

Barn Chores

REPURPOSING STABLES INTO A FUN HOUSE







TOP TO BOTTOM Two views of the entertainment barn and the surrounding stone walls; sliding barn doors separate an eating area from the main room. A pub room was built replete with cane-back chairs, wine cooler, and refrigerator.





While they don't finish each other's sentences, Charles Haver and Stewart Skolnick are very much in sync, and it shows in the elegant, timeless houses and interiors that they create. They are noted for designing comfortable, country homes that relate to the area and have a sense of history. They fit well into the landscape, and there is a comfort level and sophistication that emanates from their work.

And they are not afraid of challenges. Case in point: an 18th-century barn that needed to be repurposed. It is situated on a property in Washington that includes approximately 70 acres, a main house, a guesthouse, and several outbuildings—plus a pool, tennis court, and spectacular gardens. While Haver & Skolnick designed the main house, it is the original barn structure that afforded the most challenges.

The 2,500-square-foot building had been in disrepair, so the initial focus was on stabilizing and preserving the structure. The foundation needed to be shored up and new technology and equipment needed to be addressed. "During the 19th century, a stable was added to the original barn," says Haver. "We wanted to preserve the wonderful original iron stall stanchions and decorative grates, and the original pine wall sheathing. We did replace the concrete floors with rustic stone paving to give it a more cohesive look."

"The owners have four teenage children," explains Skolnick. "And they wanted a place where they could have fun. They love watching television, so there is a large-screen, state-of-the-art theater in the attic loft. Built-in banquettes provide a cozy alternative to conventional theater seating. Speakers are concealed behind iron grates and copper lanterns add to the barn environment. Antique hooked rugs are used as wall coverings."

The horse stalls now are home to pinball machines and what was once the largest birthing stall is now a bar. This area



INSIDE VIEW The main room features comfortable couches and a large wood and metal coffee table; the main theater features a large viewing screen and plush seating; the original horse stalls now house various pinball machines. The pool table takes center stage in the main room.



can be closed off via the sliding barn doors that were fashioned from salvaged pine boards and some of the original iron gates. "The idea was to be playful," says Skolnick. "We used games scene and carnival themes for the art. Everything is bright and cheerful. The owners did not want a beige and bland interior."

The entertainment barn has been carefully designed and orchestrated and no detail has been left undone. In addition to the media room and the theater, the main section of the original barn has been turned into the billiard room and a place for the family to gather. Once again, the architects preserved original hand-hewn timbers and rough ceiling sheathing. The walls are coated in unpainted plaster. Authentic rustic antique furnishings complete the picture.

Haver and Skolnick met thirty years ago in New York City where they were both working for Gensler Architects, one of the largest firms in the world. Haver, originally from Pennsylvania, got his degree in architecture from the University of Virginia. Skolnick grew up on eastern Long Island and went to the University of Arizona and then on to Cornell. Although they knew of each other, a fateful Caribbean vacation brought them together.

"We stayed in New York until 1992," Haver says. "We had bought a house in Sharon to escape to on weekends. A few years later we devised a way to transition into living in Connecticut full time."

While they were restoring their own house, people would stop by and ask if they would be interested in doing work for them. They went from doing bathrooms and kitchens to larger projects. Although their background was in corporate interiors, the two men made the transition to Connecticut architecture.

The designers maintained the integrity of the original barn and the new house fits in seamlessly with the other buildings on the property. The entire property is of a piece and as one enters through the front gate and drives through the courtyard, past the orchard, on to the house and barns, it is evident that the designers created a magical place. And needless to say, the entertainment barn is a big hit with everyone. ■

