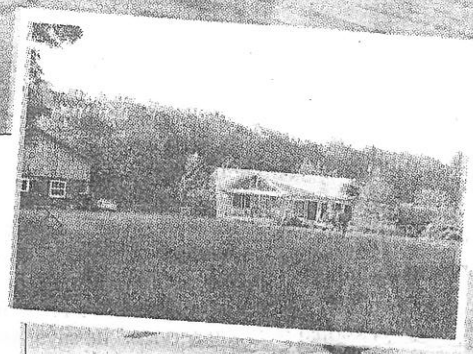
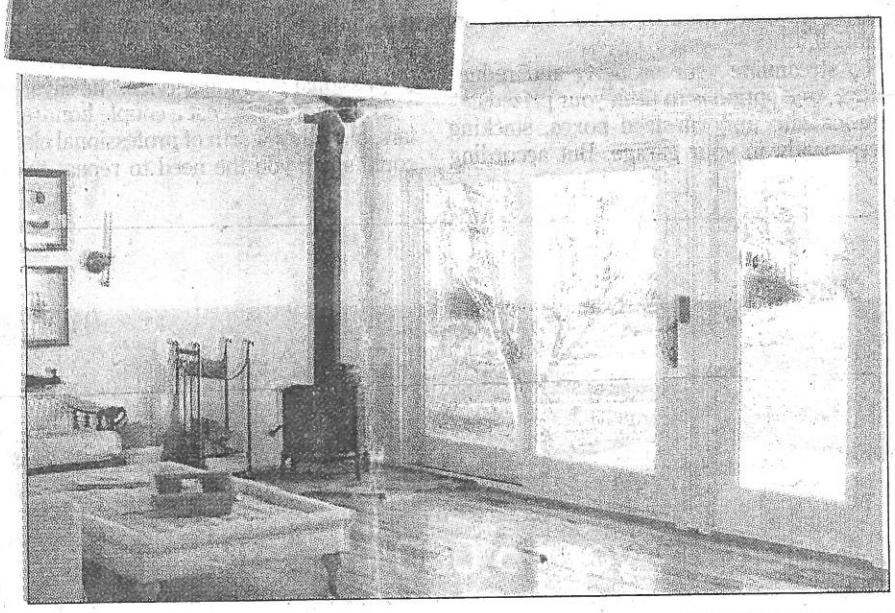
Chapel Hill News
REAL ESTATE

Barn, modular house remodels highlight surroundings

White cabinets provide ample storage in the open kitchen designed by Anne Abney.



The back of the house and barn can be seen from the meadow.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A fire in the wood stove and views of the meadow from the main house great room are soothing on a cold winter day.

BY SALLY KEENEY
CORRESPONDENT

Erik and Torey Wahlstrom found the farm of their dreams on 13 acres in Orange County. Down a curving driveway there's a large pond for ducks, meadows for chickens and space for a large vegetable garden — all surrounded by woods.

The couple had been living in Los Angeles where space, peace and quiet are at a premium.

"Our entire property there — house and yard — was under 5,000 square feet," Torey said. "The woman that lived here (Orange County) was a master gardener. She had beautiful plantings and had a marvelous vegetable garden."

"We were pretty specific in what we were looking for when we came East: a pond, forest, landscape of rolling meadows and tons of wildlife," Torey said.

Also high on the list was a separate guest house, because the couple has family on both coasts.

"We wanted them to be comfortable and have their own space to relax and feel at home even though they are staying with someone," Torey said.

Erik is a business advisor for start-up companies. Torey is a freelance artist and illustrator, toreywahlstrom.com, or Bramble Pie at bramblepie.etsy.com. They work from home when they are not traveling to meet clients.

"We spent a lot of time driving around on weekends," Torey Said. "We loved the big fields and cows and wanted a place near that type of setting."

When they drove out with their real estate agent René Hendrickson to see the Orange County farm Torey found online, they liked the rural drive out to it and the layout of the property with its long driveway.

"The barn was this amazing big old building, and part of it was being used as a woodworking space and the rest was open to park tractors and farm equipment," Torey said.

The vegetable garden was behind the two-story barn, which has an interior staircase that makes storing lumber or large boxes easy. The tin roof of the barn was mirrored on the 25-year-old modular house with two-car garage attached to it.

The modular house was situated on the lot so that the front door and a large deck had southern exposure and views of a very large pond — Wildcat Pond. The back deck faced north with a view of a large meadow — a wonderful place to relax at the end of a summer day.

Torey could see the garage as her future art room and the barn as a "sort of fun place where we could create something like the guest house." The modular house would remain the main house, but needed kitchen and bath updates and wall demolition to make room for a large open great room with expanses of glass to see the surrounding meadows.

Finding a builder

"We met builder Gail Crabtree and decided pretty quickly to go with her," Torey said. "We didn't even talk to anybody else."

"Torey and Erik knew the theme of what they wanted," said Crabtree, who has been building homes in the Triangle for 30 years as G. Crabtree Home Building.

"I knew we needed a designer to help bring us all together," Gail said. "I suggested Anne Abney, who has a master's degree in architecture from N.C. State University College of Design, a school that puts a high emphasis on modern architecture, which Erik really likes."

The Wahlstroms moved to the farm in October 2012. Bathroom remodeling in the main house started the next month. The couple continued living in the modular house as the laundry room and baths were being completed and Abney's design of the barn guest house began to take shape.

Crabtree started work on the barn in December 2012, and completed it in March 2013. The Wahlstroms moved into the barn while Crabtree started renovation of the public rooms of the modular house, whose glass-walled great room and kitchen were designed by Abney. The entire renovation of the modular house was complete by June 2, 2013.

"The point of the whole design process was opening up spaces and letting in natural light," Abney said.

Abney took the chopped up rooms of the modu-

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lar house and designed a large open great room with windows the size of sliding glass doors to allow natural light to flood the space.

To give the room a contemporary feel, we took down the crown moldings and kept the trim around doors and windows minimal," Abney said. "Keeping the walls white both here and in the barn allowed the walls to be a palette. They can paint in the colors with furnishings."

"The greater design challenge was with the barn because the workshop space that was to be turned into a guest house was so small (750-square-feet)," Abney said. "They wanted the space to be open and to see as much of the outside as they could, while still maintaining the integrity of the home. The challenge was to keep the space as open as possible, while still providing as much storage as possible."

"Designing the guest house was a real collaborative thing between us and Gail and Anne," Torey said. "It was shaped from these different viewpoints. We didn't even know what was there until Gail tore out the ceiling and we saw the rustic beams. We were thinking more contemporary, but the rustic ceiling got us going down that road."

"The farmy,-country elements were already here," Torey said. "The original owner built the barn using a tin roof and big beams that were hand-milled. Some may have come from this property. He poured the concrete floor, himself, and there is a lot of aggregate patterns in it that shine through the polished concrete."

Crabtree had the wood-plank ceiling and heavy timbers sand blasted to bring out rustic features of the structure's original design.

"I love the finishes in the barn and how bright the space became with the light wood in the ceiling and the polished concrete floor," Torey said. "The polished floors were Erik's idea because he had always admired the finish in commercial buildings in California.

"We thought we would enjoy the guest house, and it surpasses all of our expectations," Torey said. "Guests love the barn and Erik can go there to hang out instead of visiting when I'm doing my artwork."

Because of the separation from the main house, the guest house in the barn can be a quiet space to place business calls or a safe place to play loud music or watch sports and cheer for the home team. Torey said that guests like it so much, they feel like it's their space. Our couples friends feel like it's a sweetheart retreat, Torey said.

While Erik finds the guest house a great place to work, Torey likes the art studio she has created in the two-car garage. The room has light pouring in from east, west and south with views of the tractor-end of the barn, the chicken and duck coops, the pond and curving driveway.

"There is lots of daylight here," Torey said. "I work in natural daylight, so it is amazing for me."

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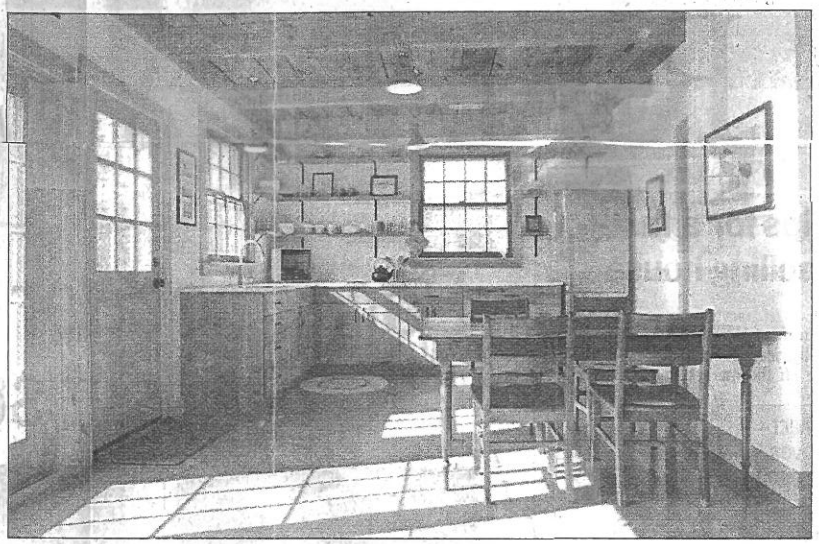

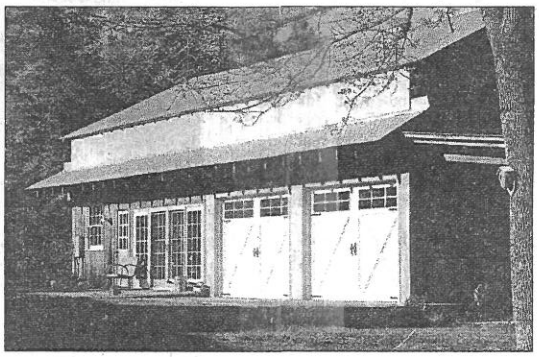

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Hickory base cabinets and heart-pine wall shelving compliment the rustic timbers and concrete flooring of the old barn turned guest house.