

Ready to Party
The sitting area of Jim and Betty Becher's new barn was designed with big Southern get-togethers in mind. Opposite: The exterior of the refurbished space.



The Party Barn

How one North Carolina couple built an over-the-top entertaining spot in record time

"MY FRIENDS AND I LOVE TO TRAVEL AND LEARN," BETTY Becher is saying. "And last January, we went to the Southern Foodways Alliance weekend at Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tennessee, where I was introduced to Jimmy Hagood. He's from Charleston, South Carolina, and he hauls around this thing called the Big Red Rig. It's a barbecue smoker he pulls behind his truck."

A few minutes after Betty met the barbecue king, she asked if he'd be interested in showing off his skills for her upcoming birthday at the weekend farm she shares with her husband, Jim, in the mountains of North Carolina. Hagood said yes.



“But then it got even better,” Betty says. “That same weekend I saw these wonderful musicians from Nashville, Joey + Rory, perform.” During the charity auction supporting the SFA, she asked the folks running things if they would auction off a performance by the duo. “Next thing I knew, I had a weekend barbecue and music party at our farm, but nowhere to put everybody,” she says.

Working with architect James Meyer, of Meyer Greenson Paullin Benson in Charlotte (the firm responsible for designing the bucolic Chattooga Club in Cashiers, North Carolina), the Bechers decided to take an existing cattle barn on their property and turn part of it into a space for parties and events. “We didn’t really use it for cattle shows anymore,” Jim says. “And at first, Betty wanted to make two-thirds of it a party barn, but I still needed to use some of it, so we compromised. We agreed the party area could be sixty feet by fifty feet, with the rest left as a working barn.”

But dressing up a former cattle house in a matter of months wasn’t easy. Like all barns, it was a large, open building, with ceilings nearly fifteen feet tall. “The space itself was my first challenge,” says Meyer. “How do you adjust the volume to make it comfortable for people to socialize happily in?”

The answer came to him and the Bechers through Carolina Timberworks, a Southern firm that specializes in repurposing old structural wood. “They called one day,” Meyer says, “and told us a guy in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was planning to take down an old barn there. And I said, ‘Buy it.’”

The Bechers purchased that barn and two others and disassembled them for materials. The beams, interior walls, and siding inside the new party barn were all milled between 1800 and 1830. The grain and time-earned patina are exquisite. But the best part is the barn’s floor. Pulled up from a defunct train depot in Kingsport, Tennessee, the timbers were originally cut and laid in 1895. “The floor makes those rooms,” Betty says. “We laid it down, sanded it very lightly, and sealed it. It’s stunning.”

Given the hurry-up timing, however, creating the Bechers’ party barn was still a breakneck exercise. “I made ceiling heights different in different spaces,” Meyer says. “It’s lower in the bar. It’s higher in the dining and social area. We used different paint colors for the walls, breaking up the space. And Betty took care of all the decorating. She was on it, down to what style of chairs and tablecloths she wanted. It all works together.”

As the deadline loomed leading up to Betty’s birthday bash, the final moments were action-packed. Three days before that first celebration, painters were using fans on the interior walls to dry them while concrete workers finished the patios outside.

“But we finished,” Betty says. “And it all came out better than we could have hoped.” —Donovan Webster

Green Acres
Clockwise from top left: Belted Galloway cows on the property; the custom bar; a sculpture by Wayne Trapp; antiques on display; the Bechers in front of *Hocus Pocus*, the Patrick Dougherty piece they commissioned; a place to break bread.



► To see more photographs of the party barn, go to gardenandgun.com.