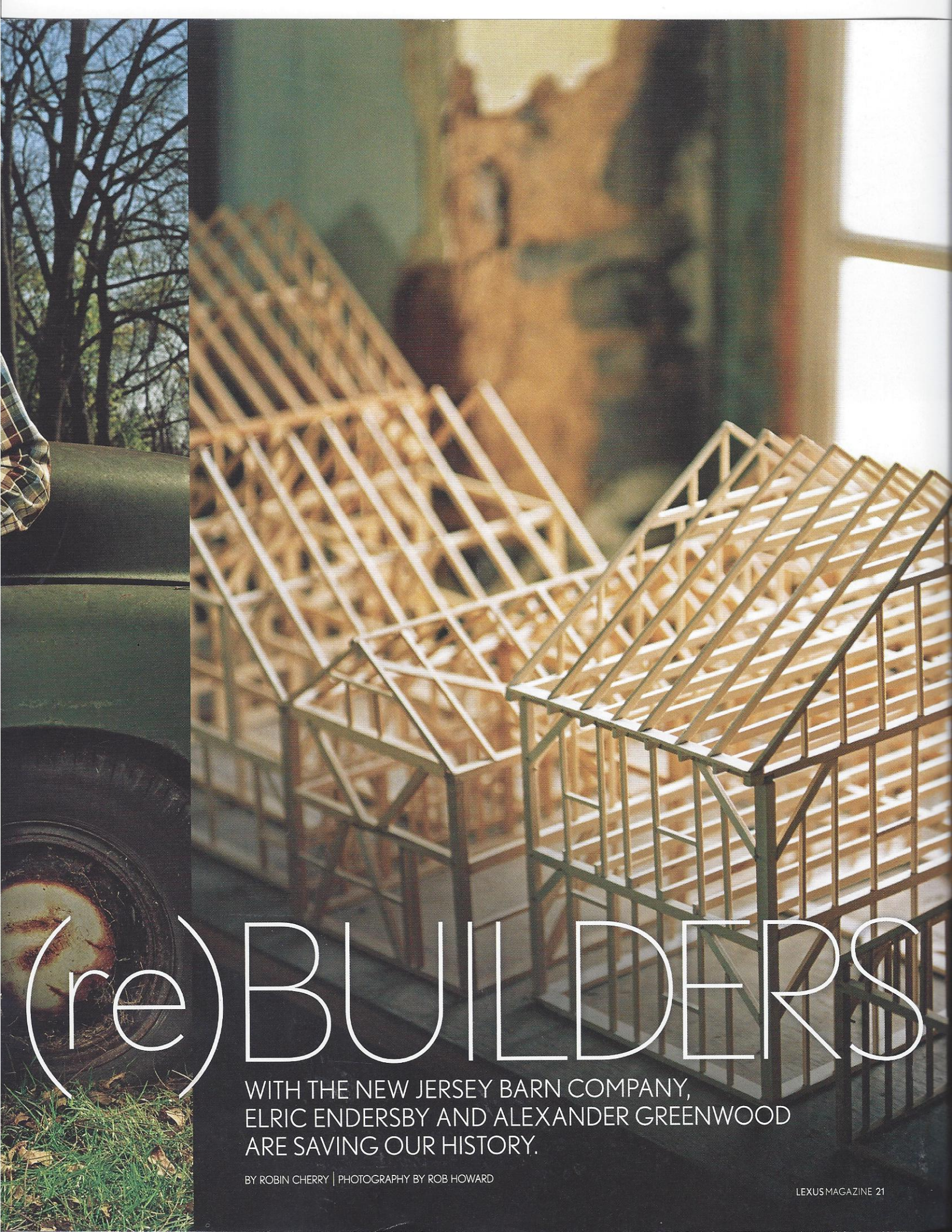


MASTER



(re)BUILDERS

WITH THE NEW JERSEY BARN COMPANY,
ELRIC ENDERSBY AND ALEXANDER GREENWOOD
ARE SAVING OUR HISTORY.

BY ROBIN CHERRY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROB HOWARD



MOST PEOPLE READ BOOKS. ALEXANDER Greenwood and Elric Endersby read buildings. The two founded The New Jersey Barn Company, which “rescues, relocates, and restores” antique barns and timber frame structures (structures in which the wooden frame, rather than the interior walls, supports the building’s entire weight).

Reading a barn is not unlike reading a good mystery story, rooting around for architectural clues that will “unlock the mystery of the barn.” One of Endersby and Greenwood’s challenges is to think like the original builders, essentially unlearning modern construction techniques. (Both contemplated careers as architects, but neither had any interest in modern architecture. Deeply committed to historic preservation, they often scour flea markets in search of antique tools to use in their work.)

The much-maligned state of New Jersey actually has the best quality and widest variety of antique barns in the United States, since the local hardwood—white oak—was larger and stronger than that found in New England, enabling builders to construct extraordinary architectural designs and dramatic spans.

English, Dutch, and Swiss-German settlers built New Jersey’s earliest barns. Each brought with them the unique framing technique of their native country. But since it really did take a village to build a barn (especially without cranes), the settlers had to work together. Over time, the different framing styles fused, creating a distinctively American style.

Today, as developers continue to develop, barns are being razed at an alarming rate, destroying a precious part of our history. Every barn that Endersby and Greenwood restore is actively

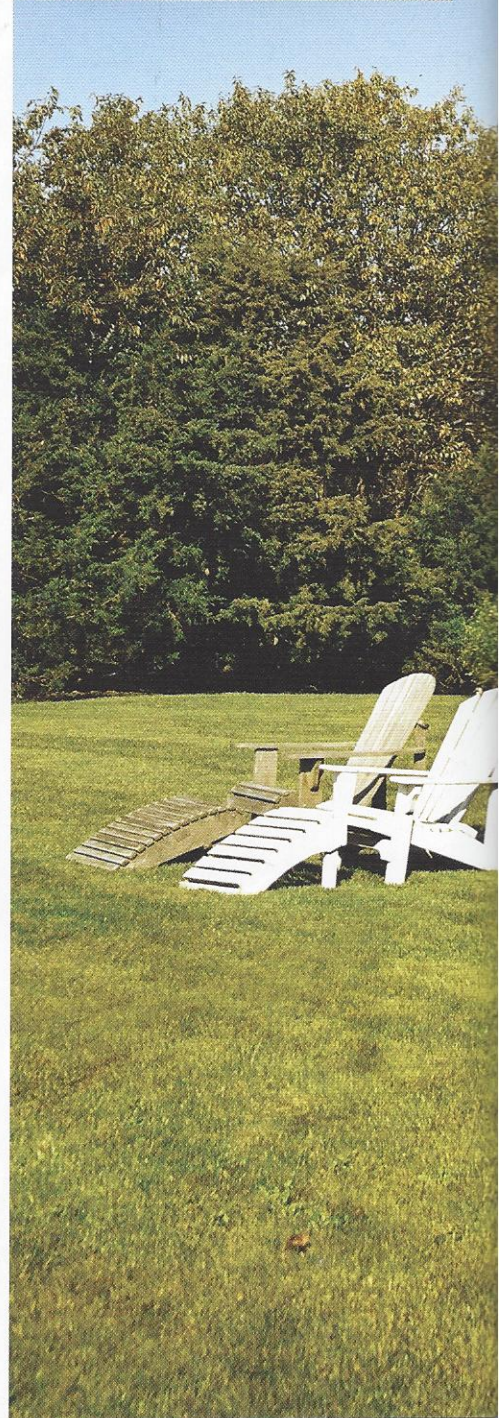
Previous pages: barn restorers Elric Endersby and Alexander Greenwood; a scale model of an available timber frame. These pages: disassembly of the Middleton-Waln barn; the kitchen, fireplace, and exterior of the barn relocated to Long Island, N.Y.

threatened; many are saved only days before bulldozing is scheduled to begin.

Barn saving is a three-part process. First, the structure must be dismantled, a process Greenwood calls “effectively the construction process in reverse.” The pieces are numbered, photographed, and taken to the shop, where they’re power-washed, fumigated, and repaired. Second, Endersby creates a scale model of each structure. This will be useful for reconstructing the barn and for luring prospective buyers. The third step, the re-erection of the structure, is by far the shortest, as by this time the building has been well documented and all its parts have been repaired.

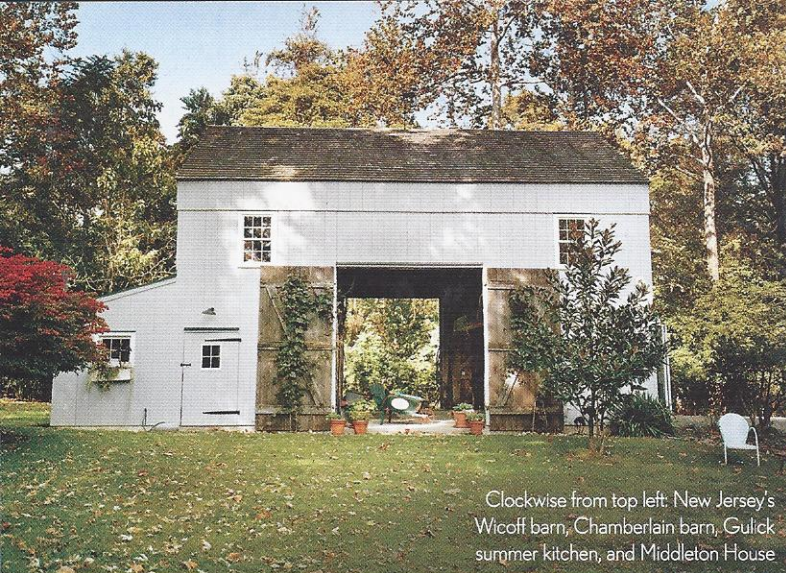
Endersby is adamant that the restored barn should look “at home” in its new location. “If we’re successful,” he says, “it shouldn’t look like an architect was there at all.” So a New Jersey barn transported to Nantucket would be covered with grey shingles, and one relocated to eastern Long Island would be covered with shingles and brick. (Endersby and Greenwood have transported buildings as far as Montana, North Carolina, and Texas, where they attached an 18th-century New World Dutch barn to a 1960s ranch house in San Antonio.)

The two barn renovators also offer design services. They collaborate with a number of associated architects on what they call “sympathetic adaptive design,” meaning it complements the existing style of the building.

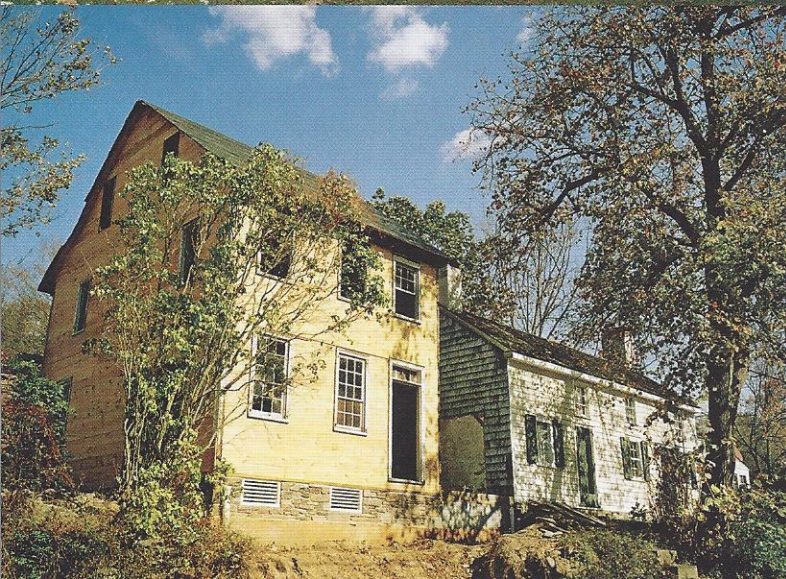
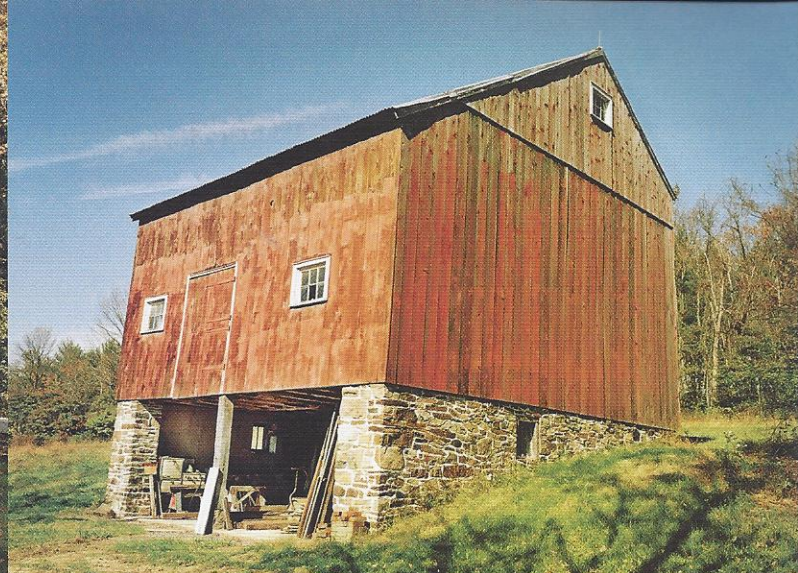




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Clockwise from top left: New Jersey's Wicoff barn, Chamberlain barn, Gulick summer kitchen, and Middleton House



(In other words, you won't be finding a Roman fountain in a Moravian barn.)

Endersby and Greenwood posit that artists were probably the first people to discover the potential of barns, as they make ideal studios for painters, sculptors, and woodworkers. And with their vast, loft-like spaces, barns have become increasingly popular second homes for city dwellers. They've also been converted into bookstores, theaters, garages, and exercise rooms. Outside Washington, D.C., The Barns at Wolf Trap is a performance space crafted out of two adjacent 18th-century barns with exceptional acoustics (it's the summer home of the Wolf Trap Opera Company). And for some reason, barns are extremely popular for weddings. As Endersby is quick to point out, "They're highly adaptable to a wide range of uses."

Though the buildings are old, they lend themselves perfectly to contemporary spaces. Collectors of large objects, such as quilts, flags, and rugs, often

appreciate barns because the structures are open enough to display their prized possessions.

Barns wear their history proudly. You can see where a horse chewed on a post or cows nuzzled the beams. You can see the hand of the people who constructed them. On a rafter of one barn, Endersby and Greenwood found that someone had scrawled "hot as Hell, July 1870."

"Barn people" are an interesting lot. Greenwood affectionately refers to his clients as "the lunatic fringe," though they include such prominent lunatics as film director Steven Spielberg and *Seinfeld* co-creator Larry David. (Endersby and Greenwood were responsible for Quelle Farm, Spielberg's East Hampton summer estate.)

With The New Jersey Barn Company, Endersby and Greenwood are doing a number of wonderful things: saving our history, raising awareness of the need to preserve these magnificent structures, and bringing a new level of refinement to the old phrase, "Were you born in a barn?" □

RESOURCES

The New Jersey Barn Company (908-782-8896) is located in an 18th-century tavern near Ringoes, N.J. The Web site (www.njbarnco.com) has more articles and information, including a number of before and after photos. The final cost of rebuilding a barn depends on the area's real estate, labor, and materials, but expect to pay upwards of \$70,000. Endersby and Greenwood are also the authors (with David Larkin) of two seminal and beautiful books on barns: *Barn: The Art of the Working Building* (Houghton Mifflin, 1992) and *Barn: Preservation & Adaptation* (Universe, 2003).

