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MAGAZINE







## THE hatfield farm

AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT UNIQUE AREA PROPERTIES

Above: The restored historic Hatfield barn at dusk.

*By John Torsiello  
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Photos courtesy of  
George Lagonia*

There is absolutely no way the former owners of what is known as The Hatfield Farm could have imagined the ultimate use for their sheep barn, located in Spencertown, NY. I mean, treadmills, basketball, high definition televisions, thermal paned windows? They weren't even dreamt about in the middle of the 19th century.

But here we are, in 2015 and the rambling, 20,000-square-foot, red sided barn, while it appears as though it could house livestock, has been turned into a spacious active lifestyle and recreation area by the present owners, who made a significant financial investment in the project.

The project, for which Lagonia Construction (George Lagonia owner) served as general contractor and Darren Mercer of Albany as architect, is a massive undertaking that took courage, foresight, much planning, workmanship and military precision to pull off. The restoration was almost complete as mid-winter approached the rolling countryside of Columbia County.

### It's about more than restoration

"Lagonia Construction, the owners and I [the architect] shared a common vision and goal to preserve this historic barn and breathe new life into its slowly decaying structure," said Mercer. "All aspects of the project were discussed in great detail by the team in order to consider all the best options for each decision. Once a construction or detail decision was reached, Lagonia Construction moved forward with skill and care to execute the work with the original goal in mind."

Interestingly, the barn was pictured in the foreground in a painting that served as the cover of an issue of *Columbia County History and Heritage* prepared by the Columbia County Historical

Society. The farm was one of 10 owned by Sherman Griswold, who is pictured with his wife, Lydia Dean, according to a story by Jim Eyre. It was known as the Hatfield Farm.

### Creating new space

"This was a very special project to be involved in," said George Lagonia, who has undertaken a number of significant new construction, remodeling and renovation works in the area and beyond, one of which was the Roe Jan Community Library in Copake. "We had done work previously for the owners of the property and had a long relationship. It's a huge building and it's thrilling to save the structure and turn it into a new use for the family."

Among the rooms inside the barn, which has been left for the most part intact, wooden beams and siding still exposed, are a state-of-the-art workout area, a living space, state-of-the-art bathroom, a basketball court and game room. Such new touches as stairs leading to an upper floor were made with wood reclaimed from the exterior of the barn. A large, folding glass and metal window, which serves as an entry point into the barn, replaced old barn doors and offers a sumptuous southwesterly view to the fields and hills beyond. Upward lighting shows off the time consuming plaster work that was added between the wooden ceiling boards.

Lagonia explained that, quite remarkably, the entire barn was raised to allow for the creation of a new concrete floor. Also, the entire barn is encased in a new exterior with the original exterior now protected from the elements.



Indeed, great care was taken to preserve and restore the existing character of the barn, while adding new design elements, such as a cupola that towers above the barn near its central point, metal roofing and metal folding doors, and to update the exterior and to reflect the new interior uses. All replacement materials match the original siding, trim, and windows. The new replacement concrete foundations are clad with stone veneer to imitate the original stone masonry of the building.

### The teamwork involved

“It is remarkable the teamwork that we had on this project,” said Lagonia as he takes a visitor through the almost-finished interior of the barn. “We lifted the barn with Larmon House Movers and then had crews from Bervy Excavation come in and excavate and Nielsen Concrete pour the concrete foundation, then we placed the barn back on the new foundation. It was done like clockwork and that aspect of the work was done in four weeks, which is really something.”

This was, of course, no easy task. Mercer said that the biggest challenge was keeping the integrity of the barn’s post and beam structure intact, while repairing and supplementing the existing framing with new footings, foundations, and an outer framing “shell” and insulated layer over the post and beam structure. He added, “In order to create new interior spaces, certain existing floor levels were removed to make larger space volumes. Existing roof framing wood timber and log trusses that were hidden by ceiling planks were revealed by removing these boards. All removed wood materials from the barn were carefully preserved and reused throughout the new interior spaces.”



Above, top to bottom, L-R: A work in progress, see photo on previous page for the finished and restored Hatfield barn at dusk. The interior of the barn contains original beams and other wood. The new cupola is placed atop the barn.

### Functional changes

All formerly separated spaces within the barn are now connected by stairs and doorways. The barn’s original agricultural use is now re-purposed to a new recreation use “and also serves as preservation model as all its original remarkable volumes and framing of the barn are maintained to their original design and aged appearance,” said Mercer.

Lagonia said there were at any one time up to a dozen of his employees and subcontractors working on the project. Lagonia, who grew up in Spencertown, began his work career as a mason and soon launched his own construction business, which has grown in leaps and bounds over the last two decades. His headquarters and work facility are located just outside of Hillsdale, not too far from the Spencertown barn.

Those who worked on the project were bound by a common goal and that they were doing something very special to preserve a bit of Columbia County history and heritage.

As with Lagonia and his crew, Mercer said, “I’m pleased and proud to be a part of a project to preserve an historic barn with modern construction methods that duplicate the structure’s original aesthetic quality while giving a new purpose to an antique building type that is unfortunately disappearing from the American landscape.” ●



Above: A protective exterior “shell” was built over the existing barn’s siding. Left: Folding metal doors, replete with large windows, is the main entryway into the barn. Also depicted in this photo is the finished cupola.



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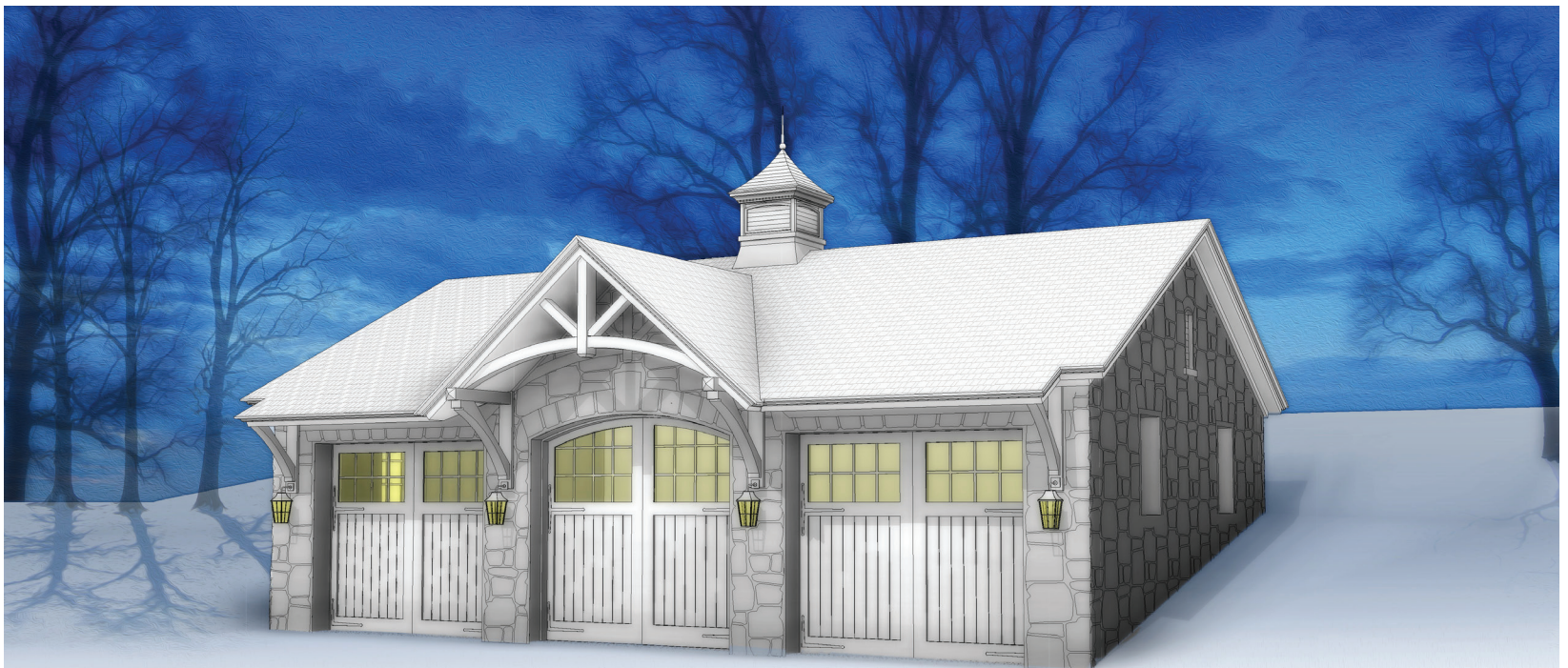
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