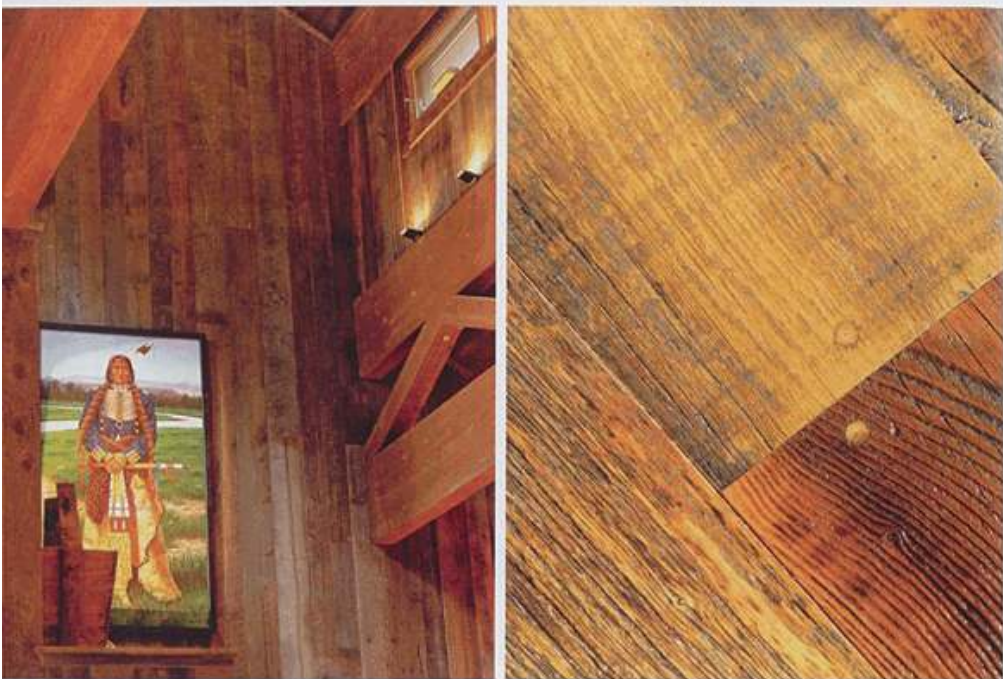


The Past as Prologue

A MONTANA RETREAT PRESERVES
AND BUILDS ON HISTORY
WHILE CREATING NEW TRADITIONS

Bigfork, Montana, architect Danin Preston Taylor designed the home to look as if it were a barn that stood on this spot for a century or more. The exterior is made of reclaimed redwood, and the corrugated steel roof will weather to an amber patina.

Story by Leslie Petrovski | Photography by Heidi Marty



TOM WAGGONER WANTED A BARN.

But his would not be a traditional barn raising. Inspired by historic barns that dot the Texas landscape, the retired geologist envisioned a guesthouse that would mimic the homey outbuildings he loved but also would function as a modern house. Tom and wife Marilyn Waggoners' 40-acre homestead on Montana's Swan River seemed to beg for something rustic, for a dwelling that would settle into its surroundings rather than dominate.

The barn concept soon captured the imagination of the design team, local builder Bigfork Builders and architect Dann Preston Taylor—who began swapping traditional interior finishes such as drywall for reclaimed barn siding and other recycled woods. In 2002, as Tom and Marilyn watched their barn-style guesthouse emerge from the forest, they scrapped plans for building a large main house and decided to live in the barn instead.

Though modest in square footage—about 2,000 square feet plus garage—the two-bedroom, two-bath Swan River barn has soaring 24-foot ceilings laced with exposed rafters and stippled with clerestory windows that bathe the space in light. A towering wood-burning fireplace, the lichen-embossed rocks hand-picked from three quarries, soars impressively upward. Burnished alderwood doors paneled with barnwood veneers hang throughout the home.

As the project evolved, the Waggoners decided to incorporate as much recycled wood as possible to give their barn an authentic weathered look. For the ruddy exterior, Brad Needroom of Bigfork Builders used reclaimed redwood from an early 20th-century train trestle that once crossed the Salt Lake Flats in Utah. J.L. Halverstadt of Wild Wood Eccentrics rescued the boards that would form the home's interior from barns in eastern Montana, the old Vaughn Cattle Company in Great Falls and an old corral from the Krone ranch in Augusta, Montana—most of it harvested and put to original use in the 1940s.

With 50 to 100 years of history hidden in the notches and grooves of the barn's wood, every room contains a story. The ripple-edged planks used for window and floor molding were once nibbled by horses when they served as feed troughs and corral rails. >

ABOVE: Wild Wood Eccentrics (wildwoodeccentrics.com) in Whitefish, Montana reclaimed the wood from old barns and corrals for use in the home's interior. Imprints of old branding irons and cowboy graffiti mark the paneling. OPPOSITE: A Western theme is evident throughout the home but it is skillfully blended with European antiques and fine art. Lichen-covered stones for the fireplace were hand-picked from three quarries. Leon Sanderson of Dubois, Wyoming created the whimsical cowboy boot mantle; the painting above it is by Montana artist Paul Surber.



THIS PAGE: A unique light fixture hanging over the slate-topped kitchen island was made by Montana artisan Poo Corbett. The horizontal piece is made from a cottonwood log; the glass shades are etched with mountain scenes. OPPOSITE: An attached, drive-through garage makes parking easy.



"It's full of all the modern technology but looks like this old barn that's been sitting by the Swan River for a century."

And the wall paneling reveals imprints of branding irons cowboys tested long ago.

"You can go to Home Depot and buy wood for much less than you can buy it from me," Halverstadt says, "but it would never have the character. The Waggoners have a part of the history of the western United States right here."

Reclaimed wood costs about three times that of new, Halverstadt estimates, a function mostly of the work involved readying it for use. Installing reclaimed floors and paneling requires an enormous amount of labor. Every nail must be pulled by hand and the wallboards mitered to fit properly, or equipped with tongue-and-groove to make a stable floor. In a nod to modern construction and the need for uniform boards to form a tight roof, the barn's ceiling was fashioned from contemporary wood that had been left outside to weather so as to echo the rest of the house.

Few details were neglected in building this fine "old" structure. Nails copied from old barn fasteners were used to secure many of the interior finishes. The roofing material, a corrugated Cor-Ten steel, rusts in such a way as to seal the roof from weather while also creating a gorgeous amber patina.

"The house looks like it's been there for 100 years," says builder Needstrom. "It's full of all the modern technology but looks like this old barn that's been sitting by Swan River for a century."

Not wanting the home to look too "Yellowstoney," the Waggoners put their collection of European antiques to use, in addition to integrating pieces of regional Western art and crafts. Enlisting the help of their Fort Worth, Texas, designer, Joseph Minton, the couple opted for an eclectic blend of Westernalia, formal furnishings and fine art. Project manager Emily Gibson of Minton's interior design firm created a bright, luxurious palette of warm reds, navy blues, greens and golds to set off the monochromatic greys and browns of the rustic interior. In the living room, comfortable wing chairs and a red chenille sofa face the stone fireplace, above which sits a whimsical mantle of carved cowboy boots by Wyoming artist Leon Sanderson. Traditional draperies fashioned from Lee Jofa fabric warm the vertical windows and dampen sound. A dramatic painting of a Native American warrior by Montana artist Paul Surber hangs above the fireplace.

The kitchen, with views of the Swan Mountains, is a tribute to the home's location. Alderwood cabinets and Ann Sacks' blue-grey ▶

THIS PAGE: The home is equipped with all the conveniences of the modern world. In the master bedroom, high and hard-to-reach Roman shades can be raised and lowered electronically.
OPPOSITE: Naturally artful curves in the molding offer clues to the source of this recycled wood: horses nibbled on the boards when the wood was part of an old feed and watering trough.



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tile themed with bas-relief bears, fish, deer and other local critters complement the paneling. A remarkable light fixture by Bigfork artisan Roc Corbett was constructed from a heavy cottonwood log and hung over a slate-topped island, its glass shades etched with graceful mountainscapes.

Similar attention to esthetics marks the outdoor spaces. A large bronze bear by Loveland, Colorado, artist Dan Ostermiller lolls by the pond in back—a lifelike sculpture that when delivered from the bed of a pickup caused fellow highway travelers to honk and stare. The deck and fire pit, also in back, extend the home's living and entertaining space.

Although the home harkens to the past, it's filled with modern conveniences and state-of-the-art gadgetry, including a sophisticated lighting system that enables the couple to set mood lights with the flick of a switch. Moisture- and temperature-sensitive windows open and close on their own, based on weather conditions. And a computer system allows the Waggoners to control security and tem-

perature settings from their primary residence in Spicewood, Texas.

Since taking up part-time residence in May 2003, the Waggoners find they spend more time in Bigfork than they expected. Enchanted with the small resort, which began life as an old logging town hugging a bay of Flathead Lake, the Waggoners have discovered that barn life suits them just fine. "It's the ease of life out here," Marilyn says. "There's no traffic. I have a great view out my kitchen window. Life is very simple now, but there are numerous nice amenities—restaurants and galleries—close by." ■

THE DETAILS

ARCHITECT Dann Preston Taylor, Bigfork, MT, (406) 837-2051
 BUILDER Brad Needstrom, Bigfork Builders, Bigfork, MT, (406) 837-3373, bigforkbuilders.com
 INTERIOR DESIGN Joseph Minton, Inc., Fort Worth, TX (817) 332-3111
 BARNWOOD Wild Wood Eccentrics, Whitefish, MT, (406) 240-1669, wildwoodeccentrics.com

THIS PAGE: Subtle earth tones of the tiles in the shower and the lichen-embossed countertop complement the golden-browns and charcoal grays of the wood. OPPOSITE: The custom-wood doors and rustic trim by Steve Anderson of Artisans Doors of Montana in Kalispell (artisansdoors.com) add to the aged and authentic look of the home's interior.

