





PHOTO BY JENNA BRISSON



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN ARTHUR

# Something Old, Something New

Farmhouse Inn barn weddings give an iconic century-old structure a new life

By Stephen D'Agostino

**O**n July 25, 2015, a couple celebrated their wedding in the big red barn at Farmhouse Inn at Robinson Farm. The former dairy barn had something else to celebrate that year: its 100th birthday. Did Tory and Barry Milstone, innkeepers at Farmhouse Inn, plan to commence the barn's new life as an event space in its centennial year? "No," says Tory. "But it was serendipitous."



PHOTO BY HANNAH MILSTONE

Innkeepers Tory and Barry Milstone.

The path the Milstones took to hosting their first wedding in the barn was one of joy, calamity, and a slow realization that the barn could be more than just a stunningly beautiful reminder of Vermont's past.

#### FROM FARMHOUSE TO FARMHOUSE INN

When the Milstones bought the property in 2007, the home was a farmhouse without the farm. The last cows had been milked in the barn in the 1970s, and the horse barn and other outbuildings, dating from the 1860s, were no longer used for their original purposes.

The Milstones converted five second-floor bedrooms into four guest rooms of the 1905 home. They hung a vacancy sign outside Farmhouse Inn at Robinson Farm on January 1, 2008, and in those first few years, they learned the art of innkeeping. In early 2009, a couple asked if they could hold their wedding on the property on Labor Day weekend the following year. Delighted that the inn could be part of their special day, the Milstones said yes.





PHOTO BY JENNA BRISSON



PHOTO BY DARIA BISHOP

Above: Couples can choose from several ceremony locations.  
Left: The reception floor in the big barn can seat up to 162.

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As it turns out, it was not to be the first wedding the Milstones hosted. Their daughter Megan, who lived in California, decided to have her wedding in Vermont in July 2010. To accommodate family and friends, Tory and Barry tackled the remaining rooms on the third floor. By the time the wedding was over, they had a new son-in-law and expanded capacity at the inn.

In early 2011, with the inn capable of hosting up to 16 guests, Tory and Barry started planning the next phase of their project: realizing the true potential of the whole property. Their hopes and dreams came crashing down, however, along with torrential rain on August 28.

"Tropical Storm Irene closed us," recalls Tory, "and we weren't sure we were going to be able to reopen." Water, mud, and debris inundated the basement, destroying the heating, electrical, water, alarm and fire-suppression systems, and the low-lying part of the grounds. Because of the extreme generosity and support they received from friends, neighbors, and even strangers, assistance for



PHOTO BY TERRY POMERLEAU



For every wedding they hosted, there were scores of couples who declined, all for the same reason. “Brides and grooms would point at the barn,” says Barry, “and ask, ‘Why can’t we have the reception in there?’”

which they are still so very grateful, they were able to resume operations on January 1, 2012.

In the years that followed, more and more people asked if the inn could host their wedding. The Milstones accommodated by setting up tents around the property, but one thing quickly became clear. For every wedding they hosted, there were scores of couples who declined, all for the same reason. “Brides and grooms would point at the barn,” says Barry, “and ask, ‘Why can’t we have the reception in there?’”

“We knew the dairy barn had a lot of untapped potential and deserved a new job,” says Tory, “but for some time the project was on ice because we weren’t sure what direction to go with it, or if we could afford to do what was needed.”

**HIGH DRIVES, HAY BALES, AND THE START OF A PROBLEM**

Surprisingly, the work the barn needed wasn’t caused by nearly 100 Vermont winters but by a shift in technology early in the barn’s life.



PHOTO BY JENNA BRISSON



PHOTO BY BELINDA NORRIS

In 1915, the year the Robinson family built the barn, hay was gathered in the fields and loaded onto horse-drawn wagons in tall piles. The carts were driven into the fourth floor of the barn, known as the high drive, from the back. The hay was weighed and then pitched to the third floor, known as the hay mow. One floor below, up to 40 Jersey cows waited to eat that hay and be milked. The second floor also had a milking room, providing a convenient way to exit the barn and get the milk to market.

Within a decade, an innovation we now take for granted changed the nature of haying. That change was baling. To take advantage of this new technology, the Robinsons removed some structural beams and installed a hayfork along the ridgepole; thus the strength of the barn was compromised over many years.

“We learned that the barn lacked the structural integrity to hold itself together,” Tory says. “Its weight was slowly pulling it apart.”

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## SOMETHING OLD BECOMES SOMETHING NEW

In 2013, the Milstones applied for a Vermont Barn Preservation grant, which offers matching funds to people who are trying to save these iconic structures. Their grant was approved for structural repairs, and in the barn's 99th year, the work began.

"The most important thing to be done," Barry says, "was to stiffen the beams." Additional work was needed to secure the floor of the hay mow and reattach the cupola, which, due to the barn's settling, had become separated from the building. Apart from the structural work, Barry says, "additional work was cosmetic or for safety reasons and not part of the grant." Those changes included widening a flight of stairs, leveling out sections of the floors that had become warped or had buckled, and installing posts on the railing along the high drive. With those changes, the barn was ready to begin its new life.

Picture a gorgeous late-summer Saturday afternoon. Guests are mingling on the grass outside the back of the barn, enjoying the last of the golden twilight as the sun dips below the hills to the west. Entering the high drive, they await the newlyweds who are posing for pictures elsewhere on the property. The band is set up on the floor below, and their music reverberates

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through the massive open space.

Once the happy couple has arrived, the guests go downstairs to the third floor, which has been beautifully decorated with custom-crafted farm tables. Café lighting strung from beam to beam casts the space in a warm glow. The reception is in full swing.

Of course, it takes more than a beautiful space like this to have a memorable wedding. Though the Milstones don't offer full wedding packages, they are very happy to work with couples to find a caterer, music, flowers, a salon for the bride and bridesmaids, and anything else couples need to provide their guests and themselves with an event to remember. "It takes a lot to pull off a wonderful wedding," says Barry, "and venues capable of hosting large gatherings obviously help the local economy."

When the last wedding guests leave and the Milstones turn out the lights in the barn, the majestic structure stands silent. Things are not the same in Woodstock today as they were in 1915, but despite a century of change, the barn continues to serve the local economy and to embody what makes Vermont the place it is. "It's 104 years old now," Tory says of the barn, "and it's having more fun than ever." 🍷

### ► Farmhouse Inn at Robinson Farm

5250 West Woodstock Road  
Woodstock, VT  
(802) 672-5433  
[www.farmhouseinnvt.com](http://www.farmhouseinnvt.com)

### Online Extra

Find fun facts about the Red Barn at Farmhouse Inn at [www.woodstockmagazine.com](http://www.woodstockmagazine.com).



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