

## *The Marriage of Old & New in a New England Inn*



**A**h, the life of the New England innkeeper. Images of convivial conversation with guests in front of an open fireplace, autumn leaves gently falling to the ground around the inn (which is white, of course), and blueberry pancake breakfasts in a large country kitchen come to mind. Bob Newhart sure seemed to like it, and thousands of people across America were convinced it was the life for them when they submitted what they hoped would be the winning essay for the contest to win the Center Lovell Inn in Lovell, Maine, several years ago. In reality, being an innkeeper can be very consuming and leave the innkeeper very little private time. If the balance between work and personal life isn't met—a delicate balance for anyone who works out of their home—burn out can be a very real factor.

When Lorraine Blais and her partner Rickie Hall bought the Bear Mountain Inn in Waterford eight years ago, they didn't have quite so many illusions about what they were getting into. They knew they would want, and need, a place apart from the rest of the inn, so they renovated an existing addition at the back of the barn that would be their living quarters for the next six years. About two years ago, however, they came up with the idea of building a barn facing Bear Pond that would house all their boat trailers, tractors, snowmobiles, boats, etc. on the ground level, and provide living space on the second and third levels. The addition they had been occupying could then be used for special events, such as the many wedding rehearsal dinners and business meetings they host throughout the summer and fall seasons. The one thing Lorraine was emphatic about was that the barn look like it belonged to the inn, which was built 200 years ago. "I wanted it to look like this barn had always been here as part of the inn's property."

Lorraine contracted an architect to design a 6000 square foot timber framed barn, using the existing barn as a blueprint. Older than the inn itself by about 75 years, the barn at Bear Mountain Inn is a straightforward New England style barn that attaches to the inn by an ell. The only difference in the exterior design of the two buildings is that the new barn is slightly higher than the old one. The new barn measures 36'x48' and has 3600 square feet of living space. Aside from bedrooms and bathrooms, the entire living space is open all the way to the cathedral ceiling. A catwalk on the third level connects two large living spaces that reflect

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# Inn Style







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the different interests and personalities of Lorraine and Rickie.

The view from the catwalk is impressive. The combination of Lorraine’s signature interior design and the abundance of honey-colored wood throughout creates a warm and intimate interior, despite the sheer size of the space. Even without interior walls, the roughly 1800 square foot living space that overlooks Bear Pond has

distinct areas that correspond to our usual sense of “rooms” and keep it from seeming like, well, a barn. There is a dining area, kitchen space, living area, office, and bar. The only difference is they all connect with one another in a space that is unified without being homogenized.

The inn, which was badly in need of renovation when Lorraine and Rickie acquired it in 1996, gave Lorraine the opportunity to do what she does best—architectural design and contracting, and the result is a beauti-

fully restored New England inn called Bear Mountain Inn that has maintained its historic integrity. When it came time to design the barn that would be their home, she took a more personal approach and allowed her creative side more freedom. Unique design elements such as an apothecary cabinet that Lorraine found and incorporated into the kitchen space to house her many cooking utensils reveal themselves one by one, and are exemplary of her clever and somewhat quirky sense of design. Salvaged shutters on either side of the large window that looks out over the pond frame it as though it were a huge landscape painting. The bathroom sink commode is actually an antique dresser that has been converted to accommodate plumbing and a sink. The bar is a solid slab of pine from a 300 year old tree in Waterford, and is inscribed with a poem that pays homage to its long and enduring life.

In fact, much of the interior wood finds its source in the “Schoolhouse Tree” that stood in front of the first one-room schoolhouse in Waterford until a few years ago when it finally reached the end of its long life. Lorraine and Rickie rescued the fallen white pine and set about convincing

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of woodworkers to cut and plane 4000 linear feet of premium grade lumber from it. The result is an interior that clearly states a passion for wood.

Mention the word “wood” and talk quickly turns to timberframer Andy Buck of Naples, Maine, who cut, erected, and enclosed the frame for the barn. Lorraine is lavish in her praise of Andy and it’s clear that this is no ordinary owner/builder relationship, but more of a friendship that has grown out of the experience of building a home.

Timberframing is the traditional building system used for nearly all the old barns in New England, but Andy first became acquainted with the craft in 1987 when the resurgence of timberframing was at its peak. The frame for Lorraine and Rickie’s barn is a straightforward, 5-bent frame with a 12/12 pitch. “A lot of people would have been tempted to put a lot of large windows on the front of the barn that faces the pond, but Lorraine resisted doing that so it would look more traditional and fit in with the rest of the inn property,” notes Andy. With the help of another joiner, Andy cut the frame over a period of about three months, and a crew of nearly twenty people gathered at Bear Mountain Inn on August 9, 2002 to raise it. “A lot of the local rock climbers took part. They love the opportunity to hang out in high places, and I’m happy to have them do it,” says Andy. He is also quick to give credit to others, and points out that most of the interior finish work was done by Bob Critchfield with Jeremy Wiser.

The barn is extremely energy efficient. In fact, a heating system has yet to be fully installed simply because it proved unnecessary. Two woodstoves, one on either level, and two Renai heaters on the first level are all that’s needed to heat the entire 6000 square feet of space. The walls are infilled with 3” rigid foam insulation and the roof with 6”. Lorraine believes the decision to double the R-value on the roof has definitely paid off.

So, two years after envisioning it, Lorraine and Rickie have realized their dream of creating a personal space apart from the inn that looks, however, like it belongs to the inn, and is very much a signature space inside. Andy sums it up by saying that he ran into Lorraine just the other day and she told him of a compliment a guest had paid her; “He said, ‘You did a nice job restoring that old barn in the back.’ Mission accomplished.”