

The barn of fun

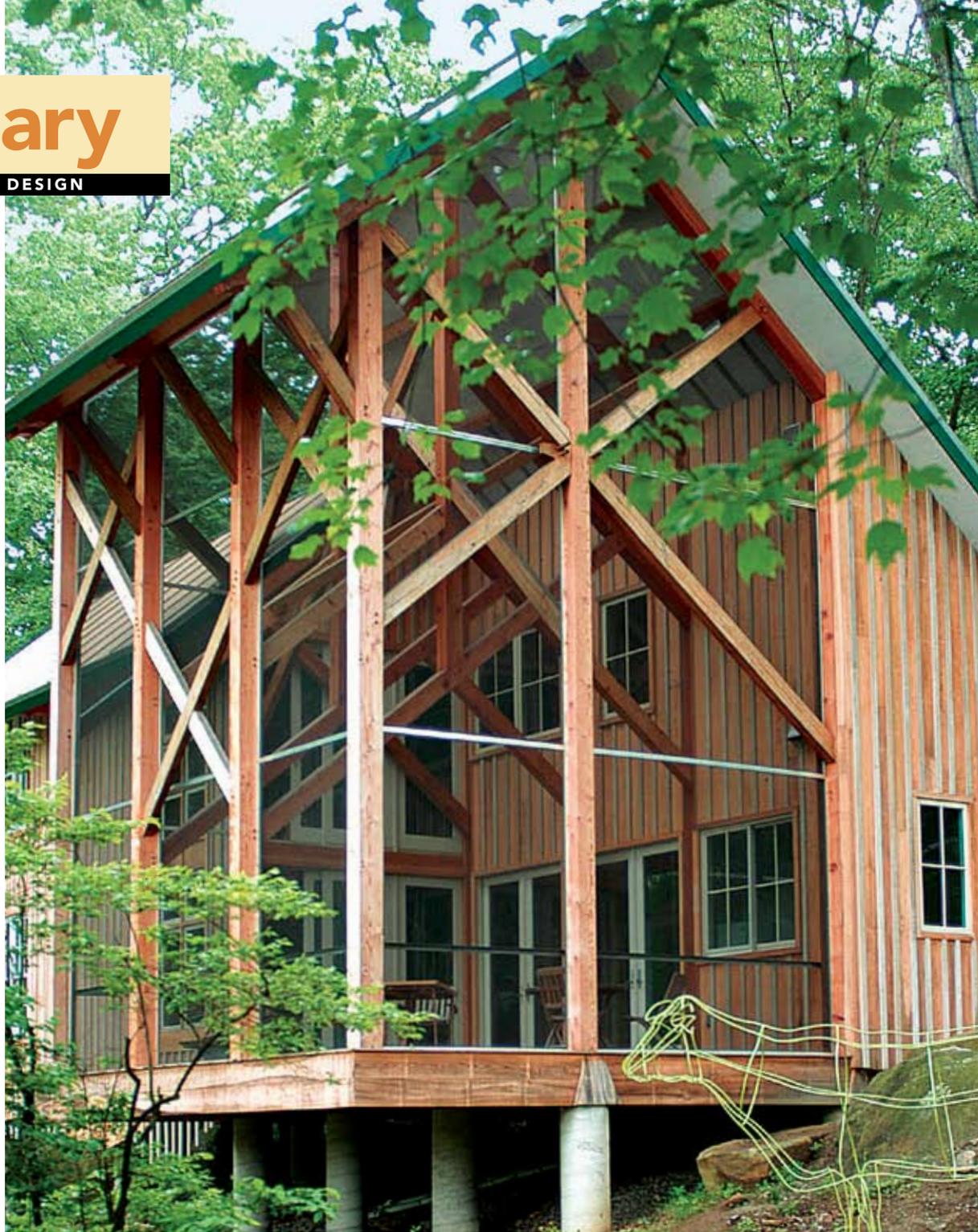
Adding on to our home with a separate building

BY DUO DICKINSON

Like many houses, ours used to be a one-bedroom “starter box,” but over the course of 15 years, additions maxed out the available land due to a view restriction, a septic field, and benign encroachment on sensitive wetlands. With two soon-to-be-teenage sons, my wife and I decided we still needed more space.

However, a 200-year-old white oak stood next to our house, a tree so glorious that when I made a three-bedroom home out of the original structure, I had to double-cantilever the floors 4 ft. beyond the piers to ensure the oak’s survival. My plan worked: The tree lived.

As you can see, adding on to our house again was not an option, but hopscotching to the other side of the tree was. We built a separate, freestanding addition that has given us



A getaway home right next door. Rather than move to a bigger house to accommodate a growing family, the author built a multipurpose dwelling with a three-story screened porch in the backyard. The porch is about 500 sq. ft.; the indoor portion adds up to 1300 sq. ft. on two floors.



Rough, and ready for fun. In a barn built from an assortment of cast-off timbers, leftover flooring, and a collection of mismatched windows, the only precious thing about it is the informal atmosphere where a family can relax together.

enough room to live out the full middle years of family life without moving.

The separate addition, now known as the “barn of fun,” has guest quarters, allowing our younger son to have his own bedroom by taking over the downstairs guest room in the main house. The new building also serves as an overflow space where teenagers can go a little nuts, and it gives us needed storage for a home with no basement (tidal wetlands) and precious little attic space (height limitations). Living on a marsh as we do, a screened porch is a necessity for eating outside, so we went a little nuts ourselves and created a sunset-worshiping space with a table that accommodates 25 for sit-down dinners.

As an architect who has designed hundreds of buildings for friends and strangers, I found determining this last piece in the puzzle of my own home to be a joy. I also fulfilled my lifelong obsession with wood. There are 32 species of wood in this project, many of which are recycled, salvaged, even historic.

The biggest gift of on-site, remote construction was time. With nothing but growing sons to push us forward, we took six years to fine-tune the details of design, construction, and zoning. The beauty of building a separate addition was that we had the joy of instant gratification as the barn grew, but at the same time, we didn’t have to endure the din of construction.

Our funds were limited, so we used time as our ally to find

Exterior photo: Duo Dickinson. Interior photos: Mick Hales.

cast-off building materials and components. A five-year-old heating plant, made unnecessary by the doubling of someone else's home, now heats the barn. Half the windows that adorn the walls were rejects due

“ The new building serves as an overflow space where teenagers can go a little nuts. ”

to a manufacturer's screwup. Also, we were able to reuse a staircase that had been removed during one of the additions to the main house.

Other materials that my job as an architect afforded me access to included leftovers such as flooring and finish plywood,

partial Avonite sheets, and two wee beams from yellow-cedar mailbox posts.

When siting the barn, we saved money by working around gigantic boulders rather than simply blasting away. We resawed a red oak (removed to make way for the barn) into flooring and air-dried it under our house for two years. And rather than use drywall, we applied two heavy coats of white paint to all the inside faces of the oriented-strand-board skin on the wall and roof SIPs (structural insulated panels), saving money and creating a delightfully textured surface.

We have occupied the barn for more than a year now, and it's a daily joy. I plod through snow, rain, and dark to work

out there every morning. Our boys practice their musical instruments and take lessons there. Countless sleepovers, video-game tournaments, and various dinner parties, fundraisers, and social occasions have made the barn hard to envision living without.

In the end, our separate addition has worked; no leaks, no settling. Most important, it has allowed our teenage sons to be away from us, as is their wont, yet still close to us, satisfying our parental need for control. Holding tight while keeping an arm's length: the parental paradox manifest in a fun building on a sensitive site.

Architect Duo Dickinson is the author of The House You Build (The Taunton Press, 2005).