

Sonoma woman gets fresh start on longtime family property



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Photos by Rebecca Chotgkowski Johanna Patri's Sonoma barn home includes a residence at the back end, an artist studio in the middle and an open-air carport on the opposite end. The barn replaced an original wood barn which had served as a sheep shed, workshop and winemaking venue.



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Johanna Patri's roots on her property in Sonoma run 48 years deep. She and her late husband, Remo, raised their family here in a wood-shingled home originally built in 1916 and surrounded

by mature trees. Patri has since moved on from that home — but not from her 23-acre property.

The old family home had been remodeled over the years, a joy for the Patris because Remo was an architect.

But the big old wooden barn behind it, which had served as a sheep shed, workshop, and winemaking venue, was in its original condition and had been deemed beyond repair when Johanna Patri decided to replace it. As the new barn neared completion, she was struck by the idea that it would be the perfect place to live.

That idea led to the construction of a residence within the new barn, where Patri now lives, while her daughter Andrea occupies the older home with her young family.

“I’ve never lived anywhere brand-new before,” said Patri, who loves her sparkling, light-filled quarters.

The 2,200-square-foot steel barn was designed by Sonoma architect Robert Baumann and manufactured to Baumann’s specifications by Garco Building Systems in Spokane, Washington. It was then built out by Steve Lanning Construction of Sonoma.

When it came time to design her 840-square-foot home within-a-barn, Patri turned to San Francisco architect Andre Rothblatt, whom she has known since he was a boy.

The heart of Patri’s small home is a great room. At one end is a kitchen and at the other end is a living area, which adjoins a spacious bedroom and bath.

Rothblatt designed towering white cabinets for the kitchen, which is anchored by a long maple island, built by Sonoma cabinetmaker Jerry Hanlon.

The floors are gray polished concrete, and the ceiling is tongue-and-groove cedar.

An array of potted plants surrounds the door to Patri’s bedroom. The sitting area on the barn patio offers a view of the adjoining vineyard. Among the treasured pieces on display in Patri’s new home are several works by her late father-in-law, Giacomo Patri, an Italian-born illustrator who founded the Patri School of Art Fundamentals in San Francisco.

As small as this kitchen is, it’s got everything I need,” Patri said. Atop the handmade walnut kitchen table she inherited is a bowl of shells collected by Johanna and Remo during the four years they lived in Hawaii early in their marriage.

Red tin Hills Brothers coffee cans — symbolic of San Francisco, where the couple met — are stacked on the shelving in the living area. Johanna has brought her memories with her. Not one furnishing is new, which is just how she planned it. Her 19-year-old cat, Tiger, snoozes on the sofa in the sun, comfortable on the familiar cushions. A long-owned print by famed Bay Area artist Richard Diebenkorn, who spent his last years in a home and studio in Healdsburg, graces a wall.

A large window over the kitchen sink looks out over vineyards to Sonoma Mountain. Binoculars rest on the windowsill because Patri enjoys watching the birds. The entryway is glass, and there are large windows on three sides of the structure with endless views that allow Patri to delight in both sunrise and sunset. This is a new pleasure after years living in the older home set among the trees and closer to the road.

The exterior of the solar-powered barn is corrugated steel with old-fashioned, farmhouse-style outdoor lights. The larger portion of it is used as Andrea's art studio, a place to make wine, and for general household storage. Some of the siding salvaged from the original barn lines its walls, and the entire structure is fully insulated.

"I don't feel lonely because at night I see the lights of houses in the distance," Patri said.

There's little reason to feel alone anyway, with Andrea and her husband, Gardner, right on this same land. Her grandson Giacomo, 13, often stops in after school and his sister Bailey, 5, rides her tricycle over to join Patri for breakfast in the morning.

Patri also has two sons with families who live in Sonoma and Redding.

The new barn sits on the exact footprint of the old, weathered one, and Patri keeps her history alive in her new abode. She's retired from her career as a land use planner for the Marin County Community Development Agency. The compact new abode provides a good jumping off point for her new life, one graced by family dinners, visits with longtime friends, and a busy volunteer work schedule.

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