



The great bones, sheer volume, open-plan living style—a barn dwelling is an inspired place to use as a primary residence, guest house, or art venue.

“Barns were built with the idea of having as much open square footage as possible,” says Phillip Thomas, founder and principal of Phillip Thomas Inc., a design firm in New York. “This open-style living lends itself to multiple and exciting ways of adaptation to modern living.”

Keep it rustic or go for a more modern edge--the design is only limited to the confines of your imagination.

Let these ideas from the design pros spark your vision.

Work With the Original Bones

What makes a barn so special is its exposed beams, vaulted ceilings, and unique nooks and crannies.

“A more rustic approach is to highlight the existing beams and interior siding,” says Erik Gilmer, managing partner of Das Mod, a real estate development firm in San Diego. “Exposing the beams and trusses in the vaulted ceilings can help to call attention to the barn structure while adding character to the interior. Staining the beamwork dark to contrast lighter colored walls is another example of how to highlight the existing rustic structure.

“By its very nature, a barn has dramatic spaces—tall sections for hay storage next to low stalls,” says Kevin Lichten, principal of Lichten Architects in New York.

“Their large structure creates the opportunity to have large open areas and connections to upper levels that are unlike standard homes, which are more compartmentalized and scaled to a single family,” says Robert D. Hoang of Lake/Flato Architects, in Austin, Texas.

Highlight Vaulted Ceilings

One of the most prized qualities of a barn is its pitched beam ceiling. Maximizing the height of a vaulted barn ceiling can be accomplished through light fixtures or eye-catching mobiles, Thomas says.

You can also take advantage of the height by turning some of the added room into a vaulted sleeping nook or office, Gilmer adds.

A barn interior from Kevin Lichten



If you want to draw attention upward, Manhattan-based designer Fawn Galli suggests using a large-scale wallpaper on the ceiling or hanging a funky light fixture to attract the eye.

Let the Space Dictate the Layout and Style

Kitchens and bathrooms easily fit in the low places where the animal stalls were located, Lichten says. The living room can reside in the tall central area; and bedrooms are naturals for tucking into the haylofts that don't absolutely need to be open to the great room below.

Galli recommends designating a few focal points, like wide, open windows or a fireplace, and building on them, while also creating intimate nooks as well as social areas.

Use the Space Creatively

A barn can be a great entertaining spot. "Large openings and true barn doors connect people to the nature that surrounds them and allows an ease of flow to the outdoors," Hoang says.

Guest accommodations also makes sense. Says Thomas: "A secondary structure in a barn, such as a stall, affords the opportunity for homeowners to create a guesthouse."