



GRANDDESIGNS

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NEW



GREAT BARN CONVERSIONS

The Seventies boom in barn conversions, which reduced many ancient buildings to extensions of the suburbs bristling with TV aerials and double garages, is finally ending. Which is a relief for conservationists who would rather see a building decay than be subjected to a bad conversion. Instead, the new wave of barn construction — conversions and new builds — heralds a more sensitive approach. Architects are finding new ways to use traditional materials such as cobb, thatch and native timber. The result is a winning combination of rusticity and modernity that acknowledges the vernacular without being stuck in the past.



PLANNING PERMISSION

GETTING PLANNING PERMISSION FOR BARNs

Bad experiences of incompetent barn conversions have made local planning authorities take a hard line. Many conservation officers working for local councils refuse to enter barns on their lists of buildings at risk in case they are bought by people who will convert them badly. Planning rules insist that an economic use should be sought for barns before turning them into new homes. This can be agriculture but could also be light storage, industrial or even an office. And these can take preference to a residential conversion because they may have less of an impact on the environment.

WHAT ABOUT LISTED BARNs?

If a barn is listed, it means it is officially outstanding. The list is a register that records buildings considered special because of age, rarity, architectural merit/technical innovation or association with a famous person/event. Listing a building means that its architectural and historic character must not be affected if alterations to either the exterior or interior are proposed.

WHAT DOES LISTING MEAN?

Grade I: buildings of exceptional interest.

Grade II: buildings of particular importance/more than special interest. Ninety per cent of listed buildings are Grade II.

Grade III: buildings of special interest that warrant every effort to preserve them.



↑ BARN AT WAKELIN, NEAR NEWMARKET, SUFFOLK

Architect: James Gorst Architects Ltd.

Client: Mr R Morris.

Date of build: 2003.

Original building: late 18th-century barn.

Cost of build: just under £200,000.

Outstanding features: traditional methods of timber joinery, roofing and tiling used in restoration work.

Sensitivity to original building: oak frame of original building was restored using traditional techniques. The space was divided as little as possible to retain shape of original building.

↔ THE BARN HOUSE, KENT.

Architect: Thomas Croft

Clients: the architect's parents, Sir John and Lady Croft.

Date of build: 1988.

Original building: typical Kentish five-bay timber-framed barn.

Inspiration: US barn conversions such as Robert Siegel's conversion of Steven

LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

If any work affects the character or fabric of a barn you will need to apply separately for this in addition to planning permission. This often requires more information, such as detailed plans. Carrying work out without Listed Building Consent is a criminal offence.

Contact your planning department if in any doubt.

FIVE WAYS TO BEAT THE PLANNERS

1. Choose a barn of beauty so planners will see its value and want it to survive.

2. Avoid barns by the road: a common official objection to conversion is unsightly new

access and difficulty of hygienic drains.

3. Talk to local planners before, not after, making application to convert.

4. Planning permission is easier to obtain in a town or village than open country.

5. When submitting plans, leave windows and doorways in their original form.

Spielberg's Long Island barn.

Cost of build: £120,000.

Style: cosy not cavernous family home complete with family furniture and paintings and a touch of stage-scenery medievalism.

Outstanding features: new, smooth geometric walls contrasted with rough textures of the barn's walls and frames. A crenellated balcony embodies the phrase 'an Englishman's home is his castle'.

Sensitivity to original building: one half of the building has been left in its original architectural state. In the other half, new elements have been painted pink, old elements red. In the architect's words: 'a house inside a barn, not a barn made into a house'.

PHEASANT BARN, FAVERSHAM KENT ↗

Architect: Duncan Chapman of Circus Architects.

Clients: Su and Paul Vaight.

Date of build: 1999-2001.

Original building: Grade-II listed threshing barn built in 1730.

Inspiration: the clients visited and were inspired by Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp, France, and Zaha Hadid's fire station at Weil-am-Rhein, Germany. Chapman was struck by the way light shot through bullet-shaped holes in the original, dark, derelict building and replicated this in the new build.

Cost of build: £500,000.

Style: cool, contemporary loft-living transplanted to the country.

Outstanding features: two white mezzanine platforms containing bedroom and study space at either end; a 9m cantilevered glass table; a sunken seating area backed by a low-lying sculptural partition overlooks the estuary.

Sensitivity to original building: the exterior is almost unaltered. Permission was granted to fit domestic windows, but Circus inserted discreet openings in places that had been previously fissured. There is no sign of the conversion from outside.

FINDING A BARN

The number of decrepit, ripe-for-conversion barns you see as you drive around the country is deceptive. As Jason Orme of plotfinder.net says: 'Often, local planners view the conversion of a barn in a rural location in the same way they would a new development. The availability of barns for full conversion depends on geography. It is easier to find barns ready to convert in the north than in the south near to London and Birmingham.'

QUAKER BARNs, NORFOLK ↔

Architect: Hudson Architects.

Clients: Anthony Hudson and his wife Jenny Dale.

Date of build: 2001.

Original building: part of complex of farm buildings.

Inspiration: the original building and local materials.

Cost of build: £190,000.

Style: rusticity not domesticity.

Outstanding features: translucent fibreglass rain screen. Each of the two buildings is treated differently.

Sensitivity to original building: main elevation uses green oak-cladding and straw bale wall construction. Local materials (all collected within a five-mile radius) were used eg knapped flint, brick and green oak. No window openings are apparent. ▶

