy' that may be enjoyed into the future."



The view upon entry of the barn shows the major solar array of windows (right), the loft space (above), and the site of a future kiln (left), fully stone-backed.