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closer look

Feering Bury Farm Barn



PICS: JAMES BRITAIN



Project cost (including barn purchase):

£850,000

Current value:

£1,000,000+

Designer:

Hudson Architects

This Grade II listed timber frame barn was converted into a family home and artist studios for Ben Coode-Adams, who worked with Hudson Architects as design collaborator and project manager. Much of the interior fit out – particularly the use of reclaimed materials – is Ben's own work.

The central structure dates to around 1560 with aisles added in the 18th century. The roof would have originally been thatched, but had long since been replaced by corrugated material – a perfect location for glazing from a design point of view. However, the local authority's conservation officers insisted the new roof should not contain any visible rooflights. Hudson

Architects' solution was a series of large yet discreet polycarbonate rooflights, which were covered in an expanded steel mesh. The openings within the mesh are orientated towards the sky, allowing diffused light to flood the building. From ground level, they're invisible and appear solid.

Inside, most of the original timber frame structure has been retained. To create private spaces, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, two large 20th century internal concrete silos were brought back into use: one contains an oak spiral staircase leading to a mezzanine bedroom, while the other houses bathrooms – serving both floors.

Accommodating bedrooms requires some serious thought. If the central bay is to be left exposed to the rafters, first floor bedrooms may be split into two wings on either side, each with its own staircase. "Always check that the height of the barn can accommodate a first floor," says Opinder. "Often the roof trusses of the barn are too low, so would prevent this without a change to the roof structure – something that will need very strong justification to gain planning approval, particularly if the barn is listed."

The expansive spaces are a great opportunity to showcase existing roof timbers and add a feature staircase. Mezzanine levels are worth considering for a home office – or any other use that doesn't require solid walls. Or, given a big enough footprint, you could plan the barn with living accommodation and bedrooms all on the same storey.

The aesthetic

Planning departments aim to preserve the rural character of the area and will push for preserving the agricultural appearance, so you may be steered towards a traditional look. Depending on where you live, the local barns will have a

distinctive exterior finish, which the planners will be keen for you to retain – either by preserving what's already there or through sensitive replacement.

Nevertheless, a mix of materials may be permitted. Stone and brick have a sturdy, timeless feel. Source new stone, where needed, from a local quarry so it will blend with its surroundings. Flint walling is a labour-intensive option, but gives stunning results. Timber cladding is a typical finish, and can be stained to fit in with the local style. The long, unbroken roof design of a barn should also match local examples, whether in slate, handmade clay tiles or thatch.

"From a design point of view there is no strict rule that says a barn has to be restored in such a way that you can hardly tell it has been converted. Extensions that are contemporary in style and materials can work well if they are skillfully designed," says Julian. "Features such as a double height entrance are often part of the original barn – take advantage by glazing this end of the building to bring in light.

Getting in enough natural light is one of the bugbears of a barn conversion, since most examples have few windows and the planners won't let you add new

ones wherever you like. "Planning authorities are becoming more restrictive on what changes you can make," says Opinder. Often the insertion of more windows is restricted as this changes the 'agricultural' appeal to a more domestic look. "Consider new glazing to the rear elevations and maybe a new extension to the barn with a more domestic look," says Opinder.

Budget considerations

Converting a barn is not the cheapest way to getting a new home. "A typical example that has been well-used for its original purpose will usually cost more per square metre to convert to a liveable standard than self building from scratch," says Julian. But the benefits are great: get your project right, and you'll be getting a property that's bursting with character; something that will be reflected in its ultimate market value.

When it comes to financing your scheme, you need to be organised from the outset. If you're using a mortgage to fund the works, choose a product that will release money as the project progresses in a similar way to self build loans. Contact finance specialists BuildStore for more advice.

CONTACTS

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